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'.[9] 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.[10]

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.[11]

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.

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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.[12]

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.[13] 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.[14]

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.