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.[276]

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.[277]

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.