5. Images of the Dead Around 4 August 2020

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.[707] 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.

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.[708] 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.[709] 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.[710] 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.[711] 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 Myrttinen, 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.[712] 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 Alkakbar 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.[713]

The SSNP also commemorates their fallen fighters who were killed during the War in Syria.[714] 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.

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. Equally, 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.[715]

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 Tayyouneh 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

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*).[716]

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.[717] 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.[718]

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.lorientlejour.com/article/1346153/kahaleh-buries-fadi-bejjani.html.

of potential sectarian strife[719]—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'.[720] 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,[721] 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-Manara', *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.[722] 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'.[723]

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 as 'thawra'.[724] 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'.[725] 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.[726] 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.[727]

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.[728] 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 Bleed. 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 Mohammad 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.[729] 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,[730] 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.[731]

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.[732] 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.[733] 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'.[734] 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/02032021100139238 (last accessed 14 June 2024; site inactive on 27 October 2024).

734 Daleel Thawra (@daleelthawra2), '3 Years Have Passed', Instagram, 18 October 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cj2tMDTqf6m/.

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.[735] 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'.[736] 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 Zwaihed, 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 Zwaihed, red and black text reads '4 August. The Martyr of the Port of Beirut. Comrade Mazen Zwaihed'. Simultaneously, Zwaihed 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. Zwaihed's party affiliation is not mentioned by Beirut 6.07.[737]

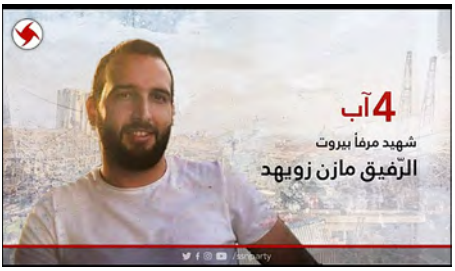

Fig. 5.9: SSNP (@ssnpparty), '4 August. The Martyr of the Port of Beirut. Comrade Mazen Zwaihed', Instagram, 4 August 2021.

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 Zwaihed', *Beirut 6.07*, 2021, https://beirut607.org/victim/mazen-raja-zwaihed/ (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.[738] 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.[739] 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.[740] 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.[741]

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.[742] 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'.[743]

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.[744] In an interview, Ziadé went even further and labelled Fares 'a movie character, a full-fledged heroine straight out of a novel'.[745] 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,[746] 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.: P.O.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*).[747] 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.[748]

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.

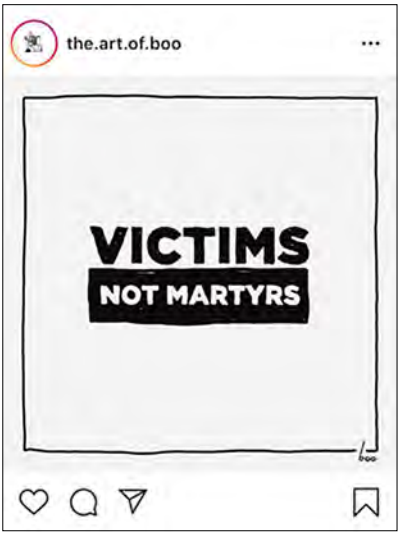

Fig. 5.16: The Art of Boo, *Victims Not Martyrs*, Instagram, 9 August 2020, Courtesy of The Art of Boo.

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.[749] 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. Ihabmmadi999, 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'.[750] 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.[751]

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.[752] 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.[753]

750 the.art.of.boo (@the.art.of.boo), '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.[754] 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.[755] 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 Zwaihed (*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.[756] 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.

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 Solidére'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',[757] 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.[758] 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.[759] 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'.[760] 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.[761] 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',[762] 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'.[763] 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.[764] 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'.[765] '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'.[766] 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'.[767]

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,

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.[768]

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'.[769]

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 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.[770]

Fig. 5.19: Hayat Nazer, *Unnamed Lady*, 2020, Rubble from the Blast, 3 Metres High, Beirut – Port Area, November 2020.

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.[771] Like el Khoury's installations at the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, these two statues 'wistfully call on something better to come'.[772] 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'.[773] 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 applies 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'.[774]

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 Pastiches 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.