

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

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.¹³⁶ 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.¹³⁷

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.

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 XXIst Century Contemporary Art*, ed. Marie Tomb (Beirut: Solidére 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.¹³⁸ 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'.¹³⁹ The media used by the Post-War-Generation include videos, film, photography, urban interventions, performances, installations, and print.¹⁴⁰

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.¹⁴¹ Three years later, the arts association Ashkal Alwan was established by Christine Tohmé, providing another key moment in the Post-War Generation's history.¹⁴² Other important art initiatives at that time were the Ayloul Festival, which was held annually between 1997 and 2001,¹⁴³ the art space Espace SD, which existed from 1998 to 2007,¹⁴⁴ 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.¹⁴⁵ Beginning in 2004, UMAM, another archive, has organised events and projects aimed at writing Lebanese history, particularly the *Wars*.¹⁴⁶

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.¹⁴⁷ 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'.¹⁴⁸

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 2002.¹⁴⁹ 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.¹⁵⁰ 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.

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.lorienteljour.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'.¹⁵¹

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.¹⁵²

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 as 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.

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*.¹⁵³ 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 Sursock Museum.¹⁵⁴

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 Khiam-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 Khiam were bombed and shelled by the Israeli Army multiple times. This led to dislocations 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 Khiam', *L'Orient Today*, 21 October 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1354073/wartime-building-bombing-and-looting-traces-of-empire-in-khiam.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 Solidére project.¹⁵⁵ 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.¹⁵⁶

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.¹⁵⁷

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

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.¹⁵⁸ 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.¹⁵⁹

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 school¹⁶⁰—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.¹⁶¹ 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.¹⁶² But even Solidére 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.¹⁶³

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.¹⁶⁴ 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

163 For the museum, see Mona Harb and Lara Deeb, 'Culture as History and Landscape: Hezbollah'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.lorienteljour.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.lorienteljour.com/article/1166230/un-musee-de-lindependance-des-kataeb-pour-lutter-contre-la-malnesie.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.¹⁶⁵ 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.¹⁶⁶

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.¹⁶⁷

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.¹⁶⁸

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.¹⁶⁹ 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.¹⁷⁰

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:

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=ZYXxPlh7zPo>.

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?¹⁷¹

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.

¹⁷¹ Toukan, *Politics of Art*, 158.