

Agnes Rameder

# PICTURING THE (UN)DEAD IN BEIRUT

Appropriations of Martyr Posters and  
Other Images of the Physically Deceased



[transcript] Image

Agnes Rameder  
Picturing the (Un)Dead in Beirut

**Agnes Rameder** completed her PhD at the department of art history at Universität Zürich in 2023. She wrote her MA thesis on contemporary photography in Tehran at Universität Wien. Her research interests and publications include the intersection of violence and images, political images, memory and photography, and the decolonization of art history. She has also worked as a freelance curator of contemporary art since 2017 and currently works as an assistant curator at Hamburger Bahnhof – National Gallery of Contemporary Art in Berlin.

Agnes Rameder

## **Picturing the (Un)Dead in Beirut**

Appropriations of Martyr Posters and Other Images of the Physically Deceased

**[transcript]**

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## Abbreviations

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- AIF: Arab Image Foundation  
AUB: American University of Beirut  
IRA: Irish Republican Army  
IUM: Islamic Unification Movement  
LCP: Lebanese Communist Party  
LF: Lebanese Forces  
LNRF: Lebanese National Resistance Front (also Jammoul)  
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation  
PLO: Palestine Liberation Organisation  
PFLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine  
PSP: Progressive Socialist Party  
SLA: South Lebanon Army  
SSNP: Syrian Social National Party

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# 1. Introduction

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It's December 2022. I am attending a talk at Beirut's Sursock Museum about the restoration of artworks that were damaged during the explosion on 4 August 2020. The museum, which has a huge collection of modern and contemporary art from Lebanon, is still closed due to the damage the blast did to the building, and the glass windows are still covered with blue plastic foil.<sup>1</sup> To enter, I must pass the museum's esplanade, which houses a congregation of sculptures that commemorate dead people. On one side there is the old Martyrs Statue, which shows a Christian woman and a Muslim woman holding hands over an urn that symbolically contains the ashes of the killed. The statue remembers the Lebanese men who died in the uprising against the Ottoman colonisers in 1916 (Fig. 1.1). On the other side, a grey bench and a white swing are placed next to each other (Fig. 1.2). They were installed to commemorate Gaïa Fodoulian and Isaac Oehlers, both of whom died in the explosion on 4 August. These two dates—1916, the starting point of a cult of martyrdom in Lebanon, and 2020, the starting point of my interest in the dead in Lebanon—are also the broad time frame that is addressed by this publication.



Fig. 1.1: Yussef Hoayek, *Martyrs Statue*, 1930, Limestone, Beirut – Esplanade of the Sursock Museum, May 2023, Photograph AR.



Fig. 1.2: Bench for Gaïa Fodoulian and Swing for Isaac Oehlers, Beirut – Esplanade of the Sursock Museum, June 2023, Photograph AR.

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1 The Sursock museum is located in the house of collector Nicholas Sursock, whose private collection is also the base of the museum's collection. It first opened in 1961. After being closed since 2008 it reopened in 2015 and is today one of Beirut's most important art institutions, with changing special exhibitions that are focused mostly on modern and contemporary art from Lebanon.

I probably would not have written this book had I not been in Beirut's Gemayzeh district, which is located close to the port, during the explosion and had I not stayed in town during the aftermath of the blast. This is not only because after this event I felt a deep connection to the tissue of the city, which had been torn apart in front of my eyes, but also because I observed, with a certain unease, the emergence of images of the dead from 4 August on the city's walls. I started to ask myself where the urgency to put up photographs of the killed comes from, as this is a practice that is not performed everywhere. For example, no posters were issued for the dead of the Paris Bataclan shooting in 2015. Furthermore, the emotional discussion on- and offline about whether the dead of 4 August should be called martyrs or victims made me question the importance of terminology.

Trying to understand what happened on 4 August is a futile endeavour. We know that ammonium exploded in the port but not why or what led to its detonation, and it is unlikely that the exact circumstances will be revealed anytime soon. It even remains unclear how many people died; the estimated numbers range from 250 to 300. Knowing that an event happened, but not knowing the precise details has often been the case in Lebanon's history.

The explosion wounded Beirut, and it made life more difficult than it already was before. In October 2019, the upheavals against the sectarian system that governs the country, which are known as the *thawra*, started. Soon after, in February 2020, COVID-19 arrived in Lebanon, and a severe economic crisis resulting in mass migration, the constant devaluation of money, and a rise in poverty started to unfold. Additionally, there is a shortage of necessary everyday resources such as electricity, while the government's corruption and incompetence often lead to deadly tragedies. On top of that, a war between Israel and Hezbollah erupted in the South in October 2023, just when I was about to leave Beirut for good after having submitted my PhD thesis, which serves as the base for this book. This is also why my analysis stops at this point and does not include images that were produced after 7 October 2023.

## 1.1 An Underview of Pictures of the (Un)Dead in Beirut

Although the explosion sparked my interest in images of the dead in Lebanon, only a small part of this book is about images of the dead of 4 August. Rather, it encompasses a broader context. I will primarily investigate how contemporary artists critically question and appropriate images of martyrs that are produced by the Lebanese sects and, in doing so, comment on the fabrication of martyrs and their images. I further examine how the artworks discussed can be contextualised with recent images of the dead in Lebanon. The question that I aim to answer is not: What is a martyr? But: How do artists question and interrogate the visualisation of

martyrs and reveal the uses of the martyr's image? To expand on this core question, I will also ask: How can image-making (both artistic and non-artistic) that has taken place in relation to the dead between 2019 and 7 October 2023 be contextualised with earlier images of martyrs?

I focus on one work as a case study, namely Rabih Mroué's play *How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April Fool's Joke* (2007; Fig. 1.3; henceforth, *Nancy*). In my reading, the play carefully and deliberately reflects on and appropriates the image and thus the figure of the martyr. In the play, four actors narrate instances of conflict in Lebanon since 1973. The actors repeatedly die as martyrs, come back to life, and die again. Almost every death is accompanied by an image, in most cases an appropriation of a martyr poster from the *Wars in Lebanon* (1975–1990). However, the photographs and names of the martyrs are replaced with those of the actors.

Except for an outlook on possible further research in the final chapter, the discussion in this book is restricted to Lebanon, in particular Beirut, as I am aware of



Fig. 1.3: *How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April Fool's Joke*, 2007, © A Play by Rabih Mroué. Written by Rabih Mroué and Fadi Toufiq. Directed by Rabih Mroué. Posters Designed by Samar Maakaroun. Based on Zeina Maasri's Research and on Her Book *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War*. 2007, Tokyo International Arts Festival, Tokyo, Photograph Kohei Matsushima.

the pitfalls of writing about a place one has not been socialised in. Understanding (art) historical and social circumstances takes time, and mistakes easily happen when looking at several contexts. Therefore, limiting the study to one location allows me to dig deeper and, hence, to avoid potential misconceptions. However, this does not mean that I am seeking to offer an overview of contemporary art from Beirut or Lebanon; rather, to use Declan Long's term, this book offers an 'under-view' of a specific topic.<sup>2</sup>

I also want to emphasise that this is not a study about images of the 'Middle East'. I am generally critical of applying this paradigm to contemporary art and visual culture, because, as Derek Gregory has pointed out, it remains unclear what the common unifier of this colonial, artificial mapping of the world is.<sup>3</sup> Beirut-based artist Tony Chakar has also written on this issue in the following email conversation with Stephen Wright:

Stephen, I've read what you've written many times, and each time the thought of belonging to a 'region', namely the Middle East surprises me—not out of an internationalist refusal to belong to a specific region, or out of denial of belonging to a 'backward' region and the desire to identify with a more elegant appellation ('Mediterranean' for instance). The more I thought about it the more it didn't make sense. What does it mean that I'm from the 'Middle East'? What does it mean to a European and what does it mean for me? In fact, the region itself doesn't exist. We might talk about it as much as you want but it's still not there. [...] Do you think I might be able to understand what it means to live under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship or to be 'liberated' by the Americans? Or would I be able to understand what it means to be living under the constant threat of being 'transferred' from Ramallah to Jordan? Or would I be able to understand what it means to live in a megalopolis of 20 million people in Cairo? How can we connect or find a common ground—and if you want to write about art in the 'region', what would be your theoretical ground.<sup>4</sup>

Chakar here points to the many different daily lives that coexist in the part of the world in which Lebanon is located and the fact that there is no shared ground that justifies thinking of the 'Middle East'.

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2 Declan Long, *Ghosthaunted Land: Contemporary Art and Post-Troubles Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 10.

3 Derek Gregory, 'Middle of What? East of Where?', in *Safar/Voyage*, eds. Feresteh Daftari and Jill Baird (Vancouver: Museum of Anthropology, 2013).

4 Stephen Wright, 'Territories of Difference: Excerpts from an E-mail Exchange Between Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz, and Walid Sadek', in *Out of Beirut*, ed. Suzanne Cotter (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2006), 60.

This book also has nothing to do with the field of terrorism studies, which includes works by Joseph Croitoru, Christoph Reuter, Robert Pape, and Charlotte Klonk.<sup>5</sup> As Judith Butler has noted, the term ‘terrorist’ can ‘apply variously and wildly to both insurgency and counter-insurgency groups, to state and non-state sponsored violence, to those who call for more fully democratic forms of government’ as well as to ‘those who criticise the repressive measures of the US government’.<sup>6</sup> In making this observation, Butler points to the random, ideologically motivated, and unstructured use of the term ‘terror’. I am not interested in which groups are perceived as ‘terrorists’ by European or US entities nor in which groups are not. It could even be argued that feeling entitled to decide who is a ‘terrorist’ suggests a certain colonial attitude. Importantly, while Klonk, for example, analyses non-Western images in Western media and frames them as images of terror, I am examining the use of images in their country of origin, where the visuals usually are not understood in the framework of terrorism.

Further, I aim to challenge ideas about the figure of the martyr, who is frequently placed in an Islamic context. Researchers like David Cook and Hatina and Litvak Meir have published books that ignore the fact that martyrdom is also celebrated in Christian communities.<sup>7</sup> In the works of other scholars, such as Carole André-Dessornes and Verena Straub, the idea of the martyr is narrowly discussed as a non-European human being who decides to conduct an operation that includes his or her own death.<sup>8</sup> By framing their research topic from such perspectives, these researchers, probably unwittingly, contribute to the image of the ‘Muslim jihadist’ who kills himself and others, propagated in the European and North American media after 9/11. By discussing Christian martyrs and the framing of civilian deaths as martyrdom, this book will point to concepts other than, and in refusal of, ‘terrorism’. Through the analysis of artworks and political images, I will make clear that only a minority of martyrs die because they blow themselves up and that martyrdom is a complex phenomenon that has various nuances.

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- 5 See Joseph Croitoru, *Der Märtyrer als Waffe: Die historischen Wurzeln des Selbstmordattentats* (Munich: Hanser, 2003); Christoph Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); Charlotte Klonk, *Terror: Wenn Bilder zu Waffen werden* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2017). For a discussion of the problematic term terrorism, see Verena Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat im Bild: Aktualität und Geschichte von Märtyrerverzeugnissen* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 21–28; Klonk, *Terror*, 16–23.
  - 6 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 153.
  - 7 See David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Hatina Meir and Litvak Meir (eds.), *Martyrdom and Sacrifice in Islam: Theological, Political and Social Contexts* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).
  - 8 See Carole André-Dessornes, *Les Femmes-Martyres dans le Monde Arabe: Liban, Palestine et Irak: Quelle Place Accorder à ce Phénomène?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013); Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*.

As the title of the book indicates, this study is not only about martyrs but also about pictures of (un)dead people. By employing the term ‘picturing’ I am drawing on Douglas Crimp, who uses the term for different media, such as photographs, drawings, paintings, sculptures, billboards, posters, and magazines. In other words, all media, including so-called high art as well as popular imagery, are understood as ‘pictures’.<sup>9</sup> Following Crimp, I do not view posters in the streets as inferior or superior to paintings or sculptures exhibited in art spaces. This is why I will use the terms ‘picture’ and ‘image’ synonymously throughout the book. I will also apply both terms to videos and films because, as Caroline Overhoff Ferreira has shown, there is no reason to exclude moving images from art history, as is often done.<sup>10</sup>

The term (un)dead is used to refer to Jacques Derrida’s hauntology, which he developed in *Specters of Marx* (1993). As long as the dead are here in pictures on the walls, they oscillate between being absent and present. Although they ceased to exist physically, they are not fully dead because, as Mroué mentioned,

the dead are present, they are talking to us as if they are talking about today. We, the living, are using the dead actually and I don’t know if the dead like this, if they approve of this. Maybe the dead want to leave Lebanon, leave the world, but we, the Lebanese, are using them as a weapon in our daily wars.<sup>11</sup>

As we will see throughout the book, the (un)dead do not fully belong to the past because their faces are still in the present and are, like weapons, being used for contemporary political purposes. This might be in the interests of the deceased, but also, it may not be. To avoid confusion and for the sake of a better readability, I will use the term ‘dead’ for the physically deceased in many parts of this book. However, in those sections where the state of being between being dead and being alive is foregrounded, we will also encounter the term ‘(un)dead’.

## 1.2 Through the Chapters

To begin, in Chapter 2, I will introduce the basic background frameworks that are necessary for the discussion of *Nancy*. I first address the roots, conceptions, and modes of the dissemination of martyrs before presenting an overview of the emergence of the figure of the martyr and his image in Lebanon.

9 Douglas Crimp, ‘Pictures’, *October* 8, 1979: 75; Hal Foster et al. (eds.), *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 580.

10 Carolin Overhoff Ferreira, *Dekoloniale Kunstgeschichte: Eine methodische Einführung* (Berlin/Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2023), 13.

11 Rabih Mroué and Richard Gough, ‘Interweaving Performance Cultures: A Perspective from Lebanon’, *Performance Research* 25, nos. 6–7 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2020.1910457>.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the contemporary art scene and art discourses in Beirut and introduce *Nancy* based on a video of the staging of the play. I offer a critical overview of scholarly contributions that mention *Nancy* and then relate it to other works by Mroué. Furthermore, I will explore the stories and images of the four actors via a visual and textual close reading and locate them in the historical background of the conflicts in Lebanon between 1973 and 2007, which is the time frame in which the play is set.<sup>12</sup>

My way of thinking follows the theorists of the Pictures Generation, who reflected on how one image can be read through another image in postmodern picture-making. They argue that under each picture lies another picture and they point to the instability of meaning by emphasising that, through the transfer of an image into another context, new layers are added to the picture. Based on the main theories of appropriation art, I will outline how in *Nancy*, Mroué, by appropriating political martyr posters, is not replicating these images but transferring them from the context of visual politics into critical art.

Chapter 4 is the longest chapter, as it contains the main analysis of this book and explores how *Nancy* questions and appropriates the political image of the martyr. In my interpretation, the play unfolds only when read via the combination of text and image. *Nancy* reveals the artificial creation of the image and the figure of the martyr, as well as the fact that martyr posters were used in a similar way by all factions that participated in the *Wars in Lebanon*. I will also shed light on how *Nancy* investigates the poster's relationship to the photographic image, to hierarchies of martyrdom and the oblivion of deaths, to gender performances, to the ruin, and to the martyr as a spectral ghost. This discussion also includes links to other artworks, most of which are created by the so-called post-war generation, who started producing art in Beirut in the 1990s and are internationally acclaimed today. Importantly, historical, social, and political influences on the artworks, which I identified in primary and secondary sources as well as through daily life in Beirut, are considered. My theoretical conceptions of how to interpret the artworks are informed by critical theory, ranging from semiotics to poststructuralism, photo theory, and hauntology.

In Chapter 5, I will explore images of the dead during the time of writing this book. Since the thawra in 2019 and 4 August 2020 not only the different religious-political groups in Lebanon, known as sects, but also NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) have issued posters of the dead. While researching this book, there were predominantly three types of dead on the walls, coexisting next to each other: sectarian martyrs, martyrs of the thawra, and the dead of 4 August.

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12 For close reading techniques, see Barry Brummett, *Techniques of Close Reading* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2020); Peter Howarth, 'Close Reading as Performance', in *Modernism and Close Reading*, ed. David James (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2020).

In this chapter, I also examine how artists reflected the pictures of the dead of the blast and explore how *Nancy* and other artworks discussed in previous chapters can be linked to artworks made after the explosion.

Chapter 6 consists of a summary of this book and also offers an outlook for further research by providing an introduction to images of martyrs in Northern Ireland and artistic reactions to them. The martyr, as we will see, is not only an Islamic or 'Eastern' phenomenon but can also be encountered in a solely European and Christian context.

### 1.3 Research in a Context One Has Not Been Socialised in and the Author's Background

It is necessary to reflect on what has influenced the choice of my research topic, methodologies, and findings, because, as Renske C. Visser claims, the cultural background and the personal experience of the author impact and shape the research project.<sup>13</sup> Thus, as Mike Broussine, Linda Watts, and Caroline Clarke argue:

researchers who are reflexively and critically self-aware about their feelings, motives, values, biographies, ethics, prejudices, passions and ways of seeing are better equipped to conduct more insightful, deeper and richer research. Part of this insight comes from realising that we are always a part of what we are researching, no matter what kind of research we are engaged in.<sup>14</sup>

Precisely because we are a part of what we are researching, we are always subjective. As Philip Ursprung has convincingly shown, no researcher or text is neutral or objective. Subjectivity starts with the choice of topics that are studied and includes the theoretical approaches with which the artworks are interpreted and the contexts in which the discussion is placed. The author is therefore to be understood not as a passive observer but as an active participant who not only describes but, through her interpretation, influences an artwork. Her text thus adds something to the artwork. The writing and the arguments are based on the experiences and worldviews of the author and are therefore not the final truth but can be contested or agreed with by other researchers, critics, or artists. This leaves the artwork open

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13 Renske C. Visser, 'Doing Death: Reflecting on the Researcher's Subjectivity and Emotions', *Death Studies* 41, no. 1 (2017): 8–9.

14 Mike Broussine, Linda Watts, and Caroline Clarke, 'Why Should Researchers Be Interested in Their Feelings?', in *Research with Feelings: The Emotional Aspects of Social and Organizational Research*, eds. Mike Broussine, Linda Watts, and Caroline Clarke (London: Routledge, 2015), 4.

and does not give it a fixed meaning.<sup>15</sup> I am discussing, commenting on, and interpreting artworks, but I am not claiming that no other readings are possible. This is why the 'I' is very present in the text: not because of a certain ego-centrality, but because I aim to constantly remind the readers that this book consists of my readings and interpretations, which are based on my background and my experiences but are not the final objective truth.<sup>16</sup>

I am also aware that I am speaking about images that emerge from an environment in which I was not socialised, as I am not Lebanese. Furthermore, I work in a post-colonial context in which I am privileged because of my European passport, which allows me to travel to many parts of the world without a visa, because of my grants, which provided me with a certain financial carefreeness while I was working on this book, and because of my perspectives after having obtained a doctoral degree from a European university. As Leah Decter and Carla Tauton wrote, it takes much longer to unlearn a privilege than to identify it. Unlearning works best when engaging with numerous viewpoints and experiences related to the topic of research, which is why I spent a substantial amount of the time working on this book in Beirut.<sup>17</sup> I observed the city's sadness and the country's cancellation of the future, but, despite my being there, I could not fully feel all this because it did not entirely confront me the way it would if I were Lebanese.

Of course, I conducted typical fieldwork activities, such as library and archival research, visits to exhibitions, and other art events, and I was looking into scholarship, cultural knowledge, and artistic production on site. At the same time, my research has always been dynamic, and I tried to include images that were created by events that happened in the country during that time. Because I was convinced that by living in a place one has not been socialised in, one learns more about it than when one is in Europe and reads books and watches movies about a faraway land, my aim was not to be an 'academic tourist',<sup>18</sup> who does fieldwork for a few months or weeks. This also meant that I lived through the country's turmoil between 2020 and 2023, which shaped my perspective on Beirut and the visuals

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15 Philip Ursprung, 'performative kunstgeschichte', in *Kunstgeschichte und Gegenwartskunst. Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Zeitgenossenschaft*, ed. Verena Krieger (Cologne/Vienna: Boehlau, 2008), 213–26.

16 My approach of reflecting on how my personal experience related to my topic of research has parallels with approaches taken by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. Particularly in her book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), Azoulay considered her own biography in her academic thinking.

17 Leah Decter and Carla Taunton, 'Embodying Decolonial Methodology: Building and Sustaining Critical Relationality in the Cultural Sector', in *Unsettling Canadian Art History*, ed. Erin Morton (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022), 99–102.

18 Last Moyo, *The Decolonial Turn in Media Studies in Africa and the Global South* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 188.

created in and about it. It was important to me to disenchant my relation to the place, so that the city would become so ordinary to me that I would not construct it as fascinating or exotic, and I hope this prevents me from creating eurocentric or orientalist readings of the images about which I am writing.

The corpus of post-colonial theory raises awareness of problems but does not offer a methodology on how to undertake research as a European in a context in which one was not socialised.<sup>19</sup> Overhoff Ferreira claims that in the broader framework of post-colonial thinking, art from outside Europe and North America has concerned art historians since the 1980s but has been researched using Western epistemologies, while contributions from scholars from the countries where the artworks emerged have been widely ignored. Decolonial art history, however, aims not only to reveal but also to overcome and unlearn coloniality in the discipline, to understand existing colonial frames of thought, and to show that non-Western discourses and Western discourses are equal.<sup>20</sup> However, Overhoff Ferreira also concludes that there is still no method for dealing with artworks that emerged outside of Europe and North America, as epistemologies are not known well enough.<sup>21</sup>

I am aware that many of my methods and many of the theories to which I am referring were invented in Europe and North America and therefore inherit a certain coloniality. But I do not believe that contemporary art from 'elsewhere' should be treated as the 'exotic other', which per se requires different approaches and methodologies. Also, artists usually do not want to be seen as ghettoised others but would rather be part of an international art discourse.<sup>22</sup>

Overhoff Ferreira further mentions that people from the region in which the visuals are situated have knowledge about the field of study and that it is crucial to consider this.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, I am also including theories that stem from Lebanon and I refer to numerous sources by Lebanese authors. My research for this book also encompassed many conversations as well as artist interviews—both those conducted by others and those conducted by myself—, which I use in combination with other sources to contextualise the artworks. A point to bear in mind, as Carsten Junker has stressed, is that although interviews are usually perceived as providing a platform for the interviewees to express themselves, it is the interviewer—in this case I—who frames the voice of the interviewee for the purposes of the interviewer's

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19 For an overview, see Alexandra Karentzos and Julia Reuter (eds.), *Schlüsselwerke der Postcolonial Studies* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012).

20 Overhoff Ferreira, *Dekoloniale Kunstgeschichte*, 10.

21 Ibid., 22–23.

22 Sussan Babaie, 'Voices of Authority: Locating the 'Modern' in 'Islamic' Arts', *Getty Research Journal* 3 (2011): 136–39.

23 Overhoff Ferreira, *Dekoloniale Kunstgeschichte*, 53.

interest.<sup>24</sup> I chose excerpts from the conversations for the frameworks of the chapters of the book. By mostly using direct quotations and not decontextualising the things said, I aim to let the interviewees speak for themselves as much as possible.

Although I tried to be as differentiated, participatory, and collaborative as possible, I cannot offer a solution on how Western-influenced art research can deal with artworks that were not created in Europe or North America. Also, such a methodology cannot be developed in one publication. This needs to happen in a broader discourse; it will need to be a collective and collaborative effort of different actors from the Global South and Global North that I hope will continue in the next years and possibly decades. I also hope that this book can be a piece of the puzzle that one day will constitute a decolonial methodological framework for analysing images that were produced outside of Europe/North America for non-European/North American eyes.

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24 Carsten Junker, 'Interrogating the Interview as Genre: Five Cases over Two Hundred Years', in *Postcoloniality—Decoloniality—Black Critique: Joints and Fissures*, eds. Sabine Broeck and Carsten Junker (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014), 312.



## 2. The Martyr and the Picture

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Martyrs are often venerated in images, among other places, in Lebanon. In this chapter, I will introduce the basic background frameworks that are necessary for the discussion of *Nancy*. First, I address the roots, conceptions, constructions, and modes of dissemination of martyrs, in particular in posters. Then, I present an overview of the emergence of images of martyrs in Lebanon.

### 2.1 Constructing the Martyr

As I will argue throughout this book, the word ‘martyr’ defies classification and is an ambiguous term used in different contexts. It denotes various meanings that are changing and unfixed. In stating this, I agree with Paul Middleton, who poignantly claimed that the definition of a martyr is ‘elusive’ and ‘doomed to failure’.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, while the etymology of the word is certainly relevant, the main object of my focus is the construction and dissemination of martyrdom. For this reason, I will first offer a very brief outline of the term’s roots, identify key issues in current scholarship, and explain conceptions of martyrs and the making of martyrs. Then, I will provide an introduction to the martyr poster.

#### 2.1.1 Concepts and Ideas

Martyrdom is ‘an inherently unstable category’<sup>26</sup> that escapes a fixed definition. An overview of the heterogeneous research on the notion and term of martyrdom has been provided by Baldassare Scolari. His discussion encompasses religious, political, cultural, and historical studies, which usually locate the emergence of the martyr within the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Scolari distinguishes two approaches that are adopted by researchers when they deal with the martyr figure. The first is essentialist and attempts to fix the martyr with a rigid definition. The second is constructivist, because it delves into

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25 Paul Middleton, ‘What Is Martyrdom?’, *Mortality* 19, no. 2 (2014): 117.

26 *Ibid.*, 130.

martyr production and asks how and why martyrs are made.<sup>27</sup> Although this book clearly follows the second approach and has no interest in defining the figure of the martyr, I will briefly look at Christian and Islamic terminology as well as Druze and secular martyrdom. These concepts are relevant for the Lebanese context because the country encompasses Christian, Shia, Sunni, Druze, and secular inhabitants, all of whom draw on their own ideas of martyrdom.

The term ‘martyr’ derives from the Greek word ‘martus’, meaning ‘witness’, and is often used to designate a person who attests to the truth by suffering.<sup>28</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the notion as follows: ‘Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ, who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity’.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, martyrs are not only aware of their deaths, they have chosen to be blood witnesses who testify that Jesus Christ died and was resurrected.<sup>30</sup> According to Sabrina Bensen, all Christian martyrs follow the archetype of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and thus serves as the ‘foundational myth of Christianity’;<sup>31</sup> he testified to being the Son of God and thus became a blood witness through his crucifixion.

While Jesus, like the other early Christian martyrs, died without active participation, the concept of martyrdom was broadened during the time of the Crusades, between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries, as Christians were encouraged to fight against their perceived enemies, and some died while doing so. Today, the idea of martyrdom extends further, with Bensen showing that the Vatican’s martyrology, an index of official church martyrs, includes the names of clerics who passed away as a result of diseases or criminal acts, not because they testified to their faith or fought for Christianity.<sup>32</sup> The Christian concept also includes the promise of an afterlife in heaven, where martyrs are compensated for their hardships on earth.

In Arabic, the term ‘shahed’ means ‘witness’ in the sense of someone who gives testimony of what they have seen—in particular, at Islamic courts. While the word ‘shahed’ appears in the Quran, its derivatives, the male ‘shahid’, female ‘shahida’, and plural ‘shuhada’, words ‘often used in the sense of martyr’,<sup>33</sup> are post-Quranic

27 Baldassare Scolari, *State Martyr: Representation and Performativity of Political Violence* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019), 90–92.

28 Sabrina Bensen, *Martyr Cults and Political Identities in Lebanon: ‘Victory or Martyrdom’ in the Struggle of the Amal Movement* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2020), 35.

29 Sandy Habib, ‘Dying in the Cause of God: The Semantics of the Christian and Muslim Concepts of Martyr’, *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 34, no. 3 (May 2014): 390.

30 Ibid.

31 Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 37.

32 Ibid., 39–40.

33 Etan Kohlberg, ‘Shahid’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: Volume IX*, eds. Clifford Edmund Bosworth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 207–08.

and can be found in hadith literature, which are writings thought to be records of the Prophet Mohammad's sayings.<sup>34</sup> A Muslim martyr is not only 'someone who dies in the cause of Allah',<sup>35</sup> as the concept is more diverse. Cook mentions that the hadiths list as martyrs not only those who died for their religious beliefs or on the battlefield; there are other categories of shuhada, including those who passed away while protecting their property and those who died because of disease, fire, accident, building collapse, drowning, or lovesickness.<sup>36</sup> As in Christianity, there is a belief in the afterlife, because Muslim martyrs are rewarded in paradise.

However, to speak of a single Muslim notion of martyrdom misses the divergent concepts among the two main branches of Islam. Their divide traces back to the death of Mohammad, when a discussion about his succession emerged and, in 680 AD, led to the Battle of Kerbala, in today's Iraq. The adversaries in this battle were the caliph Yazid I and Hossein, the grandson of Mohammad. Despite being outnumbered, Hossein and his group decided to fight, until they lost after ten days. Hossein was killed, and Islam split into two branches: Sunnites and Shiites.<sup>37</sup>

After Kerbala, Hossein, like Jesus in Christianity, became the archetypal martyr of the Shia and a role model for a shahid. Hossein embodied 'being steadfast in critical situations based on faith and idealism, and furthermore, a revolutionary call to fight oppression and tyranny. While this could mean the end of one's life, it also means to achieve martyrdom before of God'.<sup>38</sup> Shia Muslims emotionally commemorate Hossein's death each year on his remembrance day, Ashura,<sup>39</sup> and his death is activated time and again in a process that Michael Fischer has termed the Kerbala Paradigm.<sup>40</sup> This describes 'a cosmic event to restore truth against falsehood and justice against oppression and to heal and redeem the community'.<sup>41</sup> The Shiites also honour numerous other martyrs, and martyrdom is a constituting element of this branch of Islam. There is no equivalent for the Sunna, which has no consistent martyrology or archetypal martyr.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, when speaking about martyrdom, it is crucial to think of the Shia and the Sunna separately.

34 Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 27.

35 Habib, 'Dying in the Cause', 392.

36 Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 33–35.

37 Ibid., 55–57.

38 Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 48.

39 In some countries, such as Iraq, Ashura is also celebrated by Sunni Muslims. However, this is not the case in Lebanon. See L'Orient Today, 'In a First, Dar Al-Fatwa Announces It Will Mark 'Martyrdom of Hussein—Then Postpones It', *L'Orient Today*, 27 July 2023, <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1344687/in-a-first-dar-al-fatwa-announces-it-will-mark-martyrdom-of-hussein-then-postpones-it.html>.

40 Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 54–55.

41 Manochehr Dorraj, 'Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture', *The Review of Politics* 59, no. 3 (1997): 495.

42 Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 47–52.

Beyond the need to recognise the differences between Shiite and Sunni concepts of martyrdom, I have identified three problems in the current scholarly discussions that should also be noted. First, researchers usually locate the beginning of martyrdom in Judaism or Christianity, thereby ignoring a global context.<sup>43</sup> All three monotheist religions can be said to be based on Zoroastrianism, the pre-Islamic religion of Iran that dates to the second millennium BCE.

The most important book that tells us about this time is Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, which is translated into English as *The Book of Kings* and was completed in the eleventh century CE. One of its central motives is dying heroically for a cause, often that of Iran.<sup>44</sup> With regard to dying for a higher purpose than life on earth, Asghar Seyed-Ghorab noted: 'The concept of martyrdom in the Iranian context goes back to pre-Islamic times, appearing for example in the ancient story of Siyāvash, retold in various books and notably in Firdowsi's *Shāh nāmih*'.<sup>45</sup> The betrayal and killing of one of the *Shahnameh*'s protagonists, Siyavash, resulted in, as Manochehr Dorraj writes, a 'cult of mourning Siyavash as a divine martyred saint'.<sup>46</sup> This myth, as several researchers have suggested, bears parallels to Hossein, who, as mentioned, is also emotionally remembered, and suffered a similar fate to Siyavash. While a plant grew from his blood, tulips grew from Hossein's blood.<sup>47</sup> Apparently, ideas of monotheistic martyrdom are influenced by the stories told in this epic.

Therefore, conceptions of martyrdom started not with Judaism and Christianity, but earlier in ancient Iran. Since the Persian empire extended all the way to Europe, I suggest that we need to allow for the ways that ancient Iranian notions of meaningful and sacrificial death influenced the Jewish and Christian notions of martyrdom. This means, among other things, that one should not view these as constituting the source of thinking about martyrdom. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this book to delve into this proposal further, but I would like to point to the eurocentrism with which the emergence of the concept of martyrdom is still discussed and the need to think in globally broader frameworks beyond Europe.

My second caveat regarding the existing sources relates to the literature on Lebanon. When thinking of the martyr in a Lebanese context, it is necessary to mention that there is a secular concept of the notion, as discussed by Bensen. Non-religious martyrs do not focus on the afterlife or dying for God but on the

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43 Scolari, *State Martyr*, 90–130. The cited sources for Christian martyrdom also often include martyrs of Judaism, such as the Maccabees or Eleazar, and of Greco-Roman mythologies, such as the death of Socrates, but they never go back further in time or look to another cultural context.

44 Dorraj, 'Symbolic and Utilitarian', 491–93.

45 Asghar Seyed-Ghorab, 'Martyrdom as Piety: Mysticism and National Identity in Iran-Iraq War Poetry', *Der Islam: Journal of the History and Culture of the Middle East* 87, nos. 1–2 (2012): 249.

46 Dorraj, 'Symbolic and Utilitarian', 492.

47 For the figure of Siyavash as a predecessor of Hossein, see for example: *ibid.*; Seyed-Ghorab, 'Martyrdom'; Touraj Darayee and Soodabeh Malekzadeh, 'The Performance of Pain and Remembrance in Late Ancient Iran', *The Silk Road* 12 (2014).

belief that one's own death can contribute to a better life for one's community in the here and now.<sup>48</sup> What Bonsen does not address are Druze ideas about what happens after a body dies physically.<sup>49</sup>

The Druze split from Islam in the eleventh century and believe that there are a finite number of souls on Earth. When a body dies, the soul leaves it and reincarnates itself in another, new-born Druze body. There are many reports of Druze children who remember their past lives, recounting them to their parents when very young. Memories are more frequent when the death was violent. Therefore, Druze relatives of martyrs often look for the souls of their deceased loved ones among the living.<sup>50</sup>

My third concern regarding the state of research is the usage of the word *shahid*. Researchers usually speak of martyrs when talking about Christian deaths and of *shuhada* when talking about Muslim deaths. But *shahid* is an Arabic word and not a solely Islamic term. As Laleh Khalili has argued in a study that deals with narratives of heroism and martyrdom regarding Palestinians who are living in camps in Lebanon, religion is irrelevant to the use of the term *shahid* among Palestinians, some of whom are Christian.<sup>51</sup> Also, Lebanese Christian martyrs are labelled *shuhada*. Therefore, the term *shahid* does not provide us with any information about the religion of the deceased.<sup>52</sup> This is why I will use martyr and *shahid* interchangeably in this book.

As mentioned above, it is not only people who die in battles or for their beliefs who are termed martyrs, but also those who pass away due to other causes, such as disease. In general, there are two approaches to understanding martyrdom, a narrow and a broad one.

Those following the narrow approach often suggest that martyrs consciously died for a cause. For example, Zeina Maasri states that the martyr, as

an age-old term for the one who is killed for his/her beliefs, has had its share of sanctification in the history of struggles; the most noble of all heroes is thought to be the person who dies fighting in defence of these beliefs, be they religious, national or ideological.<sup>53</sup>

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48 Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 55–57.

49 As we will see later in this book, Nancy also fails to address the notion of Druze martyrdom.

50 See Rabah Halabi and Gabriel Horenzyck, 'Reincarnation Beliefs Among Israeli Druze and the Construction of a Hard Primordial Identity', *Death Studies* 44, no. 6 (2020): 347–49; Gebhard Fartacek (ed.), *Druze Reincarnation Narratives: Previous Life Memories, Discourses, and the Construction of Identities* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

51 Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 140.

52 *Shahid* is also the Persian and Hindi word for martyr.

53 Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 87.

Maasri thus conceptualises the martyr as a brave hero who fought for a certain cause, which makes us think primarily of soldiers or warriors. When martyrs are portrayed as such, as Friederike Pannewick writes, they usually had a choice whether to commit the deeds that led to their deaths.<sup>54</sup> Even though they were not certain about being killed, these people knew that their actions might result in their deaths.

This narrow understanding of martyrdom stands in opposition to the second approach, which consists of a broader concept. As Khalili has shown, this also encompasses civilians, often women and children, who died without having chosen to do so and often without being personally targeted. These ‘unintentional martyrs’<sup>55</sup> are usually presented not as heroes but as passive victims, whose lives have been cruelly and unjustly taken by the enemy.<sup>56</sup>

Both types—active heroes and passive victims—are created. For this to happen, martyrs need three ‘ingredients’. First, there needs to be a violent death, preferably but not necessarily due to a perceived enemy. Second, as Straub writes, someone needs to elevate this death to the level of martyrdom. Referring to the cultural theorist Aleida Assmann, Straub claims that the martyr, as a witness, needs a further witness who not only confirms the death but also distributes it within the framework of a certain narrative.<sup>57</sup> This narrative does not need to correspond to the actual events that led to the death, and in some cases, as Middleton argues, the intentions of the martyrs are rendered secondary. The third ingredient is an audience that is willing to consume the disseminated narrative of the death.<sup>58</sup> In short, martyrdom needs to be mediated to and witnessed by others to become meaningful.

## 2.1.2 Dissemination in Posters

There are different ways to spread the narrative of martyrdom. For example, transmission can take place through literature, songs, memorials, murals, postcards, graffiti, or other means. In this book, my main interest is the poster as a communicator of a martyrdom.

Posters are a lightweight medium, are made of cheap material, and usually include images and text. They are spread to communicate a message to a certain audience in a clear and simple way.<sup>59</sup> Of course, it cannot be ascertained if the in-

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54 Friederike Pannewick, *Opfer, Tod und Liebe: Visionen des Martyriums in der arabischen Literatur* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2012), 35.

55 Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 209.

56 *Ibid.*, 141–42.

57 Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 41–42.

58 Middleton, ‘What Is a Martyr’, 128.

59 Elizabeth Guffey, *Posters: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 30–33; James Aulich, *War Posters: Weapons of Mass Communication* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 15.

tended message is actually received, as the meaning of a poster is polysemic and thus differs depending on the audience.<sup>60</sup> In this way, posters can, as Maasri has noted, ‘fail to address one person yet communicate effectively with another’.<sup>61</sup>

Posters are reproduced and put up in multiples and are therefore able to be seen repeatedly by anyone passing by.<sup>62</sup> This is why they reach a broader audience than do visuals exhibited in museums or galleries or printed in newspapers, for instance. At the same time, posters are fleeting, short-lived, and ephemeral. Elizabeth E. Guffey understands posters as an anthropomorph in the sense of the Greek philosopher Xenophanes. In other words, posters have a life of their own: they are born when they are printed, they live when they are circulated, and they die when they are taken down, are washed away by rain, or are covered by yet other posters. Some posters also have afterlives, mostly in museums and archives, but also in curatorial and artistic practices.<sup>63</sup>

Martyr posters are a type of political poster. This function, where the poster is used as a political tool, has existed since the French Revolution, with later notable usage during the two World Wars, when posters were the primary medium through which governments communicated with their citizens to make announcements or to issue calls for mobilisation.<sup>64</sup> Political posters also elicited emotions. For example, after Germany was pushed back from French territories in 1944, many Nazi posters were torn down and burnt.<sup>65</sup> The medium flourished again during anti-imperialist protest actions, such as those against the Vietnam War during the 1960s.<sup>66</sup> According to Maasri, posters that emerged in this transnational movement also reached Lebanon and, as we will see below, became the ‘medium par excellence’ in the country in the 1970s.<sup>67</sup>

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60 Henri Myrntinen, ‘Death Becomes Him: The Hypervisibility of Martyrdom and Invisibility of the Wounded in the Iconography of Lebanese Militarised Masculinities’, in *Making War on Bodies: Militarisation, Aesthetics and Embodiment in International Politics*, ed. Catherine Baker (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 138.

61 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 6.

62 Of course, posters can also be put up indoors; however, their function there differs. This book is interested only in outdoor posters.

63 Guffey, *Posters*, 34–37.

64 Christina Holtz-Bacha and Bengt Johansson, ‘Posters: From Announcements to Campaign Instruments’, in *Election Posters Around the Globe: Political Campaigning in the Public Space*, eds. Christina Holtz-Bacha and Bengt Johansson (Cham: Springer, 2017), 3–5; Aulich, *War Posters*, 15–18.

65 Guffey, *Posters*, 96–97.

66 Carmen Brosig, ‘Remember Wounded Knee’. Strategische Re-Appropriationen stereotyper Repräsentationen Amerikanischer Ureinwohner im politischen Poster’, in *Zeitlichkeit und Materialität: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf Theorien und Phänomene der Präsenz*, eds. Juliane Engel, Mareike Gebhardt, and Kay Kirchmann (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2019), 334.

67 Zeina Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut’s Golden Sixties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 179.

Today, Christina Holtz-Bacha and Bengt Johansson argue, the political poster remains mainly in the form of election posters.<sup>68</sup> Guffey, whose perspective is more global since it looks beyond Europe and North America, points to the fact that posters still have other political roles, which she illustrates, among other examples, with martyr posters in Palestine, which are a means of communicating deaths for a political cause. These images encompass a photograph juxtaposed with slogans and symbols and narrate an absence through the presence of the face of the deceased.<sup>69</sup> It could be argued, too, that martyrs and their posters are usually created in circumstances where a collective needs to make sense of recurring deaths. This is because martyr images frame these deaths as having happened for a cause and therefore give meaning to them.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, I would like to add that none of the aforementioned publications considers the expansion of the medium of the poster. Today, posters, including those of martyrs, exist not only on offline walls but also in online spaces—in particular, on Instagram. Political agents, like street artists, use this platform to ‘showcase the issues, events, people, and places [they] care about’, as Lachlan MacDowall and Kylie Budge write.<sup>71</sup> These Instagram posts usually encompass a picture and textual descriptions, as we will see with specific examples throughout the book.

There are differences, however. Whereas before the advent of Instagram, one had to enter the street to view posters, this can now be done at home on our phones. Strolling turned into scrolling.<sup>72</sup> Unlike the situation of offline posters, users can interact with the posts by leaving comments, which can support or contradict the content. Of course, interaction with the poster was also possible before, mainly by destroying it, which is not easily done with Instagram posts unless someone reports a page and requests that it be blocked. As a result, the digital posters are more durable and long-lasting than physical images, especially since rain and other weather conditions are no longer a threat.

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68 Holtz-Bacha and Johansson, ‘Posters’, 1–5.

69 Guffey, *Posters*, 242–51.

70 Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 149.

71 Lachlan MacDowall and Kylie Budge, *Art After Instagram: Art Spaces, Audiences, Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 54.

72 *Ibid.*, 55.

### 2.1.3 The Poster-Based Transmission of the Martyr as a Figure That Escapes Definition

The figure of the martyr is difficult to grasp. In today's Lebanon, there are five main ideas of martyrdom. Shia and Christian narratives are closely linked to each other, as each includes an archetypal shahid (Hossein or Jesus) who, despite having a choice, decided to die at the hands of evil in a state of injustice. The Sunnis also imagine an afterlife for the shahid, but do not centralise martyrdom. The Druze, on the other hand, believe in the continuation of the soul on Earth, while in the secular concept of martyrdom, the realm of the afterlife is absent.

In general, there are two concepts of martyrdom that, as we will see throughout the book, function independently from religion. The narrow concept only considers those who have heroically chosen death as martyrs, while the broader concept also considers passive victims as shuhada. Importantly, martyrs are always constructed, and their stories need to be transmitted to an audience. This can be done via martyr posters, which are political posters that often emerge in contexts that have a need to make sense of many deaths. The medium in general is a mode of communication that is put up in multiples on the streets and online and is therefore able to reach a broad audience. Martyr posters are also very present on the walls in Lebanon, the country to which I will turn now.

## 2.2 The Dead Are on the Walls: Re-Tracing Images of Martyrs in Lebanon

Images of the dead, in particular martyrs, are widely visible in Lebanon. I will here introduce the roots of the image of the martyr in that country and begin with a wider historical view to provide background information that is connected to the emergence of the country as well as to its martyrs. In 1920, after the defeat and partition of the Ottoman Empire (of which Lebanon was a part from 1516 until 1918) in WW1, Great Britain and France divided some of the Ottoman Empire's former territories. This partition was previously decided in the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. Lebanon became a part of the French mandate. During WW2, the pro-Vichy administration in Lebanon was overthrown by Free French and British troops, and due to fears that Lebanon would fall under British control, France agreed to grant Lebanon independence, which it gained in 1943.<sup>73</sup>

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73 Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 75–80, 104–08. For the Sykes-Picot agreement, see also Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions* (London et al.: I.B. Tauris, 2024 [1988]), 20–21.

Today, there are eighteen sectarian groups in the country. The political sphere is also highly sectarianised, with the parliamentary seats divided among the sects.<sup>74</sup> According to the National Pact, the president must be a Maronite Christian,<sup>75</sup> the speaker of parliament a Shiite, and the prime minister a Sunnite. Therefore, it is not surprising that the ideology of most of the Lebanese parties is deeply intertwined with religion and that sectarian strife is still taking place on a regular basis. The history of these conflicts can be traced back at least to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the first big wave of killings happening in the 1860 Shuf Wars, a violent dispute between Druze and Christians in Mount Lebanon that resulted in massacres, displacements, and killings based on religious affiliation.<sup>76</sup>

It seems that the people who died in the conflict of 1860 have never been elevated as martyrs. As Lucia Volk has shown, the first people who were remembered as shuhada in Lebanon were a group of men of different confessions who staged an insurgency against the Ottoman rulers. This led to the public hanging of fourteen of these men in 1916 in Beirut, in today's Martyrs Square. According to Volk, the Ottoman rulers spread photographs of the dangling bodies shortly after their execution as a warning sign for other possible insurgents. In 1955, a book was published in Beirut that narrated the events that led to the deaths of these men and included portraits of the killed, presenting them as martyrs.<sup>77</sup> However, not everybody in Lebanon agreed that the insurgents were martyrs, as they were sometimes viewed as French collaborators who supported colonialism. This, Bosen argues, is an early symptom of what happens often in Lebanon: martyrs of one group are viewed as betrayers by another sect.<sup>78</sup>

In 1930, a sculpture remembering the dead of 1916, designed by Yussef Hoayek (Fig. 1.1), was inaugurated. As I outlined in the introduction, this work shows a Christian woman and a Muslim woman facing each other, mourning the ashes of the martyrs, symbolically placed in an urn between them. Many people thought this sculpture, which represented loss and sorrow, was not heroic enough, and after it was vandalised several times, it was replaced with a new monument in 1960.<sup>79</sup>

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74 Lucia Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 6.

75 The Maronites are a Christian subgroup with wide political influence in Lebanon. For details on the Maronites, see Salibi, *A House*, 72–107.

76 Traboulsi, *History*, 33–35.

77 Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 41, 47, 73. In 1972, the title page of the Lebanese newspaper *An Nahar* featured eleven portraits of the dead. I encountered the issue in Alfred Tarazi's exhibition *Memory of a Paper City* at UMAM, which took place from 10 June 2022 to 15 July 2023.

78 Bosen, *Martyr Cults*, 60–62.

79 Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 54–69. As Volk has shown, Hoayek's statue disappeared for more than fifty years, before being mysteriously found again in a warehouse in 2001. It has since been placed in front of the Sursock Museum. The original pedestal is missing and the Christian woman's nose is absent.



Fig. 2.1: Marino Mazzacurati, *Martyrs Statue*, 1960, Bronze, Beirut – Downtown, May 2021, Photograph AR.

It was built by the Italian Marino Mazzacurati and consists of four bronze figures (Fig. 2.1): a standing woman holding a torch, a standing man, and two recumbent men below.<sup>80</sup> The youthful, strong, muscular, and athletic bodies of all four figures represent victory and heroism.<sup>81</sup> Replacing the sculpture shows us how contested the representation of martyrdom was and embodies the question of whether the dead should be depicted as victims or heroes.

Both monuments represent but do not portray the deceased.<sup>82</sup> This would change with the *Wars in Lebanon*, which officially started in 1975 and ended in 1990, when posters of martyrs entered Lebanon's walls widely.<sup>83</sup> Usually referred to as 'the Lebanese civil war', I prefer to speak in terms of the *Wars in Lebanon* (henceforth, *Wars*). First, I use the plural because there was not constant fighting throughout the fifteen years, but armed confrontations that alternated with periods of relative peace. Second, I do not use the term 'civil war' because not only Lebanese militias, but also factions of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), such as Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and armies of other countries, such as the Syrian, Israeli, French, and US armies, participated in the *Wars*.<sup>84</sup> Although I will offer greater detail on the conflict in the Chapter 3 and occasionally throughout the book, I do not intend to write a history of the *Wars*, as other books exist on this subject.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the collection of the American University of Beirut (AUB) holds both scientific and non-scientific literature about, as well as

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80 Ibid., 97–103.

81 The inauguration of the new statue happened two years after a violent episode in 1958, which is sometimes referred to as 'the first civil war'. These armed clashes between Christians on the one side and Muslims and Druze on the other lasted several months and were caused by debate over a proposed change to the constitution and the question of whether Lebanon should join the Arab League. Especially the Christian parties opposed this, as they argued that the country should instead orient itself towards Europe and the US. Today, the thousands of people killed in this dispute are mostly forgotten. See Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 70–74. According to Volk, the only exception is a memorial in the small town of Beqaata in the Shuf mountains, which was commissioned by Kamal Jumblatt, the leader of the Druze Progressive Socialist Party, and inaugurated in 1960. Fifty-five Druze fighters and four civilian Christians who died in the clashes of 1958 are buried on the plot and labelled as martyrs (Volk, *Martyrs and Memorials*, 79–97).

82 Ibid., 112.

83 Haugbolle claims that posters were already used as a means of political communication during the conflicts of 1958, but I have not seen any of these. Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 165.

84 Chad Elias, *Posthumous Images: Contemporary Art and Memory Politics in Post-Civil War Lebanon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 5–6.

85 See Edgar O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon: 1975–92* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 1998) and Traboulsi, *History*, 187–239.

still and moving images from, the *Wars*.<sup>86</sup> Instead, what matters in the context of this book is that the period of the *Wars* was a golden age of visual martyrdom.

Already in 1978, journalist Maria Chakhtoura published a book focused on political graffiti, which became popular in the early days of the *Wars*. She also depicted posters of Christian and Muslim martyrs, demonstrating that the medium appeared on the walls as soon as the *Wars* began.<sup>87</sup> The most important publication that addresses posters during the *Wars*, however, is Maasri's book *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (2009). She analyses the signs, the discourses, and the materiality of the medium and situates the posters in their socio-political and historical frameworks.<sup>88</sup> Maasri contends that the posters were produced and circulated not by a single hegemonic actor but by several actors, and that these actors were not grassroots activists because many were linked to the fragile Lebanese state. Each of the groups claimed to be engaged in righteous activism while accusing the other groups of distributing persuasive propaganda.<sup>89</sup> Taking this into account, Maasri demonstrates that a framework of thought that is polarised between propaganda and activism is inapplicable to the poster culture during the *Wars*.

I will follow Maasri and think of the posters not as propaganda but as visual politics, a term offered by Maasri without being further defined. To do so, I draw on Roland Bleiker, who argues that images should be understood not 'just as illustrations or as representations but as political forces themselves'; therefore, visuals are consciously produced and circulated by political players in order to shape opinions by eliciting emotions that could not be activated by using text alone.<sup>90</sup> This was also achieved during the *Wars* by the many actors involved, which I will introduce in detail in 3.5. Each of the participating parties had their own media office, which produced political visual material, such as posters of martyrs.<sup>91</sup> Across all factions, these posters typically encompass a juxtaposition of text and image; they usually include a photographic portrait of the deceased, symbols, and biographical information about the life and death of the person depicted.<sup>92</sup>

Maasri argues that Lebanese poster production should be seen within a global context. After the Nakba of 1948 and the expulsion of thousands of Palestinians from their land, many of these refugees came to Lebanon, where, particularly

86 'Lebanese Civil War: 1975–1990', American University of Beirut, accessed 12 March 2023, <https://aub.edu.lb/libguides.com/c.php?g=655280&p=4599659>.

87 Maria Chakhtoura, *La Guerre des Graffiti: Liban 1975–1978* (Beirut: Dar An-Nahar, 1978).

88 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 17.

89 *Ibid.*, 6.

90 Roland Bleiker, 'Mapping Visual Global Politics', in *Visual Global Politics*, ed. Robert Bleiker (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1.

91 For details of the technical process of making the posters, see Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 35–37.

92 *Ibid.*, 88.



Fig. 2.2: PFLP (Designer Marc Rudin/Abu Jihad), '9th anniversary of the foundation of the popular front for the liberation of palestine', 1976, Poster, Palestine Poster Project Archives, Courtesy of Laura Zimmermann.

after the Arab defeat in the Six Day War in 1967, they started to organise themselves with the goal of returning to their homes and liberating Palestine. Fighters died in these activities and martyr posters were produced for them.<sup>93</sup> The figure of the Palestinian freedom fighter, the fedayee (which translates as zealot), was visually staged as a heroic, gun-carrying revolutionary guerrilla (Fig. 2.2).<sup>94</sup> Back then, printing technologies were more readily available in Beirut than in other Arab cities, which is why the poster industry thrived there.<sup>95</sup> These Palestinian posters 'were a precursor to Lebanese civil war political posters'<sup>96</sup> and the fedayee can be seen as a forerunner of the Lebanese sectarian martyr.

European influences can also be identified in the sectarian posters of the Wars. One poster (Fig. 2.3) shows Bachir Gemayel, who was the leader of

the Christian factions and was assassinated in 1982. He is pointing towards the viewer with his index finger, and the accompanying slogan reads: 'Our Lebanon Needs You'. This is a clear appropriation of a famous WWI poster, designed by Alfred Leete, that depicts Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War. Kitchener, whose index finger is pointed towards the spectator, is positioned amidst a slogan reading 'BRITONS [Lord Kitchener] WANTS YOU' (Fig. 2.4).

As Ghassan Hage and Sune Haugbolle have shown individually, Bachir (I am using his first name, as this is how he is usually spoken of in Lebanon) is still venerated and remembered on the walls today—often in relation to the notion of

93 Ibid., 39.

94 Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 56–57; Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism*, 181–89 and 216–17.

95 Ibid., 180–81. Lebanon also had the first printing press in the region. See Bahia Shehab and Haytham Nawar, *A History of Arabic Graphic Design* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2020), 85.

96 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 38. For a general overview of martyr cults among the Palestinians in Lebanon, see Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*. For an overview of Palestinian resistance posters, see Shehab and Nawar, 152–74.



Fig. 2.3: LF (Designer Pierre Sadek), 'You! Our Lebanon Needs You!', 1983, Poster, 48 x 66 cm, KBA 5, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).



Fig. 2.4: Alfred Leete, 'Britons Join Your Country's Army!', 1914, Poster, 74 x 50 cm.

Christian martyrdom.<sup>97</sup> The poster of Bachir that appropriates Leete's image is also depicted in a lavishly illustrated booklet by Wassim Jabre, which has a strong political Christian undertone and is therefore to be classified as a sectarian publication. Nonetheless, this source gives valuable insight into how the right-wing political Christian factions constructed their narrative, according to which it is necessary to resist a feared Muslim takeover of Lebanon. Jabre also emphasises that martyrdom was one of the first topics used in Christian posters of the Wars, and that images of Jesus are frequently invoked.<sup>98</sup>

Another international source of inspiration came from the martyr imagery of the Islamic Republic of Iran,<sup>99</sup> particularly from the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from 1980 until 1988. A very well-known photograph that is frequently circulated

97 Ghassan Hage, 'Religious Fundamentalism as a Political Strategy: The Evolution of the Lebanese Forces' Religious Discourse During the Lebanese Civil War', *Critique of Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (1992); Sune Haugbolle, 'The Secular Saint: Iconography and Ideology in the Cult of Bashir Jumayil', in *Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East: Sainthood in Fragile States*, eds. Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

98 Wassim Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters, 1975–1985* (Beirut: Trebia Publishing, 2012), 10.

99 Zeina Maasri, 'The Aesthetics of Belonging: Transformations in Hizbullah's Political Posters (1985–2006)', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5 (2012): 168.



Fig. 2.5: Islamic Republic of Iran, Amir Haj Amini, 1987 (?), Poster.

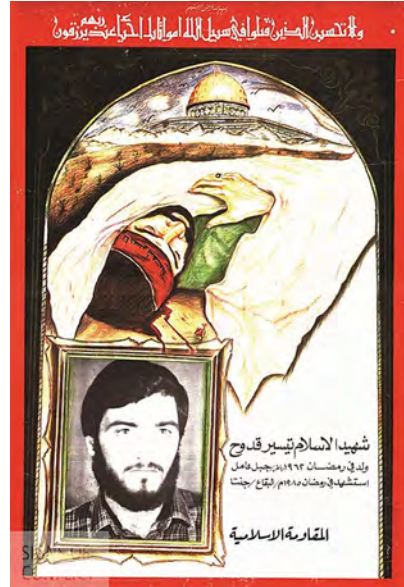


Fig. 2.6: Hezbollah, 'The Martyr of Islam Tayssir Kdou', 1985, Poster, 43 x 64 cm, HZB 5, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

on posters in Iran is that of Amir Haj Amini lying dead in the trenches (Fig. 2.5), still wearing military gear and a red headband. His face is sprinkled with blood.<sup>100</sup> Christiane Gruber explains the presence of blood as an 'emphatic mode of representation', where the spilled blood was understood to be necessary for the continuation of the Shia line of Islam, which is dominant in Iran, because life was transfused into the community via the blood. In other words, blood is believed to give life, just as plants and flowers grew out of the blood of Hossein and Siyavash.<sup>101</sup> Such images reactivate the Kerbala Paradigm and by referring to Eric Butel, Gruber claims that during the Iran-Iraq War, Iranian soldiers were turned into 'little Hosseins', fighting against Saddam Hossein, who became a contemporary Yazid.<sup>102</sup>

Especially Hezbollah, a Shiite group that has existed since 1982, adapted particular elements, such as red headbands, from the Islamic Republic's iconography

100 Younes Saramifar, 'The Pain of Others: Framing War Photography in Iran', *Ethnos* 84, no. 3 (2019): 481–82.

101 Christiane Gruber, 'The Martyrs' Museum in Tehran: Visualizing Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran', *Visual Anthropology* 25, nos. 1–2 (2012): 81.

102 Christiane Gruber, 'The Message Is on the Wall: Mural Arts in Post-Revolutionary Iran', *Persica* 22 (2008): 26.

(Fig. 2.6).<sup>103</sup> The influence links with the fact that during the *Wars*, Iranian graphic designers came to Lebanon and helped Hezbollah set up a professional media office and design posters.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, there are local forerunners. First, banners with political slogans (*yafra*) appeared on the walls even before the emergence of posters.<sup>105</sup> Second, putting up images of the dead—including those who died of natural causes—in the neighbourhood where they had lived has been practised in Lebanon even before 1975 and is done until the present day (Fig. 2.7). The martyr poster, as ‘a continuation of this practice’, is intended to inform the neighbourhood about the loss of life.<sup>106</sup>

During the *Wars*, martyr posters served as a ‘tool for struggle’.<sup>107</sup> Maasri has shown that heroic *shuhada* were used in competitions between political actors to outnumber each other in a symbolic commitment to their cause. The posters of martyrs demonstrate the amount of human capital a political player was able to provide, which again shows strength.<sup>108</sup> Khalili argues that martyrs remind the living of an obligation,<sup>109</sup> because each martyr’s death called for vengeance and therefore acted as a mode of mobilisation and recruitment for new fighters, who should be encouraged to follow the path of their brothers, neighbours, or friends, whose faces are visible in the posters.<sup>110</sup>

Importantly, images of heroic martyrs as ideal examples of the group for which they died create a sense of community and an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide in terms of identity.<sup>111</sup> Since the beginning of the *Wars*, posters have also been used to mark



Fig. 2.7: Announcements of Deaths, Beirut – Ashrafieh, March 2022, Photograph AR.

103 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 96–98.

104 *Ibid.*, 50.

105 *Ibid.*, 36–37.

106 *Ibid.*, 88.

107 *Ibid.*, 51.

108 *Ibid.*, 87–88.

109 Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 65.

110 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 88.

111 *Ibid.*, 102.



Fig. 2.8: Amal, 'We Are Guided from the Light of Your Eyes', Beirut – Zoukak el-Blat, February 2023, Photograph AR.

territory. Certain sectarian militias controlled specific areas, and the posters were used to define the sectarian affiliation of the location.<sup>112</sup>

Usually, posters vanished from the walls after a while, with only the posters of assassinated leaders, such as Kamal Jumblatt of the Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and Bachir, remaining until the present day.<sup>113</sup> Also, the image of Mussa al-Sadr, the founder of the Shiite Amal movement who disappeared in Libya in 1975, can still be encountered. As his body has never been found, he is technically missing, but the many visuals that are still omnipresent in Shia quarters of Beirut adhere to martyr iconography (Fig. 2.8).<sup>114</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that in 1982 a new type of martyr, the 'istishahid', emerged. This was a designation for people who conducted martyrdom operations. In most cases, these operations were executed by driving a vehicle with explosives into a military post of the perceived enemy, which meant that

the death of the driver was almost always presumed. I deliberately do not call these actions 'suicide operations': first, because they were not conducted due to fatigue from being alive, and second, because members of Muslim parties also conducted such operations. While suicide is forbidden in Islam, martyrdom operations are, as Bonsen claims, a controversial matter of discussion among Muslim scholars and are often legitimised as acts of self-defence.<sup>115</sup> Throughout this book, we will encounter images of those who conducted martyrdom operations.

112 Chakhtoura, *La Guerre*, 13; Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 51.

113 For different categories of martyrs, see Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 123.

114 For Mussa al-Sadr, see *ibid.*, 64–67; Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 165–72, 192–97.

115 Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 51. André-Dessornes's study has demonstrated that these operations were also conducted by women, and Straub has shown us that these operations generally granted an important role to photos and videos. See André-Dessornes, *Les Femmes-Martyres*; Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*.

The *Wars* were officially ended in 1989 with the Taif Agreement, but heavy fighting continued until 1990. In the end, there was no change in the political system or any solution to the conflicts. The warlords entered parliament, turned into politicians, and have remained as such until the present day. The fact that thousands of people vanished during the *Wars* was put to rest, and their relatives rarely learned anything about their whereabouts.

In 1991, the General Amnesty Law was passed. It pardoned most crimes between 1975 and 1990, with the exception of deaths that are considered to have sparked the *Wars* and assassinations of important political and religious figures.<sup>116</sup> This means that until the present day, many Lebanese feel that what happened to their relatives, who died or disappeared during the *Wars*, remains unaccounted for. There were no consequences for the killings and abductions, and this has led to a state of impunity. Judith Naeff summarises this as follows:

the situation after 1990 remained de facto unchanged, apart from the fact that the warring factions agreed that it was in everyone's interest to bring the large-scale violence to a halt. It is why many Lebanese maintain that the war has never really ended. The lack of a political solution to the issues that had been fought over against high costs, combined with the absence of judicial closure to the crimes that had been perpetrated, excluded redemptive debates on justice, reconciliation and commemoration from the political public sphere.<sup>117</sup>

Due to this lack of closure, it is not surprising that posters of martyrs of the sects persisted after the official end of the *Wars*, as Paula Schmitt and Haugbolle have both shown.<sup>118</sup> Schmitt argues that today's posters are 'designed to intimidate and provoke opponents, rather than gather new followers'.<sup>119</sup> Henri Myrntinen, in contrast, writes that the dead are still used as 'a call for others to follow their sacrificial example'.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, Bonsen claims that martyr posters today, like those produced during the *Wars*, are part of a competition for 'political power between parties of different sects' and are utilised to make sense of a death but also for the legitimisation of political goals, identity politics, and the recruitment of new followers.<sup>121</sup>

116 Sami Hermez, *War Is Coming: Between Past and Future Violence in Lebanon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 180–81.

117 Judith Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries of Beirut: A City's Suspended Now* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 24. Naeff's book further includes a section on literary and artistic reflections on martyrdom, where she argues that these artists and writers criticise how martyrs are turned into fetishised and de-individualised object-images by the sects (Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 219–25).

118 Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 161–93; Paula Schmitt, *Advertised to Death: Lebanese Poster Boys* (Beirut: Arab Printing Press, 2009).

119 *Ibid.*, 65.

120 Henri Myrntinen, 'Death Becomes Him', 128.

121 Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 125.

The violence did not stop after the official end of the *Wars*, however. On the one hand, the Israeli Army, which first invaded Lebanon in 1978, remained present in the South of the country until 2000, which led to frequent violent clashes with resistance groups such as Hezbollah. Also, the Syrian Army, which had been stationed in Lebanon since 1978, stayed until 2005. On the other hand, sectarian violence continued. Of particular importance was 2008, when Hezbollah tried to gain control over West Beirut following an attempt by the government to close the party's media stations. This resulted in an armed conflict between sectarian militias in and outside of Beirut, until negotiations settled the violence.<sup>122</sup> The deal that was made included an agreement to take down all political posters. As Are John Knudsen has shown, this 'poster truce' has not been implemented, and political posters remain on the walls.<sup>123</sup>

However, there have been attempts to erase traces of the *Wars*. This is most notable in the reconstruction of Downtown Beirut, a section of the city—located on the so-called Green Line between predominantly Christian East Beirut and predominantly Muslim West Beirut—that was heavily destroyed during the *Wars*. At the beginning of the 1990s, Rafic Hariri—a businessman who mediated the Taif Agreement and was elected as prime minister with his party, the Sunni Future Movement, in 1992—founded a company called Solidère (an acronym for 'Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction du Centre-ville de Beyrouth'), which subsequently demolished many of the historical buildings in Downtown and replaced them with new edifices. The reconstruction of this part of the city is largely perceived as a failure, because it does not resemble the pre-war city centre and because references to the violence that took place there are lacking. The current architecture almost pretends the *Wars* never took place. Haugbolle observes that 'the war happened downtown if anywhere, but it was there, if anywhere that the war was rendered invisible'.<sup>124</sup> Because of this ignorance, Volk cites the social scientist Joe Nasr, who described Solidère's reconstruction as a 'continuation of war by other means'.<sup>125</sup> Plans to include a memorial to the *Wars*, the so-called Garden of Forgiveness, have never been realised.<sup>126</sup> Today, Downtown is a non-place

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122 Ibid., 122.

123 Are John Knudsen, 'Death of a Statesman—Birth of a Martyr: Martyrdom and Memorials in Post-Civil War Lebanon', *Anthropology of the Middle East* 11, no. 2 (2016): 9. There was another unsuccessful attempt in 2015 to remove all political posters and other sectarian symbols from central Beirut; see Sarah Hamdar, 'Hizbullah-land? Branding Religio-Political Identity in Dahiya', *Journal for Cultural Research* 23, no. 3 (2019): 325.

124 Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 84–89; the quotation is on page 88. See also John Nagle, 'Defying State Amnesia and Memorywars: Non-Sectarian Memory Activism in Beirut and Belfast City Centres', *Social & Cultural Geography* 21, no. 3 (2020).

125 Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 109.

126 Ibid., 164.



Fig. 2.9: Future Movement, Rafic Hariri and Mazzacurati's Martyrs Statue, Poster, Beirut – Beshara el-Khoury Street, July 2007, Photograph Ward Vloehbergs.

with few opportunities to spend time, while numerous road-blocks prevent public access to certain streets.

Architecture cannot erase memory, force amnesia, or end an ongoing conflict, however. Following the official end of the *Wars*, new martyrs emerged. Between the mid-2000s and mid-2010s, numerous politicians, intellectuals, and journalists who were critical of the Syrian presence in Lebanon were assassinated—often through car bombs—and subsequently remembered in posters.

The most important of these killings was that of Hariri, who died in a massive car bombing on 14 February 2005.<sup>127</sup> The subsequent cult of the president-martyr,<sup>128</sup> which includes his memorial images, has been analysed by both Knudsen and Ward Vloehbergs.<sup>129</sup> Hariri was buried in a mausoleum next to Mazzacurati's Martyrs Statue, which was damaged during the *Wars* and restored by Hariri. Some posters show Hariri next to this same statue, which places him in a lineage with the martyrs of 1916 (Fig. 2.9).<sup>130</sup> As a consequence of Hariri's assassination, protests led to the so-called Cedar Revolution, which ended the Syrian tutelage in Lebanon in 2005.

One year later, Hezbollah abducted two Israeli soldiers. This caused another Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the so-called Tammuz War, named after the Arabic word for July, the month in which the war started. Lasting thirty-four days, with

127 For the car bombs, see Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 118–20; for Hariri's assassination, see Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 160–61.

128 *Ibid.*, 33. Of course, Hariri was not the president of Lebanon, but the Arabic word for prime minister is 'rais al-wuzara', which translates as president of ministers. See Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 211, footnote 46.

129 Knudsen, 'Death of a Statesman'; Ward Vloehbergs, *Architecture, Power and Religion in Lebanon: Rafiq Hariri and the Politics of Sacred Space in Beirut* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

130 Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 166–67. The Martyrs Statue is also depicted in posters by the Christian Kataeb and the Sunni Futurist Movement, but not by the Shia parties Hezbollah and Amal; see Lina Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 17. Mazzacurati's Statue was used in the imagery of the *Wars* from the beginning; a poster of Mostafa Maarouf Saad shows him in front of the statue and the port of Saida. See Chakhtoura, *La Guerre de Craffiti*, 126.



Fig. 2.10: Hezbollah, 'The Shahid al-Mujahed Rabiḥ Afif Alik (Abu Hadi) and the Shahid al-Mujahed Rami Bassam al-Assad (Jihad)', 2017, Online Poster.



Fig. 2.11: SSNP, 'The Hero Martyr Comrade Adonis Naser. He Was Martyred in a Battle of Heroism... Lattakia Countryside. 19.12.2016', Online Poster.

Hezbollah as the most-involved Lebanese faction, the war resulted not only in considerable destruction, but also in the creation of many martyrs, whose posters covered the streets of Hezbollah areas.<sup>131</sup> Finally, Israel retreated, and Hezbollah narrates this as the group's 'Divine Victory'.

Hezbollah's next opportunity to create new martyrs came with their contribution to the War in Syria, in support of Bashar al-Assad, that started in 2011. Many of Hezbollah's combatants died and are remembered on posters (Fig. 2.10), including a photographic headshot, his name, and the date and place of his death, as well as the Dome of the Rock (right) and a headband (left).

The secular Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) also participated on the side of al-Assad in this war and remembers their dead of this conflict in posters (Fig. 2.11). Christopher Solomon provides comprehensive historical insight into the importance of martyrdom within the party, which he—referring to Antuan Saadeh, the group's founder, who was executed in 1949—terms 'The Party of the Martyr'.<sup>132</sup> Due to the relatively small size of the SSNP, Hezbollah's martyr posters resulting from the War in Syria were significantly more prevalent.

131 Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 186.

132 Christopher Solomon, *In Search of Greater Syria: The History and Politics of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), 11.



Fig. 2.12: Amal, 'In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. The Martyrs Are with Their Lord. They Have Their Reward and Their Light. The Amal Movement Invites Its Faithful Followers to Participate in the Funeral of the Shahid al-Mujahed Mustafa Mounir Zbib', 2021, Online Poster.



Fig. 2.13: Hezbollah, 'Martyr of Treachery, al-Mujahed Mohammad Jamal Tamer (Samer)', 2021, Online Poster.

Hezbollah dominates the martyrdom discourse in Lebanon because they had the most opportunities to create new martyrs after the *Wars*. This is reflected in scholarship on this subject, as the majority of scientific literature on martyrdom in Lebanon has been written about this party.<sup>133</sup>

Hezbollah, but also Amal, created martyrs in an incident that happened during the time of writing, namely, the one-day Tayyouneh street battle that took place on 14 October 2021, in Beirut. This was caused by a dispute over the appointment of the judge responsible for the investigation of the explosion of 4 August. As a result, the Shia duo (Hezbollah and Amal) clashed with the Lebanese Forces (LF), a Christian party. Seven people were killed and visually proclaimed as martyrs (Figs. 2.12–2.13).<sup>134</sup>

133 Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 3. For example, Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) examines images of martyrs in Beirut's southern suburb and Hezbollah area, the Dahiyeh; Kinda Chaib, 'Hezbollah Seen Through Its Images: The Representation of the Martyr', in *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*, ed. Sabrina Mervin (London: Saqi, 2010) has studied the visual portrayal of the group's shuhada; Maasri, 'Aesthetics' has re-traced changes in the party's posters throughout the years; and Bashir Saade, *Hizbullah and the Politics of Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 43–62 has tackled the group's martyr imagery. Most recently, Sarah Hamdar, 'Hizbullah's 'Ashura Posters (2007–2020): The Visualization of Religion, Politics and Nationalism', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 14 (2021) has studied the party's posters after 2006 and demonstrated how the Kerbala Paradigm is visually held alive through current political events.

134 For this incident, see Tala Ramadan et al., 'At Least Six Dead, 30 Injured After Gunfire Erupts as Hezbollah and Amal Stage Protest Against Bitar', *L'Orient Today*, 14 October 2021, <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1278001/at-least-one-dead-nine-injured-as-gunfire-erupts-amid-protest-by-bitar-critics.html>.

Taking down martyr posters was still discussed in 2022, when the caretaker tourism minister asked Hezbollah and Amal to remove billboards that were located on the road from the airport to the city centre and thus visible to everyone who arrives in Lebanon and travels into Beirut. There were fears that these images, many of them showing shuhada, would irritate tourists, which the country desperately needed in its disastrous economic situation. These images were indeed replaced with tourism advertisements.<sup>135</sup>

Since 2019, non-sectarian martyrs have been created, and they were visible in images on Beirut's streets at the time of writing. These images showed men who were killed during the *thawra*, the protests against the sectarian system that took place in 2019 and 2020 (Fig. 2.14). Also, images of those killed in the explosion on 4 August 2020 appeared on the walls (Fig. 2.15). Their deaths sparked debate about who should be labelled a martyr and who should not. I will go into more detail about their images in Chapter 5. Today, the commemoration of martyrs takes place not only on the walls, but also online on the Instagram pages of sectarian parties, revolutionary groups, and NGOs.



Fig. 2.14: 'The Heroic Martyrs of the Thawra. Oh Souls Who Have Left This World, You Will Enter Paradise God Willing...'. Beirut – Martyrs Square, May 2021, Photograph AR.



Fig. 2.15: Images of the Dead of 4 August on Lampposts, Beirut – Port Area, January 2021, Photograph AR.

135 Sally Abou Al Joud, 'Caretaker Tourism Minister Asks Hezbollah and Amal to Remove Airport Road Billboards', *L'Orient Today*, 3 June 2022, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1301605/caretaker-tourism-minister-asks-hezbollah-and-amal-to-remove-airport-road-billboards.html>.

### 2.3 Martyrs and Posters in Lebanon

In this chapter, I have focused on concepts of martyrdom and their association with the poster and provided a detailed consideration of the martyr and his image in Lebanon.

First, I argued that martyrdom is an unstable category that escapes fixed definition and that martyrs are always constructed and disseminated by a certain group. In general, there are two approaches towards martyrdom that, as we will see throughout the book, function independently from religion. The narrow concept only considers those who have heroically chosen or at least accepted death as martyrs, while the broader concept also considers passive victims as *shuhada*. In this publication I focus on the poster as a transmitter of the narrative. The medium is a multiple that typically includes image and text and can be found in both offline and online spaces.

In the second part of this chapter, I turned my focus to Lebanon. I showed that the earliest martyrs can be traced back to at least 1916, and that the visual portrayal of the dead has been widely practised in posters by all sects in the country since 1975 and is presently ongoing. Today Hezbollah dominates the martyr discourse in that country, but other martyrs of other sects are also still present on the walls. During the time of writing, posters of the physically deceased that were not put up by sectarian groups also entered the street. Most of these images showed the martyrs of the *thawra* and the dead of 4 August.



### 3. Introducing *Nancy* and the Play's Context

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In this chapter, I will introduce Mroué's stage play *Nancy* and its context through different aspects that are necessary for the main analysis offered in Chapter 4. First, I trace the Beirut art scene and contemporary Lebanese art discourses. Then I outline the play and its reception, consider the state of research—focusing particularly on the tendency to neglect the play's visuals—and set up the broad parameters of my own theoretical response. This is followed by a contextualisation of *Nancy* in relation to two other works by Mroué on the subject of martyrdom. Then, I present the content of the play itself, giving a summary of the stories of each of the four actors in relation to the historical background of the anecdotes they relay. Finally, I introduce theories of appropriation art and use these to identify strategies of appropriation that Mroué employs in *Nancy* when drawing on martyr posters from the *Wars*.

#### 3.1 Beirut's Art Scene and Contemporary Lebanese Art Discourses

*Nancy* and Mroué are embedded in the Beirut art scene and the contemporary discourses on art from Lebanon.<sup>136</sup> I will outline both in the following. Numerous articles, books, chapters, and exhibition catalogues have been published on individual artists from Lebanon after the *Wars*. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss all of these in detail, and thus I will limit myself to the major works.<sup>137</sup>

Mroué is counted among the so-called Post-War-Generation. This is a group of artists born in the 1960s and 1970s who were tightly linked to each other, including Ziad Abillama, Tony Chakar, Joana Hadjithomas/Khalil Joreige, Lamia Joreige, Walid Raad/The Atlas Group, Walid Sadek, Jalal Toufic, and Akram Zaatari.

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136 As Marie Tomb has mentioned, it would be too simple to label all art that has been made in Lebanon or by Lebanese citizens as 'Lebanese art'. Many artists do not define themselves primarily via their nationality and do not want to identify themselves via a cultural marker, and therefore Tomb suggests using the phrase 'art from Lebanon'. See Tomb, 'On the Lebanese-ness of Lebanese Art', in *Rebirth: Lebanon XX1st Century Contemporary Art*, ed. Marie Tomb (Beirut: Solidère and The Beirut Exhibition Center, 2011).

137 For some of these references, see the bibliography provided by Ghalya Saadawi in 'Rethinking the Witness: Art After the Lebanese Wars' (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2019).

The first academic work to address art of this generation was Sarah Rogers's 2008 PhD dissertation, which examines art from Lebanon from the nineteenth century to the present. Rogers explains that the Post-War-Generation started to explore the effects of the *Wars* in 1990s Beirut, and that their art-making is usually characterised by the use of archival aesthetics, the blurring of fact and fiction, an engagement with postmodern theories, and the questioning of documents, notions of truth, and ideological grand narratives.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, their art is, as Kaelen Wilson-Goldie writes, 'work that is experimental, research-based, and critically engaged with sociopolitical issues related to identity, representation, the writing of history, the production of knowledge, and the exercise of power'.<sup>139</sup> The media used by the Post-War-Generation include videos, film, photography, urban interventions, performances, installations, and print.<sup>140</sup>

The beginning of post-war art is usually dated to 1992 and an installation by Abillama, who was dealing with the very recent history of the country by incorporating tools of war, such as bullets, missiles, and military equipment, into an art installation on a beach in the north of Beirut.<sup>141</sup> Three years later, the arts association Ashkal Alwan was established by Christine Tohmé, providing another key moment in the Post-War Generation's history.<sup>142</sup> Other important art initiatives at that time were the Ayloul Festival, which was held annually between 1997 and 2001,<sup>143</sup> the art space Espace SD, which existed from 1998 to 2007,<sup>144</sup> and the Arab Image Foundation (AIF), a photography archive that was established in 1997 with the mission to collect and preserve photography from the region.<sup>145</sup> Beginning in 2004, UMAM, another archive, has organised events and projects aimed at writing Lebanese history, particularly the *Wars*.<sup>146</sup>

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138 Sarah Rogers, 'Postwar Art and the Historical Roots of Beirut's Cosmopolitanism' (PhD diss., MIT, 2008), 52–61. See also Sarah Rogers, 'Out of History: Postwar Art in Beirut', *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007); Hanan Toukan, *The Politics of Art: Dissent and Cultural Diplomacies in Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 139; Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, 'Contemporary Art Practices in Post-War Lebanon: An Introduction', in Cotter, *Out of Beirut*, 84–85.

139 *Ibid.*, 85.

140 Saadawi, 'Rethinking the Witness', 126; Toukan, *Politics of Art*, 139.

141 Rogers, 'Out of History', 10–11; Saadawi, 'Rethinking the Witness', 133–37.

142 Rogers, 'Postwar Art', 49–50.

143 *Ibid.*, 44–45.

144 *Ibid.*, 65.

145 *Ibid.*, 50. See also Daniel Berndt, *Wiederholung als Widerstand? Zur künstlerischen (Re-)Kontextualisierung historischer Fotografien in Auseinandersetzung mit der Geschichte Palästinas* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018), 39–47.

146 Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 40.

All these spaces opened during a time when there was no wide gallery system, museum of contemporary art, or art fairs in Beirut. This fits with Rasha Salti's observation, made in 2002, that the artists came from the middle class and usually had day jobs while practising art in their spare time and financing their projects themselves.<sup>147</sup> In 2006, Suzanne Cotter similarly noted that 'networks of artists, writers, performers and filmmakers run independent spaces and organise events and small festivals where work can be presented for short periods'.<sup>148</sup>

An important figure was the French curator Catherine David, who included artists from the Post-War Generation in *Documenta X* (1997), where she was the artistic director, and in her project *Tamáss: Contemporary Arab Representations*, which was exhibited in different European cities. She also participated in Ashkal Alwan's art programme *Homeworks* in 2002.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, the first major exhibition of Post-War Generation artists abroad, *Out of Beirut*, was organised by Cotter and took place in Modern Art Oxford in 2006.

The literature that I have cited ends the discussion around 2010, although the art scene in Beirut was thriving between 2010 and 2019, partly because of the opening of the Beirut Art Center in 2009. The centre is the first non-profit exhibition space dedicated to contemporary art in Lebanon, and it has held numerous solo and group exhibitions.<sup>150</sup> The openings of the galleries Sfeir-Semler (2006), Tanit (2009), and Marfa' (2015) were also significant; today, all represent artists of the Post-War Generation. Other institutions that should be mentioned are the Beirut Art Fair, which came into being in 2010 and had its—at least for now—last edition in 2019, and the Sursock Museum, which reopened in 2015 as a space for modern and contemporary art. Other important initiatives that emerged in these years include both private institutions, such as the Dalloul Art Foundation and the Saradar Collection, and those with a more alternative-space character, such as Mansion, the Temporary Art Platform, and Haven for Artists.

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147 Rasha Salti, 'Framing the Subversive in Post-War Beirut', in *Homeworks: A Forum on Cultural Practices in the Region; Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria*, eds. Christine Tohmé and Mona Abu Rayan (Beirut: Ashkal Alwan, 2002), 79–88.

148 Suzanne Cotter, 'Beirut Unbound', in Cotter, *Out of Beirut*, 26.

149 Catherine David, 'Learning from Beirut: Contemporary Aesthetic Practices in Lebanon', in Tohmé and Abu Rayan, *Homeworks*, 33.

150 Isabelle de le Court, *Post-Traumatic Art in the City: Between War and Cultural Memory in Sarajevo and Beirut* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 44–45; Jim Quilty, 'Opening the Beirut Art Center's Doors a Little Wider', *L'Orient Today*, 22 February 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1329194/opening-the-beirut-art-centers-doors-a-little-wider.html>.

These initiatives and institutions, along with others, turned Beirut from a city without much infrastructure for the arts into a regional art hub. A collector who visited the Beirut Art Fair in 2017 noted the city had an extremely vibrant art scene, writing that ‘it’s a city curators love visiting, and the scene here is organic—you have all the important components of a strong scene: artists, museums, nonprofits, publishing houses, collectors, patrons, curators, and everything in between’.<sup>151</sup>

Until the current crisis, much financial support came from the banking sector, which introduced ethical questions of funding into Beirut’s art spaces. As Rayya Badran writes:

The banks’ attempts at participating in the discourse of contemporary art reveals a more conspicuous move to become part of the engines that drive the art scene. The perceived informality or ‘non-institutionality’ of Beirut’s older organisations must now grapple with the emergence of distinct proposals and agendas in relation to art production and circulation.<sup>152</sup>

These art spaces have run into a slew of issues since 2019; as the economic crisis started to unfold, banks withdrew their funding. During the thawra, most spaces closed, and the explosion of 4 August left many spaces heavily damaged. After 2020, several directors, including those from the AIF, the Sursock Museum, and the Beirut Art Center, stood down from their posts. Although new directors were appointed, the institutions are still gripped by questions of programme re-orientation and funding.

Even if most of these places have been rebuilt and reopened at the time of writing, I have never experienced the art scene in Beirut as ‘thriving’. Of course, there were openings every now and then, but shows were few and exhibitions tended to stay open for several months, which resulted in little change of the programme, and many artists left the country after the explosion. What remains today is a very small scene. Apart from a few exceptions, such as the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Mophradat, and Mawred, spaces are heavily reliant on funding from European sources, such the British Council, the Institute Français, or the Goethe-Institut. The fact that these institutions are the financial backbone of Beirut’s art scene raises questions of neo-colonialism and political soft power.

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151 Arsalan Mohammad, ‘Beirut’s Art Scene Is in the Midst of a Reawakening, Its Movers and Shakers Say’, *ArtNet News*, 29 September 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/beirut-art-scene-1099994>.

152 Rayya Badran, ‘On the Beaten Path: A Short Reflection on Art Spaces in Beirut’, *La Belle Revue*, 2019, <https://www.labellerevue.org/en/global-terroir/beirut/on-the-beaten-path-a-short-reflection-on-art-spaces-in-beirut>.

Another problem during the time of writing this book were the daily struggles—for example, with electricity—that often made it impossible to focus on producing meaningful art. It is not surprising, then, that the art production was preoccupied with the status quo of living in a place ruined by a severe economic crisis and a devastating blast, rather than with the *Wars*.<sup>153</sup> I will discuss examples of these works in Chapter 5. Nonetheless, the artist-run space take\_over has opened after the blast and still had an active programme in June 2024. Also, Sfeir-Semler has opened an additional space in the late summer of 2023 and the gallery no/mad utopia opened its doors in Gemmayzeh in October 2023. Finally, I would like to note that many works from the Post-War Generation, as well as from a younger generation were on show in Ashkal Alwan's group exhibition, *Intimate Garden Scene (in Beirut)*, which displayed art from Lebanon from the last approximately 30 years and was held in the Surssock Museum.<sup>154</sup>

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153 However, there are still young artists who continue the path of the Post-War Generation. An example is Batoul Faour's exhibition *The Bunker, The Barracks and the Base*, which was on show in the Mina Image Center in fall 2023. The work traces the history of the barracks and fortifications in the Kham-Marjayoun valley in the South of Lebanon. These structures were built by the British and overtaken by the French. They then became a South Lebanon Army/Israeli prison and were finally bombed by the Israeli Army in 2006. A three-channel video installation shows kids playing in the barracks, interviews of former inmates, and the landscape, which allows stunning views to Syria and Palestine/Israel. The work deals with notions of history and memory in a wider geopolitical sense in this sensitive region at the border and became terribly urgent after the events of 7 October 2023, as the South and especially Kham were bombed and shelled by the Israeli Army multiple times. This led to displacements of the inhabitants as well as heavy damage to individual livelihoods. For an interview with the artist and a discussion of the work, see Jim Quilty, 'Wartime Building, Bombing and Looting: Traces of Empire in Kham', *L'Orient Today*, 21 October 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1354073/wartime-building-bombing-and-looting-traces-of-empire-in-kham.html>.

154 This exhibition opened on 30 November 2023 and was supposed to run through 15 November 2024.

### 3.1.1 Beyond Trauma and Amnesia

Art from the Post-War Generation is often interpreted as dealing with the artist's traumatic experiences during the *Wars* or as countering the post-war amnesia that is embodied by Hariri's *Solidère* project.<sup>155</sup> I consider such readings problematic and simplistic. I also do not think, as Johnny Alam claims, that the Post-War Generation aims to create a national identity by writing alternative histories.<sup>156</sup>

Instead, my way of thought follows Ghalya Saadawi, who has poignantly noted:

the notion of trauma and the need to rewrite history through memory in artistic contexts is not useful, structurally or discursively, in understanding what is at stake in the Lebanese context, nor does it help us understand artistic production that has worked precisely to address the violations, obscurities and impediments in governmentality and the discourses of or [sic] war—politically.<sup>157</sup>

While Saadawi claims that the application of trauma theory does not tell us anything about the events addressed and that it misses the political aspect of these works, my point is rather that by reading these works in the framework of trauma theory, such as that offered by Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, the artists are reduced to traumatised victims who try to soothe their pain by making art. I instead understand the works as being created by highly reflexive individuals who critically question and engage with images resulting from a time of violence. This reflects the thoughts of the Lebanese Post-War Generation artist and writer Walid Sadek, who has indicated that he does not want to be viewed as a passive victim

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155 See Saadawi, 'Rethinking the Witness', 163–66. For example, Mark Westmoreland argues in 'Crisis of Representation: Experimental Documentary in Postwar Lebanon' (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2008) that there is a crisis of representation among artists from Lebanon due to gaps left by amnesia. Marie Tomb, in *War/Identities: When Words Aren't Enough: Human Rights Seen Through the Eyes of Lebanese Artists* (Beirut: Human Rights Watch, 2016), interprets works of the Post-War Generation as constructing alternative and possible stories of the *Wars* to make the Lebanese face their amnesia. In a similar vein, Maria Domene Danes reads the art of the Post-War Generation in 'Ar(t)chive Production in Post War Lebanon' (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2018) as dealing with traumas resulting from state-sponsored amnesia, which these artists oppose and challenge by reviving memories through archival practices. The same strain of thought is followed by Isabelle de le Court, whose writing in *Post-Traumatic Art* focuses on how war trauma as a civil experience is aesthetically mediated. In doing so, she situates the work of the Post-War Generation between trauma and amnesia.

156 Johnny Alam, 'Real Archive, Contested Memory, Fake History: Transnational Representations of Trauma by Lebanese War Generation Artists', in *History, Memory, Performance*, eds. David Dean, Yana Meerzon, and Kathryn Prince (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 169–86.

157 Saadawi, 'Rethinking the Witness', 90.

waiting for a future release.<sup>158</sup> Naeff, with reference to the writings of Sadek, has also expressed doubt as to whether trauma theory is the right methodology to apply to the works of the Post-War Generation. She argues that these artworks deal with an unresolved past rather than with individual trauma.<sup>159</sup>

Explaining why amnesia is a problematic term to apply to the Lebanese situation requires more elaboration, however. It is mostly argued that the state's disinterest in establishing a culture of memory—which is evident, for instance, in the fact that the *Wars* are not taught in school<sup>160</sup>—is caused by fears of a re-emergence of the sectarian conflicts. While I am not questioning this, I would add that it comes as no surprise that a governmental system that is unable or unwilling to provide electricity, handle garbage removal, implement public transport, or elect a president does not have the ability to establish a culture of remembering fifteen years of contested violence.

I find it difficult to speak of amnesia regarding the *Wars*, because, there are competing sectarian memories. Wilson-Goldie already questioned the existence of amnesia in 2006, writing that there is a public discourse about the *Wars* in political and religious leaders' speeches, in the media, and in private conversations.<sup>161</sup> Volk and Haugbolle individually argued in 2010 that the term 'collective amnesia', which surrounds the *Wars* and can be traced back to the sociologist Samir Khalaf, is not accurate, because many published war memoirs, novels, symposiums, and other works provide details about life during the *Wars*. A memorial for the *Wars* consisting of non-usable tanks stacked on top of each other was even built by the Lebanese Army. The only amnesiacs, according to Volk, are urban planners and politicians.<sup>162</sup> But even Solidère was unable to remove all traces of the *Wars* from Downtown. Ruins, such as the Holiday Inn and the Murr Tower, to which I will return in 4.5, are still embedded in the city centre, serving as unintentional memorials, and strangeness is still tangible in Downtown. One cannot but feel that there is something wrong when one walks through the city centre's empty streets, some of which are blocked, and encounters barbed wire and abandoned high-end shops and restaurants.

What is more, memory is also institutionalised by the sects. The Hezbollah-run Mleeta museum opened on a remote hill in Southern Lebanon in 2010. It focuses on the militia's resistance activities against the Israeli occupation by exhibiting

158 Walid Sadek and Mayssa Fattouh, 'Tranquility Is Made in the Picture', *Filip* 17 (2012), <https://fillip.ca/content/tranquility-is-made-in-pictures>.

159 Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 41–42.

160 Erik van Ommering, 'Formal History Education in Lebanon: Crossroads of Past Conflicts and Prospects for Peace', *International Journal of Educational Development* 41 (2015): 201.

161 Wilson-Goldie, 'Contemporary Art', 85–86.

162 Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 74–84; Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 107–08.

destroyed Israeli army equipment, thereby representing the Israeli Army as weak. There is also a large, labyrinthine open-air space leading through a forest, where, every now and then, visitors encounter a tunnel, a shelter, or Hezbollah missiles, making the daily life of the resistance fighters tangible.<sup>163</sup>

Also, political Christian sectarian memory is musealised. The Musée de l'Indépendance in Jounieh opened in 2019 and is run by the Christian Kataeb party. Here, the history of Lebanon, from biblical times to the present and including the Wars, is told. Certain episodes, such as the massacre of Damour, when Palestinian factions conducted an ethnic cleansing of Christians in that coastal town in 1976, are highlighted, whereas the massacre of Sabra and Shatila, in which Christian militias slaughtered thousands of Palestinians in 1982, is not mentioned. The museum's storyline tells how Christian resistance is necessary in order to avoid falling under Muslim occupation in Lebanon.<sup>164</sup> Both museums present a sectarian version of history: Mleeta tells the narrative of Hezbollah, and the museum in Jounieh tells the narrative of the Kataeb.

In addition, I was constantly confronted with memories of the Wars in my daily life in Lebanon. For example, in August 2022, I was lying on the beach when an elderly man approached me and my friends to sell beer. We started chatting, and he told us that he was a soldier during the Wars and of the battles in which he participated. He further elaborated that he kidnapped two people back then, who he then exchanged for two kidnapped members of his faction. Before he left, he showed us a scar on his belly that he claimed was caused by being shot during the Wars. Of course, I have no way of verifying his stories, but this anecdote demonstrates that the Wars are discussed, and details are even shared with strangers on a lazy Sunday afternoon at the beach.

As there is no amnesia of the Wars, the Post-War Generation of artists does not write a history of a void. This is also what the artists themselves are saying. According to Mroué, there is no absolute truth about the Wars but rather multiple narratives, with each sect having its own interpretation. He believes that every version

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163 For the museum, see Mona Harb and Lara Deeb, 'Culture as History and Landscape: Hizballah's Efforts to Shape an Islamic Milieu in Lebanon', *The Arab Studies Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2011); Khatib, *Image Politics*, 61–65; Hatim El-Hibri, *Visions of Beirut: The Urban Life of Media Infrastructure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 144–77. Another Hezbollah museum that commemorates the group's martyrs who died fighting the Islamic State (IS), but that also encompasses martyrs of the Wars, opened in August 2023 in Baalbek. See Lyana Alameddine, 'Hezbollah's 'Jihadi Museum' Opens in Baalbek', *L'Orient Today*, 4 September 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1348336/hezbollahs-jihadi-museum-opens-in-baalbek.html>.

164 Patricia Khoder, 'Un Musée de l'indépendance des Kataëb pour Lutter Contre l'amnésie', *L'Orient le Jour*, 13 April 2019, <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1166230/un-musee-de-lindependance-des-kataeb-pour-lutter-contre-lamnésie.html>.

in the parties' discourses is true, and in his artistic practice he attempts to merge and confront all of these without claiming to provide a complete narrative.<sup>165</sup> In an interview he elaborated on this further by saying:

We thought that we would like to 'think' the war instead of remembering it. We were not interested in telling about how we lived during the war and what it had done to us; that would kill every work of art.<sup>166</sup>

In a similar vein, Hadjithomas/Joreige told me that they do not think there is a problem of amnesia, and that there are rather a multitude of existing memories that are not transformed into a history.<sup>167</sup>

And Sadek claims that the *Wars* never ended and are ongoing. Instead of amnesia, he locates an excessive presence of violence in Beirut, a city that is inhabited by subjects who have witnessed too much. Their memory of the *Wars* and therefore the presence of the *Wars* makes it impossible to see a future.<sup>168</sup>

Taking these statements into account, I find it more fruitful to think the work of the artists of the Post-War Generation beyond the framework of amnesia or trauma. This book therefore follows approaches by Chad Elias and Daniel Berndt. Elias does not apply these problematic paradigms but analyses how the post-war artists react to the images of the *Wars* by means of appropriation, by challenging discourses of the political system and by creating images that were previously excluded from the sectarian memory.<sup>169</sup> Berndt analyses how photography plays a role in the artistic construction and reconstruction of history and memory and how artists negotiate photographs as objects of social relevance. He does not primarily situate works of the Post-War Generation in the context of the *Wars*, but instead bases his discussion on film and media theories.<sup>170</sup>

Finally, Alam's claim that these artists try to create a national identity is not feasible, because their works reach only a limited audience in Lebanon, as Hanan Toukan has shown. One of her interlocutors told her:

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165 Philip Bither, 'Rabih Mroué in Conversation with Philip Bither', Walker Art Center, filmed 1 February 2012, video of interview, 61:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYXxPIh7zPo>.

166 Maria Hlavajova, Jill Winder, and Cosmin Cosimas, 'In Place of a Foreword: A Conversation with Rabih Mroué', in *Rabih Mroué: A BAK Critical Reader in Artist's Practice*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder (Rotterdam: BAK, 2012), 18.

167 Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Zoom Conversation with the author, 23 and 30 March 2021.

168 Sadek and Fattouh, 'Tranquility Is Made'; Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 171.

169 In one chapter of his book, Elias discusses martyrdom in art practices and focuses on how artists examine the changing media of martyr images and how Hezbollah has adapted Lebanese left-wing martyrdom representations (Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 75–92).

170 Berndt, *Wiederholung als Widerstand?*

There is a huge gap between [that] kind of artistic production and people here [in Lebanon], so that you are actually producing for a Western audience and that's a bit difficult, because then you're producing what they would like to see or not see in a situation of violence. But you never test what you're producing with your local viewers. For instance, Ras Beirut would see a courageous play on the war by Rabih Mroué, but his audience is comprised mostly of those same people who are already very close to the rest of the Ashkal Alwan group and who share a lot of the same experiences. Most of them are disillusioned Leftists or Nationalists, and there are a few hundred of those. You then take that same play to Japan or wherever and audiences can see a courageous Lebanese criticizing his system [...]. But you can't take this to Zgharta or Bint Jbeil ... so then who is your public?<sup>171</sup>

The works of the Post-War Generation do not resonate beyond leftist urban intellectuals and probably could not be staged in small, conservative towns in the Lebanese hinterland, such as Bint Jbeil and Zgharta. Therefore, it is not realistic to believe that the Post-War Generation could indeed contribute to the identity formation of the country. Importantly, the statement also critically mentions that many of these artists show abroad more than they do in Lebanon.

The question of spectators is still relevant today. While the Beirut audience is dwindling due to migration, shows on art in Lebanon are often held abroad. A recent example is *A Manifesto of Fragility: Beirut and the Golden 60s*, which was on display in Berlin's Gropius Bau and at the Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art in 2022, as well as in Qatar's Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in 2023. The exhibition has never been shown in Lebanon and was therefore accessible only to a foreign or diasporic audience.

To sum up, it is problematic to discuss art from the Post-War Generation in the framework of amnesia and trauma: first, because there is (sectarian) memory of the Wars and second, because it is not my goal to view artists as traumatised victims. Due to a limited audience, art can also not create a national identity or change society. Therefore, this book builds on works by authors who understand artworks from the Post-War Generation as reflections of an unresolved past that is still present in Beirut and that affects pictures and image-making. While the Post-War Generation emerged at the beginning of the 1990s in a situation without art institutions or substantial funding, there have been significant changes in the 2010s, and today the post-war artists are represented by galleries and are internationally established. However, the ongoing crisis that began in 2019 has also affected the art scene in Beirut. *Nancy* was created at a time when no financial crisis was in sight, but when—then like now—sectarian strife was simmering in Beirut. I will now turn my focus on the play.

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171 Toukan, *Politics of Art*, 158.

### 3.2 About *Nancy*

*Nancy* premiered in Tokyo in 2007 and then toured Lebanon and other countries.<sup>172</sup> Four actors, Ziad Antar, Hatem Imam, Rabih Mroué, and Lina Saneh, sit next to each other on a black sofa (Fig. 1.3), which, as Monique Bellan points out, does not provide enough space for them to sit comfortably. Like Lebanon, the sofa seems to be too small for all the different people who are located very close to each other.<sup>173</sup>

For one and a half hours, the four protagonists narrate fragmentary anecdotes about incidents from the conflicts that took place in Lebanon between 1973 and 2007. The actors use lighthearted language and talk at quite a fast pace in Amiyeh, the Levantine version of colloquial Arabic that is spoken in Lebanon. *Nancy*, as the critic Jim Quilty notices, does not follow conventional theatre forms. This is because the actors are not communicating with each other but are delivering monologues, and they almost never react to the anecdotes the other actors relay.<sup>174</sup> This has also been pointed out by film and media scholar Stella Bruzzi, who understands *Nancy* as a speech act, in Judith Butler's terms, because the speech itself forms the action of the play.<sup>175</sup>

As *Nancy* progresses, the four protagonists repeatedly tell that they die as martyrs. Each time they die, they return to life, only to die again in another incident of conflict. Almost every anecdote of death that the actors tell the audience is accompanied by an image that pops up on one of the four large, rectangular screens that are located above the heads of the actors. Most of the visuals, which were created by graphic designer Samar Maakaroun, are appropriations of posters—taken from various Lebanese sects—of martyrs who died during the Wars. In the play, however, the visuals include photographs and the names of the actors. Some of these photographs came from the personal collections of Antar, Imam, Mroué, and Saneh; others were staged for the play. The selection of posters from the Wars is based on Maasri's research for her 2009 book *Off the Wall*, which I introduced in Chapter 2. While working on her publication, Maasri showed the posters she had collected to Mroué, who used them as a source of inspiration. Maasri agreed to provide Mroué with all her visual material, and Maakaroun based her remakes of the posters on this collection.<sup>176</sup>

172 Cis Bierinckx, 'Reconstructing Fragments', in *Interviews: Rabih Mroué*, ed. Nadim Samman (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2022), 218.

173 Monique Bellan, *Dismember Remember: Das zeitgenössische Theater von Rabih Mroué und Lina Saneh* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2013), 157.

174 Jim Quilty, 'How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April Fool's Joke', *Bidoun* (2008), <https://new.bidoun.org/articles/how-nancy-wished-that-everything-was-an-april-fool-s-joke>.

175 Hila Peleg and Stella Bruzzi, 'Towards 'Approximation'', in Hlavajova and Winder, *Rabih Mroué*, 52.

176 Samar Maakaroun, Zoom conversation with the author, 17 February 2021. The production of the posters for *Nancy* took around three weeks.

While the actors speak, the Arabic text is visible on the floor in front of the sofa and the English translation can be seen on a screen above the images. The stage set-up, including the sofa, the actors, the screens, and the text in Arabic and English, creates a certain excess of speech and visuals. This was intended to point to the overkill in daily life during the Wars.<sup>177</sup>

The curator and art researcher Arkadiusz Poltorak describes the visual strategy in *Nancy* as 'archival appropriation', and in the play this strategy is used to reveal how figures, such as martyrs and heroes, are constructed.<sup>178</sup> Bruzzi also understands the visuals as a critique of the images of martyrs in Lebanon and as complementary to the speech.<sup>179</sup> In Quilty's reading, the posters 'reflect different phases in each character's political career'. Importantly, he mentions the interplay between the posters and the text and indicates that the screens are not only 'ornaments' but a vital part of the play. He also remarks that, via the posters, the individuality of the actors is subsumed.<sup>180</sup> In a similar vein, Bruzzi describes the actors as composite characters who represent multiple personalities, but not necessarily themselves as individuals.<sup>181</sup> Theatre and performance studies scholar Solveig Gade notes that because the actors only tell combat-related stories, they become de-individualised. They are presented as fighters and martyrs but not as human beings with feelings and emotions, 'reduced as it were to the archetypal identity of the figure of the fighter'.<sup>182</sup>

Some visuals show the martyrs in almost comical heroic poses, which might emphasise their readiness to fight.<sup>183</sup> These very images are the reason why Haugbolle, a sociologist, locates *Nancy* in a gender-based framework and reads the play as a critique of the stereotypical roles of men in warfare and of political discourses that celebrate violence and masculinity.<sup>184</sup>

Furthermore, Mayssa Jallad mentions that Murr Tower, which was Beirut's highest building during the Wars and a site of battle, appears on the screens. She understands the building, which is still present as a widely visible ruin in Beirut,

177 Ibid.

178 Arkadiusz Poltorak, 'History as an April Fool's Joke: Defamiliarising Collective Memory in Rabih Mroué's *So Little Time*', *Art History & Criticism* 14 (2018): 43.

179 Peleg and Bruzzi, 'Towards Approximation', 55.

180 Quilty, 'How Nancy'.

181 Peleg and Bruzzi, 'Towards Approximation', 61.

182 Solveig Gade, 'Learning to Live with Ghosts in the Aftermath of War: On Documentary Strategies in Rabih Mroué's *How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April's Fool's Joke*', *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 8, no. 4 (2015): 334.

183 Bellan, *Dismember Remember*, 156.

184 Sune Haugbolle, 'The (Little) Militia Man: Memory and Militarized Masculinity in Lebanon', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 8, no. 1 (2012): 133–34.

as a 'fifth character' of *Nancy*.<sup>185</sup> Also, the cultural analyst Naeff stresses the role of Murr Tower at the end of the play and interprets it as 'admonition'.<sup>186</sup>

Regarding the choice of title, Quilty suggests it refers to 13 April 1975, the official starting date of the *Wars*.<sup>187</sup> According to Mroué, however, it is related to the ongoing violence in Lebanon. He explained that he read an article about the tensions between Palestinians and Israelis in Ramallah that was called 'How I Wished that Everything Was an April Fool's Joke' and that had as its author a writer whose first name was Nancy. He liked the title, as it points to the inability to leave the vicious cycle of never-ending violence between Palestinians and Israelis, which can be perceived as absurd. As the different sects in Lebanon also continue to fight in different ways, this vicious cycle reminds Mroué of the one in Lebanon—and of an April Fool's joke.<sup>188</sup>

This situation of ongoing violence relates to the four protagonists' repeatedly dying as martyrs, then returning to life. Contrary to the claims of some researchers, these returns to life are not resurrections.<sup>189</sup> In a Lebanese context, resurrection is associated with the Druze belief in the return of the soul, which, as Mroué stressed, is not addressed in *Nancy*.<sup>190</sup> Instead, Mroué compares the actors' deaths and their returns to life to a videogame, saying:

We know that all the new generation is going into these video games where you die and you continue the game from the point where you died, not from the beginning. And you continue and die and come back alive and couldn't end—so on and so forth. [...] As if we are saying that we are the Lebanese. We are destined to be killed and to come again and continue to war again like we'll not stop. We are not tired, so.<sup>191</sup>

185 Mayssa Jallad, 'Beirut's Civil War Hotel District: Preserving the World's First High-Rise Urban Battlefield' (MA thesis, Columbia University, 2017), 134-35.

186 Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 93. Haugbolle had already drawn attention to the significance of Murr Tower as a *lieux de mémoire* in *Nancy* in 'The (Little) Militia Man', 134.

187 Quilty, 'How Nancy'.

188 Claire Shine, 'How Rabih Beat the Censor', *Financial Times*, 12 October 2007, <https://www.ft.com/content/44be3f1c-7864-11dc-8e4c-0000779fd2ac>.

189 For example, Jallad, 'Beirut's Hotel District', 134 and Poltorak, 'History as an April Fool's Joke', 42 write of resurrections.

190 Rabih Mroué, Zoom conversation with the author, 18 May 2021. Druze beliefs in reincarnations in relation to martyrdom are addressed in Lawrence Abu Hamdan's work *Once Removed* (2019). Abu Hamdan interviews the reincarnated self of a former militiaman of the PSP, who tells Abu Hamdan that he died when he was seventeen and shows Abu Hamdan photographs of his previous self during the *Wars*. In 2019, this very PSP militiaman, whose name is Bassel Abi-Chahine, did a photo series called *West Beirut Shot Twice*. He juxtaposed photographs of sites in West Beirut, where he believes he was active at during the *Wars*, with images he took of the same sites in 2019. These juxtaposed photographs were also used in *Once Removed*.

191 Deborah Amos, 'Play Challenges Lebanese to Face Past, Present', *NPR*, 6 October 2007, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=15067619>.

Dying and coming back to life are related to the current situation in Lebanon. In this way, the transgenerational sectarian strife in the country has similarities to a videogame where protagonists are caught in a loop, a continuous cycle of violence, as recently manifested in the 2021 Tayyouneh clashes. Even if someone who is fighting for a certain party dies, there is someone else living who is willing to continue this fight. Mroué further clarified the ongoing situation of violence when he explained the concept of the coming-back-to-life element in *Nancy*:

In each battle, each one of the four fighters is killed but soon comes back to life to fight again, only to be killed once more. This cycle repeats indefinitely. It resembles a war taking place inside a video game, but it is not. It is a kind of *mise en abyme* of the same thing. It seems to me this is our reality. Wars have been ongoing in Lebanon for decades, and people are still ready to be killed for the sake of warlords, leaders, political parties, or their 'religious beliefs'. It seems as if no one has learned anything from the past, or as if we, the Lebanese, are stuck in the feedback loop of the same idea: fighting to be killed and becoming a hero/martyr for a few days, rewarded with a poster to be commemorated for a short time, and then coming back to life to fight again.

Nobody questions or asks: Why are we fighting these wars? Why are we unable to stop this killing machine? Who can stop it? The killing machine continues, and we are feeding it with our bodies.<sup>192</sup>

However, the returns to life in *Nancy* were not convincing for the artist and writer Jalal Toufic. After the play was first staged in Beirut, he argued that it would only work if its intention really was to be an April Fool's joke, because it is clear that the actors are living people who pretend to be dead. Thus, *Nancy* allegedly failed to deal with madness and undead.<sup>193</sup> Toufic's critique was one of the earliest the play received. Media coverage of *Nancy* that occurred shortly after its 2007 premiere focused instead on the euphoric reactions the play received when performed in Beirut and on the initial banning of the play in Lebanon.<sup>194</sup> *Nancy* was censored because it mentioned the names of still-active politicians, such as Nabih Berri and Michel Aoun. The former was the speaker of Parliament and the latter the president

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192 Rabih Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.

193 Jalal Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon* (n.p.: Forthcoming Books, 2007), 73–75.

194 Amos, 'Play Challenges Lebanese'; Quilty, 'How Nancy'; Shine, 'How Rabih Beat the Censor'; Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, 'Lebanon Bars Production on Militia Follies', *The New York Times*, 20 August 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/20/arts/20iht-mroue.1.7180112.html>. For the blurry regulations on censorship in Lebanon, see Ghadir Hamadi, 'Film Censorship in Lebanon: How Does It Work', *L'Orient Today*, 25 August 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1347431/film-censorship-in-lebanon-how-does-it-work.html>.

of Lebanon at the time of the play's writing.<sup>195</sup> Crucially, *Nancy* presented these figures not in a glorifying manner, but as warlords. Finally, after Tarek Mitri, who was then the minister of culture, was about to take the case to the Council of Ministers in August 2007, the play was granted permission to be staged without any changes.<sup>196</sup>

During the 2010s, *Nancy* was repeatedly but briefly addressed in scholarly works. While Jallad describes it as a 'chronological documentary play',<sup>197</sup> and the art critic Wilson-Goldie as a narration of the history of the *Wars*,<sup>198</sup> Yvonne Albers, a scholar in Middle East studies, frames *Nancy* as an attempt to deal with the inability to find closure with the past.<sup>199</sup> In a similar vein, Haugbolle notes that *Nancy* reflects how the Lebanese state is unable to deal with the effects of the *Wars*, including the conflict's multiple memories, which still exist today.<sup>200</sup> Bellan argues likewise, writing that the play reflects how violence and history repeat themselves in the country. She further locates the anecdotes told in *Nancy* in the blurred space between fact and fiction and points to the potential, but not yet proven, reality of the stories told.<sup>201</sup> Bruzzi situates the play 'explicitly' in a trauma discourse because the fragmented stories of the actors refer to their disjointed memories, which are due to the trauma they have lived through.<sup>202</sup> This is contested by a very thoughtful reading of *Nancy* that was published by Gade. She interprets the play as a negotiation of Lebanon's recent past via the return of revenants. Due to the absence of notions of loss and mourning, *Nancy*, in Gade's opinion, should be read not in the framework of trauma studies or as a representation of history but as a juxtaposition of different coexisting narratives.<sup>203</sup> Her approach is shared by Poltorak, who reads *Nancy* as a negotiation of the contested remembrance of the past, in which a universal, true account cannot be found due to the different narratives of the *Wars* that are clashing in Lebanon.<sup>204</sup>

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195 Aoun's term ended on 31 October 2022.

196 Rabih Mroué and Fadi Toufiq, *How Nancy Wished that Everything was an April Fool's Joke* (Beirut: Ashkal Alwan, 2012), 11; Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021; Fadi Toufiq, Zoom conversation with the author, 6 May 2021.

197 Jallad, 'Beirut's Hotel District', 134.

198 Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, 'The Body on Stage and Screen: Collaboration and the Creative Process in Rabih Mroué's Photo-Romance', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 25 (2010): 74.

199 Yvonne Albers, *Scheiternde Zeugen machtlose Wähler: Der Zuschauer im zeitgenössischen libanesischen Theater* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2011), 38.

200 Haugbolle, '(Little) Militia Man', 133–34.

201 Bellan, *Dismember Remember*, 155–61.

202 Peleg and Bruzzi, 'Towards Approximation', 60–61.

203 Gade, 'Learning to Live', 330.

204 Poltorak, 'History as an April Fool's Joke', 42–43.

Almost all the publications I have cited focus on the text of the play and only briefly mention the images. Only Gade has analysed one of the posters in relation to the poster of the *Wars* it appropriates. She claims that Mroué investigates how martyr posters were used as political tools during the *Wars*, specifically for convincing men to join militias and ‘distributing competing ‘truths’ and histories’ by ‘taking the cynical ‘appropriation logic’ of political parties ad absurdum’. These truths and realities, Gade argues, are undermined in *Nancy*, as the posters are transformed from documents into an artwork, where Mroué questions whether the poster can be trusted as testimony.<sup>205</sup>

In summary, the existing writings on *Nancy* focus mainly on the actors’ speech, which is interpreted as revealing how difficult it is to achieve closure from the *Wars*, or as a comment on the instability of history and identity in post-war Lebanon. Individual publications also address peculiar aspects of the play, such as masculinity (Haugbolle), Murr Tower (Jallad, Naeff), or fact-fiction (Bellan, Gade). Most authors read *Nancy* primarily as a reflection on the memory and history of the *Wars*. In my understanding, which is informed by a background in art history—rather than Middle Eastern, cultural, or theatre studies—the play unfolds only when read not only via the text, but via the combination of text and image.

### 3.3 Reading *Nancy* as an Interplay of Text and Image

The above-mentioned publications, with the exception of Gade’s writing, tackle but do not analyse the combination of text and image. While Gade certainly provides a fruitful start to the discussion of *Nancy*’s visuals, her examination is limited to the appropriation of just one poster. In this book, I will scrutinise not only one image, but a substantial selection from the play.

In my reading, *Nancy* carefully and deliberately reflects on, questions, and appropriates the image and thus the figure of the martyr. I do not understand *Nancy*, as Bruzzi does, in the framework of trauma. This is because, as mentioned, I do not think it is productive to think of artists as traumatised victims. I also do not read *Nancy*, like Wilson-Goldie and Jallad do, as a historical documentation of the *Wars*. This is because the play does not cover many crucial events of the conflicts and because there are important historical figures, such as Mussa al-Sadr, who do not appear in the play. This also corresponds to what Mroué and Fadi Toufiq, who co-wrote the play, write in the script’s foreword:

The text narrates the history of our long and various wars; however, it does not strive to provide an alternative history to add or compare to the other existing histories of these wars.<sup>206</sup>

205 Gade, ‘Learning to Live’, 335–40.

206 Mroué and Toufiq, *How Nancy*, 9.

The authors clearly state that their goal was not to write an additional history of the *Wars*. By narrating fragmentary incidents of the conflicts in Lebanon, *Nancy* is not unearthing secrets of the past—the stories of the *Wars* are well known. I suggest instead that the play, when read as an interplay of text and image, analyses martyr posters and demonstrates that these images were and are used by all parties involved in the *Wars* in a similar mode and for similar purposes: political advertisement, the making of territorial claims, the marking of identity, and mobilisation. The images likewise serve as weapons against political rivals. *Nancy* also delves into the construction and dissemination of the martyr poster, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4.

Throughout this book, I will argue that the martyr posters behind the four actors are, as Quilty mentioned, not merely decoration but a crucial component, since they, in combination with the words of the actors, constitute a critique of the construction of the martyr. My focus on the importance of the image is informed by my background as an art researcher, and I want to emphasise that my discussion is not based on a theatre studies approach. I believe that this focus is necessary because, as elaborated above, the writings on *Nancy* by scholars of other disciplines have emphasised more the speech than the visuals. As a result, the relevance of the posters as a crucial element of the stage setting of the play has been overlooked. By drawing attention to the visuals, I hope, I will be able to provide a new interpretation of *Nancy*, which cannot be achieved when only the text or only a few images are considered. The posters of the play are not illustrating the speeches but are incarnating concepts.

My research is informed by a close reading of a video of the staging of *Nancy*, which I repeatedly accessed in the audiovisual archive of Ashkal Alwan, and the book *How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April's Fool's Joke* (2012), which comprises the Arabic version and English translation of the text as well as reproductions of the visuals. My Arabic is still a work in progress; therefore, I worked with the English translation (the parenthetical page references refer to this version). In addition to drawing on secondary literature and on interviews with Mroué, Maakaroun, and Toufiq, I will link *Nancy* to other artworks—both by Mroué and by other artists. Furthermore, I will identify the specific importance of the appropriations of *Wars* posters, which I have gathered from the library archives of the American University of Beirut and Maasri's collection, which she names *signsofconflict* and which can be accessed online.<sup>207</sup>

### 3.4 Nancy as Mroué's Most Evasive Artwork on Martyrdom

I consider *Nancy* to be the most deliberate artistic reflection on martyr images by an artist of the Post-War Generation, as it encompasses a multitude of sects and tackles numerous aspects regarding the multi-faceted figure of the martyr. I would also like to note that during the time of researching and writing this book, more than a decade after the staging of *Nancy*, many people in Beirut still remembered the play, which they watched in the Masrah al-Madina theatre. Obviously, *Nancy* has left a remarkable impression.

To better introduce *Nancy*, it is useful to take a look at Mroué's work in a wider sense. Many of the artist's works explore the construction of the image and figure of the martyr, and a whole book could be written solely on this very topic in Mroué's oeuvre. This is not my aim. Rather, I chose *Nancy* because it is Mroué's only work that examines the martyr images of almost all major players in the *Wars*, including Christian groups.

I will now briefly discuss the performance *Three Posters* (2000), which Mroué conceptualised in collaboration with the renowned, late writer Elias Khoury, and the non-academic lecture by Mroué, *The Inhabitants of Images* (2008; hereafter *Inhabitants*).<sup>208</sup> These two works, which address images related to secular martyrdom and Islamic martyrdom, have been more frequently and thoroughly discussed in scholarly literature than *Nancy* has been.

#### 3.4.1 *Three Posters*: Leftist Martyrdom Operations in the South

Much has been written on *Three Posters*, with Shela Sheikh even arguing that it inspired other artists such as Jalal Toufic and Joana Hadjithomas/Khalil Joreige to deal with the image of the martyr in their artworks.<sup>209</sup> *Three Posters* was first performed in Beirut in 2000, yet it was still present in that city's galleries at the time of writing. In 2022, for its fifteen-year anniversary, Tanit Gallery organised a show called *15 Years, Crossed Perspectives*. Gallery artists were invited to choose an artwork that has influenced them in recent years. The curator of the show, Karina El Helou, also chose a work, opting for *Three Posters*, with two photographic stills of the 2000 performance shown in the exhibition space.<sup>210</sup>

208 Non-academic lectures are a recurring medium in Mroué's body of work. In all of them, he is sitting on a stage behind a table, reading from a paper, often about images that appear on a screen next to or behind him. See Michal Kobialka, 'Refracting Difficult Pasts: Temporal Answers and the In-Between: Rabih Mroué in Conversation with Michal Kobialka', in *Staging Difficult Pasts: Transnational Memory, Theatres, and Museums*, eds. Maria M. Delgado, Michal Kobialka, and Bryce Lease (London/New York: Routledge, 2024), 104–05.

209 Shela Sheikh, 'I Am the Martyr (X)': Philosophical Reflections on Testimony and Martyrdom' (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2012), 21.

210 The exhibition ran from 5 November 2022 until 2 January 2023.



Fig. 3.1: Rabih Mroué and Elias Khoury, *Three Posters*, 2000, Video-Performance, Courtesy of the Artists.

*Three Posters* is divided into four parts. In the first, Mroué appears on a screen, wearing military clothing and a beret with a red star (Fig. 3.1). The wall behind him is plastered with posters of martyrs of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), with a party flag visible. Mroué introduces himself as the martyr Khaled Rahal, who is about to conduct a martyrdom operation for the cause of the Communist Party.

Martyrdom operations mostly occurred in the South and were directed against the occupying Israeli Army or their Lebanese allies, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), but never targeted other Lebanese militias. Usually, a vehicle with explosives was driven into a military post, and the death of the driver was almost certain. These operations were, as Bonsen writes, 'a military and psychological weapon', where the memory of the *istishahid* would 'create emotions and identity to strengthen support by their communities'.<sup>211</sup> Therefore, it was common among certain factions involved in the *Wars* to record a video statement in which the martyr explained his or her reasons for the action beforehand. The broadcast on TV happened only after the death of the martyr.

Yet unlike those who appear in these videos, which are all too familiar to any Lebanese individual who watched television in the 1980s, Mroué as Rahal reads

211 Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 113.

not one version of his testimony but three, which are almost identical. In doing so he conveys that different versions of the martyrs-to-be were filmed and that the 'best performance' was screened. In other words, *Three Posters* reveals the process of making a martyr video. The 'rehearsals' of Mroué as Rahal include signs of insecurities such as stuttering and wandering eyes that do not focus on the camera. These signs show that the martyr is a human being and not only a hero, as he is presented in his images.

In the second part of *Three Posters*, a door opens, behind which Mroué is standing. While the Beirut audience knew Mroué as an actor and therefore did not question whether he was acting, it was now revealed that the spectators had not watched a taped video, but that Mroué had performed live behind the door. The artist, now on stage, reads another testimony, but this time in the name of Rabih Mroué. He includes biographical information about his participation in operations in the South against opponents of the Communist Party (of which, as he tells the audience, he was a member). This information, as he wrote in a reflection on *Three Posters*, was also new to people who knew him well, and therefore it was at this point in the performance that the audience in Beirut started to question the boundaries of fact and fiction.<sup>212</sup>

In the third part, an actual video that was recorded before a martyrdom operation during the Wars is screened. It shows found footage of Jamal al-Sati, a militant of the Communist Party who blew himself up alongside a mule at an Israeli checkpoint in Southern Lebanon in 1985. Like Mroué earlier, al-Sati reads his testimony multiple times with minimal changes. The spectators watch the unedited version with the different takes and thus see al-Sati sometimes making reading errors and stuttering. In his case, the 'best' version was screened on *Télé Liban* in 1985. Finally, in the fourth part of *Three Posters*, a video projection of a politician from the LCP appears on the screen, explaining the reasons for martyrdom operations.

*Three Posters* analyses the construction of the figure of the martyr, reveals him as a human being, and questions authenticity by focusing on the media-based fabrication of the shahid as an image.<sup>213</sup> However, in *Three Posters*, martyrdom is addressed only in the context of the LCP, and dying is thematised only via the conducting of attack. Further, the performance deals with today's hegemony of the martyrdom narrative in the South, as Mroué and Khoury write that *Three Posters* reflects 'the politics and role of the Lebanese Left during the civil war' and that 'it

212 Rabih Mroué, 'Three Posters', in *Image(s), Mon Amour. FABRICATIONS*, ed. CA2M Centro de Art Dos Mayo (Madrid: CA2M, 2013), 307.

213 For *Three Posters*, see Juan A. Gaitán, 'Conciliations: Witness and Spectator', *Afterall* 25, no. 1 (2010); Sheikh, 'I Am the Martyr', 21–25; Chad Elias, 'Stage and Screen', in *On Three Posters 2004 by Rabih Mroué*, Tate Research Publication (2015), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/in-focus/on-three-posters-rabih-mroue/stage-and-screen>; Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 222–23; Elias, *Post-humous Images*, 75–86; Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 145–53.

makes a critical and autocritical assessment of the Left's absence today in the Lebanese political arena—and in a way, declares our defeat'.<sup>214</sup>

At the beginning of the *Wars*, secular leftist movements fought against the Israeli occupation of the South and celebrated those who died in this process as martyrs. Shia parties gradually took over the resistance, and today Hezbollah holds the hegemony in telling the story of martyrdom and resistance.<sup>215</sup> Soon after 9/11 Mroué stopped performing *Three Posters*, and he explained this decision as follows:

My refusal to perform this work again has to do with my desire to respect the memory of Jamal al-Sati and his cause. I do not want people to misunderstand his position and label him a terrorist (this is actually what happened several times when we performed the work outside Lebanon). I think that this is unfair and presents a very narrow view of his actions. Although I am against suicide operations, al-Sati was defending his rights. He undertook a military operation against an occupying army, not against civilians, and it was in his country, not on foreign land, so it was an act of political resistance. I think we have to respect this.<sup>216</sup>

The appropriation of images of martyrdom in *Three Posters* is limited to a specific point on the political spectrum, namely the left, to a certain geography of Lebanon, namely the South, and to a certain mode of death, namely martyrdom operations. A non-academic lecture by Mroué, *Inhabitants*, provides a broader view of martyrdom yet does not encompass all parties involved in the *Wars*.

### 3.4.2 *The Inhabitants of Images: Muslim and Leftist Martyrdoms*

*Inhabitants* is structured into three parts and a conclusion. Mroué sits behind a desk throughout the non-academic lecture and reads a text from a piece of paper, while images are projected on a screen next to him (Fig. 3.2). In the first part, Mroué is discussing a picture that shows Hariri, who was killed by a car bomb in 2005, and the former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who died in 1970 (Fig. 3.3). They are depicted together, with Hariri looking older than Nasser; thus, this image could not have come into existence without the help of digital tools. Mroué examines the photograph of this unlikely meeting as well as the photograph's production and distribution.

214 Rabih Mroué and Elias Khoury, 'Three Posters: Reflections on a Video/Performance', *The Drama Review* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 185.

215 Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 90.

216 Chad Elias, 'Interview with Rabih Mroué', *Tate Research Publication* (2015), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/in-focus/on-three-posters-rabih-mroue/interview-with-rabih-mroue>.



Fig. 3.2: Rabih Mroué, *The Inhabitants of Images*, 2008, Non-Academic Lecture, Photograph Houssam Mchaimch.



Fig. 3.3: Rabih Mroué, *The Inhabitants of Images*, 2008, Non-Academic Lecture, Courtesy of the Artist.

In the second part, the artist talks about martyr posters in the Dahiye, a suburb of Beirut that is a Hezbollah area. The images of Hezbollah members who were killed in the Tammuz War in 2006 are—as is visible in the image behind Mroué in Fig. 3.2—hanging high on highway lampposts, which makes it impossible to look at them closely when walking or driving. Mroué muses about how these posters were created and their overall design, and links them to Hossein's martyrdom in Kerbala. He points out that all the shuhada in the posters wear the same uniform and that their heads were just added to a template with the help of Photoshop, which creates an unindividualised, uniform image of all men.



Fig. 3.4: Rabih Mroué, *The Inhabitants of Images*, 2008, Non-Academic Lecture, Courtesy of the Artist.

Mroué perceives this editing as a violent act against the *shahid* and his image, even though there are good intentions behind it. He suggests that these montages kill the martyrs a second time. By replacing the head of a martyr with his own photograph, Mroué also demonstrates how easily one can become a martyr, at least visually (Fig. 3.4).

The third part of *Inhabitants* evokes *Three Posters*, as Mroué shows stills of video testimonies that were made by conductors of martyrdom operations, mostly from the LCP, while they were sitting in front of posters of their predecessors. Finally, in the conclusion, Mroué narrates that he asked many of his friends to send him an image that the friend's loved ones could use as a memorial image after that friend's death. His request is refused by all. The performance ends with a letter from Rabih to himself in which he explains that he also does not want to select an image of himself that would act as his memorial picture after his death because he does not want to kill his image as well. In this part, Mroué changes his discussion from martyr posters to images of the dead in general.<sup>217</sup>

217 For *Inhabitants*, see Gaitán, 'Conciliations', 84–85; Peleg and Bruzzi, 'Towards 'Approximation'', 56–57; Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 86–90; Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 223–24; Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 93–97.

*Inhabitants* analyses the fabrication and contextualisation of martyr posters, but also discusses how images have the capacity to manipulate emotions. While this non-academic lecture addresses a broader spectrum of martyrs in Lebanon than *Three Posters* does—namely, Shia, Sunni, and secular Communists who died through different modes, such as martyrdom operations, car bombs, and combat—the notion of Christian martyrdom is absent.

*Nancy*, unlike *Three Posters* and *Inhabitants*, deals with various kinds of martyrs and their images, not only with the dead from the Communist Party and the Muslim parties. Therefore, *Nancy*, as we will see, reveals that each group operated with similar visual strategies and had a comparable conception of its shuhada. Throughout my discussion of *Nancy*, I will make references to *Three Posters* and *Inhabitants*, since I understand the appropriations of the image of the martyr as a common thread uniting these three pieces.

### 3.5 Four Sectarian Martyrs on Their Way to Murr Tower: The Protagonists, and the Historical Background of *Nancy*

I will now introduce the stories and not all but a substantial amount of the visuals of the four actors of *Nancy* and show that, although they belong to different parties, their lives and deaths are similar. Furthermore, I will locate the stories of the actors in the historical background of the conflicts in Lebanon between 1973 and 2007, which is the time frame in which the play is set. I will also link the posters of *Nancy* to their underlying images, which, in most cases, are posters issued by the sectarian groups during the *Wars*.

Many of the stories the protagonists are telling could have happened as narrated and they are sometimes inspired by actual occurrences or by literary works. For example, an anecdote relayed by Ziad, who tells of his death by freezing in the mountains (15), is modelled after an episode in Elias Khoury's novel *White Masks* (1981).<sup>218</sup>

In the script, the actors are referred to by their first names only, which evokes a feeling of intimacy, and I will also use their first names in the discussion. As mentioned above, Rabih, Hatem, Ziad, and Lina usually do not talk to each other but speak in monologues. For this reason, I will re-trace the story of each actor separately until the end, when all four protagonists meet at Murr Tower.

*All of the images that appear in this section are taken from Rabih Mroué's 2007 play How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April Fool's Joke. It was written by Rabih Mroué and Fadi Toufiq and directed by Rabih Mroué. The posters were designed by Samar Maakaroun and are based on Zeina Maasri's research and on her book Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War. The images are courtesy of Rabih Mroué.*

218 Elias Khoury, *White Masks* (Quercus: Maclehorse Press, 2010 [1981]), 175–77.

### 3.5.1 Rabiḥ: From Christian Parties to Murr Tower

At the beginning of the play, Rabiḥ introduces himself by saying 'I'm Rabiḥ Mroué, resident of Jbeil' (13). This statement is accompanied, on the screen above him, by an ID photograph showing his face (Fig. 3.5). He then tells the audience that in 1973 he joined a training camp with the right-wing Christian National Liberal Party, also known as Ahrar.<sup>219</sup> At this point the visual on the screen changes (Fig. 3.6), so that the ID photograph shown in *Figure 3.5* is supplemented by the Ahrar logo (a golden cedar on a red-white circle), Rabiḥ's name in white letters, and the name of the party in black letters.



Fig. 3.5: *Nancy*, Rabiḥ.



Fig. 3.6: *Nancy*, Rabiḥ, 'Ahrar'.

From 1975 until 1977, Rabiḥ remained a member of Ahrar. During these years, he died three times, once in a clash with a rival militia and twice in the infamous 'Battle of the Hotels', which took place between 1975 and 1976 in the Hotel District of Downtown Beirut. Allied Christian militias fought against Muslim and secular leftist paramilitaries. The main zones of battle were hotels, such as the Holiday Inn, and other high-rise buildings, such as Murr Tower, which the warring factions had seized and used as bastions. This battle was important because it led to the

219 The training camps of which Rabiḥ speaks were organised in Mount Lebanon as early as 1973; see Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 25.

establishment of the Green Line, which divided mostly Christian East Beirut and mostly Muslim West Beirut and would remain unchanged until 1990.<sup>220</sup>

The three deaths of Rabih that were just mentioned are accompanied by martyr posters, all of which include a photograph of the actor, a slogan labelling him a *shahid*, his date of death, the Ahrar logo, and a building. The first of these posters is also the first martyr poster that appears in *Nancy* (Fig. 3.7). It shows Murr Tower in its urban surroundings. The two following posters (Figs. 3.8–3.9) depict Rabih in front of the Holiday Inn. The latter two images are almost identical, but one of them (Fig. 3.9) additionally includes a photograph of the Spanish singer Julio Iglesias above the building. This is a reference to the text, in which Rabih explains that he oversaw the security of Iglesias, who came to Lebanon for a concert in 1977, when the *Wars* were thought to be over and thus celebrities and pop stars visited and performed there.

In 1978, Tony Frangieh, the commander of the mostly Maronite, pro-Syrian Marada brigade, was assassinated by the Kataeb—also known as the Phalange, a right-wing Maronite Christian party then allied with Israel—in the so-called ‘Ehden-massacre’ along with his wife, his young daughter, and dozens of villagers. Some accounts suspect that Bachir, the son of Kataeb founder Pierre Gemayel, was the initiator of this bloodbath. The event is considered to be part of Bachir’s

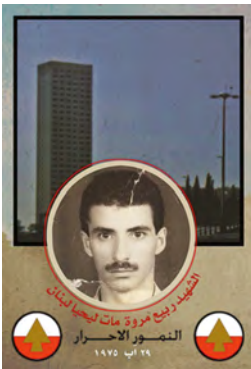


Fig. 3.7: *Nancy*, Rabih and the Beirut Skyline, ‘Martyr Rabih Mroué. He Died for Lebanon to Live. Tigers. Ahrar Party. 29 August 1975’.



Fig. 3.8: *Nancy*, Rabih and the Holiday Inn, ‘The Martyr Hero Rabih Mroué. 21 March 1976. Ahrar’.



Fig. 3.9: *Nancy*, Rabih, the Holiday Inn, and Julio Iglesias. ‘The Martyr Hero Rabih Mroué. 21 March 1976. Ahrar’.

220 For details of the Battle of the Hotels, see Paul Jureidini, R.D. McLaurin, and James M. Price, *Military Operations in Selected Lebanese Built-Up Areas, 1975–1978: Technical Memorandum* (Aberdeen: U.S. Army Human Engineering Laboratory, 1979); Traboulsi, *History*, 192–98; Gregory Buchakjian, ‘Habitats Abandonnés de Beyrouth: Guerres et Mutations de l’Espace Urbain 1860–2015’ (PhD diss., Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2016), 51–59.



Fig. 3.10: *Nancy*, Rabih with a Halo of Doves, 'Died for Truth. Martyr Rabih Mroué'.



Fig. 3.11: *Nancy*, Rabih with Doves, 'Died in Battle to Defend the Party. The Martyr of the Ahrar Tigers. The Hero Rabih Mroué'.

efforts to unite all Lebanese Christians under his leadership—even if this meant resorting to violence.<sup>221</sup> Bachir was also the leader of the Lebanese Forces (LF), the military wing of the Kataeb. After the murder of the Frangieh family, members of Marada sought vengeance and killed Rabih at a checkpoint, since they mistakenly identified him as a Phalangist. One year later, the Phalange attacked Ahrar to force them under Bachir's command.<sup>222</sup> Disillusioned, Rabih decided to leave the *Wars* and hence also Ahrar. He informed his party supervisor of his decision, but the supervisor became upset and shot Rabih dead. Despite the fact that neither of these killings happened in combat—one was the result of a misunderstanding and the other of a decision to turn away from violence—Rabih is remembered as a martyr in a poster in both cases (Figs. 3.10–3.11). These posters show Rabih's face, flying birds, and the Ahrar logo against an orange background.

Rabih's story continues:

For two days afterwards I lay there, left to my dead devices, thinking about it all, mulling it over, analysing... Well, well... Finally, I came to the conclusion that it was indeed in the interest of the Christians to unite as one voice, one rifle under a strong, solid leadership such as that of Bachir Gemayel and his Lebanese Forces. (19)

221 For the Ehden massacre, see Traboulsi, *History*, 209.

222 For details of the attack, see *ibid.* 209–10.

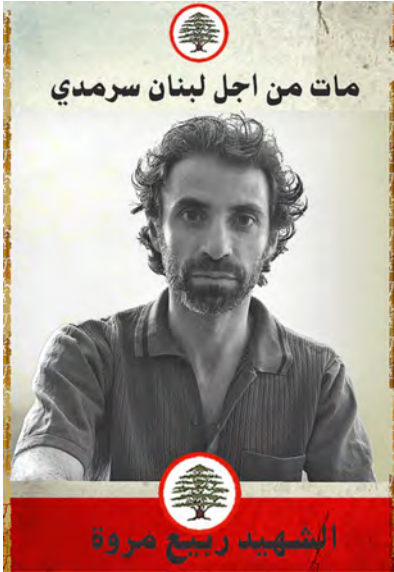


Fig. 3.12: Nancy, 'Died for an Infinite Lebanon. Martyr Rabih Mroué'.

Putting his thoughts into action, Rabih joined the LF in 1980, and he later died as a martyr for his new militia while finishing off the last Ahrar bastion, thereby terminating the influence of Ahrar as a political player. At this point, his martyr poster (Fig. 3.12) no longer bears a golden cedar; instead, there is a filigree green cedar in a red circle, which is the logo of the LF that appears above and below Rabih's body.

In 1982, Bachir Gemayel, at that time president-elect, was assassinated by a bomb that was placed in the Phalange's party premises and detonated there. The Phalange, with the assistance of the Israeli Army, took revenge by entering the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in West Beirut and slaughtering thousands of Palestinian

civilians. Rabih also participated in the massacre. It is often suspected that Elie Hobeika, a high-ranking militiaman of the LF, whose security division Rabih was part of, played a vital role in the execution of the carnage.<sup>223</sup>

One year later, the Israeli Army withdrew from parts of Mount Lebanon, which they had occupied, leaving a power vacuum. Both the Phalange and the then pro-Syrian Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) attempted to gain control of this region, culminating in the infamous 'War of the Mountain'. In the course of this conflict, Rabih died in an ambush by the PSP, who finally won the battle.<sup>224</sup> As a consequence of this victory, the PSP, according to Rabih's speech, was trying to reinvent Lebanon. Among other things, they changed the flag and anthem, and what outraged Rabih most was that they aimed to rewrite the history books. He says, 'Here I flip for real—anything but history! It made my blood boil. I get up straightaway and drive out there in my car in defence of history' (24). On his way, he died in a car accident and is consequently remembered as 'Martyr of History'.

In 1985 and 1986, the Phalange suffered internal struggles. First, Bachir's brother Amin, who had become his successor, was overthrown by Hobeika and Samir Geagea. This controversy finally led to a partition of the party into the LF, led by

223 For details of Bachir's assassination and the Sabra and Shatila massacre, see *ibid.*, 218.

224 For the War of the Mountain, see *ibid.*, 224.

Hobeika and Geagea, and the Kataeb, led by Gemayel. Rabih sided with the LF. Soon after, Geagea and Hobeika could not agree on whether to sign a Syrian-brokered peace treaty to end the Wars. While Geagea objected to this, Hobeika favoured the acceptance of the treaty and even went to Damascus to sign it. Consequently, the two men split, and Geagea remained in control of East Beirut while Hobeika relocated to Zahlé, a mainly Christian town in the Bekaa valley.<sup>225</sup>

Rabih stayed loyal to Hobeika, was killed by the Geagea faction of the LF in 1986, and was presented as a martyr in a poster issued by the LF (Fig. 3.13). The image shows Rabih wearing sunglasses with a cross-shaped pendant dangling from his necklace. The design of the poster, a white background with a red stripe in the lower part, corresponds to a poster issued for him earlier in the play (Fig. 3.12). After a week, Rabih came back to life and tried to flee from Geagea's sphere of influence, but he was caught by Geagea's men, as the accompanying press clipping that appears on the screen above his head (Fig. 3.14) shows. Finally, he was killed a second time by Geagea's men.



Fig. 3.13: Nancy, 'Died for an Infinite Lebanon. Martyr Rabih Mroué'.



Fig. 3.14: Nancy, Press Clipping That Mentions Rabih.

Hobeika established his own faction, the Syrian-supported Promise Party, in 1986. Rabih joined this party, as he tells the audience:

I dedicated myself to working full-time in the security division, where I was involved in planning various... erm... 'security ops', for lack of a better term... The goal was to shake up the sense of security and stability in those areas of East Beirut that fell under the Lebanese Forces' command. (29)

225 For the split, see *ibid.*, 226–27.



Fig. 3.15: Nancy, 'Martyr of the Dear Homeland Rabi' Mroué. Free Lebanon State'.

Two years later, in 1988, the commander of the Lebanese Army, Michel Aoun, was appointed as interim prime minister of Lebanon. He attempted to end the presence of the LF in East Beirut by sending the Lebanese Army to Ashrafieh, a predominantly Christian quarter in East Beirut, to wage the 'War of Liberation', which Rabi' participated in on Aoun's side. The battle finally ended in October 1990, when the Syrian Army stormed the presidential palace and Aoun was forced into exile.<sup>226</sup> Consequently, the Syrian Army also took over East Beirut, and Rabi' moved to the South of the country, where he joined the predominantly Christian South Lebanon Army (SLA), a militia that was commanded by Antoine Lahad and backed by Israel.

Eight years later, Rabi' was assassinated by Hezbollah, also known as the Party of God. The Shiite group emerged in 1982 and has close ties to the Islamic Republic of Iran. This time, Rabi's martyr poster (Fig. 3.15) shows him standing cross-armed next to a map of Lebanon. In 2000, the Israeli Army withdrew from the South. Rabi' continued to live in Lebanon and, because he had been a militiaman during the Wars, he was frequently visited by the security forces when bombings and assassinations occurred.

On 25 January 2007, Rabi' heard on television about the shooting at the Arab University in Beirut. Four students were killed in this incident, which was caused by sectarian strife between Shia and Sunni groups. It resulted in several days of violence, which were the most severe sectarian scuffles that took place after the nominal ending of the Wars and before the release of Nancy.<sup>227</sup>

Fears of an open civil war erupted, and this fighting triggered the creation of the play, as Toufiq told me:

226 For the War of Liberation, see *ibid.*, 242–43.

227 'Four Killed in Beirut University Clash', *The Guardian*, 25 January 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/jan/25/internationaleducationnews.highereducation>.

But for us, it was [...] to see if there was still the possibility of civil war. This Arab University fighting showed us we still carry this potentiality [...]. The Beirut Arab University shooting was the first one after the official ending of the civil war. This kind of fighting, sniping, two kinds of religious parties doing street fighting [...]. For me, [...] it was this event that triggered the re-visiting of the civil war.<sup>228</sup>

After having heard about the Beirut Arab University shooting, Rabih went to Murr Tower because, as he explains, 'given my former experience in combat, I know that the battle for Beirut is as good as won by whoever's the first to control the Tower' (34). This detour to Murr Tower is accompanied by an image of Beirut's skyline (Fig. 3.16).

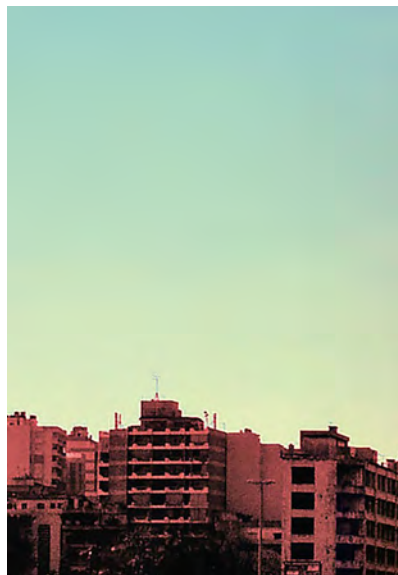


Fig. 3.16: *Nancy*, Beirut Skyline 1.

Rabih's story is that of a fighter martyr who repeatedly died in battle. Although he was frequently killed by the parties to which he belonged, these parties still remembered him as a martyr in visuals. Due to his being murdered by his fellow combatants, he left his militia more than once, only to fight against them in the next battle and be killed by his former affiliates. Therefore, Rabih embodies not only the fighter but also the victim of his own party.

### 3.5.2 Hatem: From Sunni Parties to Murr Tower

The second fighter figure is Hatem. Like Rabih, he introduces himself at the beginning of *Nancy*: 'My name is Hatem Imam; resident of Tariq el Jdideh, Beirut; originally from Tripoli' (13). These words are accompanied by his ID photograph (Fig. 3.17). Next, he says, 'When the war first broke out, I was with the Morabitun' (14). The same photograph still appears on the screen, but it is now sectarianised, with the octagonal Morabitoun logo below and the name of the party written above Hatem's head (Fig. 3.18). The Morabitoun, which translates as steadfast in English, was the military wing of the Sunni, pan-Arabist Independent Nasserist Movement, which was founded in the late 1950s.

228 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021. Gade argues that the 2006 War was the initial trigger for writing *Nancy*; see Gade, 'Learning to Live', 343.



Fig. 3.17: Nancy, Hatem.



Fig. 3.18: Nancy, Hatem, 'Morabitoun'.

Hatem was killed when the Morabitoun, together with the Palestinian factions, took over Murr Tower during the Battle of the Hotels in 1975. The poster commemorating his death as a martyr shows him in front of that tower (Fig. 3.19). A few months later, in 1976, Hatem was killed again during the Battle of the Hotels, but this time in the Holiday Inn by, he thinks, a Phalangist; his killer was actually Rabih, who was then still a militiaman of Ahrar. The poster commemorating Hatem's martyrdom (Fig. 3.20) shows the Holiday Inn and three photographs of the actor's face.

In 1982, Hatem went to the South to assist his Palestinian allies in a battle and was killed. The poster accompanying this martyrdom has Hatem wearing sunglasses, with his photograph surrounded by a green background (Fig. 3.21). The Morabitoun logo is also visible. After his death, the Palestinian Fatah organised a large funeral for Hatem, which impressed him to such an extent that he subsequently decided to only officially remain a member of the Morabitoun but to actually fight for Fatah. With Fatah, he says, 'I fought in numerous battles and got killed frequently' (21). This speech is accompanied by a replica of the previous image, except that it omits the Morabitoun logo as well as the slogans, and retains only the photograph of Hatem's face, which is still placed on a green background (Fig. 3.22). Due to the logo's absence, it remains unclear which group, Fatah or the Morabitoun, has issued this poster.

After the Israeli invasion of West Beirut in 1982, many of the Palestinian fighters were forced to leave Beirut for Tunis, where they were granted refuge. Hatem, still fighting with Fatah, intended to leave as well. When boarding the ship, however,



Fig. 3.19: Nancy, Hatem and Murr Tower, 'The Militant Brother Hatem Imam: Martyred in the Beirut Fighting. 27 December 1975'.

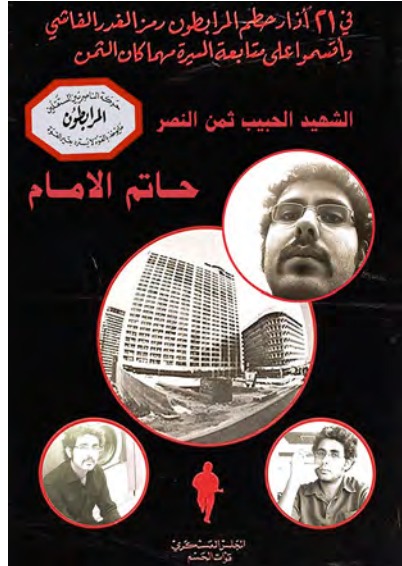


Fig. 3.20: Nancy, Hatem and the Holiday Inn, 'On March 21, the Morabitoun Crush the Symbol of Fascist Treason and Vow to Continue Their Journey at Whatever Cost. The Beloved Martyr Is the Price of Victory: Hatem Imam'.

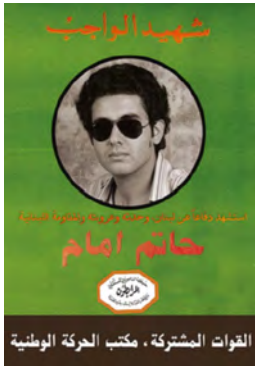


Fig. 3.21: Nancy, 'Martyr of Duty. Died Defending Lebanon, Its Unity, Its Arabism, and the Lebanese Resistance. Hatem Imam. The Joint Forces/The National Movement Office'.

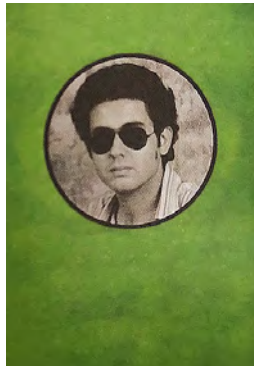


Fig. 3.22: Nancy, Hatem on a Green Background.



Fig. 3.23: Nancy, Green Background Without Hatem.

he was struck by a stray bullet—fired by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)—and later died in Tunis.<sup>229</sup> This death is accompanied by a green monochrome poster (*Fig. 3.23*), which I read as a hint that this death is not perceived as martyrdom.

After the 1983 withdrawal agreement between Lebanon and Israel, which was supposed to establish peace between the two countries and confine Israeli presence in Lebanon to the South,<sup>230</sup> leftist militias attempted to oppose this treaty and Hatem returned to Beirut. He fought again with the Morabitoun, who in 1984—together with their allies—managed to repel the Lebanese Army and Christian militias from West Beirut, which as a result was controlled predominantly by the PSP and by Amal.<sup>231</sup> Amal, which is an Arabic acronym of Lebanese Resistance Regiments, and as an abbreviation translates into English as hope, is a movement founded in 1975 by the Iranian cleric Mussa al-Sadr. It was the first Shia party and militia in Lebanon. Hatem, who was involved in these fights in West Beirut, was wounded and then taken to hospital, where he learned that the Morabitoun's 'allies'—Amal, the LCP, and the PSP—were conspiring against the Morabitoun. Their aim was to eliminate his militia in order to gain more power for themselves:

a wounded man is brought into my room. We exchange a few greetings. In a moment of stupidity, I mention that I am a Morabitun. He pulls out a gun on the spot and shoots me dead. The Red Cross transfers my body to Tripoli. (25)

The poster accompanying this death (*Fig. 3.24*) shows Hatem wearing a red headband in front of a background of red and black stripes. Nine drops of blood are visible in the lower part, while the Morabitoun logo is located at the centre, from which the stripes radiate.

In the same year, the Morabitoun dissolved and Hatem joined the Sunni, anti-Syrian Islamic Unification Movement (IUM) in the Northern city of Tripoli, and he died there in combat. His death is accompanied by a poster (*Fig. 3.25*) in which he is depicted with a takke, a form of Sunni headgear that is worn during prayer, in front of a background that shows the Dome of the Rock, a red flower, birds, and the moon. The slogans mention that the IUM has issued the poster.

In 1987, Hatem decided to go on the Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. There, he met someone who convinced him to move to Afghanistan in order to join the Islamic mujahedeen in their fight against Soviet occupation.

229 For historical events surrounding the PLO's departure from Beirut, see Traboulsi, *History*, 215.

230 *Ibid.*, 223.

231 *Ibid.*, 224–25.

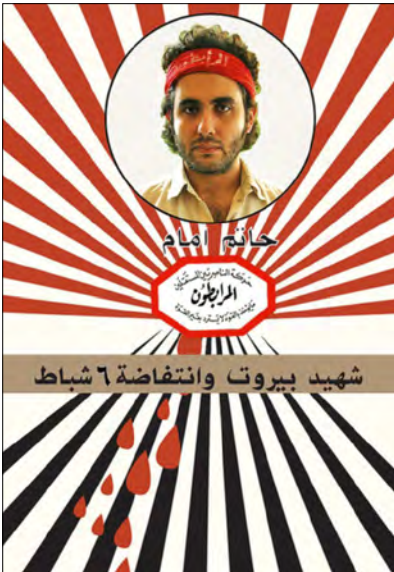


Fig. 3.24: *Nancy*, 'Hatem Imam. Martyr of Beirut and the February 6 Insurgency'.

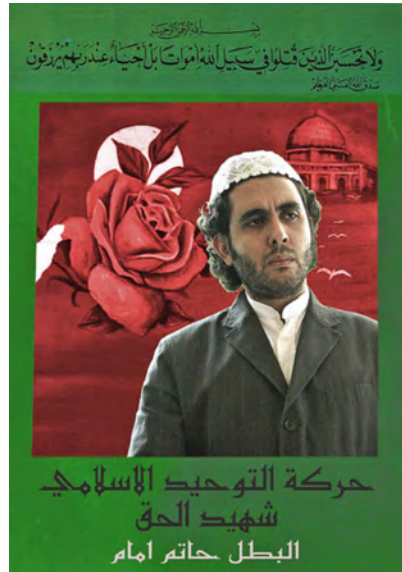


Fig. 3.25: *Nancy*, 'In the Name of God the All-Merciful. And Do Not Consider as Dead Those Who Have Died for God, for They Are Truly Alive. Islamic Unification Movement. Martyr of Truth: The Hero Hatem Imam'.

Two years later, Hatem was killed when the Soviet Union left Afghanistan and civil war broke out. This death is commemorated with a pink poster (Fig. 3.26) that shows a stylised flower with a drop of blood in its centre. Six of the flower's petals are black, the seventh shows Hatem's face.

Not tired of international adventures, Hatem intended to continue his global fight for Islam in Bosnia.

Now, due to my ignorance of the urban fabric of Bosnian streets, I was killed in record speed along with my unit—whereupon the brothers politely asked me to leave the country as soon as possible for the safety of their fighters. (31)

This death is accompanied by the same image as that shown in Figure 3.26, but now all the petals are filled with photographs of martyrs (Fig. 3.27).<sup>232</sup>

232 The names of all martyrs are indicated as Hatem Imam. Mroué said the multiple images of Hatem are because he died many times; thus, several deaths are compressed into one poster. Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.



Fig. 3.26: Nancy, 'The Militant Brother Hatem Imam. The Blood of the Martyrs Is the Truest Expression of the Victory of Blood Over the Sword'.



Fig. 3.27: Nancy, Hatem and Other Martyrs, 'The Blood of the Martyrs Is the Truest Expression of the Victory of Blood Over the Sword'.

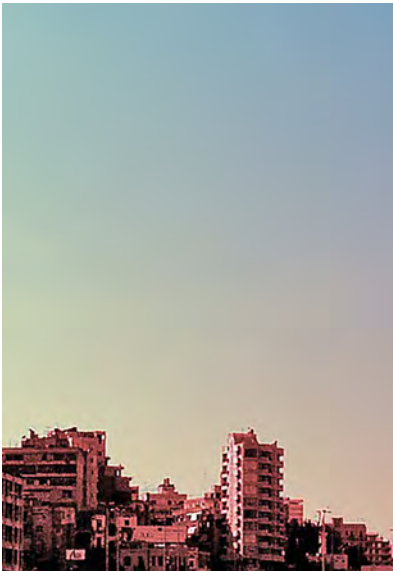


Fig. 3.28: Nancy, Beirut Skyline 2.

Hatem returned to Tripoli, where he joined a Salafist group and established a religious training camp. The so-called 'Dinnieh group' tried to build a miniature Islamic State in Northern Lebanon and had even started to seize villages before the Lebanese Army dissolved the group in 1999 and killed several of its members, among them Hatem. After this incident, Hatem abandoned his life as a fighter and started selling Arabic sweets in Beirut.

In 2005, the killing of Hariri encouraged Hatem to join the protests of the so-called 'Cedar Revolution'. He sided with the Sunni-led March 14 camp, a coalition of Sunni groups, Christian groups, and the PSP that called the

Syrian Army to end its tutelage of Lebanon, which it indeed did in 2005.<sup>233</sup> Finally, when Hatem heard about the Beirut Arab University shooting in 2007, he, like Rabih, headed to Murr Tower. A view of Beirut's cityscape then becomes visible behind him (*Fig. 3.28*).

Like Rabih, Hatem is a fighter martyr who died in various battles. He was usually forced to change his militia because it dissolved, was expelled from the country, or was dispelled by the army. Hatem's story is remarkable due to his international endeavours, which also point to the larger geopolitical context of the *Wars*.

### 3.5.3 Ziad: From Communist and Shia Parties to Murr Tower

Like Rabih and Hatem, Ziad, the third fighter, introduces himself while accompanied by an ID photograph (*Fig. 3.29*). He says: 'Ziad Antar; from the South; from Kfar Kila, Marjeyoun District' (13). The next image (*Fig. 3.30*) shows the same photograph politicised with a hammer and a sickle that refer to the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), a non-confessional group of intellectuals and workers. Ziad joined the fighting in 1976 after moving from the South to Beirut, where he started working as a security guard but was still not an official member of the LCP. He was injured



*Fig. 3.29: Nancy, Ziad.*



*Fig. 3.30: Nancy, Ziad, 'LCP'.*

233 For the context of Hariri's killing and the Syrian withdrawal, see Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 158–63; Khatib, *Image Politics*, 16–19.



Fig. 3.31: Nancy, Ziad, LCP Application Form, 'Name: Ziad Antar. Born: Kfar Kila. Department: South'.



Fig. 3.32: Nancy, Ziad and the Sannine Mountains, 'The Hero of Sannine. Ziad Antar. Member of the Political Office of the Communist Party'.



Fig. 3.33: Nancy, 'Martyr of the LCP. Martyr of the PFLP. Ziad Antar. To Die or Not to Die, What Care I. For This Life Is but a Figment of the Imagination...'



Fig. 3.34: Nancy, 'PFLP. The Land Is Ours. Ziad Antar. 9 November 1976. He Was Martyred on the Southern Soil While Confronting Israeli Agents'.

by a shell in a battle in the Sannine mountain range, where he froze to death. After his death, the LCP asked him to fill in an official application for the party, as this would 'allow them to issue a black-and-white poster of me in the Party's name' (15). This is visualised by a fragment of an application form (*Fig. 3.31*). In the upper left-hand corner, a hammer and a sickle, referring to the LCP, are visible. Right next to this, a photograph of Ziad, wearing sunglasses, is pinned to the paper, and further personal information is indicated.

His martyr poster, issued by the LCP (*Fig. 3.32*), proves that Ziad's post-mortem application was successful. He even received a coloured poster. After being buried in the South, he got a call from the LCP to join the leftist resistance against the Israeli occupation there. Subsequently, Ziad died during a joint operation of the LCP and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) against the Israeli Army in 1976. The poster issued on this occasion (*Fig. 3.33*) depicts him in combat gear with crossed hands.

Two years later, Ziad, who was still lying dead on the battlefield, returned to life because of powerful Israeli shelling. He immediately continued fighting and was killed again by the Israeli Army, which was about to establish a permanent presence in the South. This martyrdom is commemorated with a poster that shows Ziad's face in front of red stripes, apparently symbolising the gushing of blood, and a hand holding a flare or torch with orange and red flames (*Fig. 3.34*). The PFLP took Ziad's body with them when they retreated.

I spent a whole month in Saida, lying down in the Hammoud Hospital morgue with nothing to do. [...] I was bored to death. I eventually left and went to look up my family, who had been displaced from our village to Beirut's southern suburb of Dahieh. (18)

When he arrived there, Ziad continued to be an energetic member of the LCP. Amal was also active in his neighbourhood, and violent scuffles between the two groups often emerged.

During one of these battles, the LCP destroyed a minaret from which Amal was firing. From Ziad's perspective, using and destroying religious buildings during fighting was inexcusable: 'Marx never said anything about bombing mosques or churches!' (20). He therefore left the LCP, which consequently ignored him. In an apparent act of defiance, Ziad joined the Amal Movement and, in 1982, fought with them against the LCP. Like Rabih and Hatem, Ziad died several times in 1982, mostly in combat against his former affiliates, the Palestinians and the LCP.

From one of these deaths, Ziad returned to life when the Israeli invasion of 1982 was in full swing. Without telling anyone, he travelled from the South to Beirut, as he wanted to join the fighting there against the Israeli Army. Shortly after his arrival, he was directly hit by a missile, and his body was torn to pieces. Therefore,

his identity remained unknown and his narration of this anecdote is not accompanied by a martyr poster: due to the absence of a body, and because nobody knew about his operation, no militia could claim his martyrdom as 'theirs'. After coming back to life, Ziad took part in a joint effort of different leftist and Muslim forces to expel the Lebanese Army and the Israeli Army from West Beirut. Afterwards, as we already know from Hatem's story, clashes kicked off between the sectarian groups that drove them out. The Morabitoun encircled the house of Nabih Berri, then and now the leader of the Amal Movement, and Ziad was involved in the operation to transport Berri to safety. During this activity, Ziad was hit by a sniper bullet fired from a minaret. This confused him again: 'I don't understand how they can bring themselves to use places of worship for such purposes, and with such nonchalance' (25). Amal commemorated his death via a poster that shows Ziad's face, white, green, and red radiating stripes, nine drops of blood, and the group's logo (Fig. 3.35). Berri was evacuated one day after Ziad's death, and Amal, the LCP, and the PSP then jointly fought and extinguished the Morabitoun.

After this experience, Ziad decided that he no longer wanted to kill anyone from a Lebanese party and thus he went to the South to fight only the Israeli Army. There, he participated in a number of operations in and around Saida, and then heard about a mysterious organisation that had executed several attacks against



Fig. 3.35: Nancy, 'Ziad Antar: The Martyr of Beirut and the February 6 Insurgency'.



Fig. 3.36: Nancy, 'In the Name of God the All-Merciful. And Do Not Consider as Dead Those Who Have Died for God, for They Are Truly Alive. Martyr of the South. Ziad Antar'.

Israeli, US, and French soldiers. Not knowing it was Hezbollah, Ziad was highly impressed by their heroism and sacrifices and wanted to make his contribution. In an individually planned operation, he decided to blow himself up at an Israeli checkpoint. But, as he narrates:

before I can push the button, I get a bullet in the head from an Israeli soldier, killing me on the spot. Obviously, I don't blow up—not even close. As a result, my body remains in Israeli custody for a year. (26–27)

The death was counted as an Amal martyrdom. This is proved by the accompanying poster (Fig. 3.36), which includes the Amal logo on the lower left corner.

Later, in 1985, when Ziad's body was released by the Israeli Army, Amal and Hezbollah argued over its ownership: 'His body belongs to us!—No way, it belongs to us and us only!' (27). In the end, this fight was won by Amal. After he came back to life, in 1987, Ziad again declined to take part in any battle with any other Lebanese militia and was criticised by his commanders for doing so.

Soon after, he was shot by a fellow militiaman. This was apparently by accident, but Ziad doubted how accidental his death really was: 'To be honest, I don't know to what extent it was really by mistake. For starters, all of these battles were taking place by mistake. Either way, I get a bullet in the gut and die on the spot' (29).



Fig. 3.37: *Nancy*, 'For Hezbollah Should Be the Victors. 13 August 1988. Shahid al-Mujahed Ziad Antar'.

After being killed by his own group, Ziad changed militia and joined Hezbollah. He died three times for his new faction and is now remembered as a martyr on a yellow and green Hezbollah poster (Fig. 3.37). Finally, Ziad returned to the South and joined the resistance against the Israeli occupation, where he was killed several times. From now on, he does not tell the audience about his further deaths for 'security reasons' (31). The poster on the screen indicates that he still died as a martyr for Hezbollah, as it labels him as such; the image shows his face in front of a black mountain and a chain of yellow flowers (Fig. 3.38). Ziad again emphasises that he cannot tell the audience anything else about his further deaths for security reasons.



Fig. 3.38: Nancy, 'The Blood of Martyrs Makes the Victory. Ziad Antar. The Islamic Resistance'.



Fig. 3.39: Nancy, 'In the Footsteps of Hossein in Yater. Martyr Ziad Antar. Died for His Motherland. Martyrs of the Islamic Resistance Who Died in the Radical Military Operation on Haqban Hill in Kfar Yater. The Islamic Resistance'.



Fig. 3.40: Nancy, Murr Tower.

This statement is accompanied by a visual (Fig. 3.39) that again labels him as a martyr and shows the actor wearing a green headband and a yellow band with the Hezbollah logo around his neck.

After hearing of Hariri's assassination in 2005, Ziad, like Hatem, went to demonstrations, but on the other political side: the March 8 camp, which was, unlike the March 14 camp, in favour of the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The March 8 movement encompasses Amal and Hezbollah, as well as some smaller players like the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). Finally, when hearing about the shooting at the Arab University, Ziad, like Hatem and Rabih, went to Murr Tower, which appears above his head (Fig. 3.40).

Like Rabih and Hatem, Ziad is a fighter martyr. Unlike the other two actors, he changed his beliefs—from secular to Shia-Islamic—in a manner that lacks loyalty to a single political-religious ideology. While Rabih and Hatem left their militias at some point after the official end of the *Wars* and started an ordinary life, Ziad is still a member, maybe even a fighter, of Hezbollah when he tells his story in *Nancy* in 2007. This could be a reference to the fact that, following the Taif Agreement, all militias were required to surrender their weapons to the Lebanese Army, with the exception of Hezbollah, which argued that they needed them to continue their resistance to Israeli occupation in the South.

### 3.5.4 Lina: From Secular and Christian Parties to Murr Tower

As with the three men, Lina's first visual is an ID photograph (Fig. 3.41) that accompanies her introduction, where she says: 'Lina Saneh; I'm from Mazraa' (13). Next, the same ID photograph appears (Fig. 3.42), but now she is marked as a political being through the addition, at the bottom of the image, of the logo of the SSNP, a secular, pro-Syrian party, founded in 1932, with the aim of restoring Greater Syria.<sup>234</sup> Lina says, 'When the war broke out, I was fighting amongst the ranks of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. I was fighting against the sectarian project and for a secular nation' (15).



Fig. 3.41: *Nancy*, Lina.



Fig. 3.42: *Nancy*, Lina, 'SSNP'.

234 Greater Syria would come to include Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, Cyprus, and parts of Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt; see Solomon, *In Search*, 33.



Fig. 3.43: Nancy, Lina and Her Children, 'They Died Defending Lebanon, Its Unity, Its Arabism and the Palestinian Resistance. The Martyrs of Beirut. Lina Saneh and Her Children. The National Christians Front'.

Lina is a Christian by religion but a nationalist by ideology. At the beginning of the Wars, when many Christians who were living in West Beirut decided to move to the Christian-dominated East of the city, Lina remained in West Beirut. There, in order to prove that the Wars were not only about the Christian and Muslim divide, and that not all Christians were anti-Palestinian, she reluctantly joined the National Christians Front, a sub-organisation of the SSNP for Christian party members. Lina became a commander and, in 1977, she was massacred with her family at home because she was criticising other parties in her neighbourhood. The accompanying poster (Fig. 3.43) shows Lina, who is joined on the lower left of the poster by images of her children, each one of whom appears in the centre of one of four flowers. After her murder, Lina abandoned the National

Christians Front but remained active in the Women's Committee of the SSNP. Her death had already provoked sectarian tensions between Christians and Muslims in West Beirut. These tensions were soon heightened because many—mostly Shiite—refugees had come to Beirut due to the Israeli invasion of the South of the country. Also, in the Women's Committee, it was often negatively pointed out that Lina was a Christian. In order to prove her non-sectarian convictions, she decided in 1981 to fight for the SSNP as a militawoman. Lina was shot, and her party has remembered her death as martyrdom with a poster of her head in front of the SSNP logo (Fig. 3.44).

After the Israeli invasion of West Beirut in 1982, Lina decided to move to the eastern part of town for safety reasons, but regularly crossed the border to continue her SSNP activities in West Beirut. Once, when she and her husband attempted to pass a checkpoint, they were kidnapped by a Palestinian organisation, and because of the mention of Christianity in their identity papers, they were accused of being Israeli spies. The Palestinians shot them and threw their bodies into the sea. That this death was not perceived as martyrdom seems to be indicated by the blue monochrome that appears on the screen above her head (Fig. 3.45). Rather,

Lina became one of the thousands of people who are missing—that is, who have disappeared without trace. Three months later, Lina's body was found in the sea, and she went home.

In 1984, the Lebanese Army tried taking over West Beirut but was repelled by an alliance between Amal, the PSP, the LCP, the Morabitoun, and the SSNP. As already mentioned in Hatem's and Ziad's stories, discrepancies between these allied groups arose, and Lina, who tried to solve the matter, was killed in an ambush by Amal. This death is accompanied by a poster that is entirely blue except for a circle, in the lower half, that includes the SSNP logo and Lina's head (Fig. 3.46).

Because of this killing, Lina abandoned all her political activities and began work in the culture section of a local newspaper in East Beirut. She continued until she was beaten to death on her way home. Her killer, who was affiliated with the LF, wanted to take revenge for the murder of a Christian that had occurred in West Beirut earlier that day. This means Lina, as a Christian, served as vengeance for a Christian victim because she had voluntarily lived in West Beirut, the predominantly Muslim part of the city, for quite a long time before having moved to Christian East Beirut.<sup>235</sup> Her martyrdom is commemorated with a black-and-white poster (Fig. 3.47) that includes a photograph of her face and a black cross slightly above her forehead. Lina states:



Fig. 3.44: *Nancy*, 'The Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Nationalist Army. First Division. The Martyr Heroine Lina Saneh (aka Um Tarek). Though Our Bodies May Fall, Our Spirit Shall Maintain Its Reality Over This Existence'.

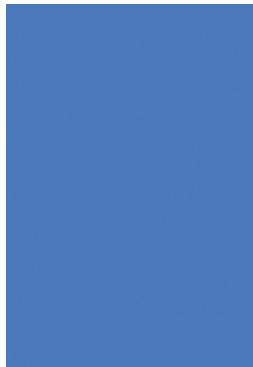


Fig. 3.45: *Nancy*, Blue Background Without Lina.

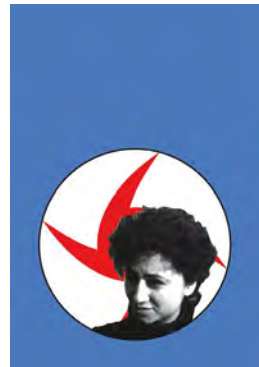


Fig. 3.46: *Nancy*, Lina on a Blue Background.

235 A similar incident is narrated in Etel Adnan's novel *Sitt Marie Rose* (1982). A Shia man, who believed that his brother was killed by Phalangists, was looking to kill a Christian in order to avenge his brother.



Fig. 3.47: Nancy, 'A Token of Love and Loyalty. Our Martyr Heroine Lina Saneh. Christian Nationals, Family and Friends of Mazraa Invite You to Pray for Her Pure Soul on Sunday March 12, 1984, at 10 am, St. Georges Church, Ashrafieh'.

After I was beaten to death by that thoughtless youth from the Lebanese Forces, I conducted a self-assessment and came to the conclusion that circumstances no longer called for a noble stance, that if I wanted to protect myself, my family and my children, I had to give up my neutral position. So, in order to cover my back, I joined the Lebanese Forces. (27)

Lina accompanied Hobeika on a visit to Syria, but upon her return she, like Rabih, became a victim of the dispute within the party, as Hobeika accused her of spying for Geagea and ordered that she be killed. After the execution of this order, Lina, like Rabih, was commemorated as a martyr by the LF, who were in fact responsible for her death. A black-and-white photograph shows her sitting on a jeep (Fig. 3.48). The overall design of the poster—namely, a white

background with the photograph and a red strip below—corresponds to posters of Rabih when he died for the LF (Figs. 3.12-3.13).

This time, however, Lina did not return to life but remained a corpse. As Hobeika was responsible for her death, she sided with Geagea, and the LF commissioned her in her dead state to spy on Hobeika in Zahlé. There, Lina was uncovered by another corpse and liquidated by Hobeika's men.<sup>236</sup> In the storyline of *Nancy*, this means the corpse was murdered again by the LF and was again remembered by the LF as a martyr. This martyrdom is indicated by a poster (Fig. 3.49) that labels Lina, who is sitting behind an office desk and talking on the telephone, as a shahida twice. The LF also organised a tribute ceremony for her, as she tells the audience: 'Over 300 martyrs were invited, myself among them. During the ceremony, Doctor Samir Geagea gave a speech and handed each of us a shield of honour in recognition for our sacrifices' (30).

Following this event, Lina became the financial commander of the LF and never died again. After East Beirut was overtaken by the Syrian Army in 1990, and follow-

236 Hobeika was indeed ousted by Geagea and Amin Gemayel in 1986. See Traboulsi, *History*, 226–27.

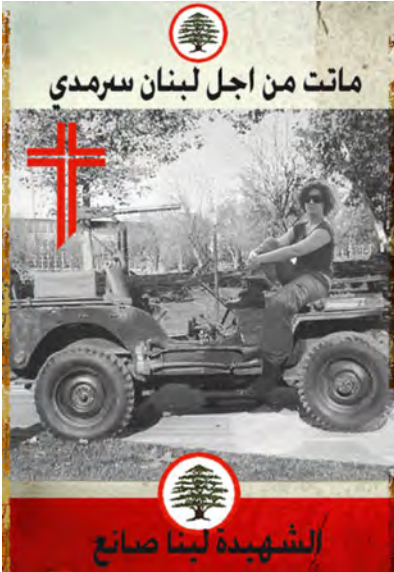


Fig. 3.48: *Nancy*, Lina on a Jeep, 'Died for an Infinite Lebanon. Martyr Lina Sanneh'.



Fig. 3.49: *Nancy*, Lina on the Phone, 'Martyr of Truth. Martyr of the Lebanese Forces. Lina Sanneh'.

ing the implementation of the Taif Agreement, the LF, like all other militias except for Hezbollah, were in theory obliged to hand in their weapons to the state.<sup>237</sup> Lina tells the audience about her activities during the official end of the *Wars* in 1990:

As for us Forces, we turned in only a small portion of our arms and managed to sell the rest to a client in Yugoslavia. Over there, the war was only just beginning... I handled the financial end of the transaction. We shipped the arms from the Jounieh port and, once in Yugoslavia, the exchange was carried out with great success. The Serbs passed us the money and we passed them the arms. (31)

This speech is accompanied by a logo of the LF (Fig. 3.50).

Two events impacted Lina's life after the official end of the *Wars*. First, there was a bomb attack in a Maronite church in Jounieh, in 1994, which killed nine worshippers and injured dozens. Fingers were quickly pointed at the LF. Therefore the



Fig. 3.50: *Nancy*, Lebanese Forces.

237 For more on the Taif Agreement and the Syrian takeover, see *ibid.*, 240–46.



Fig. 3.51: *Nancy*, Beirut Skyline as Seen from Murr Tower.

militia, which had now turned into a party, was forced to dissolve. Geagea was then arrested and sentenced for the commission of the bombing as well as the killing of the Ahrar leader, Dany Chamoun, who, along with his family, was massacred in his home in 1990. After the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, Geagea was released, and today he is the head of the LF and an important player in Lebanon's political landscape.<sup>238</sup>

The second incident Lina recounts is her arrest after the assassination of Hobeika in 2002,<sup>239</sup> because it was thought that she wanted to take revenge against him for ordering her killing twice. Finally, Lina tells the audience that she was watching TV when she learned of the shooting at the Arab

University in 2007. She left her family at home and went to Murr Tower. The visual that accompanies this speech is parallel to the one that accompanies the male fighters: the Beirut skyline as seen from Murr Tower (Fig. 3.51).

The character of Lina is remarkable, not only because she is the only woman in the play but also because she is anti-sectarian and joined the LF for opportunistic reasons. Lina died in combat only once. Her other deaths were caused by kidnappings, conspiracies within the party, and beatings on the street.

Lina is also the only protagonist who engages with the speeches of the other actors; specifically, she usually corrects them. For example, when Ziad mentions that the Southern city of Sour was invaded by the Israelis in 1978, Lina interrupts him by saying that the town was actually invaded in 1982 (17–18).

238 Marilyn Raschka, 'Bomb Kills 9, Injures 60 at Church in Lebanon: Terror: Catholic Worshipers Were Taking Communion in Beirut Suburb. No One Claims Responsibility', *Los Angeles Times*, 28 February 1994, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-02-28-mn-28251-story.html>; Ali Jaber, 'Leader of a Major Christian Clan Is Assassinated in Beirut with His Family', *The New York Times*, 22 October 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/22/world/leader-of-a-major-christian-clan-in-beirut-is-assassinated-with-his-family.html>. For Geagea's release, also see Nader Moumneh, *The Lebanese Forces: Emergence and Transformation of the Christian Resistance* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2019), 201–04 and 318–19. Moumneh writes from the perspective of an LF-sympathiser. This does not make the history he is telling 'wrong', but it should be noted that there is a certain ideological preference in favour of the LF written between the lines.

239 For his assassination, see Trevor Mostyn, 'Obituary Elie Hobeika', *The Guardian*, 25 January 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jan/25/israelandthepalestinians.lebanon>.

When Rabih tells the audience of the War of the Mountain between Christian and Druze militias, including abductions and massacres, Lina simply mentions the date 1860, establishing a historical link to the nineteenth century, when violence also erupted between Druze and Christians in the Shuf mountains (24).

### 3.5.5 All Sectarian Martyrs Are Heading to Murr Tower

Rabih, Hatem, Ziad, and Lina are portrayed as sectarian martyrs who die multiple times. Although they come from different backgrounds and go through different ideological phases during the play, they have comparable experiences and are presented by their parties as martyrs in similar ways. Notably, none of the actors claims to be part of the Druze PSP. When I asked Mroué why the PSP was absent, he said that he had not realised this. As the stories of the four protagonists are based on the stories of real people he and Toufiq actually knew, he suspected that none were members of the PSP.<sup>240</sup> Toufiq, on the other hand, said that because *Nancy* is not a representation of history and should not be understood as a history book but as an artistic reflection of the *Wars*, it was not important to include all warring factions.<sup>241</sup>

In contrast to the PSP, the LF are omnipresent, as not only one but two actors, Lina and Rabih, join the party at certain points. Mroué explained this as follows:

During the civil war, many parties in the West part of Beirut and Lebanon tried to live together, sometimes allying with each other and sometimes fighting. In the East, however, one political party quickly took over and controlled everything. It was the Lebanese Forces under the command of Bachir Gemayel, who was assassinated in 1982. Since then [Bachir's assassination], three to four political parties have emerged on the political scene, fighting among themselves. During Bachir's period, the Eastern part of the country was well-organised and had the structure of a fascist state. The Lebanese Forces enforced military service for all young males living there, imposed taxes on the inhabitants, and suppressed dissenting voices. They were very well organised. In contrast, the Western part was not controlled by one party or leader, resulting in total continuous fighting and chaos.<sup>242</sup>

The Christian actors who lived in East Beirut were simply more likely to join the Phalange or, after the split of the party in 1985, the LF or the Kataeb or any of the few small Christian parties, whereas the actors who lived in West Beirut had a greater variety of choices of which party to join.

240 Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.

241 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021.

242 Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.



Fig. 3.52: *Nancy, Bachir*, 2007, Tokyo International Arts Festival, Tokyo, Photograph Kohei Matsushima.

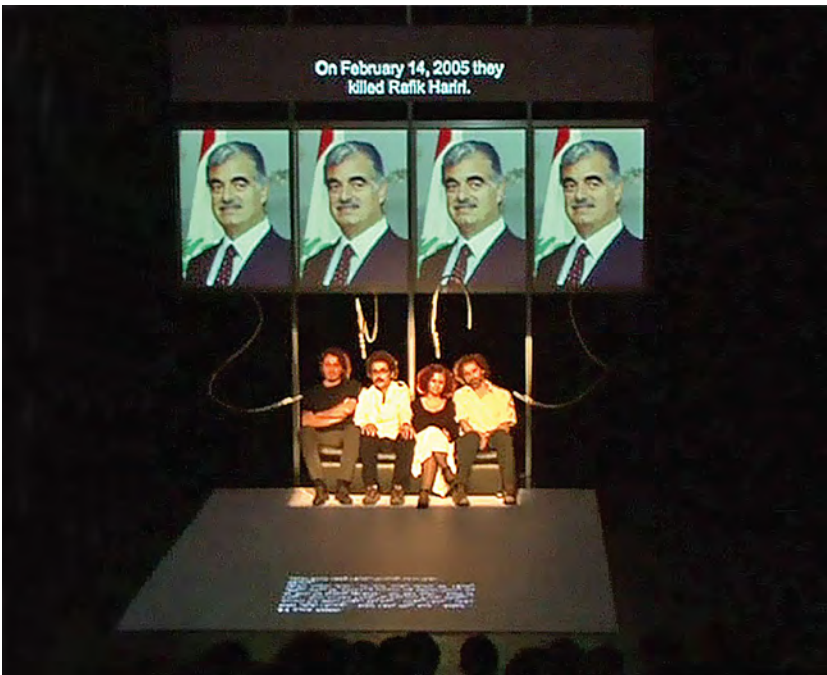


Fig. 3.53: *Nancy, Hariri*, 2007, Masrah al-Madina, Beirut, Still from Video from Ashkal Alwan's Audiovisual Archive.

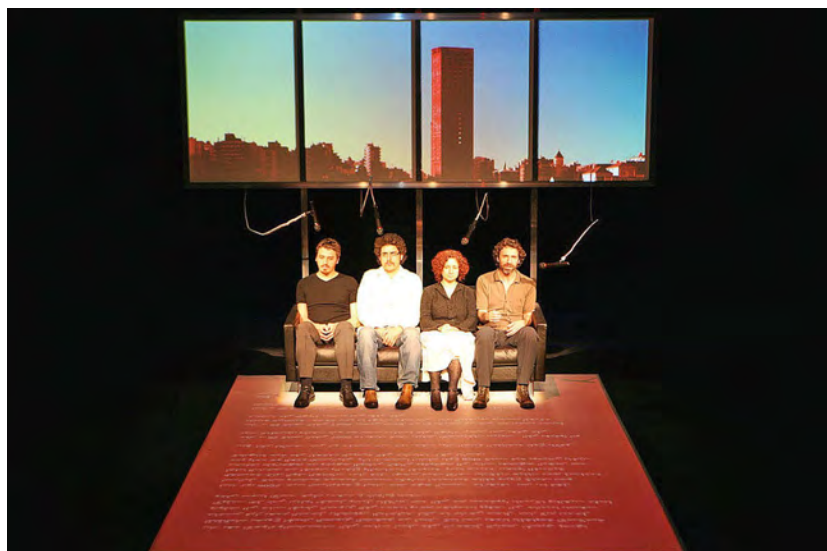


Fig. 3.54: *Nancy*, Murr Tower, 2007, Tokyo International Arts Festival, Tokyo, Photograph Kohei Matsushima.

When Rabih tells the audience of the death of Bachir, posters of Bachir appear; and when Hatem tells the audience of the death of Hariri, posters of Hariri appear (Figs. 3.52–3.53). Unlike the other martyrs, their images are visible not only on one screen but on all four screens simultaneously. This points to their status as ‘celebrity martyrs’, as I will elaborate further in 4.3.

At the end of the play, each actor separately hears about the sectarian clashes at the Arab University, and all four protagonists then make their ways towards Murr Tower, where they come together. This meeting is accompanied, above the heads of the actors, by fragmentary images of the building and its urban surroundings. When seen together, these images appear as a panorama (Fig. 3.54). *Nancy* ends with a voice from offstage—according to the script, the words belong to the text of a typewriter—that runs as follows:

**Typewriter:** On Thursday night, January 25, 2007, our units received an anonymous phone call reporting suspicious movement in the whereabouts of the Murr Tower. At once, a unit from the Lebanese Army headed to the aforementioned place, and followed a rigorous search and investigation, found four bodies lying on the rooftop of the Murr Tower—with five combat machine guns at their side. The firearms were duly confiscated and the four bodies arrested. Upon interrogation, the four bodies confessed in full. Eventually, it became apparent that the confiscated firearms were all licensed weapons and that the crimes committed all fell under the General Amnesty Law issued at the end of the civil war. The four detainees were released on bail. (38)

It remains unclear how the four actors died there; however, just as after almost every other death in *Nancy*, they return to life. While the Lebanese Army found five weapons at Murr Tower, they only discovered four bodies. As Mroué explained to me, one person, who also came to Murr Tower, managed to flee and is consequently not present on the couch in *Nancy*.<sup>243</sup>

Only at the end of the play does the audience realise that they were spectators of a confession that the four actors have made about the crimes they committed during the *Wars*. However, these crimes are not legally crimes because they fall under the General Amnesty Law of 1991, and Rabih, Hatem, Ziad, and Lina were released. At the very end of the play, when the actors have already left the stage, original posters from the *Wars*—selected from the posters in Maasri's collection that served as underlying images for the visuals of *Nancy*—appear on all four screens.

### 3.6 Martyr Posters from the *Wars* and Their Appropriation in *Nancy*

The final aspect of *Nancy* that remains to be tackled in this chapter relates to the martyr posters. The makers of *Nancy* are picture-users who select, present, and recontextualise—in other words, appropriate—posters from the *Wars*. They are not replicating these images but are transferring them from a context of visual politics into critical art.

In the following, I will introduce the main theories of appropriation art and give an overview of the parties' poster formats during the *Wars* based on archival material, which is taken mostly from Maasri's collection [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com) and the library archives of the AUB. Then, I will outline how *Nancy* appropriates these and, finally, argue that by using strategies of appropriation art the play reveals that all parties involved in the conflicts used similar elements and schemes of image-making.

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243 Ibid.

### 3.6.1 Underneath Each Picture There Is Always Another Picture: Introducing the Pictures Generation and Other Theories of Appropriation Art

The term 'appropriation' was coined by Karl Marx, who used it to refer to the violent takeover of goods and labour.<sup>244</sup> In visual art, appropriation art is conventionally understood as a term that

refers to the taking over, into a work of art, of a real object or even an existing work of art. [...] the term seems to have come into use specifically in relation to certain American artists in the 1980s, notably Sherrie Levine [...]. Her aim was to create a new situation, and therefore a new meaning or set of meanings, for a familiar image. [...] Appropriation has been used extensively by artists since the 1980s.<sup>245</sup>

Appropriation art is a theory-based art form that, through discursive reframing, imitates, quotes, changes, or combines other artworks or images of mass media and questions these very pictures from a critical-analytical perspective.<sup>246</sup> Appropriation art is grounded in the Pictures Generation, which was a group of artists, including Sherrie Levine, active in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s who adapted pre-existing images from one visual territory to another. In doing so, they questioned notions of authorship, authenticity, and originality in images.

The theorists of the Pictures Generation—Craig Owens, Douglas Crimp, and Benjamin Buchloh—reflected on how one image can be read through another. Crimp responded in a seminal text to Michael Fried, who warned that art would deteriorate if the boundaries of the media became fluid. In this fluidity, or in other words, in the space between the different media, Fried locates the 'theatrical', which, according to him, presupposes time and the presence of viewers. These two aspects make the 'theatrical' non-artistic for Fried, who demands that the artwork should be available at any time and that it should not depend on the spectator. Unlike Fried, Crimp does not lament the dissolution of media. Rather, media become almost irrelevant for him, as they tell us little about the work as such.<sup>247</sup> Appropriation art requires the disclosure of 'structures of signification', which are to be found in the underlying, earlier picture—no matter what medium is being used. This entanglement with time, that is, the necessity of a preceding picture, together

244 Isabelle Graw, 'Dedication Replacing Appropriation', in *Remastered: The Art of Appropriation*, eds. Verena Gamper and Florian Steininger (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther Koenig, 2017), 87.

245 Simon Wilson and Jessica Lack, *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 20–21.

246 Johannes Meinhardt, 'Visuelle Brüche, Schichten und Stufen der Appropriation', in *Comeback: Kunsthistorische Renaissancen*, ed. Nicole Fritz (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2019), 21–22.

247 Crimp, 'Pictures', 76–77.

with the abandonment of the significance of the medium and the need of a viewer who is able to identify the earlier picture, is what makes appropriation art post-modern.<sup>248</sup>

Crimp points out that the Pictures Generation emphasised the importance of relating images when writing: 'picturing what is always already another picture, [these] artists are, for the most part, picture users rather than picture makers'; and 'their activity involves the selection and presentation of images from the culture at large'.<sup>249</sup> Thus, appropriation art is primarily about re-using existing pictures rather than inventing new ones.

Owens understands the Pictures Generation in a manner similar to Crimp when he identifies it as including 'artists who generate images through the reproduction of other images'.<sup>250</sup> He calls such structures 'allegorical', describing them as follows:

Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (allos = other + agoreuei = to speak). He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured [...]. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement.<sup>251</sup>

Appropriation artists recontextualise existing images by changing their meaning without inventing new pictures. According to Crimp, 'underneath each picture there is always another picture'.<sup>252</sup> To reference an existing image is, as Owens writes, to 'venture into proscribed territory',<sup>253</sup> and to interpret allegorical images, they must be 'deciphered'.<sup>254</sup>

In the framework of thought of the Pictures Generation, artists who use allegorical structures are not copying existing images, plagiarising them, or making aesthetic mistakes. Instead, they are critically engaging with the pre-existing images and their meanings. According to Buchloh, since the quoted images are usu-

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248 Ibid., 87–88.

249 Douglas Crimp, 'About Pictures', *Flash Art*, 88–98, 1978, <https://flash-art.com/article/about-pictures/>.

250 Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 69.

251 Ibid.

252 Crimp, 'Pictures', 87.

253 Owens, 'Allegorical Impulse', 67.

254 Ibid., 70.

ally identifiable, 'the viewer encounters a decentralized text that completes itself through his or her reading and comparison of the original and subsequent layers of meaning that the text/image has acquired'.<sup>255</sup> The underlying image is still significant, as the context of the new meaning can be read only in relation to it. By displaying an image in another framework, new layers of meaning are added to it. Recontextualisation, as Martha Buskirk summarises, is a critical strategy.<sup>256</sup>

Appropriation art has also been practised after the Pictures Generation. Juliane Rebentisch argues it could, due to the artist's analytical, social, and cultural scientific approach, be understood as a forerunner to today's artistic research.<sup>257</sup> In the twenty-first century, appropriation art became popular because of the easy accessibility of image programs, such as Photoshop, along with digital photography and the internet. However, twenty-first-century appropriation art differs from that of the Pictures Generation because it is not primarily concerned with notions of originality, authorship, and authenticity. Instead, it is focused on examining how the meaning of images is generated and transported. As a result, some theorists, such as Johannes Meinhardt, argue that the art of appropriation after the Pictures Generation lost much of its analytical and artistic rigour.<sup>258</sup>

Others, however, still locate a subversive potential in today's appropriation art. Verena Gamper, for example, writes that works that reference and 'build upon a preexisting pictoriality'<sup>259</sup> can be understood as 'speech meets counterspeech' and therefore as responses to preceding images.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, Isabelle Graw argues that appropriation art is still strategic and goal oriented.<sup>261</sup> She also points out that because images have agency and are able to strike back, they have the potential to undermine the intentions of the one who has appropriated them.<sup>262</sup> At the same time, she criticises Crimp for claiming that appropriation is immanently critical and subversive. According to her, appropriation art should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and so one cannot say that a work of appropriation art is intrinsically critical. It is certain that something has changed when a picture is appropriated, but 'what has actually changed can only be determined by investigating concrete, specific works'.<sup>263</sup>

255 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Allegorical Procedure, Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum* (September 1982): 52.

256 Martha Buskirk, 'Appropriation Under the Gun', *Art in America* 80, no. 6 (June 1992): 37.

257 Juliane Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2013), 163.

258 Meinhardt, 'Visuelle Brüche', 21–23.

259 Verena Gamper, 'Appropriation as Dialogue: Artworks Among Themselves', in Gamper and Steininger, *Remastered*, 21.

260 Verena Gamper, 'Introduction', in Gamper and Steininger, *Remastered*, 9.

261 Graw, 'Dedication', 85.

262 *Ibid.*, 83.

263 *Ibid.*, 89.

In the following, I will investigate the posters of *Nancy* as individual cases of appropriation art. In doing so, I first trace the emergence of the posters among the different factions during the *Wars* and then identify visual strategies of appropriation used in the play.

### 3.6.2 Formats of Martyr Posters During the Wars

During the *Wars*, all parties that published and financed posters for their fallen militiamen issued ordinary formats, or obituary formats, as Maasri calls them. These ordinary formats usually encompass a photograph and the name of the deceased, a short biography, often the logo of the party, and a slogan. Ordinary formats were also serialised. In the serial format, posters consist of a template in which only the photograph, name, and biographical information are changed, while all other parts of the poster remain uniform. According to Maasri, the serial format was used not only because it saved time but also because it created a standard visual identity, which meant that it was clear at first sight which group had issued the poster.<sup>264</sup> On the other hand, Lara Deeb argues that the serial format makes martyrs ‘faceless, like indistinguishable masks’, because they are reduced to ‘pieces of a collective’.<sup>265</sup>

The visual material I found in the archives suggests that Ahrar was the first party involved in the *Wars* to remember their martyrs in posters in serial formats. Posters from 1976 show the faces of the martyrs inside a cedar (*Figs. 3.55–3.56*), while the logo of the party—a cedar in a circle—appears on both the lower left and the lower right, with the name of the shahid written between. This format is not appropriated as such in the posters of *Nancy*. Yet I would suggest that the play gives Ahrar such a prominent role in the beginning—when five martyr posters of Rabih (*Figs. 3.7–3.11*) are shown—because Ahrar seems to be the first Lebanese party that organised the distribution of martyr posters serially.

The Phalange (since 1985, the Kataeb/the LF) also launched martyr posters for their dead militiamen in the early stages of the *Wars* (*Fig. 3.57*).<sup>266</sup> However, I could not detect any seriality across their posters in the 1970s. For well-known martyrs, the Phalange, like the other parties, designed more distinctive formats. As previously noted, the most prominent martyr of the Phalange is Bachir, who is the subject of numerous images. One of these posters, as mentioned above, shows up in

264 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 89.

265 Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*, 57. Deeb writes about Hezbollah posters, but her statements can be transferred to the standardised formats of all groups.

266 According to Maasri this is a poster issued by the Phalange. However, she gave the reference number ‘NLP 14’ to the image, which would indicate that it is an Ahrar poster.

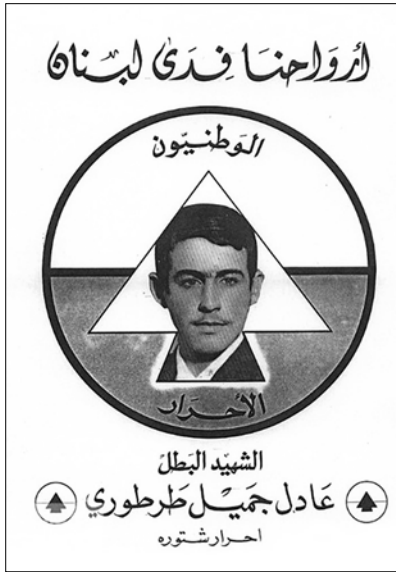


Fig. 3.55: Ahrar, 'Our Souls in Ransom to Lebanon. The Martyr Hero Adel Jamil Tartturi', 1976, Poster, 16 x 22 cm, NLP 10, signsofconflict.com.



Fig. 3.56: Ahrar, 'The Hero Martyr of Love and Freedom. The Martyr Hero Khalil Hajula', 1976 (?), Poster, 16 x 22 cm, NLP 8, signsofconflict.com.

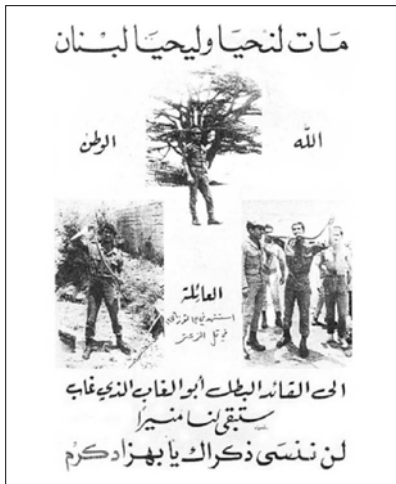


Fig. 3.57: Phalange (?), 'He Died So That We May Live and So Lebanon May Live. We Will Not Forget Your Memory Oh Bahzad Karam', 1976, Poster, 21 x 30 cm, NLP 14, signsofconflict.com.

*Nancy*—specifically, it appears simultaneously on each of the four screens that are above the actors (Fig. 3.52). I could not find many posters for individual martyrs commemorated by the LF or the Kataeb after Bachir's death in 1982, and therefore would argue that after 1982, the LF and the Kataeb remembered their martyrs through Bachir, who served, as I will elaborate further in 4.1, as the archetypal martyr, metaphorically embodying all fallen LF and Kataeb militiamen. This is reflected in *Nancy*, as the underlying images of many posters of Rabih, such as the depictions with muscular crossed arms and sunglasses (Figs. 3.12, 3.13), are images of Bachir (Fig. 3.58), as I will discuss further in 4.4.

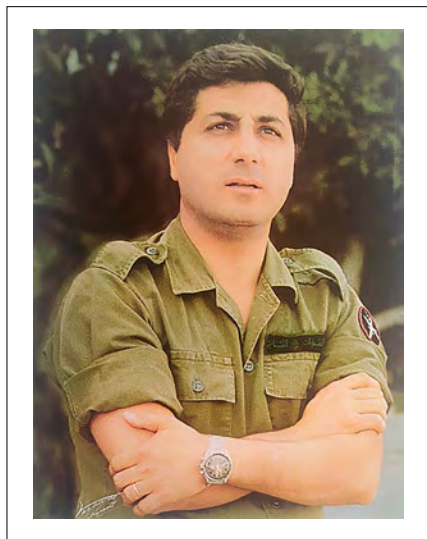


Fig. 3.58: Phalange (Photographer Varoujan), Bachir Gemayel, 1980, Poster, 25 x 34 cm, WJA 37, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

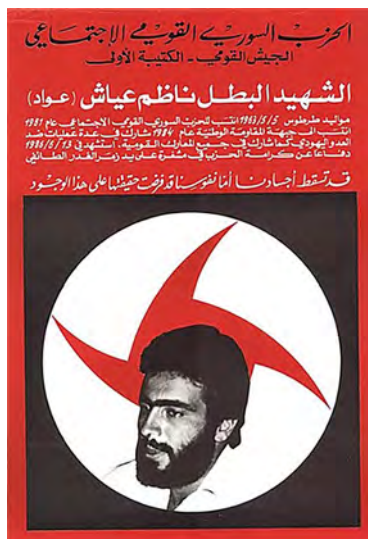


Fig. 3.59: SSNP, 'The Martyr Hero Nazem Ayyash', 1986, Poster, 47 x 68 cm, AAJ 43, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

In contrast, Lina's posters are not direct appropriations of the LF and Kataeb posters in terms of format. Rather, they are related to the role of female martyrs across various militias, a notion to which I will also return in 4.4. Posters of Rabih and Lina (Figs. 3.12, 3.13, 3.48) encompass a white background with a red stripe below. This points to the fact that serial formats existed but does not provide conclusive evidence of a direct appropriation of LF posters, as I could not find such a poster design in the archives I visited.

Around 1985, a general decline in the number of posters from the Kataeb can be observed. According to Jabre, the reason for this was the establishment of the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, a television channel that the group used for communicating their political messages. Due to this new medium, images lost relevance.<sup>267</sup>

The SSNP had already commemorated its main martyr, Antuan Saadeh, before the Wars had started. He was the founder of the party and was killed in 1949.<sup>268</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the group's first martyr posters concerning the Wars date from 1975. The SSNP started to produce serial formats at the latest in 1980 and in the following years developed several versions of these, always in black,

267 Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 6.

268 For details about the life and death of Antuan Saadeh, see Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 98–100; Solomon, *In Search*, 11–32. The AUB library archives hold a large collection of letters and photographs from Saadeh's life.



Fig. 3.60: LNRF/LCP, 'Martyr of the LNRF. The Pearl of the Bekaa Lola Abboud', 1985, Poster, 28 x 68 cm, ASH 134, signsofconflict.com.

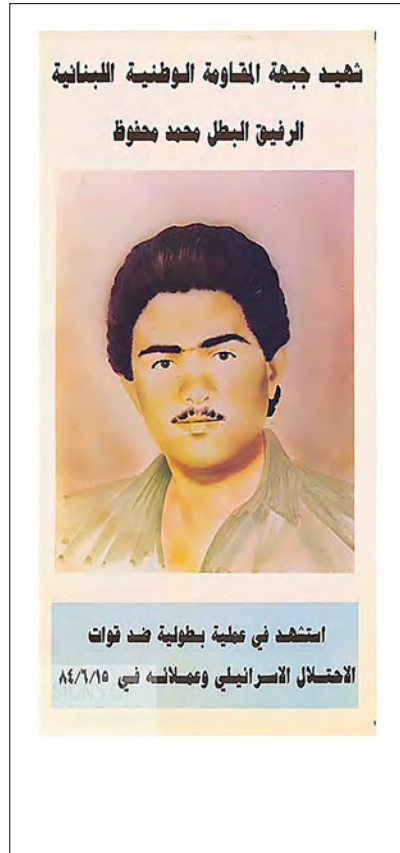


Fig. 3.61: LNRF/LCP, 'The Martyr of the LNRF. Hero Comrade Mohammad Mafuz', 1984, Poster, 27 x 57 cm, ASH 176, signsofconflict.com.

red, and white. For a death of Lina (Fig. 3.44), Nancy appropriates a poster used for commemorating the SSNP's martyr Nazem Ayyash (Fig. 3.59). It depicts the martyr's face on a red background and includes the party logo and slogans.<sup>269</sup>

The LCP employed a serial format in 1984–85 (Figs. 3.60–3.61).<sup>270</sup> This format is also the underlying image for a death of Ziad (Fig. 3.33). It shows the martyr in the centre of the image on a bright background, with black writing above and below the photograph and a turquoise-blue stripe containing a slogan in the lower part

269 For a discussion of martyr posters of the SSNP, see Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 94–96; Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 128–39.

270 These posters were issued in collaboration with the Lebanese National Resistance Front (Jammoul).



Fig. 3.62: LCP, 'The Martyr Leader Ahmad al-Mir al-Ayubi (Abu Hassan). Member of the Office of the Lebanese Communist Party', 1979, Poster, 48 x 70 cm, LCP 17, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

of the poster. Like the other parties, the LCP commemorated their high-ranking party members in distinct formats, as evidenced by a poster that was published in 1979 (Fig. 3.62). This image is appropriated in *Nancy* for a death of Ziad for the LCP (Fig. 3.32). Both pictures show the men directly looking at the viewer and include a flower with a cut stem.

The Morabitoun and the Arab Socialist Union, a Sunni Nasserist organisation that was closely allied with the Morabitoun, also distributed posters of their martyrs in the first years of the Wars, although to a lesser extent than did other parties discussed. Given the small number of Morabitoun posters that remain in the archives, it seems that the group was not as active in celebrating its martyrs visually as were Ahrar, the SSNP, the LF, the Kataeb, and the LCP. What is remarkable about the

Morabitoun posters is the recurrent presence of the Holiday Inn after they won the Battle of the Hotels (Figs. 3.63–3.64). One of these posters has a collective format (Fig. 3.63). This kind of format, in contrast to the individual format, depicts not a single shahid but rather a group of martyrs, who often died in the same battle.<sup>271</sup> The poster in Fig. 3.63 is the underlying image for a death of Hatem for the Morabitoun (Fig. 3.20). In another death of Hatem for this same militia, a serial format employed by the Arab Socialist Union (Figs. 3.65–3.66) serves as the underlying image (Fig. 3.21). The background of these posters is a dazzling green, and the photograph of the martyr is placed in a circle. Above and below his face, red text commemorates his martyrdom, and a black stripe with white letters is visible on the bottom of the image. In the remake in *Nancy*, the octagonal Morabitoun logo is added to the poster.

271 For collective martyr posters, see Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 89–91; Chaib, 'Hezbollah Seen', 125.

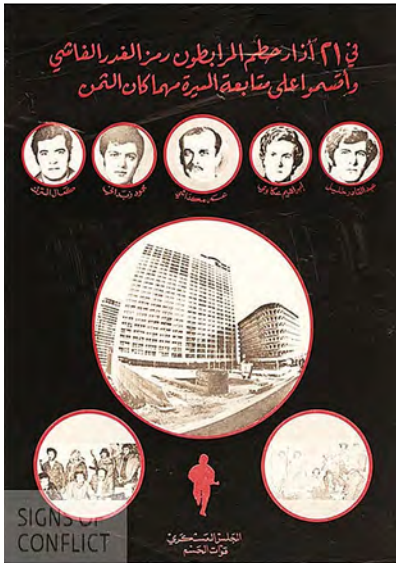


Fig. 3.63: Morabitoun, 'March 21, the Morabitoun Destroyed the Symbol of Fascist Treason and Pledged to Continue the Journey at Whatever Cost', 1976, Poster, 46 x 62 cm, AUB 107, signsofconflict.com.



Fig. 3.64: Morabitoun, 'March 21, the Morabitoun Destroyed the Symbol of Fascist Treason and Pledged to Continue the Journey at Whatever Cost – Ibrahim Koleilat', 1977, Poster, 50 x 70 cm, AUB 14, signsofconflict.com.

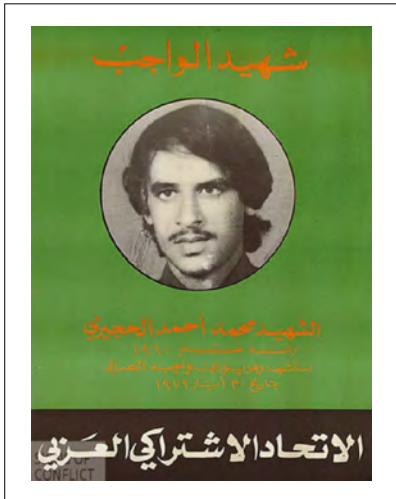


Fig. 3.65: Arab Socialist Union, 'Martyr of Duty. The Martyr Mohammad Ahmad al-Hujairi', 1979, Poster, 42 x 58 cm, ASH 13, signsofconflict.com.

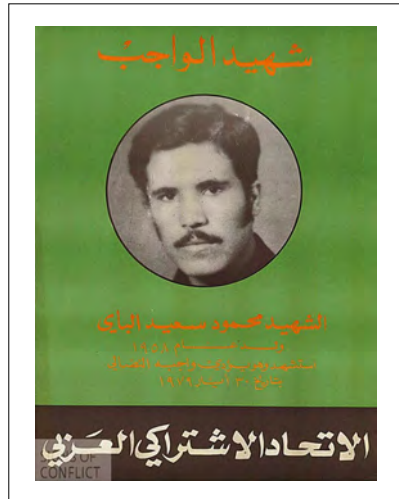


Fig. 3.66: Arab Socialist Union, 'Martyr of Duty. The Martyr Mahmud Said al-Bay', 1979, Poster, 42 x 58 cm, ASH 14, signsofconflict.com.



Fig. 3.67: Amal (Designer Nabil Kdouh), 'The Martyr Commander, Hajj Hassan Hossein Jaafar (Abu Jammal)', 1988 (?), Poster, 42 x 60 cm, BYR 013, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

According to Bonsen, the first martyr posters issued by Amal date from 1975.<sup>272</sup> Amal and Hezbollah often transferred photographs into paintings and drawings and employed elements of caricature (Fig. 3.67).<sup>273</sup> Both groups' posters are diverse in style, and I agree with Schmitt's claim that, among the various parties, Shia posters show the richest iconography and use the most dramatic effects.<sup>274</sup>

Hezbollah has developed different serial formats over time. One of these was invented in the 1980s and consists of the party logo, prominently placed in the centre of the poster, along with a photograph of the martyr, his name, and other biographical information, as well as a commemorative slogan (Figs. 3.68–3.69).<sup>275</sup> This format is appropriated in *Nancy* for a poster that accompanies a death of Ziad for Hezbollah

(Fig. 3.37). Individual posters by Hezbollah serve as underlying images for posters depicting further deaths of this actor. For instance, the death of Ziad that is commemorated in Figure 3.38 is based on a Hezbollah poster that includes a rising sun behind a black mountain and a yellow chain of flowers in front of the mountain (Fig. 3.70). Hezbollah posters also act as underlying images for the posters of deaths of Ziad for Amal. An example is a Hezbollah poster that depicts martyrs in front of a background showing the Dome of the Rock, birds, and flowers (Fig. 3.71) that is appropriated for a poster that commemorates a death of Ziad (Fig. 3.36) for Amal.

To sum up, many factions involved in the Wars venerated their martyrs in posters and used distinctive individual, but also serial and collective, formats. Some of these martyr cults, such as that of the SSNP, began decades before the Wars started; others, such as Hezbollah's, started during the Wars.

272 Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 329.

273 Chaib, 'Hezbollah Seen', 115–16; Maasri, 'Aesthetics', 169.

274 Schmitt, *Advertised to Death*, 69.

275 Straub briefly mentions this template (*Das Selbstmordattentat*, 82).



Fig. 3.68: Hezbollah, 'The Victimised Martyr Jafar Hossein Jafar', 1986, Poster, 40 x 55 cm, ASH 23, signsofconflict.com.

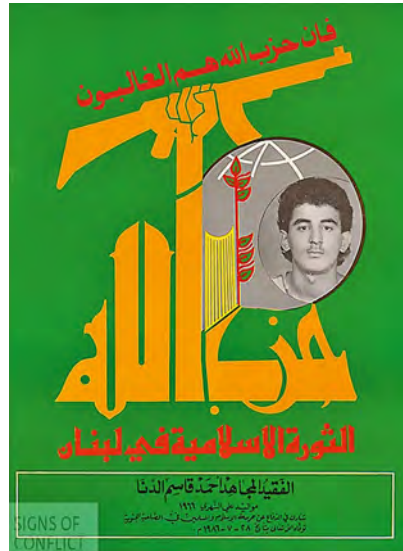


Fig. 3.69: Hezbollah, 'The Lost Fighter Kassem al-Danna', 1986, Poster, 39 x 54 cm, ASH 22, signsofconflict.com.

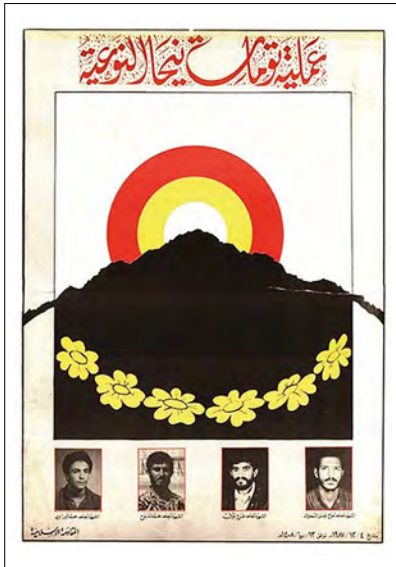


Fig. 3.70: Hezbollah (Designer Mohammad Ismail), 'Toumat Nihah's High-Quality Operation', 1987, Poster, 50 x 70 cm, HZB 17, signsofconflict.com.



Fig. 3.71: Hezbollah, 'Martyrs on the Path to Jerusalem', 1987, Poster, 49 x 70 cm, HZB 14, signsofconflict.com.

### 3.6.3 Visual Strategies of Appropriation in *Nancy*

In tracing the history and types of martyr posters from the *Wars*, I have also shown examples where *Nancy* appropriates them. In most cases, the underlying image is a poster of the faction for which the actors died. This is the first appropriation strategy that I have identified in *Nancy*. I call this mode direct appropriation.

A second strategy, which I term cross-appropriation and which I also have hinted at above, is that where a poster from another faction is used as the underlying image, as I have shown with the Hezbollah poster (Fig. 3.71) that serves as the underlying image for an Amal poster (Fig. 3.36) in *Nancy*. Another example is a poster accompanying a death of Rabih for the SLA. This poster, in which he is standing next to a map of Lebanon (Fig. 3.15), seems to be an appropriation of a poster by the Lebanese Army (Fig. 3.72) that also shows a man with a Lebanese map. Another example is a poster accompanying Lina's death for the LF (Fig. 3.48), which appropriates a poster of the Lebanese National Resistance Front (Fig. 3.73) by depicting the same kind of vehicle.

A third visual strategy employed in *Nancy* is the fusion of posters. In this case, elements from two posters from different parties involved in the *Wars* are merged into one poster in *Nancy*. This can be seen in an image that accompanies a death of



Fig. 3.72: Lebanese Army, 'The Army Is You Is Us', Poster, 45 x 60 cm, ASH 74, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

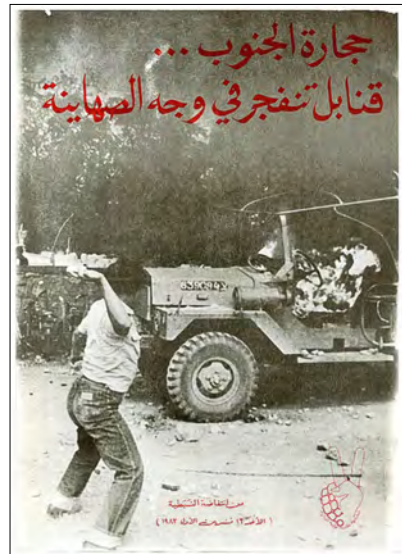


Fig. 3.73: LNRF, 'Stones of the South... Bombs Explode in the Face of the Zionists. From the Nabatieh Uprising 16 October 1983', 1983, Poster, 32 x 45 cm, AAJ 106, [signsofconflicts.com](http://signsofconflicts.com).

Ziad for the LCP (Fig. 3.32): while both the man (who is facing the viewer) and the rose with the cut stem originate from a poster by the LCP (Fig. 3.62), the mountains in the background seem to be appropriated from an Amal poster (Fig. 3.67), which could be a hint that Ziad will join Amal later in the play. A fusion of underlying images also occurs in another poster of Ziad, one in which he—as the visual suggests via the inclusion of both logos and the mentioning of the names of both parties—dies for the PFLP and LCP jointly (Fig. 3.33). The overall design is reminiscent of a serial LCP template (Figs. 3.60–3.61), as discussed above. However, the actor's pose is not one usually assumed in ID photographs; rather, because of his crossed arms and his gaze, which is directed upwards to his right, it resembles a poster of Bachir issued by the Phalange (Fig. 3.58).

A fourth visual strategy is the multiplication of one poster. In this case, one or more underlying images are appropriated for several posters in *Nancy* in such a manner that the re-made versions differ only in minor details. Examples of multiplications are detectable in two images showing Hatem and Ziad as martyrs for Amal and the IUM, respectively (Fig. 3.25, 3.36). Both pictures are appropriations of a Hezbollah poster (Fig. 3.71), as they depict the Dome of the Rock, a moon, birds, and a red rose with green leaves in the background. Only the corpse in a shroud is omitted from the posters in *Nancy*. Crucial is that both posters look the same in *Nancy*; only the photograph, the name, and the party branding differ from each other.

Other examples of multiplications are three posters that accompany Rabih after having died for Ahrar and Hatem after having died for the Morabitoun (Figs. 3.8–3.9, Fig. 3.19). All three posters show the same image structure, namely a man standing in front of a ruin. While the placement of a ruin (though the ruins are different, as I will elaborate in 4.5) visible in the background is an appropriation of a Morabitoun poster (Fig. 3.64), the man standing in front of the building could be traced back to two underlying images; namely, images of a fighter of the PSP (Fig. 3.74) and of Mustafa Marouf Saad, the founder of the military wing of the Popular Nasserist Organisation, a Saida-based group allied with the Morabitoun (Fig. 3.75).

Multiplications can also be detected in two posters that accompany deaths of Hatem and Ziad (Figs. 3.24, 3.35). In both images, the logo of the party—in one case Amal and in the other case the Morabitoun—is placed below the head of the martyr. The writing inside a beige strip announces the deaths as martyrdoms. Red rays come from above, and green (Fig. 3.35) and black (Fig. 3.24) rays emanate from below the photograph, while nine drops of blood are visible at the bottom of the poster. The rays are appropriations from a PSP poster that depicts three martyrs' faces and red rays emanating from a sinking sun in its upper half, and black stripes in its lower half, where five drops of blood can also be seen (Fig. 3.76).

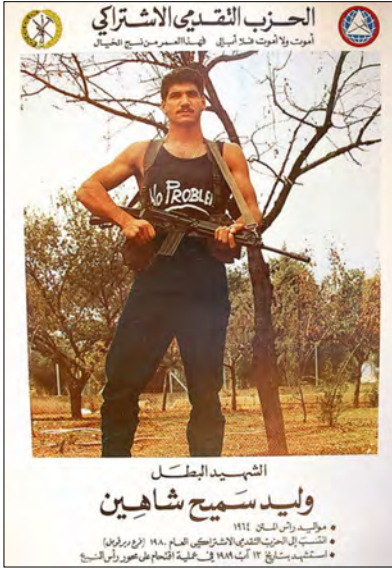


Fig. 3.74: PSP, 'To Die or Not to Die, What Care I. For This Life Is but a Figment of the Imagination. The Martyr Hero Walid Samih Chahin', 1989, Poster, PSP 63, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).



Fig. 3.75: Popular Nasserist Organisation, 'The National Leader, Mustafa Marouf Saad. The Symbol of the Lebanese National Resistance', Poster, 50 x 70 cm, 320-PCD2080-077, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

A fifth visual strategy can be detected in what I call the Green and Blue Groups, posters accompanying deaths of Lina and Hatem, which I will discuss in detail in 4.3 (Figs. 3.21–3.23, 3.44–3.46). In Hatem's case, the underlying image is a serial poster of the Arab Socialist Union (Figs. 3.65–3.66); in Lina's case, the underlying images are the poster of the SSNP member Ayyash (Fig. 3.59) and, due to the presence of a female face, Sana Muhaidly, who is also a martyr of the SSNP (Fig. 3.77). In both cases, the underlying images are chosen from either the party the actor died for or an allied party. Crucially, the elements of the *Nancy* posters in both respective groups gradually disappear or reappear.

Finally, there are also posters that are appropriated as found, without any changes. This applies to the posters of Hariri and Bachir (Figs. 3.52–3.53) and the press clipping of Rabih's humiliation (Fig. 3.14).

By using—sometimes also combining—these six strategies of appropriation and thereby demonstrating that many pictorial elements of the posters can be transferred from one political faction to another, *Nancy* makes evident that the visual language of the martyr poster is very similar among the parties involved in the *Wars*. Common elements in posters among the parties are the logo of the party,



Fig. 3.76: PSP, '1st Annual Commemoration of Their Martyrdom in the War of the Mountain', 1984, Poster, 50 x 70 cm, PSP 20, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).



Fig. 3.77: LNR/SSNP, 'I Am Now Planted in the South, I Soak Its Earth with My Blood – Sana', 1985, Poster, 45 x 60 cm, AAJ 24, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

an image of the deceased person, symbols, and slogans. Further, the multiplications that involve only minor changes could be read as a nod to the seriality of the poster production.

### 3.6.4 Underneath Each Poster There Is Always Another Poster

The posters of *Nancy* are not isolated pictures; they are engaging and communicating with already existing images. Their meaning can be grasped only when they are thought in relation to the posters of the *Wars*. Like the artists of the Pictures Generation, the makers of *Nancy* do not take images as given but appropriate them critically. Although most of the visuals in *Nancy* have been changed and modified, they are still clearly identifiable as originating from martyr posters of the *Wars*. The original context remains relevant for the new interpretation of the pictures because the images need to be read through each other. In doing so, a new meaning is added to the image, which replaces the previous meaning. *Nancy* does not replicate the posters of the *Wars*. Instead, through its references to visual cultures of martyrdom surrounding the *Wars*, the play transfers martyr posters from a context

of visual politics into critical art, where the use of the martyr poster for various political purposes is questioned and reflected on. Therefore, *Nancy* shows that appropriation art in the twenty-first century has not lost its subversive layer and can still act as ‘counterspeech’.

Mroué is a picture-user who selects and presents existing pictures. He has commented on his image-making practice as follows:

maybe the role of artists and even intellectuals is not to produce images but to take iconic images and try to deconstruct them. To ‘de-sacralise’ them. There are a lot of images that have become icons that have in turn become untouchable. For example, when I talk about the street posters of martyrs, [...] these images impose themselves on society and it’s difficult to question their presence and impact on our daily lives. [...] My work is trying not to produce new images but to find and take these images and deconstruct them through reflection and by re-reading them in a human, personalised manner.<sup>276</sup>

For *Nancy*, we could say that Mroué reflects which ideas and messages the underlying images were intended to transmit and in which discourse they were aimed to function. By changing the context of their presentation, he transfers the posters into the territory of contemporary art, and this allows critical examination of the posters. In doing so, he provides a reading of these images that does not follow the originally intended reading.

### 3.7 Similar Stories, Similar Visuals, and a Common Meeting Point

In this chapter, I first offered an outline of the recent and current state of Beirut’s art scene and argued that the state of research on art production in Lebanon frequently includes discussions on the Post-War Generation, of which Mroué and *Nancy* are part, but often in the framework of trauma and amnesia. I will contest these two modes of thought in the following discussion of *Nancy* and of other artworks dealing with topics that are similar to those of the play.

Then, I introduced different aspects of *Nancy*. The stage of the play was consciously conceptualised as an overkill of speech, written text, and image in order to resemble the situation during the Wars. Moreover, the element of dying and coming back to life that is similar to a videogame reminds Mroué of the situation in Lebanon now and then.

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276 Anthony Downey, ‘Lost in Narration: A Conversation Between Rabih Mroué and Anthony Downey’, *Ibraaz*, 5 January 2012, <https://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/11>.

Although most scholars read *Nancy* as dealing with the history and memory of the *Wars*, I argue that when text and image are read in combination, *Nancy* constitutes a critique of the image and figure of the martyr. Although the martyr is a recurring figure in Mroué's oeuvre, *Nancy* is more evasive than his other artworks. By addressing shuhada from different Lebanese regions and sects, the play reveals that the different groups operated with similar visual strategies and had similar conceptions of their martyrs. This becomes clear via the text not only because Rabih, Hatem, Ziad, and Lina, who come from different sectarian backgrounds, are portrayed as having similar experiences but also because the modes of appropriation of the images that accompany their deaths are comparable.

The notion of the shahid/a is neither pictorially—as shown via the analysis of the posters—nor conceptually—as demonstrated via the analysis of the play's text—restricted to Christian, Islamic, or secular parties. At some point, all parties involved in the *Wars* visually celebrated their fallen militiamen and militiawomen. This has also been emphasised by Mroué, who told me,

I lived in Lebanon and experienced the entire war. I left Lebanon eight years ago, but I spent my entire life in Beirut, raised with the culture of martyrdom. At a certain point in my childhood, I praised and idealised the idea of martyrdom. Like most kids at the time, I dreamt of being a martyr. This ideology was spread by all political parties in Lebanon, whether they were Muslim, Christian, or secular. They all converged on the concept of martyrdom. It is a culture that dominates all political parties, the people, and the society in which we lived and continue to live today.<sup>277</sup>

Mroué sees in ideological martyrdom the common 'meeting point' of all factions involved in the *Wars*. In *Nancy*, this seems to be addressed when all four actors, who had frequently turned into martyrs, meet at Murr Tower at the end of the play.

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277 Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.



## 4. Appropriating and Questioning Images of the Sectarian Martyr in Nancy

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In this chapter, I explore how *Nancy* questions and appropriates the posters of the martyrs of the *Wars* and in doing so shows us how these images are constructed. In each part I focus on one particular aspect.

First, by referring to theories of semiotics, and linking the posters of the *Wars* to the posters of *Nancy*, I will analyse how the play appropriates the martyrdom-related logos, symbols, and slogans of the parties involved in the *Wars*. Furthermore, I will argue that the play reveals that all groups equally used these elements in their imagery.

The next part sheds light on how the play reflects on the photographic image in the martyr poster. Aided by photo theories of the index and by relating *Nancy* to other artworks, I will show that *Nancy* demonstrates that truth claims in martyr posters should always be questioned. Alongside this, I will show that the play reflects on modes by which an existing photograph is turned into the picture of the martyr and therefore becomes a symbolic currency, the price in humans that a party was willing to pay. I will also discuss images depicting graphic scenes and suggest that many posters of martyrs can be linked to a counter-image that shows the deceased not as a hero, but as a defeated other.

This analysis is followed by a discussion of how *Nancy* reflects on the hierarchical distinctions between the visual memorialisation of martyrs and the oblivion of other deaths. Through an examination of selected posters from the play along with the accompanying text, and in connection with posters of the *Wars*, other artworks, and secondary literature, I will argue that *Nancy* establishes a theoretical discourse on the construction of the martyr and the missing—the people who disappeared during the *Wars*, and who are not considered as martyrs. At the same time, *Nancy* reflects on the differences between ordinary martyrs and celebrity martyrs and reveals that the images of celebrity martyrs are—regarding quantity and time—more present and lasting than those of ordinary martyrs, because each celebrity martyr has the power to evoke strong emotions as he embodies a dream of how Lebanon should be in the future.

Next, through an analysis of selected posters in combination with the text of the play, considerations of underlying images, theories from psychology, and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, I argue that a set of posters from *Nancy* reflects

gender roles performed in martyr posters of the *Wars*. I further claim that findings on hypermasculine commercials can be applied to martyr posters, as they are also circulated to persuade.

I will then focus on depictions of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower in the posters of *Nancy* and connect these two ruins of the *Wars* to the poster of the martyr. I also discuss the rumours and potential histories that often surround shuhada. Aided by secondary literature and an essay by Walid Sadek, I will argue that the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, like the posters of the martyrs, render unfinished business past instead of acknowledging the *Wars*' present protraction.

Finally, considering Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology, I discuss the spectral qualities of shuhada. The martyrs in the posters are neither fully dead and invisible nor entirely alive and visible, and they point to both the past, where they died, and the future, where the dream they died for should be realised. However, *Nancy*, in my reading, only partially embodies Derrida's ghosts. This is why I focus in this last part on the artwork *Faces* (2009), by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, which, in my reading, illustrates the spectral qualities of the martyr. By resorting to other theories of present-absent images, I will also clarify that the martyrs do not embody a latent absence and are not images that have withdrawn past a surpassing disaster but can be grasped best when thought with Derrida.

The concluding aim is to make clear that *Nancy* thoroughly investigates the construction of the sectarian martyr and the fabrication of its image, which is used not only for commemoration, but also as a means of visual politics.

## 4.1 The Sectarian Use of Logos, Symbols, and Slogans

*Nancy* reveals that the parties that took part in the conflicts equally used martyrdom-related symbols, slogans, and party logos in their posters during the *Wars*. The play therefore demonstrates that the anatomy of the martyr poster, which I envision as a 'body', was very similar among the groups.

My thinking of the poster as a body is inspired by Guffey's understanding of the medium as an anthropomorph, which I mentioned in 2.1. It also links with the work of visual semiotician Sandra Moriarty, who claims that an image consists of codes that must be decoded in order for meaning to be extracted, in a process that is similar to that of a doctor looking for a patient's symptoms before making a diagnosis.<sup>278</sup>

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278 Sandra Moriarty, 'The Symbiotics of Semiotics and Visual Communication', *Journal of Visual Literacy* 22, no. 1 (2002): 20–25.

Furthermore, my reading of the pictures is informed by Roland Barthes's essay 'Rhetoric of the Image', where he argues that all images are polysemic, in the sense that their meaning is not fixed and there are multiple ways in which they could be interpreted. Barthes identifies three possible modes of analysing pictures.<sup>279</sup> First, there is the 'literal' denotative reading, which describes what is seen. Taking a Hezbollah poster (Fig. 3.71) as an example, we see photographs of three men, a building, a flower, a moon, and birds.

Second, there is Barthes's connotative reading, which attempts to understand more than what is literally seen. Here, the learning of certain cultural and political knowledge is necessary. This knowledge is crucial to understanding that the building in the poster is not just any building but is the Dome of the Rock, that the men are martyrs, and that the other symbols mentioned are linked to Muslim martyrdom. Knowing all this, we understand that we see an image commemorating three shuhada who died for a party with an Islamic ideology.

At the same time, symbols are culturally specific, as highlighted by Rowena and Rupert Shepherd, who write that a symbol is 'something that a particular culture considers to mean something else'. They further explain that the meaning of the symbol is 'often capable of more than one interpretation, and beyond really precise definition'. Thus 'the world of symbols is a world of inference and suggestion, rather than of concrete facts and definite statements'.<sup>280</sup> For the following discussion, it is important to consider what the 'coded iconic message' of the discussed symbols means in the Lebanese cultural context, however, the same symbol might have different connotations elsewhere.

According to Barthes, the third layer of reading an image is the linguistic message—namely, the text that is written in the image—which anchors the meaning of the connoted message. In the Hezbollah poster, the slogan 'Martyrs on the Path to Jerusalem' confirms what we suspected after the connotative reading—namely, that the poster commemorates martyrs of a Muslim party—because, as I will elaborate below, liberating Jerusalem as a place of desire is, in the context of the *Wars*, restricted to parties that ground their ideology in Islam.

Using Barthes's framework, I will read the posters on the connotative and linguistic levels. Precisely, I will shed light on the party logos and other symbols that are frequently employed in martyr posters of the *Wars* and in their appropriated versions in *Nancy*. Finally, I will discuss the slogans.

279 Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in *Roland Barthes: Image, Music, Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977).

280 Rowena Shepherd and Rupert Shepherd, *1000 Symbols: What Shapes Mean in Arts and Myth* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 10–11.

### 4.1.1 The Party Logos and Their Appropriation in Nancy

The party logo is a visual identity that is brandished by the poster, making clear which group has issued it.<sup>281</sup> By appropriating logos that can be found in posters distributed during the Wars, Nancy reflects how the parties employed their logos in their martyr images.

Five deaths of Rabih (Figs. 3.7–3.11) are marked by the logo of Ahrar. As I noted in 3.5.1, at the beginning of Nancy, Rabih was a fighter for this party. Ahrar's logo consists of a golden cedar in a black circular outline, whose upper half is filled with white and lower half with red.<sup>282</sup> Red and white are the colours of the Lebanese flag, which also includes a green cedar.<sup>283</sup>

The cedar is a Christian-connoted symbol that is repeatedly mentioned in the Bible. The tree is related to Lebanon's political heritage. While there are—mostly but not only Muslim—ideologies that search for the roots of the country in an Arab past, right-wing Christians claim that the legacy of Lebanon is inherently Phoenician. The Phoenicians were an ancient Semitic civilisation, which means that the right-wing Christians locate Lebanon in a context that is not fully Arab but rather Mediterranean.<sup>284</sup> For example, by claiming that the Phoenicians traded the expensive cedar wood, the cedars in Lebanon are linked to the country's Phoenician and biblical past.<sup>285</sup> Also, in the Kataeb-run Musée de l'Indépendance, the cedar is mentioned in a wall text that cites Psalm 92:12: 'The Righteous Shall Flourish Like a Palm Tree, He Shall Grow Like a Cedar in Lebanon'.

The use of the cedar in Ahrar's logo is a reference to the party's Christian ideology. In the group's posters, the tree appears in different variations in the early years of the Wars, but it was usually not coloured but in black and white. In one example employing a serial format, the martyrs' faces are placed into the outline of the tree, and two logos are visible below (Figs. 3.55–3.56).<sup>286</sup> Apparently it was only after the 1990 assassination of the Ahrar leader, Dany Chamoun, that the coloured logo was

281 Hamdar, 'Hizbullah-land', 318–20 discusses Hezbollah as a brand.

282 It seems there is also a version of the logo with a green cedar; see Schmitt, *Advertised to Death*, 39.

283 Lebanese Army, 'alam al-lebnaniyeh abr al-tarkih', *YouTube*, 1:37 min, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SSFFJE9Wp8&t=25>.

284 For an analysis of the history of this invented or even fantasised Phoenician national legacy, see Salibi, *A House*, 167–81.

285 Hage, 'Religious Fundamentalism', 29.

286 However, there are also a few posters from the end of the 1970s that show the coloured logo. That the cedar is gold might be explained by the fact that the Kataeb, which was the first Christian party in Lebanon and was founded in 1936, also used the cedar in their logo. To distinguish the Ahrar cedar from the green one of the Kataeb, a change was made not only to the shape, but also to the colour. Gold is often associated with something precious, which might suggest that the Ahrar is also a precious party.



Fig. 4.1: Ahrar, 'A Dream Stolen', Poster, NLP 12, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

frequently used (Fig. 4.1).<sup>287</sup> This latest version of the logo is also visible in the posters in Nancy for the deaths of Rabih. As mentioned in the play, these deaths happened in the early years of the Wars, when Ahrar still predominately used its black-and-white logo.

The cedar also appears in the logo of the Christian LF, the party for which Rabih and Lina die in Nancy (Figs. 3.12–3.13, Figs. 3.48–3.49). In this case, the green tree is depicted in front of a white circle that is outlined in red; hence, analogies to the Lebanese flag are evident. Not only the cedar, but the whole flag is primarily linked to Christianity. During the French mandate, which started in 1920 and privileged Christians over Muslims, the flag consisted of a tricolour with a cedar. After

Lebanon's independence in 1943, the flag was redesigned by the Christian Henri Pharaon, who decided to change the tricolour to the red-white-red Spanish fess but kept the cedar. Most flags of Arab countries include the colours red, white, and green and also—unlike the Lebanese flag—black. These colours, as Bahia Shehab and Haytham Nawar argue, are symbols for previous dynasties. Contemporary interpretations of the colours, such as white standing for snow, a symbol of peace and purity, and red for the blood shed by martyrs for the country, only later became connotations.<sup>288</sup> However, it can be assumed that the current popular symbolic meanings of the colour red and the flag's tree were adapted by Ahrar and the LF into their logos. Today, also non-Christian parties use the flag in their visuals. In particular, Hariri's Future Movement often includes the Lebanese flag in its visual politics. This is reflected in Nancy, as the Lebanese flag is visible behind Hariri when he appears on all four screens (Fig. 3.53).

287 In this poster, Dany Chamoun wears a T-shirt with the logo of the Ahrar Tigers, the party's military wing. Their logo, like the Ahrar logo, has a cedar in a circle, but a tiger is added into the cedar. By wearing this T-shirt, Chamoun brandishes himself as belonging to Ahrar, and to the Ahrar Tigers in particular.

288 Shehab and Nawar, *Arab Design*, 113. For contemporary popular interpretations of the colours, see Hussein Yassine, 'How the Lebanese Flag Was Created', *The 961*, 4 May 2020, <https://www.the961.com/how-the-lebanese-flag-was-created>.

The LF used their logo in posters at latest in 1980, when they were still the Kataeb's military wing. A poster shows the LF's leader Bachir giving a speech, standing below a cross. The LF logo is—notably in colour in the black-and-white image—visible in front of him, and the Kataeb's logo on a flag can be seen on the left-hand side of the image. It is a cedar consisting of three bold green stripes and a brown stem (Fig. 4.2). Apparently, both cedars, that of the LF and that of the Kataeb, coexisted in the same image until the LF split from the Kataeb in 1985. It was only then that each party usually used its own tree emblem. However, both cedars can still be seen next to each other to this day. For example, in a poster for Bachir in Sassine Square, which is the heart of the Christian district of Ashrafieh, the Kataeb cedar (left), the Lebanese flag (middle), and the LF cedar (right) are all visible (Fig. 4.3).

The usage of the LF cedar in *Nancy* reflects its actual usage but is slightly exaggerated, as the LF applied its logo usually one time in its posters, but not three times as is done in *Nancy* (Fig. 3.13). The LF cedar also appears once on the screen on its own, accompanying a speech by Lina (Fig. 3.50). A cedar in a Lebanese context, when depicted elsewhere than in the national flag, usually points to Christian ideology and is employed in *Nancy* as such, as the tree only appears in posters of Rabih and Lina when they die for Christian parties.



Fig. 4.3: Poster of Bachir Gemayel (Building on Left), 'You Raise... Lebanon Remains', Poster of Samir Geagea (Centre), 'I Am with You, Boy from Ashrafieh', Advertisement Poster (Building on Right), Beirut – Sassine Square, October 2021, Photograph AR.



Fig. 4.2: LF, 'Tel al Mir – Tel al Zaatar 13 April 1980', 1980, Poster, 88 x 58 cm, WJA 19, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Of course, the meaning of symbols, when appropriated, can potentially be hijacked. An example is the logo of the Jammoul, or Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF), an umbrella organisation that consisted of Lebanese left-wing and pro-Arab parties that engaged in activities aimed at expelling the Israeli Army from Lebanon, and that stood in clear opposition to Christian groups, such as the Kataeb

and the LF.<sup>289</sup> The logo of the Jammoul comprises a cedar in a white circle that is outlined in black. The tree's branches are made of red letters that read 'Lebanese National Resistance Front', while the black trunk forms the words 'The South' and the red words below the cedar read 'Until Victory and Liberation'.<sup>290</sup> Like the Kataeb cedar, the Jammoul logo does not appear in *Nancy*, although it was often depicted in posters issued jointly by the Jammoul and the SSNP (Fig. 3.77).

The SSNP logo, which has remained unchanged since the start of the *Wars*, consists of a red 'zawbaa', which translates as whirlwind, on a white circle outlined in black (Figs. 3.59, 3.77). Following Solomon's reading, the black represents colonialism, sectarianism, and feudalism, while the white disc stands for daylight, which can destroy the negatively connoted elements. The four-armed red whirlwind symbolises the pillars of the party ideology—namely, power, freedom, organisation, and duty. According to the SSNP, the zawbaa stems from ancient Syrian artefacts, on which it has been frequently engraved as a symbol of matter and spirit.<sup>291</sup> It has been repeatedly mentioned that the shape of the zawbaa is similar to that of a swastika, or 'Hakenkreuz'; these claims have been just as repeatedly denied by the SSNP.<sup>292</sup> The zawbaa appears in *Nancy* only in posters that accompany the deaths of Lina for the SSNP (Figs. 3.44, 3.46). The use of the SSNP logo in the play is a direct reflection of the logo's use during the *Wars*, as the SSNP employed it in almost all the posters they distributed.

In contrast to the SSNP, the LCP rarely used its logo, a red dove inside a cedar, in its posters.<sup>293</sup> Instead, the sickle and the red star are employed in *Nancy* for the deaths of Ziad for the LCP (Figs. 3.33–3.34). These symbols are taken from posters of the Communist Action Organisation, a small party that was founded in 1970 (Fig. 4.4), and seem to point to the ideology of Communism rather than to the LCP in particular.

The Morabitoun logo consists of a red-outlined white octagon with black text inside that reads: 'Independent Nasserite Movement al-Morabitoun. What Is Taken by Force Cannot Be Regained Without Force' (Fig. 4.5). In *Nancy*, the logo is

289 Traboulsi, *History*, 221–22; Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 26.

290 For the logo, *ibid.*, 93.

291 For details about the zawbaa, see Solomon, *In Search*, 40–42. Maasri claims that the four pillars of the SSNP are freedom, duty, order, and force (Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 73).

292 Straub never mentions the words zawbaa or whirlwind in her book, and simply terms the SSNP's logo a Hakenkreuz (Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 106). The Hakenkreuz was the logo of the German National Socialist German Workers Party. The SSNP is a different party with a different logo. Whether there was an ideological connection between the SSNP and the National Socialist German Workers Party is not as clear as Straub claims. In contrast to Straub, who refers only to one source of secondary literature, Solomon, by considering numerous historical sources, explains in depth that the origins of the zawbaa are complex and difficult to answer clearly.

293 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 93.

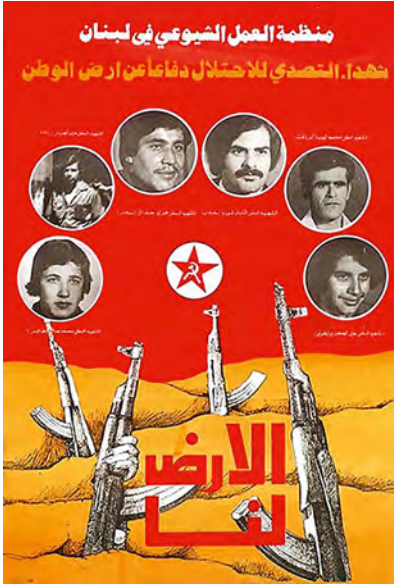


Fig. 4.4: The Communist Action Organization in Lebanon, 'The Martyrs of Confronting the Occupation in Defence of the Homeland. The Land Is Ours. The Martyr Mahmoud Ayoub, Martyr Qassim Shaw Rabba, Martyr Fawzi Hamdash, Martyr Ali Al-Khalil, Martyr Ali Al-Hujairi, Martyr Mohammed Saleh', Poster, 55 x 81 cm, 146-PCD2081-01, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.



Fig. 4.5: Morabitoun, 'Independent Nasserite Movement al-Morabitoun', Poster, 60 x 44 cm, 157c-PCD2081-18, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.



Fig. 4.6: Logo of the Islamic Unification Movement (al-Tawheed), 'There is No God Except God and Mohammad Is the Messenger of God. God Is Great. The Islamic Unification Movement'.



Fig. 4.7: Logo of the Revolutionary Guards (Sepah-e Pasdaran) of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

applied to all posters accompanying the deaths of Hatem that clearly happened for the Morabitoun (Figs. 3.19–3.21, 3.24). In reality, the group usually claimed ownership of posters not by using their logo but by writing their name (Figs. 3.63–3.64). I encountered only one poster that depicts the group's logo; in that instance, the logo was the only content, appearing on a black background (Fig. 4.5). This mode of depiction is comparable to the LF logo that accompanies a speech by Lina (Fig. 3.50).

The posters in Nancy that commemorate Hatem's later deaths for the IUM do not bear the movement's black-and-white logo (Fig. 4.6), but instead include elements used in the IUM logo, such as the Dome of the Rock, which I will discuss below. However, whether this non-application of the logo in the posters of Hatem corresponds to the use of the IUM's posters during the Wars cannot be said with certainty, because no posters of the IUM remain in the archives I have visited. Rabih's death for the SLA (Fig. 3.15) also appears without a logo; and, as was the case for the IUM, I could not find a single poster by the SLA in the archives.

In contrast, the frequent use of the logos of Amal and Hezbollah for the posters for Ziad (Figs. 3.35–3.39) reflects the branding of both parties' posters during the Wars. Amal's logo (Fig. 3.67) consists of stylised white letters forming the word Amal, which translates as hope, on a green circle outlined in red. According to Maasri and Bonsen, red stands for blood and sacrifice, green for Islam, and white for martyrdom.<sup>294</sup>

Hezbollah's logo consists of a stylised rendering of the party's name topped by a Kalashnikov, which is held by a fist above the first letter aleph. The logo also encompasses: a quote from Sura 5:56, 'The Party of God Is Victorious'; a globe; a Quran; and a seven-leaved olive branch, a plant that, according to the Quran, is holy (Figs. 3.68–3.69). All these elements combined are supposed to symbolise Islamic universalism. This is also suggested by the slogan of the initial posters, 'The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon', which in the 1990s was changed to the more realistic 'The Islamic Resistance in Lebanon'.<sup>295</sup> Much of Hezbollah's imagery is appropriated from the iconography of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and this is also true for the group's logo, which is almost identical to the logo of the Pasdaran, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (Fig. 4.7).<sup>296</sup>

In Hezbollah's early days, the logo was black-and-white, but a wish to colour it quickly emerged.<sup>297</sup> Posters from 1986 (Figs. 3.68–3.69) demonstrate that the militia experimented with different colours before settling on yellow as the primary

294 Ibid., 65. For an earlier version of Amal's logo, see Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 176.

295 For the Hezbollah logo, see Adham Saouli, *Hezbollah: Socialisation and Its Tragic Ironies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 63–64.

296 Schmitt, *Advertised to Death*, 70; Chaib, 'Hezbollah Seen', 12; Maasri, 'Aesthetics', 169.

297 According to Aurélie Daher, Hezbollah's first logo was published in September 1984 (Daher, *Hezbollah: Mobilization and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 53).

and green as the secondary colour. Hezbollah's colour choice of green on a dazzling yellow background for their logo is noteworthy. Dazzling yellow is—unlike green, which is associated with Islam—not a colour typically employed by Muslim parties, although some Palestinian factions, such as Fatah, also use yellow in their party brandishing. Hezbollah's choice of yellow is probably due to the fact that green was already taken by Amal. Hezbollah's yellow is eye-catching and makes it easy to immediately differentiate their posters and flags from those of Amal, which are often visible in the same neighbourhood. Both Shiite parties had and have the same clientele and are therefore in a certain amicable competition. Another reason for choosing yellow might have been that the Pasdaran flag also has dazzling yellow. According to Hezbollah designers, yellow represents strength, revolution, rebellion, intuition, and warning.<sup>298</sup> In *Nancy*, Hezbollah's uncertainties about which colour to use are not reflected in the 1980s posters of Ziad; apart from one exception that shows Hezbollah's early logo in black and white (Fig. 3.38),<sup>299</sup> only the yellow-green logo (Figs. 3.37, 3.39) is applied.

Finally, the logo of the PFLP appears on the upper-left corner of a poster for Ziad (Fig. 3.33). It consists of the stylised red Arabic letter jeem with a dot that stands for 'jabha', which means front and is the first word of the group's Arabic name. Also visible is an arrow targeting an outline that forms the map of Palestine.<sup>300</sup> The PFLP logo was indeed employed in this form in posters from the party (Fig. 2.2).

The logos in the posters of *Nancy* are a reflection of their use in the posters of the *Wars*, but they are visible more often in the play than in actual posters. Sometimes logos of groups that appear in *Nancy* are not depicted. For instance, there is no logo of the IUM, even though this group did have a logo. It is notable that *Nancy* tends to show only the latest version of a party's logo. I would argue that this is done for the sake of simplicity, as many different logos could create confusion, particularly for spectators not familiar with the emblems of the Lebanese parties. Alternatively, by opting for a selected set of logos, the visuals in *Nancy* help to locate the current party affiliation of the actor, which is also easier when the variety of logos is limited. This is relevant because, besides the Hezbollah logo with its dazzling yellow, the dominant colours of all the other logos are similar: usually red, white, black, and green.

At the same time, the choice to depict only the most recent logo seems to be a comment on the present day, as most of these logos are still used in today's Leb-

298 Sarah Hamdar, 'Hizbullah's 'Ashura Posters (2007–2020): The Visualization of Religion, Politics and Nationalism', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 14 (2021): 316.

299 This poster is also discussed by Gade. However, she does not call the Hezbollah logo by its name but identifies it as 'a raised fist and a Kalashnikov, [a] symbol that [was] frequently deployed in the visual language of Islamic Resistance posters' (Gade, 'Learning to Live', 337).

300 Shehab and Nawar, *Arab Design*, 162.

anon. For example, during the election campaign of 2022, I witnessed the LF cedar and the Kataeb cedar on flags and posters that were put up next to each other amicably (Fig. 4.8), while the Amal, Hezbollah, and SSNP logos are still visible in martyr posters to this day (Figs. 2.10–2.13). Therefore, showing the updated versions of the logos in *Nancy* could be read as a comment on the sectarian strife that has not ended with the official end of the *Wars* but stretches into the present.



Fig. 4.8: Flags with LF and Kataeb Cedars and Dagger Cross on T-Shirt, Beirut – Ashrafieh, May 2022, Photograph AR.

#### 4.1.2 Sectarian and Pan-Sectarian Symbols and Their Appropriation in *Nancy*

The posters of the *Wars* and of *Nancy* include not only party logos but other symbols as well. Here I will limit my discussion to symbols that appear repeatedly in *Nancy*'s posters. Some of these symbols are linked to specific sectarian identities, others are employed equally by groups with different ideologies. I will first address sectarian-connoted symbols—namely, the cross, the headband, the Dome of the Rock, and the destroyed Star of David—and then continue with pan-sectarian symbols—namely, birds, flowers, and blood.

##### Sectarian Symbols: The Cross, Headband, Dome of the Rock, and Broken Star of David

Some symbols in the posters of the *Wars* were used only by certain groups. In the following I will discuss four of them.

In *Nancy*, the inclusion of the cross and headband, a Christian- and a Shia-connoted symbol respectively, addresses the fact that symbols can activate religious myths of archetypal martyrs. Various posters accompanying the deaths of Lina and Rabih (Figs. 3.13, 3.47–3.49) for Christian parties include a cross. For example,



Fig. 4.9: LF (Designer Morr), 'The Blood of 350 Martyrs Was Shed in the Bekaa for It to Remain a Free Lebanese Land. Commemoration of 2 April 1981', 1981, Poster, 40 x 60 cm, WJA 065, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

one poster of Lina shows a black cross on her forehead (Fig. 3.47), and a poster of Rabih depicts him with a huge golden cross-necklace dangling from his chest (Fig. 3.13). The cross, which is a symbol that is deeply tied to the crucifixion of Christ, can also be encountered in posters from the Wars, such as a poster issued by the LF (Fig. 4.9) that shows numerous crosses erected in the ground. The image commemorates the martyrs of the Siege of Zahlé, which happened from 1980 to 1981, when the Syrian Army and their allies encircled the Christian town in the Bekaa valley. Zahlé was then successfully defended by the LF and the city's residents, which resulted in a few hundred deaths, which are remembered as martyrdoms in the poster.<sup>301</sup>

While crosses such as those depicted in Figures 3.47 and 4.9 are used among Christian communities globally, there is also a specific Lebanese

cross visible in posters for Lina and Rabih (Figs. 3.13, 3.48–3.49). Known as the dagger cross or, in the terminology of the LF, the 'salib al-muqawama'—that is, the resistance cross—it consists of two broad red lines that form a cross-shape that terminates obliquely at the bottom edge of the vertical beam.<sup>302</sup> While the diagonal cut stands for the will and determination of the Lebanese Christians to keep their cross planted in Lebanon, its red colour points to the hardships, suffering, and finally martyrdom of both Jesus and the Christians in that country.<sup>303</sup> Right-wing Lebanese Christians created a narrative that Christians in Lebanon are threatened by Palestinians and Shias who seek to extinguish Christian culture. The aim of the LF and the Kataeb is, therefore, to resist this perceived threat. Of course, this narrative ignores the privileges that Christians (and in particular the Maronites) have enjoyed, especially during the time of the Otto-

301 For the Siege of Zahlé, see Traboulsi, *History*, 210–11.

302 Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 20.

303 Ibid.; LICCANADA, 'The Meaning of the Lebanese Forces Cross', *YouTube*, 1:10 min, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuAUq9glymM>.



Fig. 4.10: 'We Have Not Forgotten and We Will Not Forget the Hero Ralf Mallahi', Poster Next to Dagger Cross, Beirut – Ashrafieh, August 2021, Photograph AR.

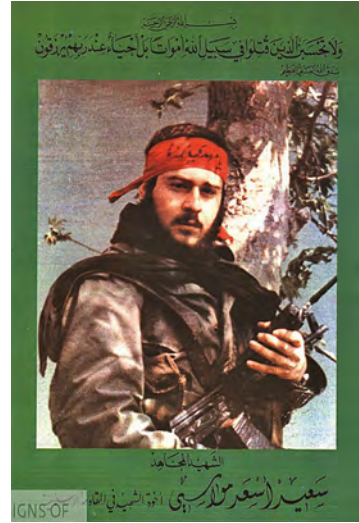


Fig. 4.11: Hezbollah, 'And Do Not Consider as Dead Those Who Have Died for God, for They Are Truly Alive. Shahid al-Mujahed Said Muwasi', mid 1980s, Poster, 33 x 40 cm, HZB 2, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

man Empire and the French mandate. The dagger cross was launched in 1984 but gained popularity only after the official end of the Wars.<sup>304</sup> Today, it is part of the LF's symbolism and is very common in Ashrafieh (Fig. 4.10).

While the repeated use of the dagger cross in the posters of *Nancy* does not reflect the realities of its use in the posters of the Wars, where it was very rarely employed,<sup>305</sup> its inclusion in the play updates the posters to the symbolism of 2007. The dagger cross, like the choice to use the latest version of the party logos, might therefore point to the ongoing sectarian strife that has not ceased with the official ending of the Wars. The cross, like the cedar discussed above, is a Christian-connoted symbol and carries, through its reference to the death of Jesus, an additional association that is undoubtedly linked to martyrdom.

Not only Christian, but also Shia martyr imagery appears in *Nancy*; in particular, in Ziad's posters when he dies for Amal and Hezbollah. I will limit my discussion here to the symbol of the headband, which Ziad is wearing in two posters that accompany his deaths for Hezbollah (Figs. 3.37, 3.39). In the first image, he is sitting

304 Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 20; Schmitt, *Advertised to Death*, 29–30. Schmitt photographed the dagger cross repeatedly in 2007. She explains that at the time of writing her book, the LF could not fully agree on whether the use of the cross as a party symbol should be continued.

305 Only at the end of the Wars, very few posters show dagger crosses attached to tanks.

with clasped arms in front of an oversized party logo, wearing a headband in the same dazzling Hezbollah yellow discussed above. In the second image, Ziad wears a green headband, the party's secondary colour, and is seen from below. Martyrs wearing headbands that are, in most but not all cases, red, are depicted in numerous posters that Hezbollah issued during the *Wars* (Figs. 2.6, 4.11). The headband stems from the iconography of the Islamic Republic (Fig. 2.5) and gained popularity in the 1980s.<sup>306</sup> Although it is primarily located in a Shiite context, it is sometimes worn by allies of the Shia groups, such as by Hatem when he dies for the Morabitoun (see Fig. 3.24).<sup>307</sup>

Among Shia Muslims, it is believed that the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Hossein, wore such a headband in the Battle of Kerbala, which is why the headbands are also worn during Ashura celebrations.<sup>308</sup> As mentioned in 2.1, Hossein represents the role model of martyrdom in Shia Islam and is the protagonist of Michael Fischer's concept of the Kerbala paradigm, living in a situation of injustice and willing to die for the community's redemption.<sup>309</sup> This corresponds to the narrative of the Lebanese Shia, at least until the liberation of the South in 2000. Hezbollah in particular claimed that there was a need to resist the Israeli occupation that had unjustly entered the soil of the Lebanese. Resistance involved all means, including the willingness to die as a martyr.

*Nancy* reflects the actual use of headbands in posters of the *Wars*. Ziad, when wearing a headband in posters that accompany his deaths for Hezbollah, turns into a 'little Hossein', and Kerbala, now metaphorically in the South of Lebanon, becomes reactivated in posters, as has been discussed by Hamdar. Hezbollah, more than Amal did, referred to the myth of Kerbala and created parallels between the past and the present.<sup>310</sup>

Similarly, during the *Wars*, Lebanese Christians reactivated the myth of Jesus's crucifixion through Bachir after his death. A poster that was issued by the Kataeb shows a drawing (Fig. 4.12) that depicts a black cross with white drapery and red blood drops, which in combination create letters that read 'Bachir'. Bensen interprets this mode of representation as a 'Christian martyrdom death and at the same time as a sacrificial death for the soil of Lebanon'.<sup>311</sup> The poster's message is almost incontestable and is graspable with just a brief glimpse. By depicting

306 Myrntinen, 'Death Becomes Him', 132.

307 Also, during the *Wars*, Morabitoun and Palestinian fighters were wearing red headbands, as historical photographs from the Battle of the Hotels confirm; an example can be found in Buchakjian, 'Habitats Abandonnés', 709.

308 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 99.

309 Dorraj, 'Symbolic and Utilitarian', 495.

310 Hamdar, 'Hizbullah's Ashura Posters', 308; Maasri, 'Aesthetics', 166.

311 Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 105.



Fig. 4.12: Kataeb (Designer Pierre Sadek), 'Lebanon', 1982, Poster, 33 x 47 cm, WJA 041, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Bachir's name on the cross, he visually becomes Jesus's incarnation, or the 'Christ of Lebanon'<sup>312</sup> who has sacrificed himself for Christianity in that country.<sup>313</sup> The death of Bachir, according to Hage, perfected his image as a saviour among the Phalangists.<sup>314</sup> Even decades after Bachir's passing, his death was equated with that of Jesus. In 2009, for example, the newspaper *al-Balad* titled an article about Bachir 'Le Saveur Assassiné'.<sup>315</sup>

*Nancy* comments on how archemartyrological Christian and Shiite myths were re-enacted and activated during the Wars. By using the cross—specifically the dagger cross—in depictions of Rabih, the play turns him into a 'little Bachir' and, through Bachir, into a 'little Jesus'. The headbands in posters of Ziad, on the other

hand, turn him into a 'little Hossein'. The groups involved in the Wars that based their identity on religion mingled the secular and the profane. Hezbollah posters are embedded in the Lebanese poster-landscape,<sup>316</sup> it is not the religious rhetoric that makes them unique, as Christian parties also played on religious elements.

The second set of sectarian-connoted symbols that *Nancy* appropriates—specifically, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the destroyed Star of David—do not evoke myths of archetypal martyrdoms but are still peculiar to certain sectarian groups. The former symbol appears in two posters in *Nancy*; one accompanies a death of Ziad for Amal and another accompanies a death of Hatem for the IUM (Figs. 3.25, 3.36). Amal, like Hezbollah, employed the Dome of the Rock in their

312 Hage, 'Religious Fundamentalism', 37.

313 Haugbolle, 'Secular Saint', 204.

314 Hage, 'Religious Fundamentalism', 37.

315 Haugbolle, 'Secular Saint', 204. Additionally, Phalangist narratives emphasise the fact that Bachir was killed when he was thirty-four, which means he was only one year older than Jesus at the time of his death. Moreover, Bachir died on 14 September, which correlates with the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, an important festivity of the Eastern Churches. This feast honours the cross on which Christ was crucified. See Hage, 'Religious Fundamentalism', 37.

316 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 50.



Fig. 4.13: Amal (Designer Nabil Kdouh), 'Jerusalem Day', Poster, 42 x 60 cm, BYR 008, signsofconflict.com.

imagery during the Wars (Figs. 2.6, 4.13). The absence of any IUM posters in the archives I visited prevents me assessing whether it also employed such imagery, although it should be noted that the Dome of the Rock is part of the group's logo (Fig. 4.6).

As Maasri has demonstrated, the symbol of the Dome of the Rock migrated from Palestinian posters to Iranian and then to Lebanese Shiite posters, in which the struggle for liberation and solidarity with Palestine is presented as a pan-Islamic cause.<sup>317</sup> Although I was unable to locate the Dome of the Rock in posters issued by Lebanese Sunni parties, the point of depicting this building in posters issued by Shia and Sunni groups in *Nancy* appears to be that the Dome of the Rock is a pan-Muslim symbol. It is used by militias that based their ideology on Islam and were pro-Palestinian, but of course not by Christian militias, and also not by secular groups that support the Palestinians, such as the LCP and the SSNP. The LCP and the SSNP view Jerusalem as the heart of Palestine. The city itself has no specific importance to them, while the Islamic parties see Jerusalem as the heart of the umma, the community of all Muslims, which is stronger than national boundaries. Therefore, the Muslim parties perceive the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem as affecting them, and they have an inherent reason to support the Palestinians in the liberation of their land, which includes the Dome of the Rock.<sup>318</sup> In short, in *Nancy*, the Dome of the Rock appears only in posters of deaths for Islamic factions, implying that its depiction was limited to different Islamic parties during the Wars.

Unlike the Dome of the Rock, the destroyed Star of David does not exclusively connote a religion but is used only by certain groups. The symbol appears in *Nancy* once—namely, in an image that accompanies a death of Ziad for Hezbollah (Fig. 3.38). Gade, who discusses this poster, does not mention the two blue Stars of David that are broken and in flames and are placed in the lower third of the image,

317 Ibid., 81–83; Maasri, 'Aesthetics', 161.

318 Ibid.; Hamdar, 'Hizbullah's 'Ashura Posters', 308.



Fig. 4.14: Hezbollah (Designer Meri), 'The Blood of the Martyrs of Islam in Ansar Detention Illuminates the Path of Jihad Against the Oppressors', Poster, 49 x 68 cm, HZB 25, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).



Fig. 4.15: LNR/SSNF, 'The Martyr Fuad Mahmoud Saleh', 1984, Poster, 32 x 47 cm, AAJ1, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

left and right of a black-and-white Hezbollah logo.<sup>319</sup> The destroyed or torn Star of David was depicted by Hezbollah in their imagery during the Wars (Fig. 4.14), but also by other parties, both religious and secular, that were active in the liberation of the South, such as the Jammoul (Fig. 4.15).

As mentioned above, the meanings of symbols vary in different parts of the world. While a destroyed Star of David would, particularly in Germany, be undoubtedly antisemitic and its display not acceptable for any reason, the same symbol depicted in Lebanon is a critique of the violence the Israeli Army has conducted in Lebanon and is not used to attack Judaism as a religion in general. The Israeli Army occupied parts of Lebanon between 1978 and 2000, conducted mass killings in the country, such as the two Qana massacres, waged a war against Lebanon in 2006, and, during the time of writing, violated Lebanese airspace on a regular basis with its fighter-jets and drones, which is a mode of psychological warfare.<sup>320</sup> It is within this context from the Lebanese perspective—decades of suffering caused by

319 Gade, 'Learning to Live', 337–38.

320 For the Qana massacres and the 2006 War, see Bonsel, *Martyr Cults*, 115–21. For violations of the Lebanese airspace, see Lawrence Abu Hamdan's artwork *Airpressure: A Diary in the Sky*, 2021.

Israeli aggression on Lebanese soil—that, when depicted in a Lebanese environment, the broken Star of David has metamorphosed into a symbol of resistance to the Israeli occupation.<sup>321</sup>

The Christian parties that were mainly pro-Israel during the *Wars* and, of course, not involved in the liberation of the South, did not use this symbol. It was predominantly Hezbollah that employed it in their posters. As a result, *Nancy*, by including a broken Star of David in a poster commemorating Ziad's death for Hezbollah, reflects the realities of the depiction of this symbol during the *Wars*, but does not tackle the fact that it was employed also by parties other than Hezbollah.

To summarise, *Nancy* can be said to reflect the actual use of the cross, the headband, the Dome of the Rock, and the broken Star of David, because these symbols appear in the play only in posters of parties or allies of parties that used them in their imagery during the *Wars*.

### Pan-Sectarian Symbols: Birds, Flowers, Blood

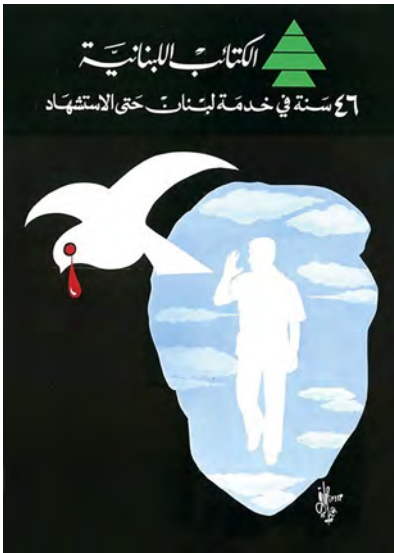


Fig. 4.16: Kataeb (Designer Pierre Sadek), '46 Years in Service of Lebanon Until Martyrdom', 1983, Poster, 50 x 70 cm, WJA 21, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Certain symbols used in the posters of the *Wars* are not linked to a sectarian ideology. These symbols are also appropriated in *Nancy*, as I will show with the examples of birds, flowers, and blood.

The first of these are shown in two posters in the play (Figs. 3.25, 3.36), which I have already discussed above and which depict, like their underlying image (Fig. 3.71), not only the Dome of the Rock but also birds, probably doves, a symbol of peace.<sup>322</sup> Additionally, in Islamic belief, the souls of martyrs turn into birds, which have a special place in paradise next to God.<sup>323</sup> However, birds are not limited to Islamic imagery, as they also can be found in posters of the Kataeb (Fig. 4.16) and appear in *Nancy* in images for Rabih when he dies for Ahrar (Figs. 3.10–3.11).

321 For the Star of David in a Lebanese context, see also Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 106–07.

322 Ibid., 99; Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 314.

323 Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 49.



Fig. 4.17: Hezbollah, 'The Oppressed Martyrs of Islam in the Massacre of Bir-al-Abed Committed by the Devilish United States-Israel-Phalange Coalition', 1985, Poster, 30 x 40 cm, ASH 144, signsofconflict.com.



Fig. 4.18: LF (Designer Pierre Sadek), 'Zahlé 2 April 1983', 1983, Poster, 45 x 66 cm, HOV 11, signsofconflict.com.

Therefore, in the play, the depiction of birds in posters issued by Christian and Islamic parties points to the pan-sectarian use of this symbol in the posters of the Wars.

Also, flowers were applied in martyr posters issued by many parties involved in the Wars and can be seen in visuals of the LCP (Fig. 3.62), Hezbollah (Fig. 4.17), and the LF (Fig. 4.18), to name just a few. Although the red tulips seen on Hezbollah posters (Fig. 4.17) are an appropriation of an Iranian tradition,<sup>324</sup> flowers in general have been used as a symbol of martyrdom across time and place and are rendered as an allegory or personification of martyrdom.<sup>325</sup> Its pan-sectarian use is reflected in Nancy, as flowers can be encountered in posters of various parties that appear in the play, such as those of the SSNP (Fig. 3.43), the LCP (Fig. 3.32), Amal (Fig. 3.36), the IUM (Fig. 3.25), and Hezbollah (Fig. 3.38).

324 Chaib ('Hezbollah Seen', 122) mentions that tulips are not a part of Lebanese vegetation.

325 Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 70; Chaib, 'Hezbollah Seen', 121; Bensen (*Martyr Cults*, 295) states that flowers are equally used on the graves of Muslims and Christians.

Finally, blood also cannot be restricted to one faction and, quite self-explanatorily, refers to martyrdom and self-sacrifice.<sup>326</sup> In *Nancy*, blood appears in posters issued by the Morabitoun (Fig. 3.24), Amal (Fig. 3.35), and the IUM (Figs. 3.26–3.27). This reflects the depiction of blood in posters issued during the *Wars*, where it could be seen in posters from almost all factions (Figs. 3.67, 3.76, 4.12, 4.16). The depiction of blood is more widespread in posters of the *Wars* than in *Nancy*. In the play, blood is not depicted, for example, in posters issued by the LF, although it was present in their poster imagery during the *Wars*.

Pan-sectarian elements, unlike symbols such as the cross, the cedar, the Dome of the Rock, or the headband, do not mark and immediately identify the ideology of the publisher of a poster. Rather, these elements are more generally connected to martyrdom. In *Nancy*, the use of pan-sectarian symbolism in the posters of the *Wars* is reflected by the application of these elements in posters of parties with different ideologies.

#### 4.1.3 Slogans in Martyr Posters and Their Appropriation in *Nancy*: Dying for a Place and as a Hero

Slogans underline the symbols in the posters.<sup>327</sup> In martyr posters, the slogans convey a linguistic message by undoubtedly clarifying that the visual is a poster of a shahid who has died for a certain party. The only knowledge required to decipher them is the ability to read the language, which, in the case of posters of the *Wars* and of *Nancy*, is usually Arabic. *Nancy* reflects that the wordings of the slogans written on the posters are partly restricted to one group and are partly used by many factions involved in the *Wars*. Here, I will discuss phrases that are mentioned repeatedly in the play, which are also phrases that were frequently used in the posters of the *Wars*.

Often, martyrs were labelled as having died for a place, mostly Lebanon, but sometimes also for a more specific locality. Rabih and Lina repeatedly die ‘for an Infinite Lebanon’ (Figs. 3.12–3.13, 3.48), while the slogan in one poster for Rabih reads: ‘He Died for Lebanon to Live’ (Fig. 3.7). These phrases are appropriated from Christian posters from the *Wars*. For example, the Chamoun family, who were assassinated in 1990, are labelled as ‘Martyrs of Lebanon’ in an Ahrar poster (Fig. 4.19) and a Phalange poster announces ‘He Died So That We May Live and So Lebanon May Live. [...] We Will Not Forget Your Memory Oh Bahzad Karam’ (Fig. 3.57).<sup>328</sup>

326 Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 126; Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 98–99; Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 62. For a discussion of blood in Hezbollah posters, see Maasri, ‘Aesthetics’, 166; Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 62.

327 Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 170.

328 For the slogans used by Christian parties, see also Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 10.

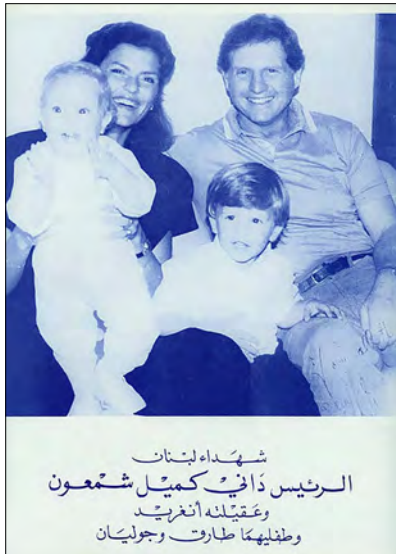


Fig. 4.19: Ahrar, 'The Martyrs of Lebanon. President Dany Kamil Chamoun and His Wife Ingrid and Their Children Tarek and Julian', 1990, Poster, 21 x 30 cm, NLP 1, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).



Fig. 4.20: Amal (Designer Nabil Kdouh), 'They Were Martyred in Defence of the South and the Unity and Arabism of Lebanon', Poster, 30 x 42 cm, BYR 003, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Such phrases were also used in posters commemorating Bachir's death. The slogan 'Bachir Lives in Us So That Lebanon Remains' appeared especially frequently.<sup>329</sup> Haugbolle explains that, for Bachir's followers, these words express that Bachir is a spirit who lives on in them and that this should encourage them to continue following his path.<sup>330</sup> These phrases announcing that the martyr died for Lebanon in order for the country to live, or proclaiming that a martyr continues to live in 'us', meaning the community, are Christian party slogans and are reflected as such in *Nancy*, where they are used only in posters commemorating the deaths of Rabih and Lina for Christian parties.

When non-Christian parties mentioned dying for Lebanon in their slogans, they usually framed it within pan-Arabism. An example can be found in an Amal poster: 'They Were Martyred in Defence of the South and the Unity and Arabism of Lebanon' (Fig. 4.20). This phrase is almost directly appropriated in a poster commemorating a death of Hatem for the Morabitoun: 'Died Defending Lebanon, Its Unity, Its Arabism, and the Lebanese Resistance' (Fig. 3.21). The South that is

329 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 112.

330 Haugbolle, 'Secular Saint', 206.

referenced in the slogan in the poster in *Fig. 4.20* is, according to Maasri, an icon of national resistance against the Israeli Army<sup>331</sup> and also appears in *Nancy*. A poster that accompanies a death of Ziad for the PFLP and the LCP reads: 'The Land Is Ours: Ziad Antar. He Was Martyred on the Southern Soil While Confronting Israeli Agents' (*Fig. 3.34*).

There are also other martyrdoms in the play that are locally confined. Hatem and Ziad, for example, are labelled as 'Martyr of Beirut' (*Figs. 3.24, 3.35*) when they die fighting for the Morabitoun and Amal, respectively. Also, these are appropriations of slogans from posters of the *Wars*, where specific locations are mentioned by different parties—for instance, the Bekaa in an LF poster (*Fig. 4.9*). Dying for a specific locality, as reflected by *Nancy's* use of this slogan for martyrs of different factions, was announced by many parties involved in the *Wars*.

Hezbollah frequently used the terms 'The Martyr of Islam' or 'Shahid al-Mujahed'.<sup>332</sup> Examples are one poster (*Fig. 4.14*) whose slogan reads: 'The Blood of the Martyrs of Islam in Ansar Detention Illuminates the Path of Jihad Against the Oppressors'; and another poster (*Fig. 4.11*) in which the dead man is labelled as 'Shahid al-Mujahed'. Similarly, in *Nancy*, when dying for Hezbollah, Ziad is labelled as a 'Martyr of the Islamic Resistance' (*Fig. 3.39*) and as 'Shahid al-Mujahed' (*Fig. 3.37*).

Furthermore, quotes from the Quran or more generally from an Islamic context are used in the posters of Hezbollah, which also appear in *Nancy*, where one slogan reads: 'And Do Not Consider as Dead Those Who Have Died for God, for They Are Truly Alive' (*Fig. 3.36*). The same text appears in a poster of Hatem that accompanies his death for the IUM (*Fig. 3.25*) as well as in a Hezbollah poster of the *Wars* that I have introduced above (*Fig. 4.11*). This Quranic quote from Sura 3:169–171 was frequently used in martyr posters issued by Islamic parties.<sup>333</sup>

There are more images in the play that directly quote slogans used during the *Wars*. In posters commemorating two deaths of Hatem for the IUM (*Figs. 3.26–3.27*), we read: 'The Blood of the Martyrs Is the Truest Expression of the Victory of Blood Over the Sword'. This quote from Ruhollah Khomeini, the first supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, can be found in a Hezbollah poster of the *Wars*.<sup>334</sup> It seems, then, that by applying Islamic quotes only to posters of militias with an Islamic ideology—thus echoing its approach to the symbol of the Dome of the Rock—*Nancy* points to the shared Islamic beliefs of these parties and the exchangeability of slogans in this framework.

331 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 110–11.

332 *Ibid.*, 96–99.

333 The dark green poster with a rectangle in its middle showing the martyrs face in *Fig. 4.11* serves also as one underlying image for *Figs. 3.25* and *3.36*.

334 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 99.



Fig. 4.21: Ahrar, 'The First Female Martyr of Lebanon. Saydeh Jamil Khayat. Martyred in the Battle of Dignity in Tel al Zaatar', 1976, Poster, 21 x 30 cm, NLP 13, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Martyr Hero Nazem Ayyash' (Fig. 3.59); and Ahrar, 'The Martyr Hero Adel Jamil Tarturi' (Fig. 3.55). *Nancy's* use of the hero-phrase for martyrs of different militias thus corresponds to its use in posters of the Wars.

Other labels were also used for martyrs in *Nancy*, for example: 'Died for Truth: Martyr Rabih Mroue' when he dies for Ahrar (Fig. 3.10), or 'Martyr of Duty' when Hatem dies for the Morabitoun (Fig. 3.21). Similar phrases can be found in the posters of the Wars. An Ahrar visual, for example, labels a shahid as 'Martyr of Love and Freedom' (Fig. 3.56), and posters by the Arab Socialist Union designate the dead as a 'Martyr of Duty' (Figs. 3.65–3.66). Also, being the first was, as Fadi Toufiq has mentioned, often a source of pride.<sup>336</sup> Ahrar, for example, labels a militiawoman as 'The First Female Martyr of Lebanon'. (Fig. 4.21).

By applying slogans across parties, *Nancy* seems to hint at their exchangeability. The label of the martyr as a hero or as someone with a certain attribute, such as being a martyr of duty or being the martyr of a specific place, can be found in posters of several parties that do not share an ideological framework. On the other

Another slogan of the posters of the Wars, namely, the PSP leader (and martyr) Kamal Jumblatt's quote 'To Die or Not to Die, What Care I. For This Life Is but a Figment of the Imagination' that can be read in the PSP poster in Fig. 3.74, is also appropriated in *Nancy*. However, it appears in a poster that accompanies a death of Ziad for the PFLP and the LCP (Fig. 3.33) and is therefore decontextualised.

The PSP martyr who is depicted in the poster in Fig. 3.74 is labelled as a hero, which is a 'stock-phrase' of martyr posters.<sup>335</sup> In *Nancy*, examples are 'The Martyr Hero Rabih Mroue' (Figs. 3.8–3.9), when he dies for Ahrar; 'The Hero of Sannine: Ziad Antar' (Fig. 3.32), when he dies for the LCP; or 'The Martyr Heroine Lina Saneh' (Fig. 3.44), when she dies for the SSNP. The hero label was used in posters of the Wars across different parties, such as the SSNP, 'The

335 Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 78.

336 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021.

hand, and in keeping with its use of symbols, *Nancy* reflects the actual use of slogans by applying only Islamic or Quranic verses to parties that employ an Islamic ideology. It does the same for Christian parties: the phrase ‘for Lebanon to Live’ is restricted to Christian parties in the posters of the play and of the *Wars*. Only the above-mentioned Jumblatt quote is transferred into a context in which it was not used. *Nancy* comments not only on the likeness of poster designs and their symbolic elements, but also on the similarities between the parties’ linguistic messages during the *Wars*.

#### 4.1.4 The Anatomy of the Martyr Poster and the Exchangeability of Logos, Symbols, and Slogans

Finally, I would like to mention a point made by Tony Chakar in his work *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* (2001–02; Fig. 4.22). The artist asked an official Hezbollah painter to make a painting of Chakar’s deceased Christian father. The painter agreed, and Chakar provided him with a photograph of his father. Transforming the photograph of the dead into a painting is a practice often employed by the Shia parties, as



Fig. 4.22: Tony Chakar, *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, 2001–02, Postcard, 12 x 16 cm, Courtesy of Tony Chakar.

I will elaborate on further in 4.2. After turning the photograph of Chakar’s father into a painting, the painter apparently did not feel comfortable adding Shiite imagery, such as the Dome of the Rock, into Chakar’s portrait. He therefore decided to add Christian-connoted cedars but kept the birds, which, as I have discussed above, are a pan-sectarian symbol.<sup>337</sup> In short, this work, like *Nancy*, shows that the anatomy of the picture of the *shahid* is built the same way among all parties and that certain symbols, such as birds, are pan-sectarian and can migrate without change to posters by other parties. Simply by exchanging one symbol, a Shiite picture is valid in a Christian context without any further changes to the overall design.

337 For *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, see Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 213–14. *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* was exhibited in Ashkal Alwan’s group exhibition *Intimate Garden Scene (in Beirut)*, which took place in Surssock Museum from 30 November 2023 and was supposed to run through 15 November 2024.

My theoretical framework in this part was informed by Barthes's essay 'Rhetoric of the Image', and the focus of the discussion was on the connotative level. I have reflected on the meanings and appropriations of party logos, other symbols, and slogans in the martyr posters of *Nancy*. The play uses these elements in a more simplistic manner than was employed in the posters of the *Wars* but suggests a pattern in how the elements were and are used in sectarian visuals. For example, in *Nancy*, crosses can be encountered only in posters that accompany Christian deaths, whereas the Dome of the Rock only appears in posters that were issued for Muslim martyrdoms. In a similar vein, Christian-connoted slogans are used only in Christian images and Quranic slogans only in posters issued by Islamic parties.

In general, *Nancy* shows us that the anatomy of the posters was very similar among all parties during the *Wars*, as all consisted of the same elements, including a party logo, other symbols, and a slogan. However, a fourth component was also common in the posters, namely, that of the photographic image. This element will be the subject of the next part.

## 4.2 The Martyr and the Photographic Image: Indexicality, Iconicity, and Truth Claims

*Nancy* reflects the photographic image in the martyr poster and opens different perspectives on the relationship between the photograph and the shahid.

I will first argue that photography is the preferred medium for the depiction of martyrs due to its indexicality (the depicted has left a trace) and iconicity (the depicted resembles the thing it represents). Both, in combination, produce emotions among the spectators.

Second, aided by a close reading of *Nancy* that is linked to *Inhabitants, Three Posters*, and a movie that Maroun Baghdadi shot during the *Wars*, I show that these works demonstrate that indexicality and iconicity do not correspond to a truth claim (the depicted scene is put into a context of what it represents, what it refers to, and how the depicted scene should be interpreted) and that truth claims in martyr posters, which are supported by photographic evidence, should always be questioned.

Next, by relating *Nancy* to *Inhabitants, ...A Faraway Souvenir*, an artwork by Hadjithomas/Joreige, and posters of the *Wars*, I demonstrate that contemporary artists reflect on different modes of turning the photographic image of the martyr into a currency. In such a process, each poster acts as a proof of the human price a party is willing to pay for their cause.

I then discuss how *Nancy* shows us the fact that the photograph is usually a recycled image that was not taken on the occasion of martyrdom but instead migrated from an ID photograph to a poster. In the context of this discussion, I will also

explain how the function of martyr posters from the *Wars* changed, because today, most posters no longer announce deaths but have become historical documents.

Finally, I discuss violent images and images of violence and argue that many posters of martyrs can be linked to a counter-image that shows the deceased not as a hero but as a defeated enemy. Depending on who has issued the poster, violent images can act as trophy pictures or as images of accusation.

#### 4.2.1 The Photograph Cannot Speak for Itself: Indexicality, Iconicity, and Truth Claims in Martyr Posters

Most of the posters in *Nancy* and from the *Wars* include photographs. Alam has argued that photography's ability 'to record an individual's singularity' is the reason it is the preferred medium for showing martyrs. Further, he writes that photography has a 'humanizing effect', as the *shahid* is shown as close as possible to his actual appearance.<sup>338</sup>

In those instances where martyr posters do not include a photograph of the *shahid*, they usually instead show a painting or drawing made after his photograph. It is beyond the scope of this book to go into detail about why photographs of martyrs were turned into paintings, but Mohammad Moussalli, who made commissioned paintings of political leaders during the *Wars*, told Maasri that one reason for the medium's transformation was that paintings make the depicted people more charismatic and appealing than they actually were.<sup>339</sup> Similarly—albeit in the context of turning photographs of martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War into painted murals in Iran—Shariar Khonsari has claimed that this shift makes the martyr's appearance 'better', because possible flaws of the face and body can be beautified.<sup>340</sup>

Photo theory usually considers painting less capable than photography in terms of its ability to capture what the subject actually looked like. For example, André Bazin claims:

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338 Johnny Alam, 'Undead Martyrs and Decay: When Photography Fails Its Promise of Eternal Memory', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 18, no. 3 (2014): 582.

339 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 48. Maasri also states that in the 1980s, Hezbollah commissioned an oil painting for each martyr, gave it to the martyr's family, and used it for his poster. It should be added that this is not the case in all posters because numerous Hezbollah martyr posters show photographs of the deceased instead of paintings.

340 Shariar Khonsari, 'The Role of Photographs and Photography in Representation of Martyrdom Mythology in the Murals of Tehran', *MANZAR The Scientific Journal of Landscape* 36, no. 8 (2016): 12.

Painting is after all, an inferior way of making likenesses, an ersatz of the process of reproduction. Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation.<sup>341</sup>

Bazin understands painting as a minor form of image-making, as photography can provide a closer resemblance to the real. This is of course also true for the martyr posters, but through the process of painting, in what Bazin would term an 'inferior way', the shahid is intended to become more handsome.

Thirteen years after Bazin, Susan Sontag stated that a photograph

is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real; like a footprint or a death mask. While a painting, even one that meets photographic standards of resemblance is never more than the stating of an interpretation, a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects)—a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be.<sup>342</sup>

Bazin and Alam focus on the iconicity of photography, which is the resemblance of the image to the thing it represents. Yet for Sontag, when defining the crucial difference between painting and photography, it is the medium's indexicality that is decisive.

Indexicality is a concept coined by the mathematician Charles Sanders Peirce in the nineteenth century. In a nutshell, the photographic index states that what had been in front of the camera has left a trace, which is perceived as evidence of the referent's existence.<sup>343</sup> For example, a bullet hole proves that a gun has been fired and has hit the wall, although the bullet is absent. The same is true for a photograph; light emanating from the camera has touched the referent and returned to the device, thereby imprinting itself on photographic paper and leaving a trace of the depicted. Like the bullet, the person in front of the camera is no longer present but has left proof that the situation has occurred. Therefore, the photograph testifies that the subject actually existed in front of the camera when hit by rays of light.

341 André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 8.

342 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Rosetta Books, 2005 [1973]), 120.

343 For a photo theoretical discussion of the index, see Peter Geimer, *Theorien der Fotografie: Zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2009), 58–69.

But photography's iconicity also plays a role, as Tom Gunning argues:

Our evaluation of a photograph as accurate (i.e. visually reflecting its subject) depends not simply on its indexical basis (the chemical process), but on our recognition of it as looking like its subject. A host of psychological and perceptual processes intervene here which cannot be reduced to the indexical process. The recognition of a photograph by a viewer as an image of its subject would not simply result from indexically. Indeed, one could produce an indexical image of something or someone that remained unrecognizable. The image must also be legible in order to be likened to its subject.<sup>344</sup>

Not only the trace is important, but also the recognition of the subject.

However, neither indexicality nor iconicity can create explanations, and therefore they should be separated from photography's truth claim, which 'is not simply a property inherent in a photograph, but a claim made for it'.<sup>345</sup> As Gunning explains,

the apparatus, in itself, can neither lie, nor tell the truth. Bereft of language, a photograph relies on people to say things about it or for it. [...] in order to tell the truth, the photograph must be subjected to a series of discourses, become, in effect, the supporting evidence for a statement. [...] in order to speak the truth the photograph must be integrated into a statement.<sup>346</sup>

A photograph is like a bullet hole, which does not tell us anything about the circumstances of the bullet hitting the wall or who fired the gun. It could be used as supporting evidence, telling a story that the gun was fired by, for example, Hezbollah in June, even if it was actually fired by Amal in July. Neither indexicality nor iconicity themselves create a truth claim. A photograph is silent. It confirms that the subjects were at some point in front of the camera, but by itself it does not make any statements about the circumstances in which it has been taken.

The photographs in the martyr posters are thus indexical and iconic, as they testify that the deceased, before becoming a martyr, actually existed in front of the camera—beams of light have transferred his face, as lifelike as possible, onto photographic paper. But the photograph of the *shahid*, except for that of the celebrity martyr, as I will discuss in 4.3, does not make sense on its own. Like the bullet holes on the walls of Beirut, it says nothing. Similarly, if a photograph of a martyr was

344 Tom Gunning, 'What's the Point of an Index?, or Faking Photographs', *Nordicom Review* 25, nos. 1–2 (2004): 41.

345 *Ibid.*, 42.

346 *Ibid.*

hung on a wall without additional information, it would not tell us when, why, or for whom he died.<sup>347</sup> To do so, the image needs to be embedded in a context. The photograph is therefore merely supporting evidence for the elements that create the truth claim—namely, the party logo, sectarian symbols, and slogan.

If we imagine the aforementioned posters without a photograph, in most cases, only logos, symbols, and slogans would remain. A truth claim—that is, the announcement of the martyrdom for a certain party—could still be made. For example, if we imagine the Ahrar poster (Fig. 3.55) that I discussed above to exist without the photograph, then, due to the party logos, it would still clearly announce a martyrdom for Ahrar. However, individual martyr posters without a photograph of the deceased would evoke an impression of incompleteness. Although the photograph acts only as supporting evidence of the truth claim, it is the element in the poster that attracts the attention of passers-by. The face of the dead is the first thing that catches the eye and creates an illusion of reality (iconicity) and proof of having been there (indexicality), which generates the medium's ability to 'conjure deep emotions'.<sup>348</sup> If we follow Barthes, the photograph would be the punctum of the poster, 'that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)'.<sup>349</sup> As a trace of the dead, it is stronger and more immediate than any symbol or writing in its power to create a sensual response among the spectators.<sup>350</sup>

Maasri argues in a similar vein when she writes that by evoking affection, martyr posters are intended to mobilise the living to follow the path of the shahid.<sup>351</sup> And I, too, was moved when looking at hundreds of martyr posters in the AUB archives. Not only the sheer mass of shuhada, one face after the other emerging from a drawer, but also the haptic object in my hands, instead of seeing it on a screen, and the intimate moment, where it was only me and the martyrs in the room, produced uncomfortable, slightly distracted emotions in me and left me with a feeling of nausea for the rest of the day.

Photographs in martyr posters are important because they have the power to attract the attention of spectators and elicit emotions. Although the photograph testifies that the subject has existed in front of the camera, it only announces him

347 Considering the custom of putting up faces of the dead in Lebanon, one could of course assume that the person depicted is dead and is potentially considered a martyr.

348 Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 50.

349 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Lang, 1981), 27. Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*, 57–58 has also applied Barthes's theory of studium and punctum to images of martyrs, but her focus is on the personal relationship the living had to the dead and not to the photograph as such.

350 K.M. Fierke, *Political Self-Sacrifice: Agency, Body and Emotion in International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 100.

351 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 88.

as a martyr when embedded in an environment that claims truth—namely, that of the logos, symbols, and slogans. In my reading, *Nancy* reflects on indexicality, iconicity, and the truth claim of the photographic image in martyr posters, as I will discuss below.

#### 4.2.2 Re-Using the Same Photograph for Different Deaths and Presenting Living Actors as Martyrs: Indexicality and Iconicity as Non-Truth Claims in *Nancy*

By re-using identical photographs of the actors for different deaths and by inserting faces of living actors in the posters of martyrs, *Nancy* reveals that indexicality and iconicity are not truth claims and that the use of the photographic medium as a creator of truth should be critically questioned.

I will here discuss only one example of the multiplication of the same photograph. This photograph appears in two posters (Figs. 3.10–3.11) that depict Rabil's face against a yellow background and looking into the camera. While each poster accompanies a different death, in both images, his left hand touches his left cheek, birds fly around him, and the Ahrar logo is visible above his head.

The first poster (Fig. 3.10) is accompanied by the following text, in which Rabilh narrates that he was stopped by Marada militiamen at a checkpoint in the North shortly after the killing of Tony Frangieh in 1978.

They said: 'What are you?' I said: 'Ahrar, I have nothing to do with this...' They said: 'Don't give us this Ahrar bullshit. You are either Marada or Phalange; which one is it?' I said: 'Ahrar...' They said: 'Marada or Phalange?' I said no more. I didn't know what to say. So they took me for a Phalangist and finished me off. (18)

The second poster (Fig. 3.11) appears on the screen after this incident, and Rabilh tells the audience that he decided to leave the war, and Ahrar.

So I toss down my weapon and walk away. I take one step and then another. My supervisor calls my name. I turn around. 'Tfeh!' he spits in my face, and fires his handgun. The bullet enters through my right eye and lodges itself in my skull, prompting my instant death. (19)

The same image of Rabilh is shown in both posters, although the circumstances of each death are different. First, he dies because Marada mistook him for a Phalangist, and second, his party supervisor is upset with him for quitting fighting and therefore shoots him. The slogans, which are quite cynical, are different. Rabilh



Fig. 4.23: Maroun Baghdadi, *Little Wars*, 1982, Film, 108 min, Courtesy of Sorayya Baghdadi.

is labelled as 'Died for Truth' in his first death and 'Died in Battle to Defend the Party' in his second. To have died for Ahrar is a truth claim that corresponds to the storyline of the play in Rabil's first death and is therefore true in the context of *Nancy*. Rabil died because he was honest about his party affiliation. This, however, is not the case with his second death, where he died neither in battle nor for the party but was killed

by the party. This shows that a truth claim has to correspond not to the actual events but rather to how truth is presented and how the photograph is contextualised.

Rabil existed in front of the camera and left an indexical trace, and his image shows him as iconic, as lifelike as possible. But even when the photograph is made to speak, its truth claim can be false. Truth is fabricated, as the re-use of the same photograph for two different deaths demonstrates.

The 'fabrication of truth'<sup>352</sup> is also revealed by *Nancy* because the play presents the faces of living actors as martyrs. Of course, their photographs on the screens prove that they are emanations of light in front of the camera, depicted as realistically as possible. But Rabil, Hatem, Ziad, and Lina are still alive. Outside the context of *Nancy*, they are not martyrs, although their faces are presented as such in the photographs in the posters of the play.

Displaying the face of a living person as the face of a martyr was already practised during the *Wars*. At the end of the movie *Little Wars* (1982), the late film director Maroun Baghdadi shows one of the protagonists, the photographer Nabil, taking a photograph of his face with his analogue camera and then developing it multiple times in a darkroom. Nabil then creates his own martyr posters in the same standardised format as martyr posters he had seen on the streets earlier in the movie. A black-and-white photograph is depicted in front of a black background, and a slogan below the photograph announces 'Martyr Nabil Srour'. Nabil puts up his martyr posters on the walls of a room, even using a ladder to reach the ceiling (Fig. 4.23). The spectators see the living photographer covering every inch of the room with posters that announce that he is dead.<sup>353</sup>

352 I take this phrase from Mroué and Khoury, 'Three Posters', 185.

353 Lina Khatib also discusses this scene in *Lebanese Cinema: Imaging the Civil War and Beyond* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 62. She does not read the scene as a critique of martyrdom but interprets it as the merging of Nabil's body with the city.

*Inhabitants* also features an obviously living person next to a poster announcing his martyrdom when Mroué inserts his own face into a Hezbollah martyr template. In doing so, he shows how easily a photograph of a face, as a lasting trace of someone who has been in front of the camera but is still alive, can at least technically become the face of a martyr and therefore establish a truth claim that is not true (Fig. 3.4). This notion has already appeared in *Three Posters*, when Mroué, at the beginning of the performance, introduces himself in a video on a screen as the martyr Khaled Rahal (Fig. 3.1) and claims that this video was made during the preparation for a martyrdom operation. Mroué is presented as a martyr, and, as Elias writes, the spectators—only the audience outside of Lebanon, I would say, because the Beirut audience knew Mroué as an actor—is made to believe that they are watching a video of the recent past.<sup>354</sup> However, the foreign spectators realise that what they saw was not a video taken during the Wars by a martyr-to-come, but a live transmission from an adjacent room by a living performer, only when a door is opened and Mroué enters the stage. As Maaik Bleeker writes, Mroué's

staging also draws attention to the performativity of this truth—in other words, that this truth is not a matter of a reality of which the video recording is a representation but instead, that the fabrication of this truth happens in the image, as a result of its virtual, phenomenal appearance to a beholder. At the moment of seeing, the images will produce the truth about the speaker, a truth that does not even exist yet at the time of their recording.<sup>355</sup>

Although Mroué announces himself as the martyr Rahal, supported by the evidence of the indexical and iconic image, he is neither dead nor Rahal.<sup>356</sup> The image is used for a fabricated truth claim and therefore *Three Posters* raises the question of which indexical and iconic images are true and which are not, and thus of how credible claims of martyrdom are. This is comparable to Rabih's second death for Ahrar in *Nancy*. He did indeed die in the storyline of the play, but this was not for the party—it was because of the party.

Although they say they are dead and they are supported by martyr posters that include their faces, the actors of *Nancy* are alive. Similarly, in *Little Wars*, Nabil is not a shahid, he is clearly alive, as he plasters his own martyr posters on the walls. In this way, then, in *Inhabitants*, *Nancy*, and *Three Posters*, Mroué, like Baghdadi during the Wars, questions the reliability of the image through his presence on the

354 Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 82.

355 Maaik Bleeker, 'Performing the Image: Rabih Mroué's Lecture-Performances', in Hlavajova and Winder, *Rabih Mroué*, 196.

356 Videos are, like photographs, indexical and iconic.

stage. He has been in front of the camera and left a trace, but when this trace is put into the context of being a martyr, the truth claim is wrong.<sup>357</sup>

Finally, it should also be mentioned that presenting the face of someone who is alive as a martyr is a certain taboo in Lebanon, as Fadi Toufiq told me about *Nancy*:

It is really offending to make your image as a martyr, if you are Lebanese and you believe in this martyr issue. People would feel offended if someone is playing this image and is making a theatre and is making fun of these things. *Nancy* was not agreeing with the culture the posters come from; it was a kind of response to this culture by overloading the use of it everywhere, whenever we had the chance.<sup>358</sup>

*Nancy*, along with *Three Posters and Inhabitants*, is breaking social taboos by portraying living actors as martyrs, as Baghdadi had already done during the Wars. By doing so, as well as by re-using the same photograph for different deaths, *Nancy* demonstrates that an indexical and iconic image cannot establish a truth claim on its own, and that truth, even when supported by photographic evidence, should always be questioned.

### 4.2.3 Any Picture: The Photographic Image of the Martyr as a Currency

The presentation of the face of a living person as the image of a martyr and the re-use of the same photographs for different deaths also reveal the arbitrariness of the face that is in the poster. Of course, for the family of the martyr, it is indeed important that the photograph depicts the relative. This is something that Elias Khoury reflects on in his novel *White Masks* (1981), which constitutes one of the earliest critiques of martyrdom among cultural practitioners in Lebanon. The protagonist of Khoury's book is Ahmad Khalil Jaber, whose son joined the militia of the LCP at the beginning of the Wars and died shortly thereafter. The father then continued to live with the face of his dead son in the martyr poster as if he were still alive.<sup>359</sup>

For the party, unlike for the relatives, it is not of primary importance whose face is shown, but it does matter that there is a face in the poster. Any face. This effectively converts the photograph of the ordinary martyr into a form of currency,

357 This was practised not only by Mroué and the other actors of *Nancy*. Maasri mentions that she met a poster designer for a party and that this individual had designed a martyr poster for himself (Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 88).

358 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021.

359 For the novel, see Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, 'The Martyr and His Image: Elias Khoury's al-Wujuh al-bayda' (The White Faces)', in *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Friederike Pannewick (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004); Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 118–20.

to which also *Nancy* points to by labelling Hatem as the ‘Price of Victory’ in a poster (Fig. 3.20). If one party can offer more martyrs than another, they demonstrate that they are willing to pay a higher price for their cause than their rivals are, which heightens the militia’s credibility.<sup>360</sup>

In *Inhabitants*, Mroué comments on a line of Hezbollah martyr posters that he saw on lampposts in the Dahiyeh after the 2006 Tammuz War (Fig. 3.2).

They are hanging on a boulevard, and not in an alley or street where they can be looked at by passers-by. Instead, they are spread in the middle of this wide boulevard, whose mission is to facilitate the flow of traffic; slowing down is not allowed, and there is no walking space for passers-by. The only probable way for us to see one frame, in a clear manner, is either to run very fast, or to drive, while looking at the posters. [...] And since the frames are all similar, except for the head and the name, we end up seeing only one, still image; the image of the martyr Mujahid, in the body of a warrior, without a name or face. The speed of motion will erase both the names and the faces.<sup>361</sup>



Fig. 4.24: Rabih Mroué, *The Inhabitants of Images*, 2008, Non-Academic Lecture, Courtesy of the Artist.

Mroué addresses the impossibility of studying a poster of a singular martyr, as these posters are only visible when driving by. Because of the speed, one sees a repetition of the same image. Individual facial traits and names get lost in motion. It does not matter whose face is on the poster, as what was there in front of the camera is no longer visible.

Mroué’s words are first accompanied by a photograph of the boulevard with the martyr posters (Fig. 3.2). The image that immediately follows shows these same martyrs with spotlit faces, thereby rendering them faceless (Fig. 4.24). This seems to be a clear comment on the index, which is reduced to the light. Iconicity in the sense of who this person was and what this person looked

360 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 87.

361 Rabih Mroué, ‘The Inhabitants of Images’, in *Rabih Mroué: Image(s), mon amour FABRICATIONS*, ed. CA2M (Madrid: Centro de Art dos de Mayo, 2013), 353–54. Keti Chukhrov, in ‘To Deserve’ the Event: On Rabih Mroué’s Poetics of Performing’, in Hlavajova and Winder, *Rabih Mroué*, 156, wrongly labels them as suicide martyrs: they were Hezbollah fighters but did not conduct martyrdom operations.

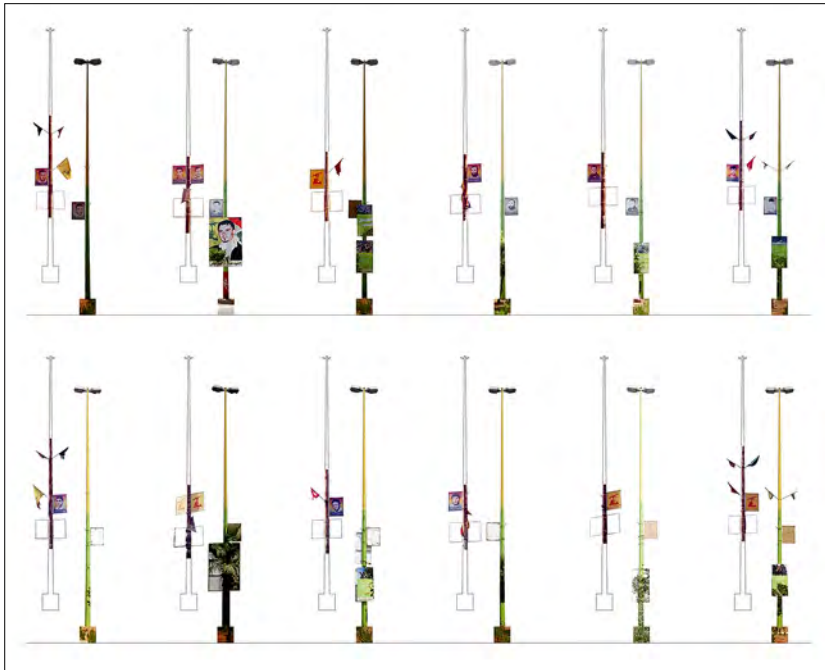


Fig. 4.25: Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige in Collaboration with Ahmad Gharbieh, *...A Faraway Souvenir*, 2001–07, Lambda Print, 100 x 600 cm, Courtesy of the Artists.

like becomes secondary. It matters only that there has been someone in front of the camera who has left a trace produced by light and therefore testifies that the man—as the poster tells us via its logo, which is not hidden by light in the second image—has died for Hezbollah. The photograph thereby acts as supporting evidence for Hezbollah's truth claim, which is the quantity of the human price the party is willing to pay in its fight against the Israeli Army.

Hadjithomas/Joreige made a similar observation in their project *...A Faraway Souvenir* (2001–07). The artists photographed images of martyrs on lampposts on a road lined with shuhada in Ouzaï, which is in the sphere of influence of Hezbollah and Amal (Fig. 4.25). Usually this road is not traversed on foot and is accessed only by car. When driving, the faces of the martyrs, as in Mroué's example in the Dahi-yeh, fly by and are not clearly visible. One cannot stop and look at the images, as one would hinder traffic; furthermore, being remarkably interested in the posters would draw suspicion.<sup>362</sup>

362 Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, 'A State of Latency', 2001, <https://sc-uat-bucket.ams3.amazonaws.com/digitaloceanspaces.com/642bcabac6c54936c6c7b553a60057e0.pdf>.

Lines of martyrs, such as those on Ouzai and in the Dahiyeh, show off the scale of sacrifice—or, in other words, how much the party was willing to ‘pay’. For the party, it is important that there is a photograph on the poster, which, by its indexicality, proves that the martyr has really given his life for the party, whose logo establishes the truth claim and therefore can, in contrast to the photograph, not be exchanged. Iconicity is secondary, as the face on the poster could be any face, turning the martyr into a currency.

As Gade has mentioned, this currency notion is also addressed in *Nancy* because the play shows how militias claimed ownership in a competition for martyrs,<sup>363</sup> as a death of Ziad demonstrates. At that point in the play, Ziad is a member of the LCP and tells the audience the following:

We gather in the square. They split us up into small units combining several members from different parties. We board the jeeps and on our way over, they brief us on the operation: We are to attack the town of Aishiyeh. [...] On November 9, 1976, before reaching Aishiyeh, our convoy is ambushed [...] Our jeep is hit and all the passengers die, myself included. In a matter of days our photos are published under the name of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. This time my parents flip for real: How dare a Palestinian organization appropriate my death! They attempt the impossible to recover my body—but this time they fail. My body remains on the battlefield, counted among the Palestinians. (16)

The poster that accompanies the anecdote consists of a bright background with a photograph of the actor standing with crossed hands, looking towards the left (Fig. 3.33). Slogans written in black are visible above and below the image and inside a turquoise-blue stripe. Ziad is labelled as a martyr of the PFLP and as a martyr of the LCP. Above the photograph, two symbols are visible: the PFLP’s logo on the right and a hammer and a sickle on the left, pointing to the LCP. Thus, the image contradicts Ziad’s narrated claim that the PFLP fully appropriated Ziad’s death from their allies, the LCP. Also, the design of the poster corresponds to LCP rather than to PFLP posters, because it is similar to a serial format used by the Communists at the end of the 1980s (Figs. 3.60–3.61).

Ziad’s martyr poster could be read as a layer added to the text of the play. It shows not only who claimed ownership over his death (the PFLP), but also for which party the actor wanted to die (the LCP). This example demonstrates that the poster’s function extends beyond being solely an obituary for Ziad; otherwise, it would be irrelevant which party he died for, and which symbols would be on the poster. It would have been crucial only that he had ceased to exist as an individual.

363 Gade, ‘Learning to Live’, 338.

Later in *Nancy*, Ziad faces a similar problem. In 1984, he was a member of Amal. After hearing of the existence of Hezbollah, then still a clandestine group, he grows inspired, as he tells the audience:

Unfortunately, I couldn't find out who these heroes were, or who their organisation was... However, they did make the homeland seem bigger in my eyes. And so I decided to offer my homeland something worthwhile by pulling a martyr number in the South, and blowing myself up at an Israeli checkpoint by the Awali River. I reach the checkpoint all belted up and ready to go, but one of the enemy soldiers appears to be on me, and I get self-conscious... Before I can push the button, I get a bullet in the head from an Israeli soldier, killing me on the spot. Obviously I don't blow up—not even close. As a result, my body remains in Israeli custody for a year. (27)

Ziad's unsuccessful martyrdom operation is accompanied by a poster issued by Amal, showing Ziad in a black suit and white shirt, looking towards the viewer (Fig. 3.36). As discussed in 3.5.3, this image is a cross-appropriation of a Hezbollah poster (Fig. 3.71), but the Amal logo is added, which shows that Amal counts Ziad's martyrdom as theirs.

The story of Ziad continues as he tells the audience:

In December 1985, during a hostage exchange with Israel, my body is somehow delivered to the so-called Party of God or Hizbullah... Prior to the burial, however, there is a minor security incident between the Amal Movement and the Party of God over my dead body: 'His body belongs to us!' —'No way, it belongs to us and us only!' A mini-clash breaks out, at the end of which Amal managed to retrieve my body. (27)

In this passage, Ziad narrates how martyrs were fought over. Although he was clearly a member of Amal, Hezbollah took advantage when given a body by mistake and did not return it to Amal, who then had to claim 'ownership' of 'their' *shahid*.

Such incidents of appropriating martyrs did occur during the *Wars* and still occur today. One example is Bilal Fahs, who in 1984 detonated a car bomb in an Israeli convoy, killing himself and probably twenty Israeli soldiers.<sup>364</sup> The eighteen-year-old Fahs stated in his last will that he wanted to be buried in a green grave inscribed with the word Amal. This clearly indicates that he wanted to die for this party. However, from time to time, Hezbollah claims that Fahs is their martyr.<sup>365</sup>

364 Bosen, *Martyr Cults*, 214–15 and 255–58. The number of Israelis killed varies depending on who narrates the incident. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 38 wrongly claims that Fahs was a member of the LCP. A poster commemorating Fahs's death was issued by Amal; see Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 94.

365 Bosen, *Martyr Cults*, 256–60.

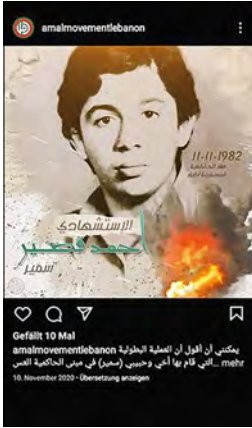


Fig. 4.26: Harakat Amal (@amalmovementlebanon), 'Istishahid Ahmad Qassir', Instagram, 10 November 2020.

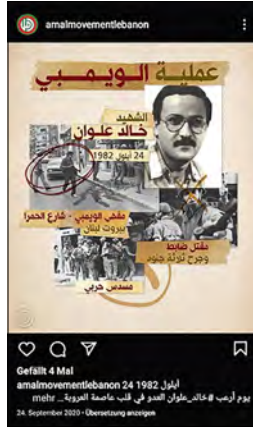


Fig. 4.27: Harakat Amal (@amalmovementlebanon), 'Shahid Khaled Alwan', Instagram, 24 September 2020.



Fig. 4.28: Harakat Amal (@amalmovementlebanon), 'Shahid Said Muwasi', Instagram, 1 January 2021.

Amal also hijacks martyrs who have died for other groups. Scrolling through their Instagram page, I encountered the face of fifteen-year-old Ahmad Qassir (Fig. 4.26). He drove a car into an Israeli Army post in 1982 and is considered Hezbollah's first istishahid, although Hezbollah, which was then still an underground organisation, only claimed responsibility for this incident two years later.<sup>366</sup> Also, Khaled Alwan, a SSSNP martyr, appears on Amal's page (Fig. 4.27), and so does Said Muwasi (Fig. 4.28), who as we have seen in Figure 4.11 was a Hezbollah martyr. All three men are labelled as a martyr, and their online posters include their death dates and commemorative slogans. The party affiliations are not mentioned, instead, a non-coloured outline of the Amal logo is inserted on the lower left-hand side of each image. Qassir, Alwan, and Muwasi are presented as having died for Amal. They, of course, did not.

The unclarity about the ownership of Ziad's martyrdoms in *Nancy*, first between the PFLP and the LCP and later between Amal and Hezbollah, are a comment on the practice of hijacking martyrs, which was and is exercised by the sectarian groups. Furthermore, these two examples, as Gade writes, suggest that *Nancy* employs 'the cynical 'appropriation logic' of the political parties ad absurdum', with

366 Lina Khatib, Dina Matar, and Alef Alshaer, 'From the Invasion to the Liberation: Communicating Hizbullah's Political Repertoire, 1982–2000', in *The Hizbullah Phenomenon: Politics and Communications*, eds. Lina Khatib, Dina Matar, and Alef Alshaer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 56; Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 94; Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 73.

Mroué and Toufiq effectively managing 'to shed light on the way martyr posters have been intentionally fabricated as 'documents of commitment', ultimately aiming at affirming the representations of reality – the 'truths', if you will – propagated by the parties'.<sup>367</sup>

The photograph of Ziad in his poster (*Fig. 3.36*) issued by Amal seems to confirm Amal's ownership of his death. On the other hand, in *Figure 3.33*, we also see that the poster's photograph only testifies that a martyrdom took place, but not for which party. By inserting symbols of both groups, Ziad, unlike on the textual plane, is made a martyr of the PFLP and the LCP, as both groups claimed to create truth and appropriate his martyrdom. This is similar to what Amal does when they show images of martyrs who died for the SSNP and Hezbollah on their Instagram page. By adding the Amal logo to the posters, their truth claims are altered without any change in the indexicality or iconicity of the photograph.

In summary, there are at least two ways to turn the shahid into a currency that shows a party's commitment to a cause. The first is to ignore the martyrs' individualities and turn them into non-iconic but indexical images of the party, as reflected in *Inhabitants* and ...*A Faraway Souvenir*. The second is to insert the indexical and iconic image in a new truth claim, as addressed in *Nancy*.

#### 4.2.4 Shifting the Truth Claim: The ID Photograph Turns Into the Image of a Martyr and the Martyr Poster Migrates from the Wall to the Archive

Truth claims are not fixed and can fluctuate while the indexicality and iconicity of the image remain unchanged. Because most of the posters of *Nancy* show headshots, which are typically employed for identity cards, the play reflects the fact that the photographs used in martyr posters were—except for those issued after martyrdom operations—not taken on the occasion of martyrdom; instead, they were usually re-used ID photographs. This means the purpose of the photograph changed. Instead of serving as a tool for identification, it functioned to announce a martyr. Furthermore, today, many of the posters that were issued during the *Wars* are no longer hanging on the walls in the streets but are instead housed in archives. These posters have turned from a means of visual politics into historical documents.

Iconicity is crucial in ID photographs because they should depict the facial features of the person as closely to their appearance as possible. As the photographer Georges Azar put it: 'there is a reason your passport has a photograph of you and not a written description or a poem'.<sup>368</sup> *Nancy* acknowledges that the ID photo-

367 Gade, 'Learning to Live', 338.

368 Maya Wakim, 'Civil War Photographer Tells the Stories Your History Books Don't Acknowledge', *Beirut Today*, 15 April 2019, <https://beirut-today.com/2019/04/15/civil-war-photographer/>.

graph becomes a politicised image only by recontextualisation. In the beginning of the play, ID images of the four actors (Figs. 3.5, 3.17, 3.29, 3.41) appear in a decorative white frame next to each other on all four screens.<sup>369</sup> Alongside these images, the actors introduce themselves with their names, places of residence, and, if applicable, places of origin:

**Hatem:** My name is Hatem Imam; resident of Tariq el Jdideh; Beirut; originally from Tripoli.

**Rabih:** I'm Rabih Mroué; resident of Jbeil; originally from Hadath.

**Ziad:** Ziad Antar; from the South; from Kfar Kila, Marjeyoun District.

**Lina:** Lina Saneh; I'm from Mazraa. (13)

This sequence is followed by the same four ID images on the screens, but now with the addition of the symbols of the party to which each actor belongs. These symbols appear below the photographs and the corresponding party names are written in black letters above the photographs: for Hatem, the Morabitoun; for Ziad, the LCP; for Rabih, Ahrar; and for Lina, the SSNP (Figs. 3.6, 3.18, 3.30, 3.42). The text that accompanies these images runs as follows:

**Rabih:** In 1973, I joined a military training camp with the Tigers of the Ahrar Party [...]

**Ziad:** I joined the war informally, before becoming a proper party man. I fought for the Communist Party... I then applied for membership and became a comrade.

**Hatem:** When the war first broke out, I was with the Morabitun. [...]

**Lina:** When the war broke out, I was fighting amongst the ranks of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. (14–15)

In this way, the photographs first help establish a truth claim that highlights the individual identities of the actors before the additions turn them into sectarian identities. These eight pictures are not martyr posters but an overture to them, as the images show that the photograph becomes something else through the addition of further elements. That ID photographs are transformed into images of martyrs is addressed in another sequence of *Nancy*, right after the appearance of Ziad's two ID photographs. A fragment of an application form for the LCP appears on the screen above Ziad's head (Fig. 3.31). On the upper left, part of a hammer and a sickle are visible, and on the right, a photograph that has a decorative white frame and shows Ziad in a white shirt with curly hair, beard, and sunglasses is clipped to the form. From the text uttered by Ziad, we learn that it was only after his first death fighting with the LCP that he officially joined the party: 'when I died, they asked me to fill out an application to become an official comrade of the Communist Par-

369 On the opening scene of *Nancy*, also see Bellan, *Dismember Remember*, 155–56.

ty, to allow them to issue a black-and-white poster of me in the Party's name' (15). The LCP's motive in inviting Ziad to become a member in 1976 was to create a poster for him. This was important because, as discussed above, by issuing a martyr poster, Ziad became LCP currency and the party could claim that he was their shahid.

Ziad also says that the poster would be issued in black and white. This is a reference to the fact that in the first two years of the Wars, 1975 and 1976, posters of individual martyrs were predominantly not coloured, as examples from Ahrar and the Kataeb confirm (Figs. 3.55–3.57). The photo that is clipped to the application form (Fig. 3.31) was also used for the poster that was issued for Ziad's death (Fig. 3.32). It shows a drawing of him in the same pose as in the previous image, with the left shoulder slightly turned towards the viewer, again with his curly hair, beard, and sunglasses in front of two snow-capped mountains and a blue sky. A further addition is a flower with a blue bullet, placed approximately at the height of his heart, severing its stem.

Although his ID photograph is transformed into a coloured figurative painting, it can still be clearly recognised. The reason his poster is not black and white might be that the underlying image—which shows a martyr of the LCP who was assassinated in 1979, Ahmad al-Mir-al-Ayubi (Abu Hassan; Fig. 3.62)—is apparently also made after a black-and-white photograph, which appears in another poster of al-Ayubi, which was also issued in 1979 (Fig. 4.29). Therefore, it could be assumed that *Nancy*, in this passage, is re-tracing the making of a painted poster during the first years of the Wars. It seems that the media offices of the parties had to decide: because coloured photographs were still not widespread, the parties either preserved the index by issuing a black-and-white poster, or they gave up the index and substituted the trace of its having been there with colour and the possibility of making the martyr more handsome. In the coloured version, Ayubi's eyes are slightly larger than in the photograph, with a small sparkle visible. I could not see such beautification in the depiction of Ziad, but I would suggest that the more eye-catching format of the coloured poster might also be a reason why photographs, which were then predominantly black and white, were transformed into paintings or drawings.

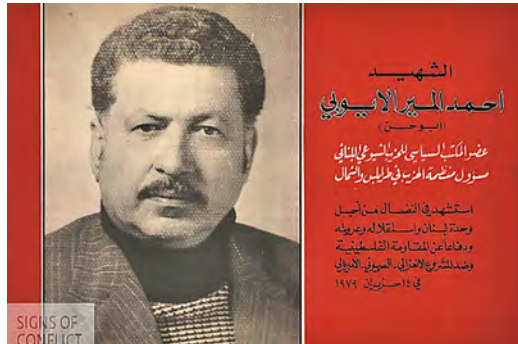


Fig. 4.29: LCP, 'The Martyr Ahmad al-Mir al-Ayubi (Abu Hassan)', 1979, Poster, 70 x 47.5 cm, LCP 21, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Therefore, *Nancy* reflects the fact that the photographs used in martyr posters are re-used ID images that either became black-and-white martyr images that preserved the index or were changed into images of martyrs by transforming the medium into a coloured painting, which made the poster more noticeable. This second change means that although the painting functioned in lieu of the index, the iconicity remained through the almost accurate depiction of the shahid.

Ziad's words accompanying the image in *Figure 3.32* are as follows:

When I applied for Communist Party membership, I gave them a photo for my party ID. It was that same photo that appeared all over the streets of Beirut after my death, with the caption: 'The Hero of Sannine: Comrade Ziad Antar'. (16)

Ziad stresses that his application photograph was used for the poster, and he therefore implies that the picture was a recycled image, originally taken for another purpose. As Maasri wrote, in these photographs, the depicted is sometimes much younger than at the time of death. Only the addition of symbols and text turns an ID image into the image of a martyr.<sup>370</sup> This re-use of photographs has been noted by Soha Bechara, who is still alive but could have been a martyr. In 1988, as a member of the LCP, she tried to assassinate Antoine Lahad, the head of the SLA. Bechara writes in her memoirs that she was conscious of the possible re-use of her ID photographs for her potential martyr poster, and thus on the night before the attempt, 'I burnt in secret my favorite photos of myself, fearing that they could be used by the Party for propaganda about the 'martyrs' of the resistance. But I still gave a few snapshots to Rabih'.<sup>371</sup> By destroying some images and giving others to her party supervisor, Bechara attempted to control the distribution of her image as a martyr, which she thought she might become.<sup>372</sup>

The artist and theorist Akram Zaatar writes in his essay 'All That Refuses to Vanish' (2017) about the changing contexts of the images of the men, women, and children who were killed in the Qana massacre in 1996. This was a war crime committed by the Israeli Army, which bombed a UN compound where civilians sought shelter from the Israeli air raids.<sup>373</sup>

370 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 89; see also Chaib, 'Hezbollah Seen', 126.

371 Soha Bechara, *Resistance: My Life for Lebanon* (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2003), 66.

372 It seems that posters of Bechara were indeed circulated after her imprisonment. Nawal Qasim Baydoun remembers that women were put in prison because they distributed Bechara's posters. See Nawal Qasim Baydoun, Michelle Hartmann, and Malek Abi Saab, *Memories of a Militant: My Years in the Kham Women's Prison* (New York: Interlink, 2021), 69.

373 For the Qana massacre of 1996, see Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 122–24; Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 115–17.



Fig. 4.30: Doha Shams, Portrait of Victims of the Qana Massacre (Nahla Haidous), 1996, Photograph, 19 x 24 cm, 0113sh00011, Doha Shams Collection, Courtesy of the Arab Image Foundation Beirut.

Zaatari recounts that the dead of Qana were buried in a mass grave, with their photographs attached. In one image depicting a woman named Nahla Haidous, plastic flowers were arranged around her face to cover her hair (Fig. 4.30). Flowers, as I discussed in 4.1, were a symbol used in martyr posters issued by different sects. Also, it is not unusual to link plastic flowers to the dead. Jocelyn Saab mentions in her movie *Lettre de Beyrouth* (1978) that plastic flowers were often put on martyrs' graves because they were cheaper than real flowers. According to Zaatari, the addition of the plastic flowers to Haidous's portrait happened out of urgency:

It is a vernacular assemblage of elements that produce an object of portraiture that is photographic in its initial form, but rectified, amended or transformed by its users to suit a specific occasion. The original portrait was intended to hang at home, in the family's private space: it is not a portrait that Nahla or her family would expect to see in public.<sup>374</sup>

Zaatari's description also applies to the martyr posters because, as in the case of Nahla, elements were added to the photograph—not plastic flowers but the party logo and other symbols and slogans. Further, like Nahla's image, the bureaucratic ID photograph of the martyr was usually not intended to be placed on a wall in the streets, but once there, it was no longer used for identification but instead turned into a recycled image that announced a martyr. Thus, a new work emerges, as Zaatari explains: 'Every time a record is reproduced a producer has authored a new work. I'd even say that every time a record is reproduced, something in it or in the knowledge of it changes'.<sup>375</sup> The designer of a martyr poster is not the photographer of the ID image. Although the photograph is the same, we know through

374 Akram Zaatari, 'All That Refuses to Vanish', in *Akram Zaatari: Against Photography*, ed. Clara Plasencia (Barcelona/Duesseldorf: MACBA/K21, 2017), 99.

375 Ibid., 100.

the visual setting in which the image is embedded that it now has a different function. We no longer see the portrait photograph of a living person, but the image of someone dead.

A photograph changes upon the vanishing of its referent. The death of a living person represents a threshold in the life of their portrait. Nahla Haidous's picture would not have hung in public had she not been killed in the Qana Massacre. When the body vanishes, each of its descriptions is recalled to fulfil a new function.<sup>376</sup>

In martyr posters, after the death of the person depicted, the ID photograph is no longer an ID photograph but enters the street's walls as an image of a *shahid/a*. Had the person stayed alive, the image would not have come into existence.

Zaatari's point also resonates with Kama Maclean, who, amidst a discussion of martyr-making in colonial India, states that the studio photograph turns into something else in the martyr poster. In my reading, this is visualised in *Nancy* in the images of Ziad in particular (Figs. 3.31–3.32), and by placing ID photographs at the beginning of the play for the audience to see where the photographs employed in martyr posters originate. Like the photograph of Ziad on his party application, the ID photographs are a 'prelude to martyrdom', as the photograph then 'migrates' to the poster.<sup>377</sup> The reproduction of the photograph no longer functions as a mode of identification; it is now a form of commemoration.

Today, Haidous's image is no longer a memorial image but part of an archival practice because her photograph is housed in the AIF. Shortly after the massacre, Zaatari travelled to Qana together with the journalist Doha Shams, who took photographs of the photographs on the mass grave and published her images in a Lebanese newspaper. Afterwards, these images were part of the 1997 festival *Les Recontres d'Arles* and then donated to the AIF.<sup>378</sup> Zaatari explained his interest in the image of Nahla in 2017:

376 Ibid., 103.

377 Kama Maclean, 'The Portrait's Journey: The Image, Social Communication and Martyr-Making in Colonial India', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 4 (2011): 1074.

378 Zaatari, 'All That Refuses', 100. For a description of the Doha Shams collection, see Ian B. Larson and Akram Zaatari, 'Collections of the Arab Image Foundation', in Plasencia, *Akram Zaatari*, 183.

My interest in this picture twenty years after its original appearance has to do with the path that it took from a mere description of a woman's face, to a dressed up object on her grave, to a small image in a newspaper, to the duplication of its framed version for the AIF and its exhibition in an international photographic event, and finally its inclusion in the AIF collection. Such a genealogy traces the object's displacement from one habitat to another, cutting through multiple practices and modes of work, notably portraiture, journalism, art, inter-institutional loans and photograph preservation. The traces that transactions leave on a photographic object become part of it. A photograph is not the same twenty years later.<sup>379</sup>

This is also true for the martyr posters discussed above. First, an ID image is taken, then it is used to announce a martyrdom on a poster, and today, many posters of the martyrs of the *Wars* are not hanging on the walls but have found their way into archives. They no longer notify about deaths, but have instead become historical documents of the *Wars*. Zaatari explains that

Haidous's portrait is a reproduction of a remake: a reproduction of a reproduction. Taking it as a sample item to study is getting hold of the latest generation reproduction; and consequently the portrait's belonging variously to social, journalistic, curatorial, institutional, archival and possibly artistic practices.<sup>380</sup>

Just as Haidous's portrait is now digitised in the AIF collection, many posters of martyrs exist in digital archives such as the AUB or *signsofconflict*. These are the latest-generation reproductions of reproductions, which put the posters into different frames. For example, martyr posters of different factions of the *Wars* were exhibited next to each other on one wall in the NABU Museum in Heri as part of the framework of the exhibition *Hope and Despair: When Art Reflects on War and History* (2020).<sup>381</sup> These posters were put on the white museum walls and therefore became part of a curatorial practice, whereas the posters visible in the Musée de l'Indépendance and in Mleeta remain in the domain of visual politics, since the displays of these two institutions—which show only Phalange/Kataeb and Hezbollah posters, respectively—belong to the context of a sectarian narration of history. Placed in archives, the posters are to be understood in the framework of academic practice, whereas in the case of *Nancy*, the posters are part of an artistic practice. Originally, martyr posters were printed for public display on streetside walls, but today many end up elsewhere. This is also made visible in *Nancy* when, at the very end of the play, unchanged martyr posters from the *Wars*—taken from Maasri's archive—pop up on all four screens.

379 Zaatari, 'All That Refuses', 99.

380 *Ibid.*, 100–01.

381 NABU Museum, *Hope & Despair: When Art Reflects on War and History* (NABU: Heri, 2020).

The functions and truth claims of photographs change through time, while their indexicality and iconicity remain the same. Especially when the referent dies, the image turns into something else, often through the addition of elements or via a physical relocation of the picture. Nahla's image and the photographs of the martyrs in posters are no longer ID images. For the research of this book, I was mostly not looking for posters on the walls but browsing through different archives. In doing so, I realised that in some cases, there is not only a martyr image; there is another picture of the same death that shows the dead person defeated.

#### 4.2.5 Other Types and Uses of Images of the Dead: Trophy and Accusation Images

The groups involved in the *Wars* did not always agree about whether a death was a martyrdom. Sometimes, the death of a militiaman was depicted in at least two images: first, in an image by the party he died for, where he was presented as a *shahid*, and second, in an image by the party that had killed him. In this second case, the picture of his death was turned into a trophy image, which acted as a counter to the heroic image of the martyr. Sometimes, the party with which the martyr was affiliated also displayed a death as an image of accusation.

This part is (except for a short discussion in 6.3) the only one in the book that includes images depicting graphic scenes in which, in contrast to most of the martyr posters, death is clearly visible. Following a classification by the semiologist Francois Jost, most of the martyr posters I have discussed until now would be termed 'images of violence', as they only suggest violence but leave it out of the frame. The dead body is not shown, but the fact that the ID photograph now acts as a martyr photograph implies that the person has died a violent death. 'Violent images', on the other hand, depict violence in a direct way.<sup>382</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this book to scrutinise in depth whether violent images should be distributed. I have decided to reproduce a selected set of them, which are part of my discussion, because I believe that every image that exists deserves to be shown and examined as long as it is contextualised. Joey Brooke Jakob argues that researchers should not perceive images as 'too horrific for research' but should try to understand why and for what purposes they were created.<sup>383</sup>

382 Cited in Emmanuel Taïeb, 'Should Images of Violence Be Shown?', *Books and Ideas* (2015), <https://hal.science/halshs-01237318>.

383 Joey Brooke Jakob, 'Beyond Abu Ghraib: War Trophy Photography and Commemorative Violence', *Media, War & Conflict* 10, no. 1 (2017): 91.

In a similar vein, Ariella Azoulay mentions that photography is not only what is printed on the photographic paper and suggests a methodology for dealing with violent images.

The photograph bears the seal of the event itself, and reconstructing that event requires more than just identifying what is shown in the photograph. One needs to stop looking at the photograph and instead start watching it. The verb 'to watch' is usually used for regarding phenomena or moving pictures. It entails dimensions of time and movement that need to be reinscribed in the interpretation of the still photographic image. When and where the subject of the photograph is a person who has suffered some form of injury, a viewing of the photograph that reconstructs the photographic situation and allows a reading of the injury inflicted upon others becomes a civic skill, not an exercise in aesthetic appreciation.<sup>384</sup>

Following Azoulay, I will not offer detailed descriptions of violent images, as I am not publishing or discussing them for aesthetic purposes. A mere description could indeed serve a voyeuristic gaze and would be of little help in grasping the picture. Beyond what is depicted, spectators should understand the context in which the image was taken, what has happened before—in other words, how this situation came to be—and what has happened after—in other words, what was done with the photograph after it was captured on camera. In doing so, movement is inscribed into the still photograph. This is what Azoulay terms 'civic skill'.

Herta Wolf makes a similar argument in her suggestion for how to analyse exposures of pain and violence:

it is necessary to first analyze the discursive anchoring of the images and the conditions under which they were made. Only then can the context of production and usage be examined for the specifics of the photographs in question: Who took the pictures? Why were these particular acts of violence recorded using a photographic, and thus indexical, medium? To whom are the pictures addressed? To whom are they meant to be shown? Which distribution channels will the pictures enter, and to which secondary uses will they be put? Only these questions can lead to a necessary, differentiated understanding of scenarios that are often so similar in iconographic terms.<sup>385</sup>

Wolf, like Azoulay, suggests focusing not on the iconography of the image but on the context in which it is embedded—in other words, under what conditions, by whom, for whom, and with what intentions the photograph was taken and distributed.

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384 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 14.

385 Herta Wolf, 'The Tears of Photography', *Grey Room* 29 (2007): 80.

Taking the thoughts of Azoulay and Wolf into account, I will not refrain from showing violent images. However, I will focus not on their aesthetic description but on the context from which they emerged and the discourse into which they were put. In the following I will first elaborate on the concept of the violent image as a trophy image, before considering its role as a counter to the heroic martyr poster. I will then discuss the accusation image as a call to arms, before finally arguing that violent images cannot create a truth claim by themselves but always need to be placed in context.

### Concealed as a Press Image: The Violent Image as a Trophy Image

*Nancy* reflects the fact that in some cases, violent images function as trophy images under the pretext of being informative press images. The aim of trophy images is to humiliate the deceased or injured person who is depicted and to declare and celebrate victory over him and his faction. Trophy images display pride in what has been accomplished, and therefore their purpose is to be circulated.<sup>386</sup>

In *Nancy*, a press clipping (Fig. 3.14) shows a grainy black-and-white image of Rabih, who wears jeans and a white shirt with blood stains below his chest. He is led by two men in military gear on both sides, one of whom carries a rifle. A third man is visible behind Rabih. All four men are anonymised, with their eyes blacked over. The fragment of the newspaper is cropped. The headline above the image reads 'The Army Decided to...', indicating that the article is about the army's intervention in the Geagea-Hobeika conflict in 1986.

Because of the photograph's placement in a newspaper, it can be assumed that a photojournalist has captured this image of Rabih. There were several reasons why photojournalists took violent images.<sup>387</sup> Georges Azar, who was an active photojournalist during some years of the Wars, has suggested that one was to have 'sensational' photos to sell to dailies and magazines.

As individual photographers, we were free to follow our interests. But the market, then and now, highly values 'bang-bang', dramatic images of violent combat. Many of us were focused on the fighting and the quest for the ultimate bang-bang image, with encouragement from our employers.<sup>388</sup>

386 Jakob, 'Beyond Abu Ghraib', 98–99.

387 Press photographs during the Wars usually appeared in black and white in the daily papers. Colour photography has been widely used since the 1990s. See Clémence Cottard Hachem and Nour Salamé, 'War Photographer: 1982–2014. A Conversation with Patrick Baz. Beirut, 2016', in *On Photography in Lebanon: Stories & Essays*, eds. Clémence Cottard Hachem and Nour Salamé (Beirut: Kaph, 2018), 326–27.

388 Michelle Woodward, 'Beirut Photographer: Interview with Georges Azar', *Jadaliyya*, 29 November 2012, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/27500>.



Fig. 4.31: The Corpse of a Man Killed by the Israeli Army, 1985, Black-and-White Photograph, 23 x 18 cm, Ph: 956.9204.1, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

A photograph from 1985 (Fig. 4.31) seems to confirm this. It shows a dead man lying on the ground, next to his pickup, between pools of blood, a blanket, and bags of potatoes. Seven photographers with cameras in their hands are capturing the gory scene, with two gesticulating towards the photographer of the photographers.

Another reason for press photographers to take such images was to preserve evidence of what had happened. As Ramzi Haidar, a photojournalist who covered the Wars, told me:

The group I belonged to was made up of people who shared my interest in documenting the war. This was the reason for photographing: to document. I thought it is necessary for the next generation to document. Some of my colleagues were documenting with words, others were preserving the archives themselves. The idea of having propaganda or using the images to serve ideas was more elaborated or clear after 1982, after the Israeli invasion of Beirut, and by then, the local photographers and the national agencies were more present, and people started to understand there is a culture of the image. It can be used. And photographers knew their images would be used in this direction or that direction.<sup>389</sup>

389 Ramzi Haidar, personal conversation with the author, 12 March 2020.

While Haidar claims that at the beginning of the *Wars* the preservatory approach was foregrounded, this changed with the Israeli invasion in 1982, when greater consciousness of the political function of the image developed.

At the same time, no photograph is purely objective, as Aline Manoukian, one of the most well-known photographers of the *Wars*, noted:

Yes, you do try to be objective, to stand back and tell the story. But the choice of whether to release the shutter in front of one scene and not another is a personal decision. You interpret the scene, you frame it, while choosing to focus on one element and to place others in the middle ground or the background or leave them out altogether. How you represent an image is a subjective decision taken even before you crop and prepare it for publication. In my opinion, a photograph is subjective. It's not the truth. It's an interpretation of truth.<sup>390</sup>

A photograph shows what has taken place in front of the camera, but simultaneously, a photograph is only a fragment of the entire scene, chosen by the photographer for reasons ranging from commercial to archival to political. By making this choice, the photographer has a share in creating the truth claim of the image.

In the case of the image in the press clipping that accompanies a death of Rabih in *Nancy*, it can therefore be assumed that the photographer had a certain interest in taking a sensational image of the defeat of the Hobeika faction and might have been a sympathiser of Geagea. The newspaper was issued on 27 September 1986 and mentions the chasing of prisoners and bombing in Beirut. This corresponds to the storyline of *Nancy*, as Rabih tells the audience while the press clipping of his humiliation (*Fig. 3.14*) is visible on the screen above his head:

On September 27, 1986—a Saturday—we charged into East Beirut from the West. We closed in on them from every side, and all our new allies came to fight with us—Amal, the Progressive Socialists, the Nationalists and the Communists—backed by Syrian artillery... We got to the heart of Achrafieh and came within a hair's breadth of conquering the entire area of East Beirut and ending the battle in our favour... That is, if the Lebanese Army hadn't stepped in at the last minute to back up the Lebanese Forces. So instead, the battle ended in their favour. I got stuck in Achrafieh. They grabbed me and squeezed hard—it was like getting caught in the jaws of an enormous pair of pliers. They beat me to a pulp; they dragged me through the streets, they disgraced me, they humiliated me, and they published my photo in all the papers. They ruined my career as a fighter... Finally, away from the eyes of the media, they took me into an alley and liquidated me. (28)

390 Clémence Cottard Hachem and Nour Salamé, 'Photographing War: A Conversation with Aline Manoukian. Beirut, 2017', in Cottard Hachem and Salamé, *On Photography*, 278.

First, Rabih narrates how the battle was lost and then how he was caught and tortured by his opponents. This torture was not only physical but also included the display of his injured body in pain in the media. The press clipping is therefore a trophy image, which we learn through the contextualising anecdote in which Rabih, while listing the cruelties he experienced from the Geagea faction, mentions the publication of the photograph.

In this case, the fact that the image of Rabih appeared in the press does not contradict its status as a trophy image, as photojournalists, via their choices of what to capture, sided with one faction to varying degrees. A photograph displayed under the pretext of political information could be intended to intimidate supporters of the humiliated person who was depicted and to announce victory.<sup>391</sup> This is also mentioned in the text of *Nancy*, when Rabih says that ‘they’—referring to his ‘enemies’—published his photograph.<sup>392</sup>

This death of Rabih is not accompanied by a martyr poster, but that does not necessarily mean his faction denies that he is a shahid. Maybe a poster was produced for him but was lost over time; today’s archives do not include instances of all martyr posters. Or maybe, as his death happened in 1986, when the production of posters among Christian parties had already declined, no poster was issued for him at all. In my reading, the absence of a martyr poster combined with the presence of a trophy image also reflects the different types of imagery that could potentially remain or not remain after one’s death.

The trophy image is distributed to display disgrace and to show the defeated other. It is the antithesis of the image of the heroic martyr. This is echoed elsewhere in *Nancy*, where both the martyr image and the trophy image are addressed.

### The Trophy Image as a Counter-Image to the Heroic Martyr Poster

After having died as an Ahrar fighter in the Holiday Inn during the Battle of the Hotels, Rabih tells the audience that he

can confirm one thing: What I read in the papers about my own death was a hundred per cent true. They wrote: ‘One of the fighters was seen plummeting from the 13th floor of the Holiday Inn. The casualty was identified as one of the Ahrar fighters’. (17)

391 This line of argumentation is also made by Wolf, who uses the examples of the dead sons of Saddam Hussein. See Wolf, ‘Tears’, 73.

392 However, Rabih’s killing took place hidden from the camera’s eye. *Fig. 3.14* is an original clipping that appeared in the papers in 1986 and is the only image in *Nancy* that presents someone else as an actor.



Fig. 4.32: Georges Semerdjian, Rightist Fighter Trained in Beirut Streets, 1976 (?), Photograph, Courtesy of Maria Semerdjian.

The visual that accompanies this text (Fig. 3.8) shows Rabih standing in front of the Holiday Inn, looking towards the viewer and wearing a tight T-shirt that exposes his bare arms. The logo on the upper-left corner of the poster indicates it was issued by Ahrar. On the lower right, a slogan in white letters reads ‘The Martyr Hero Rabih Mroué’. When we consider all these elements in combination, this poster presents Rabih as having fought and died heroically for Ahrar. No trace of his violent death is visible. Only the text of *Nancy* that accompanies this poster addresses the existence of a counter-image.

When reading the anecdote of *Nancy* quoted above, an iconic image from the *Wars* that shows a dead man being dragged behind a car comes to mind immediately (Fig. 4.32).<sup>393</sup> This fits Azar’s observation that certain photojournalistic images are recallable in an instant in the visual memory of those familiar with the imagery of the *Wars*. As Azar explains: ‘you say the picture of the man playing the piano and I know exactly what you are talking about. You just need to say it and with iconic photographs like that, it just somehow sears itself into your consciousness’.<sup>394</sup> Although

393 This image is also re-enacted and turned into a moving image in Maroun Baghdadi’s film *Hors la Vie* (1991).

394 Beirut Banyan, ‘Ep.94 (Audio): Photography & Photojournalism with Georges Azar’, *YouTube*, 14 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgRFVQftNkM>.

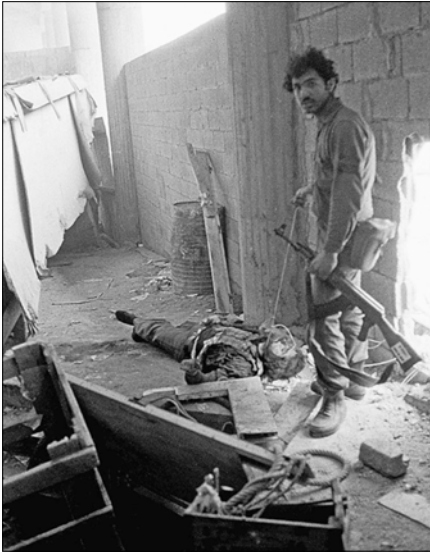


Fig. 4.33: Morabitoun Militiaman and Dead Phalangist, 1976, Photograph, Courtesy of Borell/SIPA.

Azar was describing the well-known image of a fighter playing a piano,<sup>395</sup> his description of instant relation is also true for the image of the man who is dragged behind a car.<sup>396</sup> In terms of the current discussion, we can say that *Nancy* here addresses the notions of image and counter-image. On the one hand, there is the heroic poster of Rabih, which is shown on the screen in the play. On the other hand, the textual plane simultaneously evokes another photograph, which the Beirut audience likely knew and could recall from their visual memory. This image shows Rabih not as a heroic martyr but as a defeated other.

By staging death in this manner, the enemy seems to be deprived of

his humanity.<sup>397</sup> When seeing this photograph and thinking it along with other violent images of the Holiday Inn—which show Morabitoun militiamen posing with their rifles and looking towards the camera next to apparently arranged bodies of dead Phalangists lying on the ground with ropes that are tied around their necks and held by the Morabitoun fighters (Fig. 4.33)—scenes of a hunter next to their dead prey come to my mind.<sup>398</sup> These images not only manifest Sontag's argument that 'to display the dead, after all, is what the enemy does',<sup>399</sup> but also, as Jakob writes, visualise the power of the subject who poses and the powerlessness of the object that is posed, producing the 'trophyed effect'.<sup>400</sup> The intention of such images is to intimidate the Phalange and clearly communicate who won the Battle of the Hotels. Also, the dead man dragged behind the car and the press clipping of Rabih's humiliation display the dead or the soon-to-die but already defeated enemy. Rabih was led to pose. He has no agency over his own body-movement; therefore, power relations are made visible.

395 For this photograph, see Buchakjian, 'Habitats Abandonnés', 109–10.

396 I will return to this image in 4.5.

397 Wolf, 'Tears', 73.

398 There are much more graphic images of dead Phalangists in the Holiday Inn. See Joseph G. Chami, *Le Mémorial de la Guerre: 1975-1990* (Beirut: Chemaly & Chemaly, 2003), 54–55.

399 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 55.

400 Jakob, 'Beyond Abu Ghraib', 96–98.

There are also instances of the *Wars* that have the image and the counter-image. For example, the Chamoun family, who were assassinated in 1990 and whose martyr image (Fig. 4.19) I will discuss in 4.4, is also depicted in counter-images. The body of the dead Dany Chamoun was published in the *New York Times*, and a simple Google search gives access to photographs showing his dead children and wife in pools of blood.<sup>401</sup>

Trophy images are images taken and distributed by the parties of the killers. These images are void of heroism, rather, the deceased is depicted as a defeated enemy, whose death should be celebrated and displayed. As discussed above, such pictures were often captured not by the parties themselves but by photojournalists who, by distributing them, become accomplices to the winning party. This is because photojournalists were usually the first to be taken to scenes of death and destruction by the militias that won the battle. This also happens in Baghdad's *Hors La Vie* (1991). In the movie's opening scene, a photojournalist is urged to take a picture of a lifeless hanged body, which he does, although he is disgusted by doing so and destroys the camera roll afterwards.<sup>402</sup> To destroy the picture, and therefore to lose it, is a strategy employed to avoid becoming a militia accomplice.

The lost image is also addressed in *Nancy* in relation to another incident, which happened in 2003. Rabih says:

I joined the South Lebanon Army under the command of General Antoine Lahad, where they assigned me to the National Guard. I stayed there for eight years, moving back and forth between Hasbaya and Marjeyoun... Until they transferred me to the Sujd base, where I was killed in a Hizbullah offensive on August 12, 1998... Five years later, I watched this operation on a Hizbullah video that I came across by chance while browsing through the Arab Book Fair in Beirut. I watched the tape because I wanted to see how I was killed. But, alas, I wasn't on the tape. I was really stung by this—it hurt my feelings. (32)

This passage, in which Rabih tells the audience that his death was not captured on video, is accompanied by a martyr poster (Fig. 3.15) that was issued by the SLA. Apparently, two images of Rabih's death exist: the poster celebrating him as a martyr and the video shot by his enemy, Hezbollah. This links with the fact that since 1986, the group has often videotaped and disseminated their operations against the Israeli occupiers and the SLA. The camcorder or, today, the mobile phone acts

401 For the assassination of the Chamoun family, see Jaber, 'Leader of a Major Christian Clan'. I am not publishing the images of the dead Chamoun family here, as they would not make the understanding of my written words clearer and, indeed, would serve nothing else but a voyeuristic gaze.

402 Khatib, *Lebanese Cinema*, 118.

as an indexical and iconic 'moving witness' to prove that Hezbollah has conducted their operation and, at the same time, offers an outlook to the future, communicating that such things could happen again. These videos establish Hezbollah's truth claim because the group controls the imagery of their operations by filming and distributing the images themselves.<sup>403</sup>

In the case of *Nancy*, the video of the operation appeared years later at the Arab Book Fair, but without displaying the death of Rabih. From the perspective of Hezbollah, if he had been in the video, it would have acted as a counter-image to the poster showing him as a martyr, as it would have recorded him dying and being defeated. However, for Rabih, the video would have been proof of his heroism and willingness to sacrifice himself for the cause of the SLA.

The same picture can be both a trophy image and a heroic image, depending on the intentions of the one who is reading it. The image itself is mute, it is given a voice only by those who interpret it. This is also the case for posters that show violent images and whose original purpose is to serve not as trophy images but as accusation images.

### The Violent Image as Accusation Image: A Call to Arms

Violent images are not always used as trophy images but can also be employed as accusation images. As Imogen Bloomfield writes, these images should

produce an unsustainable level of shock and reactive engagement in the [...] cause. Atrocity photography therefore became an important tool in [...] high-energy visual propaganda [...]: the need to address and affect individuals within a collective, and to elicit and capitalise on base sentiments against an enemy.<sup>404</sup>

Unlike the trophy image, the accusation image is not intended to serve as a declaration of victory or as a chilling example of what will happen to the enemy. Instead, by showing a dead member of one's own group, accusation images intend to elicit shock and, in doing so, aim to motivate their audience to fight the enemy, who is presented as responsible for the commission of the hideous acts depicted.<sup>405</sup>

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403 For a detailed analysis of the use of Hezbollah videos during operations, see Walid el Hourri and Dima Saber, 'Filming Resistance: A Hezbollah Strategy', *Radical History Review* 106 (2010). The practice of filming operations is not restricted to Hezbollah, as Amal, for example, has also recorded martyrdom operations; see Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 259.

404 Imogen Bloomfield, 'Photographs of Child Victims in Propaganda Posters of the Spanish Civil War', *Modern Languages Open* 16, no. 1 (2018): 6.

405 *Ibid.*, 6–9.

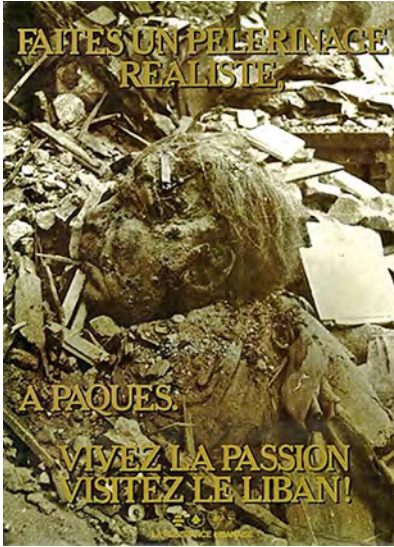


Fig. 4.34: Phalange, 'Go for a Realistic Pilgrimage at Easter. Experience the Passion, Visit Lebanon', 1978, Poster, 44 x 60 cm, WJA 7, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

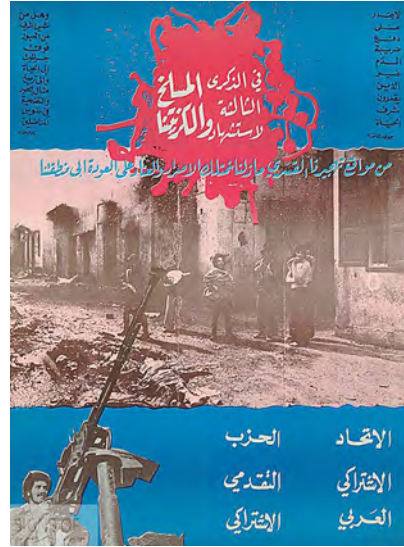


Fig. 4.35: Arab Socialist Union/PSP, 'The 3rd Annual Commemoration of the Fall of Maslakh and Karantina', 1979, Poster, 42 x 58 cm, ASH 12, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Accusation images as such do not appear in *Nancy*, but they should be mentioned here because they are a component of the discussion about the non-truth-claiming essence of photographs and the medium's need for contextualisation. The practice of showing violent images as accusation images was employed by several groups during the Wars. An early example is a Phalangist poster that was issued in 1978 (Fig. 4.34). Its colours are dominated by golden brown, and it shows a decapitated skull lying in rubble; according to Jabre, it is a Christian civilian. The accompanying text reads, 'Go for a Realistic Pilgrimage at Easter. Experience the Passion, Visit Lebanon', thereby cynically playing on tourism posters and the narrative of Easter.<sup>406</sup> As discussed in 4.1, parallels between the Passion of Jesus and the suffering of the Christians of Lebanon are repeatedly drawn, and without mentioning it directly in the poster, the Syrian Army—whose shelling, according to Jabre, caused the death—is accused of the killing.<sup>407</sup>

406 For tourism posters in Lebanon in the 1960s, see Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism*, 25–62.

407 Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 10–11. Maasri does not discuss the exposure of violence in the posters but she mentions posters issued by the PLO, which show dead civilians. In this context, she argues that these images should portray the Palestinian victims and expose and condemn the aggression of the enemy (*Off the Wall*, 76–79).



Fig. 4.36: Hezbollah, 'Who Will Respond to the Israeli Aggression on Behalf of the Children of the South??', 1993, Poster, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

One year later, the PSP and the Arab Socialist Union issued a poster that included an image that was taken during or after the massacres of Maslakh and Karantina (Fig. 4.35). These occurred in 1976, when the Phalange and their allies killed hundreds of unarmed, mostly Palestinian, civilians. The poster is divided into three horizontal bands: the upper band shows a blue background with a red form, apparently symbolising a pool of blood, in which white text reads: 'The 3rd Annual Commemoration of the Fall of Maslakh and Karantina'; the middle band includes a photograph of a charred dead female Palestinian body lying on the ground and, behind her, Phalange fighters celebrating her death and playing the Oud (a lute-typed instrument); and in the lower band, a fighter aims a tank's muzzle at one of the Phalangists, and this suggests that

the fighter belongs to the alliance of the PSP and the Arab Socialist Union.

The photograph in the middle panel, which depicts a fragment of the massacre, was shot by Don McCullin as part of his photojournalistic trip to Lebanon.<sup>408</sup> However, he did not take this image in order for it to be put on a poster; it became an accusation image only through recontextualisation. This example underlines the unstable meanings of photographs. Had this image been taken by a Phalangist and distributed by right-wing Christian media, it would have turned into a trophy image. However, because it appears on a poster that was issued by the Phalange's opponents, it acts as an accusation image.

Hezbollah also uses violent images as accusation images. It does so, for instance, in a poster that was issued in 1993 and commemorates the deaths of three children killed during Israeli shelling of the South (Fig. 4.36). Three colour photographs show the children while alive, with captions labelling them child martyrs and providing information about their names, ages, and places of residence. Below these photographs, two black-and-white images depict two of the children

408 Cottard Hachem and Salamé, 'Photographing War', 277 and 284–85; Michael Young, 'Conscience with a Camera', *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 9 January 2017, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/66375>.

post-mortem, lying on stretchers in either a morgue or hospital. Both photographs show the results of the bombardments, as the children's organs are oozing out and their clothes are blood-soaked. The background consists of a red, relatively amorphous form, probably symbolising a pool of blood. On the bottom of the poster, the Hezbollah logo is visible (in this case in black and white) and the date of issue is indicated. On the top, blue bombs branded with the Star of David as well as the US flag are depicted falling on the children. The slogan asks, 'Who Will Respond to the Israeli Aggression on Behalf of the Children of the South?'. The poster therefore leaves no room for interpretation as to who, in Hezbollah's opinion, is responsible for the suffering. Furthermore, its intentions are linked with an observation made by Bloomfield regarding the presentation of killed children as victims in posters issued by the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. Specifically, Bloomfield notes that the depiction of the dead bodies of children usually creates stronger emotions and greater shock than the display of the dead bodies of adults, because killing children is widely perceived as beyond any red line.<sup>409</sup>

All three Lebanese posters I have discussed were issued by the party with which the dead were affiliated. Two of these posters (*Figs. 4.35–4.36*), either include traces of those who were responsible for the dead, such as a flag or the Phalangists, or mention the accused party in the slogan. The Phalange poster (*Fig. 4.34*) relies solely on the skull, apparently anticipating that it is common knowledge who is to be held responsible.

Violent images are used to create emotion through the exposure of the horrific deeds that the enemy has caused. The purpose of these posters is not only to grieve the killed but also to encourage people to fight against the injustice depicted. These images are a call to arms.

The three posters show a dead woman (*Fig. 4.35*), dead children (*Fig. 4.36*), or, in the Phalangist narrative, a dead civilian (*Fig. 4.34*), but no dead or mutilated militia fighters. I suggest that depicting the humiliated strong male would be a sign of defeat, whereas showing graphic images of deceased women or children is an act that accuses those who committed the murder and functions to demonstrate that there is a need for protection from 'the other'. This corresponds to Khalili's statement about the Palestinian struggle, where suffering is often presented through the faces and bodies of women and children, while the heroic fighter is remembered as a defender via the strong male body.<sup>410</sup>

409 Bloomfield, 'Photographs of Child Victims', 6–9.

410 Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 37. Volk also made a similar observation (*Memorials and Martyrs*, 181).



Fig. 4.37: Hezbollah, 'The Fingerprints of Zionism's Barbarism Are on the Bodies of the Martyrs of Islam in Ansar Detention', Poster, 71 x 61 cm, 337-PCD2080-095, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.



Fig. 4.38: SSNP, 'Halba Massacre', 2008, Poster, 49 x 69 cm, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

Nonetheless, this is only a tendency and exceptions exist. Hezbollah, for example, issued a poster showing the photographs of four militiamen (Fig. 4.37), apparently dead and tortured, with one even blindfolded. Visible on the corners of the poster are ID images that show the martyrs, like the children in the Hezbollah poster (Fig. 4.36), while they are still alive. The text in the poster reads: 'The Fingerprints of Zionism's Barbarism Are on the Bodies of the Martyrs of Islam in Ansar Detention'. Like the image, the slogan is clearly intended to accuse those who, in the perception of Hezbollah, are responsible for the dead. In a similar vein, a poster issued by the SSNP in 2008 shows eleven party members who were killed when the Future Movement attacked the SSNP headquarters in Halba, a town in the North (Fig. 4.38).<sup>411</sup> While the ID photographs depict the men alive, the camera roll in the upper part of the poster contains gory scenes of corpses.

Photographs of dead women and children were used by various parties during the Wars as accusation images. These photographs showed the violence of the perceived enemy and sought to persuade their own followers to take up arms to prevent such atrocities happening in the future. In contrast, the militiamen, who should be in charge of stopping these killings, were only exceptionally shown in the posters as dead and defeated.

411 For the attack in Halba see Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 122.

### Indexicality, Iconicity, and the (Non-)Truth Claim of the Violent Image

The same violent image can be used as a trophy image or as an accusation image. If the trophy image of Rabih (*Fig. 3.14*), which apparently was published by the Geagea faction under the pretext of being a press image, had been distributed by the Hobeika faction, it would have turned into an accusation image—one showing the atrocities committed by the Geagea faction—and acted as a call to arms. To understand this, one must look outside the frame, because it is only via the text of *Nancy* that we learn that the taking of this image was part of a humiliation practice.

Wolf argues that images of violence and violent images are ‘unintelligible’ and cannot describe or interpret what is depicted. To do so, discursive elements need to be added, and the photograph needs to be contextualised, as ‘the actual referents’ are ‘in the discourses that influence the way they are read’.<sup>412</sup> Photographs are not looked at by everyone in the same way, and their meaning is not always evident or clear.<sup>413</sup>

This also applies to the images discussed in this subchapter. For the Phalange, the photographs of the Holiday Inn (*Figs. 4.32–4.33*) are images of horror and inhumanity executed by the Morabitoun and their allies. For the Morabitoun, these images celebrate the victory of the Battle of the Hotels. For Rabih, the lost image in Hezbollah’s video would have been not what Hezbollah intended it to be, a trophy image, but an image of his heroic martyrdom. The dead woman in front of the celebrating Phalange fighters (*Fig. 4.35*) could act as a trophy image for the Phalange, but by being exposed on a poster issued by the PSP and the Arab Socialist Union commemorating the massacre, it turns into an accusation image. What is primarily important is not the intention of the photographer, but the party who issued the poster and the elements—namely, text or symbols, such as bombs or the muzzle of the gun—that have been added to make it clear that these images should accuse.

In the eyes of the Israeli Army, the photographs on the poster depicting dead Hezbollah fighters (*Fig. 4.37*) are probably images of dead terrorists, whereas for Hezbollah, they are images of the injustice that the Israeli Army executes in Lebanon. The same is true for the dead children (*Fig. 4.36*), who, in the official Israeli discourse, would probably be labelled as unfortunate civilian casualties, although some Israelis might also see the deaths of potential future Hezbollah fighters and therefore have feelings beyond simple regret. Also, the Syrian Army probably had another take on the macabre image of the skull on the Phalange poster, one that differed from that of the Lebanese Christians (*Fig. 4.34*). From the perspective of the Syrian Army, the image would not be read as depicting a civilian; but they might see a Phalangist militiaman, whose killing was necessary.

412 Wolf, ‘Tears’, 83.

413 Jakob, ‘Beyond Abu Ghraib’, 91.

Without context, these images can be both trophy images and accusation images. These pictures just tell us that someone has died. The photograph, if a witness at all, is an uninformative witness. Via its indexicality and iconicity, it can give a fragmentary impression of what has happened, but it does not tell us why. Photographs themselves do not establish a truth claim on their own but need to be put into context.

#### 4.2.6 Uses and Abuses of Photography's Non-Truth Claim

In this part, I have first argued that, in itself, the photograph found in a martyr poster not only fails to establish a truth claim, but also is not even needed for doing so. Rather, the photograph acts as supporting evidence. The medium, due to its iconicity, shows the most lifelike version of the deceased possible, while its indexicality bears a trace of the referent. At the same time, truth claims are always constructed in photographs.

*Nancy* reflects the fact that photography was the primary medium employed for depicting the shahid in martyr posters of the *Wars*. However, by announcing living actors as martyrs, by the visual strategy of multiplied appropriations, and by re-using the same photograph for different deaths, *Nancy* makes us question the truth claim of the photograph of the shahid/a and reminds us that no photograph should be trusted as a proof of martyrdom. Truth can be fabricated.

By undoing the martyr's individuality, as in *Inhabitants* and *...A Faraway Souvenir*, and by inserting images into a false truth claim, as in *Nancy*, it becomes clear that the photograph's application to the poster exceeds the function of pure commemoration. The militias turned the faces of the martyrs into a currency, meaning they showed off—in competition with other parties—how much human capital they had paid for their cause. For the sectarian groups, it was important only that there was *a* face in the poster. It did not matter *whose* face it was.

Most images in *Nancy*'s posters, like those in posters of the *Wars*, are re-used ID photographs. By migrating the photograph from an identity card to a martyr poster, another truth claim—not the identification of a person but the announcement of a martyr—was created. After the death of an individual, without any change, a new image emerges from an existing image because the image now fulfils a new function. Through time, the purpose of the picture changes. Today, martyr posters from the *Wars* are often found as historical documents in archives and museums or are used in art projects, such as *Nancy*, instead of acting as visual politics on the walls.

The instability of indexicality and iconicity is also visible in violent images. The same photograph can act as both a trophy image and an accusation image, depending on who is publishing the picture with which intentions, as *Nancy* partly reflects

via a press clipping showing an atrocity. Photographs prove that the depicted scene or individual has existed in front of the camera, but they cannot produce a narrative on their own. To do so, they need a context in which they are made sense of—in other words, a context in which a truth claim is established. This also applies to photographs of martyrs. They do not tell anything without being placed in the context of the poster, but they are a necessary element of the poster because the photograph is the locus of emotion. However, there is the exception of celebrity martyrs, well-known dead people whose images create truth claims by themselves. I will discuss these pictures in the next part, where we will see that *Nancy* reflects the fact that not all deaths are remembered equally.

### 4.3 Constructed Nuances of Visual Memory: Hierarchies of Remembrance and the Oblivion of the Dead

There are nuances of remembrance among martyrs, and not all people who experienced a violent death are framed as shuhada. The existence of ranks among Lebanese martyrs has already been identified by Volk,<sup>414</sup> and has been further discussed by Bensen. The latter distinguishes between ‘civilian martyrs’, who she describes as ‘passive victims of the several wars and conflicts’, and ‘fighting martyrs’, a term she applies to ‘those who were actively engaged in fighting, dying in battle’. Both civilian and fighting martyrs are usually not well known, and I therefore call them ordinary martyrs. The third type of shuhada Bensen identifies is that of ‘leader martyrs’, who are ‘political leaders [who] have been assassinated’.<sup>415</sup>

We will see in this part that *Nancy* reflects on the different hierarchies in the visual memory of martyrdom in posters of the *Wars*, and I will further discuss how the play addresses deaths that sunk into oblivion and are not announced in posters, particularly the deaths of those who disappeared during the *Wars*, the so-called ‘missing’. They are the antithesis of the celebrity martyr, a term I use to designate very well-known martyrs, in particular the leader martyrs.

First, I will claim that the Blue Group (Figs. 3.44–3.46) and the Green Group (Figs. 3.21–3.23), which I have previously identified in 3.5, reveal that there are different hierarchical categories of martyrs and that not all deaths are remembered as martyrdoms. Then, I suggest that *Nancy* establishes a theoretical discourse on the construction of the martyr and the missing, and I will explore how these two figures are linked to each other visually and conceptually.

In the second part of this subchapter, I will delve into the construction of celebrity martyrs and focus on the examples of Bachir (Fig. 3.52) and Hariri (Fig. 3.53), who appear in *Nancy*. I will argue that the play reflects the fact that the images of

414 Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs*, 33.

415 Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 123.

celebrity martyrs are, regarding quantity and time, more present and lasting than those of ordinary martyrs. The reason for this difference is that each celebrity martyr embodies a dream of how Lebanon should be in the future. Finally, we will see that images of celebrity martyrs can often be linked to counter-images.

### 4.3.1 The Blue Group of Lina and the Green Group of Hatem as Reflections of the Hierarchy of Ordinary Martyrs

*Nancy* shows us that not all deaths are perceived as martyrdoms and that there are hierarchies of martyrs. First, I will discuss the images of the play that I have termed the Blue and Green Groups. Each group consists of three visuals, which, in my interpretation, link to each other. These images accompany three deaths of Lina and three deaths of Hatem, and they appear after each other on the screens above the two actors' heads. I will argue that two of these visuals, read in combination with the text, announce the deaths of both actors as martyrdoms from different points in the hierarchies (Figs. 3.21–3.22, 3.44, 3.46). Their deaths, accompanied by two monochromes (Figs. 3.23, 3.45), are not registered as martyrdoms. It seems that Lina's death is counted among the thousands of people who went missing during the Wars,<sup>416</sup> while Hatem's death goes unnoticed due to a lack of the necessary infrastructure for producing posters.

#### The Blue Group: Two Different Ranks of Martyrdoms Among Three Deaths

The first image of the Blue Group (Fig. 3.44) is a martyr poster of Lina; the second is a blue monochrome (Fig. 3.45); the third also depicts a blue monochrome, but in this instance it also includes the logo of the SSNP and Lina's head (Fig. 3.46). The first of these (Fig. 3.44) was issued after Lina's death in battle. She was increasingly harassed in West Beirut for being Christian, even by her own secular party. Consequently, Lina decided to take a stand:

So what more did they want me to do to prove to them that I was every bit a National? They wanted me to fight? Fine, fight I shall! In 1981, I ask the central command to transfer me to military duty. After some hesitation, the command grants me my request and dispatches me to the Ras el Nabeh frontline. I am killed right from the first clash. (20)

Despite being Christian, Lina had finally proved her commitment to the cause.

416 Until the present day, it is unclear how many people disappeared during the Wars. The indicated numbers range from three thousand to seventeen thousand. See Lina Comaty, *Post-Conflict-Transition in Lebanon: The Disappeared of the Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 27–30.

This death is accompanied by a martyr poster with all the elements of the ordinary format, such as the party logo, headshot, and slogan, which commemorate Lina's heroic death in combat. The poster is a direct appropriation of one issued by the SSNP for Nazem Ayyash (Fig. 3.59). One can assume he died in combat because the text in the poster mentions that he took part in resistance operations against the Israeli Army and other enemies.

The overall designs of the posters (Figs. 3.44, 3.59) are identical. They show a red background with a black square that encompasses the SSNP logo and an image of the martyr in half-profile. Additionally, text that is either black or white appears above the square and against the red background. This text provides the name of the martyr and further information on the death. The slogan declares Lina a 'Martyr Heroine', while Ayyash is labelled a hero.

The inclusion of a female face, however, echoes the commemoration of Sana Muhaidly (Fig. 3.77),<sup>417</sup> a member of the SSNP who drove a car with explosives into an Israeli Army post in 1985. She was allegedly the first Lebanese woman to conduct a martyrdom operation.<sup>418</sup> The martyrdoms of Ayyash and Muhaidly are directly linked to the cause of the SSNP and are celebrated by the party. On my reading, the choice to appropriate and fuse these two SSNP posters for the depiction of Lina as a shahida who died in combat is an indication not only that her death in *Nancy* happened for the SSNP but also that Lina, like Ayyash and Muhaidly, died while active against the enemy. It is an affirmation that Lina's death in this instance is unquestionably martyric.

This is not the case with the visual that directly follows on the screen above Lina (Fig. 3.45). It shows a rectangular blue surface, and Lina's accompanying speech describes a scene that took place in 1982, when she was crossing a checkpoint between West and East Beirut:

At the border between Tebbieh and Ras an Nabeh, my husband and I are kidnapped by the Palestinian Organisation for Jihad... They accuse us of being Israeli collaborators [...]. They tie up my tongue, blindfold us and take us away in a car. When we arrive at our destination they shoot us [...]. A little later, two men lift me up and toss me in the air. I land in water and drown. I learn afterwards that they have thrown my body into the sea—the Mediterranean Sea to be exact. (22)

Lina's words indicate that most of the abductions during the *Wars* happened at checkpoints. In most cases, the kidnapped were killed and buried in mass graves;

417 That the image of Sana Muhaidly was an underlying image for this poster of Lina was confirmed by Maakaroun, Zoom, 17 February 2021.

418 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 94; Bosen, *Martyr Cults*, 135–37; Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 99–102. Pape (*Dying to Win*, 38) wrongly affiliates her with the LCP.

others, like Lina, were thrown into the sea.<sup>419</sup> The rectangular blue monochrome seems to point on the one hand to the Mediterranean, into which Lina's body had been thrown, and on the other hand to the non-martyric oblivion of the dead of the missing, for whom no posters were issued, as I will discuss below.

Ironically, as a member of the secular SSNP, Lina was an ally of the Palestinians, who were looking for Christians to kidnap. Soha Bechara narrates a similar incident in her memoirs. In 1976, a cousin of hers was stopped at a checkpoint set up by a Palestinian group and asked for his papers, which labelled him as Christian. Although he was not with the Phalange but a soldier in the Lebanese Army who considered himself politically left and pro-Palestinian, he was executed on the spot.<sup>420</sup> Like Lina, his political convictions did not save him from being killed, as it seems the religion stated in her identity papers, based on which most people were chosen to be kidnapped, had more weight than her party affiliation.

Lina's story in *Nancy* continues after this death. Her body is removed from the water, she returns to life, and lives as a national, anti-sectarian Christian in West Beirut. Eventually, she dies again. This time she is killed by an ambush during her activities with the SSNP in 1984, as she tells the audience:

Then, on February 6, we organised an insurgency in West Beirut against the biased sectarian Army—by 'we' I mean the Nationalists, along with the Amal Movement, the Morabitun, the Progressive Socialists, the Communists, [...] and many others. Naturally, this insurgency was not altogether free from some minor transgressions. Yazbek's coffeehouse, for example, and the surrounding Mosbeiteh neighbourhood came under attack by Amal's militia... Whereupon I stepped in to resolve the matter amicably and help clear the air... However, I failed to follow up on the task, mostly because I was killed in an ambush they had set up especially for me. (23)

In this incident, Lina neither dies in combat while fighting nor does her body go missing, and her whereabouts do not remain unknown.

Lina's violent death, which was caused by her perceived allies, is remembered by the SSNP in a martyr poster, but it shows only two elements that are part of typical martyr imagery—namely, the SSNP logo and her headshot (Fig. 3.46). Other components frequently employed in these posters, such as a slogan and written biographical information about the shahida, are absent. I interpret the inclusion of only a few elements that can be usually found in martyr posters of the *Wars* as an

419 Erik van Ommering and Reem el Soussi, 'Space of Hope for Lebanon's Missing: Promoting Transitional Justice Through a Digital Memorial', *Conflict and Society* 3, no. 1 (2017): 173; Comaty, *Post-Conflict Transition*, 26. For kidnappings, see Michael Humphrey and Maroun Kisriwani, 'Impunity, Nationalism and Transnationalism: The Recovery of the 'Disappeared' of Lebanon', *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 3 (2001).

420 Bechara, *Resistance*, 50–51.

indication that Lina's death, despite being caused by a friendly militia, is still considered a martyrdom by the SSNP, albeit of a lower rank. Therefore, I would argue that the poster that accompanies Lina's death in combat (Fig. 3.44), by including all the typical elements of martyr posters and appropriating posters of SSNP martyrs that died either while fighting or in martyrdom operations, refers to a higher stage of martyrdom and points to a death that is more prestigious than the death commemorated by the poster in which those elements are removed. Although Lina was indeed part of a militia at the time of the latter death, she did not die in combat against the outspoken enemy but was ambushed because of an inter-ally dispute.

Returning to Bonsen's categorisation of martyrs into fighting and civilian martyrs, there is no doubt that Lina, in her first death, is a fighting martyr, but it is difficult to label her a civilian martyr in her third death: although she did not die in active combat, she was still a member of a militia. At the same time, it is not necessary to exactly apply Bonsen's categories. Instead, what Bonsen has shown, and what can also be seen in the reflection of Lina's deaths in *Nancy*, is that there are hierarchies in the deaths of ordinary martyrs.

I do not link the monochrome (Fig. 3.45) to any martyr poster of the *Wars*, as it is void of elements typically employed in these. Rather, in my reading, it indicates that this death of Lina is not interpreted as martyrdom by her party, a point I will return to below in my discussion of the differences between the missing and the martyrs. In the following, I will analyse the hierarchy of deaths in another example from *Nancy*, the Green Group, which visualises three deaths of Hatem.

### The Green Group: Two Different Ranks of Martyrdoms Among Three Deaths

Like the Blue Group, the Green Group of Hatem hierarchically distinguishes martyrs. The first picture of this group (Fig. 3.21) is a poster issued by the Morabitoun, which shows a green background with a black-outlined circle, in which there is a headshot of Hatem wearing sunglasses. A red slogan above describes him as a 'Martyr of Duty' (21). Below, the Morabitoun logo is depicted. The poster includes all the elements typical of martyr posters published during the *Wars*. Hatem died in combat for his militia, as he tells the audience:

As part of the Morabitoun, most of the battles we fought took place in Beirut, with the exception of one battle, which took place in the South—in Nabatieh to be exact. We headed out there as part of a unit of joint forces, to provide backup to the Palestinians in their battle against the Amal Movement. During the battle, a Palestinian mortar falls on our position by mistake. Well, shit happens. Friendly fire. So what? It is Wednesday April 14, 1982. I go home dead. (21)

Hatem narrates that he died as a militiaman of the Morabitoun while supporting the Palestinians in their battle in the South. Although he was accidentally killed by his allies, he is still remembered as a *shahid*.

The underlying images for this poster (Fig. 3.21) are two posters issued by the Arab Socialist Union, an ally of the Morabitoun (Figs. 3.65–3.66). The slogan ‘Martyr of Duty’, colours, typography, and composition are identical, but in *Nancy* the Morabitoun logo has been added. The text tells us that the martyrs of the Arab Socialist Union, Ahmad al-Hujairi and Said al-Bay, died on 30 May 1979. In the spring of this year, fighting took place in the South between the Israeli Army and the Palestinians, as well as their allies, such as the Nasserist parties.<sup>421</sup> Therefore, I assume that al-Hujairi and al-Bay died in combat just as Hatem did. The choice of a poster that remembers someone who died in combat as a martyr for the party seems to confirm the status of Hatem’s death as a fighting martyr.

In contrast to the Blue Group, the underlying images are not taken from the party for which the protagonist of *Nancy* died. I suggest that posters of the Arab Socialist Union were chosen because the posters on *signsofconflict.com*, which was the collection that the graphic designer Maakaroun used when designing the posters for *Nancy*,<sup>422</sup> do not include posters of the Morabitoun in the ordinary martyr format, but show martyrs with other elements and scenes, such as the Holiday Inn, Nasser, or anti-Israeli visuals. This, I would suggest, is the reason why the makers of *Nancy* resorted to posters of an ally of the Morabitoun.

The next poster (Fig. 3.22) that is shown on the screen above Hatem’s head is a replica of the previous one, but all elements except the green background and Hatem’s face in the circular form are removed. This image corresponds to a poster of Lina in the Blue Group (Fig. 3.46), which also shows a monochrome background with a circle of the face of the deceased and excludes other elements typically employed in martyr posters; however, in Lina’s image, unlike in Hatem’s, the party logo is still visible. The circumstances of Hatem’s death are a direct continuation of the killing by friendly fire, quoted above. The Palestinians organised a large funeral for him that impressed Hatem so much that he decided to stay with the Morabitoun only officially and to actually fight for Fatah. ‘With Fatah’, he says, ‘I fought in numerous battles and got killed frequently’ (21). I would argue that the use of martyr posters issued by a Morabitoun ally as underlying images could point to the fact that Hatem, in this case, died for Fatah. In other words, he died for a militia that was friendly with the Morabitoun, just like the Arab Socialist Union was. Because he died for a faction in which he was not enrolled, I read the visual presentation of his second death as indicative of a martyrdom that is of a lower rank than the martyrdom of his first death. The SSNP logo in the poster of Lina seems to refer to

421 O’Ballance, *Civil War*, 89–90.

422 Maakaroun, Zoom, 17 February 2021.

the fact that she died as an active and committed member of her party, whereas the absence of the Morabitoun logo in Hatem's poster might hint at his abandonment of his militia at the time of his death.

The third visual of the Green Group (Fig. 3.23) shows a green monochrome, which seems to correspond to Lina's blue monochrome, not least because these two visuals appear simultaneously on the screens above the two actors' heads. This last Green Group image accompanies an unusual death. Hatem, still a member of the Morabitoun and fighting for Fatah, decides to leave with the Palestinians for Tunis in 1982, when the PLO was evacuated from Beirut, and is again accidentally killed by Palestinian fire:

We boarded the boats with the Kalashnikovs ululating and the bullets singing in the air... All of Beirut came to bid farewell to her heroes. There I was, on deck, holding back my tears. Suddenly, I feel something warm on my neck: A stray bullet. Once in Tunis, they transfer me to [sic] hospital where, affected by my bullet wounds, I die a week later. (22)

Hatem speaks of the PLO fighters boarding the ships and of the farewell ceremonies, in which it is certain that not all of Beirut participated, as anti-Palestinian groups such as the Phalangists supported the evacuation and had no interest in honouring their enemies. Nonetheless, the leftist forces that were allied with the Palestinians did indeed bid them farewell by shooting guns and live ammunition. This practice is frequently employed in Lebanon to this day for celebrations or political events, sometimes causing accidental deaths.<sup>423</sup>

As neither this book nor *Nancy* is searching for a historical truth, it is not of interest here whether one or more PLO fighters really died when boarding the ships in 1982. What is crucial is the question of why this death of Hatem is not presented as a martyrdom. When the PLO settled in Tunis, the group had to set up its infrastructure from scratch. According to Salti, none of the PLO poster designers left Beirut for Tunis.<sup>424</sup> This means, unlike Lina, who is not remembered as a martyr because her body was thrown into the sea and therefore her death could not be

423 There are reports that ninety people passed away because of such unintentional celebratory shootings in 2017. See Chloé Domat, 'I Feel Ecstatic When I Shoot': Lebanon's Problem with Gunfire Celebrations', *Middle East Eye*, 28 September 2017, <https://acquiaproduct.middleeasteye.net/news/i-feel-ecstatic-when-i-shoot-lebanons-problem-gunfire-celebrations>. Hearing and seeing gunfire is not uncommon in Lebanon, especially on weekends when weddings are held. Domat stresses that this practice is not peculiar to Lebanon but common in the region.

424 Rasha Salti, 'The Palestinian Poster: Popularizing National Landmarks and Symbols', in *Palestinian Journeys: Timeline*, ed. Institute for Palestinian Studies, n.d., <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/10528/palestinian-poster>. Between 1982 and 1987, the time of the first intifada, only a few posters were produced by the Palestinians.

ascertained, Hatem is not remembered as a martyr due to a reason based on practical grounds; there was no one with the skills to design a poster and therefore the narration of the death could not be transmitted via this medium. It is also possible that the Morabitoun, still in Beirut, might have been unaware of Hatem's death, consequently consigning it to oblivion.

The first image of the Green Group includes all the elements typically employed in martyr posters and appropriates posters of martyrs who died in combat. Therefore, Hatem's death in combat for the Morabitoun is presented—referencing Bosen's categories—as a fighting martyrdom. However, the second image, which accompanies a death that Bosen would also term a fighting martyrdom, lacks some elements of the first visual. At the same time, as mentioned above, it is my goal not to apply Bosen's categories exactly but to emphasise that ranks of ordinary martyrdom exist and that they are visualised in *Nancy* by the exclusion of certain visual elements. Of course, dying for one's own militia appears to be a higher stage of martyrdom than dying for a militia in which one is not enrolled. The monochrome (Fig. 3.23) points to the fact that infrastructure and personnel, such as graphic designers, need to be present in order to frame and disseminate a death as martyrdom. If image-makers are absent, the death goes unnoticed.

### Hierarchies in the Remembrance of Deaths in the Blue and Green Groups

Considering the posters in combination with the circumstances of Lina's and Hatem's deaths as they are narrated in the text accompanying the Blue and Green Groups, I suggest that *Nancy* reflects the hierarchies of the remembrance of deaths through its choice of underlying images as well as its inclusion and removal of elements that are typically found in martyr posters. Two visuals (Figs. 3.21, 3.44) embody the ordinary fighting martyr, who died in combat for his or her own militia and is visually remembered with all the typical components of martyr posters. Two other images (Figs. 3.22, 3.46) seem to hint at a lower rank of the ordinary martyr, which is emphasised by the absence of some elements that are usually found in martyr posters. For each actor, there is one death (Figs. 3.23, 3.45) that is not remembered as martyrdom by their parties. This is expressed because these deaths are accompanied not by martyr posters but by monochromes. There are reasons for this—namely, the non-ascertained death as well as its oblivion, which is due to the absence of makers of visual memory.

As the reason for Hatem's unnoticed death is peculiar to the PLO rather than pan-sectarian, I will not examine it further. Instead, I will now focus on Lina's death, which addresses the unfinished business of the missing in Lebanon, a topic that pertains to all sectarian groups. In particular, I will elaborate on the question of why the missing are not perceived as martyrs.

### 4.3.2 The Blue Screen as an Indicator That the Missing Are Not Perceived as Martyrs and the Unfinished Business of the Missing in Context

The thousands of people who went missing during the *Wars* are not remembered as martyrs. By analysing the blue monochrome that accompanies Lina's narration of her disappearance, I will demonstrate how, in my reading, *Nancy* establishes a theoretical discourse on the constructions of the martyr and the missing. Further, I will explore how these two figures are linked to each other and we will see that the missing are characterised by an ambiguous loss, whereas the faith of the martyrs is clear. The blue monochrome seems to refer to the fact that if Lina's body had been found, it is likely that the SSNP would have declared her as their martyr. Instead, as her whereabouts remained unknown to the party, at least for the duration of the blue screen's appearance, she was probably categorised as a disappeared person; thus, the empty monochrome surface could also hint at her status as missing, as its void literally figures absence.

Such a reading is emphasised when the blue monochrome is linked to *Secrets in the Open Sea* (1994/2004), an artwork by Walid Raad's project The Atlas Group. Each photographic print of the series shows a monochrome in different shades of blue (Fig. 4.39). A small black-and-white photo depicting a group of people is visible in the lower-right corner.<sup>425</sup> According to The Atlas Group, the blue prints were found under the rubble in Downtown Beirut in 1992, whereas the photographs were discovered only after the prints had been sent to laboratories in France for analysis, where they

recovered small black and white latent images from the blue prints. The small images represented group portraits of men and women. The Atlas Group was able to identify all the individuals represented in the small black and white images, and it turned out that they were all individuals who drowned, died or were found dead in the Mediterranean between 1975 and 1991.<sup>426</sup>

It is not relevant for our discussion that this story is fictional. What is important is that there are two images in *Secrets*—namely, the blue monochrome and the black-and-white photograph showing people whose bodies, like Lina's, were found in the Mediterranean during the *Wars*. Like Lina, they probably went missing but did not die as martyrs.<sup>427</sup>

425 Mroué said that he did not have a link to *Secrets* in mind but rather chose blue here because it is the colour of the sea. Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.

426 Walid Raad, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), 107.

427 For more artists dealing with the topic of the disappeared, see Tomb, *War/Identities*, 64–79; Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 93–130.



Fig. 4.39: Walid Raad/The Atlas Group, *Secrets in the Open Sea*, Plate 19, 1994/2004, Digital Print, 173 × 111 cm, © Walid Raad, Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

The theme of the missing, which is a central and unfinished chapter of the *Wars*, is also a uniting factor for all sects, as the practice of abducting and killing people was employed by all armed groups involved in the conflicts. Most people were kidnapped for an exchange of hostages, for financial reasons, or for revenge.<sup>428</sup> Unlike the deaths of the martyrs, it is in most cases not clear when or where the missing have died<sup>429</sup>—although it is likely that those who disappeared during the *Wars* are dead. Because the bodies of the missing have never been officially found, some relatives are still hoping for their return, while no one is waiting for the martyrs to physically come back.<sup>430</sup> The loss of the missing, as Walid Sadek writes, remains ‘unascertainable’.<sup>431</sup> Similarly, Erik van Ommering and Reem el Soussi speak of an ‘ambiguous loss’.<sup>432</sup>

428 Much has been written about the missing. The most comprehensive publication is Comtay, *Post-Conflict Transition*. For a recent article summarising the wider problem, see Karim Chehayeb, ‘The Archivists of Lebanon’s Amnesia’, *Newlines Magazine*, 25 June 2021, <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/the-archivists-of-lebanons-amnesia/>.

429 Comtay, *Post-Conflict Transition*, 4.

430 Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 94.

431 Walid Sadek, *The Ruin to Come: Essays from a Protracted Civil War* (Pulley: Motto Books, 2016), 115.

432 van Ommering and el-Soussi, ‘Space of Hope’, 174.



Fig. 4.40: Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, *Lasting Images*, 2003, Video Installation – Super 8 mm Film, Variable Dimensions, 3 min, Courtesy of the Artists.

The vagueness of the fate of the missing is explored in *Lasting Images* (2003; Fig. 4.40) by Hadjithomas/Joreige. In this work, the artists tried developing the last analogue film shot by Joreige's uncle, who disappeared during the Wars. The results are images in which only slight shadows and contours are visible. Like the images of the film, the whereabouts of the uncle and all the other disappeared remain unclear.<sup>433</sup>

Most of the remains of the kidnapped are believed to lie in mass graves. Only some of their bodies have been found.<sup>434</sup> In his movie *Erased, Ascent of the Invisible* (2018), Ghassan Halwani tackles the fact that the Lebanese Army 'found' bones of soldiers killed by the Syrian Army in a mass grave—not coincidentally—shortly after the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 and termed these soldiers martyrs.<sup>435</sup> This incident proves that the disappeared could be elevated to martyrs, but—it seems—only if their whereabouts are found. The Lebanese ruling class has no interest in revealing what has happened to the disappeared, as every militia in the Wars, and probably many of those individuals in power today, were involved in the kidnappings or at least had knowledge about them.

433 Tess Takahashi, 'Material Traces of Lebanon: A Documentary Aesthetics of Feeling in the Art Gallery', in *Post 1990 Documentary: Reconfiguring Independence*, eds. Camille Deprez and Judith Pernin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 196–97; Nour K. Sacranie, 'Alternative Remembrances: Memory, History and the Civil War in Contemporary Lebanese Art', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 9, no. 1 (2016): 12–13; Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 107–10.

434 Comaty, *Post-Conflict Transition*, 51–52.

435 For this incident, see also *ibid.*, 116.

In *Erased*, Halwani also addresses an inconclusive investigation undertaken by Lebanese officials in 2000. This resulted in a suggestion by an army general to stop looking for the missing and to instead build a memorial for them at the Beirut Waterfront District, where many bodies, like Lina's in *Nancy*, had been thrown into the sea. In the movie, the general also suggested labelling the disappeared as martyrs:

We proposed to the prime minister back then that we had better pay tribute to the families of the disappeared financially and morally, so we proposed to pay the wife or mother of each missing person the amount of 5 million Lebanese Pounds and to erect a memorial for them somewhere with a label that says something like 'Let's remember so we never repeat' or something including the line 'Martyrs of the civil war'. The goal was to close the case.<sup>436</sup>

The reason behind the idea to construct the disappeared as martyrs in this never-executed memorial was not to present them as a heroic examples that should be followed, but to silence the families of the missing by elevating their disappeared relatives to martyrs. The deaths of the missing, paradoxically, should be forgotten via being honoured. The construction of martyrs here would have served to artificially close unfinished business, without resolving questions of justice or culpability. Their deaths are supposed to be consigned to oblivion by naming them *shuhada*.

Until the present day, the fate of the missing is blurred and thus their remembrance is significantly different from the commemoration of martyrs. In my reading, this is also expressed in *Nancy* via the blue monochrome, which echoes The Atlas Group's *Secrets*. By showing the monochrome instead of a martyr poster, *Nancy* seems to imply that the missing are not perceived as martyrs. It also seems to hint at another fact: while the militias involved in the *Wars* published a visual memorial of their dead martyrs via posters, none has taken care to issue posters of their followers who disappeared during the *Wars*. Back then, the disappearances were announced with a photograph in newspapers only.<sup>437</sup> However, the missing continued to live on in images after the *Wars*, usually circulated by their families.

436 Ghassan Halwani, *Erased, Ascent of the Invisible*, Film, 2018. Humphrey and Kisriwan ('Impunity', 130) mention that Hariri also wanted to name the disappeared 'martyrs of Lebanon'.

437 I want to thank Marie-Claude Souaid, from UMAM, for finally clarifying that no posters of the missing had been issued during the *Wars*.

### The Missing and the Martyrs: An Afterlife in Images

Photographs of the missing existed in Beirut's urban space after the *Wars* had officially ended, but they were normally not present in posters in the streets. Rather, the disappeared were visually remembered by their families, who formed NGOs, such as *ACT for the Disappeared* and the *Committee of the Families of Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon*. These NGOs focus on finding justice for the missing and establishing what happened to them, a notion that is questioned by Sadek. He argues that the haunting presence of the missing preoccupies their living relatives and absorbs all their attention. Instead of waiting for the return of the disappeared, Sadek suggests performing what he calls the 'labour of missing', which encompasses talking with the absent disappeared in silence.<sup>438</sup> In other words, the relatives should start a dialogue with the missing by talking to them but without expecting an answer, as 'one must learn to converse with silence rather than in silence'.<sup>439</sup> In doing so, the loss could be recognised, and it might be accepted that the person will not return and that their whereabouts will remain unclear.<sup>440</sup> Sadek does not propose that relatives should forget the missing, but instead aims to turn their present absence into something that is more productive than waiting for their return or calling for justice, which is 'terribly rare and painfully unlikely in post Ta'if Lebanon'.<sup>441</sup>



Fig. 4.41: Lebanese Women Hold the Images of Missing Relatives at a Rally in Beirut in front of the National Museum, 2012, Courtesy ANWAR AMRO/AFP via Getty Images.

438 Sadek, *Ruin*, 115–30.

439 *Ibid.*, 126.

440 *Ibid.*, 129.

441 Walid Sadek, 'A Surfeit of Victims: Time After Time', *Contemporary Levant* 4, no. 2 (2019): 158.



Fig. 4.42: Tent with Images of the Missing, 2015, Beirut – Downtown, Photograph Oriol Gallart, Courtesy of Middle East Eye.



Fig. 4.43: Tent Without Images of the Missing, Beirut – Downtown, September 2021, Photograph AR.



Fig. 4.44: Tent with Images of the Missing, Beirut – Downtown, October 2023, Photograph AR.

However, both NGOs seem not to care too much about Sadek's proposal and hold regular commemorative events for the missing until the present day, at which relatives frequently hold photographic headshots of their loved ones in their hands (Fig. 4.41).

These images, which sometimes also include biographical information, such as the name of the disappeared, are not lasting, as they leave the street when the relative does. Additionally, in 2005, the *Committee of the Families* set up a tent in Downtown Beirut and hosted a permanent sit-in to not forget the missing, whose images were put up on the outside of the tent (Fig. 4.42).<sup>442</sup> At the time of my research in September 2021, the tent was still standing but had been abandoned (Fig. 4.43), with only remnants of adhesive tape and imprints of the photographs remaining. The missing had disappeared a second time, first as people, now as pictures. Two years later, however, I encountered a few images of the disappeared there, although they did not include personal information about the depicted (Fig. 4.44). Even when the tent was still a place of congregation and commemoration, the

442 Comaty, *Post-Conflict Transition*, 77–78.



Fig. 4.45: Missing Exhibition, Poster, UNESCO Palace, Beirut, April 2008, © Monika Borgmann.

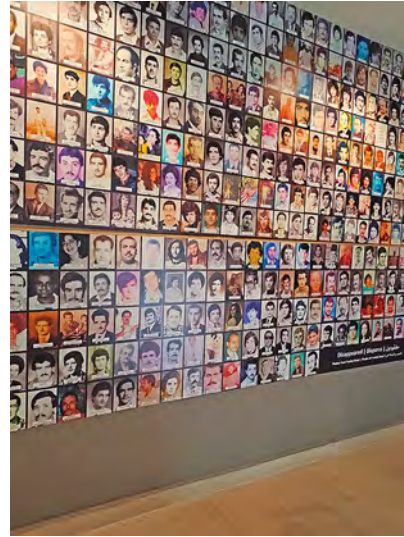


Fig. 4.46: Wall of the Missing, Musée de l'Indépendance, Jounieh, April 2021, Photograph AR.

images of the kidnapped appeared in one specific place in town, and they were not scattered around one sectarian area, as the martyrs were. In other words, the faces on the tent need to be visited, while the martyrs in the posters visit the inhabitants of Beirut.

In 2008, however, the faces of the disappeared did enter the streets in posters. This occurred in the context of advertising for the exhibition *Missing*, which was organised by UMAM. The ID images in frontal view (Fig. 4.45) lacked—in contrast to their presentation inside the exhibition space—any biographical information, such as the person's name or the year when they were last seen, and through the large number of faces, the depicted seem to disappear within the poster.<sup>443</sup>

Additionally, images of the missing are presented in the Kataeb-run Musée de l'Indépendance, which, as mentioned in 2.2, presents the Kataeb's narrative of history. Oddly, this sectarian version of the past is interrupted by a large wall showing photos of people who disappeared during the *Wars* (Fig. 4.46).

443 van Ommering and el Soussi, 'Space of Hope', 177; Comaty, *Post-Conflict Transition*, 141; Elias, *Post-humorous Images*, 99. See also Norman Saadi Nikro, 'Memory Within and Without the Photographic Frame: Wadad Halwani's *The Last Picture... While Crossing*', *Memory Studies* 12, no. 3 (June 2019): 286–87.



Fig. 4.47: Ghassan Halwani, *Untitled*, 2013, Digging the Wall Searching for a Six-Year-Old Poster, Intervening with a Pencil, 12 cm high, Gemmayzeh, Beirut, June 2020, Photograph AR.

The headshots are the same types of images, and in parts are even identical to, those used by the families and by UMAM. They are, like those inside the UMAM exhibition, accompanied by the missing people's names and ages, along with the dates of disappearance, but as with the poster for this exhibition, individuals disappear in a sea of faces. Although displayed in a museum and not in the street, this presentation is a remarkable exception to the sectarian visual oblivion of the missing. What is even more noteworthy is that the Kataeb shows not only Christian names but also numerous Muslim names, such as Ali, Hossein, or Mohammad.

On the wall of the missing, the museum ruptures its sectarian version of history and seemingly perceives the unfinished business of the disappeared as a pan-sectarian issue that needs to be addressed.

The photographs used to represent the missing are, as in the case of the martyrs, ID photographs that migrated to another function.<sup>444</sup> Therefore, it is not the iconography that distinguishes the images of the missing from images of the ordinary martyrs, but the party logo and other symbols that are added to the depiction of the martyrs and are absent in the images of the missing. The similarities in the visual representation of the missing and the martyrs seem to be so striking that Alam mistakes posters of the missing for posters of martyrs in his brief discussion of an untitled wall painting by Halwani, which was created in 2013, is featured in *Erased*, and remains in Gemmayzeh to this day (Fig. 4.47).<sup>445</sup> Five years after the abovementioned UMAM exhibition, the artist dug out the posters of this show, which, in a metaphorical analogy to the disappeared buried in mass graves, were

444 Ibid., 286.

445 Johnny Alam, 'Undead Martyrs', 584. For a discussion of this work, see also Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 102–05.

then buried under a layer of posters on a wall. Halwani was further interested in how a missing person is represented and how he could represent these invisible persons.<sup>446</sup> When finding the remnants of a face, Halwani added black letters with the person's name and birthdate, along with the date and place the missing person had last been seen, next to the individual photograph.<sup>447</sup> In doing so, he attempted to give individuality to the anonymous faces.

Halwani explained to me that he was shocked when he saw that the poster that was advertising the exhibition at UMAM also included an image of his father, who also disappeared during the *Wars*. It was the first time he saw his father's image displayed streetside, and he had not been informed before that these images would appear on a wall in Beirut:

It was the first time for me to see the face of my father in public. The faces of the disappeared were always very well framed, held as individuals, by the caring hands of their mothers, sisters, brothers, or children. It was the first time I saw those faces amassed altogether inside a design configuration of a grid, with the complete disappearance of the gentle and caring hands of their beloved ones, deprived even of their names, or any detail of familiarity. This was very violent.<sup>448</sup>

Halwani's addition of names was intended as critique of UMAM's exhibition poster, where the missing were rendered nameless and lost in a sea of faces. Certainly, it is not UMAM who is erasing the missing from the public discourse, but the General Amnesty Law of 1991 and therefore the sectarian system.<sup>449</sup>

Being rendered nameless would never happen to an ordinary martyr on an individual poster, neither in the street nor in a museum. Also, most of the collective martyr posters include the names of the dead, as an example from the Communist Action Organisation and an example from Hezbollah prove (*Figs. 4.4, 4.17*). The distinction between the image of the missing and the image of the martyr is not made in the photograph itself, because in both cases, re-used ID photographs are transferred to another context. Images of the missing, in contrast to posters of martyrs, lack symbolism, party branding, the commemorative slogan, and, in many cases, biographical information. While the photos of the missing should raise aware-

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446 Ghassan Halwani, personal conversation with the author, 25 May 2020. Tomb, *War/Identities*, 70 claims that Halwani dug out posters of the missing that the families had put on the walls. Actually, he excavated posters of the UMAM exhibition. I have not heard of any case where families have put up photos of the missing on a wall in Beirut, except for the tent of the *Committee of the Families of the Disappeared* of course.

447 In some cases, he also drew a body for the face; see *ibid.*, 70.

448 E-Mail, Halwani, July 5, 2024.

449 *Ibid.* The artist said it was not his intention to reflect upon the relationship between the martyrs and the missing (Halwani, personal conversation, 25 May 2020).

ness of their unfinished business, the images of the martyrs act in the framework of visual politics, for instance, by announcing territorial claims and serving as a means of recruitment for the militia, as I have elaborated in Chapter 2.

The martyrs are presented in posters on the streets in their sectarian topography and are sponsored by sectarian groups. The images of the missing, on the other hand, are confined either to exhibition spaces, such as UMAM and the remarkable pan-sectarian remembrance of the Musée de l'Indépendance, or to a tent that they leave only sometimes, when carried by relatives. An exception was the poster for the UMAM exhibition, when the posters of the missing found their way onto the walls but were without names or other biographical information. This de-individualisation was critically reflected by Halwani when he tried to return their personalities, which they, in his understanding, had been deprived of. Today, except for Halwani's excavated poster and occasional appearances of headshots of the disappeared on the tent in Downtown Beirut, images of the missing are absent from Beirut's outdoor walls.

### Missing vs. Martyrs: The Same Visual Style and Constructed Remembrance

The missing as well as the martyrs died under violent circumstances. What determines their constructed state of being is the way they are remembered, which also applies to their images. It seems that by using the blue monochrome instead of a martyr poster, *Nancy* points to the almost invisible state of the missing on Beirut's streets today. Had the bodies of the missing been found or their deaths been undoubtedly confirmed, they would have been elevated to the rank of martyrdom, and consequently, their headshots would appear on posters in the streets, and not just as a one-time exhibition advertisement. At the same time, this means that had the bodies of the martyrs disappeared, their faces would have never found their way onto the walls but would have only been published in newspapers and occasionally visible on the walls of the tent in Downtown Beirut.

Moreover, their deaths would have remained unascertained, and the loss would have remained ambiguous. While the missing are still dying an ongoing death without closure, in other words, a death that is not even acknowledged as such, a martyric death is a definitive closure that is intentionally held open. This particularly applies to celebrity martyrs, who are the antithesis of the missing.

### 4.3.3 Bigger Than Death:<sup>450</sup> The Celebrity Martyrs in *Nancy*

Every sectarian group has one or more leader martyrs, usually someone who held a high-ranking position in his party and is unlike the ordinary martyrs well known in Lebanon.<sup>451</sup> Among these celebrity martyrs, as I call them, the deaths of Bachir and Hariri, who appear in *Nancy* (Figs. 3.52–3.53), especially had severe consequences for the country.

We will see in the following that pictures of celebrity martyrs differ from those of ordinary martyrs because their posters are able to do without additional identifying information, as it is common knowledge in Lebanon who they are and how they died. Moreover, posters of celebrity martyrs can invoke collective para-social grief and are a symptom of the inability of celebrity martyrs to die fully. Bachir and Hariri are held alive in images since both men carry a dream of what Lebanon should be in the future. Finally, I will claim that their images provoke counter-images that depict faces that carry dreams opposed to theirs.

The posters of Bachir and Hariri that are used in the play were actually distributed on the walls. However, in the case of the celebrity martyr, these particular images act as placeholders for any of the multitude of posters showing Bachir and Hariri. This is why I will also include other pictures of these two figures in the following discussion.

#### Bachir and Hariri in *Nancy*: A-Grade Celebrity Martyrs

The posters of Bachir and Hariri appear, unlike all other visuals in *Nancy*, not only on one screen but on all four screens simultaneously and are images that were appropriated as found. Bachir is depicted with an earnest expression, looking upwards (Fig. 3.52). Hariri, on the other hand, is shown from his shoulders up, smiling into the camera in front of a Lebanese flag (Fig. 3.53).

When Bachir dies, Rabih, a member of the LF at the time of Bachir's death, says:

On September 14, 1982 they killed Bachir Gemayel. They killed the dream within us... They practically killed us. I felt, that was it: It was all over. The dream was over. I felt my blood dry up. I was ready to do anything, anything to quell my rage. And it wasn't just me—we all felt the same. (23)

450 I have taken this expression from an artwork by Sadek titled *Bigger Than Picasso* (1999).

451 For a list of leader martyrs, see Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 97–98.



Fig. 4.48: Kataeb (Photographer Varoujan), Bachir, 1982, Poster, 65 x 95 cm, KBA 1, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Rabil's speech corresponds to what many of Bachir's followers at the time of his death felt, namely the start of the end of the dream of a Christian-dominated Lebanon.

Bachir's image as a political and military leader had already been circulating during his lifetime. An example is a photograph, distributed at the end of the 1970s, that shows him in military gear with crossed arms and thus emphasises his muscularity (Fig. 3.58). Another example, discussed by Maasri, is a poster of Bachir's election victory on 23 August 1982, which depicts him sitting on the shoulders of his followers while celebrating his triumph. This very poster turned from an image of joy into an image of grief when Bachir was killed on 14 September in the same year (Fig. 4.48).<sup>452</sup> Analogous to the ID imag-

es discussed in 4.2, this photograph transformed itself into something else, without actually changing, after the death of the referent.

After Bachir's death, the distribution of his images flourished, and they contributed to his framing as the main martyr of the Lebanese Christians, as elaborated in 4.1. He was remembered, according to Maasri, as 'the heroic figure and role model' that the Phalange 'relied on to lend its struggle credibility and continuity'.<sup>453</sup>

As in the case of Bachir, images from within Hariri's lifetime were turned into posters of a martyr after his death.<sup>454</sup> Hariri was usually depicted in formal dress, most often a business suit and tie, freshly shaven with perfectly done hair, often in front of the Lebanese flag.<sup>455</sup> This is also the case in *Nancy*, where his images accom-

452 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 62.

453 *Ibid.*, 57.

454 As Knudsen mentions, the slogan 'The Truth' (al-haqiqa) was often added to the post-mortem image ('Death of a Statesman', 2). Today one mostly encounters a simple headshot of Hariri. For the cult of Hariri, see Vloeberghs, *Architecture, Power and Religion*, 304–17; Khatib, *Image Politics*, 15–29.

455 Souad Al Merheb, 'A Leadership Inheritance: Representing the Father-Son After the Assassination of the Father-Leader', *signsofconflict.com* (2012), [http://www.signsofconflict.com/Publications/essay\\_details?id=14](http://www.signsofconflict.com/Publications/essay_details?id=14).

pany a speech by Hatem, who at the time of Hariri's death was a seller of Arabic sweets but still felt connected to the Sunni cause. Hatem says:

February 14, 2005... They killed Rafik al Hariri... They killed the dream within us... They practically killed us. I felt, that was it: It was all over. The dream was over. I felt my blood dry up. I was ready to do anything, anything to quell my rage. And it wasn't just me—we all felt the same. (33)

Hatem's words are exactly the same as Rabih's when Bachir died; only the date and the name have changed. This seems to point to the fact that every party has its own celebrity martyr who is venerated in similar ways. The reference to his blood drying up hints at the strong emotions the deaths of these leader martyrs caused among their followers. Both Rabih and Hatem feel as if they are part of a collective, which, due to the killing of the leader, has the impression its dream is over.

The sameness of the two actors' speeches, and the sameness of the way the images of Hariri and Bachir are appropriated as found on all four screens simultaneously, point to the fact that not all martyrs are equal; the deaths of celebrity martyrs are considered more important than those of ordinary martyrs. The pictures of Bachir and Hariri do not need any additional information, such as a caption or symbols.<sup>456</sup> They establish a truth claim through their iconic and indexical images because everybody knows what they stand for, and thereby their images become connoted symbols themselves.

Appropriating a poster of a glorified person such as Bachir or Hariri without turning that picture into an homage to the referent is tricky, but it works in *Nancy* first and foremost because the repeated text explicates that there is no intended veneration of Bachir or Hariri. This becomes clear when looking at Alfred Tarazi's work *Beirut Zoo* (2020; Fig. 4.49), which consists of a box that has the shape of an ancient Phoenician theatre and contains images that can be moved when handles are turned. The pictures in the left and right panels refer to the history of the Phalange and the history of Israel, respectively, and the middle panel depicts scenes of the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982, including a collage that includes images of animals, corpses, buildings, and Bachir. Tarazi wanted to critically reflect on how history is constructed, and he aimed to visualise the absurdity of Bachir's plan to turn parts of the Palestinian Sabra and Shatila camps into a zoo.

When I look at *Beirut Zoo*, I see a certain veneration of Bachir. This is especially because he is embedded in a shape that is clearly Phoenician and therefore points to the origins of Lebanon in the historical understanding of right-wing Christians, and because Palestinian, Muslim, or leftist narratives of history are absent. Still, I

456 Al Merheb, 'Leadership Inheritance'.



Fig. 4.49: Alfred Tarazi, *Beirut Zoo*, 2020, Turning Box (Print on Canvas, Wood, Stainless Steel), 120 x 80 x 20 cm, Courtesy of the Artist.

am convinced Tarazi had not the slightest intention to create a shrine for Bachir.<sup>457</sup> Rather, it seems to me that this case is an example of what Graw has claimed regarding the power of the appropriated picture. According to her, images have the agency to strike back and therefore to undermine the intentions of the one who has appropriated them.<sup>458</sup>

Of course, there are celebrity martyrs from other warring factions who have been memorialised in posters, but the images of Bachir and Hariri were more significant. This reflects what Fadi Toufiq told me:

The deaths of Hariri and Bachir mark a point of the before and after, and things have changed for us. It was kind of a calendar, like marking the point. [...] This is the way we count the days, before Bachir Gemayel was assassinated or after.<sup>459</sup>

Mroué also confirmed this by saying something similar when I asked him why the death of Kamal Jumblatt, the celebrity martyr of the PSP, is mentioned in the written text of *Nancy* but not accompanied by a visual.<sup>460</sup>

457 Alfred Tarazi, personal conversation with the author, 24 August 2022.

458 Graw, 'Dedication', 83.

459 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021.

460 Mroué and Toufiq, *Nancy*, 17.

The assassinations of Bachir Gemayel and Rafic Hariri were two major turning points in the history of modern Lebanon. In contrast, Kamal Jumblatt's assassination never became a turning point like the other two because his son and all the political parties accepted it for political reasons during a 'sensitive political period'. This acceptance allowed his son, Walid Jumblatt, to take over the party (PSP) and his father's role, and they shut the case down immediately. Gemayel's assassination had significant consequences, including the Sabra and Shatila massacre, the invasion and occupation of Beirut by the Israeli Army, and his brother Amin Gemayel becoming the president of the Republic. The Lebanese Forces also split into two factions, one under Samir Geagea and the other under Elie Hobeika. Jumblatt's assassination, like many others in the country, was shut down by the state and political parties due to various reasons and circumstances. Hariri's assassination, however, was a significant issue in Lebanon. This is why I decided to mark these two moments—Gemayel's and Hariri's—in the play.<sup>461</sup>

According to Toufiq and Mroué, compared to the deaths of other well-known martyrs, the deaths of Bachir and Hariri caused severe consequences for Lebanon.

In short, I would argue that *Nancy*, through the incorporation of the images of Bachir and Hariri—without turning them into a possible tribute—, distinguishes the deaths of celebrity martyrs in terms of their importance. Like celebrities, martyrs can be categorised in terms of A-grade and B-grade. Bachir and Hariri would of course be A-grade celebrity martyrs, while other dead people, such as Kamal Jumblatt, would be B-grade celebrity martyrs. Although Jumblatt was a leader martyr, his death did not have as enormous an impact on Lebanon's history as did the deaths of Bachir and Hariri.

### The Afterlives of Celebrity Martyrs and the Image of the Celebrity Martyr as a Locus of Collective Para-Social Grief

Celebrity martyrs live on in pictures after their deaths and their images have the ability to invoke para-social grief among followers. Regarding A-grade celebrity martyrs, this applies more to Bachir than to Hariri, probably because it is easier to market the image of a thirty-four-year-old man as a celebrity than that of a man in his early sixties. This is why, in the following discussion, I will primarily focus on Bachir and his portrayal, which, as I claim, is similar to those of celebrities.<sup>462</sup>

461 Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.

462 Also, Straub (*Das Selbstmordattentat*, 68) mentions that a poster of Palestinian martyrs reminds her of pop-aesthetics—in particular of the Beatles—but she does not delve further into this thought.

The field of celebrity studies commonly defines a celebrity as follows:

A 'celebrity' is a person in the public eye who, for better or worse, has earned fame or infamy, or found renown or scandal, as a consequence of some act or supposed quality, and is celebrated as a result. Today, the word is often associated with people in the entertainment business. Linked closely to fame, and dependent on the media for both public circulation and image evolution, 'celebrity' is a word with a long history and extraordinary cultural significance.<sup>463</sup>

This means that celebrities are well known and are venerated for certain deeds they have performed. At the same time, they need to rely on the media, which distributes their images.

A personality cult that resembles pop stardom also surrounded Bachir during his lifetime. Maasri noted this point when writing about Bachir's visual omnipresence during the *Wars*, explaining that 'posters occupied the streets, schools, universities and homes of Lebanon's Christian regions. Like a pop star, his posters equally adorned the rooms of infatuated adolescents and local neighbourhood shops'.<sup>464</sup> Bachir's hyper-visibility is also addressed in *Nancy*, when Lina talks about the results of Bachir's election as president.

On Monday, August 23, 1982, the Council of Ministers convenes in Fayadieh and elects Lebanese Forces chief Bachir Gemayel as President of the Republic. This causes deep divisions across the country. For Christians, it is as if they'd been bitten by the euphoric bug of victory... And like an epidemic, this euphoric contagion spreads until it reaches the Christians of Moseitbeh. In all naiveté, they start hailing the new president and putting his picture up on their balconies in the middle of West Beirut. I warned them. 'This is a provocation of your National and Muslim milieu—it's not cool' I said. I begged them to at least take down the picture of Bachir in Yazbek's coffeehouse, but no one listened. The whole affair caused considerable damage to us Christians of West Beirut. All eyes began to follow us, suspiciously. (23)

Lina tells us not only of the sectarian joy that had befallen the Christians after Bachir's election, which she compares to a virus, but also of how this very virus manifested itself in the image of Bachir that was distributed by the Christians in West Beirut. His poster invoked two different reactions: on the one hand, the Christians admired the picture; on the other hand, it raised anger and suspicion

463 Matthew Pratt Guterl, 'Celebrity', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*, ed. Peter N. Stearns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195176322.001.0001/acref-9780195176322-e-265?rskey=AVVxuF&result=266>.

464 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 63.



Fig. 4.50: Benoit Cysemergh, Bachir, 1978, Photograph, Courtesy of Paris Match via Getty Images.

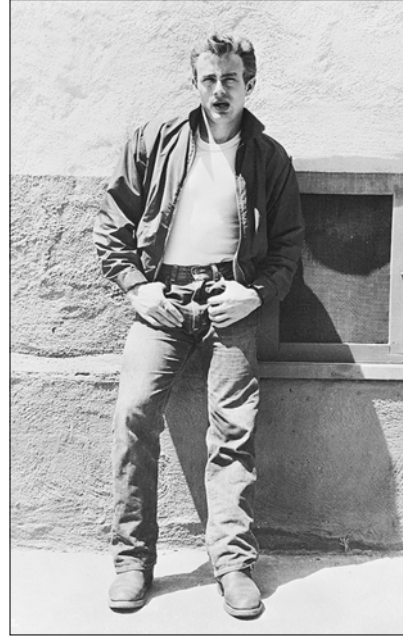


Fig. 4.51: James Dean Stands on a Wall in a Scene from the Film *Rebel Without a Cause*, 1955, Courtesy of John Kobal Foundation/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

among rival groups. At the same time, Lina speaks of Bachir's image as being like that of a pop star: omnipresent. It even appeared in West Beirut, where his followers constituted the minority.

The pop star-like perception of Bachir and the ubiquity of his image are also addressed in the animated documentary movie *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) by the Israeli director Ari Folman. The film reflects the memories of Israeli soldiers who were involved in the massacre of Sabra and Shatila. One of the movie's scenes shows images of Bachir on the walls of Beirut, while the voice of one (now-former) Israeli soldier remembers the habits of his Phalangist allies, explaining that 'they always carried pictures of Bachir on them. Bachir pendants, Bachir watches... To them, the man was what David Bowie was to me. A star, an idol, a mega hunk, striking'. I read the Israeli soldier's reference to Bowie as not strictly visual because the androgynous, eccentric, queer imagery of Bowie does not correspond to those images of Bachir that stage him as a military leader.<sup>465</sup> Rather, mentioning Bowie appears

465 For a discussion of the imagery of Bowie, see Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 134–35.

to be a broad hint at the concept of celebrity imagery, with some images of Bachir showing a similar aesthetic. For example, there is a photograph depicting Bachir standing alone in front of a building with a melancholic expression on his face (Fig. 4.50). This picture resembles a famous photo of James Dean taken in 1955 on the set of *Rebel Without a Cause* (Fig. 4.51). Both black-and-white photographs show a solitary man standing against a wall and not directly looking into the camera, but dreamily gazing outside the frame. Dean's hands are posed to focus attention on his waist and his shirt is tucked into his trousers, so that, as in the case of Bachir, the upper part of his body is accentuated. I do not claim that this photo of Dean actually served as the underlying image for Bachir's photograph, but I want to suggest with this example that the visual language of stardom found its way into the iconography of Bachir.<sup>466</sup>

Even after their deaths, celebrity martyrs stay alive. Ruth Penfold-Mounce observed regarding the passing of celebrities: 'Death is far from the end of celebrity figures. Instead it is a new realm [...]. The body may be gone, but their image and legacy thrive'.<sup>467</sup> And Kasey Clawson Hudak even argues that deceased celebrities can stay alive only when their images keep on circulating, as otherwise 'their fame would die along with their bodies'.<sup>468</sup>

Bachir's afterlife in images is addressed in Ziad Doueiri's movie *The Insult* (2017), which narrates the story of a minor dispute between Tony, a right-wing Christian mechanic, and Yasser, a Palestinian construction worker in today's Beirut, which leads to a lawsuit. Tony's workshop is full of posters of Bachir. While working, Tony and his colleagues often watch videos of Bachir's speeches, which become the background noise of the workshop. Tony knows Bachir's words by heart; he can even utter them in unison with his idol on the screen. Although Bachir is physically dead, his still and moving images are still part of the life of an ordinary Christian Beirut citizen in 2017.<sup>469</sup>

Like the photograph of Dean, the images of Bachir in *Nancy*, *Beirut Zoo*, *Waltz with Bashir*, and *The Insult* do not need any caption or explanation of who is depicted, because, as with celebrities—for example, Julio Iglesias, who smiles from behind the Holiday Inn in a poster in *Nancy* (Fig. 3.9)—everyone knows who is depicted. The accompanying text of Figure 3.9 runs as follows:

466 James Dean is not generally perceived as fulfilling the normative stereotypes of masculinity in the 1950s; see Will Scheibel, 'Rebel Masculinities of Star/Director/Text: James Dean, Nicholas Ray, and Rebel Without a Cause', *Journal of Gender Studies* 25, no. 2 (2016).

467 Ruth Penfold-Mounce, 'Celebrity Deaths and the Thanatological Imagination', in *Death in Contemporary Popular Culture*, eds. Adriana Teodorescu and Michael Hvidd Jacobsen (London: Routledge, 2020), 52.

468 Kasey Clawson Hudak, 'A Phantasmic Experience: Narrative Connection of Dead Celebrities in Advertisements', *Culture, Theory and Critique* 55, no. 3 (2014): 389.

469 For a review of the movie, see Max Weiss, 'Ziad Doueiri's *The Insult* and the Returns of the Lebanese Civil War', *Middle East Report* 286 (2018).

**Rabih:** [...] in the summer of '77 when the war in Lebanon had come to an end, I had the wonderful opportunity to meet Aznavour and my darling Dalida, and also Julio Iglegus—

**Lina:** Julio Iglesias...

**Rabih:** [...] and many other celebrities who came to sing for the resurrected Lebanon; the Lebanon rising from the ashes... Seeing as I was head supervisor of security for these festivities, everyone insisted on having their picture taken with me. Above all my friend Julio Iglegus—

**Lina:** Iglesias. (17)

Rabih tells us of 1977, when he was a militia fighter on a break and working as a security guard because the *Wars* were thought to be over. Julio Iglesias really played a concert in Jounieh. Also, Charles Aznavour and Dalida came for gigs in Lebanon this same year.<sup>470</sup> Fadi Toufiq told me:

During the civil war there was nightlife. International stars were coming to the country, making concerts; people were attending in between fighting, and the fighting people were having a life. [...] For some people, when you say 15 years of civil war, they will equate that with 15 years of bombing. It is not like this. [...] there are people who fight for a few months in certain areas and then come back to [non-fighting] life. We managed to have a life. [...] We had this summer; it was not official, but we had these 10 months of non-fighting, and in Lebanon, whenever you come back from war, you make parties.<sup>471</sup>

This coexistence of a cult of martyrs and a cult of pop stars, as well as of war and parties, is visualised in the poster that juxtaposes Rabih as a martyr with Julio Iglesias.

Moreover, Rabih here reverses the culture of stardom, which includes taking a picture with the celebrity, by ironically turning himself as the head of security/a martyr into the object of desire with which everyone wants to be photographed. Rabih's inability to pronounce Iglesias's name and Lina's corrections seem to point to the fact that Rabih does not really know who his friends—as he terms them—are. What is important to him is that they are well known. In other words, their status as celebrities is the reason he mentions them. This results in the photo of Rabih and Iglesias together as visible in the poster in *Figure 3.9*. The picture of Iglesias above the Holiday Inn is not extraordinary in terms of aesthetics; as Richard Howells points out, photos of celebrities are valued not for their aesthetics but for who

470 Marvinne Howe, 'Beirut Having Fun Again, but Troops Watch', *New York Times*, 25 June 1977; James M. Markham, 'The War That Won't Go Away', *New York Times*, 9 October 1977.

471 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021.

they depict.<sup>472</sup> This is also true for the images of Hariri and Bachir. None of their posters are visual masterpieces, nor is the photo of Iglesias in the poster in *Nancy*. But when it comes to the portrayal of celebrities, aesthetics become secondary. What is important is the person who is depicted, because the faces of celebrities, stars as well as martyrs, can invoke emotions.

Howells writes that that pop stars—and, I would add, celebrity martyrs—live through their images in the absence of physical contact, as fans and celebrities usually do not know each other in person. As a result, the image serves as the point of encounter between fan and star.<sup>473</sup> Tony, the protagonist of *The Insult*, is too young to have known Bachir in person, and his relationship with Bachir has been lived only para-socially via images. This term designates a one-sided but deeply felt relationship between fan and celebrity.<sup>474</sup> After Bachir's death, his physicality was completely replaced by his picture, and therefore the relationship between him and his followers became exclusively para-social. Although his followers might not have known him in person, they collectively felt loss and grief over his death. This is also addressed in *Nancy*, when Rabih says, 'I felt, that was it: It was all over. The dream was over. [...] And it wasn't just me—we all felt the same' (23). The para-social grief sensed by the Phalange is also addressed in the documentary movie *Massaker* (2004), to which I will return in 4.4, where Monika Borgmann, the late Lokman Slim, and Hermann Theissen interviewed six former Phalange fighters. One of the interviewees narrates the feelings he had in 1982 about the death of Bachir: 'everything we had lived for had suddenly vanished [...] Bachir Gemayel was dead, and we felt we were too'. By using the word 'we', the interviewee emphasises that, as in the case of the deaths of celebrities, tremendous despair was felt collectively. Grieving an ordinary martyr, on the other hand, takes place in more individual realms. The pain about the loss is caused by a genuine connection; the mourners knew the deceased in person.

As I have shown with the example of Bachir, the veneration of images of celebrity martyrs is comparable to the adoration of images of pop stars and other celebrities. The person being depicted is more important than the aesthetics of the photograph. Sometimes images of celebrity martyrs taken during their lifetimes evoke star iconography, as I have suggested with the comparison of Bachir and Dean. Post-mortem, both live on in the image, which invokes para-social grief, a real collective emotion felt by their fans and followers. These points are reflected

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472 Richard Howells, 'Heroes, Saints and Celebrities: The Photograph as Holy Relic', *Celebrity Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 124.

473 *Ibid.*, 113.

474 Hilde van den Bulck and Anders Olof Larsson, 'There's a Starman Waiting in the Sky': Mourning David #Bowie on Twitter', *Convergence* 25, no. 2 (2019): 309.

in *Nancy* via Lina's remarks on the presence of Bachir's poster in West Beirut, as well as via the appearance of an aesthetically ordinary poster of Bachir on all four screens, showing him gazing dreamily towards the sky, while Rabihi's accompanying speech points to the collective para-social grief felt by Bachir's followers. This grief is linked to the dream each celebrity martyr carries.

### The Carrier of the Dream: The Celebrity Martyr on the Threshold Between Life and Death

Each celebrity martyr carries a sectarian dream regarding the political shape of Lebanon—a dream that has not yet been implemented but is supposed to be realised in the future. As mentioned above, the physical death of a star, as well as of a celebrity martyr, does not result in their final extinction because their picture and legacy remain. Celebrity martyrs, although physically dead, stay alive in posters.

The ability of the celebrity martyr to persist on the wall is contrary to that of the ordinary martyr, whose poster production is usually shut down at some point, as addressed by Elias Khoury in his novel *White Masks*. Khoury narrates that three years after the martyrdom of the LCP militiaman Ahmad, the party refused his father's request to reprint Ahmad's martyr posters.<sup>475</sup> This means Ahmad was held



Fig. 4.52: 'The Dream of the Republic', Beirut – Gemmayzeh, September 2020, Photograph AR.

alive in images for three years after his passing but finally died fully when the party decided to cease the production and distribution of his images. The poster of the celebrity martyr, however, keeps on being printed and distributed for decades, like the above-mentioned poster of Bachir (Fig. 4.48), which was put up after his election victory in 1982 and shortly after turned into a poster of a martyr. Maasri still saw this image in Ashrafieh in the 2000s.<sup>476</sup> And I also encountered it in 2020, in an odd combination with the rubble of the explosion that surrounded it. An added slogan labelled Bachir as 'The Dream of the Republic' (Fig. 4.52).<sup>477</sup>

475 Khoury, *White Masks*, 21–22.

476 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 62.

477 Also, Haugbolle encountered posters of the Kataeb that announce that 'Bachir is the Dream and the Truth' (*War and Memory*, 179).

The ongoing visual presence of Bachir is linked to the dream referred to by Rabih in *Nancy*, which is carried by the celebrity martyrs. This phrase indicates that Bachir stands for the entire idea of a Maronite Christian-dominated Lebanon, in which the Syrian-Iranian influence is absent and the factions of the March 8 alliance are weak players. This dream not only forms a collective group identity but also is supposed to be implemented in the future, so that the death of the leader was not in vain.

To understand the essence of the Lebanese cause, or dream, from the perspective of the Lebanese Christian right-wing parties, I draw on Jabre's sectarian publication about Christian posters. He characterises the goal of the 'resistance', as he describes the united Christian groups during the *Wars*, as follows:

Culturally [...] [f]or them [the Lebanese Christians], losing the war meant losing their identity and seeing their culture merge into an Arab-Muslim culture which doesn't represent them. This would undoubtedly have an impact on their lifestyle, like other Eastern Christians who are reduced to the status of second-class citizens. Finally, the political victory is revealed by the will of the Resistance to rally the [sic] Lebanese Islam to its main cause, namely the final recognition of Lebanon as an independent country, a refuge for persecuted minorities throughout history, and the firm refusal of the establishment of Palestinians. The [sic] political Maronitism will succeed post mortem, when in 2005 the Sunnis will adopt the slogan of Bachir Gemayel, 'Lebanon First'.<sup>478</sup>

In Jabre's statement one can clearly read anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian sentiments along with the idea of a Christian-dominated Lebanon, which is disguised under the narrative of resistance. Of course, the fact that a slogan of Bachir's was adapted by the Future Movement does not mean that political Maronitism has succeeded after the *Wars*. What Jabre here refers to is that Sunnis, Druze, and most of the Christian parties allied together in the March 14 block.

Hariri's aim was to rebuild the country as a financial and touristic regional hotspot, one that was grounded in a pan-Arabist ideology and that maintained good connections with Europe and the US but particularly with Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries.<sup>479</sup> His dream or cause, like that of Bachir, stands in opposition to that of the March 8 alliance, who advocate for a heightened Syrian-Iranian presence in Lebanon. Sadek links these two divergent dreams to the fact that Lebanon is stuck between two different, coexisting chronotropic conceptions of time. For the Future Movement, the assassination of Hariri announced the beginning of a 'Messianic Waiting Time' for justice to be delivered by the tribunal that was set up

478 Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 26.

479 For Hariri's ideological position, see Knudsen, 'Death of a Statesman'.

in The Hague to examine the murder. According to Sadek, the time until the issuing of the verdict was suspended.<sup>480</sup> The March 8 camp, however, lived in the 'Time of the Umma', which was announced by Hezbollah's secretary general Hassan Nasrallah during the Tammuz War as a counter-time to that of the Future Movement. Hezbollah's time—and, in a wider sense, the March 8 movement's time—is that of an immediate now, an urgent present caused by an Israeli threat.<sup>481</sup> The end of the 2006 War did not end the Time of the Umma. According to Sadek, the 2008 street fights between Hezbollah and the Future Movement in West Beirut were a 'standoff between the two conceptions of time'.<sup>482</sup>

These two colliding times also encompass the ideas of what Lebanon should be in the future and the dreams the celebrity martyrs carry. As Sadek writes:

In struggling to overshadow one another, these two conceptions of national time mark an exacerbation of strife in Lebanon. Hizb Allah, leading a coalition of parties opposed to Hariri's Future Movement, strive to fix the identity of [Lebanon] through its leading Shi'i model of armed resistance to Israeli military expansionism and American imperialism, while the Sunni Future Movement [...] claims to represent a Lebanese democratic forefront of a pan-Arab identity, born of its resistance to a dictatorial Syrian Ba'ath regime. Important to add, for pro-Hariri Sunnis this resistance only begins with the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and includes, out of mere courtesy, preceding practices of resistance to the Syrian regime by various Christian and Druze militias and political parties.<sup>483</sup>

In this passage, Sadek claims that Hariri's death heralded a new time for the Future Movement, while the March 8 movement lives in another time and dreams another dreams.

A new time also began for the Phalange after the death of Bachir, but it was not a time of waiting for the day of his killer's trial. Rather, the Phalange took revenge in the days after Bachir's killing by committing the Sabra and Shatila massacre. For the Phalange, the murder of Bachir symbolises the beginning of the catastrophe, when the Maronite dream state that seemed to be almost here after Bachir's election started to slip away. Nonetheless, although Christian supremacy seems to be out of reach at the moment, the idea is not dead yet. Both the Kataeb and the LF are still waiting for the return of the near-dominance that political Christianity achieved in 1982. This moves the time they live in closer to the Messianic Waiting Time of the Future Movement than to the Time of the Umma of Hezbollah.

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480 Sadek, *Ruin*, 93–94.

481 *Ibid.*, 92–93.

482 *Ibid.*, 97.

483 *Ibid.*, 93.

Sadek's conception of clashing and coexisting times was manifested at the time of writing. In March 2023, the Lebanese government spontaneously decided to postpone the international summertime—which meant that the sun would set one hour earlier—so that people who observed Ramadan could break their fast sooner. This led to practical problems, such as a lack of clarity around international flight arrival times, as well as to general confusion, because many institutions and businesses decided to ignore the government's decision. Furthermore, parts of the Christian population felt that not changing time was an affront against them and that it favoured Muslim needs. Again, time drew a rift along sectarian lines. After a few days of slight chaos, the government reversed its decision, and Lebanon followed Coordinated Universal Time once again.<sup>484</sup>

The coexistence of conflicting times and dreams in Lebanon is also embodied in *The Insult*, namely, through the portrayal of Tony, who is blinded by Bachir's dream, and Yasser, who lives in the Palestinian Mar Elias refugee camp. We see the camp in only one scene, where it is full of posters of Yasser Arafat (Abu Ammar), who is not a martyr but during his lifetime had a celebrity status among the Palestinians that was similar to the status Bachir had among the Lebanese Christians. We could assume that Yasser would support the March 8 movement, and Tony would support the ideas of the March 14 movement. At the end of the movie, the two men, together with their lawyers, meet at court. Officially a case about a minor physical dispute is heard but in actuality, the clashing times, dreams, and versions of history of the inhabitants of Lebanon are negotiated. A part of the evidence at this court hearing is a video of a hate speech against the Palestinians by Bachir. The playing of this video provokes great emotions and Yasser, who is apparently saddened and embarrassed, perceives it as an insult, while the Christian court audience cheers for Bachir's words and image.

That the images of celebrity martyrs can indeed evoke tensions is demonstrated by incidents that manifest the two clashing times. In 2016, the Kataeb held a commemoration for Bachir at the AUB, which provoked SSNP supporters to burn a poster of Bachir at the ceremony. Consequently, scuffles between the SSNP and the Kataeb broke out in front of the university.<sup>485</sup> The March 8 movement, of which the SSNP is part, blames Bachir for his political actions, which is why his poster is encountered and treated with rage. On the other hand, right-wing Christians perceive the same poster as deserving praise and admiration, and the fact that it was destroyed elicited anger.

484 L'Orient Today, 'Lebanon Will Officially Shift to Summer Time Overnight Wednesday to Thursday', *L'Orient Today*, 27 March 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1332824/lebanon-will-officially-shift-to-summer-time-overnight-wednesday-to-thursday.html>.

485 Daily Star, 'Bachir Gemayel AUB Memorial Sparks Scuffles', *Daily Star*, 26 April 2016.

Another incident, which occurred in March 2022 at the Arab Book Fair in Beirut, was connected to a poster of the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani. Soleimani was murdered by a US drone in Iraq in 2020. Immediately after his death, his image became omnipresent, practically everywhere in Iran and also in Shia parts of Lebanon.<sup>486</sup> In a Lebanese context, Soleimani acts as a celebrity martyr of Hezbollah. His image stands for the March 8 movement and a Lebanon closely tied to Iran and Syria and the Time of the Umma. The presence of his poster outraged a visitor to such an extent that the visitor started to punch it, which led to scuffles that were calmed by riot police, who came to the book fair and ended this clash of times and dreams.<sup>487</sup> The burning and punching of images is equivalent to doing violence to the dream and time for which the martyr stands and it proves how strong the emotions connected to these images are. The picture of any ordinary martyr would not have been able to evoke such rage.

In *Nancy*, after the killings of Bachir and Hariri, Rabih and Hatem say 'they killed the dream in us'. The anticipated dream was assassinated when the celebrity martyr was killed. In this way, the power of killing collective hopes and dreams or starting a new time is attached exclusively to celebrity martyrs, whereas the loss of an ordinary militiaman could be resolved, as the whole cause was not attached to this individual.

Nonetheless, even after the deaths of Bachir and Hariri, the dream was not killed forever but, like the actors in *Nancy*, quickly came back to life. The successors of the celebrity martyrs have tried to implement the dream, but always under the shadow of the celebrity martyr, which is also reflected on social media. An example is a 2020 tweet from Bachir's nephew, Samy, who is currently leading the Kataeb:

My companion President Bachir Gemayel, we remember you today along with all the other martyrs who have been assassinated with you. With your martyrdom, a myth was born that inspires young and old people to always defend Lebanon [...]. We pledge you to always keep your promise and your courage.<sup>488</sup>

486 Amir Ahmad Arian, 'The Martyrdom of Soleimani in the Propaganda Art of Iran', *The New York Review*, 30 September 2020, [https://www.nybooks.com/online/2020/09/30/the-martyrdom-of-soleimani-in-the-propaganda-art-of-iran/?lp\\_txn\\_id=1422923](https://www.nybooks.com/online/2020/09/30/the-martyrdom-of-soleimani-in-the-propaganda-art-of-iran/?lp_txn_id=1422923).

487 Farah-Silvana Kanaan, 'Brawl Breaks Out at Beirut Book Fair After Visitors Try to Remove Qassem Soleimani Poster', *L'Orient Today*, 7 March 2022, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1292871/scuffle-breaks-out-at-beirut-book-fair-after-visitors-try-to-remove-qassem-soleimani-painting.html>.

488 Kataeb.org, 'Kataeb Leader to Martyr Bachir Gemayel: We Will Always Keep Your Promise and Your Courage', *kataeb.org*, 14 September 2020, <https://en.kataeb.org/articles/local-2020-09-14-kataeb-leader-to-martyr-bachir-gemayel-we-will-always>.

In this para-social conversation between the living nephew and the physically dead uncle, Samy points out that Bachir is a specific kind of martyr, one whose death acts as a role model for what Samy perceives to be the defence of Lebanon. Furthermore, Samy taps into the myth of the Christian resistance and assures his uncle that he will keep working on the realisation of his uncle's promise, which equals the dream.

Also, Saad Hariri, Rafic's son and a politician of the Future Movement, addressed his assassinated father directly in 2011:

Dear beloved father, Lebanon's great martyr: Do I talk to you or about you? Or should I tell you the story of the difficult years we experienced? [...] This day is yours, my beloved father. [...] I am filled with joy because I am the son of martyr Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.<sup>489</sup>

These examples show that Bachir and Hariri stay alive not only in the posters that are produced and distributed until today, but also in sectarian remembrance. This is especially evidenced by the fact that they are addressed in the present tense by Samy and Saad, which refers to their position as being on the threshold between life and death. Furthermore, the continuation of the dream through their successors is visualised, as the celebrity martyrs are included in some of their successors' posters.

Bachir, who is today the celebrity martyr of the LF as well as the Kataeb, appears on posters together with his two successors: his son Nadim, a Kataeb politician, who was the party's candidate in the 2022 elections, and the current leader of the

LF, Samir Geagea. I encountered an image of Geagea on Sassine Square, in the aftermath of the 2021 Tayyouneh clashes, in a remarkably smaller size than Bachir, who was hung up high on the wall (Fig. 4.3). In the election campaign of 2022, Bachir appeared next to Nadim (Fig. 4.53) and Hariri in posters for current candidates (Fig. 4.54) of his party, just as he was earlier depicted next to his son Saad, who became his political successor right after his death (Fig. 4.55).<sup>490</sup>



Fig. 4.53: Posters of Bachir and Nadim Gemayel, Beirut – Ashrafieh, June 2022, Photograph AR.

489 Cited in Knudsen, 'Death of a Statesman', 12.

490 Schmitt, *Advertised to Death*, 28, 31, 40–43.



Fig. 4.54: Posters of Hariri and Election Candidates, Beirut – Zoukak el-Blat, May 2022, Photograph AR.

Souad al Merheb has claimed that the juxtaposition of predecessors and successors constitutes a legitimisation and promotion of the successor's leadership, among other factors, because of the emotions attached to the image of the celebrity martyr.<sup>491</sup> In particular, I would argue this is because of collective para-social grief. The placement of Bachir and Hariri into or next to the image of the successors also holds alive the dream and the promise that the celebrity martyrs embody and manifests that fulfilment is now in the hands of the successors.

As mentioned in 3.4, Mroué comments in *Inhabitants* on a photomontage that shows Rafic Hariri next to the former Egyptian president and advocate of Pan-Arabism, Gamal Abdel Nasser, in an encounter that could never actually have taken place due to the different lifetimes of the two men, with Hariri being older than Nasser (Fig. 3.3):

we can say that someone [...] wanted to [...] create some sort of controversial scandal, or a mobilisation call for struggle, or for the purpose of moral support, in favour of the power of Hariri's son, who asked a designer to fit the two men [Hariri and Nasser] by force in the same picture to show that he is the heir of a dignified, pan-Arab tradition.<sup>492</sup>

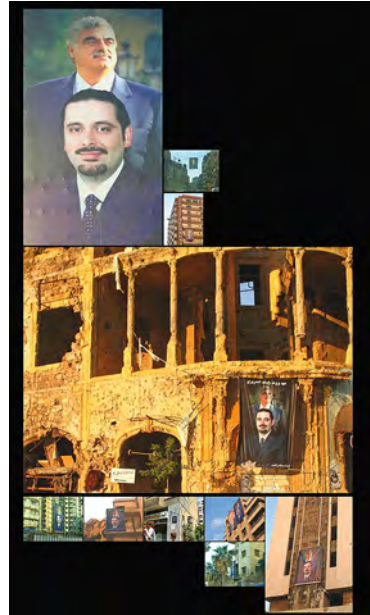


Fig. 4.55: Rabih Mroué, *Make Me Stop Smoking* (Election Poster, Saad and Rafic Hariri), 2006, Non-Academic Lecture, Courtesy of the Artist.

491 Al Merheb, 'Leadership Inheritance'.

492 Mroué, 'Inhabitants', 340.

In this statement, Mroué suggests that the author of the image is a supporter of Saad Hariri, who, by juxtaposing Nasser and Rafic in one poster, claims to be the rightful heir to his father's and Nasser's Pan-Arabist project. Soon after, in *Inhabitants*, Mroué addresses the above-mentioned dream carried by Rafic, which is now passed on to Saad:

The father, a liberal, modern, Pan-Arab Sunnite Moslem, invites Nasser, also a Sunnite Moslem, also modern, also Pan-Arab to meet with him. Nasser responds to this meeting, and comes to pledge allegiance to Hariri's son, the heir of the true Arab line. [...] The Arabism stands in opposition with the Shiite Islamic Project, which demonstrates loyalty to Iran. From another angle, Hariri is welcoming Nasser in order to reassure him that his Arabism is not dead, and that Nasserism is still alive within us; it will remain alive as long as the Hariri son is carrying its flag, and fighting any outsiders, whether the outsider is represented by the Shiite Iranian Islamic Project or the Zionist Israeli-American Project, or the new colonialist Western project.<sup>493</sup>

Mroué comments on the inheritance of Rafic's dream—namely of an Arab, Sunni-led Lebanon, influenced by Nasser's Pan-Arabist frame of thought—by Saad. This very dream that has now been passed on to Saad stands in opposition to all other dreams, particularly that of the March 8 alliance, which includes political and cultural proximity to Iran and Syria.

Hariri's dream of how Lebanon should be is as utopian as all the other dreams which the celebrity martyrs carry. In its geopolitical function as a balance zone between neo-colonial international players, Lebanon will never be fully Maronite, fully Iranian- and Syrian-dominated, or fully pan-Arabic.<sup>494</sup> Similarly, the time the country is in will never be either a Messianic Waiting Time or a Time of the Umma, but always both. It is via posters that dreams, as things that are uncompleted and worth fighting for, are held alive. When Bachir and Hariri passed away physically, they did not die fully but, like celebrities, stayed alive in the realm of the image that still carries their dream. Their posters remain on the walls much longer than those of ordinary martyrs. Bachir and Hariri also often appear in or next to posters of their successors, who are now charged with realising this very dream.

However, as Lina mentions in *Nancy* regarding the installation of an image of Bachir in West Beirut: 'this is a provocation of your national and Muslim milieu—it's not cool' (23), celebrity martyrs, both before and after their physical passings,

493 Ibid., 344.

494 For an analysis of Lebanon's situation of being stuck between regional powers, specifically with regard to some security incidents that happened in the summer of 2023, see Yara Abi Akl, 'Is There a Link Between the Recent Spate of Security Incidents?', *L'Orient Today*, 11 August 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1346177/is-there-a-link-between-the-spate-of-security-incidents.html>.

are not perceived as heroes by everyone, as Bensen has also claimed when writing that ‘one’s heroic martyr is another’s ‘butcher’’.<sup>495</sup> For example, in the eyes of the SSNP, Bachir is a perpetrator, and the party instead celebrates his assassin, Habib Shartouni, in posters.

### The Poster of the Counter-Hero: The Carrier of the Counter-Dream

Unlike ordinary martyrs, whose killers are not part of the public memory, it is well known in Lebanon that Bachir was murdered by SSNP members Nabil Alam and Habib Shartouni, and that the UN tribunal in The Hague convicted Hezbollah member Salim Ayyash of having killed Hariri.

In the following, I will discuss the pictures of the (alleged) killers of the celebrity martyrs as counter-heroes. Although they are still alive, their visual presence encompasses elements typically employed in martyr posters and their images presuppose the image of the celebrity martyr.

In the case of Bachir’s killers, Shartouni’s name and face gained more prominence than Alam’s. It seems this is because Alam is said to have provided the explosives, but Shartouni was the one who carried out the actual murder by pressing the detonation button that caused the explosion and the subsequent death.<sup>496</sup> I could not find any posters depicting Alam, but Shartouni is remembered on at least two posters (Figs. 4.56–4.57).

The first of these (Fig. 4.56) was issued in 1982, shortly after Shartouni had been jailed, and it demanded his release, as the caption, ‘Freedom to the Imprisoned Militant Habib Shartouni’, tells us. The poster shows a headshot of Shartouni in a rectangular frame. The accompanying writing is in black and red, with the Jammoul logo visible above. The same photograph of Shartouni’s face can be seen in the second poster (Fig. 4.57), which was issued in 1984 and shows his portrait rendered in red within a white circle on a black background. Above and below his face, white text reads: ‘On the 9<sup>th</sup> Commemoration of One of Their Most Atrocious Massacres; We Salute You Who Executed the People’s Judgment Over the Butcher. 13 April 1984’. This means that the poster was released on the ninth anniversary of the official

495 Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 106.

496 Another reason might be that Shartouni seems to be still alive, while Alam passed away in 2014. For the assassination of Bachir and Shartouni’s role and the trial, see Scott Preston, ‘Lebanon’s Civil War Scars Re-Emerge with Assassination Case Verdict’, *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, 27 October 2017, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/10/lebanon-bashir-ge-mayel-killer-sentence-timing.html>; Solomon, *In Search*, 111–12.



Fig. 4.56: L NRF/SSNP, 'Freedom to the Imprisoned Militant Habib Shartouni', 1982, Poster, 45 x 60 cm, ASH 2, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).



Fig. 4.57: Friends of Habib Shartouni, 'On the 9th Commemoration of One of Their Most Atrocious Massacres. We Salute You Who Executed the People's Judgment Over the Butcher. 13 April 1984', 1984, Poster, 32 x 47 cm, AAJ 76, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

beginning of the *Wars*. The writing also tells us that it was issued by the 'Friends of Habib Shartouni'—in other words, as Maasri suspects, the SSNP.<sup>497</sup>

Both posters correspond in terms of composition and colours to two different SSNP serial martyr poster designs (Figs. 4.58–4.59). While in *Figures 4.56* and *4.59* a rectangular photograph is placed in the middle of the image, with the Jammoul logo above and writing below, in *Figures 4.57* and *4.58* the photograph is depicted in red within a circle on a black background with white writing above and below.

497 Maasri mentions the contrast of colours and argues that the posters commemorating Bachir are usually in white and bright colours, and that the posters of Shartouni are dominated by black (*Off the Wall*, 77–78). But Maasri only discusses *Fig. 4.57* and not *Fig. 4.56*, which is dominated by white. This is why I do not necessarily see a binary of black posters of Shartouni and white posters of Bachir.

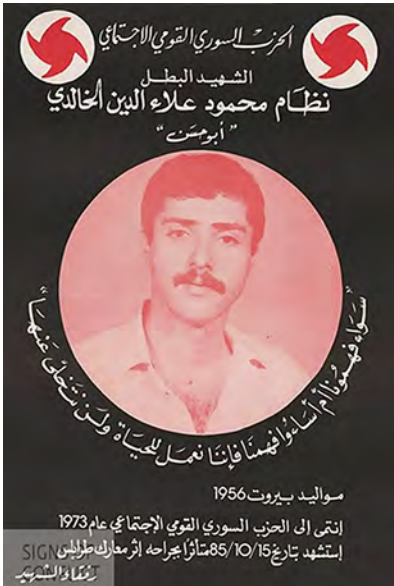


Fig. 4.58: SSNP, 'The Heroic Martyr Mahmoud Alaaeddine Al-Khalidi', 1985, Poster, 31 x 47 cm, AAJ 478, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

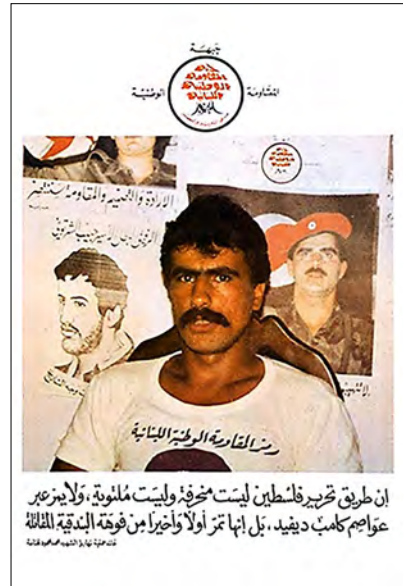


Fig. 4.59: LNR/SSNP, 'The Road to the Liberation of Palestine Is Not Crooked and Does Not Pass by the Capitals of Camp David. But It Passes First and Foremost from the Nozzles of the Fighting Rifles. The Leader of the Naharya Operation the Martyr Mohammad Mahmud Kanaa', 1986, Poster, 45 x 60 cm, AAJ 81, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

The poster in *Figure 4.59* was issued for SSNP member Mohammad Mahmud Kanaa's martyrdom operation in 1986. Kanaa is depicted in front of posters of his preceding martyrs and a poster of Shartouni.<sup>498</sup> I read the SSNP's application of the martyr poster's visual language to the depiction of Shartouni as well as the placement of his poster among martyr posters as an expression of the fact that in 1982, as well as in 1984 and 1986—the times when the posters were issued—he was imprisoned and potentially awaiting death. Put differently, employing martyr imagery for a living man seems to point to his suffering and determination for the cause. His deeds, namely, the killing of Bachir, should be honoured like the deeds of martyrs who sacrificed their lives.

498 Straub (*Das Selbstmordattentat*, 128–29) discusses this poster but does not recognise the image of Shartouni in it. Straub also mentions another SSNP member and conductor of a martyrdom operation, Wajdi Sayigh, and notes that in his martyrdom video he calls for the Kataeb to release Shartouni (*ibid.*, 110).

When the Syrian Army took over Ashrafieh in 1990, Shartouni managed to escape from prison to Syria. His current whereabouts are unknown, but it can be assumed that he was alive in 2017 because of an interview he gave to *al-Akhbar* newspaper after he was sentenced to death in absentia in that year for having killed Bachir. When the trial took place, members of the SSNP organised protests and paraded images of Shartouni outside the court. They claimed that the killing of Bachir was 'a national duty, not a crime'; or, as one of their supporters said, 'This was not a political killing rather it was done to carry out justice'. The Kataeb held counter demonstrations and held up posters of Bachir outside the court.<sup>499</sup>

The presence of these images in 2017 demonstrates how the celebrity martyr Bachir and the counter-hero Shartouni embody conceptions of Lebanon. In the case of Bachir, the dream is Maronite Christian, under the umbrella of the March 14 movement. In the case of Shartouni, the dream is a pro-Syrian Lebanon under the umbrella of the March 8 movement. In other words, two divergent ideas of what Lebanon should be and of the time in which Lebanon exists, which are similar to the two sides of the court case of *The Insult*, clash in the posters of the protagonists of Bachir's killing.

The inclusion of Shartouni's face in a poster displayed in the streets presupposes the existence of the poster of Bachir. Bachir's face is naturally frozen in time because, after 1982, no further pictures could be taken, and thus he stayed, like James Dean, eternally young. Shartouni's face also remains frozen in 1982. Of course, for Shartouni's own security as a wanted person, his present likeness as a man in his sixties is not distributed in public, but this is not the primary reason his face, photographed in the early 1980s, became an icon of the SSNP. His face at this very particular moment symbolises a dream of what Lebanon should be, one that is contrary to what Bachir's face, photographed at approximately the same time, embodies. A photo of Shartouni's face from the 2020s would not be immediately linked to him and therefore would not be instantly loaded with meaning. Thus, the same face that appeared on the poster issued in 1984 was still visible during the trial in 2017.

Just as Bachir is a celebrity to the Kataeb and the LF today, Shartouni inhabits a certain position of stardom, as Scott Preston, a journalist who covered the trial, has observed:

Yet the sentencing has exposed political divisions across the country, as many leftists regard Shartouni with the estimable stardom that Lebanese Christians confer upon Gemayel. For supporters, Shartouni is perceived as a defender of Lebanon amid fears that Gemayel would have consented to wider Israeli influence in the country.<sup>500</sup>

499 Joseph Haboush, 'Court Sentences Bachir Gemayel's Killers to Death', *The Daily Star*, 21 October 2017.

500 Preston, 'Lebanon's Civil War Scars'.

Preston rightly notes that the political division was just exposed and not created through these images. Shartouni became a celebrity hero among Bachir's adversaries because he killed Bachir. Had he killed a Phalange militiaman, he and the militiaman would have fallen into oblivion—Shartouni immediately, and the militiaman at the end of his poster production.

Furthermore, this murder would have been pardoned due to the General Amnesty Law of 1991. But, because he killed Bachir, Shartouni at least in theory, would have needed to appear in front of a court because only the killings of political leaders during the Wars, including Bachir, are legally considered crimes. The murders of ordinary martyrs do not get tried, even when the killers hold a well-known position in Lebanon, as the example of Mohamad Fahmi shows. Fahmi, while being interior minister, stated on TV in the summer of 2020 that he had killed two people during the Wars. As these two people were not well known, their murders will remain unpunished until eternity.<sup>501</sup> The existence of trials is reserved exclusively for the murder of celebrity martyrs.

Taking up the position of the counter-hero is not limited to Shartouni. The Hariri Tribunal, which had investigated the circumstances of Hariri's murder since 2009, announced its long-awaited sentence in August 2020 and declared that Hezbollah member Salim Ayyash was guilty of having killed Hariri.<sup>502</sup> In the same month, a banner depicting Ayyash was visible in his hometown of Harouf in the South (Fig. 4.60).<sup>503</sup> A red frame shows an ID photograph of Ayyash, who wears a checked shirt and sports a moustache and earnest expression. A slogan reads, 'The People



Fig. 4.60: 'The People of the Town of Harouf Are Proud of Their Resistant Son, Hajj Salim Ayyash', 2020, Banner.

of the Town of Harouf Are Proud of Their Resistant Son, Hajj Salim Ayyash'. While this banner does not correlate as strongly with the Hezbollah martyr posters as the posters of Shartouni do with the formats of the SSNP martyr posters, the exposure of an ID photo that no longer functions as an image used for identification and a slogan in a street is reminiscent of martyr posters.

501 MEMO, 'Lebanon: Interior Minister Admits Killing 2 During Civil War', *MEMO: Middle East Monitor*, 29 June 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200629-lebanon-interior-minister-admits-killing-2-during-civil-war/>.

502 For the trial, see Nohad Topalian, 'Disappointed with Hariri Case Verdict, Lebanese Accuse Hezbollah of Obstructing Justice', *Al Mashareq*, 14 December 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200629-lebanon-interior-minister-admits-killing-2-during-civil-war/>.

503 In March 2022, three more men with ties to Hezbollah were sentenced in absentia for killing Hariri.

Like the photograph of Shartouni, the one of Ayyash seems to have been taken many years ago. In 2020, he was fifty-seven years old, but his face appears to be younger. It would be plausible that it was taken around 2005, at the same time as the Hariri assassination. Therefore, as in the case of Shartouni, it seems that Ayyash's face was also frozen at the very time of the murder he is convicted of committing.

Similar to Shartouni's image outside the court in the Bachir trial, Ayyash's image also sparked controversy, which is observable on social media. The factions supporting Ayyash claimed that he was not guilty and that the court only needed a scapegoat. A tweet defending Ayyash reads as follows:

It was clear from day one what this one billion dollar show (mostly from Lebanon) was about. They imprisoned innocent people for years, made conflicting accusations & discovered nothing about the bomb, bomber, or vehicle. They needed a scapegoat so they convicted #Salim Ayyash.<sup>504</sup>

Another tweet, whose author is apparently convinced of Ayyash's guilt, reads:

Say goodbye to #Lebanon Salim Ayyash, found by the special court #STL @STLebanon in The Hauge guilty on multiple counts related to the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri & 21 others in 2005, celebrated in his #Hezbollah hometown Harouf as a 'résistance hero'.<sup>505</sup>

As in the case of Bachir and Shartouni, these tweets show how the image of the counter-hero Ayyash polarises. However, he is not celebrated for having killed Hariri; rather, his guilt is denied and the fairness of the trial is questioned. On the other side, opponents of the banner of Ayyash criticise his celebration in his hometown.

The image of the counter-hero is as controversial as the image of the celebrity martyr because it embodies a counter idea to the celebrity martyrs' dream of what Lebanon should be in the future. The depiction of the counter-hero has parallels to the iconography of martyr posters, which I read as an expression of the honour that the faction producing the banners and posters has for the deeds of the counter-hero. The photographic age of the alleged killer presupposes the picture of the martyr. Like the images of Bachir and Hariri, the images of Shartouni and Ayyash

504 Cited in Al Jazeera, 'A Banner Celebrating Salim Ayyash, Who Was Convicted of the Assassination of Rafik Hariri, Ignites the Communication Sites in Lebanon', *Al Jazeera*, 20 August 2020, <https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2020-08-20-a-banner-celebrating-salim-ayyash--who-was-convicted-of-the-assassination-of-rafiik-hariri--ignites-the-communication-sites-in-lebanon. HyZlmddehMv.html> (last accessed 14 June 2024; site inactive on 24 October 2024).

505 Cited in *ibid.*

were frozen in the time of the celebrity martyrs' deaths. This is particularly visible in the case of Shartouni, who, like Bachir, remains visible as a young man on a poster that frames him as a celebrity because he killed a celebrity martyr.

### What Makes a Celebrity Martyr?

The equivalent images and speeches accompanying the deaths of Bachir and Hariri in *Nancy* point to the special status of these two men in Lebanon's recent history. They are not only leader martyrs, like Kamal Jumblatt, but their deaths also had severe consequences for the country. Therefore, I termed these two men A-grade celebrity martyrs. In *Nancy*, the posters of Bachir and Hariri appear on all four screens simultaneously, and their images are appropriated as found. Via the textual layer of the play, the underlying image is prevented from striking back and does not turn the images of Bachir and Hariri into a possible homage. Unlike the situation faced by posters of ordinary martyrs, the image production and distribution of celebrity martyrs has not stopped but is still ongoing. The format of their posters is usually not serial but individual and, as in all photographs of martyrs, it is not the aesthetics that primarily matter but the depicted face. Additionally, some elements of their images are reminiscent of those of celebrities.

Bachir and Hariri are situated on the threshold between life and death. Although the celebrity martyrs have ceased to exist physically, they remain alive in images as they continue to represent their parties' respective dreams of the political shape of Lebanon. Post-mortem, these dreams are in the hands of their successors, the images of whom are often juxtaposed with the face of the celebrity martyr. Because of the dream that the celebrity martyr carries, his face evokes more emotions than pictures of ordinary martyrs, as reflected in the text of *Nancy*. These feelings manifested themselves in the showdown of images at the AUB and the punching of the poster at the Arab Book Fair. Additionally—and although this is not part of *Nancy* it is nonetheless relevant—the image of the celebrity martyr provokes further pictures of counter-heroes, who are usually the murderers or alleged killers of celebrity martyrs and whose faces embody a counter-dream.

#### 4.3.4 Fabricated Remembering. Fabricated Forgetting.

In this part I have shown that *Nancy* reflects that the remembrance and oblivion of deaths is nuanced. The fact that celebrity martyrs are on a higher stage of visual memory than ordinary martyrs is addressed in the play as the posters of Bachir and Hariri appear on all four screens simultaneously, with images appropriated as found. Also, the memory of ordinary martyrs is varied, as those who died in combat



Fig. 4.61: SSNP, '8 July the 38th Annual Commemoration of Antuan Saadeh's Martyrdom', 1987, Poster, 46 x 70 cm, ZMA 430, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

for their militia are placed on a higher stage of martyrdom than those who died in other ways, as reflected in the Green Group of Hatem and the Blue Group of Lina. Hierarchies of death are emphasised in *Nancy* through the choice of the underlying images of the posters as well as through the inclusion and reduction of elements that are typically found in martyr posters.

Another group of the dead addressed in *Nancy* are those who are forgotten, which are primarily the missing. They died, like the martyrs, under violent circumstances, but posters of the disappeared were never hung on the walls during the Wars, which is reflected in the play when the blue monochrome—instead of a martyr poster—appears on the screen in the sequence of Lina's abduction and subsequent killing. Not all deaths are memorialised equally, and there is

a hierarchy of remembering and forgetting that is dependent on how the person died, who they were during their lifetime, and how much interest a collective had in keeping their memory alive.

This hierarchy of deaths is also, I would suggest, unconsciously visualised in a poster issued by the SSNP on the thirty-eighth anniversary of Antuan Saadeh's death (Fig. 4.61). Saadeh, who was the party's founder and leader martyr and was executed in 1949, is depicted at a significantly larger scale than all other shown faces. The well-known martyrs, most of whom conducted martyrdom operations, such as Muhaidly or Kanaa, are shown in colour, whereas the ordinary martyrs are presented in black and white; the SSNP's missing are, of course, absent. Remarkably, many women appear in colour, which demonstrates that they played an important role in the SSNP's fabrication of martyrdom. In the following part, I will focus on how *Nancy* reflects on the gendered aspect of martyrdom in the posters of the Wars.

#### 4.4 Gendered Martyrdom: Performances in the Image After Death and the Martyr Poster as an Advertising Image

The remembrance of martyrs in pictures is gendered, as men and women are visualised differently. In this part, I will claim that a set of posters that appear in *Nancy* reflect the fabricated gender roles performed in martyr posters of the *Wars*. My conceptual framework is guided by Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble*, who argues that, unlike biological sex, social gender is not natural but performed. By learning gender, certain acts, like walking or speaking in a particular way, become normalised as either male- or female-connoted. For example, it is not biologically determined that women wear make-up and high heels and that men do not. These are merely norms society has taught us through repetition over time.

Butler further argues that the media contributes to forming these constructed gender performances, because they are ritualised when continuously shown and seen. Gender is not performed on purpose; that is, although a role is taken up, it is not acted out as in a theatre play. Rather, gendered acts are repeated because they are internalised and learnt from society. Therefore, as Butler poignantly claims, gender 'is the stylized repetition of acts through time'.<sup>506</sup> It is this performance of gender in martyr posters that, even post-mortem, is revealed in *Nancy*.

In the following, I first discuss selected posters accompanying deaths of Lina. In my interpretation, these posters, in combination with the text of the play and the underlying images, reflect on the roles women performed during the *Wars*, including their visualisation as martyrs. Second, I examine several posters of the three male actors and identify characteristics of what I term the 'hypermasculine format', a specific mode of poster issued during the *Wars* that depicts the male fighting martyr in an exaggeratedly masculine manner. I claim that findings on hypermasculinity in commercials can also be applied to martyr posters in the hypermasculine format, because these posters also serve as an advertisement for the militia that circulated them. In conclusion, I argue that *Nancy* reveals and subverts constructed roles of femininity and masculinity that are performed in posters of the *Wars*.

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506 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), 179. See also Diana Newall and Grant Poole, *Fifty Key Texts in Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 227–31.

#### 4.4.1 Lina as a Reflection of Modes of Female Martyrdom During the Wars

The posters in *Nancy* predominantly show men. This reflects the gender roles of the shuhada of the Wars, who were mostly male, as the number of available martyr posters in the archives I have visited confirm. In the play, six posters depict Lina as a martyr.<sup>507</sup> In four instances, she is part of a militia but gets killed without being actively engaged in combat (Figs. 3.43, 3.46, 3.48–3.49), in another case, she dies while fighting (Fig. 3.44), and in yet another she dies as a civilian (Fig. 3.47). Below we will see that *Nancy* reflects on women as different kinds of martyrs. First, there was the non-fighting shahida, who was active in her militia but not as a combatant; second, there was the militant shahida, who was killed while militarily active; third, there was the massacred shahida, who was killed at home; and fourth, there was the civilian shahida, who was killed by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

##### Modes of Female Martyrdom I: The Non-Fighting Martyr, Active in Her Militia

The most common role of women during the Wars was to assist the fighters without taking up arms. This is also reflected in *Nancy*. In 1985, so the play's storyline goes, Lina had joined the LF for her own safety after moving from West Beirut to LF-controlled East Beirut. Here, she worked in the party's media office until she was accused of being a spy for Geagea and was killed by Hobeika's men (27). After coming back to life, she continued her activities within the party and tells the audience of the following incident:

Hobeika flew out of the East Beirut area and landed in Zahlé, which he proceeded to turn into headquarters for himself and his mob. I was [...] assigned a security mission [...] to infiltrate Hobeika's mob in Zahlé and convey information about his forces. I, of course, accepted the mission; I hadn't forgotten that it was Hobeika himself who had ordered my execution the last time. I headed out to Zahlé and, in a couple of days, I was found out. A member of Hobeika's mob [...] recognised me... He reported me, they captured me, [...] they liquidated me. (28–29)

The text implies that Lina was not actively fighting in combat but working as a spy on a mission.

<sup>507</sup> A monochrome (Fig. 3.45) also accompanies a death, but as discussed in 4.3, here Lina is not a martyr but a missing person.

The poster that accompanies the speech (Fig. 3.49) shows Lina sitting behind an office desk covered in papers, talking on the telephone. This mode of depiction is peculiar, as it does not adhere to the ordinary format because, instead of an ID photograph, it shows a photograph of Lina in a workplace setting. As Fadi Toufiq explained, Lina's role alludes to a role women performed during the Wars.

[Lina] is intermediate. She is not a full fighter, but she is not a civilian. She was part of the civil war. This was mainly the role of women in a party. In the Communist Party you have women fighters, but rarely. They [women in general] were active more logistically in the media and things like this.<sup>508</sup>



Fig. 4.62: Committee of Friends of Marie Rose Boulos, 'Because She Is with the People. Because She Is with the Future. Because She Is with Lebanon. In Memory of the Martyred Marie Rose Boulos', 1976, Poster, 49 x 69 cm, 220-PCD2081-45, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

Even when they were not fighters, women across all militias were part of the Wars as they supported the warring factions—for instance, by doing administrative and media work, as Lina is depicted doing, or by transporting and gathering information, as the text of Nancy implies.<sup>509</sup>

Sometimes women died without being engaged in combat, as the tragic death of Marie-Rose Boulos shows. Boulos's story is worth mentioning here, as both Lina and Boulos died a violent death because of their non-violent activities. Boulos was a Syrian Christian who was a teacher and social worker in Palestinian refugee camps and was executed by Christian militiamen for this—in other words, for collaborating with the perceived 'enemy'. Not only is Boulos remembered as a martyr on a poster (Fig. 4.62), but the late poet, writer, and artist Etel Adnan

508 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021.

509 Maria Holt, 'Lebanese Shi'i Women and Islamism', in *Women and War in Lebanon*, ed. Lamia Rustum Shehadeh (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999); Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, 'Women in the Lebanese Militias', in Rustum Shehade, *Women and War*, 149–50; Bonsel, *Martyr Cults*, 208. Other activities included cooking for the fighters, collecting money, providing shelter, and smuggling weapons. For a case study of how a woman could be active during the Wars without taking up arms, see Kari H. Karamé, 'Maman Aida, a Lebanese Godmother of the Combatants: Fighting Without Arms', in Rustum Shehade, *Women and War*.

also modelled her novel *Sitt Marie Rose* (1982) after Boulos's life and death.<sup>510</sup> The poster, a headshot of Boulos in front of a transparent pink mass of children, has no stylistic parallels to the poster of Lina, and I have not encountered any posters of the *Wars* showing a martyr engaged in office tasks.

The fact that women, across all militias, aided their militant group by different non-combatant means in the widest sense—ranging from spying to educating the fighter's children—and died due to this is reflected in *Nancy* through the discussed death of Lina. She was neither a civilian nor a fighter, as she was working for the LF not by taking up arms, but as a spy and media officer. However, some warring parties also had female fighters, as Toufiq mentioned in the quote above.

### Modes of Female Martyrdom II: The Militant Martyr

*Nancy* also reflects a second mode of female martyrdom; that is, in certain parties, women performed the role of militants, and this included fighting in combat as well as conducting other activities, such as martyrdom operations. As Jennifer Philippa Eggert has convincingly shown by interviewing previous female fighters, women were not urged into participating in combat, it was the women themselves who insisted on taking up arms.<sup>511</sup>

In *Nancy*, Lina only once dies in battle. In 1981, she was increasingly harassed in West Beirut for being a Christian, even by her own secular party, the SSNP. Consequently, Lina decided to take a stand, as I have already discussed in 4.3 in the context of hierarchies of ordinary martyrs. I am here re-quoting her anecdote:

So, what more did they want me to do to prove to them that I was every bit a National? They wanted me to fight? Fine, fight I shall! In 1981, I ask the central command to transfer me to military duty. After some hesitation, the command grants me my request and dispatches me to the Ras el Nabeh frontline. I am killed right from the first clash. (20)

Finally, Lina had proved her commitment to the cause by dying for it in combat. The fact that Lina herself insisted on fighting for the party echoes the realities of the *Wars*.

510 Etel Adnan, *Sitt Marie Rose: A Novel* (Sausalito: PostApollo Press, 1982). For the novel and the historical person of Marie-Rose Boulos, see Olivia C. Harrison, 'Resistances of Literature: Strategies of Narrative Affiliation in Etel Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose*', *Postcolonial Text* 5, no. 2 (2009).

511 Jennifer Philippa Eggert, *Women and the Lebanese Civil War: Female Fighters in Lebanese and Palestinian Militias* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 162.



Fig. 4.63: LNR/SSNP, 'This Is a Lesson to All the Angry Ones and Conspirers So That They May Know That We Do Not Differentiate Between the Jews of the Inside and the Jews of the Outside. Ibtissam'. 'I Am the Son of the Sham, Come to Water My Land, the Land of the South, with My Blood. Khaled', 1985, Poster, 46 x 61 cm, ZMA 420, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

As discussed in 3.6, the design of the accompanying poster (Fig. 3.44) resembles a poster issued by the SSNP for the martyr Nazem Ayyash (Fig. 3.59). The fact that Lina is female, however, reminds me of a poster commemorating Sana Muhaidly (Fig. 3.77). Like Ayyash, Sana was a member of the SSNP, a militia that had female militants and visually remembered female martyr peers with the same imagery as their male colleagues.<sup>512</sup>

Maasri has identified that the posters the SSNP issued after martyrdom operations have a serial format that consists of the Jammoul logo at the top, a large photograph of the martyr in the centre, and, at the bottom, a statement from the martyr's message in the video taped before the operation, followed by his or her name (Figs. 3.77, 4.59, 4.63).<sup>513</sup> The equality of men and women fighting within the militia seems to be emphasised in a poster (Fig. 4.63) that shows Ibtissam Harb and Khaled al-Az-

raq, who conducted a martyrdom operation together in 1985.<sup>514</sup> They are depicted in combat clothes, their clasped hands raised as if to communicate that they will jointly succeed in the cause, including dying as martyrs, no matter their gender.

Looking through the posters in the archives, I found numerous images of female militant martyrs of the SSNP and the LCP. Also, the LCP employed one of their standardised templates equally for martyred men and women, as the poster

512 For the role of women in the SSNP, see Solomon, *In Search*, 145–49; Al Jazeera, 'Lebanon's Women Warriors', YouTube, 46:11 min, 2010, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5K949l\\_qso](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5K949l_qso).

513 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 94–96.

514 Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 123. Whether they were married, as Straub claims (*Das Selbstmordattentat*, 128), is not proven.



Fig. 4.64: SSNP, '...For Liberation and Change. The SSNP Invites You to Participate in the Celebration in Honour of Martyr Sana Muhaidly and the Martyrs of the Resistance Front. Place: Beirut Around Sin el Fil. Date: Sunday 26 April 1998, 10 am', 1998, Poster, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.



Fig. 4.65: SSNP (@ssnpparty), 'I Am Now Planted in the South, I Soak Its Earth with My Blood, Istishahida Sana Muhaidly, 'The Bride of the South' 9 April 1985', Instagram, 8 April 2022.

of istishahida Lola Abboud demonstrates (Figs. 3.60–3.61).<sup>515</sup> In the gender ideologies of these two parties, it was clear that women were equally allowed to conduct militant activities. Nonetheless, the SSNP and the LCP had significantly more male than female militants. The SSNP in particular distributed visuals of female martyrs to such an extent that numerous posters of these women survive until the present day.<sup>516</sup>

Their posters were reprinted after the Wars had ended. An example is a poster of Sana issued in 1998 (Fig. 4.64), and her face is still posted on the party's Instagram page today (Fig. 4.65). It seems that the ongoing distribution of her images fulfils what Sana said in her farewell video, in which she told spectators she was

515 According to Eggert (*Women and the Lebanese Civil War*, 101), the LCP had the highest number of female fighters of all militias involved in the Wars. Like the SSNP, the LCP also advertised their female martyrs. An example is the video of Jamal al-Sati, whom we have encountered in the context of *Three Posters*. In this video, which was taped before his martyrdom operation, he explains his action while sitting in front of multiple posters of his two female LCP predecessors, Lola Abboud and Wafa Nur al-Din.

516 It is possible that parties such as the Kataeb or the LF issued posters for their fallen female combatants, but that these posters are not housed in the archives I have consulted.

still alive, even though she knew the tape would only be broadcast after she had physically died.<sup>517</sup> No other martyr of the party, except for the founder, Antuan Saadeh, is distributed in images to such an extent as Sana. The choice to put a woman at the forefront of the visuals of the commemoration of martyrdom was deliberately made by the party. They could have put a male face—for example, that of Wajdih Sayigh, who undertook the first martyrdom operation for the SSNP<sup>518</sup>—as the focus of remembrance of the party's activities against the Israeli occupation, but Sana's face is more visible than his in the party's online and offline posters.

In the anatomy of LCP and SSNP posters, no visual distinction can be observed between those for male martyrs and those for female martyrs. However, there are differences when looking beyond the frames of the posters and into the discourse in which the pictures are situated. Two important components of female martyrdom that are not addressed in *Nancy* but that I consider crucial are the focus on the women's looks and the rumours that often surround their deaths.

First, attractiveness is usually mentioned only regarding female martyrs. For example, those who praised the deeds of Sana right after her martyrdom operation, like Hafez al-Assad, who was then the president of Syria, highlighted not only her heroism, but also her beauty. I have never encountered an account that focuses on the handsomeness of Bilal Fahs or other male martyrs.<sup>519</sup> Mia Bloom, writing about Palestinian female martyrs, argues that the women's physical appearance is an advantage for the group for which they die. Compared to their male peers, pictures of young women who choose to become martyrs draw more attention and prompt spectators to ask, 'what could make such a pretty girl do that? There must be something seriously wrong'.<sup>520</sup> Therefore, it is possible that the party deliberately took advantage of the youthfulness and looks of the women.

Second, as André-Dessornes has shown in her study on female martyrdom operations, the deaths of women are often surrounded by gossip. The author has conducted an interview with Soha Bechara, who recalled that in the 1980s there were often rumours when women died in martyrdom operations. Specifically, it was often alleged that the unmarried women were pregnant, which would have hurt

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517 The members of the SSNP who opted to conduct martyrdom operations recorded a video before their deaths in which they explained the reasons for the operation. For an analysis of the video of Muhaidly, see Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 99–152.

518 Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 109.

519 Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 118. Straub also cites a poem that praises Muhaidly as a 'beautiful bride'. For Bilal Fahs, see Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 255–58.

520 Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2011), 128.

the woman's reputation, and thus the choice to become a martyr would have been a drastic solution to not lose honour. Bechara also remembers that such rumours were spread after she tried to kill Lahad, although according to her account, she was not pregnant.<sup>521</sup> Whereas martyred men were praised for having died heroically against the Israeli occupation, for some people, it seems, it was hard to imagine that women would do this for the same reason and not because they wanted to save their honour.

The notion of the rumour is also interesting on another level. There are a few accounts that an eighteen-year-old woman, Somayah Saad, conducted a martyrdom operation for Hezbollah on 10 March 1985.<sup>522</sup> However, Straub argues that no source other than Amir Taheri mentions this woman,<sup>523</sup> and Bonsen, who provides a list of martyrdom operations conducted in Lebanon, names the martyr who caused the explosion on 10 March 1985 as Abu Zaynab/Amir Kalakish.<sup>524</sup> Contradicting this claim, Joseph Alagah indicates that Kalakish conducted his operation on 11 March 1988.<sup>525</sup> As mentioned, this book is not seeking to write history, and therefore I am not interested in finding out who is responsible for the detonation in March 1985, which, as we know from press reports, undoubtedly happened in the South and killed twelve Israeli soldiers.<sup>526</sup>

Instead, let's hypothetically assume that Somayah did exist and that she conducted the attack, because comparing her case to Sana's demonstrates how the gender of the martyr is constructed.<sup>527</sup> Somayah's example shows that even if a woman takes all the necessary measures to become a martyr for a group, she is not made a shahida if there is no remembrance by the party, which ultimately decides who becomes a martyr and whose death sinks into oblivion. Sana became the SSNP's poster girl. On the other hand, Somayah, if she existed, took the same action as Sana but her memory was erased because Hezbollah's gender ideology does not include female intentional martyrs, and therefore, women who potentially

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521 André-Dessornes, *Les Femmes-Martyres*, 101–02.

522 Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror: The Inside Story of Islamic Terrorism* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 116.

523 Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 176.

524 Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 109.

525 Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program* (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 38.

526 John Kifner, 'Car Bomb Hits Israeli Convoy in Southern Lebanon, Killing 12', *New York Times*, 11 March 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/11/world/car-bomb-hits-an-israeli-convoy-in-southern-lebanon-killing-12.html>.

527 A similar incident occurred in 1987, when a Sunni woman named Soraya Sahouni blew herself up in Beirut's airport. No group claimed responsibility.

gave their lives for the party are not recognised as martyrs.<sup>528</sup> In contrast, the SSNP's gender ideology includes female martyrs, and women who gave their lives for the SSNP are actively remembered visually.

Beyond the SSNP and the LCP, I encountered only one poster showing a female militant martyr, which was from Ahrar. It commemorates Saydeh Jamil Khayatt and was issued in 1976 (Fig. 4.21). The poster fits the characteristics of the ordinary format by including the party logo, an ID photograph of the deceased, and a slogan that commemorates her death, labelling her as Lebanon's first female martyr who died in battle. While there is little information about Ahrar's gender ideology during the Wars, the largest Christian party—the Phalange, which later split into the Kataeb and the LF—had female battalions; despite this, its leadership was at odds on whether women should fight.<sup>529</sup>

Regarding the other parties involved in the Wars, images commemorating women as martyrs are absent in the archives I have consulted. However, there are sources suggesting that Amal and Hezbollah potentially had female combatants, albeit in very small numbers, and allowed women to fight when absolutely necessary.<sup>530</sup> The Sunni and Druze parties, on the other hand, officially had no female fighters at all.<sup>531</sup> Generally, the visual distribution of the militant shahida is, with some exceptions of Christian parties, restricted to the SSNP and the LCP.

528 Whereas Hezbollah officially does not have any women who conducted martyrdom operations, the group, as a Hezbollah representative told André-Dessornes, acknowledges Sana Muhaidly and Lola Abboud, who conducted martyrdom operations for the SSNP and the LCP, as martyrs because they were fighting the common enemy, Israel. See André-Dessornes, *Les Femmes Martyres*, 129. It is therefore surprising that Straub, who refers to a 1986 source that claims that Hezbollah does not accept Sana as a martyr, ignores André-Dessornes's more recent findings. See Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 176–77.

529 On gender ideology regarding female participation in combat within the militias, see Eggert, *Women*, 10–11.

530 Eggert, *Women*, 88; Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 244. Amal had only twenty women who were killed in combat. Holt ('Lebanese Shi'i Women', 176–87) interviewed a female Hezbollah member, who told her that waging war is primarily a man's thing, but women are allowed to join if necessary. Nasrallah agreed on this point, though he also stressed that fighting by women should be avoided, and according to him, Hezbollah women did not take up arms. This claim is countered by Al Jazeera, 'Lebanese Women Warriors', because the documentary includes an interview with a woman linked to Hezbollah who narrates that she took up arms during the Wars. Of course, fighting with weapons is not the only mode of struggle that women can engage in. Accounts also mention that women in the South participated in fighting by other means, such as pouring boiling hot oil from their windows on Israeli soldiers; see Eggert, *Women*, 115. Bensen also mentions that women attacked Israeli soldiers with kitchen knives (*Martyr Cults*, 188).

531 Eggert, *Women*, 9–11; also see page 175 for the Morabitoun and pages 116–17, which includes Eggert's interview with a woman who recalls that despite the fact that the PSP officially had no female fighters, women took up arms when Israeli soldiers entered their village. Chami published a photo of female PSP fighters training with arms (*Le Mémorial de la Guerre*, 75).

The fact that Lina's only death in combat occurs for the SSNP (Fig. 3.44) echoes this gender ideology. The SSNP, more than any other party, foregrounds their female martyrs and actively and vividly remembers their killed women in posters. The choice of the two underlying images in combination, namely, images of Sana and Ayyash, points in my reading to the equality the SSNP claimed that male and female militants had; this equality was particularly evident in the imagery commemorating their martyrdoms.<sup>532</sup> However, most of the deaths of women during the *Wars* happened not because they were active in combat, but because they died in other ways, such as in bombings or massacres.

### Modes of Female Martyrdom III: The Martyr Massacred at Home

Targeted political killings inside the domestic space were another way in which women died during the *Wars*. The *shahida*, massacred at home, appears in Nancy when Lina tells the audience the following anecdote that happened 'in early '77' (17):

I found myself a commander in the National Christians Front, fulfilling my duty with all my heart and enthusiasm. I even became a staunch defender of the West Beirut National Christians. That is, until certain parties started getting irritated with me for endlessly criticizing the liberties we were taking in the National neighbourhoods. First, they notified me that I'd better cool it a little. Then, they sent me a pretty threatening message. Finally, they sent someone over to assassinate me... And that was how I died at home in Mazraa, along with my husband and four children, a massacre. (16)

Lina's speech is accompanied by a poster showing her headshot (Fig. 3.43). In the lower-left corner, four flowers are visible; the white petals are empty, and in the centres, photographs of faces representing Lina's children are inserted. The children are also mentioned in black letters that appear next to the flowers and that read: 'The Martyrs of Beirut. Lina Saneh and Her Children'.

Using the image of a living being for the representation of a dead person is often met with emotional discomfort by those lending their faces. I suspect that this is the reason why the children are photographs of Saneh's and Mroué's younger selves.<sup>533</sup> The fact that the killed husband is missing from the image is probably

532 Maasri, when discussing a poster of Sana issued by the SSNP in 1986, describes it—due to the soft strokes used for this portrait of the *shahida*—as a 'typical stereotype of romanticised femininity' (*Off the Wall*, 94). Compared to all other posters of Sana, this image is an exception, which is why I would not place much relevance on a single poster.

533 Maakaroun, Zoom, 17 February 2021.

based on the same reason and on the storyline, as it would have been confusing to use a face of one of the three male actors, who do not act as Lina's husbands in the play.<sup>534</sup>

Here, Lina is militarily active but is assassinated at home and not—as in her death, which I have discussed before—in combat. Such assassinations happened during the *Wars*. An example is the case of Linda al-Atrash, the sister of the PSP's leader Kamal Jumblatt. She was killed together with her daughter in her apartment in East Beirut in 1976.<sup>535</sup> The two incidents are comparable, as the Christian Lina lived in Muslim-dominated West Beirut when she was massacred and Linda, who was Druze, lived in the Christian-dominated eastern sector of the city. I have not encountered a poster commemorating Linda as a *shahida*, probably due to the gender ideology of the PSP, which refrained from visualising women martyrs.<sup>536</sup>

Other women who died in other politically motivated massacres were remembered on posters and performed there as martyrs. A poster (Fig. 4.19) that commemorates the killing of the Chamoun family also shows Ingrid, the wife of Ahrar's leader Dany Chamoun. Ingrid was killed along with her husband and their two young sons. A family photograph depicting the smiling couple with their children on their laps was turned into a poster of martyrs, including a slogan that labels all dead family members as *shuhada*. Even though Ingrid did not die fighting—rather, she was inside her home—she is presented as a martyr, which she only became due to her husband's political activity.

Compared to the deaths of Linda and Ingrid, Lina's case in *Nancy* is slightly different. She did not die because of her husband or brother, but because of her own activities in the militia. Nonetheless, the mode of the image, a family photograph including children, is comparable to the poster of the Chamouns. At the same time, Lina's image is a deconstruction of the commemorative poster issued when a family was massacred at home, not only because a woman instead of a man turns into the protagonist, but also because, while the children remain present, the husband is not depicted. No male hero is needed, and Lina herself performs as the heroine who is assassinated for her political deeds.

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534 Lina is also massacred in a poster of the Blue Group (Fig. 3.46), as I discussed in 4.3. As this visual does not correspond to the family image, I will not mention this death further at this point.

535 Traboulsi, *History*, 200.

536 An exception is a poster issued by the PSP that commemorates the massacres of Masklakh and Karantina and depicts a dead woman lying on the ground. I have discussed this image in 4.2. Linda al-Atrash's portrait covered the frontpage of the magazine *Assayad* on 10 June 1976, with the caption 'Why Did They Kill Sitt Linda?' I encountered this magazine in Alfred Tarazi's exhibition *Memory of a Paper City* at UMAM, which ran from 10 June 2022 to 15 July 2023.

### Modes of Female Martyrdom IV: The Civilian Martyr

Other women were killed during the *Wars* without being politically active and were murdered without being personally targeted. Lina, too, dies as a solely civilian martyr. After moving from West to East Beirut, the following incident occurred, as she tells the audience:

One pitch-black night, while on my way back to our new home in Furn el Chebbak, a hysterical youth springs up in my path and starts screaming: 'You traitor, you collaborator, you bitch, you f.' He proceeds to beat me to a pulp. He keeps at it until my blood has soaked into the ground and I die. That was on March 12, 1984. Later I learnt that the youth in question had killed me to avenge his brother, who had been abducted that same day in West Beirut when on his way to work at the Central Bank. That's sectarianism for you, that's where it leads. (26)

Lina was selected for an act of revenge because she had chosen to live in the Muslim part of town before moving to the Christian-dominated part.

The black-and-white image that accompanies this death (*Fig. 3.47*) shows an ID photograph of Lina looking into the camera. A black cross is visible in her hair. As Lina was not part of any militia at the time of this death, the poster lacks a party logo. The visual reminds us of the announcements of deaths still visible in East Beirut's streets (*Fig. 2.7*), for it includes a black cross, black letters, and a photograph of the deceased. Today, these announcements are used for non-martyric deaths, and I would argue that this image type is chosen in *Nancy* because the death happened not as a result of Lina's heroism, but while she was walking as a civilian on the street and unfortunately encountered an angry youth.

Like Lina, civilian women who have died due to being in the wrong place at the wrong time are presented as martyrs in images of the *Wars*. An example is a poster issued by Hezbollah in 1985 (*Fig. 4.17*). It shows headshots of men, women, and children in rectangular frames. The faces of some of the depicted, male and female, are obscured by flowers. Below each photograph, the dead are labelled as a *shahid* or *shahida*. All the depicted people died when a car bomb exploded in the Dahiyeh. The Bir al-Abed bombing was aimed at murdering a high-ranking Hezbollah official but instead killed dozens of civilians, mostly women and girls, who were leaving a mosque or doing other daily tasks. The mother of two of the dead told journalist Nora Boustany that 'Ahmed and Zeinab were working, not fighting. She [Zeinab] was selling a bride her trousseau. Now they are both dead'.<sup>537</sup> The Shia

537 Nora Boustany, 'Beirut Bomb's Legacy Suspicion and Tears', *Washington Post*, 6 March 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/03/06/beirut-bombs-legacy-suspicion-and-tears/28371cdd-e9ac-4792-89df-88bf0c0c64c7/>.

women, like Lina in the poster in *Figure 3.47*, did not die in combat. Their murders were not the result of personal targeting and they were not actively engaged in fighting. Nonetheless, they are remembered as martyrs on posters.

#### The Depiction of Lina as a Reflection of Women Primarily Performing the Role of the Martyr by Being Killed Violently, but Not in Combat

While the focus on female martyrs' looks and rumours surrounding their deaths are absent in *Nancy*, Lina combines four different roles that female martyrs performed in images during the Wars. The play illustrates via the poster in *Figure 3.49* that women died while being active within their parties yet without taking up arms. Other women, such as Muhaidly, died as militant martyrs and were widely remembered as such in visuals, though in most cases this was only by secular parties such as the SSNP and the LCP. By framing Lina's only death in combat as a martyrdom for the SSNP (*Fig. 3.44*), the play highlights the visual equality of female martyrs that was more vivid in the SSNP than in any other party. Throughout the play, Lina never becomes a martyr for a faction that did not have visuals of female martyrs, such as the Morabitoun. Women who were in familial relationships with influential politicians and were killed at home, such as Ingrid Chamoun, were also turned into martyrs, as happened to Lina in the death that accompanies the poster in *Figure 3.43*. But Lina is not murdered because of a man; rather, she performs the role of the heroine martyr herself. Women were also frequently killed while living their daily lives, such as the women exiting the mosque in Bir al-Abed. Still, they were remembered as shuhada, as Lina is in the image in *Figure 3.47*.

During the Wars, women were elevated to the rank of martyrdom primarily because they were killed violently without taking up arms; Lina, too, died in combat only once. This is in contrast to men, who were usually turned into martyrs by being militiamen and by dying in battle, as Rabih, Hatem, and Ziad repeatedly do in *Nancy*.

#### 4.4.2 Appropriations of the Hypermasculine Martyr Poster in *Nancy* and the Disenchantment of the Hypermasculine Fighter in Other Cultural Productions

The hypermasculine format is a certain type of martyr imagery, which shows exaggerated traits of masculinity and can be encountered among almost all parties involved in the Wars and is caricatured in *Nancy*.

My discussion here continues the work of Haugbolle, who argues that *Nancy* reflects on hegemonic masculinity during conflict.<sup>538</sup> Male gender roles performed

538 Haugbolle, '(Little) Militia Man', 118.

during the *Wars* included specific attributes such as a peculiar uniform, weapons, facial expressions, and bodily poses. All these are labelled 'militarised masculinities' in Myrntinen's brief study on the visuals of martyrs on Lebanese streets today.<sup>539</sup> Khalili has also earlier identified an 'emphasis on hyper-masculine heroism' among Palestinian fighters and martyrs, where men are presented as having courage during battle, acting out violence while being fearless, cool, and effective, and willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause.<sup>540</sup> All these points also apply to the Lebanese factions, as I will elaborate below by linking selected pictures of *Nancy* to their underlying images, which are posters from the *Wars* that have a hyper-masculine format. As we will see, *Nancy*, via the exaggerated use of attributes and symbols associated with masculinity in the posters of the *Wars*, ridicules the depiction of the male martyr. Furthermore, the reading of the image and text of the play in combination reveals that it is only the image of the shahid that presents the martyr as a hero, while the text points to the martyr's humanity by emphasising soft traits and emotions; this deconstruction of the hero also takes place in other Lebanese cultural productions. I start with the identification of the elements of the male hero in posters of the *Wars* that can also be found in the posters of *Nancy*.

### The Elements of the Male Martyr I: What Makes a Man Is Not the Gun, but the Sunglasses

Several images in *Nancy* (Figs. 3.13, 3.19, 3.32) show Rabih, Hatem, or Ziad wearing sunglasses. These posters commemorate the men's deaths as martyrdoms for their respective militias; namely, Rabih for the LF, Hatem for the Morabitoun, and Ziad for the LCP. All three died in combat while fighting against their perceived enemies.

A poster (Fig. 3.19) that accompanies Hatem's death was issued when he died in combat against the Phalange:

In the end, the battle is settled in our favour, and we seize control of the tower. In my excitement, I run all the way up to the roof and start shouting for the people of Beirut to behold this first victory of the Morabitoun: 'God is Great. Allahu akbar!' A moment later, I feel this heat in my head: A Phalangist sniper perched on the roof of the Holiday Inn delivers a bullet, and I die on the spot. (14)

The poster shows the actor standing, oriented to the viewer. His body is visible down to slightly below his waist, and his arms are at his sides. This depiction reminds me of the pose of Mostafa Marouf Saad (Fig. 3.75), who was, as mentioned, not a martyr but the leader of a Sunni militia, the Popular Nasserist Movement.

539 Myrntinen, 'Death Becomes Him', 123.

540 Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 20–21.

Like Hatem, he is wearing sunglasses and is standing on the right-hand side of the poster with a ruin in the background. What is noteworthy is that in this case, it is not the poster of a martyr that was appropriated. This, in my reading, was done because the masculine traits of militiamen (and militia leaders) should be foregrounded. As I have argued in 4.2, most of the actual posters of the martyrs of the *Wars* appropriate ID photographs, in which the men, of course, do not wear sunglasses. Therefore, it seems, the makers of *Nancy* resorted to an image of a militia leader, although he had not become a martyr.

Another mode in which sunglasses are included in the visuals of *Nancy* is the appropriation of one of the rare posters of the *Wars* depicting a martyr who is wearing sunglasses. This is employed in the poster that was issued after Rabih's death for the LF during the Geagea-Hobeika dispute (Fig. 3.13). Rabih, who was part of Hobeika's faction, talks about Geagea's reaction to Hobeika's travel to Damascus to sign the peace treaty:

Geagea's response comes a couple of days later, in the form of a full-fledged military offensive. First on the list are our offices in the Military council... The attack lasts two hours and ends with our defeat and my death—along with nine of my friends... It was the first day of the year 1986. (27)

The poster accompanying this death of Rabih is—although he is not depicted with a rifle, but only in combat gear and wearing sunglasses—an appropriation of an iconic and widely reproduced image of Bachir Gemayel (Fig. 4.66), issued by the Phalange, that shows him with Ray-Ban sunglasses and a gun.<sup>541</sup>

A third visual strategy of incorporating sunglasses is to add them to an appropriated image, and this is done in the depiction of Ziad's death (Fig. 3.32), which occurred under the following circumstances:

Then in early '76 I joined the fighting in the Sannine mountain range. [...] A Russian-made shell descends on us from the Syrian side, and a piece of shrapnel gets lodged in my gut. Comrade Nassim carried me on his back, but we had a long distance to cross and it wasn't easy walking in the snow. He was getting tired and I couldn't take it anymore, I just wanted to die and get some rest. I begged him to leave me behind... He agreed, but he promised to come back for me with the other comrades... Hardly half an hour later the cold had penetrated my bones and I was frozen stiff. The battle was settled in the Syrian Army's favour. Nevertheless, my comrades counted me as the first hero to fall in the Sannine battle against the separatist isolationist project for Lebanon. (15)

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541 Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 6. In Bachir's case, the gun was a Belgian CAL.

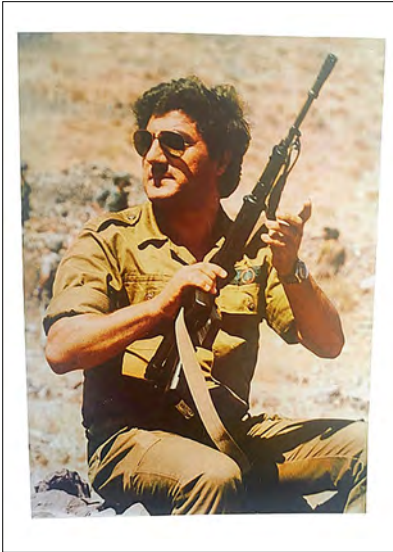


Fig. 4.66: Phalange (Photographer Varoujan), Bachir, 1980, Poster, 47 x 65 cm, WJA 39, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).



Fig. 4.67: LNRF/SSNP, 'Oh My Family in the South, a Few Steps and I Will Be with You, a Bride You Hail to the Soul of the Martyrs. Norma Abu Hassan', 1986, Poster, 45 x 60 cm, ZMA 423, [signsofconflict.com](http://signsofconflict.com).

Here, a poster of LCP martyr Ahmad al-Mir al-Ayubi (Abu Hassan; Fig. 3.62), which I have already discussed in 4.2, served as the underlying image.<sup>542</sup> Both posters show the martyrs in front of a blue background, looking directly at the viewer. Also, the red flower with a blue bullet cutting its stem, symbolising the death of the depicted, is appropriated in the poster of Ziad, but the sunglasses were added in *Nancy*.

Generally, men with guns were frequently visible in martyr posters of the *Wars* (Figs. 3.64, 3.67, 3.74, 4.9, 4.11, 4.13). However, guns are not a purely male-connoted symbol. Women with rifles are also depicted in SSNP posters, which visually celebrated its female martyrs more than any other militia, as can be seen in an image of Norma Abu Hassan where she holds a black gun (Fig. 4.67). Another example is a poster issued by the LF (Fig. 4.18) to commemorate the Siege of Zahlé. The drawing shows a woman, whose face is left blank. She is holding a black rifle in her hands, and a bunch of daisies is growing out of the muzzle of her gun.<sup>543</sup>

542 For the poster, see Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 91.

543 Maasri interprets the woman as the Virgin Mary (*Off the Wall*, 79). I would argue that she could also be a female fighter.

As women are depicted with weapons in posters, it seems that sunglasses are a more masculine-connoted element than guns. The fact that sunglasses were worn by male fighters of different militias is reflected in *Nancy* by showing the three actors having died for different factions with sunglasses. According to Mroué, Ray-Bans were particularly popular.

This is related to the macho culture during the war and represented in the political posters. It was a trend for most political parties. In the Lebanese Forces, wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses like the leader Bachir Gemayel was a trend followed by most members. This trend was similar for other political parties and militias.<sup>544</sup>

Similarly, Jabre points out that sunglasses, primarily Ray-Bans, were fashionable among fighters.<sup>545</sup> The brand was invented in the 1930s to prevent US Army pilots from being blinded by rays while flying. Twenty years later, Ray-Bans entered pop culture and were, for example, worn by James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. The brand was male-connoted for decades; it was only in the 1960s that a model was designed for women.<sup>546</sup>

The popularity of sunglasses and guns among militiamen is also mentioned in memoirs and novels about the *Wars*, such as one by Youssef Bazzi, a former fighter of the SSNP, who remembers: 'I stood at the checkpoint, wearing gold-rimmed Ray-Ban sunglasses with green lenses, a white tank-top and camouflage khakis, holding a British-made VAL rifle'.<sup>547</sup> Similarly, Rawi Hage describes a militiaman in his novel *De Niro's Game* (2006), which is set during the *Wars*, as follows: 'Abou-Nahra had on his Ray-Ban sunglasses, so you couldn't tell whether he was looking at you'.<sup>548</sup>

I have not encountered sunglasses in posters or photographs depicting female martyrs or fighters.<sup>549</sup> While a few posters across different militias show male martyrs wearing sunglasses, there are numerous photographs of male combatants that show the fighters with sunglasses and confirm how popular they were during the *Wars*.<sup>550</sup> One photograph by Harout Jeredjian (*Fig. 4.68*) illustrates that gender was performed by wearing or not wearing sunglasses. Two fighters, one male and one

544 Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.

545 Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 6.

546 Ray-Ban, 'Ray-Ban: The History of the Top-Selling Eyewear Brand Worldwide', *Luxottica Homepage*, n.d., [https://www.luxottica.com/sites/luxottica.com/files/ray-ban\\_history\\_en.pdf](https://www.luxottica.com/sites/luxottica.com/files/ray-ban_history_en.pdf) (last accessed 5 December 2023; site inactive on 25 October 2024).

547 Youssef Bazzi, *Yasser Arafat Looked at Me and Smiled* (Beirut: Ashkal Alwan, 2005), 41.

548 Rawi Hage, *De Niro's Game* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2006), 90.

549 However, I have seen photographs from the *Wars* of women wearing sunglasses at funerals.

550 Images of male martyrs wearing sunglasses are also shown in Schmitt, *Advertised to Death*.



Fig. 4.68: Harout Jeredjian, *Untitled*, 1976, Courtesy of Georges Boustany Collection.

female, are walking next to each other carrying guns, but only the man is wearing sunglasses, while the woman's face is bare.

Wearing sunglasses de-individualises, as a part of the face is covered. This creates the appearance of similar-looking militiamen. As discussed above, women are depicted in martyr posters because of their looks; for this reason, it is more essential that their faces are fully visible and not partly covered.

In short, what distinguishes the gender performance of the male martyr from his female counterpart is not the gun, but the sunglasses. This is also reflected in *Nancy* by the decision to depict Rabih, Hatem, and Ziad wearing sunglasses.

#### The Elements of the Male Martyr II: Crossed Arms in Military Clothes, a Muscular Body in Everyday Clothes

The second element of the male martyr's image that *Nancy* points out are body poses, namely, crossed arms and the exposure of a (semi)muscular body. Two posters in the play stress the body of the male fighter. The first is a death of Rabih for the LF (Fig. 3.12), and the second is a death of Ziad for the PFLP and the LCP (Fig. 3.33). Ziad tells the audience, 'We are to attack the town of Aishiyeh. [...] On November 9, 1976, [...] Our jeep is hit and all the passengers die, myself included' (16). Ziad's death is accompanied by a poster that shows him in combat clothing; his muscular

arms are crossed, and he is looking to his right. His slightly unbuttoned shirt reveals part of his bare chest. Rabih is depicted in a similar vein. With crossed arms in military gear, he looks towards the viewer. His chest is also revealed by a V-neck. He tells of his death as follows: 'on Tuesday, October 27, 1980 to be exact—I join the campaign to finish off the last of the Ahrar's bases in Ain el Remmaneh... [...] I am wounded in several places and die' (19). Both Rabih and Ziad die in combat.

The underlying image of the posters for Rabih and Ziad is a depiction of Bachir (Fig. 3.58) in which he is shown with crossed, strong, and muscular arms in military gear; specifically, he is wearing a shirt that reveals part of his chest. Bensen interprets this staging of Bachir as a demonstration of his 'strength, being a brave soldier of Lebanon'.<sup>551</sup> According to Schmitt, the image shows an idealised male fighter, characterised by 'a military uniform' and a 'facial expression of fierce resolve'.<sup>552</sup> I have not encountered posters in which women are depicted in this manner. Although the SSNP's female martyrs are wearing military gear in posters (Fig. 4.67), they are shown neither with crossed arms nor with an emphasis on their muscles.

A second mode of visualising masculinity in *Nancy* is the accentuation of the whole body in everyday clothes, as can be seen in images of Hatem (Fig. 3.19) and Rabih (Figs. 3.8–3.9). Rabih, as I will elaborate further in 4.5, died like Hatem in the Battle of the Hotels. Both martyred fighters wear a fitted top (a tight T-shirt for the former and a slim-cut shirt for the latter) tucked into their trousers, which are held with belts, accentuating their semi-muscular bodies. Their arms hang at their sides, and they look towards the viewer. Parts of their lower arms are uncovered, and Hatem's white shirt, via the V-neck, exposes part of his chest. A gun holster is visible around his right shoulder.

One underlying image of this depiction could be a poster issued by the PSP (Fig. 3.74) that shows Walid Samih Chahin, an ordinary militiaman and martyr. He stands in front of a tree wearing non-combatant clothes and, like Rabih and Hatem, is frontally posed, looking towards the viewer. Chahin is, like Hatem, depicted with a rifle. Unlike the two images of *Nancy*, however, it is not just the lower arms of the PSP fighter that are exposed, because he wears a tank-top (on which white letters read 'No Problem') so that his hyper-trained muscular arms are fully visible.

*Nancy* reflects on two postures performed by the male martyr in posters of the Wars: first, the depiction of martyrs in combat gear and with crossed muscular arms; and second, the exposure of the whole muscular body, in everyday clothes, often with a weapon. I have not encountered such depictions of women in martyr posters, as I have not encountered women wearing sunglasses. I call the combination or partial application of these elements in posters of martyrs the hypermasculine format.

551 Bensen, *Martyr Cults*, 105.

552 Schmitt, *Advertised to Death*, 91.

### *Nancy* as a Reflection of Exaggerated Masculinity in the Posters of the Wars

Hypermasculinity is a concept that is rooted in psychology and was coined as a term by Donald L. Mosher and Mark Sirkin in 1984. It describes an exaggerated form of stereotypical masculinity that consists of four elements: first, toughness as emotional self-control, meaning that feelings such as fear, distress, empathy, and sensitivity are regarded as weak, while anger is perceived as the only legitimate emotion; second, physical and verbal violence are considered acceptable behaviours of masculine power; third, dangerous situations are perceived as exciting, and surviving them is believed to be manly; fourth, insensitive, aggressive, and depersonalised attitudes towards women and sex. In combination, these elements describe a male personality who wants to be powerful and dominant over other men, women, and the environment, often by resorting to violence.<sup>553</sup>

Not all four traits can be found in the hypermasculine format in the *Wars* posters and in the *Nancy* posters. Whereas dominance over women and violence as acceptable behaviour are absent,<sup>554</sup> toughness is expressed through an emotionless face; specifically, through sunglasses that cover the eyes and thus conceal all possible feelings that the depicted men may express. The exposure of the body and the posture with crossed arms point to strength and bravery, and therefore to the willingness to place oneself in a dangerous situation that might be perceived as exciting.

Broader existing discussions on the performance of exaggerated male attributes in imagery from the *Wars* are, with the exception of Myrntinen's article, limited. Researchers usually focus on the image of Bachir alone. In this regard, Haugbolle writes of 'muscular Maronitism', which describes the image of a young, healthy, and strong Maronite, or at least Christian fighter, primarily embodied by Bachir.<sup>555</sup> Traboulsi, in a similar vein, speaks of 'muscular Libanity', referring to Bachir.<sup>556</sup>

By appropriating hypermasculine poses from the posters of the *Wars* for Rabih, Hatem, and Ziad, who died as fighting martyrs for different militias, namely the Phalange, Ahrar, the LCP, the PFLP, and the Morabitoun, *Nancy* reflects the fact that the exaggerated visualisation of the male combatant in posters of the *Wars*

553 Megan Vokey, Bruce Tefft, and Christ Tysiaczny, 'An Analysis of Hyper-Masculinity in Magazine Advertisements', *Sex Roles* 68 (2013): 562–63.

554 Remarkably, little research has been conducted regarding sexual violence against women during the *Wars*, with the first study on this topic published only recently. See Legal Action Worldwide, *They Raped Us in Every Way Possible, in Ways You Can't Imagine: Gendered Crimes During the Lebanese Civil War* (n.p.: Legal Action Worldwide, 2021), <https://www.legalactionworldwide.org/wp-content/uploads/They-raped-us-in-every-possible-way-23.05.2022.pdf>.

555 Haugbolle, 'Secular Saint', 208–10.

556 Traboulsi, *History*, 216.

is not limited to Bachir; as I have shown with the underlying *Wars* posters of the LF, the Popular Nasserite Movement, and the PSP, they can also be encountered in other images of martyrs and among various groups involved in the conflicts. In my reading, the exaggerated re-staging of these poses in *Nancy* caricatures the visual hypermasculinity in the posters of the *Wars*.

### Undermining Hypermasculinity: The Hero Is a Human and (Un)Heroic Militiamen in Other Cultural Productions

The hypermasculine fighter is disenchanted in *Nancy* and in other artworks. Hypermasculinity in *Nancy* is expressed only in the visuals. Read in combination with the text, the play denounces the construction of the hypermasculine martyr and reveals him as being not a hero but a human, who expresses emotions. For example, when he departs with the PLO for Tunis in 1982, Hatem admits: 'There I was, on deck, holding back my tears' (22). Rabih, as mentioned in 4.2, is deeply saddened when he learns, after the *Wars* had officially ended, that one of his deaths has not been captured on camera, saying, 'I watched the tape because I wanted to see how I was killed. But, alas, I wasn't on the tape. I was really stung by this—it hurt my feelings...' (32). Similarly, Ziad wishes to die after he was wounded in a battle in the Sannine, explaining, as quoted above, 'I couldn't take it anymore, I just wanted to die and get some rest...' (15).

These examples show that, on the textual plane, the martyr is presented as an everyday human, with feelings such as sadness, sensitivity, and distress, who only through the circumstances of war becomes a fighter. Fadi Toufiq commented on this notion regarding *Nancy*:

[The militiamen] were citizens, not fighters. No one is born as a fighter. A fighter is not a genre of people; it is not a nationality. It is our cousin, our brother; it is the family. [...] A fighter is not someone as now they speak about them; they were not these bad guys. They were the loved ones on the street. [...] In a civil war, you do not need a uniform; if you throw [down] your arms, you become a civilian and we brought that notion to the theatre—these four performers, four fighters—and we showed the people how they are. They are you; they are anyone.<sup>557</sup>

In this passage, Toufiq does not speak of any heroism of the fighters but describes them as any man or woman next door who became a fighter because he or she was born in the temporality and locality of war.

557 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021.

The fighter, as Khatib has also argued for Lebanese cinema—in particular, for movies by Baghdadi—is characterised not as a superhero, but as a man with human traits, who despite having these traits, commits violent acts.<sup>558</sup> In the hypermasculine format, however, the shahid is never visually portrayed as a man-next-door, but as a hero. This stands in contrast to the ordinary format, where the ID images themselves do not create the impression of the martyr as an extraordinary being.

*Nancy* does not demonise the militiamen; rather, Rabih, Hatem, and Ziad partly fit into Haugbolle's concept of the 'little militia man'. The 'little militia man' joined a militia due to economic and social circumstances and now feels remorse for his deeds during the *Wars*.<sup>559</sup> Such sentiments are absent in the text of *Nancy*. Therefore, regarding *Nancy*, I would not speak of the 'little militia man' but of the '(un) heroic militiaman'. To better understand the construction of this figure, I will link his portrayal to other Lebanese cultural productions.

First, there is the movie *Memory Box* (2021) by Hadjithomas/Joreige, in which the artists tell the story of three generations of Lebanese women and the effects of the *Wars* on them. One of them, Maia, came of age during the *Wars* and left the country with her mother before the official end of the conflict, whereas her daughter was born in Canada. While still in Lebanon, Maia had a boyfriend, Raja, who was part of a militia. In *Memory Box*, he is portrayed not as a strong hero but as a gentle and sensitive lover who takes risks not in the battle but in his endeavours to see Maia. This is evident, for instance, when he secretly collects her from her house in the middle of the night.

Another example is *Three Posters* (2000; Fig. 3.1). By showing different takes of al-Sati's video, which he recorded before his martyrdom operation, the audience sees that the martyr-to-be sometimes stutters or corrects himself, as Mroué explained:

You see the very human side of him; you see the fear in his eyes. You can also see the pride he had for his cause. I think you can feel his hesitation in his stuttering. You sense that he is reading from or has memorised a written text, and that sometimes he tries to improvise but then cannot go on. You feel all of these things.<sup>560</sup>

By watching the different versions of the video, and the martyr's insecurities and errors in the process of recording, it becomes obvious that 'the martyr is not a hero but a human being'.<sup>561</sup>

558 Khatib, *Lebanese Cinema*, 105–25.

559 Haugbolle, '(Little) Militia Man', 135.

560 Elias, 'Interview with Rabih Mroué'.

561 Mroué and Khoury, 'Three Posters', 183.

A third example on which I will focus is the representation of the (un)heroic militiaman in the documentary movie *Massaker* (2004) by Borgmann, Slim, and Theissen, which in my reading denounces the hypermasculinity of fighters. The filmmakers interviewed six former combatants of the Phalange who committed atrocities in the massacre of Sabra and Shatila in 1982. These men, like the four actors in *Nancy*, provide details, sometimes including exact dates and locations, of their experiences during the Wars, although in *Massaker* they are restricted to Sabra and Shatila. Similar to Rabih, Hatem, and Ziad, the ex-combatants do not express regret for the violence they have committed.

The visual depiction of the protagonists of *Massaker* is in no way heroic (Fig. 4.69). Their faces are not visible; the spectators only see the men in dim light, and the frequent close-ups evoke an interrogation scene.<sup>562</sup> However, the Phalangists show hypermasculine traits. In some scenes, they present themselves as tough guys with no emotions. For example, when an interviewee re-enacts a memory of killing a Palestinian with a knife, he says without sentiment that it is better to slaughter and torture a human than shoot him, as the experience before death is more painful. In another scene, an interviewee says, 'During a street battle you have to be ice cold like a refrigerator'. These statements are devoid of empathy or sensitivity.

Physical violence as an acceptable expression of masculine power is also repeatedly acknowledged. For instance, a militiaman mentions that it is no problem to shoot at people, and another of the interviewees re-enacts without any expression of pity how the Phalangists hijacked the homes of Palestinians, throwing grenades inside them, killing the inhabitants. A militiaman bluntly explains, 'We were there to kill them'.



Fig. 4.69: Monika Borgmann, Lokman Slim, Hermann Theissen, *Massaker*, 2004, Film, 99 min, Courtesy of Monika Borgmann.

562 Mark Westmoreland, 'Catastrophic Subjectivity: Representing Lebanon's Undead', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 30 (2010): 200.

Other sections of *Massaker* reflect the belief that survival in dangerous situations is perceived as manly. A commander says that he brought his men to Sabra and Shatila 'to give them a chance to kill and see blood. The most important thing to survive a war is to see blood'. The ex-fighters also boldly claim that they enjoyed the killings and that there was a subconscious competition to see who could slaughter the most Palestinians.

Furthermore, insensitive, aggressive, and depersonalised attitudes towards women are addressed. One Phalangist remembers another fighter, who had raped and killed a Palestinian girl, saying, 'We didn't object. We laughed. You've got a little one. Why didn't you kill her straightaway. She stinks, she his dirty. Her pubic hair is one meter long. He said I needed a fuck—how else could I get it'. This memory, uttered without regret, is only one of numerous passages that make *Massaker* terribly difficult to watch.<sup>563</sup>

While the statements I have discussed, taken together, seem to embody the hypermasculine man who wants to be powerful and dominant, in this case over the Palestinians, by killing and torturing them, the filmmakers simultaneously deconstruct the image of the ruthless and barbaric militiaman by including narrations by the interviewees, which show that they are not only tough guys but also humans with feelings. For example, a Phalangist tells the audience that he was terrified and shocked when he saw the many dead in the camp but participated in the massacre because he was afraid that he would be killed if he refused to do so. Another interviewee remarks that he did not have the courage to kill, which is why someone else killed for him. Also, the commander admits that ninety percent of his men were afraid to go to the camp. Another man says that seeing people slaughtered made him feel sick, and he could not stand watching. Awkwardly, compassion for animals is addressed when a militiaman expresses pity for dead horses, shot in Sabra and Shatila, and another man tells in a lengthy anecdote of his love for his cats and that the mother cat has given birth to her kitten in his bed.

The different narrative parts and the visuals of the movie, when combined, show that although these men committed hideous atrocities and have undoubtedly hypermasculine traits, they also have emotions, and although they do not express any pity or regret about what they have done, they also feel love, sadness, and fear, which portrays them not as heroes but as human beings.

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563 Direct violence is shown in *Massaker* in photographs of mutilated bodies of Palestinians who were killed in the massacre. To me, it was not these violent images that made watching the movie so distressing, but rather the violence described in detail by the militiamen. I watched *Massaker* twice and felt extremely disgusted and disturbed both times. The fact that none of the survivors of the massacre is given a voice by the filmmakers, who invite only the perpetrators to speak, has been criticised in Lebanon. See Westmoreland, 'Crisis of Representation', 136; Sune Haugbolle, 'Best Practices' of Global Memory and the Politics of Atonement in Lebanon', in *Replicating Atonement: Foreign Models in the Commemoration of Atrocities*, ed. Mischa Gabowitsch (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 66–68.

Like *Massaker*, *Three Posters*, and *Memory Box*, *Nancy* demonstrates that the hypermasculine militiaman does not exist outside his image. Only the surface carries the illusion of a tough hero. These men are not emotionless machines but have, like every human being, the ability to feel not only anger but also fear and love and, at times, insecurity. The hypermasculine men in the posters were neither heroes nor demons, but men who lived next door, (un)heroic militiamen, who either died during the *Wars* and became martyrs or, if they survived, are part of Lebanese society today.

#### 4.4.3 The Hypermasculine Format as Advertisement for the Militia

There are parallels between the martyr posters in the hypermasculine format and certain commercial ads that target men, as both follow a mechanism to establish an illusion of a hypermasculine man and are intended to persuade. Martyr posters, as Maasri has argued, are supposed to encourage men, and in some cases, women, to join the militia that has issued the poster.<sup>564</sup> Hamdar has characterised Hezbollah as its own religious-political brand,<sup>565</sup> and Chaib has pointed out that Hezbollah is using the tools of advertising for the posters of martyrs and that it brands them via the party's logo, calligraphy, and colours.<sup>566</sup> These observations are also valid for the posters of many of the other groups involved in the *Wars*. The title of Schmitt's book, *Advertised to Death: Lebanese Poster Boys*, also hints at this notion; however, she does not discuss the proximity of the martyr poster and the advertising poster, which I will further examine here.

#### The Promise to Become the Ideal Man by Buying a Product/Joining the Militia: Hypermasculinity in Commercial Advertisements and Martyr Posters

A collective of psychologists who have studied the frequent employment of hypermasculinity in advertisements in US men's magazines came to the conclusion that usually the hypermasculine traits of 'calloused attitudes towards women and sex' and 'violence as manly' do not appear in commercial ads. In contrast, the hypermasculine components 'toughness and emotional self-control' and 'danger as exciting' are frequently depicted in the advertisements they studied. The reason for this, the authors argue, is that these two traits are socially more accepted than violence in general and aggression against women. Therefore, a broader audience will be reached when these two components are omitted.<sup>567</sup>

564 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 88.

565 Hamdar, 'Hizbullah-land?', 318.

566 Chaib, 'Hezbollah Seen', 131.

567 Vokey, Tefft, Tysiaczny, 'Analysis of Hyper-Masculinity', 572.



Fig. 4.70: Duncan Skipper (Art Director), Maxi-Milk, 2012, Online Poster. Imagery from an old Maximuscle Protein Milk campaign. Maximuscle has since rebranded to MaxiNutrition and is now focused on providing everyday sports nutrition products for everyone.

A typical example of hypermasculine advertising appears for a protein product that builds muscles, called Maxi-Milk (Fig. 4.70). It shows a rugged, strong, muscular, physically fit, shirtless man in an outdoor setting. His facial expression is relaxed, embodying 'toughness and emotional self-control', although he is holding himself up with one hand on a rock while hanging from it, an activity that points to 'danger as exciting'. In his other hand, he holds a bottle of the advertised product, from which he is drinking. On the poster's upper right, a slogan reads, 'MILK for REAL MEN', and on the bottom right, a bottle of the product is depicted. This is the logo that serves as the recognition factor for the brand.

Such constructed advertisements do not represent how men actually are but rather create an illusion of the ideal of a man. Through the combination of the image of the advertised product and the

man who performs hypermasculinity and owns and uses the product, the ad holds the promise that when buying that item, the depicted version of manliness can be achieved. The target group and those who can be most influenced by such advertisements are young men with lower social or economic power. This is because these men are more likely to buy products that promise that by owning them, one can obtain women, economic security, and social status, which more older men have already gained. Through the presence of such commercials in daily life and their repeated and constant exposure to potential consumers, hypermasculine performances of gender are intended to be normalised and validated. These ads, along with men's early socialisation and the consumption of other media, such as movies and videogames, play a role in the teaching and shaping of masculinity. In other words, these commercials have a substantial influence on hypermasculine behaviour in society because they encourage men to consciously and unconsciously re-enact the men presented in the images.<sup>568</sup>

As with the ad discussed above, the martyr posters in the hypermasculine format are usually void of elements that show aggressive attitudes towards women

568 Ibid., 564–65, 572.

and that depict violence as acceptable manly behaviour. Like the men in the commercials, the shuhada are portrayed as strong, muscular, and rugged, embodying toughness and the perception of danger as exciting. Of course, elements of hypermasculinity in posters of martyrs are depicted not in order to sell a product but to convince young men to join the militia that has issued the poster.

Becoming first a militiaman and then maybe a martyr is framed as the illusion of the ideal man. When becoming part of the militia, as the poster seems to promise, men can achieve the desired masculinity presented in the image. Like the hypermasculine ads, the hypermasculine posters primarily target young and economically unstable men because, as Haugbolle has stated, joining a militia gave boys access to sex, easy money, and guns.<sup>569</sup>

Also, celebrities are often used in hypermasculine commercials. For example, Daniel Craig appears in ads for Omega watches.<sup>570</sup> The use of a celebrity as a face of a brand is comparable to a poster's depiction of a celebrity martyr, who is the face of a dream. Bachir, whose status as a celebrity martyr I discussed in 4.3, is, like Craig, a branded face. He is advertising not a watch but the idea of a Christian-dominated Lebanon.

In *Nancy*, this is particularly reflected in the posters in *Figures 3.12* and *3.13*, which show Rabih as 'little Bachir'. Rabih reproduces hypermasculinity by re-staging the pose of the celebrity martyr with crossed arms and military gear (*Fig. 3.58*). Bachir's image is used to promise that everyone could become like him by joining the Phalange. The posters present Bachir both as one of the militiamen and as a hero. This is also emphasised by Jabre in an outburst of sectarian glory:

As for Bashir, it wasn't just a matter of admiration towards him but rather veneration. An unexpected hero, he is the 'hope' of a strong Lebanon, where Christians would live free, far from any kind of dhimmitude [a term for the situation of Christians living under Muslim rule]. The posters that were plastered at every street corner represented Bashir in his military uniform, arms crossed or holding his gun. The propaganda was to convey the image of a charismatic leader who does not hesitate to take up arms and fight alongside young resistance fighters. This selflessness shows the young commander was admired by both young combatants and civilians.<sup>571</sup>

This passage would be a perfect advertising text for another of Bachir's posters (*Fig. 4.66*), as Jabre here puts in words what the image should communicate. The poster seems to say: 'You, a little boy, can be like me, wearing combat gear, a gun, and

569 Haugbolle, '(Little) Militia Man', 128–29.

570 Elizabeth Nichols, 'Behind the Brand of James Bond', *The Luminary* 4 (2014).

571 Jabre, *Lebanese Resistance Posters*, 18.

sunglasses. I talk like you. I am young, like you. You can be a tough fighter, seeking danger to protect us, Christians. Be like me, join the Phalange!' All these words do not need to be said. The image of Bachir communicates this message itself.

While posters could already convey this message during Bachir's lifetime, they did so even more after his death. Especially around 1983, during the War of the Mountain, many posters of the dead leader were installed to motivate young fighters to continue his cause.<sup>572</sup> Now, it was proven that Bachir would die for his convictions, and he turned into a role model who encouraged others to sacrifice themselves following his example.

The martyr posters in general, celebrity and non-celebrity, contributed to the learning of masculinity. Just as people in urban landscapes are constantly surrounded by advertising posters, the Lebanese were—during the Wars—and still are repeatedly exposed to posters of martyrs, often next to commercial ads. In one example on Sassine Square, Bachir's poster is placed in the vicinity of a jewellery ad (Fig. 4.3). Through its regular visualisation, hypermasculinity is supposed to be accepted, shaped, and internalised in order to encourage men to re-enact the martyrdom shown. Like the bottle of the Maxi-Milk protein drink, the parties' logos serve as branding.

The hypermasculine format, including a muscular man with a weapon and sunglasses, in relation to the multitude of images in the ordinary format that show ID photographs, stands out. It is therefore arguably more effective at catching the attention of passers-by and it is intended to evoke in the young men strolling by a desire to become like the poster boy.

This is also true for the posters showing women, as they are depicted far less frequently than men. Especially women sympathising with the SSNP or the LCP might be encouraged to join the militia when they see images of Sana Muhaidly or Lola Abboud. These two women, like all other female martyrs, are not portrayed with stereotypical feminised images, and their posters are devoid of any sexualisation or objectification of the female body, despite the fact that such depictions existed in Lebanon prior to and during the Wars. Alfred Tarazi collected numerous examples of magazines presenting women as sexualised objects and exhibited them in his show *Memory of a Paper City* (Fig. 4.71). I suggest



Fig. 4.71: *Memory of a Paper City*, UMAM, Exhibition View, Courtesy of Alfred Tarazi.

572 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 63–64.

that the reason for the non-sexualisation of women in martyr posters is that the posters of female fighters should not enhance the image of a 'loose' woman, rather they should present self-sacrifice as an honourable deed. Sometimes women are carrying weapons, as in the case of Norma Abu Hassan (Fig. 4.67), and sometimes women are depicted in the serial format, as in the case of Sana Muhaidly (Fig. 3.77). But the depiction of women is unlike that of men because their pose matters less than the sheer fact that they are women. Simply being a woman makes them stand out from the mass of faces of male martyrs.

#### 4.4.4 Deconstructing and Revealing the Gender Roles Performed in *Nancy* and Other Works of Art

Because social gender is constructed, roles can be changed, at least in theory. During the *Wars*, it would have been possible to depict female martyrs with sunglasses or crossed hands in posters. However, this did not happen because it would have been perceived as odd if a woman, such as Norma Abu Hassan (Fig. 4.67), had performed the same pose as Walid Samieh Chahin (Fig. 3.74), exposing her body in a tank-top and showing her muscular arms.

In the posters of *Nancy*, the performance of gender is especially revealed in one black-and-white poster that depicts Lina (Fig. 3.48). The actor sits on a military jeep, wearing sunglasses, and her arms are bare. She narrates her death for the LF as follows:

I joined the Lebanese Forces. Given my former political background and my experience in the media, I was assigned to their media office. [...] Until I found myself on the media consultant team accompanying Hobeika on his visit to Syria. Upon our return, Hobeika accused me of working for Samir Geagea—and of leaking information on the serious concessions he had offered to the Syrians... The charge ended up costing me a bullet in the head. (27)

This death of Lina, again caused by the Geagea-Hobeika conflict, fits into the typical roles women performed during the *Wars* because Lina was affiliated with a militia without actively taking part in combat.

The underlying image comes from a poster that was issued by the Lebanese National Resistance Front (Fig. 3.73). It shows a man throwing a stone at a vehicle on which, in this version, nobody is sitting. What is crucial, however, is that Lina wears sunglasses and her arms are bare, elements that, in the posters of the *Wars*, are restricted to men. Butler would term this strategy of depicting one gender with attributes ritually performed by the other as 'cross-dressing'. At the same time, Figure 3.48 is an example of a subversive act against the categories of gender, as explained by Butler:

If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations itself.<sup>573</sup>

If the poster, in particular the hypermasculine format, is thought of as Butler's law, then *Nancy* subverts it by turning it against itself when it shows Lina with elements usually restricted to men. Also, the exaggerated depiction of masculinity in the posters of Rabih, Hatem, and Ziad are permutations that turn the posters of the *Wars* into mere parodies of themselves. The hypermasculine format in the play reveals that the construction of gender takes place even after death, and to such an extent that, as Christopher Kilmartin stated when characterising hypermasculinity, 'the picture that emerges is of a man who is not really masculine but is more of a caricature of masculinity'.<sup>574</sup>

Post-mortem gendered performances are also addressed in *Inhabitants*. While sitting in front of a poster that shows a meeting of Nasser and Hariri (Fig. 3.3), Mroué narrates the deaths of Nasser and Hariri:

Going back to the question of this meeting, it might symbolically represent a meeting between the genders of the two deaths; Nasser's 'feminine' death, and Hariri's 'masculine' death. [...] We should not forget that Nasser died defeated. [...] especially since he died of a natural, rapid death. His death did not fit that of a hero. [...] He died of sadness and bitterness; he died in the same way that a mother would die, if her loved ones passed away. As for Hariri, he was killed, assassinated, slaughtered... like a hero would be. His murderers were forced to use hundreds of explosive materials in order to get rid of him. He was not an easy target, and refused to go down easily.<sup>575</sup>

Mroué, in this passage, reflects on the gendered perceptions of modes of deaths. While a silent, natural death is constructed as feminine, a killing with tonnes of TNT is perceived as masculine and heroic due to the massive violence involved. This is also the case in *Nancy*, where primarily the men die in battles, while Lina is killed under violent circumstances repeatedly, but only once in combat.

Of course, returning to the images of Sana (Fig. 3.77) or Norma (Fig. 4.67), we see that women can also die as heroes. The notions of feminine death from sickness and masculine death out of heroism are nothing more than constructions that are neither essential nor 'normal'. The societal pressure that relatives experience regarding the idea that male deaths should be heroic is also reflected in *Memory Box*

573 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 119.

574 Christopher Kilmartin, *The Masculine Self* (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2007), 43.

575 Mroué, 'Inhabitants', 344–45.

by Hadjithomas/Joreige. The protagonist Maia's father is portrayed as a man who tries to stay away from the militias and therefore loses his position as the head of a school. This makes his life void of sense, which finally drives him to commit suicide. Maia's mother wants to hide the fact that he shot himself and so she stages his assassination, which she explains to her daughter by saying, 'He should be remembered as a hero'.

Another example of the gendered construction of martyrdom can be found in Lamia Joreige's project *Objects of War* (1999–), in which the artist asked people to share the story of an object linked to the Wars. Joreige videotaped her interviewees holding their chosen object while they told their personal memories connected to it.<sup>576</sup> Youssef Bazzi, whose book I have cited above, shows a photograph of his friend and fellow militiaman Kifah Abou Rached. After surviving an assassination attempt, Kifah was killed in an ambush during the Wars, and Bazzi told Joreige:<sup>577</sup>

When he died, I decided to keep his photo and had it plastic-coated, as a souvenir of him. [...] I thought he was [...] an untouchable man, a born leader, a man whose body had been riddled with 14 bullets and who was defying bullets again. His body structure, his muscles made me envious. I'm such a small, frail man. I felt his strength, I longed to get some of it.<sup>578</sup>

Bazzi describes the daring and fearless qualities of his friend, which he admires and partly envies. In short, he tells Joreige that Kifah was a heroic fighter and, finally, a martyr, although the photograph Bazzi holds is void of these qualities. It simply shows the picture of a man (*Fig. 4.72*).

Another of Joreige's interviewees, a Palestinian woman who grew up in the refugee camps in Lebanon, also holds a photograph (*Fig. 4.73*). She tells the artist that it depicts her sister, whom she labels as 'martyr Khaldiyah Ahmad Sharour', who died when killed by shrapnel on her way to the camp's well. Khaldiyah was not a fighter but died while performing the everyday task of fetching water. Her sister describes Khaldiyah not as a heroic martyr but as an everyday human. This evokes Lina's remembrance as a shahida in *Nancy* when she was murdered when walking home (*Fig. 3.47*). Also, Khaldiyah was not part of a militia and died without intending to become a martyr.<sup>579</sup> Kifah, on the other hand, is presented as having died for a cause in combat, like Rabih, Hatem, and Ziad in most of their deaths. Therefore,

576 Lamia Joreige, *Lamia Joreige: Works 1994–2017* (Beirut: Kaph, 2017), 15. For *Objects of War*, see also Laura U. Marks, 'Dangerous Gifts: Lamia Joreige's *Objects of War*', *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (2007).

577 The assassination attempt is also narrated by Bazzi in his memoirs (Bazzi, *Yasser Arafat*, 30–31); see also Joreige, *Lamia Joreige*, 22–23.

578 *Ibid.*, 23.

579 *Ibid.*, 21–22.



Fig. 4.72: Lamia Joreige, *Objects of War No. 2*, 2003, Multimedia Installation (Videos and Objects), Dimensions Variable, Courtesy of the Artist.



Fig. 4.73: Lamia Joreige, *Objects of War No. 3*, 2003–06, Multimedia Installation (Videos and Objects), Dimensions Variable, Courtesy of the Artist.

*Objects of War*, like *Nancy* and *Inhabitants*, reveals the gendered constructs of martyrs and the post-mortem performances of masculinity and femininity, and comments, like *Memory Box*, on society's urge to fabricate heroes when men die, while women are mostly labelled as victims.

#### 4.4.5 Martyrdom Is a Gendered Performance

In this part I have shown that *Nancy* reveals the socially constructed gender in martyr posters employed by the militias. It is not essential for women or men to fight or not to fight or to become martyrs or not. Also, it is not essential that male martyrs are depicted with sunglasses, crossed arms, and muscular bodies in posters, while female martyrs are not. These are gender roles that are performed by the militias and that were normalised by being repetitively acted out and depicted.

Applying Butler's theorisation to martyrs, it can be said that showing a martyr is an act and that presenting the shahid/a in a certain mode—for instance, as a fighter—or with specific attributes is a stylisation. These stylised acts have been repeatedly depicted since 1975 and therefore became naturalised. *Nancy* reflects on these roles by presenting Lina as a martyr only in posters of militias that actually had female martyrs, and thus comments on the roles women performed during the Wars. At the same time, the play usually only shows Rabih, Hatem, and Ziad in the hypermasculine format. This calls attention to the exaggerated traits of the shahid's manliness, which were restricted to male shuhada during the Wars. Like the images of female martyrs, the posters of hypermasculine martyrs stand out because they do not conform to the usual obituary format.

There is only one image from *Nancy* (Fig. 3.48) in which Lina is depicted with the male-connotated attributes of sunglasses and bare arms. This cross-dressing

reveals the gender roles as well as the post-mortem practice where men perform the role of a fighting martyr who died in battle and women predominantly perform the role of a non-fighting martyr.

Through exaggerated appropriations of the hypermasculine elements of the posters of the *Wars*, as well as through Lina's cross-dressing, *Nancy* caricatures this hypermasculinity and shows on the textual plane that the hero is constructed and does not exist beyond his image. In reality, he is a human being who feels emotions such as fear and love. The hypermasculine format shares parallels with commercial ads; these images aim to convince men to join a militia and to buy a product, respectively. In one of the appropriations of the hypermasculine format that shows Hatem with sunglasses and the holster of a gun (Fig. 3.19) we see Murr Tower in the background, which brings us to the next part, which is about ruins of the *Wars*.

#### 4.5 Premature Historicist: The Martyr Poster and the Ruin as Presents Framed as Past

Martyr posters from the *Wars*, like ruins from the *Wars*, belong not only to the past but also to the present. In this part, I will focus my attention on the depictions of the Holiday Inn and of Murr Tower (Burj al-Murr in Arabic) in the posters of *Nancy*. Both buildings still exist in Beirut's cityscape as iconic remnants of the *Wars* and were sites of martyrdom during the infamous Battle of the Hotels. They also appear in Mroué's play as indicators of this battle.

Below, I will link five posters from *Nancy* that depict the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower to posters of the *Wars* and to the historical events of the Battle of the Hotels. Within this discussion we will see that the stories told in *Nancy* should be understood not as a narration of history but as anecdotes of historical potentialities that could have happened. Also, looking at these five posters in combination points to the fact that when there is a martyr, there is often a counter-martyr, and that shuhada are often surrounded by rumours. Then, I explore the meaning of Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn in contemporary Beirut and argue that these ruins, like celebrity martyr posters, evoke strong emotions. Finally, I suggest that the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower can be understood through Walid Sadek's concept of the 'premature historicist ruin', which 'frames presentness as past'.<sup>580</sup> The temporality of both buildings is non-linear, as they belong not only to the past but also to the present. This framework of thought can also be applied to the martyr posters, as they, like the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, render unfinished business past instead of acknowledging the present protraction of the *Wars*.

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580 Sadek, *Ruin*, 178.

#### 4.5.1 The Holiday Inn and Murr Tower as Locations of Rumour, Historical Potentialities, and Encounters of Martyrs and Counter-Martyrs Before and During the Battle of the Hotels

The very first martyr poster that appears in *Nancy* (Fig. 3.7) shows a photograph of Rabihi's face in a circle that partly overlaps an image of Murr Tower. The colour of the background is green ochre. Ahrar logos are placed on the lower left and right, and between them is written 'Tigers. Ahrar Party' in black and '29 August 1975' in white.<sup>581</sup> The poster is accompanied by the following speech by Rabihi:

I was killed in the marketplace in Downtown Beirut during clashes with the Palestinians and their Muslim and Leftist allies on August 29, 1975. I was killed in the Surock souk. [...] I could tell by his clothes: a Morabitun. He shot me before I shot him... [...] He was so scared and shaken that he hardly realised he'd killed me... I must have been his first. (14)

Here, Rabihi speaks of himself as a member of Ahrar who was killed in combat by a member of the Morabitoun in Downtown Beirut, which is not far from Murr Tower. Due to his killer's anxiety, Rabihi suspects that he was the first person his opponent had ever shot, and this statement also hints at the fact that it is the first death and martyrdom in the whole play.

Clashes, like the one Rabihi recounts, had occurred since April 1975 between the Lebanese Front—which consisted of different Christian militias, was led by the Phalange, and was backed by smaller groups, such as Ahrar—and the Lebanese National Movement—which consisted of Lebanese Muslims, various Palestinian factions, and non-religious leftist military groups. These hostilities can be understood as the prelude to the Battle of the Hotels.

Murr Tower also appears in another poster, discussed in 4.4, in which Hatem stands in front of the building (Fig. 3.19). In the bottom left corner, a Morabitoun logo is visible. Above the logo, we read 'The Militant Brother Hatem Imam'; next to the logo, writing in red says 'Martyred in the Beirut Fighting'; and below that, writing in white reads '27 October 1975'.<sup>582</sup> Due to their height, Murr Tower—then the tallest building in town—and the adjacent hotels in Beirut's Hotel District were attractive locations for surveillance and the positioning of snipers.<sup>583</sup> Hatem does not entirely understand this, as becomes clear in the speech accompanying Fig. 3.19:

581 In Mroué and Toufiq, *Nancy*, 14, we read 21 August 1975. This is a typo; the Arabic writing in the poster clearly indicates 29 August.

582 In *ibid.*, the text says December; this is again a typo.

583 Sara Fregonese, 'The Urbicide of Beirut? Geopolitics and the Built Environment in the Lebanese Civil War (1975–76)', *Political Geography* 28 (2009): 314–15.

My first kill was a Phalangist... I killed him in the Sursock souk. [...] My first real battle was the battle for the Murr Tower. I don't know why there was such a fuss over that tower... There was nothing in there; it was a skeleton of a building; an empty shell, with nothing inside to confiscate. [...] In the end [...] we seize control of the tower. In my excitement, I run all the way up to the roof and start shooting [...]. A moment later, I feel this heat in my head: A Phalangist sniper perched on the roof of the Holiday Inn delivers a bullet, and I die on the spot. That was on October 27, 1975—Monday. (14)

Through the inclusion of an image of Murr Tower in both posters, a connection between the two men is established. The speech informs the spectators that it was Hatem who killed Rabih in the summer on Sursock Souk. The fact that Hatem thought he had killed a Phalangist in the events leading to the Battle of the Hotels probably points to the quantitative dominance of the Phalange among the Lebanese Front, so that for adversaries, when killing a Christian, it was most likely that he was a Phalangist.

Hatem here also tells the audience about the beginning of the Battle of the Hotels, which started on 22 October 1975 and lasted until 23 March 1976. On 23 October 1975, the Morabitoun seized control over the unfinished Murr Tower, which is also described as such by Hatem, when he calls it a 'skeleton' and an 'empty shell'. Christian militias entered the Holiday Inn on 27 October, that is, after Murr Tower was occupied by the Morabitoun.<sup>584</sup> Hence, it is historically unlikely that an actual member of the Morabitoun had been killed by a Christian sniper from the Holiday Inn right after entering Murr Tower: on 23 October, Christian militias were still not in the hotel, and on 27 October, Murr Tower had already been held by the Morabitoun for four days.<sup>585</sup> Even though Hatem's speech hints at the main factions involved in the Battle of the Hotels and at its important locations—namely, the Lebanese Front in the Holiday Inn and the Lebanese National Movement in Murr Tower—the date he indicates does not match documented historical events. This again emphasises that the play should not be read as a narration of history.

Fighting in the Hotel District repeatedly erupted and subsided until March 1976, when most of the hotels were seized by the Lebanese National Movement, but the Holiday Inn remained a Christian bastion. It ultimately fell in a floor-to-floor battle that lasted from 21 to 23 March.<sup>586</sup> The seizure of the damaged building is also addressed by Hatem, who says:

584 Jureidini, McLaurin, Price, *Military Operations*, 5–6.

585 Al Jazeera, 'How the Holiday Inn Became a Symbol of the Lebanese Civil War: War Hotels', *You-Tube*, 25:26 min, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DTGfjRrQ4>.

586 Jureidini, McLaurin, Price, *Military Operations*, 6; Fregonese, 'Urbicide of Beirut?', 314–15.

on Sunday, March 12,<sup>587</sup> 1976, to be exact—we conducted an offensive led by Fatah... This time the mission was to raid the Holiday Inn. [...] We succeed in taking over the hotel after inflicting a crushing defeat on the Phalangists. The first thing I do, I head straight to the top floor to catch my sniper-killer from last time... On my way up, I am ambushed on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor: A dead Phalangist lying on the ground suddenly opens fire, wounding me fatally. (15)

Hatem tells the audience that he was killed by a member of the Lebanese Front after entering the captured building. His speech is accompanied by a visual that presents his passing during combat for the Holiday Inn as martyrdom (*Fig. 3.20*). A circle outlined in red depicts the Holiday Inn embedded in its urban scenery. Three smaller circles show photographs of Hatem, and a red running-man silhouette is visible.

Rabih is also shown with the Holiday Inn in another poster (*Fig. 3.8*). In this example, he is standing in front of the building on the left-hand side of the image, which corresponds to the poster in *Figure 3.7* because of the green, ochre background, the use of black and white for the slogans, the Ahrar logo, and the inclusion of an iconic ruin of the Wars. Also, the day of his death, 21 March 1976, is indicated. This date was historically a day of heavy fighting and therefore also a day on which many martyrs were created.<sup>588</sup> The poster is accompanied by the following anecdote:

The comrades carried me away and put me up in Holiday Inn. They told me to rest there, it was a stronghold, it was safe. Not a month later we come under attack [...]. The battle was a tough one, ranging from floor to floor... I died on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor. The Palestinians had taken over the hotel and my body was still on the ground when I saw them: The Morabitun mob tooting their victory. As if they were the rightful heroes behind the battle... As if they were the ones who had vanquished us... This made my blood boil... My rifle is still there next to me where it had fallen. [...] I grab it and spring up, landing square on my feet... I empty my clip into the guts of the first guy I run into. I stick him full of holes. In under a second, bullets are raining down on me from all sides. I stumble backwards towards the window... Bullets are whizzing through me and I'm stumbling backwards... Bullets and backwards... Until I crash through the window of the 13<sup>th</sup> floor and drop dead all the way down. That was on March 12, 1976. (15–16)<sup>589</sup>

587 This is a typo in the script of *Nancy*. It should read '21' instead of '12'.

588 Traboulsi, *History*, 198.

589 The indication of 'March 12', instead of 'March 21', is again a typo in the English script.

Here, Rabih explains that he had killed Hatem again after the Holiday Inn was captured by the Morabitoun, who, as Rabih's speech indicates, were backed by Palestinian military groups, such as Fatah, as mentioned by Hatem. Hatem's martyrdom, the result of being killed by Rabih, is again commemorated by the Morabitoun (Fig. 3.20).

This poster of Hatem appears next to Rabih's (Fig. 3.8) on the screens above the actors. The placement of the posters next to each other points to the fact that martyrs can often be linked to counter-martyrs. This notion becomes clearer if we look at two figures who were said to be involved in the Battle of the Hotels and who seem to be personified by Hatem and Rabih. Specifically, in this reading, Hatem would embody the Morabitoun field commander Omar Mekhdashi and Rabih would embody an infamous Phalange sniper who shot Mekhdashi after the Holiday Inn had been seized.

That Hatem's story resembles Mekhdashi's is emphasised by the image because Hatem's poster (Fig. 3.20) is an appropriation of a Morabitoun poster (Fig. 3.63) that was issued in 1976 to commemorate the men who died when the Holiday Inn was captured. The overall designs of both images are the same; the only notable change is that the portraits of fighters are replaced with photographs of Hatem. On top of the poster from the Wars, the headshots and names of the five Morabitoun casualties that the seizure of the Holiday Inn caused are depicted in circles. As in the remake in *Nancy*, they are outlined in red. The circle in the middle in Figure 3.63 is slightly larger than the others and shows Mekhdashi's face, with his name indicated.<sup>590</sup> The appropriation of this poster seems to be an emphasis of *Nancy's* text, in which Mekhdashi is not mentioned, however, he, like Hatem, died through sniper fire in the Holiday Inn.

Samer Sabbagh, a Morabitoun fighter who was present when the Holiday Inn was captured, remembers that the sniper who killed Mekhdashi was then thrown from the building by members of the Lebanese National Movement.<sup>591</sup> The stories of a sniper falling from an upper floor of the Holiday Inn are infamous in Beirut. Rabih also mentions this:

590 Jallad does not mention the poster in this context but indicates that five Morabitoun members died when the Holiday Inn was captured ('Beirut's Civil War', 57). Mekhdashi and the Holiday Inn appear in at least one other poster issued by the Morabitoun (Fig. 3.64). This poster dates from 1977 and was published to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the seizure of the Holiday Inn. It shows a drawing of a militiaman of the Morabitoun who is smashing a miniature version of the Holiday Inn with the butt of his rifle. Next to the building, Mekhdashi's face is depicted. Maasri claims that the poster aims to create the impression of the 'other', as it shows the destruction of a 'Western capitalist icon' (Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 105).

591 For the killing of Mekhdashi, see Jallad, 'Beirut's Civil War', 57.

A lot was written on the Holiday Inn battle: stories, legends, some credible, others less credible... But, I can confirm one thing: What I read in the papers about my own death was a hundred per cent true. They wrote: 'One of the fighters was seen plummeting from the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of the Holiday Inn. The casualty was identified as one of the Ahrar fighters'. (17)

Nancy here hints at the rumours that surround the deaths of the Phalangists in the Holiday Inn. Whether they jumped in a last heroic act to prevent themselves from being killed or were thrown depends on who is telling the story.<sup>592</sup>

There exist images of corpses that had allegedly been thrown from the upper floors of the Holiday Inn.<sup>593</sup> I find in particular the body that is visible in the photograph in *Figure 4.32* strangely intact for one that had been thrown from such a height, although photographer Saleh Rifai claims that the dead man, who was tied by a rope to a vehicle and dragged through the streets, was a sniper thrown from the Holiday Inn.<sup>594</sup> Also writing on this image, Gregory Buchakjian notes that it is difficult to confirm that it really shows a sniper who has fallen from the Holiday Inn, even if it is labelled as such. He asserts that it is nearly impossible to authenticate this photograph and that the stories of falling snipers remain urban legends that ignite collective imaginations. Since no images of men falling from the Holiday Inn exist, it remains unclear whether someone actually fell from the hotel.<sup>595</sup> As I have discussed in 4.2, a photographic image cannot establish a truth claim by itself, and the fact that someone says a photograph shows a sniper who has been thrown from the Holiday Inn does not mean that the photograph actually depicts this.

Additionally, Nancy adds a layer of confusion to this already ambiguous anecdote, as in the play, the falling militiaman is said to be from Ahrar. I could not find any report that confirmed that a fighter who allegedly fell from the Holiday Inn was from that party. Rather, the falling snipers are usually labelled as Phalangists, if they are mentioned at all.<sup>596</sup> There are no indications that Ahrar fighters were inside the Holiday Inn. Historical reports rather convey that after Ahrar lost the St. Georges Hotel, which they had occupied, they simply left the Hotel District and therefore also the Battle of the Hotels.<sup>597</sup>

592 Buchakjian, 'Habitats Abandonnés', 27.

593 Jallad, 'Beirut's Civil War', 75.

594 Al Jazeera, 'How the Holiday Inn'.

595 Buchakjian, 'Habitats Abandonnés', 26–27.

596 In *Military Operations*, Jureidini, McLaurin, Price do not mention falling fighters. James M. Markham mentions that two Phalangists were thrown from the Holiday Inn; see 'Beirut Leftists Seize Holiday Inn in Heavy Assault', *New York Times*, 22 March 1976.

597 Jureidini, McLaurin, Price, *Military Operations*, 6; Buchakjian ('Habitats Abandonnés', 114–15) mentions that the Phalange briefly occupied the St. Georges after Ahrar had left and describes in detail how Ahrar left the area by sea.

Although it is unlikely that an Ahrar fighter was inside the hotel, there is still the potentiality that one of the party's militiamen, whose story has not been captured in the existing accounts of the Battle of the Hotels, decided to assist his Phalange allies in fighting when all other Ahrar fighters retreated. In other words, the possibility that the story happened as narrated in *Nancy* remains. At least, there is no proof that it has not taken place as told.

Nonetheless, the narration of an Ahrar martyr in the Holiday Inn, like the previously mentioned inaccuracy regarding historical dates, demonstrates that *Nancy*, while frequently indicating precise dates and days, should not be read as an alternative history to the existing sectarian narratives. This is also confirmed by Fadi Toufiq in the following conversation:

**AR:** You are very precise with the dates and even the days of the week. For example, there is Monday, October, 27. Sometimes the dates correspond to the actual incidents, and sometimes they do not...

**FT:** That's a way of ridiculing history and people who are mixing up dates [...]. But that has to do with the situation, because in this kind of history, we have to admit that something is lost in oblivion [...]. So we want to [...] reflect that we are revisiting something as being lost in our oblivion or lost in ignorance. People have a memory. We were presenting, not representing. We were presenting a memory of what had happened [...]. It is kind of a human telling of what has happened, not a scholar, not a historian [...] so this is why.<sup>598</sup>

What is crucial for Toufiq is that the actors of *Nancy* tell memories of ordinary militiamen, albeit that their recollections might not match what actually happened. Also, the urban legend of the Holiday Inn sniper can be understood as a transmission of hearsay. Although there is no proof that an Ahrar fighter was thrown from that building, it might have been a circulating rumour that is narrated in *Nancy*.

The incorrect dates, and also some of the anecdotes told, provoked interesting reactions when the play was staged in Beirut, as Mroué explained:

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598 Toufiq, Zoom, 6 May 2021.

When we presented the piece in Beirut, some audience members would correct us during the show, shouting: 'This is not right; the truth is...' I would always thank them by saying, 'Yes, you are right', and then we continued our lines. After the show, some people blamed us for mentioning certain events while omitting others, questioning why we did so. They would tell us what happened from their point of view. As you can see, the story/history alternates depending on the perspective and sociopolitical background of each person. This is why in the introduction of the book [Mroué and Toufiq 2012], I wrote something like: We do not want to write a new history; we do not need another version to be added to the existing versions. Our aim is only to question all versions and express our doubts about our history.<sup>599</sup>

Instead of representing what has been, *Nancy* addresses selective memories that imagine potential histories. They might be real, or fiction, or a mixture of both.

Furthermore, the anecdotal structure of the play is another indication that *Nancy* does not claim to represent history. Tess Takahashi has characterised the function of the anecdote in the work of Hadjithomas/Joreige in a way that can also be applied to *Nancy*:

The anecdote's personal, minor, unofficial status can present potential resistance to official state histories. Because it lacks the supposed rigour and careful evidence of an academic history, the anecdote is fragile and malleable, travelling through time, by word of mouth, based on individual memory and hearsay. While the anecdote can move through cycles of elaboration and across social fields like gossip, however distorted and fictionalised, it carries a grain of emotional truth that can attain the power of cultural myth.<sup>600</sup>

The anecdotes told by the actors in *Nancy* are framed as the personal experiences of the actors, and what they tell us are fragments that can be placed in a bigger historical context, but none of them is strictly representing one of the sectarian histories of the *Wars*; at the same time, *Nancy* does not sketch another version of history that could exist parallel to the sectarian ones. Additionally, many things the actors tell us cannot be proven to have happened, as the stories of the play are parts of the individual memories of the protagonists or hearsay they have heard in the past and now tell on the stage in the present. These spoken words oscillate between fact and fiction and might include a small part of truth.

For reasons that must remain unclear, Murr Tower does not appear in posters that were issued during the *Wars*. The inclusion of the Holiday Inn as a site of victory in *Nancy's* Morabitoun poster (Fig. 3.20) reflects the building's actual use in the

599 Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.

600 Takahashi, 'Material Traces', 191.

posters of the militia (Figs. 3.63–3.64). The Holiday Inn is absent from the posters of the Lebanese Front, as that building is a symbol of defeat for them. When also inserted in posters of Rabih dying for Ahrar (Fig. 3.8), *Nancy* expands the depiction of the Holiday Inn beyond its use in the posters of the Wars. This alteration could point to the fact that, when contextualised with historical accounts of the Battle of the Hotels, the story of Rabih falling from the Holiday Inn as an Ahrar militiaman cannot be located in these narrations, like the Holiday Inn cannot be located in the posters. Furthermore, this adaptation could hint that his story is modelled after the infamous sniper, who may have fallen from the very building next to which Rabih is shown.

The appearance of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower next to the image of the martyr in the five posters of the play discussed above link the stories that Rabih and Hatem are telling and indicate that both actors are narrating the same incidents before and during the Battle of the Hotels, but from rival perspectives. The Lebanese Front's version is embodied by Rabih, and the Lebanese National Movement's version is embodied by Hatem. While Hatem's embodiment of Mekhdashi is evoked through the visual plane but not mentioned in the text, Rabih's embodiment of the sniper is evoked through the textual plane but not visualised.

The fighters meet and kill each other, often in the same locations, and they are consequently remembered as martyrs by their parties. At the same time, historical inconsistencies in both stories point to the fact that not all memories correspond to actual historical events. There are numerous histories of the Wars, and the anecdotes told in *Nancy* could potentially have occurred, although no proof exists. The martyr and the rumour, or versions of what has happened, are closely linked, as I have also shown in 4.4 with the rumours regarding Muhaidly and other women who conducted martyrdom operations. Therefore, what *Nancy* is demonstrating here, without siding with anyone or claiming to tell a truth, is that anecdotes about martyrs are often surrounded by rumour.

While other buildings that were sites of struggle during the Battle of the Hotels, such as the Phoenicia Hotel or the St. Georges Hotel, were reconstructed, Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn remain ruins that are laden with meaning in the urban landscape until the present day.<sup>601</sup> They are now relics of the Wars, and the ending of *Nancy* alludes to this when a panorama containing Murr Tower appears across all four screens. In the following, I will shed light on the history of both buildings.

601 There are other famous remnants from the Wars in Beirut's urban landscape, such as the Grand Theatre or The Egg.

#### 4.5.2 The Holiday Inn, Murr Tower, and Martyr Posters as Containers of Unfinished Business and Emotions Today

Many artists have dealt with Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn in paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures, movies, and installations.<sup>602</sup> In general, it appears that there is greater interest in depicting Murr Tower. This is also reflected in *Nancy*, where three of the visuals show the Holiday Inn (Figs. 3.8–3.9, 3.20) and six show Murr Tower (Figs. 3.7, 3.16, 3.19, 3.28, 3.40, 3.51). Mroué explained the decision not only to highlight Burj al-Murr, but even to end the play with the tower as follows:

After the Battle of the Hotels in 1976, the Holiday Inn became destroyed and deserted but was never demolished. Since then, it has remained unchanged, standing as a witness to what happened. Burj al-Murr has also stood since the beginning of the civil war in 1975, abandoned and unchanged, erected in the middle of Beirut between east and west at the detraction line, as a monument. During wartime, it served different functions. It became a multifunctional building for militias, a hot-spot for snipers, a prison, a torture site, a place for hiding corpses, a military spot, headquarters for different political parties, mainly the Syrian Army and later the Lebanese Army, and so on. Construction began before the war broke out, intending to make it the tallest tower in the Middle East, symbolizing modernity in the Arab world. Then the war came and stopped everything. The tower is still there, reminding us of our failure. It is said that there is a mass grave underneath it, but nobody wants to talk about it. It holds a violent history within its skeleton, much more than the Holiday Inn holds.<sup>603</sup>

According to Mroué, Murr Tower was more a location of tragedy and more contested than was the Holiday Inn, which experienced mostly quiet years after the Battle of the Hotels. Armed disputes about the building took place only once, namely,

602 For examples of artistic interpretations of Burj al-Murr, see Melissa Plourde-Khoury, 'Challenging Panopticism Through Representations: Burj al Murr', *Middle Eastern Journal of Culture and Communication* 11 (2018); India Stoughton, 'The Man Who Turned Beirut's Infamous Burj el Murr Into a Fairy Tale', *The National*, 10 June 2019, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/film/the-man-who-turned-beirut-s-infamous-burj-el-murr-into-a-fairy-tale-1.872423>. For examples of artistic reflections of the Holiday Inn, see Buchakjian, 'Habitats Abandonnés'; Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 94.

603 Mroué, Zoom, 18 May 2021.

after the Israeli invasion in 1982. Murr Tower, on the other hand, was handed over to different factions multiple times after 1976.<sup>604</sup>

The construction of the brutalist-style, forty-storey concrete tower started at a mind-blowing speed in 1974. It is said that one floor was completed every day.<sup>605</sup> Even after the Battle of the Hotels, the aim was to return to the initial construction plan. As Michel Murr, the owner, optimistically told *An Nahar* newspaper in 1977: 'If the situation continues to improve, the construction of the building will be over in a year's time, I believe. This includes 400 offices, a cinema theater, a luxury restaurant, a commercial center and a landing pad for helicopters'.<sup>606</sup> Murr's hopes were in vain. Nonetheless, Murr Tower, although never finished, was the tallest building in town.

During the *Wars*, Burj al-Murr was, as Mroué mentioned, a torture site, a surveillance spot, and a sniper's nest.<sup>607</sup> After the *Wars* officially ended, Solidère purchased the tower in 1994, and the lower floors now serve as an army base while the upper floors are abandoned. Its future remains unclear.<sup>608</sup> According to Melissa Plourde-Khoury, Murr Tower 'was a symbol of Beirut's modernization and prosperity, it is a reminder of the war, a looming cement landmark and a popular icon'.<sup>609</sup> Naeff similarly points to its pre-war relevance when she writes:

The tallest tower of the city until the mushrooming high rises of the 2000s, this building is charged with symbolic meaning. As a world trade centre to be, the Murr tower symbolizes the pre-war commitment to capitalist modernity as a project that was prematurely and violently aborted.<sup>610</sup>

604 Moe-Ali Nayel, 'Beirut's Bullet-Ridden Holiday Inn—A History of Cities in 50 Buildings. Day 28', *The Guardian*, 1 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/may/01/beirut-holiday-inn-civil-war-history-cities-50-buildings>. Some newspaper articles give an impression of how contested Murr Tower was. See, for example, Nora Boustany, 'Leftist-Shiite Battles Rage in West Beirut. Syria Vows to Send Troops from Damascus', *Washington Post*, 19 February 1987, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/02/19/leftist-shiite-battles-rage-in-west-beirut/d7d86df5-ba56-4aa6-a49b-b9ffc26b9304/>.

605 Plourde-Khoury, 'Challenging Panopticism', 297.

606 Michel Murr in *An Nahar*, quoted in Zaven Kouyoumdijan, *Lebanon Shot Twice* (Beirut: Arab Image Foundation, 2001), 61.

607 Sadek, 'A Surfeit of Victims', 155.

608 Plourde-Khoury, 'Challenging Panopticism', 296–98.

609 *Ibid.*, 298. Elias, on the other hand, does not understand Murr Tower as a typical monument, because it does 'not conform [to] the traditional protocols of the monuments namely to produce symbols that serve either to console viewers or redeem tragic events'. Elias, *Posthumous Images*, 133.

610 Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 92.

Although Naeff confuses Murr Tower with the never-started project for a world trade centre in Beirut, she is right when she, like Plourde-Khoury, points to the promise of capitalism and modernity that Murr Tower was intended to manifest.

Due to the beginning of the *Wars*, another nuance was added to the building, and today the tower remains a trace of the violence, dominant in the city's urban landscape. This is emphasised by a statement by architect Abdul-Halim Jabr, who still remembers rockets flying from Murr Tower eastward, as he told the now-defunct online newspaper *Daily Star*:

for my generation this is a building that was never used as a proper building. That makes it a huge part of the war, people assign meaning to it, and some who care about the city believe it should be there because it is part of an unresolved conflict.<sup>611</sup>

Much of this statement could also be applied to the Holiday Inn, which is, like Murr Tower, an unintentional memorial of the *Wars* in Downtown Beirut.

The Holiday Inn was the last and most luxurious hotel completed in Beirut's Hotel District. The twenty-four-storey building was finished in 1974, just before the *Wars* officially started.<sup>612</sup> Like Murr Tower, the Holiday Inn is today used as an army base and its future is unknown.<sup>613</sup> Both buildings are constant reminders of the *Wars*, as they are the last traces of the Battle of the Hotels, creating a stark contrast to Solidère's surrounding architecture, which Jalal Toufic criticises:

as long as there still are war-damaged buildings in the Central District [...], such buildings will still evoke a counter to the enormous weight of the myriad concrete buildings that are being constructed in the rest of Beirut with no regard for urban planning.<sup>614</sup>

611 Venetia Rainey, 'Fate of Beirut's War Ruins Still Unclear', *The Daily Star*, 19 May 2014, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Fate+of+Beirut%27s+war+ruins+still+unclear-a0368524124>.

612 India Stoughton, 'The Scars of War on Lebanon's Holiday Inn', *Al Jazeera*, 30 December 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/12/30/the-scars-of-war-on-lebanons-holiday-inn>.

613 Jallad, 'Beirut's Civil War', 154–55. The Holiday Inn embodied the misty-eyed Golden Age of Lebanon that was not quite so golden given the sectarian and class-related tensions that were brewing under the surface and that sometimes erupted, as in the violence of 1958, which is sometimes referred to as the 'First Lebanese Civil War'. See also Sana Tannoury-Karam, 'Reckoning with the Past: Selected Scenes from the Modern History of Lebanon', in *The Lebanon Uprising of 2019: Voices from the Revolution*, eds. Rima Majed and Jeffery C. Karam (London: I.B. Tauris, 2023), 21.

614 Jalal Toufic, 'Ruins', in *Thinking the Ruin*, eds. Matthew Gumpert and Jalal Toufic (Istanbul: Istanbul Studies Center, 2010), 38.

Toufic seems to acknowledge that these architectural remnants in Downtown Beirut are somehow out-of-place in their urban landscape and therefore act as reminders of the *Wars* and point to the unfinished past. At the same time, Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn have a different status than the many house ruins in Beirut, which I term 'ordinary ruins'. The 'celebrity ruins' status of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower becomes clear when looking at two interventions in these buildings by Jad el Khoury.

In 2015, el Khoury painted doodles of blue characters around the holes created by missiles and bullets on the façade of the Holiday Inn. He highlighted the holes by integrating them into seemingly carefree motifs, which evoked an amusing atmosphere (Fig. 4.74). As el Khoury says, he wanted to show how the *Wars* still shape daily life in Lebanon, and the work was intended to speak about his desire to live happily in the now without the omnipresent overshadowing of the *Wars*.<sup>615</sup> It could be argued that el Khoury, using very simple means and employing a lighthearted visual language, shows how these two times—that is, 1975 to 1990 and today—are not linear but overlap and coexist in his daily life.

While the artistic quality of the doodles is questionable and there is also no aesthetic link between them and the Corbusier-style façade of the Holiday Inn, it is not the work as such that is of interest for the current discussion, but the reactions to it.<sup>616</sup> A 2015 newspaper article by India Stoughton gives an impression of how emotional and controversial the debate was, including the issue of whether it is right to paint directly onto the Holiday Inn. One of her interviewees said, 'When I pass by it, I feel the negative energy. I only like to see positive things, and Jad's doodles are so fluffy and funny and funky'. Buchakjian, on the other hand, exclaimed, 'This is an outrage! An outrage to Beirut, an outrage to memory, an outrage to everything!'<sup>617</sup> While some people were happy about el Khoury's jollification of a remnant of the *Wars*, others were angry about it. Finally, el Khoury's doodles were overpainted with white.

In 2018, el Khoury undertook an intervention on Murr Tower. For ten days, colourful curtains, commonly used in Beirut for closing balconies for protection from the sun, rain, and wind, hung on the building's windows (Fig. 4.75). The wind made the curtains blow and created a dynamic element on the static tower. In doing so, el Khoury says, he aimed to give life to a dead building.<sup>618</sup>

615 Beirut Banyan, 'Ep.58 (Audio): Urban Art with Jad El Khoury', *YouTube*, 16 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyB8k2yDFRo>; Jad El Khoury, Zoom conversation with the author, 22 April 2021.

616 For a critical discussion of the work and whether humour is the right way to approach a building with a heavy past, such as the Holiday Inn, see Sabrina DeTurk, *Street Art in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 56–59.

617 Stoughton, 'Scars of War'.

618 Khoury, Zoom, 2021.



Fig. 4.74: Jad el Khoury, *War Piece*, Installation on Holiday Inn, Beirut, 2015.



Fig. 4.75: Jad el Khoury, *Burj al Hawa*, Temporary Installation on Murr Tower, Beirut, 2018, Photograph Elie Abou Jaoudeh.

While this intervention received remarkable media attention and prizes,<sup>619</sup> critical voices were also raised. For example, Sadek claimed that the cheerful aesthetics of the installation are an ornamental reduction that does not match the tragic events that Murr Tower embodies. In Sadek's reading, el Khoury erases or at least ignores the past that is contained and carried by the tower. By making a celebrity ruin of the *Wars* 'merry', el Khoury suppresses the memory of violence and therefore reduces the ongoing *Wars* to a 'bad vibe that can be spooked away'. Sadek further states that el Khoury's installation expels the past into the distance and focuses only on the future as it 'wistfully calls on something better to come'.<sup>620</sup> As in his Holiday Inn intervention, el Khoury ignored the heavy weight that surrounds Murr Tower.

Writing about street art more widely, Sabrina DeTurk questions el Khoury's awareness of the buildings' significance in the past and present. She critically notes that she suspects that it is difficult for el Khoury, who was born at the end of the *Wars*, to understand the heavy meaning these ruins have for those who experienced the *Wars*, and that his non-subtle interventions might have come too soon, as the pain is still present. With his 'insistence on transforming the buildings into sites of whimsy and humor he destabilizes, perhaps even destroys, their memorial function, turning the walls into sites of play rather than purpose'.<sup>621</sup>

If we take the ruin as analogous to the martyr, the many house ruins in Beirut would be ordinary ruins, similar to the ordinary martyrs, whereas the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower could be understood as celebrity ruins, similar to celebrity martyrs, such as Bachir or Hariri. As mentioned in 4.3, in comparison with the celebrity martyrs, the ordinary martyrs who died during the *Wars* have a marginal visual presence in town, and the production of their posters ceased at some point. Also, the destruction of ordinary ruins usually goes unnoticed. In contrast, since the end of the *Wars*, public debates have been regularly held on whether the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower should be destroyed.<sup>622</sup> These discussions can be linked to el Khoury's doodles on ordinary ruins, such as a building on the ring bridge, which were very similar to those he painted on the Holiday Inn.<sup>623</sup> The fact that there was no public criticism regarding this intervention demonstrates that the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower are not ordinary ruins, like the numerous bullet-ridden houses in Beirut, but celebrity ruins.

619 Jad El Khoury, 'Burj el Hawa', *Nuart* 2 (2019), [https://nuartjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NJ2-1\\_06-El-Khoury.pdf](https://nuartjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NJ2-1_06-El-Khoury.pdf).

620 Sadek, 'Surfeit of Victims', 155–57.

621 DeTurk, *Street Art*, 59–60.

622 Rainey, 'Beirut's War Ruins'.

623 Beirut's Bright Side, 'Jad el Khoury's Healing Arts', *Beirut's Bright Side*, <https://www.beirutsbright-side.com/jad-el-khourys-healing-arts/>.

There is also a collective emotional sensitivity that surrounds celebrity ruins. Of course, individual emotions are attached to ordinary ruins, just as they are to posters of ordinary martyrs, but these emotions are limited to a small group of people, usually those who used to live in these buildings, whereas the discussion about the future of and interventions on the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower triggered collective sentiments, and people who had never set foot in these buildings expressed their opinions and feelings about them. I understand the collective emotions attached to the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower as the reason why works by other artists dealing with these buildings, such as *Nancy*, did not receive such controversial criticism and media attention as el Khoury's interferences. I believe this is because he did not just represent these buildings; he also intervened on their very surfaces.

Born in 1988, el Khoury, unlike most artists who worked on the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, did not live through the *Wars*. Thus, he has a greater emotional distance from these buildings than artists who have personally experienced the period of the *Wars*. For him, Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn were always there and unchanging throughout his life. It seems that for people of el Khoury's generation, the untouchability of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, which is caused by emotions attached to these buildings, is no longer a given, which is why el Khoury aimed for an actual intervention.<sup>624</sup>

This untouchability also applies to the martyr posters. While it usually triggers no wide criticism to visually reflect on them—examples are *Nancy* and other works by Mroué, such as *Inhabitants* and *Three Posters*—to my knowledge, there have been no artistic interventions on actual on-site martyr posters. The reason might be that emotions are attached to the posters of martyrs, as they are to buildings damaged by the *Wars*. The act of destroying them is perceived as cruel by Jalal Toufic, who writes:

The physical destruction of severely damaged buildings to construct others in their place is sacrilegious [...]. It exhibits the same brutality that was shown during the war. The demolition of many of the ruined buildings of the city center by implosions [...] was war by other means; the war on the traces of the war is part of the traces of the war, hence signals that the war is continuing.<sup>625</sup>

Also, to destroy or intervene in a poster of a martyr on the spot would be viewed as sacrilegious and brutal, as a scene in Elias Khoury's novel *White Masks* points out, when the protagonist Khalil tears down posters of shuhada and gets arrested for

624 Paola Yacoub intended to exhibit a photograph of the Holiday Inn inside the Holiday Inn in the framework of the Ayloul festival in 2001, but the Syrian Army did not grant her permission. De Le Court, *Post-Traumatic Art*, 134–35.

625 Toufic, *Ruins*, 37.

doing so. The militia leader, who had taken him to prison, asked Khalil, ‘How could we let the posters of our martyrs, our war heroes, be torn down? You know how precious such pictures are to the relatives and friends of the dead, don’t you?’<sup>626</sup> In other words, to take the poster down is to commit violence not only against the poster and the physically deceased martyr, but also against living people.

Through their juxtaposition of celebrity ruins and martyrs, the posters in *Nancy* (Figs. 3.7–3.9, 3.19–3.20) seem to draw connections between untouchable elements to which emotions are attached. Considering the ruins, this untouchability is exclusive to celebrity ruins, as many ordinary ruins in Beirut have been destroyed without raising protest action. However, for the martyr posters, this untouchability extends to both the ordinary and the celebrity. Simultaneously, we could interpret the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower as metaphorical martyrs who lost their purposes or lives during the *Wars* and now linger as (un)dead buildings among the living buildings that still have a function. In this sense, the buildings would be analogous to the faces of the dead on the martyr posters, which linger among the living on the walls.

The Holiday Inn and Murr Tower are celebrity ruins to which polysemic emotions are attached. Changes in situ drew a lot of attention to them, and actual interferences on their façades were met with criticism. This makes these two buildings comparable to martyr posters, which also have the capacity to invoke emotions. Once on the wall, they cannot be taken down, as this would be perceived as an assault against the image. As a result, I read Rabi’h’s and Hatem’s presence in front of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower in *Nancy* as a link between the characteristics of the celebrity ruin and the martyr poster, as both elicit emotional responses and contain unfinished business from the *Wars*. In particular, Burj al-Murr represents the ill-defined space between then and now.

#### 4.5.3 Premature Historicist Celebrity Ruins

At the end of *Nancy*, the relevance of Murr Tower is highlighted again, as all four actors meet there. In my reading, the building can be understood as ‘premature historicist ruin’ that belongs not only to the past but also to the present.<sup>627</sup> When each actor separately hears about the sectarian clashes at the Beirut Arab University in 2007, each decides to go to Murr Tower, saying the same sentence: ‘Given my

626 Khoury, *White Masks*, 206–7.

627 This stands in contrast to the interpretation of Naeff (*Precarious Imaginaries*, 93), who understands Burj al-Murr’s appearance in *Nancy* as an admonition—although it remains unclear to me where she locates a pedagogical aspect in the building’s appearance. I also do not read the role of Murr Tower in the play like Jallad (‘Beirut’s Civil War’, 134), who suggests that the ruin is a fifth character in the storyline. My reason for this is that, unlike the four actors, Murr Tower neither speaks nor tells anecdotes about the *Wars*.

former experience in combat, I know that the battle for Beirut is as good as won by whoever's the first to control the Tower...' (34–35). Their speeches are accompanied by images of fragments of the urban landscape of Beirut, which, across all four screens, forms a panorama that includes Murr Tower (Fig. 3.54).

The inclusion of the tower at the end of the play functions like a bookend that links with *Nancy's* opening, where the very first poster of martyrdom also depicts the building (Fig. 3.7). I understand this as a hint that incidents from the years between 1975, the date of issue for Fig. 3.7 in the storyline of the play, and 2007, the end of *Nancy*, are located in the same temporal realm. The building still has meaning in the now, precisely because it acts as a reminder that the business of the *Wars* is, like the tower itself, unfinished. This is not only because the ex-fighters, who are still alive, immediately return to their war habits by trying to seize the tallest building in town, but also because the sectarian system is still intact and sectarian strife still occurs.

Two Lebanese artists and thinkers, Walid Sadek and Jalal Toufic, have reflected on the ruin.<sup>628</sup> Toufic claims in his essay *Ruins* (2003) that houses become ruins by being deserted by their inhabitants and that the building's material destruction is only the manifestation of the ruined character. According to him, this applies when one dwells in the building instead of living inside it, but he does not elaborate further on whether a building can also turn into a ruin when someone has only dwelled in it.<sup>629</sup> Sadek links Toufic's thought to the Heideggerian notion of dwelling, which describes a certain peace of existence in a permanent place.<sup>630</sup> Taking these reflections into account, neither the Holiday Inn nor Murr Tower would be classified as a ruin, as no one has ever dwelt in these buildings; this is true for Murr Tower because it has never been inhabited, and it is true for the Holiday Inn because the guests only came for short stays.

Given their prominence as highly damaged buildings in the city centre, however, I find it difficult not to think of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower as ruins. Another characteristic of the ruin that Toufic identifies and that is important for my discussion is its non-linear temporality; ruins 'exist in a past that is artificial,

628 I have consciously refrained from using ruin theory that stems from Europe—for example, texts by Walter Benjamin—because there are matching theories that originate from Beirut.

629 Toufic, 'Ruins', 35. Also, Fares Chalabi, in 'The Present Against the Past and the Future: Reclaiming the Present as a Strategy of Cultural Resistance in Post War Lebanon', *Journal for the Critique of Science, Imagination, and New Anthropology* (2022), 123, reads Toufic's 'Ruins' as saying that a place turns into ruin when it is abandoned by its inhabitants. However, when I asked Toufic about this at a talk at the Arab Image Foundation on 20 June 2022, he said this could be a marker of a ruin but that it does not necessarily have to be.

630 Sadek, *Ruin*, 186–87.

one that does not belong to history, was not gradually produced by it'.<sup>631</sup> In other words, ruins are placed in an anachronistic realm in which a past is artificially constructed.

This temporal layer is also considered by Sadek in his essay *Waiting for the Ruin to Come* (2016). He suggests that the *Ruin to Come* as a mental figure needs to be constructed by the 'overlivers' of the Wars, who, by sharing their 'excessive knowledge' that still weighs on them, build the ruin. The *Ruin to Come* is still not built in Lebanon, and the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower are surely not categorisable in this way. Sadek, in my reading, would term both buildings as 'premature historicist' ruins, as he observes that:

The catastrophe that may inhabit the present and bind it tight to the crushing weight of its unyielding presentness is efficiently framed as a ruin; it is swiftly evicted from the present. [...] Proximity made distant is precisely what the historicist ruin accomplishes.<sup>632</sup>

The premature historicist evacuates 'the present of what remains unfinished in the past'.<sup>633</sup> In other words, Sadek claims that the premature historicist ruin fools us into believing that a present catastrophe is already past. He sees the reason for this as follows:

The framing of wrecks as ruins is crucial for maintaining a political investment in the narrativization of present negativities as an already-settled past. [...] The historicist ruin is therefore a temporal marker of a present made past. [...] The present wreck when framed as a ruin, is no longer the site of catastrophe. Rather, it merely dons its form.<sup>634</sup>

If we think of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower only as relics of the Battle of the Hotels, as remnants of bygone disasters, we miss the fact that these two ruins, like all other wreckage from the Wars, belong not only to the past but also to the present. This is because the problems that were present in 1990, when the Wars officially ended, are still present today in the protracted now. Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn, like the Wars, remain unfinished negativities. Although the Wars are framed as past, they are present, as is evidenced by the shooting at the Arab University in January 2007, with which *Nancy* ends. This potential for protracted and inherited violence was also still present in Lebanon at the time of writing, as is confirmed

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631 Toufic, 'Ruins', 37.

632 Sadek, *Ruin*, 176.

633 *Ibid.*, 186

634 *Ibid.*, 176.

by the street fights in the Tayyouneh area of 14 October 2021, which caused seven casualties. Beirut still has the potential to be turned into a war zone.

I would suggest applying Sadek's thoughts not only to wreckage but also to the posters of martyrs of the *Wars*.<sup>635</sup> Expelling the posters into the realm of the past enhances the illusion that they belong to a settled catastrophe. These pictures try to fool us into believing that they point to the past, even though they also belong to the now because the conflicts are not over.

This overlapping and the impossibility of distinguishing between the past and present is also tangible in *Memory Box* by Hadjithomas/Joreige. In one scene, set during the *Wars*, people are dancing at a party, when suddenly the electricity cuts, which was also a very common occurrence in Beirut during the time of writing and researching this book. In another scene in the movie, also set during the *Wars*, someone complains about the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira, which caused the audience in the Beirut cinema I was sitting in to laugh. By the time I watched the film in 2022, the Lira had devalued to a point that was worse than ever. Past and present are mixing and mingling.

In my understanding, through the injection of life that the posters experience in *Nancy*—namely, via the depiction of the contemporary bodies of the actors who are placed in front of the premature historicist ruins of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower—the play comments on the non-linearity of time of the martyr posters of the *Wars*. The play seems to hint at the presentness of the posters, the unresolvedness of the *Wars*, and the constant making of new martyrs. In the present, we witness not only the continuation of the wreckage of the *Wars*, but also the creation of new wreckage, such as that caused by the Beirut port explosion.

Moreover, the faces of the dead that I encountered on the walls during the time of writing—those who died in the thawra, or in the explosion on 4 August—are directly linked to the *Wars*. It is still not disclosed, and probably never will be, why the explosion happened. But the fact that the sectarian system stored tonnes of ammonium nitrate in the port and therefore in the middle of the city, right next to residential buildings, makes the sectarian system and the people who govern Lebanon to blame for the blast. These people, such as Nabih Berri, who was the speaker of parliament, Michel Aoun, who was president, or Samir Geagea, who was the leader of the LF on 4 August 2020, are the same men who are responsible for the *Wars*, in which they actively participated. Also, the martyrs from the thawra were ultimately created by the sectarian system, as without its existence, the thawra would not have taken place. In short, the thawra and 4 August are a result of the sectarian system, which is not past.

If wreckage like Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn are rendered past, it is impossible to address negativities of the present, since awareness that they also belong to the realm of the now can never be achieved.

635 Sadek applies his thoughts to stamps. See *ibid.*, 177–78.

#### 4.5.4 Martyr Posters and Celebrity Ruins as Markers of a Presentness Framed as Past

In this part, I showed that the inclusion of Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn in *Nancy* serves multiple functions. First, the buildings link the stories that Rabih and Hatem tell the audience about the Battle of the Hotels. However, the memories of the protagonists do not exactly match the historical events of the battle, and *Nancy* should not be read as another history of the *Wars*.

Second, *Nancy* injects time into the posters of the *Wars* by including the contemporary bodies of the actors, by adding Murr Tower, and by expanding the use of the Holiday Inn to the defeated parties of the Battle of the Hotels. Like the martyr posters, the premature historicist celebrity ruins of Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn are not limited to the realm of the past but indicate the unfinished business of the *Wars*, which is stretching into the present. They are temporal markers of presentness made past, as both point to negativities in the now.

This non-closure manifests itself through rumours, ambiguous stories, and potential histories that surround not only the buildings but also the martyrs and counter-martyrs, as I have demonstrated with the Holiday Inn sniper and Mekhdashi. Until the present day, polysemic emotions are attached to both wreckage and posters, which turn them into untouchable elements, as illustrated by the interventions of el Khoury at the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, which drew remarkable attention and criticism. The notion of anachronistic time is also central to the next part, in which I will introduce the aspect of the future and the undead ghost in relation to the martyr.

### 4.6 The Time Is Out of Joint: The Martyr as a Spectral Ghost

Sectarian martyrs can be understood as spectral ghosts, since they are simultaneously absent and present, visible and invisible, dead and alive. The figure of the ghost has often been addressed by researchers when writing about images and artworks that deal with martyrs. Alam, for example, claims that ‘martyrs are undead beings that haunt the living population’<sup>636</sup> and Gade has linked *Nancy* to Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*. According to Gade, the actors are located on the thresholds between life and death and presence and absence because they repeatedly tell the audience that they die as martyrs but return to life shortly after.<sup>637</sup>

Responding to their texts, I will first focus on the ghostliness of the martyrs on the walls in Lebanon. Here, I will follow Bachir Saade’s convincing strain of thought, which claims that Hezbollah martyrs can be linked to the figure of the

636 Alam, ‘Undead Martyrs’, 577.

637 Gade, ‘Learning to Live’, 341.

ghost as conceptualised by Derrida in his framework of hauntology.<sup>638</sup> Extending Saade's argument, I will show that Derrida's concept can be applied to the martyrs of all parties involved in the *Wars*. Like Derrida's ghosts, which I will call 'spectral ghosts', the shuhada of posters are neither fully dead and invisible nor entirely alive and visible. They arrive from the past, appear in a different form in the present, and point to the future, but they do not completely belong to one of these three temporalities.

Second, I will explore how the notion of the spectral ghost manifests itself in artworks and I will argue that *Nancy* does not necessarily help us fully understand the spectrality of the martyrs in pictures. Rather, a series by Hadjithomas/Joreige, called *Faces* (2009), reflects on the ghostly qualities of martyrs more than *Nancy* does.

Third, through a reading of theoretical texts by Hadjithomas/Joreige and Jalal Toufic, I will distinguish images of spectral martyrs from other images of present absence that often appear in Lebanese cultural productions. Specifically, I will differentiate them from latent ghosts, which are embodied by images of the missing, and from tradition that withdrew after a surpassing disaster, such as the 'living martyrs'.

#### 4.6.1 Spectral Ghosts on the Walls and the Undead Lives of the Martyrs in Lebanon

Sectarian martyrs are simultaneously present and absent, dead and alive. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida writes about the haunting presence of Marxism in Europe after 1990, yet Derrida's hauntology also fits the ghostliness of the shuhada in Lebanon. He does not understand history as chronological but introduces the specter, which embodies an ambiguous temporality. A specter inhabits a 'non-present present' because it is here but never in flesh and blood, and 'one does not know if it is living or if it is dead'.<sup>639</sup>

This is also true for martyrs. After the person's death, their posters stay on the walls and are sometimes even reprinted. Therefore, the martyrs remain in a state between death and life, absence and presence. Bachir, as I have elaborated in 4.3, is still visible everywhere in the Christian districts of Beirut. Examples of this omnipresence are his image on Sassine Square (*Fig. 4.3*) as well as the photograph that shows him after his election victory, which I encountered in Gemmayzeh's rubble in the late summer of 2020 (*Fig. 4.52*). The placement in today's city of images of people who died in the past creates disjointed time. Derrida writes:

638 Saade, *Hizbullah*, 43–62.

639 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 5.

Before knowing whether one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future, of the past present and the future present, one must perhaps ask oneself whether the spectrality effect does not consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other.<sup>640</sup>

The time of the specter is ambiguous. Specters come into the present from both the past and the future; as arrivants, they point to what will be, and as revenants, they point to what was.<sup>641</sup>

Referring to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Derrida claims that the coming, going, and returning of the specter are unpredictable.<sup>642</sup> It disappears only to reappear. Ghosts are 'furtive and untimely', they do 'not belong to that time, it does not give time, not that one: 'Enter the ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost' (*Hamlet*)'.<sup>643</sup> The only thing that is certain is that the specter will come back to haunt, but 'one cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back'.<sup>644</sup> Specters were already there before, but when they return, they do so in a different form.<sup>645</sup>

In Lebanon, shuhada of all warring factions continue to haunt the country to this day. In his discussion of Hezbollah martyrs, Saade remarks that the shahid is not to be located only in the past, present, or future but rather moves through and exists between these temporalities. Martyrs died in the past as revenants and remain in the present, where they are remembered via memorials or in operations that are carried out in their names. This again makes them—as arrivants—point towards the future, where Hezbollah's dream of Lebanon, for which the martyrs died, should be fulfilled. Furthermore, Saade claims that all Hezbollah shuhada are haunted by Hossein, who was the first martyr and therefore the first ghost among the Shia, and whose experience was then repeated by all shuhada that followed him.<sup>646</sup> Through every martyr of Hezbollah, Hossein comes back in a different form. What Saade writes about Hossein could also be applied to the Christian parties, and we could understand Bachir as a specter of Jesus, as I have discussed in connection with the depiction of Rabih in 4.1.

It is not only these archetypes of martyrs that haunt the present and call for the realisation of incomplete dreams for Lebanon, which are left open by the dead from the *Wars*. For example, the Hezbollah fighters who died in the War in Syria were trying to complete the party's cause. These more recent Hezbollah martyrs,

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640 Ibid., 48.

641 Ibid., xix.

642 Ibid., 2.

643 Ibid., xix.

644 Ibid., 11.

645 Ibid., 107.

646 Saade, *Hizbullah*, 43–62.

who coexist on the walls with the old martyrs who died during the *Wars*, disjoint time. What is crucial is the sect to which the martyr points, not the year or decade of death. A poster of someone who was killed in the 2010s can be placed next to a poster of someone who was killed in the 1980s. What counts is that the martyr died in the past, no matter how recent or distant, and that the image is now here in the present, pointing to an unfulfilled dream that should be implemented in the future.

But there are also spectral martyrs of other parties. Amal, which has not been involved in the War in Syria, barely announced new martyrs during the time of writing this book—with a few exceptions, such as after the sectarian clashes in Tayyouneh—and their posters mostly remember shuhada who died during the *Wars* or the 1990s. These martyrs, as Bonsen states, must be kept alive in Amal's memorial culture<sup>647</sup> in order to compete with Hezbollah martyrs, because Hezbollah still produces a large number of new shuhada.

For the Christian parties today, which have had very few new martyrs since the official end of the *Wars*, it is mostly Bachir who represents the spectral ghost, which he turned into right after his death.<sup>648</sup> In 1982, shortly after Bachir's murder, a Phalangist journalist wrote that 'Bashir Gemayel is not dead because he was us, and because we are still Bashir Gemayel. He is in all of us: (I am Bashir Gemayel) ... You are Bashir Gemayel ... They are Bashir Gemayel...'.<sup>649</sup> These words show that in the perception of the Phalange, Bachir is not fully dead but alive in his followers and successors,<sup>650</sup> who even become embodiments of Bachir—'little Bachirs', as I have argued in 4.1. Bachir is to be located in the blurred space between presence and absence. This is also emphasised with the slogan 'Bachir is living in us', which often accompanies his posters.<sup>651</sup>

The posters not only hold Bachir alive here in the present, even as he is past, dead, and absent, they also point to him as a revenant and to the ideas that he advocated for Lebanon when he was alive. Simultaneously, as an arrivant, he evokes the dream of a Maronite-dominated Lebanon, which should be implemented in the future.<sup>652</sup> This spectral presence is particularly emphasised in the poster of Bachir haunting the rubble of late summer 2020 (*Fig. 4.52*). It was as if Bachir, the 'dream of the Republic' (as the slogan labels him), had come back to insist after the explosion that his presence was needed to save Lebanon in the future.

647 Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 249.

648 There are a few exceptions—for example, Pierre Gemayel, Bachir's nephew, who was assassinated by gunmen in 2006. Posters announcing him as a martyr can still today be encountered in Christian areas.

649 Hage, 'Religious Fundamentalism', 39–40.

650 *Ibid.*

651 Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 179.

652 *Ibid.*, 206. For the ghostly Bachir in the image, see also Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 62.

Furthermore, Bachir's depiction next to his successors, Nadim Gemayel (Fig. 4.53) and Samir Geagea (Fig. 4.3), points to his spectrality, as discussed in 4.3. He carries his dream, which he started to implement in the past and which is supposed to come true in the future with the help of his heir. This is also true for Hariri and is directly addressed by Mroué in *Make Me Stop Smoking* (2006; Fig. 4.55). In that non-academic lecture, he comments on the juxtaposition of father and son Hariri in a photograph that shows Rafic behind Saad as follows:

This photo appeared in the streets right after the assassination of Rafic Hariri and before the elections. It shows the ex-prime minister standing behind his son. One can see the photo in different sizes hanging everywhere in Beirut. The assassinated father standing behind his son. It reminds me of Hamlet and the ghost of his father. But I wonder; does the son in this photo know that this is the ghost of his father standing behind him? If not, then one might say that the son is not able to see ghosts in a city full of ghosts, just as Hamlet's mother who can't see her husband's ghost. In this case, the son might think that what has appeared behind him in this poster is simply a photo of his father hanging in the living room.<sup>653</sup>

Mroué reflects upon the fact that not everyone can see ghosts when he claims that Saad fails to understand that the depiction of Rafic is not only iconic and indexical but that the image also keeps the ghost of his father alive. Derrida, who frequently refers to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, explains that only some people can see specters, and Mroué too refers to Hamlet's mother, who is unable to see the ghost of Hamlet's father. Likewise, Jalal Toufic establishes a connection regarding the poster of the Hariris and *Hamlet*, and terms the father-son Hariri poster a 'kitschy unintentional visual adaptation' of Shakespeare's play, which shows Rafic 'like a ghost' behind Saad.<sup>654</sup>

These spectral returns are not limited to Hariri and Bachir but apply to all celebrity martyrs. They all carry the unfinished business of the protracted Wars and are located between times. The Wars can return at any moment, as we have seen in

653 Rabih Mroué, 'Make Me Stop Smoking', in *Rabih Mroué*, ed. Alenka Gregoric (Ljubljana: Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana, 2014), 191.

654 Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon*, 70. Here it should be noted that Toufic's conception of ghosts is different from Derrida's, although Toufic's ghosts share some similarities with spectral ghosts because they are in transit and do not stay in one place. Ghosts, according to Toufic, mostly appear in fiction and haunt the scene of a crime 'like an audiovisual record that each time plays back the same message' (Jalal Toufic, *Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Dead in Film* (Sausalito, CA: Post Apollo Press, 2003), 281). This means the ghost repeatedly returns with the same unfinished business, which he relays in a language that is difficult to understand. However, Toufic's ghost lacks the notion of being an arrivant, which is crucial for the conception of the martyr as a ghost that I am suggesting here.

2007 with the Arab University Shooting, in 2008 in West Beirut and other parts of Lebanon, and in 2021 in Tayyouneh. Those who think the Wars are over are, following Toufic, like zombies: half-asleep and unable to see below the surface, with no sensitivity for the still-violent atmosphere in Lebanon, and, like Hamlet's mother, unable to sense ghosts.<sup>655</sup>

Also, the ghostliness of the conductors of martyrdom operations should be considered, although not all have remained very visible as specters to this day. While martyrs such as Wajid Sayighi, whom I mentioned in 4.4, are not extensively venerated in images in the present, posters of people like Ahmad Qassir, who is considered to be Hezbollah's first istishahid, are still plastered around Hezbollah areas decades after their deaths.<sup>656</sup> Qassir still comes back. This is also true for Sana, whom I termed the poster girl of the SSNP in 4.4. Not only are her images reprinted, but new designs were even developed after her death, as is demonstrated by an example from 1998, which I found in the AUB library archives (Fig. 4.64). This poster no longer matches the standardised formats of the SSNP of the 1980s; in particular, the transparent layers, divided into four differently coloured quarters over her face, point to the disjointed time of her pre-Photoshop death and the time of the design of the image. The specter of Sana also appears regularly on her death date on the SSNP's Instagram page (Fig. 4.65). Like celebrities, as discussed in 4.3, the circulation of images of the dead needs to be continued to prevent the martyrs from dying fully and to keep them on the threshold between death and life.

The spectrality of the conductors of martyrdom operations is noteworthy on another level. As mentioned, before their operation they usually recorded farewell videos in which they announced their status as martyrs. Sana and her peers were self-conscious about the place and time of their physical passing. When Sana, with the knowledge that her speech would be broadcast only after she had physically ceased to exist, told her video audience, 'I am not dead but alive among you',<sup>657</sup> she herself pointed to her status as a specter in a Derridean sense because, at the time of the video's airing, she indeed would be dead and alive at the same time, absent as a breathing body and present as an image. Also, Jamal al-Sati, whom we have encountered throughout this book in the framework of *Three Posters*, said in his video testimony that he would abandon his country in body only.<sup>658</sup>

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655 Toufic, *Vampires*, 104–05.

656 Saade, *Hizbullah*, 55.

657 Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 137. According to Toufic, Sana was the first to use such a phrase. See Toufic, *Vampires*, 358.

658 Straub, *Das Selbstmordattentat*, 124.

These two young people's words have nothing to do with heaven or paradise, as they were voiced by members of a secular party. Further, both are saying 'I am the martyr' and are thereby unconsciously hinting at the disjointed time of martyrdom. When uttering this phrase, they are clearly alive, but they point to their death in the future, as when watched on TV, their life will have been a thing of the past. At the time the video was broadcast, they were already revenants, as they belonged to the past and had physically ceased to exist. But they were also arrivants, as the cause they died for should be achieved in the future.<sup>659</sup>

As explained by Derrida, one cannot foresee when the ghost comes back. The specter of al-Sati also returned unexpectedly in *Three Posters*. Since it was broadcast on TV in 1985, probably almost nobody has seen his video—it was only fifteen years later, in the framework of the performance, that al-Sati returned. But the video came back in another form because it was appropriated from visual politics into critical art, and because Mroué now uttered the words in addition to al-Sati. Therefore, we could say that Mroué and Khoury helped the specter appear.

The incarnation of Derrida's spectral ghost through the martyrs in Lebanon is visible in images showing the absent bodies in present posters on the walls. The martyrs can return as specters in a different form. As an image and not as a body. Furthermore, the posters of the shuhada act as symbols of the militias they died for during the *Wars*. These military groups still exist in today's Lebanon but have now turned into political parties. Therefore, I understand the pictures of the sectarian martyrs as revenants from the past, where they lived physically, but also as arrivants from the future, who carry an unfulfilled promise, which consists of domination over Lebanon by the group they have died for.

It is the sectarian parties that do not allow the ghosts on the walls to rest. They use them to point to their sacrifices in the past and to remind their followers that the future dream still needs to be accomplished—if necessary, also with violence. Martyrs live on in the present in posters while being physically dead. Only when they disappear from the walls do they die fully.

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659 See also Jeroen Coppens, 'How Images Survive (in) Theatre: On the Lives of Images in Rabih Mroué's *The Pixelated Revolution* and *Three Posters*', *The International Journal of the Image* 9, no. 2 (2018): 67–70.

#### 4.6.2 Enter the Ghost, Exit the Ghost, Re-Enter the Ghost: Spectral Ghosts in *Nancy* and in *Faces* by Hadjithomas/Joreige

In *Nancy* the notion of the spectral ghost following Derrida's hauntology appears only partially, whereas *Faces*, on which I will focus below, can be read as a thorough reflection of the spectrality of the martyrs on the walls in Beirut.

##### (No) Spectral Ghost in *Nancy*?

*Nancy* is not necessarily suitable for re-tracing the spectral ghosts on Beirut's walls; when looking for them in the play, they can be located less on the visual and more on the textual plane. Gade is right when she writes that the blurred space between death and life is addressed in *Nancy* because death is not something that makes the actors incapable of action.<sup>660</sup> Rather, they seem to be very much alive in the tasks they do while they claim to be dead. Examples can be seen for all four protagonists, as when Ziad says, 'Thus, when I died, they asked me to fill out an application to become an official comrade of the Communist Party' (15); when Rabi'h, lying dead in the Holiday Inn, tells the audience, 'My rifle is still there next to me where it had fallen. Don't ask me how, but I grab it and spring up, landing square on my feet...' (16); when Hatem states after being killed by friendly fire, 'I go home dead...' (21); and when Lina narrates, 'After my slaughter in Moseitbeh, I thought, 'Enough!' I understood that staying in West Beirut was impossible for any Christian' (26). Even after having died, they are able to fill in forms to join a party, kill enemies, walk home, or decide to move to another part of town. The actors say they are dead but perform activities that presuppose they are alive.

There are other instances in the play where the realms of death and life become even more disjointed. In one part of *Nancy*, Lina, after she gets killed, does not return to life; rather, as a corpse, she travels to Zahlé to spy on Hobeika for the Geagea faction:

as I was a corpse and thus unlikely to arouse suspicion [...] I headed out to Zahlé and in a couple of days, I was found out. A member of Hobeika's mob—a corpse himself—recognised me... He reported me, they captured me, and—for the second time—they liquidated me. (29)

This death while dead is followed by a speech by Lina: 'After I was liquidated for a second time by Hobeika's mob, the Forces organised a tribute ceremony. Over 300 martyrs were invited, myself among them' (30).

<sup>660</sup> Gade, 'Learning to Live', 341.

In another instance, after Ziad's failed martyrdom operation and the invasion of West Beirut by the Israeli Army in 1982, Ziad says:

Seeing as my body had vanished, I said to myself, 'Why not join as a secret cell?' I called on some brothers and we proceed immediately with our undercover manoeuvre. I started preparing for an operation on Salim Salam Boulevard. I admit that the operation turned out to be a bit more complex than I had thought—due to certain mobility and communication issues—and especially due to the fact that my unit had been found out, and the whole lot of them arrested by the Israelis. They were transferred to the Ansar detention centre... As for me, I fled to my brother's house [...] (22–23)

In these two passages, the dead-alive conditions of Lina and Ziad become even more blurred. Lina spies as a corpse and then gets killed by another corpse. Her state of being dead seems to be manifested by being killed again, although she was already not alive. After having died twice and being double-dead, she, together with other martyrs, is honoured in a ceremony.<sup>661</sup> On the other hand, although he no longer materially exists, Ziad plans a resistance activity against the Israeli Army and manages to flee in his immaterial state.

Gade reads these incidents as an undoing of the straight logic that divides death from life, which results in disorientation.<sup>662</sup> In particular, in these two instances, the realms of deadly absence and lively presence become totally entangled and impossible to distinguish, which is a characteristic of the spectral ghost.

However, the different times seem to be less blurry in *Nancy*. While I agree with Gade, who claims that the play points to the repetition of violence in different times and demonstrates how the present is haunted by the past, I do not agree that an outlook on future violence is immanent in the play.<sup>663</sup> Rather, I believe the future is merely absent in *Nancy*. In my understanding, there are only two overlapping times; namely, the now of the actors on the stage and the past, which is the temporality of the anecdotes they tell the audience. At no point in the play do the actors say that their goal is to keep fighting in the future.

661 Also the accompanying poster points to her being double-dead, as she is labelled as a *shahida* twice (Fig. 3.49).

662 Gade, 'Learning to Live', 342.

663 *Ibid.*, 341–43.

Furthermore, the storyline is linear in time because the actors tell of their experiences in chronological order, beginning in the 1970s and ending in 2007. A connection to the time before the *Wars* is established only once, when Lina links the War of the Mountain to the violent fights between Christians and Druze in the Shuf in 1860 (24). At the end, when all the actors revive their wartime habits and meet at Murr Tower, the notions of past and present are blurred, but the future remains absent.

I am also hesitant to agree with Gade's claim that the actors are in a space in between absence and presence. She writes that the four protagonists are present in the theatre where they tell the audience that they are themselves but that, because they are actually acting, they are absent as individuals.<sup>664</sup> Usually actors are playing someone else. This means that all actors are present and absent simultaneously, but it does not mean that all actors are automatically Derridean ghosts. Therefore, I understand the actors in *Nancy* not as absent but rather as constantly present, sitting on the black couch.

Even when the actors come back to life through their speech acts, they come back in the same form, sitting on the sofa. Also, their faces in the posters are clearly the same as those visible in the previous poster. Sometimes their photographs are even identical, as discussed in 4.2. Their returns to life are predictable; we know after a few deaths that we can expect them to come back soon after they get killed.

Because of the absent realms of the future, the linearity of time, the constant presence of the actors as images as well as persons, the return of the actors in the same form, and their predictable comings and goings, the only convincing manifestation of the Derridean spectral ghost that I see in *Nancy* is in the blurring of being dead and alive. This should not be perceived as a flaw of the play, but *Nancy* does not necessarily help us fully understand the spectral presence of the martyrs in posters in Lebanon. Therefore, in the following, I will discuss the artwork *Faces* (2009) by Hadjithomas/Joreige, where the spectral ghost is manifested with all its characteristics.

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664 *Ibid.*, 341.

Hadjithomas/Joreige's *Faces*: Re-Tracing Specters of the Protracted Wars

In my reading, *Faces* comments on the state of martyrs as ghosts of the protracted Wars. Hadjithomas/Joreige started working on *Faces* (Fig. 4.76) after the 2006 War. They took images of posters of martyrs of this war as well as of the Wars, and describe the work as follows:

In Lebanon, we live surrounded by dead people looking at us. Since the beginning of the civil wars, posters have covered the walls of the city. They are images of men, martyrs who died tragically, while fighting or on [a] mission, or who were political figures and were murdered. For years, we have been photographing the posters of martyrs belonging to different parties, religions, or creeds [...]. But we only select posters greatly deteriorated by time. [...] these posters remain there, the features and names have disappeared. There remains the rounded shape of a face, a barely perceptible silhouette, hardly recognizable. We photographed these images at various stages of their progressive disappearance. Then, [...] we attempted to recover certain features, to accentuate others, to bring back through drawing, the image of a face, a trace, matter, a lasting image.<sup>665</sup>

Hadjithomas/Joreige photographed weathered posters of martyrs of different sects in different phases of decay on the streets of Lebanon. They later returned: if the poster was still there, they rephotographed it to show the process of its disappearance. Afterward, they reconstructed fragments of facial elements according to the traces that were still left in the image.



Fig. 4.76: Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, *Faces*, 2009, Digital Prints, Photographic and Drawing Works, Each Approximately 33 x 50 cm, Courtesy of the Artists.

665 Hadjithomas/Joreige quoted in Alam, 'Undead Martyrs', 578–79.

The prints of *Faces* are divided into groups; some include one image, some two, and some three, with each group showing the same poster in different temporal stages. When the group consists of only one image, it means not only that the poster has disappeared upon the artists' return, but also that the poster in the first image taken was in such a deteriorated state that no fragments of facial features remained traceable for the creation of drawings. When there are two images, the poster was no longer there when the artists returned, or they did not manage to go back. Therefore, traces of the face had to be found in the first poster they photographed, and the state of decay was not visualised in a separate image. Usually, when there are three images, the photograph was still there upon the return of the artists, who photographed it again, and the drawings in the third image were made after traces that were found in the second image.<sup>666</sup>

The artists explained the drawing process as follows:

In one case, you have just an eye left. You can imagine there was another one, but there is not enough information in the image, there is no possibility to draw the other eye. Meaning it is not inventing the image; it is to reinforce what was lasting in the image. For us, it is really a reflection [...] on the photographic image [...]. In the beginning, we even thought we could use digital tools, for example, Photoshop, but this was not good enough because we needed something more human, illustrators or artists that could give their interpretation.<sup>667</sup>

The artists hired two illustrators who had not seen the previous image.<sup>668</sup> Importantly, the illustrators did not imagine what the poster could have looked like, rather they were searching for traces in the posters and highlighting them.

Looking at one group of *Faces* (Figs. 4.77–4.79), the three portrait-format posters seem to show the same motif at first glance. The shape of a men's head and shoulders is still clearly recognisable, but details can only be guessed due to the weathered condition of the images.

In the first picture (Fig. 4.77), traces of torn paper are visible on the entire image. On the top right-hand side, a bright circle, which was probably once the party logo, is depicted. The man's eyes, eyebrows, nose, and mouth are faintly visible. His black hair can be seen against a blue background. The martyr's grey-black clothing is no longer clearly identifiable due to the poster's poor state. The collar is rounded at his neck and has the shape of a jagged semicircle below. Again below,

666 Hadjithomas and Joreige, Zoom, 23 and 30 March 2021.

667 Ibid.

668 Contrary to Naeff's statement, Ghassan Halwani was not involved in this project (*Precairous Imaginaries*, 224). One of the illustrators was Stéphanie Saadé, an artist whom we will encounter in Chapter 5.



paper remnants can be seen. In the lower third of the picture, there is a black band, extending just beyond halfway across, where the poster has been partially torn from the wall. In the small residual section at the bottom left, four letter fragments remain: a red trace with black outlines, and a little further from it on the left, three black letter fragments in a different font.

The second image (Fig. 4.78) shows traces of time. The circle in the upper right corner has faded almost completely; the rest of the red letter with the black outline is no longer visible. The man's nose and mouth have disappeared; the eyes and eyebrows are bleached out. The entire background appears darker, while the letter fragments at the bottom left are no longer visible, and the peeling paper below the man's neck seems to have fallen off. Overall, the poster is more damaged, and fewer physiognomic features can be identified than in the previous poster.

The third image (Fig. 4.79), unlike the previous two, includes the illustrators' interventions. The circle in the background at the top right is again plainly visible. The eyes, eyebrows, chin, and ears are clearly defined, and the nose and mouth are now partially shown. The jagged bottom of the collar and the golden paper remnants underneath it are visible, as are the rest of the red letter with a black outline and the paper residue in the black area in the lower right of the image. In general, facial elements in Figure 4.79 that disappeared due to weather and time in Figure 4.78 are in the same position as in Figure 4.77, but are emphasised through details and contrast, which means that these interventions and reappearances go beyond reconstruction and can be described as

Figs. 4.77–4.79: Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, *Faces Number 1–3*, 2009, Digital Print, Photographic and Drawing Works, 35 x 50 cm, Courtesy of the Artists.

modification. Although *Faces*, like *Nancy*, uses the strategy of twenty-first-century appropriation art, it is not changing the poster but rather is capturing what is left.<sup>669</sup> Crucially, the face comes back not as it was but in a different form.

In my reading the artwork comments on the status of the martyrs as specters of the protracted *Wars* in Lebanon. Alam is right to argue that *Faces* is not about commemoration or restoring an image to what it once was. This would have been an easy task, as the posters of the martyrs of the *Wars* are accessible in archives, whereas images of more recent martyrs can be encountered in a 'healthier' state on another wall.<sup>670</sup> The names of the martyrs shown in *Faces* are no longer legible, and the party logo is no longer recognisable. In other words, the shahid's identity and faction affiliation become secondary. Therefore, Hadjithomas/Joreige are not restoring the image in order to remember or mourn individuals; rather like Mroué in *Nancy*, they are appropriating posters and recontextualising them from visual politics into critical art. In doing so they theoretically engage with the image and the figure of the martyr.

Noor Sacranie links *Faces* to the barzakh, which is a space between two metaphysical realms, 'the earthly and the spiritual, the known and the unknown, the actual and the imaginary'.<sup>671</sup> While these ambiguities touch on the spectral, a more direct connection to the ghost is made by Nat Muller, who calls the images of *Faces* ghost-like and haunting. She also locates the posters in the spectral, in-between space of presence and absence, which, in her reading, is illustrated in *Faces* because Hadjithomas/Joreige bring the dead back as if the artists were engaged in 'visual forensics'.<sup>672</sup> It seems Muller had Derrida's hauntology in mind when writing on *Faces* but had not dug deeper in her thought, which I will do now.

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669 *Faces*, unlike *Nancy*, does not comment on the gendered martyr because, as Hadjithomas/Joreige explained, at the time they photographed the posters, they did not find female martyrs on the walls. Moreover, unlike *Nancy*, *Faces* does not place special emphasis on the hierarchy of martyrs. Celebrity martyr Bachir appears in the series but is artistically treated in the same way as the ordinary martyrs. Therefore, in *Faces*, all martyrs are made equal. Bachir is only integrated into the presentation of *Faces* when shown abroad, as the artists do not want him to be recognisable immediately, which would be the case in Lebanon. Furthermore, Hadjithomas/Joreige only sell *Faces* as a whole series. This means people with certain political preferences are forced to buy all images and cannot buy, for example, only the portrait of Bachir. Hadjithomas and Joreige, Zoom, 23 and 30 March 2021.

670 Alam, 'Undead Martyrs', 580–81.

671 Sacranie, 'Alternative Remembrances', 16–17.

672 Nat Muller, 'On Being Contemporary – Re-Activating the Present: Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige in Conversation with Nat Muller', *Art Papers* (January/February 2013), <https://sc-ua-tbucket.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/1b8b9c2cf881e1a3dc09a102a0a88626.pdf>. Also, Omar Kholeif, in 'Dreaming Our Way to the Future: Unfolding the Work of Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige', *Mousse* 53 (2016): 252, notes regarding *Faces* that 'all that remains is the empty shell of an oval face, peculiar ghosts lingering and lining the city streets'.

Derrida's claim that specters are present and absent simultaneously is visible via the state of the images in *Faces*. The picture is clearly here, but it is also absent; parts of its surface have disappeared, although it has not yet vanished entirely. The overall composition can be adumbrated, but details can only be guessed. By being only partly perceptible, the martyrs in *Faces* are like spectral ghosts, visible and invisible at the same time. Even in the images, which were modified by the illustrators, not all elements can be seen. The posters show people who have physically ceased, lived in the past, but are being kept alive. As long as the poster is on the wall, the martyr is not fully dead, even when the image is no longer clearly visible, as *Faces* shows. And, as mentioned, ghosts can return.

The coming and going of the ghost is indicated in the groups of *Faces* that include three images; this is specifically signified by the disappearance, fading, and bleaching of certain elements in the second image and the partial return of these elements through the interventions of the illustrators in the third. This also points to the disjointed time; parts of the first poster reappear in the third poster so that some of its original form is reactivated by enhancing the traces, still visible in the picture, that were already thought to be lost. But *Faces* also demonstrates that the ghosts return in a different form, as not all modifications correspond to the first image that the artists took of the poster. Some elements are lost, some reappear. Hadjithomas/Joreige thereby reflect that posters often come back in a different form, either with a change in design, as in the example of Sana (Fig. 4.64), or because someone else is continuing the cause, as in the recent images of Hezbollah martyrs who died in Syria, which can be understood as a comeback in a different form of Hezbollah's previous martyr posters (Fig. 2.10).

However, the groups that consist of only one image seem to point to the fact that not all ghosts return, or that there are ghosts that are not yet there. In Lebanon, too, not all martyrs return, like the thousands of ordinary martyrs whose images at some point left the walls and were never reprinted. But, just because they are not here yet does not mean that they will never return. Al-Sati, for example, came back in *Three Posters* fifteen years after his martyrdom.

As mentioned above, 'zombies', such as Hamlet's mother, cannot see ghosts. When Hadjithomas/Joreige claim that they needed humans because Photoshop was not good enough, we understand that sensation is needed to feel the absent presence of the ghost. Not everyone can do so, and a non-human programme like Photoshop surely cannot.

The artists said that *Faces* questions the idea of the return of the image. Seeing the posters deteriorated so badly would make them wonder if in those vanishing images, the dead people looking at us were not trying to escape, but to rest.<sup>673</sup> However, in my reading, by bringing the martyrs back in the second and third images

673 Hadjithomas and Joreige, Zoom, 23 and 30 March 2021.

of *Faces*, Hadjithomas/Joreige do not immediately lay the ghosts to rest, but they also do not ignore or expel them. There is a temptation to do so because, as Derrida writes, there is a fear that the specter will come back.<sup>674</sup> Nevertheless, by trying to chase ghosts away, one actually chases after them. Thus, Derrida advises learning to accept them, to live with them, to speak of and with them, to keep them close, and to allow them to come back, as only this will make our lives different and better.<sup>675</sup>

One must have the ghost's hide and to do that, one must have it. To have it, one must see it, situate it, identify it. One must possess it without letting oneself be possessed by it, without being possessed of it.<sup>676</sup>

One should catch the ghost, be willing to see it, locate it, identify it, and finally gain power over it. This is precisely what Hadjithomas/Joreige seem to do in *Faces*: they allow parts of the ghost to re-emerge but are still controlling how much appears—namely, only parts of the image, of which traces are still detectable. In doing so, it could be argued, Joreige/Hadjithomas avoid being possessed by the ghost.

This, however, happens to Khalil Jaber, the father of the LCP militiaman Ahmad in *White Masks*. Khalil became obsessed with his son's posters after his son's death. He was concerned that the posters could become damaged when it rained, and when they deteriorated, he hung up new ones. By putting up more pictures, Khalil did not allow the ghost of Ahmad to rest. According to Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, 'the image of the martyr has become more real than his death. [...] It was as if Ahmad had not died. Reality (Ahmad) was replaced by its image (the poster). The poster became the man, the man the poster'.<sup>677</sup> When the poster production for Ahmad was ceased by the LCP, as Mejcher-Atassi mentions, Khalil realised that his son was really dead.<sup>678</sup> But the ghost remained, and Khalil wanted to expel him by destroying the dozens of posters of Ahmad he still had at home. First, he tried to remove his son's image with an eraser, then he shredded the posters and chewed them into little paper balls until no trace of Ahmad's face was left. At the end of the novel, Khalil dies, but shortly before he was seen while attempting to paint over the posters of other martyrs on the walls.<sup>679</sup> This means that Khalil first tried to kill the specter of Ahmad, who lived on in images, with different means of violence, and then attempted to kill other ghosts on the street. Finally, it could be argued that trying to kill the ghosts eventually killed Khalil.

674 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 2.

675 *Ibid.*, 109.

676 *Ibid.*, 165.

677 Mejcher-Atassi, 'Martyr and His Image', 350.

678 *Ibid.*

679 Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 220–22.

In *Faces*, however, Hadjithomas/Joreige do the opposite. They allow the ghosts to appear and, it seems, they follow Derrida's advice to welcome them. Unlike Khalil, who tried to exorcise the ghosts, Hadjithomas/Joreige try to embrace them by re-tracing them without copying them. Drawing them as a copy would indeed have been a form of commemoration similar to what the parties do when they reprint posters of their martyrs. But Hadjithomas/Joreige are not bringing the ghosts back in the same form; they seem to question where all these ghosts that are roaming around Lebanon come from and how to best deal with and live with the ghosts' present absence.

Hadjithomas/Joreige make the martyrs' sectarian affiliations unrecognisable by reducing them to mere silhouettes. By doing this, and by juxtaposing martyrs of the *Wars* with those who died during the 2006 War, they seem to point to the fact that the *Wars* are protracted and that the current situation has been created by all sectarian parties equally. The sects did not forget the *Wars*, and neither many of its martyrs. This issue of sectarian memory cannot be solved by plastering the city full of faces that are pointing to a dream of the past and the future, a dream that is a hope for one group and a threat for the group's political opponents.

The way Hadjithomas/Joreige treat the ghosts could be linked to Walid Sadek's conception of the *Ruin to Come*, which I have already introduced in 4.5. Sadek suggests that the Lebanese should refrain from rushing into the future or remaining obsessively stuck in the past and instead should come together in the present and talk about what they have seen and experienced. From this chorus of contrasted speeches and fragmented accounts of experiences of the *Wars*, the *Ruin to Come*, which is 'necessary for building a livable future', could be gradually created.<sup>680</sup> But to do so, the ghosts must be welcomed. This is because the

dead of a past that refuses to simply pass away can be renamed. Not as martyrs, heroes, victims or accessorial casualties but as cornerstones for a making to be recognized by those who come after as a ruin poised to be built.<sup>681</sup>

If the *Ruin to Come* is built, the dead would not be glorified or victimised, but accepted as being here, as having died, and as having effects on the present. They would be the cornerstones of the *Ruin to Come*, a time that would then be free of revenge and sectarian dreams and would acknowledge the past for what it was. The dead, like the past, could be viewed from a different perspective, as the martyrs would not stand for a dream not yet achieved that needs to be accomplished in the future, nor would they symbolise a threat that could resurface at any moment. This is wishful thinking, of course.

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680 Sadek, *Ruin*, 164.

681 *Ibid.*, 174–75.

In *Faces*, it seems, Hadjithomas/Joreige propose not ignoring ghosts but welcoming them in a non-sectarian manner and literally re-tracing their origins. They show us not only the martyrs, who are dead physically but alive in the image, but also—due to the partly vanished surface of the posters—the way that the martyrs are visible and invisible, present and absent at the same time. An image of the past comes back in a different form after the interventions of the illustrators, who can see the different ghosts. But not all ghosts returned—sometimes the artists did not find the image and sometimes there was not enough information from which to draw. *Faces* thereby illustrates that the ghosts' comeback is unpredictable. By embracing the martyrs of different sects without copying them, Hadjithomas/Joreige are not like Khalil in *White Masks*, trying to extinguish them out of grief or disappointment, and Hadjithomas/Joreige also do not want to use the image of the martyr for political purposes like the parties do. It seems, they prefer to invite the ghosts to return, but not to finish their business, which is the sectarian dream the martyrs died for. In my reading, for Hadjithomas/Joreige, the point of the invitation is to accept that the ghosts are here and thus to prevent them from causing trouble in the present, which is sometimes embodied through clashing images, as I have discussed in 4.3. The martyrs can be laid to rest only when the *Ruin to Come* is built, and this can be done only when the martyrs are no longer glorified or demonised but instead recognised as what they are: hauntings of the past and the future that have effects on the present.

### 4.6.3 Images of Present Absence: Other Ghostly Images

In Lebanon, we find different kinds of ghostly figures and images. This corresponds to Derrida's claim that ghosts are varied and heterogeneous.<sup>682</sup> I will now explain why the images in *Faces* and the pictures of the martyrs on Beirut's walls are spectral and neither latent ghosts nor images that withdrew after a surpassing disaster. To understand that images of martyrs fit into neither of these two concepts, I will make a distinction between these three ghostly pictures and show that the crucial difference between the latent and the spectral image is that the latter has already been visible whereas the latent picture might appear for the first time at some point. Furthermore, in contrast to the withdrawn image, the spectral picture returns in a different form.

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682 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 95.

### The Latent Image: The Missing

Joey Ayoub claims that ‘the disappeared will always be present, as ‘ghosts’.<sup>683</sup> This is also true for the martyrs, who share iconographic similarities with the missing, as I have elaborated in 4.3. However, the martyrs and the missing are different ghosts because the missing are in a state of latency, meaning their images are still waiting to become visible in the streets. In contrast, the posters of the martyrs, although sometimes invisible, have been there already. While *Faces* has been linked to latency by Alam and Naëff,<sup>684</sup> I argue that posters of martyrs are usually not latent.

Hadjithomas/Joreige explain the concept of latency, which they coined in a Lebanese context, as follows:

Latency is the state of what exists in a non-apparent manner, but which can manifest itself at any given moment. It is the time elapsed between the stimuli and the corresponding response. The latent image is the invisible, yet-to-be-developed image on an impressed surface. The idea is that of the ‘dormant’—slumber, slumbering—like something asleep, which might awake at any moment. Latency has connotations with [...] the idea of the repressed, the hidden [...] it is [...] a diffused state, [...] underground [...] as if all could resurface anew.<sup>685</sup>

Latency is therefore an invisible, hidden, and suppressed presence of a fact or image that is absent but is in a waiting position; it can emerge from this position, but it has not done so until the present. Also, Hadjithomas/Joreige explicitly refer to the undead and the revenant when offering their explanation of latency:

This is a story about the return of the undead, the revenant of something resembling the capacity of remembrance that makes us human. [...] Being haunted is refusing the mechanical state [...] it is something that resists. Being here, today, is accepting to live with our ghosts, to long for them, to feed them.<sup>686</sup>

Like spectral ghosts, latent ghosts should not be expelled but welcomed. In Hadjithomas/Joreige’s body of work, an example of latency connected to martyrs is ... *A Faraway Souvenir* (Fig. 4.25), which I have already introduced in 4.2. Here, the artists not only photographed the images of martyrs that were inside the frames on the

683 Joey Ayoub, ‘The Civil War’s Ghosts: Events of Memory Seen Through Lebanese Cinema’, in *The Social Life of Memory: Violence, Trauma, and Testimony in Lebanon and Morocco*, eds. Norman Saadi Nikro and Sonja Hegasy (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 56.

684 Alam, ‘Undead Martyrs’, 580; Naëff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 225.

685 Hadjithomas and Joreige, ‘Latency’, in Tohmé and Abu Rayyan, *Homeworks*, 40.

686 *Ibid.*, 48.

lampposts in Ouzai but also took pictures of empty frames that were on these same lampposts. The artists call these empty frames latent because they are next to the spectral martyr, waiting for the shahid to come.

The post anchors these two temporalities in a kind of reality, of continuous present. Whereas juxtaposing these temporalities creates a time lag which cannot be easily represented. Just like the ceremonial adopted for the video pre-taped farewell of the fighters before their suicide operations. In this farewell shown on [a] TV news program, the fighter introduces himself in these terms 'I am the martyr' followed by his name. His status of martyr precedes the suicide operation he will carry out.<sup>687</sup>

This intermingling of times on the lampposts of Ouzai is comparable to the videos of the conductors of martyrdom operations, which I have already discussed above. The video is latent in the time between its recording and its being broadcast on TV. The individual announces himself or herself to be a martyr, but only becomes one when the video is shown on TV, and not necessarily when carrying out the operation.

On the lampposts in Ouzai, each empty frame is latent and points to a future martyr who is still invisible, yet to be. The empty frames are placed next to spectral martyrs who died in the past and who are still present via their images. These are already here and therefore not latent. A picture can only be latent if it still needs to manifest itself. Images, once revealed, do not return to their latent status.

Contrary to *Faces*, where the poster was here and faded, the images in the empty frames in Ouzai have still not been there. Also, when speaking about *Faces*, Hadjithomas/Joreige do not understand the fading posters of martyrs as latent:

It is not latency. Sometimes images don't last, meaning in time images can be altered [...] Images are not going into latency but into fading, obturations, off-screen obliteration, scratches, dissolving, whatever. Images become figures of absence. Absence and latency are not the same.<sup>688</sup>

To understand the difference between the latent image and the spectral image better, I will return to *Lasting Images* (Fig. 4.40), which I introduced in 4.3 when I discussed the differences and similarities between the visuals of the martyrs and the missing.

As mentioned, the artists developed the last film that Joreige's uncle shot before he went missing during the *Wars*. The results were barely visible figures on a white surface. These pictures are ghostly in a latent sense because they were there before, on the film roll, but have never been exposed. Through the act of developing,

687 Hadjithomas and Joreige, 'A State of Latency'.

688 Hadjithomas and Joreige, Zoom, 23 and 30 March 2021.

Hadjithomas/Joreige freed them from their latent status and made them visible. At the same time, Hadjithomas/Joreige tried to stay haunted.<sup>689</sup> Here, to be haunted means to accept living with latent ghosts, and to refuse the state's—and also the militias'—attempts to forget the missing, who are not visualised in posters and therefore not acknowledged on the city's walls.

Although their images have, with the exception of the above-mentioned UMAM poster, never been visible on the walls, the missing are here. Many people in Lebanon know about them; many of the disappeared are buried in unmarked mass graves in Beirut, and people walk over them on a daily basis. While the martyrs are haunting the living due to their visibility on the walls, which creates problems in the present, the missing are haunting due to their visual absence. Only Halwani, who dug out the UMAM posters and added biographical information to the anonymous faces, gave the missing a small amount of visibility on Beirut's walls, even if today only one trace of his work remains in Gemmayzeh (Fig. 4.47). Of course, the images of the missing have never been absent for their relatives. The martyrs and the missing might share a space in a living room, but they do not share space on the walls on the streets.

Although the fact that only fragments are left in *Faces* makes it similar to *Lasting Images*, the mode of present absence is different because the posters of *Faces* were visible on the wall. These images disappeared and reappeared, but they were not waiting to appear for the first time in a hidden position, like the image on the film rolls in *Lasting Images* and the future posters in the frames seen in *...A Faraway Souvenir*.

### The Image Withdrawn Past a Surpassing Disaster: The Living Martyr

Some researchers link *Faces* to Jalal Toufic's notion of withdrawal past a surpassing disaster. For example, Sacranie suggests that *Faces* could be thought in the framework of this concept because, in her reading, Hadjithomas/Joreige 'attempt to restore some of what was lost'.<sup>690</sup> However, I would argue that images of martyrs usually do not withdraw past a surpassing disaster, as images that experienced such an event remain in the same form, which is not the case in *Faces*.

689 Hadjithomas and Joreige, 'Latency', 48.

690 Sacranie, 'Alternative Remembrances', 9.

A surpassing disaster is defined by Toufic as follows:

whether a disaster is a surpassing one (for a community—defined by its sensibility to the immaterial withdrawal that results from such a disaster) cannot be ascertained by the number of casualties, the intensity of psychic traumas and the extent of material damage, but by whether we encounter in its aftermath symptoms of withdrawal of tradition.<sup>691</sup>

Toufic claims that after a surpassing disaster, certain things, which he calls ‘tradition’—such as films, videos, music, art, paintings, and different forms of texts—withdraw immaterially, although it appears that they have survived. They look the same, but they are no longer the same.

After a surpassing disaster, artists should either resurrect the tradition that has been lost, or ‘record this nothing’ and reveal and acknowledge the loss; for example, artists can take photographs of the withdrawal of the referents, so that they are available for people in the future who might be able to resurrect the tradition.<sup>692</sup> This is because ‘art acts like the mirror in vampire films: it reveals the withdrawal of what we think is still there’.<sup>693</sup> According to Toufic, the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster is comparable to the undead figure of the vampire, who, as he elaborates, is not reflected in the mirror. After surpassing disasters, tradition, like the vampire, seems to be here but is not.

Just as some cannot see spectral ghosts, some do not realise that a surpassing disaster has taken place, and therefore not all people are able to sense the immaterial withdrawal of the tradition. Some people think the tradition is still available and continue living in a time that has already gone by, while others consciously choose to be oblivious to it.<sup>694</sup> Toufic writes that this is wrong—in a manner, I would add, that is similar to the way that Derrida claims it is wrong to ignore the spectral ghost. It is crucial to recognise that something has vanished, although it seems to be here.

An example of an artwork that deals with the loss of tradition is Walid Raad’s/ The Atlas Group’s *Appendix XVIII* (2008–12; Fig. 4.80), which has been discussed by Fares Chalabi. Raad considers the *Wars* a surpassing disaster, not because they killed, wounded, and traumatised thousands of people, but because they affected forms, colours, lines, and shapes, which sensed the danger and therefore withdrew and hid in letters, numbers, circles, and squares, as well as in other colours, but

691 Jalal Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* (n.p.: Forthcoming Books, 2009), 11–12.

692 *Ibid.*, 57–60. See also Naeff, *Precarious Imaginaries*, 168–69.

693 Toufic, *Withdrawal*, 57.

694 Chalabi, ‘Present’, 119.

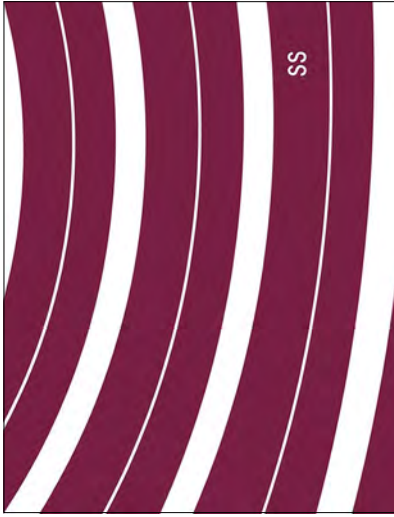


Fig. 4.80: Walid Raad/The Atlas Group, *Appendix XVIII, Plate 199\_A History of a Nomination*, 2008–12, Inkjet Print on Archival Paper, 42 x 54.2 cm, © Walid Raad, Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery New York.

also in catalogues and dissertations. In other words, the forms, colours, lines, and shapes appear to be present even though they have withdrawn. Raad photographed and documented the withdrawals to make it possible for people in the future to resurrect them.<sup>695</sup>

The withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster is also addressed in Hadjithomas/Joreige's text 'A State of Latency' (2001), in which the artists reflect upon Mayla Soufangi, a woman who conducted an unsuccessful martyrdom operation in the South of Lebanon, which led the Israeli Army to send her to the notorious Khiam detention centre. A TV programme then labelled her a 'living martyr', because she had already recorded her martyr video using the stock phrase 'I am the martyr'. After her release, Soufangi was no longer

the same, as Hadjithomas/Joreige tell us in the text. She started to take drugs and question her sexual identity. Her failed martyrdom operation and imprisonment could be termed a surpassing disaster because when she returned from jail, a part of her had withdrawn, although she looked the same as before.

The artists do not resurrect the tradition of Soufangi but document the loss of her personality. Hadjithomas/Joreige write that 'he who proclaims himself a martyr, who projects himself onto one of the empty frames of the electric posts of *Ouzai*, cannot come back himself, but [as] another. There is no return from the realms of death'.<sup>696</sup> Soufangi had planned to become a martyr and probably envisioned herself in a martyr poster. Via the act of naming herself a martyr in a video and by taking the action to turn into an *istishahida*, along with the following imprisonment, she entered the realm of the undead in Toufic's sense.

According to Chalabi's reading of Toufic, the undead are physically alive but aware of the fact that they are dead while alive: 'Realizing that, the one who died before dying wakes up and becomes a lucid dreamer because he sees that the others, those who didn't experience death before dying, live in a dream thinking that

695 Ibid., 120. For the presence of the notion of withdrawal after a surpassing disaster in Raad's work, see also Saadawi, 'Rethinking the Witness', 110–11.

696 Hadjithomas and Joreige, 'State of Latency'.

they are just alive'.<sup>697</sup> By entering the realm of the undead, which is usually accessed through extreme situations, such as drugs or imprisonment, one becomes a witness to death. There, in the realm of the undead, one can collaborate with one's own dead double; this process is subject to constant anxiety, word salads, glossolalia, theft of thought, and other disturbances, and therefore one is unable to focus or write.<sup>698</sup>

Toufic criticises the fact that Marwan Hamadé, a former PSP member of parliament, is considered a 'living martyr' just because he survived an assassination attempt. This survival, according to Toufic, has not brought Hamadé into the realm of the undead, because the undead withdraw from the world in order to survive an extreme situation.<sup>699</sup> As an example of a living martyr, he instead suggests Riad al-Turk, who was imprisoned in Syria for seventeen years and lost his ability to dream and his connection to his life outside prison, which made him enter the realm of the undead.<sup>700</sup> Mark Westmoreland has expanded on Toufic's ideas, suggesting that Soha Bechara, who was imprisoned in Khiam for ten years after her failed assassination attempt on Antoine Lahad, turned into a living martyr because she survived despite torture and captivity.<sup>701</sup> Undead beings experienced another realm while still being physically alive and, by entering this realm, they changed into someone else, although this is not visible on the outside.

I should mention here that my concept of the undead, with which I describe the martyrs on the walls who are unable to die fully, does not match Toufic's conception of the undead. According to Toufic's critique of *Nancy*, which I introduced in 3.2, the dead, like the undead, are lost and disconnected from the living. Toufic notes that the four actors in the play, however, are living people who only pretend to be dead, because the dead do not hold inner monologues or wait for each other to stop talking before they start speaking; the dead hear only voiceovers, which are the voices of all the other dead. Also, Toufic claims that the absence of glossolalia points to the fact that the actors in *Nancy* are not dead.<sup>702</sup>

Whether *Nancy* has failed to embody Toufic's conception of the dead should not concern us too much here, but I would like to note that *Faces* does not address withdrawals of traditions that should be documented or preserved. This is the case because, as mentioned above, the posters of *Faces* in different stages do not look the same. Rather, the deterioration and return of elements is clearly visible.

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697 Chalabi, 'Present', 125.

698 *Ibid.*, 124–25.

699 *Ibid.*, 125.

700 Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon*, 24–27.

701 Westmoreland, 'Catastrophic Subjectivity', 199.

702 Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon*, 73–75.

As a result, I do not think that Hadjithomas/Joreige resurrect a tradition past a surpassing disaster in *Faces*. What would this tradition be? If we understand the Wars and the 2006 War, after which *Faces* was created, as surpassing disasters, then the martyr posters are a result of the conflicts. They were produced by them. Can a surpassing disaster create images?

### Images of Martyrs: Not Latent, Not Withdrawn, but Spectral

There are various images of present absences with only slight but important nuances. The posters of martyrs in general and of *Faces* in particular are not latent because they have previously been visible, and they are also not images that withdrew after a surpassing disaster because they change form and usually do not look the same when they return.

Via the conceptions of the latent and the withdrawn image, the figure of the martyr also differentiates itself from the missing, who are usually in a state of latency, and from the figure of the so-called living martyr, who withdraws after having experienced a surpassing disaster. While the images of the missing have never been widely revealed on the walls, the images of the living martyrs, in particular the videos they recorded, look the same but lost their tradition after the martyrdom project failed and the martyr was imprisoned.

#### 4.6.4 The Martyr as a Spectral Ghost

I understand martyrs as undead beings due to their present absence. They died in the past but are still on the walls of the present, and despite the non-existence of their physical bodies, they are still alive and visible in pictures. Martyrs, like ghosts, move through time. As arrivants, they point to the future because they carry an unfinished dream for which they died. This dream, like the martyrs, comes from the past, which turns them into revenants. Martyrs haunt the present in a different shape, not only because they are now here in a different form, not as beings in flesh and blood but as images, but also because, through time, their posters are redesigned and redistributed or because someone else continues their cause in a different body as a specter of the predecessors.

There are several reasons that *Nancy* is not especially well suited to reflect the ghostly presence of the martyrs in Lebanon: the absence of a future realm, the linearity of time, the constant presence of the actors as images as well as persons, the return of the protagonists in the same form, and their predictable comings and goings. Only the actors' deaths and returns to life correspond to Derrida's hauntology.

I have argued that *Faces* is a better example of the reflection of the ghostly presence of the martyrs. Posters of shuhada from different decades are set next to each other, and their unpredictable comings and goings are visualised. Due to the partly

vanished surface of the posters, the martyrs are visible and invisible, present and absent at the same time. An image of the past can return in a different form. This seems to symbolise the sectarian dreams regarding Lebanon that the shuhada carry; these dreams originate from the past, where they were conceptualised, and the future, where they should be implemented.

Hadjithomas/Joreige embrace the martyr in *Faces*; unlike Khalil in *White Masks*, they do not become possessed by the ghost or try to extinguish it. They also do not want to use the image of the shahid for political purposes, like the political parties do. Rather, they seem to say that the martyrs can only be laid to rest when the *Ruin to Come* is built, and this can only be done when the martyrs are accepted as what they are: hauntings of the past and the future that disturb the present, but not beings that should be glorified or demonised. However, to identify the martyr's haunting, it is important to differentiate the martyr's image from other images of present absence, meaning from other ghosts. Unlike the missing, martyrs are usually not, latent because their posters were previously visible, and their images also did not withdraw after a surpassing disaster, because they change their form and may have been created as a result of such an event.

#### 4.7 How *Nancy* Shows Us via Appropriation That the Martyr Image Is Fabricated

My interpretation of *Nancy* differs from previous writings on it, which primarily understand the play as a reflection on the memory and history of the *Wars*. In contrast, I argued that *Nancy*, via the visual strategy of appropriation, questions the picture and the figure of the martyr and shows us how images of shuhada, as fabricated remembrances, are used in the framework of visual politics.

By selecting underlying images from various parties for the re-made posters, *Nancy* shows that the anatomies of the martyr posters of all sects involved in the *Wars* consist of similar components: the party logo, other symbols, slogans, and an image of the deceased. All sects, in an act of uncritical appropriation, turned ID photographs into images of martyrs after the death of the referent. Unlike the parties, *Nancy* does not copy or replicate these images, but transfers them from the context of visual politics into critical art. Images of martyrs speak only when embedded in a truth claim. This has also been pointed out by Tony Chakar in *Four Cotton Underwear for Tony*. Simply by replacing one or a few elements, an image can become a picture for a martyr of another party. The imagery of the martyr, although of course differing with regard to religious or sectarian-cultural peculiarities, is in its basic structure the same among all Lebanese factions.

Also, the same photograph can be presented as an accusation image or as a trophy image, depending on who is publishing the poster with which intention,

as *Nancy* reflects via a press clipping showing a scene of atrocity. Furthermore, by announcing the living as martyrs, *Nancy* and Mroué's non-academic lecture *The Inhabitants of Images* demonstrate that an iconic and indexical image does not establish a truth claim, as it always depends on the context in which a picture is read. Concerning the *Wars*, this has already been addressed in Maroun Baghdadi's movie *Little Wars*.

For each of the militias, when issuing posters of ordinary martyrs, it was not of primary relevance whose image was in the poster as long as there was a photograph that 'proves' that someone had died for the group, as *Nancy* shows by re-using the same image for different deaths. The arbitrariness of the martyr's face is also addressed in *Inhabitants* and in Joana Hadjithomas/Khalil Joreige's *...A Faraway Souvenir* by undoing the martyr's individuality. This turns the shahid into a currency for the militia in a competition for shuhada.

Usually, a martyr is perceived as a perpetrator by adversaries, who often have their own (counter-)martyrs, as we have seen via the images and stories of Rabih and Hatem that accompany clashes before and during the Battle of the Hotels. The fact that not every group recognises the same dead as shuhada is manifested through incidents such as SSNP members burning an image of Bachir in front of the AUB.

Sometimes two groups proclaim the same shahid, as narrated in an anecdote by Ziad, whose martyrdom was claimed to be Hezbollah's as well as Amal's. This reflects metaphorical battles fought over ownership of the martyr, as is visible in the Instagram pages of the different parties, where martyrs of other groups appear.

Not all martyrdoms are remembered equally, and martyrs, like the wreckage of the *Wars*, can be divided into ordinary and celebrity. *Nancy* addresses this fabricated hierarchy of shuhada via the choice of underlying images, the disappearance and re-appearance of elements in the posters in the Blue and Green Groups, and the showing of Bachir and Hariri on all four screens instead of only one. In particular, the deaths of these two men had severe consequences for Lebanon, and their images elicit strong emotions among their followers until the present day, as we have seen not only via the textual plane in *Nancy* but also in Ziad Doueiri's movie *The Insult*. This is because these martyrs carry the dream of the faction for which they died. Especially when appropriating images of celebrity martyrs, there is a danger that the image will strike back, meaning that it becomes an unwanted glorification instead of a critical engagement, as I have shown with the depiction of Bachir in Alfred Tarazi's *Beirut Zoo*.

Celebrity martyrs, as *Nancy* and Ari Folman's movie *Waltz with Bashir* point out, are visualised and venerated like pop stars. This stands in contrast to the missing. Although it is likely that the disappeared also died a violent death, they are absent from the walls, as shown by the blue monochrome accompanying Lina's kidnapping in *Nancy*, which I linked to Walid Raad's/The Atlas Group's *Secrets in the Open*

*Sea*. Also, a scene in Ghassan Halwani's movie *Erased, Ascent of the Invisible* reveals the constructs of the figures of the martyr and the missing, and Hadjithomas/Joreige visualise the vague whereabouts of the disappeared in *Lasting Images*.

Not only hierarchies of memory are fabricated, but also performances of gender, as we have seen via Lina's posters. Men are portrayed as martyrs in significantly more cases than women are. The urge to fabricate heroes when men die and to label women who die as victims is also revealed in Lamia Joreige's *Objects of War*, Mroué's *Inhabitants*, and Hadjithomas/Joreige's *Memory Box*.

Through the appropriation of the hypermasculine format and Lina's cross-dressing, *Nancy* also caricatures how the militias wanted to 'sell' the image of a man with exaggerated masculine traits and how they tried to awaken desires among young men to become like the poster boy and join a militia. Thereby, the posters function in the same way as commercial advertisements, with the party logo as branding. At the same time, through the friction of the visual and textual planes, *Nancy* demonstrates—like *Massaker* by Monika Borgmann, *Lokman Slim*, and *Hermann Theissen* and *Three Posters* by Mroué and Elias Khoury—that the hypermasculine hero exists only in the image and is actually a human being with feelings.

I have further suggested thinking of the martyr as a spectral ghost, which *Nancy* does not fully reflect. However, *Faces* by Hadjithomas/Joreige visualises the martyr as a Derridean specter. By re-tracing the process of fading and returning elements in martyr posters, *Faces* shows us that shuhada are both visible and invisible, absent and present, revenant and arrivant at the same time. Crucially, *Faces* visualises that the images of martyrs are spectral and not latent, such as the images of the missing because the posters of the martyrs were already here and did not emerge from an invisible position. *Faces* also shows that posters of martyrs are not images that withdrew past a surpassing disaster but still look the same—such as those shown by Walid Raad/*The Atlas Group* in *Appendix XVIII*.

Shuhada are often surrounded by rumours, and *Nancy* tackles this fact with the story that Rabih tells the audience about his death at the Holiday Inn. There are no historical accounts of Ahrar fighters plummeting from the building, as Rabih claims has happened; hence the account that Rabih tells is unlikely—but not impossible—to have taken place as such. Also, the fact that *Nancy* indicates dates that not always correlate with historical events and that certain episodes of the play evoke anecdotes that can be found in literature—such as Ziad's death in the Sanine Mountains, which is modelled after a story in Elias Khoury's *White Masks*—means we can never be sure if what the martyrs tell us is true, untrue, or partly true.

The notion of time is also relevant because *Nancy* draws parallels between martyr posters and the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower by depicting the two ruins in posters juxtaposed with shuhada. Wreckage and martyr embody the unfinished business of the *Wars* until the present day, and both are prematurely historicist because, even though they are framed as past, they also belong to the present.

Polysemic emotions are attached to both ruin and image, which turns them into untouchable elements, as I have demonstrated with the reactions to the interventions of Jad el Khoury at the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower.

Through the depiction of contemporary bodies of the actors, but also by using only the most recent versions of the party logos and other symbols, some of which—such as the dagger cross—were barely employed during the alleged time the posters were issued, the play hints at the non-linearity of time, the presentness of the posters, and, by implication, the unresolvedness of the *Wars*. This leads to the constant creation of new martyrs, such as at the shooting at the Arab University, the incident with which *Nancy* ends. If the martyrs, like the wreckage of the *Wars*, are rendered past, it is impossible to address the negativities of the present, as the awareness that they also belong to the realm of the now can never be achieved. This consciousness is necessary to build the *Ruin to Come* conceptualised by Sadek Mroué also said something similar in an interview when he claimed that it is necessary to confront

the different Lebanese histories with each other, not to point a finger towards them by saying that they are full of contradictions and fabrications and they are not objective and all written for the sake of their own ideological purposes, etc. No. This was not the aim at all. On the contrary, it was, and it still is, an attempt to put them together, to try to listen to each one of them carefully and understand their logics; to comprehend their refusal of each other and their fear of that 'other'.<sup>703</sup>

As I stated in 3.1, today's problem with the *Wars* in Lebanon is not amnesia but divergent sectarian memories. *Nancy* does not condemn these memories but rather accepts their coexistence.

Also, the Lebanese Army seems to have reflected the coexistence of different martyrs, probably unconsciously, in a poster, which I will briefly introduce to underline the relevance of the points discussed in *Nancy*. The poster in *Figure 4.81* shows just over one hundred faces of people who have died in Lebanon in the last hundred years. Below a blue sky with white clouds, the top edge of a wall is visible, suggesting that these photographs should symbolise posters. In the top right, the logo of the Lebanese Army is depicted. It consists of two crossed swords, two wings, and an anchor, crowned by a cedar and encircled by a laurel branch with the words 'Honesty, Sacrifice, Loyalty' below.<sup>704</sup> On the left of the logo, bold white text reads 'All of Us for the Homeland', which is also the title of the national anthem.<sup>705</sup>

703 Hlavajova, Winder, Cosimas, 'In Place', 16–17.

704 'The Army Insignia', Lebanese Army, [https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/army\\_s\\_logo](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/army_s_logo).

705 The Lebanese anthem was written between 1932 and 1934 by the Maronite poet Rachid Nakhleh; see Shehab and Nawar, *Arab Design*, 112; Salibi, *A House*, 29.

Like *Nancy*, the army poster shows martyrs from different sectarian groups. The army is Christian-commanded but includes soldiers of all sects and therefore has a certain interest in presenting itself as an organisation that does not have any sectarian differences but rather enforces the idea of one nation.

The arrangement of the faces does not differentiate shuhada regarding sectarian affiliation, religion, or time of death. For example, there are many people in the second horizontal row from the top who were assassinated or killed. We see a black-and-white photograph of Riad al Soloh (d. 1951), Lebanon's first prime minister and therefore of course Sunni, wearing a Tarboosh (a high hat). Two images right of him is Francoise el Hajj (d. 2007), a high-ranking Maronite army general, wearing an army uniform. Again, two images right of him is Hariri (d. 2005) in his usual business outfit. Next to him is a black-and-white photograph of the PSP leader Kamal Jumblatt (d. 1977) and again next to him we see Bachir's nephew Pierre Gemayel (d. 2006), a Kataeb politician, smiling in a shirt. Next to him is Wissam Adnan al Hassan (d. 2012), a Sunni general of the Lebanese intelligence service, wearing glasses, and a photograph of Dany and Ingrid Chamoun with the couple's two children (d. 1990). Next to them is a photograph of Hassan Lakkis (d. 2013), a Hezbollah military commander, in combat gear. Two images right of him is Nasrallah's son Hadi (d. 1997) wearing an olive cap and a keffiyeh. And again next to him is Abbas Mussawi (d. 1992), Hezbollah's former secretary general, wearing glasses and a turban.



Fig. 4.81: Lebanese Army, *All of Us for the Homeland*, 2010s, 48 x 33 cm, Poster, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

Like *Nancy*, the army points to the varied nuances of martyrdom. A dead civilian is visible in the top row, where an iconic photograph of the 2006 War, in which a screaming man is carrying the body of a girl, is included. Istishahid Bilal Fahs is depicted on the far-right of the bottom row, and celebrity martyr Hariri is shown in the second-to-top row with the same image that was used in *Nancy*. Six images to his right, we see the fighting martyr Lakkis. Yet types of martyrs not addressed in *Nancy* are also depicted. For instance, uniformed Red Cross workers are scattered across the image, and intellectual martyrs also appear: the journalist Samir Kassir can be seen in the second-to-bottom row (to the right of a black-and-white photograph of istishahida Lola Abboud), and the bearded thinker Mahdi Amel appears in a black-and-white photograph below Kassir.

Just as the actors in *Nancy* all meet at a common place, namely Murr Tower, these martyrs are gathered in the army poster, where, as in the play, certain symbols can be encountered. The Lebanese flag is the most prominent emblem; it points to the desired unification of Lebanon, which the army advocates. Other visible symbols are the Hezbollah logo in the second row, as well as the LF cedar and the Amal logo in the bottom row. The use of these symbols in one image hints, like *Nancy*, at the fact that all parties used a similar strategy of symbolism as branding.

As in *Nancy*, most of the photographs in the army poster are ID images that, after the death of the referent, were turned into pictures of martyrs. And as in the play, other kinds of photographs are visible, such as the family photograph of the Chamouns.

Unlike *Nancy*, however, the army's poster does not address hierarchies of martyrdom. Hariri and Bachir—who is depicted, one row below Hariri, with his daughter Maya, who died one year before her father in a car bomb attack that was directed towards him—are shown in the same white frame employed for all the other martyrs.<sup>706</sup> However, the gendered distribution of martyrdom is reflected in the army's poster, as significantly more men than women are visible. The image of Ingrid Chamoun points to the women who were massacred at home during the Wars, while a black-and-white photograph of LCP member Lola Abboud in the fourth row from the top represents the female istishahida. Hypermasculine martyrdom is also partly performed in the army poster, as only men are shown wearing sunglasses and in military clothes. The missing are, of course, absent.

According to the truth claim of the army, all those depicted are martyrs. But, unlike *Nancy*, the army does not critically question the figure and the image of the martyr. It seems that the goal of the agglomeration of photographs of the dead is to promote national unity by announcing that all parties have paid a price in martyrs. Here the shuhada are not divided into martyrs on one side and counter-martyrs

706 However, Bachir's photograph is slightly larger than most of the others—although this might be caused by the landscape format. Bachir is also positioned near the poster's centre.

on the other, but their images, when seen together, act as the common ground that unites all Lebanese sects. By showing them in this way, it could be argued, society should be persuaded to follow the path of the martyrs in this poster, namely, to stand next to each other instead of opposing each other. This path would also be the desired outcome of the *Ruin to Come*. The army is here presenting an imagined future, of which the martyrs are Sadek's 'cornerstones'.

At the same time, this poster, like *Faces*, could be read as an attempt to put the ghosts to rest, as the depicted are neither demonised nor glorified. Rather, their presence is acknowledged. Their status as arrivants carrying a sectarian dream is intended to be extinguished by showing them all in the same image in the same size, as if the army tried to say they all died for the same cause. For Lebanon.



## 5. Images of the Dead Around 4 August 2020

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During the time of writing and researching this book, posters of the dead still had several functions that go beyond sole commemoration and artists were still concerned with images of the dead. In this chapter I will discuss three types of dead that coexisted next to each other: sectarian martyrs, martyrs of the thawra, and the dead of 4 August.<sup>707</sup> We will see, regarding the functions and anatomies of these posters, that many of the arguments and streams of thought raised in the discussion of *Nancy* were still valid at the time of writing this book. However, I will also point out concepts that I believe have changed and no longer apply to today's realities.

This is followed by an analysis of artworks that engage with and comment on current images of the dead, understood in the widest sense. I will focus on the events of 4 August, as they overshadowed the thawra and possibly even the unfinished business of the *Wars* at the time of writing. I will also show that notions discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, such as twenty-first-century appropriation art, iconic architectural remnants, and haunting present absences, are still recurring and that many topics of *Nancy* are still relevant today.

### 5.1 Coexistence: Sectarian Martyrs, the Martyrs of the Thawra, and the Dead of 4 August

Old and new concepts and images of the dead were sharing Beirut's walls during the time of writing and research. In the following, I will introduce the three primary forms of the dead I encountered on the city's walls and online. Beginning with the persistence of images of sectarian martyrs, I then consider the martyrs of the thawra as everyday citizens, before finally turning to the dead of 4 August, who oscillate between the figures of the martyrs and the missing.

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707 Of course, images of people who died natural deaths are still placed on the walls, but these are not the focus of this book.

### 5.1.1 The Persisting Image of the Sectarian Martyr

Images of sectarian martyrs, whose posters I have extensively discussed in the previous chapters, are still present today. These types of posters, which are still scattered all over Beirut, show pictures mostly of men who are announced as martyrs by the sectarian group for which they died.

Currently, Hezbollah issues most of the martyr posters. During the time of writing, this was mostly a result of their involvement in the War in Syria. As no other group—except for the tiny SSNP, which, like Hezbollah, militarily supported the Syrian regime in that war—participated before 7 October 2023 in any open armed conflict, the other sects did not have the same frequent opportunities that Hezbollah had to elevate deaths as martyrdoms in recent years.<sup>708</sup> Additionally, the number of deaths caused by the group's self-proclaimed resistance activities against the presence of the Israeli Army in the South and in the Tammuz War are not paralleled by any other faction.

There are no official numbers of how many Hezbollah members were killed in Syria because of the group's security policy, where little information leaves the realms of the party, as Ziad also hints at the end of *Nancy*. However, it is estimated that around 1,800 Hezbollah fighters had died in that conflict by 2017.<sup>709</sup> Although Hezbollah has been sending its fighters to Syria since 2011, the group has only announced martyrs since 2013, when it officially admitted involvement in the conflict.<sup>710</sup> This means that Hezbollah members were not immediately presented as shuhada, despite dying in the same manner as their fellow fighters later in the war.

However, the fact that Hezbollah did not instantly announce their martyrs in Syria is not a new phenomenon. Similarly, early shuhada, such as Ahmad Qassir, who died before the group officially declared its existence, were only proclaimed as martyrs years after their passing.<sup>711</sup> Only by dying in the right circumstances can one become a martyr; that is, not only are resources and infrastructure needed, but the will of the party is also crucial. One Hezbollah man to fall in Syria is Ali al-Akbar Mohammad Chashfieh, who died in 2015 and received a large funeral that

708 Myrntinen, in 'Death Becomes Him', 126, provides details about the involvement of both Hezbollah and the SSNP in the War in Syria. The author also suspects that Lebanese Sunni groups that are related to al-Qaida participate in this very war but do not commemorate their dead on the walls.

709 Saouli, *Hezbollah*, 192.

710 *Ibid.*, 190–91. Hezbollah already announced in 2012 that some of its members were killed on 'jihadi duty'. Many Lebanese started to wonder what this duty could be, as Hezbollah was not officially involved in any armed conflict at that time. Of course, fingers quickly pointed to the War in Syria. See Leela Jacinto and Marc Daou, 'Are Hezbollah's Mysterious 'Martyrs' Dying in Syria?', *France 24*, last modified 7 October 2012, <https://www.france24.com/en/20121007-syria-uprising-hezbollah-mysterious-martyrs-killed-line-jihadi-duty-iran-lebanon-fsa>.

711 Saadeh, *Hizbullah*, 50.



Fig. 5.1: Hezbollah, 'Shahid al-Mujahed Ali al-Akbar Mohammad Chashfieh', Poster, Beirut – Zoukak El Blat, December 2022, Photograph AR.



Fig. 5.2: Islamic Republic of Iran, 'Colonel Martyr Ehsan Kerbalaipur. Died 7 March 2022 in Syria', 2022, Online Poster.

was sponsored by Hezbollah.<sup>712</sup> The anatomy of the poster issued for him (Fig. 5.1) is comparable to those from the *Wars*. It contains the party logo, which acts as the group's visual identity, in the lower-right corner. Also, other symbols that were already used in posters from the *Wars* and in *Nancy* are visible; namely, there is a bird next to the logo and, at the lower left, a bloodstain that, when examined closely, forms a silhouette of a man reading a book, most likely the Quran. The bird, like the posters of Islamic parties issued during the *Wars*, represents the belief that Chashfieh now has a special place next to God as a result of his self-sacrifice, to which the bloodstain points. The slogan refers to him as 'Shahid al-Mujahed', an expression already used by Hezbollah during the *Wars*, as I explained in 4.1. Also, the colours of the poster—yellow, green, red, and black—correspond to those that the group employed in their earlier posters; only the orange tones are new.

A gun, whose presence in martyr posters of the *Wars* was also addressed in a poster from *Nancy* (Fig. 3.19), is visible in the left frame. Despite the presence of the rifle and the martyr dressed in combat gear, this poster is not in the hypermasculine format. On the contrary, the man's reading of the book and the shahid's slightly shy look away from the camera indicate a man who has piously studied the Quran before dying for his cause.

712 Amer Farhat, 'Tashiih Mohib Alshahid Ali Alkakar Mohammed Chashfieh Fi Baladeh Jbah', *Nabatieh News Network*, 28 October 2015, <http://nn-lb.com/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=4304> (last accessed 3 June 2023; site inactive on 7 October 2024).

Parallels to Iranian posters are, like during the *Wars*, still visible in this image. For instance, a poster (Fig. 5.2) that commemorates an Iranian serviceman who also died in the War in Syria, in which the Islamic Republic, like Hezbollah, participated on the side of Bashar al-Assad, includes the same bird, which seems to be a stock motif. Also, the stylised drops of blood scattered across the image, the typeface of the slogans, and the nuances of how the colours yellow and orange fuse into each other are similar in the two images.

While Chashfieh's image is in an individual format, other images (Fig. 2.10) show us that the serial format, which is also reflected in *Nancy* via the multiplication of posters, is still used to the present day. Both posters in Figure 2.10 show the same yellow template, with the Hezbollah logo at the top-left corner and a light-yellow strip centred across the bottom of the poster, in which we read 'Shahid al-Mujahed' followed by the name of the deceased. Only the photograph, the name, and, in this case, the symbols are changed.

Looking at the symbolism further, we see that, like Ziad in some of his deaths for Hezbollah in *Nancy* (Figs. 3.37, 3.39), the fighter in the left image of Figure 2.10 wears a headband. As I have noted, this is a symbol directly linked to Hossein's martyrdom in Kerbala and therefore reactivates Hezbollah's resistance narrative, including the presentation of the fighters as 'little Hosseins'. The Kerbala paradigm is still intact, but now Kerbala has relocated to Syria.

The right image of Figure 2.10 depicts the Dome of the Rock in the background. During the *Wars*, the Dome of the Rock was a symbol used by Islamic parties to express their struggle for liberation and their solidarity with Palestine—a use reflected in *Nancy*. Hezbollah participated in the War in Syria because the group needs to have a direct land route to their main sponsor, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and this is possible only if their ally al-Assad is in power in Syria. Officially, however, the group justifies its involvement in the conflict with a resistance narrative. If the al-Assad regime fell, so Hezbollah's argument goes, Israel would not only encircle Hezbollah and threaten the militia, as well as Shia Islam in general, but there would also be a greater risk that Palestine, including the Dome of the Rock, would be lost to Israel indefinitely.<sup>713</sup>

The SSNP also commemorates their fallen fighters who were killed during the War in Syria.<sup>714</sup> But due to the party's size, it has far fewer dead to mourn than Hezbollah. An example is the Lebanese citizen Adonis Naser, who died in 2016. A commemorative poster (Fig. 2.11) depicts Naser in military fatigues, smiling into the camera, in front of a beige map of Greater Syria that represents the lands the SSNP wishes to unite. Maps were also included in posters from the *Wars*, and this is also reflected in *Nancy* (Fig. 3.15). On the other hand, the binoculars dangling

713 Saouli, *Hezbollah*, 186–89.

714 Solomon, *In Search*, 129–30.



Fig. 5.3: SSNP, 'The Blood of the Martyr Is the Ink of History. Comrade Martyr Jianna Khadher Eid. While Performing a National Mission in the De-Mining Unit, She Was Martyred in the Eastern Countryside of Salamiyah on Monday 30 October 2017 When a Mine Left Behind by Terrorists Exploded', 2017, Online Poster.

ly, the use of the serial format and the inclusion of certain symbols and slogans are a continuation of the posters of the *Wars*. The only novelties are minor additions of symbols and colours.

Also, the gender ideologies of the parties have not changed. While Hezbollah still does not announce women as militants, the SSNP still does. Solomon mentions a woman named Jianna Khadher Eid, who was killed in Syria in October 2017. She is remembered in a poster that depicts her in combat gear (Fig. 5.3), in a manner similar to the SSNP's female conductors of martyrdom operations during the *Wars*. As is also reflected in *Nancy* via the fact that Lina's only death in combat occurs for the SSNP (Fig. 3.44), the party still remembers female martyrs like their male counterparts.<sup>715</sup>

Furthermore, Mariam Farhat's commemoration is a continuation of Hezbollah's remembrance of female martyrs during the *Wars*. Farhat was shot on the balcony of her home during the Tayyounh clashes in 2021. Like the women who were killed in the Bir al-Abed bombing (Fig. 4.17), Farhat died because she was in the

from Naser's chest are an element that I have not seen in posters from the *Wars*; however, they, like the sunglasses, are a tool through which to see. The logo that is depicted in the top red bar was already used by the SSNP during the *Wars* and is appropriated in *Nancy* as such. At the bottom of the poster, we read 'The Hero Martyr Comrade Adonis Naser. He was Martyred in a Battle of Heroism [...] Lattakia Countryside 19.12.2016'. This demonstrates that the hero martyr phrase, which was used for martyrs of various militias during the *Wars* and was sometimes followed by the location and the date of death, is still used in today's posters.

This SSNP poster, like the Hezbollah posters discussed above, includes the same basic elements as the ordinary or obituary format used during the *Wars*, namely, a photograph of the deceased, the martyr's name, a slogan, and the logo of the issuing party. Equal-

715 Ibid., 147. Eid was of Syrian and not of Lebanese nationality; however, in the ideology of the SSNP, this is not of importance as they dream of establishing Greater Syria.



Fig. 5.4: Mariam Farhat, Al-Mayadeen, 19 October 2021.

wrong place at the wrong time; still, she is designated a martyr, at least by the Hezbollah-friendly news channel, Al-Mayadeen (Fig. 5.4).<sup>716</sup>

While Farhat is presented as a passive victim, men associated with Hezbollah, such as Mohammad Jamal Tamer, who also died during the Tayyouneh clashes, are remembered as fighting martyrs (Fig. 2.13). Also, the members of Amal who died in these same clashes were men and

are equally presented as shuhada (Fig. 2.12). The Amal poster for Mustafa Munir Zbeeb follows the typical anatomy of a martyr poster from the Wars. It includes an ID photograph of the deceased, the party logo, and the typical party colour green, as well as a sura from the Quran (57:19), ‘The Martyrs Are with Their Lord. They Have Their Reward and Their Light’, written in the second line in white on top of the image. Quranic quotes had already been included in posters during the Wars, as Nancy has also reflected (Fig. 3.36). As we see, the gender performances that occurred during the Wars are still present. In the SSNP, men and women die as heroic martyrs; for Amal and Hezbollah, women can only be victimised martyrs.

While none of these posters corresponds to the hypermasculine format, press images of Tayyouneh do. One of these (Fig. 5.5) shows Hezbollah and Amal militiamen in everyday clothes wielding Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, exposing muscular arms reminiscent of posters from the Wars. I also remember a video that was broadcast on Twitter during the Tayyouneh clashes. It showed the masked Hezbollah militiaman Mohammed Hassan Al-Sayed, who was firing a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) and was shot while doing so, dying on the spot. This depiction corresponded to the hypermasculine format because a man firing an RPG amid a street battle could be linked to the hypermasculine perception of danger as exciting and toughness as emotional self-control.

Another video, which emerged a few months before the clashes in Tayyouneh, stands in contrast to the video from Tayyouneh. In August 2021, shortly after the Israeli Army bombed a part of South Lebanon and Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel as retaliation, a video that went viral showed Hezbollah militiamen driving around with a rocket launcher in the South. They were stopped by Druze residents, who, due to concerns about Israeli reprisals, did not want Hezbollah weapons moved through their village. When the residents forced the vehicle to

716 Al-Manar, ‘The Story Behind Lebanese Forces Militia Ambush in Tayyouneh’, *Al Manar*, 17 October 2021, <https://english.almanar.com.lb/1452420>.



Fig. 5.5: Fighters from Hezbollah and Amal Take Aim with a Kalashnikov and an RPG Launcher, 14 October 2021, Photograph Ibrahim Amro, Courtesy of AFP via Getty Images.

halt, at least one Hezbollah militiaman appeared to be very frightened and anxious as he was crouching in the car.<sup>717</sup> He embodies an additional side of Tayyouneh's heroic rocket launcher. Of course, he was a different individual, but both men represent the figure of the Hezbollah militiaman. As *Nancy* has shown us regarding the *Wars*, fighters, while hypermasculine heroes on the surface, are still actual humans with feelings and emotions, such as distress and anxiety.<sup>718</sup>

Furthermore, posters still generate irritation and conflict; this took place, for example, when Hezbollah installed a poster of Al-Sayed, whom I mentioned above, in Manara, a mixed Shia-Sunni neighbourhood in West Beirut. Some commentators interpreted this as a provocation and an unnecessary, additional infliction

717 Gareth Browne, 'Tensions Between Hezbollah and Lebanon's Druze Near Boiling Point', *The National News*, 7 August 2021, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/lebanon/2021/08/07/tensions-between-hezbollah-and-lebanons-druze-near-boiling-point/>.

718 Gender performances of martyrdom are also still reactivated among Christians. The image formula of a man in everyday clothes holding a gun can be seen in posters of Fadi Bejjani, who was killed in a gunfight between Hezbollah and Christian residents when a Hezbollah truck with ammunition overturned while it moved through the Christian village of Kahale. For his poster, depicting him in jeans, a black shirt, and an automatic rifle, see *L'Orient Today*, 'Kahaleh Buries Fadi Bejjani', *L'Orient*, 11 August 2023, <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1346153/kahaleh-buries-fadi-bejjani.html>.

of potential sectarian strife<sup>719</sup>—in this sense, it is comparable to Lina’s criticism of the installation of Bachir’s image in West Beirut. Until today, one group’s hero is another group’s enemy: for Hezbollah, Al-Sayed’s poster is a declaration of power, and the depicted is admired by the sect’s supporters; in contrast, the same image raised anger among Hezbollah’s rival groups.

In East Beirut, however, I noticed an increased number of posters of LF leader Samir Geagea popping up on the streets shortly after the Tayyouneh clashes. Geagea was accused of having incited his militiamen to attack the Hezbollah and Amal protestors in Tayyouneh, for which he was later summoned to court. Geagea’s Christian followers supported him against prosecution, using language reminiscent of slogans employed in martyr posters from Christian parties as discussed in 4.1, such as ‘Bachir Lives in Us So That Lebanon Remains’. One of Geagea’s followers told a journalist during a protest against Geagea’s being summoned to court, ‘We are here today in 2021 sacrificing for Samir Geagea just like he sacrificed for us in 1994 so Lebanon could remain and we could remain’.<sup>720</sup> Moreover, Geagea here receives the same treatment as Salim Ayyash, who was sentenced for the killing of Hariri, since Ayyash’s guilt is also denied by his followers, as mentioned in 4.3. Geagea is the counter-hero to the Hezbollah and Amal martyrs who died in Tayyouneh. He embodies the Maronite Christian dream, in opposition to the dream of the Hezbollah/Amal martyrs of a pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian Lebanon under the umbrella of the March 8 movement.

The posters of sectarian parties still announce shuhada who died years ago. On the one hand, as I have shown throughout the book, sectarian memory is long lasting, and the dead of the *Wars* are still reactivated on the walls and online by all parties. While the Christian sects grant Bachir a certain monopoly on signifying martyrdom, with his reprinted posters serving as the embodiment for all fallen Christian militiamen,<sup>721</sup> Hezbollah and Amal still remember ordinary martyrs who died during the *Wars* in posters, although to a lesser extent than their celebrity martyrs. The LCP and the SSNP occasionally put up new images of their martyrs

719 Sawt, ‘A New Provocation from Hezbollah... The Image of an RPG Launcher Raised in the Al-Ma-nara’, *Sawt*, 24 October 2021, <https://english.sawtbeirut.com/lebanon/83313/>.

720 The Arab Weekly, ‘Lebanese Christian Leader Geagea Dodges Military Court Summons’, *The Arab Weekly*, 28 October 2021, <https://push.thearabweekly.com/lebanese-christian-leader-geagea-dodges-military-court-summons>.

721 On 14 September 2022, on the fortieth anniversary of Bachir’s death, the LF published twelve posts with his photograph on their Instagram account. The Kataeb put less effort into the visual online distribution of Bachir’s image on this same day; their Instagram showed only one image of him and one video of him giving a speech.

who died during the *Wars*. They also, like the other parties, do this on Instagram, where the quote that had already been employed for Sana in 1985 was still used in 2022 (Figs. 3.77, 4.65). The Sunni martyrs of the *Wars* seemed to be rather absent during the time of research.

Images of Christian and Sunni men (among them Hariri) who died in the 2000s and early 2010s are venerated as ‘March 14 Martyrs’ or ‘Cedar Revolution Martyrs’ and can still be encountered in the streets. All of the killed were critics of the Syrian regime, and they died mostly by car bombs.<sup>722</sup> An example, which I have mentioned in 4.7, is the Kataeb politician and nephew of Bachir, Pierre Gemayel, who was shot in his car and whose image is still present at the site of his assassination on the Coastal Highway towards the North. The faces of those who died as a result of the car bombs are often accompanied by the slogan ‘We Will Not Forget’.<sup>723</sup>

During the time of research, Hezbollah dominated the martyr discourse due to the large number of human losses the militia has suffered in their involvement in the War in Syria, as well as to their infrastructure and political will to produce martyrs. Yet they are not the only group that participates in the martyr discourse today. Rather, all sectarian parties still visually venerate deaths as martyrdoms. They either create new martyrs, whose posters are placed on the wall shortly after their deaths, or they reactivate images of shuhada who died during the years of the car bombs or the *Wars*. All of these images follow the anatomy of the poster used during the *Wars*, with only minor changes in symbolism and colours.

All the depicted that have been mentioned are spectral ghosts. They are revenants because they physically died in the past and embody a future dream as arrivants. Like celebrities, as discussed in 4.3, the circulation of images of the dead needs to continue in order to prevent them from dying fully and to keep them on the threshold between death and life. These images are stuck in both the past and the future, and they do not allow a new narrative to emerge within the groups. Rather, glorification and victimisation remain sources of revenge and sectarianism. These images show that Sadek’s *Ruin to Come* is certainly not yet built. However, new images and a new dream emerged in 2019.

722 For the car bomb incidents, see Bonsen, *Martyr Cults*, 118–19. Also, intellectuals, who were not members of a party but were outspoken critics of the Syrian regime, were among the killed—for example, Samir Kassir and Gebran Tueni.

723 Although these car bombs targeted Christian and Sunni politicians alike and therefore, in theory, created a certain community of death, the sectarian borders were sustained. Usually, Christian victims were remembered only in Christian areas and Sunni victims only in Sunni areas (Schmitt, *Advertised to Death*, 10–11).

### 5.1.2 Everyday Citizens: The Martyrs of the Thawra

New martyrs were created in 2019 and 2020, when widespread protests took place in which people tried to overthrow the sectarian system. These protests are commonly referred to as ‘thawra’.<sup>724</sup> The independent online news outlet *Megaphone* wrote on their Instagram page that ‘whatever followed the uprising, the fact remains that people were martyred, wounded, and beaten for the possibility of this ‘imagined future’. A duty remains to remember and demand revenge against the regime that killed them’.<sup>725</sup> The post from which this text is drawn also includes images of men—there were no female casualties—who have been killed in the framework of the thawra since 2019. The dead of the uprisings, like the sectarian martyrs, can be understood as both revenants and arrivants, as they died in the past but carry into the future the dream of a non-sectarian Lebanon, which should be implemented so that their deaths were not in vain.

One of the dead, Alaa Abou Fakher, was shot by the Lebanese Army, on 12 November 2019, while he was protesting. Abou Fakher was active in the thawra, but he was also a representative of the PSP and therefore a part of the sectarian system. His memory is thus twofold: revolutionary and sectarian.<sup>726</sup> As his sectarian commemoration does not significantly differ from the sectarian poster anatomy discussed above, I will now focus on his revolutionary memorial.

An image that I encountered in spring 2020 in Martyrs Square (*Fig. 5.6*) shows a black-and-white selfie of Abou Fakher with the Lebanese flag wrapped around his head. Visible beyond his head are protests in Martyrs Square, which was the epicentre of the revolution, and Mazzacurati’s statue. A connection is thereby made between the martyrs of 1916 and the martyrs of the thawra. White text announces the dead individual as a shahid, followed by his name.

724 It should not concern us too much whether the upheavals of 2019–20 should be called thawra (revolution) or intifada (upheaval). I would like to mention that the word thawra has other implications beyond those encompassed by the word revolution. Khalili has argued that in everyday use the term refers to different meanings and is also used as a euphemism for guerrilla warfare and a synonym for armed struggle and for the rejection of the status quo (Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 97). Rima Majed and Jeffery G. Karam recently argued that a revolution should not be defined in binary ways—either outcome or failure—and that the result of a revolution does not need to be political but can also be social or economic. See Jeffery G. Karam and Rima Majed, ‘Framing the October Uprising in Lebanon: An Unfolding Revolutionary Situation’, in Karam and Majed, *The Lebanon Uprising*, 3. Further, they clarify that the term thawra is used in the sense of revolt, revolution, and uprising (*ibid.*, 11).

725 Megaphone (@megaphonenews), ‘3 Years After ‘October 17’’, Instagram, 17 October 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjorCFyImCs/>.

726 Abou Fakher received a funeral from the PSP and is celebrated as a martyr by his party. See Marc Ghazali, ‘Exploring Political Identity Among Supporters of the Lebanese Uprising’, *The Legal Agenda*, 11 November 2020, <https://english.legal-agenda.com/exploring-political-identity-among-supporters-of-the-lebanese-uprising/>.



Fig. 5.6: 'The Martyr of the Thawra Alaa Abou Fakher', June 2020, Beirut – Martyrs Square, Photograph AR.



Fig. 5.7: 'Martyr of the Lebanese Thawra Hossein Hassan al-Attar', Beirut – Martyrs Square, June 2020, Photograph AR.

Selfies are not the only novelty in depictions of martyrs of the thawra. Often, the dead are now shown while engaged in leisurely activities. Hossein al-Attar is depicted while drinking coffee and smoking a cigarette (Fig. 5.7). A Lebanese flag is superimposed over his right arm, and the slogan written in red and white declares him 'Martyr of the Lebanese Revolution. Hossein Hassan al-Attar'. Al-Attar was part of a crowd that blocked the road to the airport when he was fatally shot by a motorcycle driver who tried to get through the blockade, as the driver had been paid to transport people and luggage to the airport.<sup>727</sup>

The depiction of the martyr engaged in leisure activities is an innovation in comparison to the static ID images prevalent in the imagery of the Wars. Al-Attar's mundane acts of smoking and drinking coffee appear to communicate that he could be anyone. Like the Arab Spring martyrs about which Elizabeth Buckner and Lina Khatib wrote, he is portrayed not as a political figure but as an everyday citizen and unnecessary victim of violence.<sup>728</sup> However, a collective format that I encountered on Martyrs Square (Fig. 2.14) shows nine shuhada of the revolution, and al-Attar is depicted, like most of the other men, with an ID photograph. Only one, Omar Zakaria, is portrayed wearing sunglasses, an element that was already present during the Wars and is reflected in *Nancy* through images of Rabih, Ziad,

727 Hussein Yassine, 'The First Lebanese to Tragically Lose His Life Protesting for a Better Lebanon', *The 961*, 22 October 2019, <https://www.the961.com/the-first-lebanese-to-tragically-lose-his-life-protesting-for-a-better-lebanon/>.

728 Elizabeth Buckner and Lina Khatib, 'The Martyrs' Revolutions: The Role of Martyrs in the Arab Spring', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 4 (2014): 378.



Fig. 5.8: 'Eyes Cried and Hearts Bled. Farewell, the Father of the Revolutionaries Doctor Mohamad Hossein Ajami', Poster, Beirut – Martyrs Square, June 2021, Photograph AR.

and Hatem in hypermasculine poses. Another continuation of the Wars in this thawra poster is the slogan, which in bold white text at the top of the image labels the dead as heroic martyrs.

Another poster shows Mohamad Ajami, an activist and doctor, while protesting (Fig. 5.8) and therefore implies that he died in the streets, although he was actually killed as a result of a car accident, which happened when he returned from a demonstration. In other words, he was not killed intentionally, but died in a car crash.<sup>729</sup> As I have also discussed with regard to the depiction of Rabih in Figure 3.11,

a truth claim does not have to correspond to the actual events but rather constitutes how truth is presented and how the photograph is contextualised. Ajami has been in front of the camera during a protest and left an indexical trace. His image shows him as iconic and as lifelike as possible in this activity, but he did not die during a protest, although the image suggests he did.

Ajami's presence in pictures stands in contrast to the absence of the two Syrian workers, Ibrahim Younes and Ibrahim Hossein, who were killed on the first day of the upheavals, when revolutionaries set ablaze a building in which the two men were sleeping. As a result, they suffocated. Although the two workers are sometimes mentioned as martyrs of the thawra,<sup>730</sup> they are not always considered as such—for example, they are absent from the martyr poster with a collective format (Fig. 2.14). This is sometimes explained by racism against Syrians in Lebanon.<sup>731</sup>

729 Following his death, it was alleged that the hospital where he was admitted refused to treat him unless he paid money. The hospital denied these accusations. This is particularly relevant to the story around his death, as during his lifetime, Ajami sometimes treated people without financial compensation; see Bassam Zaazaa, 'Lebanon's 'Doctor for the Poor' Dies After Hospital Demanded Money for Car Crash Treatment', *Arab News*, 30 March 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1834856/amp>.

730 For instance, this took place in an Instagram post from the *Megaphone* account Megaphone, '3 Years After'.

731 Sawssan Abou Zahr, 'Lebanon's Syrian Refugees: The Forgotten Victims of the Beirut Blast, and Collateral Damage in a National Crisis', *Peace Insight*, 7 July 2021, <https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/lebanons-syrian-refugees-forgotten-victims-beirut-blast-and-collateral-damage-national-crisis/?location=&theme=>.

At the same time, the presentation of these two men as martyrs of the revolution is a fabricated truth. Like Rabih, who is portrayed in *Nancy* as having died for Ahrar (Fig. 3.11), when in fact he died not for the party but because of the party, Younes and Hossein did not die for the thawra but because of it.

These examples demonstrate that the images of the martyrs of the thawra are constructed. Ajami did not die while protesting, nor did the two Syrian workers. On the other hand, Abou Fakher, although he did not die for the PSP, is remembered as both a sectarian and a revolutionary martyr, while the dead of the thawra who did not belong to a sectarian party are considered only revolutionary martyrs. As mentioned in the *Megaphone* statement above, the sectarian system is usually held responsible for the killings. Yet it was in fact responsible for the death of only one of the examples discussed: Abou Fakher.<sup>732</sup> The other deaths happened because of a car accident, a man who wanted to earn his money by taking people to the airport, and thawra activists burning a house.

Initiatives close to the thawra still hijack killings, just like the sectarian parties did during the *Wars* when they presented martyrs of other groups as theirs, and just as *Nancy* reflects when Hezbollah and Amal discuss the 'ownership' of Ziad's death (Fig. 3.36). An example is a post on Daleel Thawra, an Instagram page that supports the revolutionary movement. On 18 October 2022, the three-year anniversary of the beginning of the upheavals, the channel published photographs of men in a montage with the Lebanese flag and labelled each a 'revolutionary martyr, the hero', followed by his name. While this slideshow mostly included men who died in connection to the thawra, it also showed an image of Lokman Slim, the late founder of UMAM, who was shot in his car on 4 January 2021.<sup>733</sup> His image is accompanied by the words 'Freedom Does Not Die. The Hero Martyr Lokman Slim'. The caption of the post reads, in English, '3 Years Have Passed, Let's Remember Those We Lost Fighting for Freedom'.<sup>734</sup> By not mentioning the circumstances of Slim's death and by placing his photograph in this visual and textual context, Daleel Thawra creates the impression that Slim died during the thawra.

While certain elements of the thawra posters, such as slogans, the coexistence of individual and collective formats, and the use of ID photographs, can be interpreted as a continuation of the *Wars'* sectarian images, there are also differences. Specifically, the depiction of the martyr as an ordinary citizen doing everyday activities or protesting, as well as the use of a selfie for a commemorative martyr poster, is a novelty. It is also important to mention that one finds no party branding

732 However, there are rumours in Beirut that the soldier who shot Abou Fakher did so because of a personal dispute, not because he was a protestor.

733 Rawi Hage, 'Of Luminaries and Assassins', *An Nahar*, 2 March 2021, <https://www.annahar.com/english/section/830-in-the-news/0203202100139238> (last accessed 14 June 2024; site inactive on 27 October 2024).

734 Daleel Thawra (@daleelthawra), '3 Years Have Passed', Instagram, 18 October 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjztMDTqf6m/>.

and that symbolism is mostly absent, with the exception of the Lebanese flag. In the thawra posters, as in the army poster I discussed in 3.7 (*Fig. 4.81*), the flag points to a Lebanon where the idea of a common nation, rather than one's sectarian affiliation, is foregrounded.

Crucially, it was not the sectarian parties that installed the posters. As Buckner and Khatib argue regarding the upheavals of the Arab Spring, these martyrs were produced by citizens and not by political elites. The presentation of these dead people oscillates between the depiction of innocent victims killed by the state and the depiction of heroes who died for their revolutionary values.<sup>735</sup> However, this representation is also constructed, because at least one of the men depicted as a martyr is understood to be both a sectarian and a revolutionary shahid, and not all of those who are presented as shuhada of the thawra were killed by the state.

Buckner and Khatib also argue that the martyrs of the Arab Spring 'came to represent the sacrifice of the 'common man', the wasted potential of the nation and its youth, and ultimately, to represent a path to salvation through righteous activism'.<sup>736</sup> This is also true for the shuhada of the thawra and turns them into spectral ghosts. Like the sectarian martyrs, they are an absent presence, no longer here and not yet here, as the sectarian system is still intact but the present images of the dead point to a non-sectarian future. Further, the visuals of these men act as an accusation against the sectarian system, which links them to the third group of images on the walls during the time of writing, namely the dead of 4 August.

### 5.1.3 Oscillating Between Martyrs and the Missing: The Dead of 4 August

Images of the dead of 4 August share similarities with the pictures of the martyrs and the missing. At the time of writing, images of those who died on 4 August were more present than images of the martyrs of the thawra. Of course, this is also caused by sheer numbers: eleven men, including the two Syrian workers, died during the thawra, while more than two hundred people—as in the case of the missing, the exact number is difficult to estimate—were killed as a result of 4 August.

As with the images of Abou Fakher, who died during the thawra, the sectarian remembrance of the shahid persists for people who were affiliated with a political party and died during the explosion. For instance, Mazen Zwaïhed, an SSNP member, is remembered as a martyr on the party's Instagram page (*Fig. 5.9*). In the post, his photograph has been superimposed over a faded view of the port area, which includes in the background the silos that were heavily damaged and became an accidental monument to the explosion, as I will elaborate on further below. The

735 Buckner and Khatib, 'Martyrs' Revolutions', 377–80.

736 *Ibid.*, 381.

party logo is visible in the top-left corner, and right of Zwaïhed, red and black text reads '4 August. The Martyr of the Port of Beirut. Comrade Mazen Zwaïhed'. Simultaneously, Zwaïhed is commemorated in the activities of Beirut 6.07, one of the NGOs that aim to preserve the memory of the dead of the blast. Zwaïhed's party affiliation is not mentioned by Beirut 6.07.<sup>737</sup>

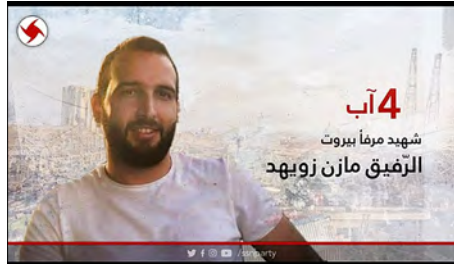


Fig. 5.9: SSNP (@ssnpparty), '4 August. The Martyr of the Port of Beirut. Comrade Mazen Zwaïhed', Instagram, 4 August 2021.

Another parallel between the remembrance of the dead of the explosion and the remembrance of the dead of the *thawra* is the diversity of their images on- and offline. This is visible in a collective format image of the dead of 4 August, which I came across on a wall in Ashrafieh (Fig. 5.10). It contains ID images as well as photographs from other occasions, such as a graduation ceremony, and shows the dead in military combat and at protests of the *thawra*. A slogan reads 'And Many Others...', addressing the fact that the ten faces are only a sample of many who lost their lives.



Fig. 5.10: 'And Many Others...', Beirut – Ashrafieh, April 2022, Photograph AR.

737 'Mazen Zwaïhed', *Beirut 6.07*, 2021, <https://beirut607.org/victim/mazen-raja-zwaïhed/> (last accessed 14 June 2024; site inactive on 27 October 2024).

Other images depict the deceased in a more leisurely atmosphere. An example is a poster portraying Ralf Mallahi (Fig. 4.10), one of the firefighters who died at the port when trying to extinguish a fire that ignited minutes before the explosion. Mallahi is smiling at the camera while, behind him, a green landscape, a waterfall, and other people, who are probably sitting and chatting at a table, are visible. Apparently, this image was taken on a leisurely outdoor trip. The white slogan reads, 'We Have Not Forgotten and We Will Not Forget the Hero Ralf Mallahi'. As previously stated, the phrase 'We Won't Forget' was a sentence frequently used in images commemorating those who died during the time of the car bombs, while the stock term 'hero' can be traced back to martyr posters of the *Wars* and was also used in thawra posters of the dead.

Unlike the martyrs of the thawra, whose images have never been presented in a serial format in the streets, the dead of 4 August were put up in such a format in the port area (Fig. 2.15). Grey photographs of the deceased appear against a black background, with their names written in white on a red stripe. The connotation of these colours does not differ from their meaning in the imagery of the *Wars*. As I was told by representatives of Beirut 6.07, black stands for mourning, red for blood, and white for peace.<sup>738</sup> At the bottom of the posters, the logos of the NGOs that initiated their distribution can be seen. As in martyr posters issued by the parties, and as reflected in *Nancy*, the logos in the images make it clear who has circulated them.

However, not all relatives wanted to provide the NGO with a photograph for public remembrance. For these deaths, an image of the port, as visible on the right-hand side in *Figure 2.15*, acts as a placeholder, while the name of the deceased is written below. This is an image strategy that was already used in collective posters during the *Wars*, as shown in a poster (Fig. 4.17) where some heads are substituted with flowers.

According to Beirut 6.07, the seriality and the use of templates is intended to point to the fact that all the dead are united under one cause; namely, to obtain justice for their deaths, which the sectarian system denies.<sup>739</sup> The serialised format on a lamppost, unified in size, design, slogan, and logos, links back to Mroué's reflection in *Inhabitants* regarding the Hezbollah martyrs who died during the Tammuz War (noted in 4.2), because the uniform posters of those who died in the explosion were also hanging on a wide street that is rarely accessed by foot. Thus, in both cases, when one drives by quickly, the posters turn into the repetition of one image, in which individual faces and names get lost in motion.

As Mroué reflected regarding the martyr posters in the Dahiyeh in *Inhabitants*, it was also impossible to study in depth the posters of the those who died in the explosion (Fig. 2.15). Even when I was standing right below one of them, it was hung

738 Beirut 6.07, personal conversation with the author, 21 November 2022.

739 Ibid.



Fig. 5.11: Brady the Black, Posters of the Dead of 4 August, Beirut – Downtown, May 2021, Photograph AR.

up too high to be fully visible. Still, the indexical image remains important because the many imprints of light are intended to testify that the explosion killed many people, and that the sectarian system has no interest in shedding light on what happened. In the posters, the photographs act as supporting evidence of the state's failure and as a call for justice.

Another installation that is more accessible to the spectator's gaze was created by Brady the Black in collaboration with the NGO Art of Change. In May 2021, he constructed posters (approximately 1.5 metres high) of those who died in the blast and erected them at eye-level on a cardboard fence in central Beirut (Fig. 5.11). Each of the images

shows a charcoal drawing, featuring the face of a deceased person appropriated from photographs Brady found on social media. The faces are surrounded with a spraypainted gold frame. Furthermore, Brady indicated the first name below the face, adding the hashtag #theymatter, but except for this, the images are devoid of symbols or slogans.

Transforming the photograph of a martyr into a painting or drawing meant thorough engagement with the appearance of the deceased person, and this is what Brady intended. By taking time to study a face, he hoped that people would stop at the image and think about it because someone had made the effort to draw it.<sup>740</sup> Following Graw, this strategy could be termed an uncritical appropriation, as Brady did not question the image but only copied it by reproducing the information contained in it.<sup>741</sup>

Converting the photographs also allowed Brady to create all the pictures in the same size and format, and when necessary, he changed the composition and made all the dead look towards the viewer. In doing so, he, like Beirut 6.07, made the pictures of all the dead alike. Syrian labourers are not visualised differently than

740 Art Breath, 'Brady Black on the Power of Art, Street Art, Lebanon, Reportage Drawing, Documenting and Art for Justice', *Art Breath*, n.d., <https://artbreath.org/interviews/brady-black>.

741 Graw, 'Dedication', 79.

members of Beirut's bourgeois families. Also, men and women are depicted equally. Moreover, he used the form of a black silhouette (*Fig. 5.11*) as a visual placeholder for the people who are either unknown or whose relatives, from whom he had not sought permission to put up the faces of their dead loved ones, demanded he take down the drawn picture. Further, Brady explained to me that he wanted to show that the blast targeted everyone.<sup>742</sup> And indeed, it was the first time in Lebanese history that a collective of dead people encompassed all sects, classes, genders, and nationalities, instead of affecting one group only. This is also why in this visual commemoration of the dead everybody seems to be remembered equally.

However, upon closer inspection, this does not fully correspond with reality. After numerous walks through Beirut and hours of scrolling through Instagram, I identified four faces that are shown more frequently than those of others. The first is three-year-old Alexandra Najjar, who is depicted in the poster in *Figure 5.10* sitting on the shoulders of her father and waving the Lebanese flag during a protest; the second is Isaac Oehlers, who was one year old when he died and for whom, as mentioned in the introduction, the swing at the esplanade of the Sursock Museum (*Fig. 1.2*) was erected; the third is fifteen-year-old Elias Khoury, who is also depicted in the poster in *Figure 5.10* wearing a red tie and smiling into the camera.

One reason for their representation might be, as I have argued in 4.2, that the display of killed children usually creates stronger emotions and greater shock than the portrayal of dead adults. Another factor is that Najjar and Khoury were Lebanese, and Oehlers was an Australian citizen. Children of families who migrated to Lebanon to work in low-paid jobs have less visibility. Images of, for instance, Zoulbab Sajid Ali, a Pakistani citizen who was fourteen when he died, and Bissan Tibati, a Syrian citizen, who was seven when she, like Zoulbab, passed away as a result of the blast, were not as often depicted as those of Najjar, Khoury, and Oehlers.

The fourth face is that of Sahar Fares, a paramedic who had rushed to the port minutes before the explosion and who died with the firefighters, due to the fire that had ignited. Her image is often accompanied by words focusing on her outwards appearance. The Lebanese daily *An Nahar* wrote in her obituary: 'Long black hair, softly tanned skin, almond-shaped dark-brown eyes, and a smile that spoke of genuine happiness—Sahar Fares was an Arabian beauty akin to princess Jasmin in Aladdin'.<sup>743</sup>

Another example of the fetishisation of Sahar Fares's appearance can be found in Lamia Ziadé's graphic novel *Mon Port de Beyrouth*, published in April 2021. Ziadé narrates the events around 4 August and accompanies her words with coloured

742 Brady the Black, WhatsApp conversation with the author, 8 July 2021.

743 Fatima Dia, 'NAYA | Woman of the Month: A Tribute to Sahar Fares', *An Nahar*, 24 August 2020, <https://www.annahar.com/english/article/1263862-naya-woman-of-the-month-a-tribute-to-sahar-fares> (last accessed 14 June 2024; site inactive on 27 October 2024).

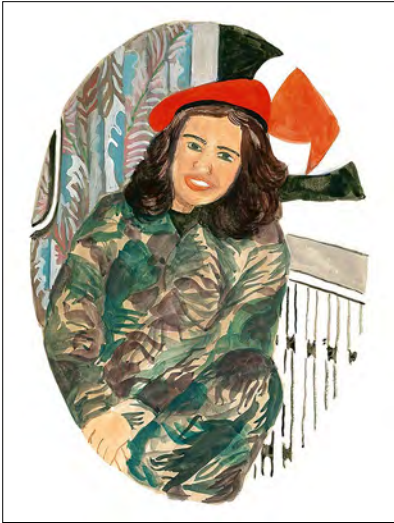


Fig. 5.12: Lamia Ziadé, *Sana Muhaidly*, 2017, Drawing, in *My Great Arab Melancholy*, page 16, Courtesy of the Artist.



Fig. 5.13: Lamia Ziadé, *Sahar Fares*, 2022, Drawing, in *Mon Port de Beyrouth: C'est Une Malediction, Ton Pauvre Pays!*, page 110, Courtesy of the Artist.

drawings, which she made based on images she found on social media. While Ziadé usually depicts each of the killed once, Fares is shown four times in the book, where she is characterised as a ‘beautiful, radiant young woman’. Ziadé does not describe young men who died during the explosion with such words.<sup>744</sup> In an interview, Ziadé went even further and labelled Fares ‘a movie character, a full-fledged heroine straight out of a novel’.<sup>745</sup> Similar to the female martyrs during the Wars, in particular Sana Muhaidly, Fares’s physical attractiveness is highlighted.

In her exhibition *The Stars Don't Die* in Dar el Nimer in 2022,<sup>746</sup> Ziadé also placed Fares and Muhaidly, both of whom she drew at life-size, facing each other diagonally (Figs. 5.12–5.13). The depiction of the women is similar. Sana wears, as in her SSNP poster, combat gear and a red beret, and Sahar wears her firefighter uniform and a black cap. While Muhaidly chose to conduct a martyrdom operation, Fares died in the explosion without having any intention to do so. Although the mode of death of these women is not comparable, Ziadé’s visualisation of them and her

744 Lamia Ziadé, *Mon Port de Beyrouth: C'est Une Malediction, Ton Pauvre Pays!* (n.p.: PO.L, 2021), 20.

745 Anne Ilcinkas, ‘French-Lebanese Illustrator Lamia Ziadé’s ‘My Port of Beirut’ Addresses the Devastation of the August 4 Explosion’, *Arab News*, 24 June 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1882536/lifestyle>.

746 The exhibition was on show from 27 October 2022 until 22 December 2022.



Fig. 5.14: Brady the Black, Poster of Sahar Fares, 2021, Beirut – Downtown, Photograph Jayson Casper.

focus on their appearance are. This demonstrates that ritualised performances of gender cannot be easily changed, as I have elaborated in 4.4.

Sahar Fares could be termed one of the ‘celebrity dead’ of 4 August. Brady the Black tried to interrupt this hierarchy of memory, and although he said his aim was to make all the dead equal, he consciously put her image in an unfavourable spot by placing it across two boards, which resulted in a crack below her nose (Fig. 5.14).<sup>747</sup> As much as it is understandable that Brady wanted to highlight the dead who are less present in the media, his attempt to reverse hierarchies of memory could also be understood as a violent act. It reminds me of Hezbollah’s cut and paste of the

martyr’s face, which Mroué criticises in *Inhabitants*, as discussed in 4.2. Brady also mutilates the face of a dead person, albeit with good intentions.

Brady’s installation was removed with water cannons on 19 January 2023. While parts of the wall were covered with advertisements the next day, other parts, as in the case of the tent of the missing, were left with poster remnants. Those who died in the blast were killed a second time. As a protest by the relatives of the dead was held on the same day, the removal could be seen as an act of warning towards them. Such protests bother the sectarian system, as it has no interest in investigating the explosion and wants to silence the relatives.<sup>748</sup>

While Brady the Black’s installation, with its inclusion of the deceased’s headshot and name, partially reminds me of martyr iconography, Beirut 6.07’s installation (Fig. 2.15) fully corresponds to the anatomy of the martyr poster. This is because it contains a headshot of the dead, their full name, a slogan, and logos. However, this visual connection stands in stark contrast to a conversation I had with the NGO’s employees, who insisted they understand the dead as victims and not as martyrs. When I asked why some of the relatives of the dead claim that their loved ones are martyrs and also declare them as such in visual material, I was sharply

747 Brady the Black, WhatsApp, 8 July 2021.

748 L’Orient Today, ‘Port Explosion: Portraits of Victims Erased in Beirut’, *L’Orient Today*, 19 January 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1325154/port-explosion-portraits-of-victims-erased-in-beirut.html>.



Fig. 5.15: Martyrs of 4 August, Statue, Beirut – Ashrafieh, October 2022, Photograph AR.

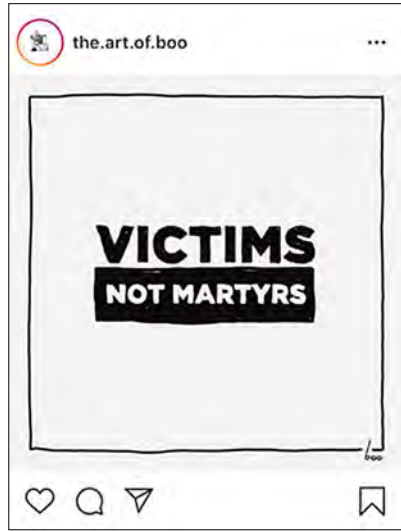


Fig. 5.16: The Art of Boo, *Victims Not Martyrs*, Instagram, 9 August 2020, Courtesy of The Art of Boo.

interrupted and told that the relatives simply did not understand what a martyr is. Only people who died while fighting for a cause are considered martyrs by Beirut 6.07.<sup>749</sup> While the NGO clearly follows a narrow understanding of martyrdom, as explained in 2.1, some of the relatives apparently follow a broad conception, which also includes people who died without any intention to do so.

However, this should not be confused with a simplistic stance that draws the line between broad (Islamic) and narrow (Christian) concepts of shuhada based only on religion. As I have demonstrated throughout the book, Christians who died in non-combat activities during the *Wars*, such as the Chamoun children, are labelled as martyrs. Moreover, after the blast, a statue that commemorated some of the dead of 4 August who died in a particular area was erected in the predominantly Christian district of Ashrafieh (Fig. 5.15). The names of these dead people, who are labelled as shuhada, are engraved on the pedestal, which is towered over by statues of Jesus and Mary.

These two main ideas of what a martyr 'is' manifested themselves after 4 August, when an emotional discussion erupted over whether the dead should be called victims or martyrs. This is visible on the Instagram page of The Art of Boo, who in one of his weekly cartoons for the newspaper *L'Orient Le Jour* simply wrote 'VICTIMS NOT MARTYRS' (Fig. 5.16). While many Instagram users agreed with

749 Beirut 6.07, personal conversation, 21 November 2022.

him, there was also criticism. Ihabmadi999, for example, wrote in a post that ‘I prefer to call them MARTYR and no one on earth can change my mind. You absolutely have no right to impose your opinion on us’.<sup>750</sup> This Instagram user clearly is a follower of the broader concept of martyrdom, and as mentioned above, it is not a new phenomenon that people who died without being actively involved in combat are labelled as martyrs, as I have shown with the people who exited the mosque in Bir al-Abed (Fig. 4.17) or the dead children killed by Israeli bombs, who are commemorated as martyrs in a poster (Fig. 4.36).

The posters of those who died in the explosion, like certain posters from the Wars, serve as accusation images, as they are intended to denounce the sectarian system’s inability and unwillingness to shed light on what led to the blast. Furthermore, according to Beirut 6.07, the posters of the killed should ensure that the dead are not forgotten, and they also hope that the installation of visuals in the streets contributes to finding justice.<sup>751</sup>

Accountability and raising awareness of the unfinished business of the explosion are also the aims of the relatives of the killed, who formed committees, such as the *Committee of the Beirut Blast Victims’ Families*, which hold regular commemorative events at the port on the fourth of each month.<sup>752</sup> They frequently carry photographic headshots of the dead (Fig. 5.17). This type of depiction reminds me of the demonstrations by the relatives of the missing, who, as discussed in 4.3, gather to demand enquiries into what happened to their loved ones (Fig. 4.41). As in the investigation into the missing, the Lebanese ruling class has no interest in seriously exploring what happened on 4 August, and the launched investigations will lead, as in the case of the missing, to no results. Further, like the general in Halwani’s *Erased* who proposed labelling the disappeared as martyrs, the dead of the blast are labelled as shuhada in a list of the dead uploaded by the Ministry of Public Health, which, despite many people dying later, stopped being updated in September 2020.<sup>753</sup>

750 the.art.of.bo0 (@the.art.of.bo0), ‘A Martyr Is Someone Who Signs Up for...’, Instagram, 9 August 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CDqPGB8JGar/>.

751 Beirut 6.07, personal conversation, 21 November 2022.

752 For the different committees and their political affiliations, see Dalal Mawad, *All She Lost: The Explosion in Lebanon, the Collapse of a Nation and the Women Who Survive* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 139.

753 ‘Updated List of the Names of the Beirut Port Explosion Martyrs’, Ministry of Public Health, 3 September 2020, <https://www.moph.gov.lb/en/Pages/127/38931/beirut-port-explosion-martyrs->



Fig. 5.17: Protest in the Port, 4 December 2023, Photograph Mohammad Yassine, Courtesy of L'Orient-Le Jour.

Officially being declared a martyr has monetary benefits. Fourteen Lebanese families received financial compensation from the state, which paradoxically decided to call the dead of the blast ‘martyrs of the army killed while performing their duty’. The firefighters who rushed to the port to extinguish a fire that preceded the explosion and who are sometimes, such as on the Instagram account *thawramap*, labelled as martyrs (unlike the other dead of the explosion) are not considered ‘martyrs of the army’, because the fact that they were civil servants means they get financial compensation from the municipality of Beirut.<sup>754</sup> Also, foreigners did not receive official martyr status. It could be said that the state’s goal with this financial compensation, as with the idea of elevating the missing of the *Wars* to martyrs, which would have also meant financially compensating the families, is to ‘close the case’, as the general in *Erased* put it, and in doing so to silence the families.

Finally, like images of martyrs during the *Wars*, images of the dead of 4 August are sometimes used for mobilisation. An example is an Instagram post by *thawramap*, which re-shared a post by the Krystel el Adm Foundation, which is named after a woman killed in the explosion. This charity for children was started by el

754 Zeina Antonios, ‘Aid to the Families of the Beirut Port Victims Is Slow to Materialize and Worth Very Little’, *L’Orient Today*, 13 April 2021, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1258448/aid-to-the-families-of-the-beirut-port-victims-is-slow-to-materialize-and-worth-very-little.html>.



Fig. 5.18: @thawramap, *NEVER FORGET*, Instagram, 15 May 2022.

Adm's parents and friends.<sup>755</sup> An image (Fig. 5.18), which was put online shortly before the elections of 2022, shows a multitude of tiny faces of those who died in the blast along with text that calls one to 'VOTE for the silenced voices'. The goal of this visual was to encourage people to vote for non-sectarian candidates, suggesting that the dead of the explosion would have done so. As the image of SSNP member Zwaïhed (Fig. 5.9) proves, not all of the killed were non-sectarian and thus some of the dead probably had no interest in supporting independent candidates. Moreover, the mode of presentation is comparable to the advertising poster for the *Missing* exhibition by UMAM (Fig. 4.45). Both pictures lack any biographical information, and through the large number of faces, the individuals seem to disappear within each other in the poster.

While the diverse photographs used to commemorate those killed on 4 August, along with the occasional remembrance that was both sectarian and non-sectarian, seem to be a continuation of the way the *thawra* martyrs were remembered, the anatomy of the posters of the dead of the explosion, in particular the serial format, is reminiscent of the way the sectarian *shuhada* were commemorated. Furthermore, the emphasis on the physical characteristics of the female dead, as well as the hierarchy of visual memory, are continuations of modes of remembrance employed during the *Wars*.

The deaths caused by the explosion are still unresolved and the relatives are demanding justice using means and images that are similar to those used by the relatives of the missing. Of course, the loss of the dead of 4 August is ascertained; it is known when, where, and how they died. No one is waiting for their physical return. What remains ambiguous is what caused the explosion. The images of those who died on 4 August are therefore here to call for justice. However, the relatives' wait, as in the case of learning what has happened to the missing, will probably never end. Sadek might suggest performing the labour of missing instead of waiting for justice to come, meaning that the relatives could converse with the absent dead in silence by talking to them without expecting an answer or an explanation why the explosion happened.

755 Mawad, *All She Lost*, 67.

The dead of the explosion are a new type of dead in Lebanon, oscillating between the figures of the missing and martyrs, as evidenced by the emotional debate over whether the dead should be labelled victims or shuhada. Also, the dead of 4 August could be understood as ghosts, but they are neither latent nor withdrawn, nor are they spectral. Their images do not carry a promise of a better future to come.

### The Blast's Dead: Other Ghosts and A City Haunted Not Only by the Past but by Lost Futures

I propose that we can read the images of those who died in the explosion with the aid of Mark Fisher's book *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), and that these images embody a cancelled future. Although Fisher's text focuses on music culture in Great Britain, his findings can also be transferred to other geographies and realms. Fisher grounds his way of thinking in the framework of hauntology, but contrary to Derrida, he does not argue that ghosts anticipate a future; he instead claims that although a better world had been promised, the future has been cancelled in the twenty-first century. Consequently, this unredeemed promise elicits a haunting nostalgia for a future that has never arrived.

Fisher identifies a formal nostalgia in twenty-first-century music, where original sound is absent because today's sound-making does not go beyond pastiche and repetition. For example, the British indie rock band Arctic Monkeys, apart from some new technological inventions, sounds like they belong to the 1980s.<sup>756</sup> Following this same theory, the posters of the dead in Lebanon, I argue, can also be described as formal nostalgia. While the thawra posters still include elements not found in sectarian posters, the posters commemorating the dead of the explosion are a pastiche of the images of the sectarian and thawra martyrs as well as of the missing. Of course, the resolution of the images is better today, and in the age of Instagram, hashtags are included in the slogans, but in their anatomy, the discussed posters are a repetition of the martyr posters of the 1970s and 1980s.

Established forms and narratives of the past are revived and repeated with new technology. This repetition, according to Fisher, shows that the future has disappeared and that we are instead stuck in the past. Therefore, the 2020 posters, as a replay of posters of the past, announce that the future has been cancelled. This phrase was also used by Nadim Mishlawi to end his movie *After the End of the World* (2022), where it refers to the situation in Beirut after the blast.

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756 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), 9–10.

During the time after the official end of the *Wars*—a time that began with Solidère's reconstruction and continued through the Cedar Revolution, Hezbollah's gradual extension of power (including the War in Syria), and finally the thawra—other futures, sectarian as well as non-sectarian, seemed to be possible, and all the martyrs who embodied these events carried a dream. These different dreams were held up as something unfinished that is worth fighting for in the future. Since the explosion, however, these better futures, which the thawra martyrs and the sectarian martyrs promised, seem to be out of reach.

However, the future, as Fisher writes, 'didn't disappear overnight',<sup>757</sup> just as the blast was the culmination of a crisis that approached slowly. Between the end of 2019 and the summer of 2020, the Lebanese Lira slowly lost value; the economy slowly slid towards its crash; the numbers of people who were migrating slowly increased; fuel, water, and electricity supplies slowly tightened; the rate of unemployment slowly grew; the health system began its slow collapse; and the security situation slowly deteriorated.<sup>758</sup> The blast aggravated these problems, and the cancellation of the future manifested itself fully. Among other issues, outward migration numbers hit the roof, money devalued at an even greater speed, one hour of governmental electricity per day was the norm, a lack of fuel rendered people immobile, and the Lebanese Army was deployed at gas stations to prevent violent scuffles.<sup>759</sup> With all these problems, it appeared to be clear that the aforementioned futures are lost, although the better worlds to come are still haunting due to their non-arrival.

Fisher argues that the sound of the British musician Burial best articulates the impossibility of the future and the constant repetition of the old: 'Crackle makes us aware that we are listening to a time that is out of joint, it won't allow us to fall into the illusion of presence'.<sup>760</sup> In my reading, the posters of the dead of 4 August, like the crackle, show us that time is disordered. They do this by depicting repetitions of the past that comment on the state of Beirut after the explosion. The ghost of the twenty-first century is the future that failed to manifest; we know that the promised future has not arrived and never will.<sup>761</sup> At least in the years after the explosion, dreams of a better future in Beirut seemed to have been crushed, and the faces of the blast's dead confirmed and embodied this. This was made clear during a panel

757 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 13.

758 For the unfolding of the crisis that has its roots before 2019, see Edmund Blair, 'Explainer: Lebanon's Financial Crisis and How It Happened', *Reuters*, 23 January 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/rates-bonds/lebanons-financial-crisis-how-it-happened-2022-01-23/>; Mawad, *All She Lost*, xxxii–xxxv.

759 Lynn Sheikh Moussa, 'Emigration from Lebanon Jumps by 446 Percent in One Year', *Beirut Today*, 10 February 2022, <https://beirut-today.com/2022/02/10/emigration-from-lebanon-jumps-by-446-percent-in-one-year/>. The situation was particularly nerve-racking in August 2021.

760 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 21.

761 *Ibid.*, 2–16.

discussion on literature at the Beirut Art Center, organised by Haven for Artists in 2023, when Reem Rantisi, editor of the magazine *Rusted Radishes*, said that there is a ‘constant feeling of crumbling’ in the city, as well as ‘gaps we have because everyone is in Berlin’,<sup>762</sup> referring to the country’s falling apart and the many young Lebanese who left, often to the German capital, thereby creating a void in Beirut.

What Fisher extracted from Burial’s music about the state of London is what I take from the posters of the dead of 4 August about the state of Beirut after the blast: ‘a city haunted not only by the past but by lost futures’.<sup>763</sup> Beirut oscillates between the unfinished past of its protracted Wars and crushed hopes for a promised future. The city decays due to a lack of basic infrastructure and people who are leaving. All this does not seem to be changing anytime soon.<sup>764</sup> Dreams that still seemed realisable in 2019 were clearly out of reach in 2020.

In the months after the blast, the situation in Beirut resonated with what Fisher wrote about the ‘wounded city’ of London, where people have ‘haunted looks on their faces’ as they know ‘that things weren’t always like this’.<sup>765</sup> ‘It is like walking into the abandoned spaces once carnivalised by Raves and finding them returned to depopulated dereliction. Muted horns flare like the ghosts of Raves past. Broken glass cracks underfoot’.<sup>766</sup> Beirut felt like a ghost town. The city became empty as people went either to the mountains or to the seaside, or they left the country for good. Journalist Dalal Mawad, for example, writes that her migration to France after the explosion ‘felt like a one-way ticket’ because for her Lebanon ‘was no longer a country with a future’.<sup>767</sup>

Those who had remained seemed discontented, tormented, and haunted. Everyone knew that the situation had been different, had been better, and would not be like that again anytime soon. A city once full of life became ruined, abandoned, void, and destroyed. Shards from the thousands of windows that had burst during the explosion were everywhere. The new arrivals were the dead in the posters, who embodied this feeling of a cancelled future.

At the same time, this does not mean that everybody has accepted that Beirut no longer feels like the future. Fisher writes,

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762 Beirut Art Center, Literary panel discussion, 26 January 2023.

763 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 98.

764 Of course, there are also people who took advantage of the crisis—for example, generator owners or manufacturers of glass. However, they are the minority.

765 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 99.

766 *Ibid.*, 98–99.

767 Mawad, *All She Lost*, 179.

Burial's London seems to be a city populated by dejected Ravers, returning to the sites of former revels and finding them derelict, forced to contrast the quotidian compromises of their post-Rave life with the collective ecstasy they once lived out. His sound is a work of mourning rather than of melancholia, because he still longs for the lost object, still refuses to abandon the hope that it will return.<sup>768</sup>

Such hopes of return and longings were also tangible in Beirut. Some NGOs still seem to hope that, although it is unlikely, what actually happened on 4 August will be made transparent and Beirut will 'rise again'.<sup>769</sup>

This hope is also manifested in two sculptures in the port area by Nadim Karam and Hayat Nazer. Nazer's statue (Fig. 5.19), which had disappeared at the time of writing, was a woman with waving hair who held a Lebanese flag in her right hand. Below her body, a clock with the time of the explosion was visible. According to the



Fig. 5.19: Hayat Nazer, *Unnamed Lady*, 2020, Rubble from the Blast, 3 Metres High, Beirut – Port Area, November 2020.

artist, this statue should communicate that Beirut will rise again, which implies a hope that the blast can be forgotten quickly. Karam's statue (Fig. 5.20) is a person holding in his right hand a bird, probably a Phoenix, which refers to a hoped-for resurrection of Beirut. Both statues are made of rubble from the blast, therefore suggesting that creation can happen out of destruction.<sup>770</sup>

In the understanding of Philippa Dourraj, these two statues hold the promise of Beirut's rising from the ashes and celebrate the return of a vibrant and resilient city with a hopeful future; but at the same time, neither tackles questions of responsibility for the explosion. In Dourraj's reading, which clearly

768 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 102–03.

769 This is a slogan from the NGO Live Love Beirut but also Beirut 6.07 published a book called 'Alive Ashes', which depicts the dead of the explosion and refers to the Phoenix, a bird who is rising from the ashes.

770 Sarah Cascone, 'An Artist's Memorial on the Site of Last Year's Devastating Blast in Beirut Has Been Met with Sharp Criticism', *artnet news*, 3 August 2021, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/beirut-memorial-sculpture-nadim-karam-controversy-1995076>.



Fig. 5.20: Nadim Karam, *The Gesture*, 2021, Steel, 25 Metres High, Beirut – Port Area, January 2022, Photograph AR.

follows Sadek's framework of thought, these statues would relegate the explosion that inhabits the present, with all of its unfinishedness, to a thing of the past that should be forgotten in order to focus on the future.<sup>771</sup> Like el Khoury's installations at the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, these two statues 'wistfully call on something better to come'.<sup>772</sup> Yet the negative status quo cannot be expelled via doodles, curtains, or statues.

The ignorance of the cancelled future that these two statues embody can also be linked to Fisher's observation that 'We can act as if [...] the future is still ahead of us. [...] dancing to ghost songs, convincing ourselves that the music of yesteryear is really the music of today'.<sup>773</sup> A cartoon by The Art of Boo appears to denounce the false hopes for a better future that Karam's statue carries. In the drawing, the statue is shown in front of the silos with two people looking at it from behind the port wall,

771 Philippa Dahrouj, 'This Is Not an Exhibition. And This Is Not Beirut' (MA thesis, American University of Beirut, 2022), 17–18.

772 Sadek, 'Surfeit of Victims', 157.

773 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 181.



Fig. 5.21: The Art of Boo, *ALL I'M SAYING...*, Instagram, 9 August 2021, Courtesy of The Art of Boo.

with a caption that reads, 'All I'm saying is, it would have looked better [...] towards the right, and in deep-sea' (Fig. 5.21). The cartoon seems to correct the false promise of the future, as in reality, hopes for a better time to come are yesteryear's music. The realistic place for these hopes is to drown in the sea.

The Art of Boo was one of many young Lebanese creatives who migrated after the blast as a consequence of the situation—like many others, to Berlin. Fisher's argument that the absence of the welfare state kills creativity ap-

plies very much to Lebanon. It would be pseudo-romanticising to see the failure to address basic needs, such as water, electricity, and security, as an accelerator of creativity. Of course, there are still exhibitions going on, and at the time of writing, there were new art spaces opening, but Beirut is no longer a cultural hub in the region, as it was ten years ago. Rather, the current cultural activities in the city are, in Fisher's terms, 'the aftermath of an era, where residues and traces of euphoric moments haunt a melancholic landscape'.<sup>774</sup>

Besides the spectral ghosts of the martyrs and the latent ghosts of the missing, those who died in the blast form another ghostly figure roaming Beirut. They appear via formal nostalgia, a repetition of established anatomies of images of the dead. Their visuals could come from another time and thereby announce that nothing new will come and the promised futures will not arrive. Hopes and dreams, although still artificially kept alive by some, are out of reach.

774 Ibid., 185.

### 5.1.4 Pastiche and Repetitions: Three Types of Dead on the Walls

Mainly three types of images of the dead coexisted on the walls of Beirut during the time of writing this book: sectarian martyrs, martyrs of the thawra, and the killed of 4 August. All of them include photographs that were taken for purposes other than announcing their death. Only through the addition of elements such as slogans, logos, or other symbols does the photograph become a commemorative image.

While Hezbollah is dominating the martyr discourse today, shuhada of other sects still populate the walls. Some died recently, others died decades ago. Except for the use of new technological means, all of the sectarian martyr posters adhere to the poster anatomy that was used during the *Wars* and that was reflected in *Nancy*.

The images of the martyrs of the thawra—which, like the sectarian posters, are constructed, as not all the men presented as shuhada died because of the state's violence—distinguish themselves from the sectarian images due to the choice of photographs, which depict the referents as everyday citizens, and the absence of party branding. It was not the sects who put up these posters, but rather revolutionary groups and relatives, and they did so in order to accuse the state of injustice and possibly to serve as a call to join the thawra while it was still ongoing.

The images of those who died in the explosion are more complex. Like the posters of the martyrs of the thawra, they were usually put up not by the sects but by NGOs and relatives, who organise meetings to commemorate the dead and to call for justice. In these gatherings, the relatives frequently hold photographic headshots of their loved ones that remind me of images held by relatives of the *War's* missing.

Pictures of the deceased from 4 August are typically used as a call for justice and, sometimes, as political advertising. I have linked the poster's re-use of known forms to Fisher's concept of formal nostalgia. This again, in my reading, hints at the fact that the dead of the explosion are only revenants, not arrivants, as they point not to a better future to come but to a future that was promised but cancelled. While the martyrs of the thawra remain spectral ghosts, embodying the dream of a non-sectarian future, the dead of the explosion are a new kind of ghost, oscillating between the figures of the martyr and the missing, announcing that the future has been cancelled.

## 5.2 Artistic Reflections of 4 August

Artists reflected the pictures of the dead of the explosion. In the following, I will identify two approaches to image-making, a documentary one and an appropriative one, and provide examples of each. My selection is only a small part of the artistic production that deals with the blast. I chose the works mainly based on their visibility in Beirut, but also due to certain links to *Nancy* and to other works previously discussed in Chapter 4.<sup>775</sup> By relating the pre- and post-explosion artworks, I would like to show how certain phenomena addressed in *Nancy* are still relevant.

### 5.2.1 Documentary Strategy: The Damaged City, the Silos, and the Absent Dead

Dia Mrad and Myriam Boulos captured the status quo of the city after the blast, variously tracking its structures, its undead, and its living inhabitants. In doing so, they move beyond the discourse of the NGOs and do not sketch futile hopes for justice that will probably never arrive.

Dia Mrad, who was already photographing Beirut's architecture before the explosion, documented destroyed houses right after the blast. The photograph that I am mentioning here (*Fig. 5.22*) depicts a close-up of a façade with shattered doors and windows, the result of which is that one can see through the houses' interiors. Different wrecked objects are lying around and, at the very top of the image, bullet holes from the *Wars* are evident in the wall. A human silhouette with no visible individual traits is standing in front of a window in the centre of the picture, probably assessing the damage to the house. Below, a white banner is placed on the handrail of a balcony. Black text reads: 'The Groom of the Sky...'. A photograph of a young man who died during the explosion, labelled with these words, was placed below the banner but not captured by Mrad.<sup>776</sup> The deceased is present not via his

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775 In three recently organised exhibitions, artists reflected on the current situation in the country. *At the Edge of the World Lies the Ebb and Flow of Promise* was a group exhibition held from 12 July 2022 until 6 November 2022 in Abbaye de Jumièges in Brussels. It displayed images that investigated the living conditions in Lebanon since 4 August. *How Will It End?* was another group exhibition that was on display from 2 December 2021 until 6 February 2022 in Villa Empain (Boghosian Foundation) in Brussels and that dealt with the aftermath of 4 August. The photographer collective Collectif 1220, in contrast, held their travelling show *Anatomy of a Fall* abroad and in Lebanon. Also noteworthy is the Art Design Lebanon initiative, which organises exhibitions in various locations around Beirut and is led by Annie Vartivarian, the mother of Gaïa Fodoulian, who was killed in the explosion.

776 Dia Mrad, personal conversation with the author, 25 November 2022.



Fig. 5.22: Dia Mrad, *Ghost of a City*, 2020, Photograph, Courtesy of the Artist.

picture but via his absence. We know that the photograph was here, but we do not see it. Therefore, Mrad's image depicts the absence of an absence, which is only indicated through the banner.

Mrad not only photographed destroyed residential buildings, but also produced a series on the silos. These silos are also present in an image by photographer Myriam Boulos, who also documented the city after the blast. A photograph taken by her (Fig. 5.23) shows a woman standing in her destroyed home looking directly into the camera. She is wearing a mask, which refers to the COVID-19 pandemic that hit Lebanon and the rest of the world in 2020. Behind the shattered windows of her flat, the silos are visible in the background.

Boulos also uses little anecdotes regarding the effects of the blast as captions for her images; in this example, it says: 'Nour Couldn't Listen to Music for Weeks after the Explosion'. This sentence points to the human, non-architectural damage done by the blast to people who have lived through it but have not died or been physically injured. Nour Saliba, the photographed woman, said:

Yes, we are all traumatized, but we are also burnt out. Last October, the Lebanese people had to put out fires that were devastating our forests because our government was unable to do its job. On top of our basic human needs being unmet (access to electricity, water and food), we sunk into an economic crisis so severe that a big chunk of the population was pushed into poverty. In the midst of our street protests that were answered with violence and aggression, the pandemic arrived. On Tuesday, what couldn't have gotten way worse became worse than we could have ever imagined.<sup>777</sup>



Fig. 5.23: Myriam Boulos, Lebanon. *Beirut on the 6th of August 2020. Nour Couldn't Listen to Music for Weeks After the Explosion*, 2020, Photographic Print on Semi-Glossy Paper, Courtesy of the Artist.

777 myriamboulos (@myriamboulos), '@noursaliba stands in her apartment...!', Instagram, 7 August 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CDoREwplrG/>.

These words, published three days after the blast, confirm that the future was slowly cancelled. Before the explosion, as Nour mentions, forest fires, a lack of basic infrastructure, poverty, violence, and the pandemic outbreak slowly approached and created problems in Lebanon, but the blast was the culmination of all these hardships. When asked in an interview about her hope for the future, Boulos answered: 'I think it is too soon for me to feel hope, I think that I am still in a survival mode right now, I don't know...'.<sup>778</sup>

The work of Boulos, unlike the statues of Karam and Nazer, does not point to a cheerful future. In the absence of an agreed-upon truth claim about what happened on 4 August, personal and unofficial accounts based on individual memories are currently the only way to speak about the events of this day. Through the accompanying anecdotes, Boulos's images, like *Nancy*, do not write a history or try to find a truth, but give a fragmentary insight into a larger context that we are presently unable to grasp or narrate fully.

The placement of a human in front of an iconic building, namely the silos, in Boulos's photograph recalls *Nancy's* depictions of Rabih and Hatem in front of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower (Figs. 3.8–3.9, 3.19). The silos were built before the Wars and served as a symbol of the city's modernisation and prosperity. They were completed in 1970 and survived the Wars almost unscathed. Until the blast, the massive, 48-metre-high structure stored most of Lebanon's grain. On 4 August, the silos took much of the force of the explosion, and without their presence, the destruction of West Beirut would probably have been much graver. Since they, like the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, carry a heavy presence, they are now an unintentional memorial charged with symbolic meaning.

Soon after the explosion, a public debate about what should be done with the silos erupted. There are initiatives that want to preserve the silos as a memorial, and there are other voices that argue that a new port is needed and that nothing can be built if the silos remain in their ruined state.<sup>779</sup> The question of whether the silos should be kept or razed to the ground echoes the discourse around Solidère's destruction of traces of the Wars in the city centre, as the demolition of the silos would mean destroying traces of the explosion. Unlike the other architectural damage caused by the blast, which was captured by Mrad and also by Boulos when depicting Nour's home, the silos are a celebrity ruin, like the Holiday Inn and Murr

778 Art Breath, 'Myriam Boulos on Photography, Documenting Lebanon and Social Justice', *Art Breath*, n.d., <https://artbreath.org/interviews/myriam-boulos>.

779 In April 2022, the parliament decided to demolish the silos, which sparked outrage from the families of those killed in the explosion, who filed lawsuits to overturn the decision because they want to preserve the silos as a site of memory and evidence that may be required for future legal investigations. See Clément Gibon, 'The Grieving Families Fighting to Preserve a Crumbling Symbol of the Beirut Blast', *Time*, 8 August 2022, <https://time.com/6202125/beirut-explosion-anniversary/>.

Tower, surrounded by a collective emotional sensitivity. Mrad, describing his visit to the silos: ‘Standing before a megastructure like this, you can’t help but feel the immense weight it carries—not just physically, but in the significance it holds for so many people’.<sup>780</sup>

An incident at the Beirut Art Center in the framework of the annual Irtijal festival on 2 April 2022 makes the emotional weight that the silos hold more tangible. During a performance by Jerusalem in My Heart, the audio-visual project showed black-and-white photographs of the silos, which were quickly moving, zooming in and zooming out. The images were accompanied by fast and loud drums as well as by stroboscopic lighting. I perceived this combination as an unnecessary provocation and noticed people leaving the room while the silos were on the screen. This sequence made me feel extremely uneasy, and I later discovered that other visitors had felt the same way.

It remains unclear to me why Jerusalem in My Heart decided to show this assemblage of images of violence, sound, and lighting in Beirut, where it could be expected that a large part of the audience had experienced the blast. The inclusion of the silos is also not fully graspable to me, because they are hyper-present in Beirut anyway—not only because they are

visible in large parts of the port area, but also because their smell has invaded the city. Fermenting grains were left inside the ruins, which caused a fire in summer 2022 that the Lebanese government was not able to or did not want to extinguish. As a result of this fire, the northern part of the structure further collapsed twice in 2022; first on 31 July and second, cynically, on 4 August, the second anniversary of the blast. Following the first incident, the Instagram page Biladi\_Lebanon posted an image of the silos with the caption ‘The Northern Part of the Silos Has Fallen for the Southern Part to Live’ (Fig. 5.24), which is a mocking use of an expression commonly employed by Christian parties for their martyrs during the Wars, as I have discussed in 4.1.



Fig. 5.24: Biladi NGO (@biladi\_lebanon), ‘The Northern Part of the Silos Has Fallen for the Southern Part to Live’, Instagram, 31 July 2022.

780 Mrad, personal conversation, 25 November 2022.

In 4.5, I argued that I read Rabil's and Hatem's presence in front of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower in *Nancy* as a means of emphasising the connections between the celebrity ruin and the martyr poster, as both elicit emotional responses from passers-by and contain unfinished business. Boulos's photograph follows the picture formula in which a person who has been killed is shown in front of building remnants. We have encountered this formula also in *Nancy* (Figs. 3.8–3.9, 3.19) and in the commemoration of the dead of the blast (Fig. 5.9). However, Boulos shows a living woman who still has agency, speaks, and owns her experience. Also, by juxtaposing the ordinary ruin, namely Nour's house, and the celebrity ruin, namely the silos, Boulos shows different kinds of wreckage in the wounded city.

The photographs of Boulos and Mrad do not look for justice or express hopes that Beirut will recover soon. Rather, they document the loss, particularly the silos, which can be seen as a conceptual continuation of the meaning of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower. Both photographers refer to the dead implicitly without depicting them in a straightforward way. Mrad does this by not capturing the photograph of the dead yet still preserving a trace of it through the banner; Boulos does this by following an image formula that is usually used for the depiction of the dead, but showing a living person who tells her story.

## 5.2.2 Appropriation Strategy: Violence, and the Absent Future

Stéphanie Saadé, Joana Hadjithomas/Khalil Joreige, and Salim Mourad ask questions about the changing contexts of pictures after a disaster and speak about loss as well as the violence done to images.

Saadé developed her idea for *A Discreet Intruder* (Fig. 5.25) before the blast. The work consists of a shutter, which is commonly used in Beirut to close storefronts or other entrances on ground level. Until 2020, many of these shutters were pierced by bullet holes that date back to the *Wars*. On Saadé's shutter, there are thirty-eight holes that were shot with an M16 rifle, which is a type of gun commonly used during the *Wars*.<sup>781</sup> The holes on Saadé's shutter are a cartography of points of departure and arrival, representing the artist's many relocations in Lebanon during the *Wars*. At the same time, these little openings allowed light to enter and created different patterns in the interior that changed according to time and season. In doing so, the static map on the shutter starts to move on the floor and becomes the surface of a journey.

781 Saadé's shutter was shot from the inside in order to reverse the violence done to the shutters and to pose the question of whether a structure could respond to the violence it had experienced.

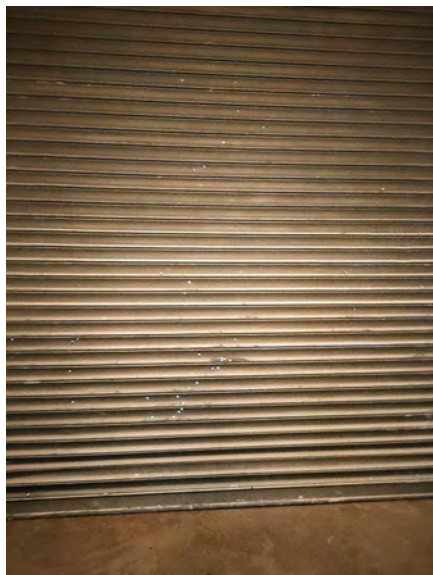


Fig. 5.25: Stéphanie Saadé, *A Discreet Intruder*, 2022, Metallic Curtain and Bullet Holes, 230 × 350 cm, Marfa' Gallery, Photograph AR.

Saadé had planned to install *A Discreet Intruder* in 2020 close to Marfa' Gallery, which is in Beirut's port area. Due to this location, however, the gallery was severely damaged during the blast, as was Saadé's shutter, which was not yet displayed but was stored nearby. Saadé, like so many others, left Lebanon after the explosion, and *A Discreet Intruder* was shown at Marfa' only in May 2022.

Although the work itself had not changed, its meaning did in the new context because the explosion shattered many of these metal shutters and rendered them unusable.<sup>782</sup> The cityscape was now populated with abstract forms that were once used as metal curtains and that, like the silos, were proof of the violence

done to Beirut. Even more than two years after the blast, I still frequently encountered deformed shutters in my daily life in that city.

Although *A Discreet Intruder* still looks the same after 4 August, it is no longer the same, as the explosion added meaning to the work. Returning to my question in 4.6—can a surpassing disaster, as conceptualised by Jalal Toufic, also produce images?—I read Saadé's work not as a resurrection of tradition or as a recording of loss but as a creation of the disaster. *A Discreet Intruder* became more layered because of the blast. Now, the holes, as a violent inscription on the metal surface of Saadé's relocations, provide a link between the Wars and the explosion. The map shot into the shutter after the blast appears to refer not only to Saadé's movements during the Wars but also to the many people, including herself, who left Lebanon after 4 August.

Saadé does not participate in the discourse that believes a better world will come in the near future. She states, referring to the light that enters through the shot holes:

782 Déborah Laks, 'Stéphanie Saadé. Stage of Life. 06 May 2022', *Marfaprojects*, 2022, <https://marfaprojects.com/exhibitions/stephanie-saade-stage-of-life/>.

For as long as I have lived here, the bullet and shrapnel holes from the civil war allowed light to enter this city's closed or forgotten spaces, enabling, during certain hours, secret ballets of sun and shadow to take place on the street. But these dances do not take place anymore in Beirut.<sup>783</sup>

The blast destroyed the shutters and with them the fragments of violence that had turned into light-spots that performed hidden dances until 2020, when they were forcefully stopped from doing so by the explosion.<sup>784</sup>

While *A Discreet Intruder* could be interpreted as showing the addition of meaning to what Toufic theorised as tradition after a surpassing disaster, Hadjithomas/Joreige use Toufic's theory as they did earlier in *A State of Latency*, but now in the context of the explosion. *As Night Comes When Day Is Gone* (2022; Fig. 5.26) has never



Fig. 5.26: Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, *As Night Comes When Day Is Gone*, 2022, Sursock Museum CCTV Recording 4th August 2020, Activation, 14 Videos Synchronised, Approximately 2 min on Loop, Courtesy of In Situ – fabienne leclerc and The Third Line.

783 Kaya Genc, 'Stéphanie Saadé on the Beirut Explosion and an Artwork Lost to the Blast', *Artforum*, 14 September 2020, <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/stephanie-saade-talks-about-artwork-lost-to-the-beirut-explosion-83896>.

784 Gilles Khoury, 'En se Racontant, Stéphanie Saadé Nous Raconte Tous', *L'Orient Le Jour*, 6 June 2022, <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1301808/en-se-racontant-stephanie-saade-nous-raconte-tous.html>.

been displayed in Lebanon, but only in Berlin, Lyon, and Doha.<sup>785</sup> It consists of fourteen screens arranged in a circle, each of which shows a never-ending loop of around two minutes of footage that surveillance cameras recorded shortly before and during the moment of the explosion. Some monitors depict scenes of people in the streets at the moment of the blast, but most of the screens display artworks falling from the walls or suffering other damage, along with other parts of the interior inside Beirut's Sursock Museum, where windows are bursting. In the artist statement on the wall next to the work, Hadjithomas/Joreige write:

Artworks, coming from a time said to be a Golden Age, reach us after facing wars, catastrophes, tragic events.

They have been traversed by a blast, that of the explosion of August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020 which destroyed in a fraction of a second, a third of Beirut.

Are they the same?

And the way we see them?

And what about us, are we still the same?

All of the artworks in the Sursock Museum were restored and now look like they did before the blast.<sup>786</sup>

If we understand the explosion as a surpassing disaster and the artworks as tradition that has withdrawn immaterially in a Toufician sense, then the security cameras have recorded the moment in which tradition was lost, while Hadjithomas/Joreige, by collecting and assembling the footage, reveal and acknowledge the loss, potentially for those who might resurrect the tradition in the future. The Sursock Museum's artworks, like the mirror in vampire films, reveal the withdrawal of what still seems to be here. Even now, after the reopening of the museum, we see the works from a different perspective, knowing that they are now devoid of tradition, despite the fact that they look like they did before.

Furthermore, Hadjithomas/Joreige ask if we are still the same after the blast. This can be linked to the living martyrs, who, as discussed in 4.6, seemed to be the same when they returned from prison but had changed their personalities, meaning a part of them had withdrawn. The extreme experience of the explosion could mean entering the realm of the undead and dying before dying in a Toufician sense.

785 The work was shown in the group show *Beirut and the Golden Sixties: A Manifesto of Fragility* from 25 March to 12 June 2022 at Berlin's Croppius Bau, in the Lyon Biennial from 14 September to 31 December 2022, and in the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha from 17 March to 5 August 2023.

786 Sursock Museum organised a talk with three experts involved in the restoration of the destroyed paintings, sculptures, and drawings on 15 December 2022. Most of the works indeed look like they did before the blast; only in a work on paper did the skin colour of the person depicted have to be changed.



Figs. 5.27 – Fig. 5.30: Salim Mourad, 218, 2021, Video, 2:12 min, Courtesy of Salim Mourad, Co-Produced by the Arab Image Foundation and Cinema Galleries.

That is because, as Chalabi argues, when the blast happened, people were unsure if they were dead or alive and perceived time to have slowed down, which is typical for the realm of the undead.<sup>787</sup> This would mean that those who lived through the explosion have turned into undead beings. They became someone else, though this is often not visible on the outside, at least not after a while. Just as the paintings were restored, physical wounds and injuries have healed, and people look as they did before, though they are no longer the same. As *Night Comes When Day Is Gone* documents the moment in which mortals enter the realm of the undead as a result of a surpassing disaster that also causes the artwork's loss of tradition.

Lastly, Salim Mourad's video 218 (2021; Figs. 5.27–5.30) also deals explicitly with the blast.<sup>788</sup> The title refers to the confirmed number of deaths from the explosion at the time the work was made. At the beginning, we see a portrait of a well-dressed woman who is wearing jewellery and looking to the left (Fig. 5.27). Her image then fades into an interior and a male voice, in

787 Chalabi, 'Present', 125.

788 The video was shown as a part of an exhibition in the Mina Image Center, initiated by the Arab Image Foundation, called *Translating Images*, which was on show from 26 August until 22 September 2022. Artists were invited to create works with pictures from the AIF archive, with all works thematically circling around Beirut.

French, says: 'The day your house was blown, you found in your living room under the glass debris the face of a man'. The image changes into an ID photograph in *passee-partout* format that depicts a man lying in and under shards of glass (Fig. 5.28). Broken glass, like Saadé's use of a shutter, is immediately associated with the explosion—not only because the city was littered with shards and because the sound of Beirut for weeks after the blast was that of glass being swept, but also because, as I myself experienced, people were still coming across tiny shards in and around houses more than two-and-a-half years later.

The photograph was blown into the artist's house when the blast happened. Due to the force of the explosion, many people's personal belongings were moved into the streets or into other houses. Mourad at first did not know who the depicted person was, but soon after found out that it was a neighbour's ex-lover, who did not die in the explosion but is still alive. The voice, referring to the images of those killed during the explosion, says: 'He did not let go, and 218 other photographs kept on coming'.

Then the scene changes; a young woman, also fancily dressed, wearing jewellery, and turned slightly to the left, apparently in a re-enactment of the photograph in the first scene, is looking at a *passee-partout* photograph (Fig. 5.29). Flickering emergency lights are visible in the background, and the silos in the vicinity of the port area slowly emerge behind the woman. This image formula—a person placed in front of the silos—was also used by announcements of deaths from the blast and by the previously discussed work by Boulos.

The voice goes on, 'But other photographs continued to emerge from everywhere. They caught fire and consumed themselves under your gaze'. In the next scene, we see *passee-partout* photographs in multiples; some of the images are flipped, and importantly, they are burning (Fig. 5.30). Mourad said that these photographs from the AIF archive, like the image of his neighbour's ex-lover, acted as placeholders for the images of those who died in the blast and should embody the violence that had been done to the dead. A fire ignited minutes before the explosion, and some of the port workers and firefighters were burned to death. Even after the explosion, the silos continued burning.<sup>789</sup> The voice-over that refers to the consumption of photographs could be understood as a reference to the fact that the faces of those who died in the explosion, which one after the other appeared on the walls of the city, could be looked at by everyone.

789 There was a massive fire in September 2020, and the silos were still burning or smouldering throughout the summer of 2022.

At the end of the video, the camera jumps back to the re-enactment of the photograph of the first scene, but the woman looks into the camera so that we can see the tears in her eyes. When I talked to Mourad about the video, he said that he felt a ghostly presence of the dead:

What was felt is that something started, an anecdote, and suddenly it became energetically more serious. It was supposed to be a bit funny, but it's not funny anymore. The ghosts used this little doorway to suddenly come with their gravitas and say we are here too. You want to speak about the guy in the salon, fine, but we are here too. This felt a bit heavy. And that's why the lady, the actress in the end, is looking at pictures and is crying. [...] It is a bit suspended, unclear, unresolved; we haven't maybe started to look the explosion in the face. [...] And what really spoke to me was realising that the ghosts of the explosion used the pictures of people from the AIF collection to materialise. Suddenly, some pictures from the collection became in the video almost representatives of the people who died in 2020, [...] so there is an overlapping of time. Of course, I did all that, but if I want to think of our selves as vessels, I feel those unrested energies, which kind of echoed or spoke with, or [were] found in, the pictures that I chose from this collection.<sup>790</sup>

Ghosts entered through the anecdote of discovering a photograph of an ex-lover of Mourad's neighbour in his house. An initially lighthearted search to find out who the man in the image was turned into a serious and heavy encounter with those who died in the blast.

In *218*, the dead appear in other forms: first through the picture Mourad found in his flat, second through the photographs of the AIF collection, and third through the re-enactments of these same images. By recontextualising photographs of the AIF that were taken decades ago and re-staging them in 2021, Mourad points out that the time of the ghost is out of joint. In the scene with the burning pictures, we see photographs, which come into being when light is burned on a photosensitive surface, that are destroyed by the same procedure. But Mourad, unlike Khalil in *White Masks*, or those responsible for removing Brady the Black's installation, does not try to expel the ghost by destroying its image; he rather shows the process of death (burning) and re-emergence (appropriation) and therefore the process of haunting. He allows the ghosts to reappear, to point out their unfinished business. Unlike in *Nancy* and *Faces*, however, the images in *218* do not resemble the appearance of the killed. This, in my reading, could be linked to the fact that those who died in the blast are not spectral ghosts like the martyrs are; they are only revenants that announce that the future is, like the images of the killed, absent.

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790 Salim Mourad, personal conversation with the author, 7 October 2022.

The strategies of appropriation used by Saadé, Joreige/Hadjithomas, and Mourad enquire into the changing contexts of artworks and other images following a (surpassing) disaster. By incorporating shutters and glass, they include elements that are emblematic for the destruction of Beirut and, thus, materials that embody the violence of the blast. Like the makers of *Nancy*, Saadé, Hadjithomas/Joreige, and Mourad are picture-users who select and present existing images and change the context of their presentation. Violence is inscribed in all three artworks through shots, burnings, and the non-sanitised, endlessly repeated moving scene of the blast. Futures seem to be absent.

### 5.2.3 Artworks Past a Surpassing Disaster

I have identified two strategies found in artistic encounters with images of the blast: first, a documentary strategy, and second, a strategy of appropriation. What all five of the discussed works have in common is that they never directly show the faces of those who died in the explosion and that they instead visualise the haunting presences of the dead, and the aftereffects it produced—such as the destruction of the city's fabric, particularly the silos. Furthermore, none of these works imagines a future. They do not, like the NGOs, look for justice, nor, like Karam's and Nazer's statues, do they express hopes that Beirut will recover soon; they rather seem to translate a depressing status quo into artworks that all bear traces of violence, either via depictions of the destroyed city, as in the documentary strategy, or via violence done to images, as visible in the appropriation strategy.

## 5.3 A Continuation of Violence, Ghosts, Ruins, and Impossible Truths

During the time of writing there were mainly three types of dead on the walls: sectarian martyrs, martyrs of the thawra, and those who died in the explosion. Photographs that changed their function, symbols, and slogans were still to be found in all these images. Nuances of remembrance still existed, because some of the dead appeared more frequently than others in posters, and gender roles were still performed, as they were during the *Wars*. For the thawra, however, this cannot be observed, as there were no female casualties, whereas regarding those who died in the blast, the performance of gender happens more in the discourse around the images than in the pictures themselves. While there are posters of the thawra that continue the inclusion of Mazzacurrati's Martyrs Statue, as has been already practised in the memorialisation of Hariri (*Fig. 2.9*), some images of those who died in the blast are juxtaposed with the silos, which I understand as a continuation of the meaning of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, in the sense that all these structures carry a heavy weight and elicit strong emotions.

The sectarian martyrs who died in recent years, as well as the shuhada of the thawra, remain on the walls as spectral ghosts, while with the dead of the blast a new kind of ghost emerged. They oscillate between the images of the martyrs and the images of the missing not only iconographically, but also conceptually, since they haunt via their presence as revenants but do not announce a future.

I suggested that there are two visual approaches by which image-makers reflect on images regarding 4 August. While artists who are following a documentary strategy capture the loss and destruction of the blast, artists who are following an appropriation strategy register the violence that artworks and images have experienced due to the explosion. As in *Nancy's* use of appropriation art, these works deal with questions of the meaning of architectural traces of the disaster, but also haunting presences, which are now void of a future.



## 6. Martyrs and Other (Un)Dead in Beirut and Beyond

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In this book, I investigated how artists reveal the construction of the martyr and of other (un)dead figures. I did this primarily through the case study of Rabi'h Mroué's play *How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April Fool's Joke* (2007), but also by situating *Nancy* in relation to other artworks, mostly created by the Lebanese Post-War Generation, to martyr posters of the *Wars*, and to images of the dead who were on the walls during the time of writing, namely the sectarian martyrs, the martyrs of the thawra, and the dead from 4 August.

### 6.1 *Nancy* and the Construction of Images of Martyrs

*Nancy* is an artwork of the Post-War Generation and exhibits the characteristics usually ascribed to these artists who started making art after the *Wars*, many of whom are internationally recognised today. By appropriating posters from the *Wars*, the play makes use of archival aesthetics, and via the anecdotes told, which are inspired by real people but also by literature, it blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction. Furthermore, *Nancy* questions notions of truth via its use of the photographic image; for example, it presents images of the living as images of martyrs. By showing us that all sects used the figure of the shahid for similar purposes, the play does not side with one faction but rather questions ideological narratives.

Mroué's career is also typical of the Post-War Generation. He started his artistic practice after the end of the *Wars*, when there was no substantial funding for the arts or infrastructure in Beirut. In 2007, when *Nancy* was staged, Beirut, as an art hub in the region, was on the rise, and soon after it thrived. Today, Mroué is a professional and internationally acclaimed artist who lives in Berlin and is represented by Sfeir-Semler gallery. Several publications on Mroué's work have appeared in recent years, but most focus on works other than *Nancy*, such as *Inhabitants* and *Three Posters*. In contrast, I have put the focus of this book on *Nancy* because it, more than his other works, challenges ideas that place the martyr in an Islamic or 'terrorist' context.

I made clear that we can approach *Nancy* from a different perspective than that employed by other writers, who have generally seen the play as a reflection on the memory of the *Wars*, chronicling the history of the *Wars* or as addressing trauma

caused by the conflicts. In contrast, I contend that *Nancy* does not reveal previously unknown historical facts, as the histories of the Wars are generally known. Furthermore, I reject the idea that the makers of the play act as artist-psychologists who work to treat trauma.

In my reading, *Nancy* challenges the ideas and representation of the martyr and demonstrates how fabricated remembrances of the deceased are employed in the context of visual politics. When read as an interaction of text and image, the play reveals the construction of the martyr poster, the usages of the shahid's image in connection with the emotions it elicits, the placement of the martyr between fact and fiction, and the intertwining of the shahid with time. By selecting underlying images of various parties for the remakes of the posters, *Nancy* demonstrates that the martyr posters of all sects involved in the Wars have the same basic structure.<sup>791</sup>

A death is constructed as a martyrdom only if a faction is interested in elevating it to a form that is higher than other deaths. This becomes clear when the martyrs are contrasted with Lebanon's missing, who also died under violent circumstances but who, unlike the shuhada, were not allowed onto Beirut's walls in poster form; this is reflected in *Nancy* when Lina's disappearance is represented via a blue monochrome instead of a martyr poster. Also, not all martyrdoms are remembered equally, and shuhada can be divided into ordinary and celebrity martyrs. *Nancy* addresses this fabricated hierarchy by showing Bachir and Hariri on all four screens simultaneously.

The militias want to possess the image of the shahid, which becomes a currency. In this way, posters are used by the warring factions to show off how much human capital they have paid for their cause, as *Nancy* reflects by excessively showing party logos. Therefore, it is usually not of primary relevance who it is that is depicted; what is usually most relevant is that a face and a specific logo are visible in the poster.

Emotions are attached to martyr posters, which are used by the militias and today's parties to turn the picture into a call to arms and into an advertising image that tries to persuade men, in particular, to enter a militia. Especially the hyper-masculine format holds the promise that by joining the military group, one can turn into the ideal man, shown in the poster. By depicting exaggerated traits of Rabi'h's, Ziad's, and Hatem's manliness, the play caricatures the hypermasculine martyr. However, on the textual plane, *Nancy* reveals that heroic martyrs exist only in their images. In actuality, they were human beings who were able to feel emotions such as fear and love.

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791 However, by not including a member of the PSP, *Nancy* probably unwittingly reflects that Druze martyrdom has been rarely addressed in research.

The fabrication of the male hero martyr can be linked to the discussion about the Martyrs Statue in the 1950s, when Hoayek's monument was not considered heroic enough and was replaced by Mazzacurati's statue that shows the martyrs, who are represented, as in *Nancy*, in the form of three men and only one woman. The three male and one female protagonist in the play reflect the reality of the *Wars*, in which significantly more men than women were venerated as martyrs. By cross-dressing Lina, who is shown with attributes usually restricted to male martyrs, *Nancy* reveals that gender is performed in martyr posters.

Likewise, truth is constructed in images of shuhada. By announcing living actors as martyrs and by re-using the same photograph for different deaths, *Nancy* reminds us that truth claims in martyr posters should always be questioned. They could be, like the shahid's story, fragments of a whole or simply wrong, even if anecdotes and images of martyrs travel through decades.

Time is inherently inscribed in the image of the martyr. Shuhada died in the past but are still on the walls of the present. Yet, unlike Murr Tower and Holiday Inn, which in *Nancy* point to the non-linearity of past and present, martyrs are not only revenants but also arrivants who carry an unfulfilled dream for the future, which is the domination over Lebanon by the group for which they died.

Although *Nancy* does not fully explore the notion of the Derridean spectral ghost—and I have argued that the sectarian martyr can be understood as such—the play nevertheless exemplifies that the martyr is on the threshold between life and death because when the protagonists die they quickly return to life. Therefore, there is no set boundary between being dead and being alive in the play. Today, as *Faces* by Hadjithomas/Joreige illustrates by re-tracing the fading image of the martyr, the shuhada appear in a different form, not as flesh-and-blood beings but as images. As long as their pictures are on the walls, the martyrs, via their spectral presence, are both dead and alive. As *Faces* shows us, it seems that the martyrs can only be laid to rest when they are not glorified or demonised and are instead accepted for what they are: hauntings of the past and the future that disturb the present.

## 6.2 Old and New Pictures of the (Un)Dead: Beirut 2020–23

During the time of writing there were mainly three types of dead on the walls: sectarian martyrs, martyrs of the thawra, and those who died in the explosion. Aside from new technical developments and minor changes in colours and symbolism, the anatomy of the sectarian martyr poster has remained the same as it was in the posters that were made during the *Wars* and then reflected in *Nancy*. However, the thawra has brought a new mode of iconicity to the martyr—namely, that of an everyday citizen. Images of the dead of the blast, in contrast, follow the anatomy

of the sectarian martyr image but also adapt the leisurely depiction of the martyrs of the *thawra*, and the images of those who died in the explosion are like the photographs of the missing often held by their relatives during protests. No new elements were introduced in their pictures, which is why I view their posters as formal nostalgia that consists of pastiches and repetitions.

Photographs that changed their function, symbols, and slogans were still to be found in all these images. Also, hierarchies of death can still be identified, since images of certain people are distributed in quantitatively higher numbers than those of others, as I have shown with the example of Sahar Fares. As was the case during the *Wars* with young female martyrs, Fares's attractiveness is often mentioned, which is not the case regarding young men killed by the blast. This demonstrates that gender roles are still performed. For the *thawra*, however, this cannot be observed, as there were no female casualties.

While some posters of the *thawra* continue the sectarian habit of including Mazzacurrati's Martyrs Statue, the images of those who died in the blast are sometimes juxtaposed with the celebrity ruin of the silos, which I understand as a continuation of the meaning of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, in the sense that strong emotions are attached to all these structures.

What distinguishes the dead from the blast from the sectarian and *thawra* martyrs is the type of ghost each becomes. The dead of 4 August are not spectral ghosts, and they are also not latent ghosts, like the missing are. Rather, they are revenants, pointing to the past but, unlike the *thawra* and sectarian martyrs, not to the future. Instead, they announce that the future is cancelled, a feeling that was also tangible in Beirut in the years after the explosion.

While the cancellation of the future was ignored by some image-makers, there are also artists who did not participate in a discourse of a better future to come but deal with the unfinished business of the blast. I suggested that there are two visual approaches by which image-makers reflect on images regarding 4 August: a documentary strategy and an appropriation strategy. While Hadjithomas/Joreige, in *As Night Comes When Day Is Gone*, visualise the moment of the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster in a Toufician sense, there are also works that were produced, mostly by the artists of the generation that followed the Post-War Generation, that remind us of aspects of *Nancy*.

The blurring of times between the *Wars* and the explosion is revealed in the works of Saadé's *A Discreet Intruder* and in Mrad's photograph *Ghost of a City*. Both works indicate that the blast is a continuation of the *Wars*, and this is similar to *Nancy*, which, through the inclusion of the time after 1990 in the anecdotes, in particular the shooting at the Arab University, points to the protraction of the *Wars*.

Murr Tower functions to bookend *Nancy* and therefore also blurs time. As mentioned above, the silos can be seen as a continuation of Murr Tower and appear as such in a photograph by Boulos and in Mourad's 218. By incorporating the silos in their images, these two artists, like the creators of *Nancy*, reflect on how ruins can be charged with symbolic and emotional meaning.

Boulos's photograph of a woman, who is standing in front of the silos, is accompanied by an anecdote of the portrayed, and the dead in Mourad's video enter his house via an anecdote. As *Nancy* has already shown us, if there is no definite version of what has happened, events can be narrated only through personal, individual, and unofficial stories. By relying on anecdotes, Mourad and Boulos resist the state's non-narrative of why the explosion happened. The images Mourad used to embody the dead of the blast are from the AIF. They come from another time and another context and are re-staged with contemporary actors who do not resemble the dead. As we have seen in *Faces*, spectral ghosts come back in a different form, but usually one that is still recognisable and bears at least a certain resemblance to its previous form. Not so in 218. A similar non-resemblance can also be found in Boulos's image, which employs the image formula of the dead in front of the silos but shows a living person, and in Mourad's image, which does not depict the picture of the man killed in the explosion but only alludes to this very image via a banner.

While *Faces* and partly also *Nancy* reflect on the ghostly presence of the sectarian martyrs by appropriating their posters and therefore making it easy for spectators familiar with martyr posters to recognise the underlying images, the artists dealing with the ghostly presence of the dead of the blast no longer make the dead resemble themselves. This, in my reading, hints at the fact that the dead from the blast are not spectral martyrs, since the future to which they point is, like their resemblance, absent.

As we have seen, many topics of *Nancy* are still relevant today. The dying and coming back to life element of the protagonists in *Nancy* is a nod to the way that, at least since 1975, Lebanon has been caught in a never-ending cycle of violence. This situation was still visible on the walls and in the city during the time of writing. Had the play been written during the time in which I wrote this book, then Rabih might have been involved as a LF militiaman in combat in Tayyouneh, where he would have killed Ziad, who then would have been hailed as a martyr on a Hezbollah poster; Hatem might have died during a protest and been declared a martyr of the thawra; and Lina might have lived in Ashrafieh; maybe she would have died in the explosion before appearing as a drawing in the installation of Brady the Black and, finally, being washed away by water cannons. However, as I have already hinted in 2.1, the celebration and visualisation of martyrs is not peculiar to Lebanon.

### 6.3 Looking Further: Martyrs in Northern Ireland

I would like to end this book with a brief discussion of images of the dead in Northern Ireland in order to provide a sketch for further research that could be conducted on images of martyrs in a context that goes beyond Lebanon.

While John Nagle has already linked Beirut and Belfast regarding the simultaneous remembering and forgetting of recent conflicts,<sup>792</sup> I chose Northern Ireland to demonstrate that the celebration of martyrdom does exist in a solely Christian and a solely European context and to show that notions of martyrdom exceed the so-called 'Middle East'. Although the visual legacy of Northern Ireland is known first and foremost through its murals, I have also seen numerous posters in Belfast and Derry.<sup>793</sup> I discuss both media together because their pictorial language and their function of communicating a simple, clear message do not significantly differ from each other.<sup>794</sup> I first address images of the dead on the walls of Northern Ireland, then I move to a discussion of Richard Hamilton's painting *The Citizen*, which deals with the making of martyrs.

#### 6.3.1 Troubled Northern Ireland: Bobby Sands and Other Christian Sectarian Dead

The walls of Belfast and Derry are full of images of people, mostly men, who died during the so-called Troubles, which officially lasted from 1968 until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. After Ireland's fight for decolonisation from the British Empire, the predominantly Catholic island became its own state in 1921. Only six provinces in the North, which had a slight Protestant majority, stayed part of the United Kingdom.

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792 Nagle, 'Defying State Amnesia'.

793 The leading scholar on Northern Ireland's murals is the sociologist Bill Rolston. Whereas the Protestant Unionist mural tradition dates to 1908, the Catholic Republicans started to draw wall paintings as part of a larger campaign supporting the hunger strikers in 1981. Posters issued during the Troubles, and now housed in Belfast's Linen Hall Library, the Ulster Museum, and the online CAIN archive, have been addressed in *Troubled Images: Posters and Images of the Northern Ireland Conflict from Belfast's Linen Hall Library*, ed. Yvonne Murphy et al. (Belfast: The Linen Hall Library, 2001) and, more recently, in Michael Welch, 'Signs of Trouble: Semiotics, Streetscapes, and the Republican Struggle in the North of Ireland', *Crime, Media, Culture* 16, no. 1 (2019).

794 Gregory Goalwin, 'The Art of War: Instability, Insecurity, and Ideological Imagery in Northern Ireland's Political Murals', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 26, no. 3 (2013): 194–95; Bill Rolston, 'The War of the Walls: Political Murals in Northern Ireland', *Museum International* 56, no. 3 (2004): 44.

The roots of martyrdom in (Northern) Ireland, can be traced back to at least until 1916 and the infamous 'Easter Rising', a violent protest against the British occupation. After the rising failed, sixteen Irish rebels were executed by the British Army. They were immediately labelled as martyrs and remain as such in murals on Northern Ireland's walls until the present day.<sup>795</sup>

A violent sectarian conflict, the so-called Troubles, escalated in Northern Ireland in the 1960s between mostly Protestant Unionist militias, who wished to remain with the UK, and mostly Catholic Republican militias, who wished to join the Republic of Ireland. In 1969, the British Army was sent to Northern Ireland, mostly supporting the Unionists. The conflict grew particularly tense in 1980 and 1981, when members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) who were imprisoned in the infamous H Block of the Long Kesh/Maze prison rebelled against their status as ordinary criminals and demanded to be treated as political prisoners. Their protest included wearing only a blanket instead of a prison uniform; refusing to 'slop out', meaning to empty the buckets they used as toilets, instead smearing the walls with excrement; and finally going on a hunger strike, in which ten men died.<sup>796</sup>

Bobby Sands, the first casualty, is the best-known hunger striker.<sup>797</sup> His face covers the wall of the Belfast headquarters of Sinn Féin, a leftist party that was closely related to the IRA during the Troubles (Fig. 6.1). In the centre of this mural, there is his larger-than-life headshot, painted after a photograph, with the substantially smaller faces of two other hunger strikers, Kienan Doherty and Joe McDonnell, at his left and right.<sup>798</sup> Quotes from Sands's writing, such as 'OUR REVENGE WILL BE THE LAUGHTER OF OUR CHILDREN', here on his left, often accompanied his images. Two birds, a lark below and a phoenix above, break the chains that surround his headshot. The phoenix is usually associated with re-creation, as it can rise from the ashes and thus symbolises the survival of the cause, whereas the lark refers to one of Sands's stories, in which he compared his struggle for freedom from British occupation to that of an imprisoned lark.<sup>799</sup>

795 See Mark McCarthy, 'Making Irish Martyrs: The Impact and Legacy of the Execution of the Leaders of the Easter Rising, 1916', in *Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland: From Peterloo to the Present*, eds. Quentin Outram and Keith Laybourn (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 165–202.

796 For a more detailed analysis of the conflict, see Goalwin, 'Art of War', 195–97; Kevin Meagher, *What a Bloody Awful Country: Northern Ireland's Century of Division* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2022).

797 Rolston, 'War of the Walls', 41; Bill Rolston, 'Trying to Reach the Future Through the Past': Murals and Memory in Northern Ireland', *Crime, Media, Culture* 6, no. 3 (2010): 300–01.

798 The third face, Sean McCoughey, who was also a member of the IRA, seems to be a later addition and refers to the tradition of IRA hunger strikes. He died in a hunger strike in 1946.

799 Goalwin, 'The Art of War', 206–7, 210.



Fig. 6.1: Bobby Sands, Mural, Belfast – Sinn-Féin Headquarters, December 2022, Photograph AR.

Although Sands was one of ten hunger strikers, his is the image that is most widely distributed, and he is 'at the centre of the narrative', as the famous image just described suggests.<sup>800</sup> This is also visible in a printed plaque commemorating the fortieth year of the hunger strike (Fig. 6.2). The faces of ten men are uniformly depicted in black circles and they are labelled as 'H BLOCK MARTYRS', which is emphasised by the arrangement of the faces in the form of the letter H. Bobby Sands is placed in the upper left-hand corner of the image, so his face is the first to be met by a European eye that reads a text or a row of images starting from the upper left-hand side.

Sands was proclaimed as a martyr immediately after his death.<sup>801</sup> In this way, as Michael Welch has shown, Sands and the other hunger strikers are often linked to Christian martyrdom.<sup>802</sup> Fionna Barber writes in a similar vein that while the British media portrayed the hunger strikers as criminals, muralists in Northern Ireland started to paint them in 'depictions of heroic martyrdom derived from the iconography of Catholicism'.<sup>803</sup>

800 Welch, 'Signs of Trouble', 19.

801 Stephen Hopkins, 'Bobby Sands, Martyrdom and the Politics of Irish Republican Memory', in Outram and Laybourn, *Secular Martyrdom*, 265.

802 Welch, 'Signs of Trouble', 19.

803 Fionna Barber, *Art in Ireland Since 1910* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 209.



Fig. 6.2: H Block Martyrs, Plaque, Belfast – Falls Road, December 2022, Photograph AR.

The hunger strikers are not the only deceased who populate the walls in Northern Ireland, however, as the Unionists also venerate their dead. *Figure 6.3* shows a mural that depicts Robert Dougan, a militiaman of the Unionist Ulster Defence Association who was killed by the IRA in 1998. As in the case of Sands, a photograph was transformed into a painting that is accompanied by a slogan. His face is framed in a circle of poppies, the central flower of Unionist remembrance. Inside the poppies, we read 'Lest We Forget'. On Dougan's right, the logo of the Ulster Defence Association is visible. It encompasses a crown, referring to the group's loyalty to the British monarchy, and the red hand of Ulster. This symbol alludes to the myth of two ancient chieftains' boat race, where the land would be won by the man who touches the land first. One of the chieftains anticipated his loss, so he cut off his hand, threw it to the land, and thereby won the race. Because of this, the red hand of Ulster symbolises struggle at all costs.<sup>804</sup>

Except in some Republican images, the few women that appear on Northern Ireland's walls are usually depicted as victims who were killed by bombs or shootings rather than as heroines.<sup>805</sup> This also applies to children, as the poster of thirteen-year-old Leanne Murray, who was murdered by an IRA bomb in 1993, confirms (*Fig. 6.4*). The image erected by Unionists shows her in a field of poppies, while above her, two bloodied hands are visible. Between them, we read: 'THE SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENT BY THE BLOOD SOAKED HANDS OF SINN FÉIN/IRA NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN'. This image makes an accusation against the enemy, and there are also other images that also do this, though in a more gruesome way.

804 Goalwin, 'The Art of War', 203–04.

805 Bill Rolston, 'Women on the Walls: Representations of Women in Political Murals in Northern Ireland', *Crime, Media, Culture* 14, no. 3 (2018): 365–80; Welch, 'Signs of Trouble', 22–25.



Fig. 6.3: Robert Dougan, Mural, Belfast – Sandy Row/Blythe Street, December 2022, Photograph AR.



Fig. 6.4: Leanne Murray, Poster, Belfast, December 2022, Photograph AR.

In Derry, I encountered a poster commemorating nineteen-year-old Seamus Bradley (Fig. 6.5), an IRA member who was shot and tortured by the British Army. While a text that narrates the circumstances of his death sits alongside a headshot of him smiling, the left and lower margins of the image show several graphic close-ups of his injuries, including his dead body. In contrast to Figure 6.4, which aims to communicate how the life of a happy girl was taken by the IRA, this image documents the cruelties enacted by the British Army. Both images testify to the brutality of the opponent.

The pictures on the walls of Northern Ireland give evidence that the conflict is not past. This is manifested by recent events, such as one reported in *The Guardian* in 2023 under the headline ‘Petrol Bombs and Punishment Beatings: Paramilitaries Still Rooted in Northern Ireland’,<sup>806</sup> or the 2019 killing of journalist Lyra McKee by a stray bullet during a street battle in Derry.<sup>807</sup> Furthermore, between 2022 and 2024, the Democratic Unionist Party refused to take part in the government, since it had to share power with Sinn Féin, which won the elections in Northern Ireland for the first time in 2022.<sup>808</sup>

806 Rory Carroll, ‘Petrol Bombs and Punishment Beatings: Paramilitaries Still Rooted in Northern Ireland’, *The Guardian*, 9 April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/09/petrol-bombs-and-punishment-beatings-paramilitaries-still-rooted-in-northern-ireland>.

807 Colin Coulter et al., *Northern Ireland a Generation After Good Friday: Lost Futures and New Horizons in the ‘Long Peace’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 6.

808 Tom Edgington, ‘Why Does Northern Ireland Need Its Own Brexit Deal?’, *BBC*, 28 February 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381> (last accessed 15 March 2023; site inactive on 29 October 2024). Agreement on a new government took place only in February 2024.



Fig. 6.5: Seamus Bradley, Poster, Derry – Bogside, December 2022, Photograph AR.

The posters and murals that show martyrs act as means by which a group defines itself, mobilises, and recruits. In this way, according to Bill Rolston, the pictures are not ‘an innocent expression of identity, but a major part of the problem of continuing violence’.<sup>809</sup> The Arts Council Programme for Northern Ireland understood this and started to take down or overpaint some political murals due to fears they could incite sectarian strife.<sup>810</sup> While it was obviously not possible to completely remove politics from the walls, the attempt reflects a desire to erase the Troubles from public memory. The surface of central Belfast is, as Rolston writes, a ‘conflict-free city, sterile as regards memorialization’. At the same time, in a certain schizophrenic way, sectarian modes of commemoration—such as the murals, many of which have not been taken down, as they are a key tourist attraction—remain.<sup>811</sup> The images of the dead are symptoms of the fact that the Troubles still trouble Northern Ireland today. Especially, Bobby Sands’s haunting presence can still be felt in art productions decades after his death.

809 Rolston, ‘Reach the Future’, 286.

810 *Ibid.*, 297–98.

811 *Ibid.*, 303–04; quote on page 303. There were also ideas of demolishing the Long Kesh/Maze, which closed in 2000, and constructing a sports stadium on its premises instead. These plans were finally abandoned, as was the idea of building a memorial for all entities involved in the conflict. Until today, an official non-sectarian memorial for the Troubles does not exist.

### 6.3.2 Richard Hamilton's *The Citizen*: Painting the Making of a Martyr

Bobby Sands is the protagonist of Steve McQueen's movie *Hunger* (2008), which tells the story of the hunger strikers and shows us that even decades after his passing—like today—Sands is not forgotten. However, I am more interested in works that pose questions about the usage of martyrdom and go beyond emotional lamentation.<sup>812</sup> Regarding the dead of the Troubles, this happened quite early, and I will limit my discussion here to one example, Richard Hamilton's *The Citizen* (1981–83; Fig. 6.6), which is housed in London's Tate Modern.<sup>813</sup>

In 1980, Hamilton watched a broadcast of the prisoners' protest on British TV, which showed IRA members Hugh Rooney and Freddy Toal in a small cell wrapped in prison blankets. The artist then appropriated these televised images into a two-metre-high painted diptych but omitted Toal, thereby creating a lonely figure in the right panel, who is in direct confrontation with the viewer.<sup>814</sup> Because of the depiction of only the long-haired, half-naked man, with a thin body and a thick beard, links with Jesus's martyrdom were immediately drawn. This is further emphasised by the cross dangling from the prisoner's neck,<sup>815</sup> and although visible wounds are absent, Liam Kelly is reminded of the image formula of the Man of Sorrows.<sup>816</sup>

In this painting, Hamilton captures a fleeting moment on the TV screen, prompting viewers to question what they see; at the same time Hamilton does not encourage the viewers to honour the IRA members or to emotionally engage with the hunger strikers. Long contends that Hamilton instead examines the politics and transmissions of martyrdom critically.<sup>817</sup> The hunger strikers, and in a wider

812 For a discussion of this movie, see Coulter et al., *Northern Ireland a Generation After Good Friday*, 135–42.

813 For a discussion of art during the Troubles in Northern and Southern Ireland, see Barber, *Art in Ireland*, 168–95 and 207–19, and Long, *Ghosthaunted Land*. Further, the Ulster Museum in Belfast organised an exhibition called *Art of the Troubles* in 2014; this resulted in the Troubles Archive, which includes art produced after and during the Troubles. It can be accessed online at [www.troublesarchive.com](http://www.troublesarchive.com).

*The Citizen* is part of a series of three works: *The Subject* (1988–90) shows a Unionist militiaman, and *The State* (1993) depicts a British soldier. All three are housed at Tate Modern.

814 Philipp Spectre, *Richard Hamilton – Introspective* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Koenig, 2019), 312–15; Mark Godfrey, 'Television Delivers People', in *Richard Hamilton*, eds. Mark Godfrey, Paul Schimmel, and Vicente Todolí (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 243.

815 Terry Riggs, 'Richard Hamilton. The Citizen. 1981–3', *Tate*, last modified January 1998, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hamilton-the-citizen-to3980>.

816 Liam Kelly, *Thinking Long: Contemporary Art in the North of Ireland* (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 1996), 122.

817 Declan Long, 'Visual Art: A Troubles Archive Essay', *The Troubles Archive*, last modified 2009, [http://www.troublesarchive.com/resources/visual\\_art.pdf](http://www.troublesarchive.com/resources/visual_art.pdf).



Fig. 6.6: Richard Hamilton, *The Citizen*, 1981–83, Oil Paint on Two Canvases, 217 x 206 cm, Tate Modern London, ©The Estate of Richard Hamilton, Courtesy of Tate Modern, London.

sense the IRA, made conscious use of the visits of journalists to the Long Kesh/Maze. As the open and direct look of the figure and the placement of his right foot as he walks towards the viewer suggest, the hunger strikers deliberately exposed to the camera their chosen living conditions, which are visualised in the left panel that is filled with brown swirls, representing excrement.<sup>818</sup> The choice of suffering was finally extended to starving to death.

*The Citizen* hints that the hunger strikers wanted to let the public watch them die and to let the audience experience the making of a

martyr. In other words, the Republicans used British television for ‘the creation of an icon’. This seemed to have worked, as the then-prime minister of Britain Margaret Thatcher felt compelled to criticise the BBC’s news coverage, arguing that, from her point of view, by being broadcast in such a condition, criminals would receive the ‘myth of martyrdom they crave’.<sup>819</sup> The televised martyr-making, combined with the Republicans’ evocations of Jesus, were intended to evoke strong emotions from the audience, and consequently to elicit support for the Republicans’ political cause.<sup>820</sup>

With *The Citizen*, Hamilton examines the ‘ingredients’ for martyrdom: first, the violent (future) death of the hunger striker; second, a medium, British television, that was consciously used by the Republicans to disseminate these deaths; and third, an audience that reacted emotionally to those deaths. If the hunger strikers had died silently in the Long Kesh/Maze prison without televised coverage, they would not have gained the responses needed for the creation of martyrs. Additionally, Hamilton shows us that the martyr is exchangeable. Rooney himself did not die during the Troubles, but as Long argues, this becomes almost secondary. Because

818 In the television clip on which *The Citizen* is based, Rooney indeed steps his foot towards the camera and looks at it self-assuredly, apparently posing, even leading the gaze of the cameraman by his movement. BBC, ‘Maze Prison Protest, BBC Newsnight (1980)’, BBC, uploaded 8 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07814nb>.

819 Godfrey, ‘Television Delivers’, 242.

820 Long, ‘Visual Art’.

Sands was the face of the hunger strike, he dominates the narrative and Rooney is associated with him simply by being depicted as an H block prisoner.<sup>821</sup> Martyrdom is about the larger framework of death, in this case the Republican cause, which is first and foremost represented by Sands, rather than by the individual.

### 6.3.3 The Martyr Is Neither Solely 'Middle Eastern' nor Solely 'Islamic'

The dead of the Easter Rising of 1916 remind us of the men who were executed in Beirut's Martyrs Square in the same year. Both groups of men were killed because they advocated for independence—the former from the British, the latter from the Ottoman empire.

Looking at the images of the dead in Lebanon and Northern Ireland, it becomes clear that they have a similar anatomy. In each country, visuals of martyrs include: a photograph, or a painting after a photograph of the deceased; symbols such as birds and flowers; an emblem that points to the issuer; and slogans, which are often alike. For example, we read 'Lest We Forget' in a Unionist mural in Northern Ireland (Fig. 6.3) and 'We Will Not Forget' in a poster issued during the Wars (Fig. 3.57).

Other points of similarity are that pictures are serialised, martyrs are predominantly male, and violent images appear in their function as accusation images. Moreover, certain people are depicted more often than others and can therefore be called celebrity martyrs; examples are Bobby Sands and Bachir Gemayel. Especially with regard to celebrity martyrs, religious myths, in particular those of Jesus (Lebanon and Northern Ireland) and Hossein (Lebanon), are reactivated in posters. And of course, different groups perceive different dead people as martyrs.

Also, violence against images is not restricted to one locality. As mentioned in 2.1, in 1944, the French destroyed Nazi posters after the Germans were pushed back in WWII. In Lebanon, images of Bachir were burned, those of Soleimani were punched, and Brady the Black's installation, which comprised pictures of those killed in the Beirut explosion on 4 August, was violently washed away with water cannons, while in Northern Ireland, the Arts Council overpainted sectarian murals. In general, the city centres of Belfast and Beirut are mostly sanitised, rid of traces of violence.

In Northern Ireland and Lebanon, the posters of the undead martyrs are a part of the Troubles and the Wars, respectively, and therefore speak of an officially ended but ongoing conflict. These protractions manifest themselves in the fact that in both locations, sectarian violence regularly flares up and the sects were unable to form a government—though since early 2024, after a two-year hiatus, the

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821 Ibid.

Northern Ireland Assembly is working again. According to Rolston, the problem in Northern Ireland—and also in Lebanon, I would add—is an ‘unnatural obsession with remembering’ that results in a ‘seemingly endless struggle’,<sup>822</sup> which is fought—among other means—via images of the dead. Of course, the situation in Northern Ireland is less complex than in Lebanon because there are only two sects and not eighteen, but in both cases, images of the different groups are used to mark sectarian territory and to define a group’s identity.

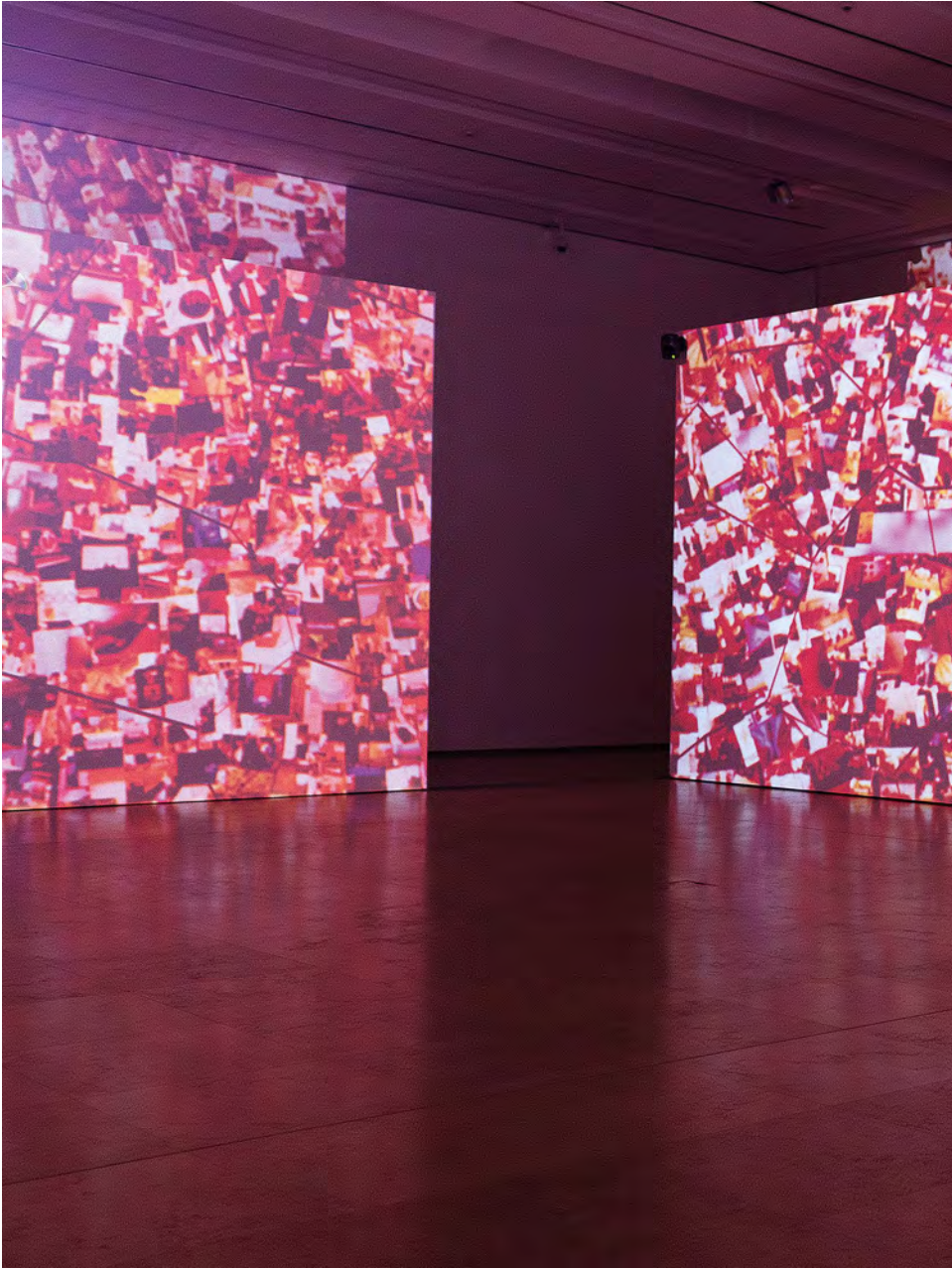
Artists in both geographies reflect this cult of martyrdom. Richard Hamilton and Rabih Mroué use the visual strategy of appropriation art and engage with images that precede theirs. Hamilton, in *The Citizen*, and Mroué, in *Nancy*, critically reveal the recipe and the transmission of martyrdom, scrutinise how archetypal myths of martyrs are evoked, and expose the fact that martyrdom is less about an individual death and more a part of visual politics.

By including the example of Northern Ireland, I thus showed that martyrdom is also celebrated in Europe and that the figure of the martyr extends the ‘jihadist from the Middle East’. There is no need to travel far to see an artistic reflection on the making of a martyr; one can just go to London’s Tate Modern and view Hamilton’s *Citizen*. Staying in Europe, it would also be worthwhile to explore how Russia’s war on Ukraine, which started while I was working on this book, has provided fertile ground for martyrdom in Ukraine as well as in Russia, and to what extent the findings of my book can also be applied to these geographies.<sup>823</sup> However, my thoughts in 6.3 should be considered not as thorough analyses, but as outlooks for further research. The martyr is not only a figure that escapes a fixed definition or conception, but also a figure that cannot be limited to certain times or geographies.

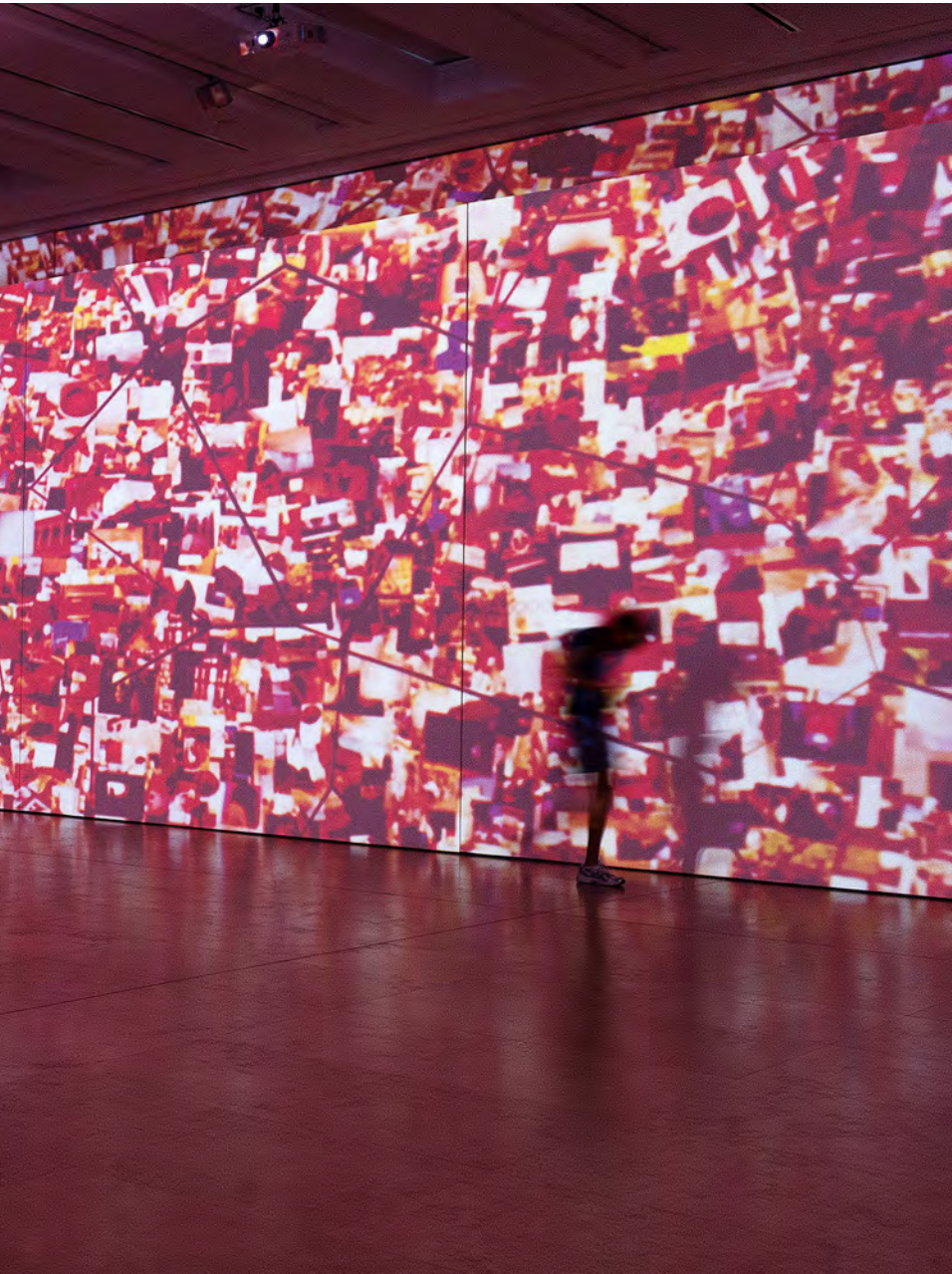
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822 Rolston, ‘Trying to Reach the Future’, 286.

823 For Russia, see Yuliya Minkova, *Making Martyrs: The Language of Sacrifice in Russia from Stalin to Putin* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2018). For Ukraine, see Guido Hausmann and Iryna Sklokina (eds.), *The Political Cult of the Dead in Ukraine: Traditions and Dimensions from the First World War to Today* (Goettingen: V&R Unipress, 2021). Neither publication touches upon the most recent war. It seems that the dead of the ongoing war are not overtly celebrated in Russia, and that this is because the government tries not to visualise the dead Russian soldiers—doing so would directly show the cost of Russian lives and thus risk support for the war among citizens. In Ukraine, in contrast, soldiers who died in the conflict are visually remembered in public; an example is the so-called ‘Wall of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine’ in Kyiv.



Zad Moultaqa, *Ejecta*, 2023, Single-Channel Stereo Sound and Video with Four Projectors, 3 min on Loop, Courtesy of Zad Moultaqa, Photograph Alma Moultaqa.



It's 26 May 2023. I am again on the esplanade of the Sursock Museum, which is reopening almost three years after it was destroyed by the explosion. The artworks inside the museum look like they did before the blast, but they have lost their tradition, not visibly but immaterially.

The colourful glass windows are restored, and the blue plastic foil has disappeared. The congregation of the sculptures of the dead is still here. They are also part of the opening. While Hoayek's Martyrs Statue is illuminated by spotlights, the bench commemorating Gaïa Fodoulian and the swing remembering Isaac Oehlert are onlookers in a corner. A DJ is standing with his booth right in front of the swing, while someone else is sitting on the bench.

It's crowded, there are many familiar faces, and it seems like all the art-people who remained in Beirut are here. Conversations flow superficially, and there is still a certain heaviness in the air. Five exhibitions are opening today. One of them is Zad Moultaqa's *Ejecta* (2023), a visual-sound installation in which digital images of the works of the museum's collection explode and then move down the frames like lava erupting and streaming down from a volcano. The noise of a blast and of shattering glass is audible simultaneously. A link to 4 August is inevitable. On a wall next to the installation, visitors are invited to write or draw as a 'healing ritual'. According to the accompanying text, the work intends to be cathartic: 'Ejecta—originally defined as volcanic ejected particles—expels the darkness, to form a crater of light'. Moultaqa hopes that this installation will 'inspire people to turn their dark thoughts about that day [4 August] into hope for the future', and adds: 'It's important today to take this violence and transform it into something positive'.<sup>824</sup> This reminds us of Sadek's critique of those who rush into a future without any consideration of the unresolved past or the dead. Like the two statues in the port, Moultaqa's *Ejecta* seems to call on Beirut to rise from the ashes, to bury the memory of the blast and to focus on the future instead of lingering in the now that is inhabited by a past that is not settled. At the same time, *Ejecta* disavows the cancelled future and acts as if the future would still be ahead; standing inside the installation felt like 'dancing to ghost songs', which try to convince us 'that the music of yesteryear', the promise of a future, 'is really the music of today'.<sup>825</sup>

There will undoubtedly be more artworks to come that deal with the blast, and maybe one day a book will be written about art around 4 August only.<sup>826</sup> We will end our journey through roughly forty-five years of Beirut's pictures here, on an evening that, despite Moultaqa's installation, does not feel like a future.

824 NEWS WIRES, 'Iconic Museum in Beirut Reopens Three Years After Damages from Port Blast', *France 24*, 27 May 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20230527-iconic-museum-in-beirut-reopens-three-years-after-damages-from-port-blast>.

825 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 181.

826 Exhibitions that are dealing with the blast that took place after the re-opening of the Sursock Museum are Jad el Khoury's *Soft Shields* in Tanit Gallery (29 November–29 December 2023) and Chérine Yazbeck's *Beirut Blast & Other Stories* in Tabbal Building (15 December 2023–6 January 2024).

## Afterword: An Ongoing Mass Production of Martyrs and a Stabilised Dystopia

I submitted the first manuscript of my PhD thesis, on which this book is based, roughly a month before 7 October 2023, and I left Beirut for good around the same time. 7 October—that is the date of the violent attack of Hamas on Israeli kibbutzim and the killing of 1,200 Israeli civilians. As a response, the Israeli Army turned the Gaza Strip into an infernal hellscape. Relentless bombing has now taken place daily for more than eight months. Gaza today is an uninhabitable place, with approximately two million residents trapped inside. As of today, at least 37,551 humans have been killed in Gaza; around 15,000 of them were children. 37,551 : 1,200. Does one Israeli life equal 31.29 Palestinian lives?

7 October created a rupture in the region and beyond. In addition to the war in the Gaza Strip, a war in South Lebanon started on 8 October, when Hezbollah began to fire towards Israel in support of Palestine. As in the 2006 War, the two main actors are Israel on the one side and Hezbollah on the other side, but smaller



Hezbollah, 'Martyrs on the Path to Jerusalem', 2024, Online Poster.

groups, such as Amal, the SSNP, and different Palestinian factions, also take part, supporting Hezbollah in this current war. These days, there is daily shelling and bombing, and there are new martyrs each day in South Lebanon. One face after the other appears on posters. There is nothing new in these images; all aspects discussed in this book regarding the sectarian martyr poster are still valid.

The Hezbollah serial format for today's martyrs is olive green and yellow. An ID photograph of the *shahid* is placed in the middle of the image, superimposed on a keffiyeh with verses from the Quran. Above his head, to his left, we read 'Martyrs on the Path to Jerusalem', a slogan that has already been used during the *Wars*. Above him, to his right, we see the muzzle of a Kalashnikov with a red dot, symbolising a bullet. This symbol brands the *shahid* as having died in the current war. Below the martyr, the Hezbollah logo, the martyr's name, and another stock phrase that was already used during the wars, 'Shahid al-Mujahed', are visible. In a few cases, a gun is added to the martyr. Some of the *shuhada* wear keffiyehs around their necks, which are often clumsily photoshopped into the image.

One martyr in the image above is significantly bigger than the other three. He is Taleb Abdallah, a high-ranking Hezbollah military commander, who was killed by an Israeli airstrike in South Lebanon on 11 June 2024.<sup>827</sup> The size of the photograph points to the fact that his death is in a higher position in the hierarchy of martyrdom than that of the other three martyrs, who were ordinary fighters.

Just as during the *Wars*, martyrdom is still gendered. All Hezbollah fighting martyrs are male, but of course, women are also killed in the violence in the South. An example is Sally Sakiki, who died on 13 June when the Israeli Army bombed a house. Also, she is remembered as a *shahida*, mostly by Amal, as she was a paramedic in an organisation that was affiliated with this party. Like most women during the *Wars*, she did not die while fighting.

The anatomy of the posters, hierarchies, and gender roles remain the same as during the *Wars* among all Lebanese groups involved. Of course, Hezbollah still dominates the martyr discourse, as it is the most active party involved in the current war and has—as of today—lost 350 members, while other groups that take part in the fighting have all together only lost around 61 fighters. In addition, approximately 100 civilians have been killed in the South by now.<sup>828</sup>

827 For Abdallah's life, see Claude Assaf, 'Who Is Taleb Abdallah, the Hezbollah Commander Assassinated in Jwaya?', 12 June 2024, *L'Orient Today*, <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1417115/who-is-taleb-abdallah-the-hezbollah-commander-assassinated-in-jwaya.html#:~:text=A%20Lebanese%20military%20source%20quoted,support%20of%20the%20Gaza%20conflict>.

828 *L'Orient Today*, 'Health Ministry: 432 Killed, 95,228 Displaced Since Start of Hostilities in October', *L'Orient Today*, 21 June 2024, <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1417919/health-ministry-432-killed-95228-displaced-since-start-of-hostilities-in-october.html>.

However, an in-depth analysis of the martyr imagery of the current war deserves further research. I only want to note that martyr mass production is still flourishing. New shuhada enter the walls and the web on a daily basis and these new posters seem to be a repetition of the previous ones. Like their predecessors who died during the Wars—or, after their nominal end, in the South, in Syria, or in Tayyounch—these new martyrs are spectral ghosts. They are revenants, who died in the past, as well as arrivants, who point to a desired outcome in the future, which is first and foremost Hezbollah's victory over Israel, and we might as well say, Hezbollah's expansion of power in Lebanon.

I wrote the part of this book about the cancellation of the future in Beirut before the current war started. It seems that what I noted has hypermanifested itself since 8 October. A situation that seemed unable to be more hopeless has become forlorn due to the addition of a war. During a 10-day visit to Beirut in June 2024, I had the impression that the crisis had stabilised. The not-getting-better is safeguarded now. The Lebanese Lira is stable (1\$ = 89,000 LL, compared to 1\$ = 1,500 LL in 2019), and for those who can afford it, everything, ranging from medicine to electricity, is available—although at horrendous prices. Beirut has become more expensive than Berlin. Many people are still leaving the country. Fear of an all-out war between Hezbollah and Israel loomed over the city during my visit. If this war does not materialise, things will probably remain as they are. During the time of writing, the crisis was dynamic and unpredictable; now it is static and set. I am not sure which of the two is bleaker. Beirut feels sad, heavy, and dystopic. There is no hope or any feasible perspective according to which the situation will change anytime soon.

And there is no longer a need for images to point to the cancellation of the future. The cancelled future is very present and tangible by itself. The faces of the dead from 4 August have now vanished from the walls. Sometimes the families still stage protests, but in vain—gaining justice is out of reach. However, the collective format of the thawra martyrs is still standing on Martyrs Square. Yet, there is no energy in Beirut to fight for the dream they are presented to have died for.

Some of the exhibitions on display during my visit respond to the dire conditions. The show *Don't Stop Drawing* in the Masrah al-Madina has drawings by Mazen Kerbaj and Jana Traboulsi. These images, which both artists have created almost daily since 7 October, show the horrors in Gaza and the artists' anger and sense of helplessness regarding this situation. Some drawings also depict the dead of Gaza, whom they label as martyrs.

Also, 4 August is still present in Beirut's art spaces, for example in Sursokk Museum, which currently holds a solo exhibition by Charbel Samuel Aoun. One of the works, called *A Breath into a Hole* (2020), includes videos of the artist's performances in the port area. He is making his way through a pile of rubble from the explosion just to plant a plant that is used to treat skin problems; he is sitting in

a claustrophobic underground chamber, which is lit only by a candle, and draws with self-made tools on the walls; finally, he digs a hole into soil. It seems that all these absurd activities of drawing in a place no one can see, digging a hole without any reason, or planting a plant in a highly polluted city, where it has little chance to survive without regular care, are a reflection of Beirut's absurdity. No matter how much effort you put in, things will not change.

The current situation is also addressed in a wall text by Reem Shadid that is accompanying a show of Raed Yassin in the Beirut Art Center. She writes:

The strangeness of the past four years, characterized by heightened levels of wars and violence, anxiety, fear, and instability, have compelled us to confront issues that have simmered and accumulated for decades, shaping the challenging material, emotional, and psychological conditions for our lived experiences. [...] How can we continue to inhabit what feels like a fatally dystopian existence—not as mere spectres or ghosts who evade it—but by clinging to this recurring out of joint sense, with purpose and intentionality despite death's pervasive presence and stealth?

## After the Afterword: War Again

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Now the full-scale war has materialised in Lebanon. It started with Israel making communication devices of Hezbollah members explode, not only killing or wounding many of the owners of the appliances but also bystanders who were just next to a person with a detonating walkie-talkie or children who played with their father's pager. This attack was the prelude to 23 September, when Israeli bombs killed 558 people — the deadliest day in Lebanon since the *Wars*. Since that date, there have been daily casualties caused by Israeli air raids. My Instagram is full of people being declared as martyrs, and Israeli killings are immediately framed as martyrdoms. These days, the broad concept of martyrdom applies much more than the narrow concept.

Between 8 October 2023 and today, 43,259 humans have been killed in Gaza, 2,897 in Lebanon, and 63 in Israel.<sup>829</sup> There is an apparent discrepancy in how Western media remembers the Israelis that were murdered and/or kidnapped on 7 October, or died later, and the killed Palestinians and Lebanese. Images and names of the former are frequently printed, while images and names of the latter are published only exceptionally. We could think of this difference with Judith Butler's categories of 'grievable' and 'ungrievable' deaths. While grievable deaths are losses of lives that matter and are worth protection; ungrivable deaths designate 'something living that is other than life', a threat that can be extinguished.<sup>830</sup> Remembered in pictures, the media clearly suggests that Israeli lives are grievable, while Arab lives, by being reduced to numbers, are rendered ungrivable. Butler writes that deaths resulting from state-sponsored violence, such as the Israeli bombs that turn Gaza and Lebanon into rubble and extinguish Palestinian and Lebanese lives in order to defend Israeli lives, are not considered as radically unjust as violence done by 'insurgency groups regarded as illegitimate', such as Hamas.<sup>831</sup> But a life taken is a life taken. The death of a Palestinian or Lebanese child being killed by Israeli bombs should outrage us as much as the death of an Israeli child killed by Hamas. Why can't lives not be mourned equally, and why are Arab lives considered less precious?

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829 AFP and L'Orient Today, 'Strike on Central Israel Wounds 19', *L'Orient Today*, 2 November 2024, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1433936/strike-on-central-israel-wounds-19.html>.

830 Butler, *Frames of War*, 14–15.

831 *Ibid.*, 41.

Like in 2006, the South pays the heaviest price in Lebanon. More than one million people had to flee their homes. And although there are shelters for the displaced, there is not enough space for all the refugees. Many people are forced to stay outside, for example on Martyrs Square, around Mazzacurati's statue. The majority of those who had to flee are Shiites, who are not always welcomed with open arms by the other sects. On the one hand, people fear that Israeli bombs could destroy their own livelihoods if they accept people from the South — indeed, Israel has bombed Christian areas that host Shiite refugees, such as the village of Aitou in the North. On the other hand, sectarian strife has never ceased to exist, and distrust of 'the other' remains, as we have seen in Beirut. Displaced people moved into the Hamra Star, a hotel that has been abandoned since more than a decade. A few days later, the owners of the building issued an evacuation order. When security forces attempted to implement this order, clashes between them and the displaced erupted. Such incidents also fuel fears of an open civil war.

When reading the Lebanese news these days, one often comes across places that we have encountered in this book: Bir al-Abed, Khiam, Kfar Kila, Harouf, the Dahiyeh, Qana, etc. Time seems to be in repeat mode. However, Hezbollah's martyr-production is temporarily on pause. While the group published posters of new martyrs almost daily up until the attack on their communication devices and the outbreak of the full-scale war, no new fighting martyrs have been announced since. Although, due to the absence of inhabitants and journalists, it is not fully clear what exactly is going on in the South right now, we know that Hezbollah is battling Israeli soldiers who have invaded Lebanon's border villages, and we can be sure that Hezbollah fighters die there in combat. Nonetheless, they are not proclaimed as *shuhada*. This is not only because Hezbollah does not need martyrs as a currency to show off how much sacrifice the party pays for its cause compared to other groups. There is no doubt that Hezbollah is the most involved faction in the current war in Lebanon. Amal, on the other hand, still announces martyrs up to this day, as the party needs to demonstrate that it pays a price as well in this war. However, the main reason why Hezbollah's martyr production is currently on hold is because it is likely that their losses in the last one and a half months have been exceptionally high, and, in particular after the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's myth of being a strong military group has been to some extent deconstructed. Announcing too many losses would expose Hezbollah's vulnerability — to Israel, but also to its displaced clientele. It also would not be good for the morale of the party's fighters and would give credit to Israel. If the paid price is significantly higher than expected, it is not made public. At least not before it turned out that it has been worth it.

Even if someone fulfils all 'requirements' to become a fighting martyr, he will not become a *shahid*, and his face will not be placed on a poster if the party is not willing to do so. Had one of the Hezbollah fighters who was killed yesterday in the

South been killed three months ago, his image would have entered a martyr poster almost immediately after his death. Currently, this is not the case. But, this is not a new phenomenon, as we have seen that the early martyrs of the War in Syria were not announced as such by Hezbollah right away. Should Hezbollah 'win' the current war (as in 2006, Hezbollah will most likely present everything that is not a permanent Israeli presence in the South as a victory), we will probably see those who were killed lately as martyrs in posters. Yet, at the moment, Hezbollah's shuhada, who died recently, are in a latent state waiting to be revealed. Their current status is that of the empty frames in, *Ouzaï*, which we have encountered in ...*A Faraway Souvenir* (Fig. 4.25). Today, their martyr posters are in an invisible but present waiting position. We do not know if their images will ever emerge from that position; maybe this will happen in three weeks, maybe in a year, maybe never. However, this is true for ordinary martyrs only; the image of celebrity martyr Nasrallah has not gone into latency. He was proclaimed a shahid immediately after his death was announced on 28 September. And his images appeared instantly in Shia areas.

Nasrallah's person and image fit my conception of being an A-grade celebrity martyr. His killing by Israeli bombs, like those of Bachir and Hariri, elicited para-social grief among his followers; for example, an Al-Mayadeen news anchor had tears in her eyes when announcing his death. And like the other A-grade celebrity martyrs, Nasrallah is on the threshold between life and death. According to his supporters, 'Our leader is still among us with his thought, spirit, and sacred approach'.<sup>832</sup> Also, Naim Qassem, the new Hezbollah secretary general, gave a speech addressing Nasrallah in the present tense. Moreover, Qassem was sitting next to an image of Nasrallah, an act that reminds us of pictures of Bachir and Hariri next to their successors, which are used as legitimisation of the new leader.

One of Nasrallah's martyr posters shows a photograph of him smiling and in his usual appearance: a black turban, a white beard, and glasses. Below him we see dazzling Hezbollah-yellow with Nasrallah's handwriting in black on it that reads 'In His Name, the Almighty, We Will Definitely Be Victorious', followed by his signature. Behind Nasrallah, a yellow-white circle of light, possibly symbolising a moon, is visible on a night-blue background. These two elements remind us of a poster of Bachir that shows his face in a circle, which has a yellow-white frame, in the middle of the image that also has a night-blue background. Below Bachir's face, a map of Lebanon is visible, and from above, the rays of a sun fall on him.<sup>833</sup> The almost same colour of the background and a rounded shape, symbolising light that frames the

832 Dany Moudalal, Sally Abou Al Joud, and Ghadir Hamadi, 'I Would Have Preferred That It Was Me and Not Nasrallah: The Immense Grief of Hezbollah Supporters', *L'Orient Today*, 28 September 2024, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1428981/i-would-have-preferred-that-it-was-me-and-not-nasrallah-the-immense-grief-of-hezbollah-supporters.html>.

833 For Bachir's poster, see Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 62.



Hassan Nasrallah, Poster in the Dahiyeh, Al-Manar, 13 October 2024.



Kataeb (Designer Raidy), '14 September', Poster, 1980s, 47 x 66 cm, KBA 11, signsofconflict.com.

face of the shahid, which is placed in the middle of the image, appear in posters of two celebrity martyrs whose ideologies were not only fundamentally opposed to each other but who also died more than four decades apart. As we have seen throughout the book and again in this example, the anatomy of the martyr posters is comparable among all sects and has not significantly changed since the Wars.

Nasrallah's image in the rubble of the Dahiyeh makes me think of Bachir's image in the rubble of Gemmayzeh after the explosion (*Fig. 4.52*). Even rubble is on sectarian territory and is claimed as such via images of the dead. Gemmayzeh's rubble belongs to Bachir's Christian followers. The Dahiyeh's rubble belongs to Nasrallah's Shiite followers. While writing these lines, more rubble is created by Israeli bombs, and there is no end to the destruction in sight. Lebanon does not seem to have a future anytime soon. Despite, or maybe because of, its martyrs.

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