

After the Afterword: War Again

Now the full-scale war has materialised in Lebanon. It started with Israel making communication devices of Hezbollah members explode, not only killing or wounding many of the owners of the appliances but also bystanders who were just next to a person with a detonating walkie-talkie or children who played with their father's pager. This attack was the prelude to 23 September, when Israeli bombs killed 558 people — the deadliest day in Lebanon since the *Wars*. Since that date, there have been daily causalities caused by Israeli air raids. My Instagram is full of people being declared as martyrs, and Israeli killings are immediately framed as martyrdoms. These days, the broad concept of martyrdom applies much more than the narrow concept.

Between 8 October 2023 and today, 43,259 humans have been killed in Gaza, 2,897 in Lebanon, and 63 in Israel.⁸²⁹ There is an apparent discrepancy in how Western media remembers the Israelis that were murdered and/or kidnapped on 7 October, or died later, and the killed Palestinians and Lebanese. Images and names of the former are frequently printed, while images and names of the latter are published only exceptionally. We could think of this difference with Judith Butler's categories of 'grievable' and 'ungrievable' deaths. While grievable deaths are losses of lives that matter and are worth protection; ungrievable deaths designate 'something living that is other than life', a threat that can be extinguished.⁸³⁰ Remembered in pictures, the media clearly suggests that Israeli lives are grievable, while Arab lives, by being reduced to numbers, are rendered ungrievable. Butler writes that deaths resulting from state-sponsored violence, such as the Israeli bombs that turn Gaza and Lebanon into rubble and extinguish Palestinian and Lebanese lives in order to defend Israeli lives, are not considered as radically unjust as violence done by 'insurgency groups regarded as illegitimate', such as Hamas.⁸³¹ But a life taken is a life taken. The death of a Palestinian or Lebanese child being killed by Israeli bombs should outrage us as much as the death of an Israeli child killed by Hamas. Why can't lives not be mourned equally, and why are Arab lives considered less precious?

⁸²⁹ AFP and L'Orient Today, 'Strike on Central Israel Wounds 19', *L'Orient Today*, 2 November 2024, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1433936/strike-on-central-israel-wounds-19.html>.

⁸³⁰ Butler, *Frames of War*, 14–15.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

Like in 2006, the South pays the heaviest price in Lebanon. More than one million people had to flee their homes. And although there are shelters for the displaced, there is not enough space for all the refugees. Many people are forced to stay outside, for example on Martyrs Square, around Mazzacurati's statue. The majority of those who had to flee are Shiites, who are not always welcomed with open arms by the other sects. On the one hand, people fear that Israeli bombs could destroy their own livelihoods if they accept people from the South — indeed, Israel has bombed Christian areas that host Shiite refugees, such as the village of Aitou in the North. On the other hand, sectarian strife has never ceased to exist, and distrust of 'the other' remains, as we have seen in Beirut. Displaced people moved into the Hamra Star, a hotel that has been abandoned since more than a decade. A few days later, the owners of the building issued an evacuation order. When security forces attempted to implement this order, clashes between them and the displaced erupted. Such incidents also fuel fears of an open civil war.

When reading the Lebanese news these days, one often comes across places that we have encountered in this book: Bir al-Abed, Khiam, Kfar Kila, Harouf, the Dahiye, Qana, etc. Time seems to be in repeat mode. However, Hezbollah's martyr-production is temporarily on pause. While the group published posters of new martyrs almost daily up until the attack on their communication devices and the outbreak of the full-scale war, no new fighting martyrs have been announced since. Although, due to the absence of inhabitants and journalists, it is not fully clear what exactly is going on in the South right now, we know that Hezbollah is battling Israeli soldiers who have invaded Lebanon's border villages, and we can be sure that Hezbollah fighters die there in combat. Nonetheless, they are not proclaimed as shuhada. This is not only because Hezbollah does not need martyrs as a currency to show off how much sacrifice the party pays for its cause compared to other groups. There is no doubt that Hezbollah is the most involved faction in the current war in Lebanon. Amal, on the other hand, still announces martyrs up to this day, as the party needs to demonstrate that it pays a price as well in this war. However, the main reason why Hezbollah's martyr production is currently on hold is because it is likely that their losses in the last one and a half months have been exceptionally high, and, in particular after the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's myth of being a strong military group has been to some extent deconstructed. Announcing too many losses would expose Hezbollah's vulnerability — to Israel, but also to its displaced clientele. It also would not be good for the morale of the party's fighters and would give credit to Israel. If the paid price is significantly higher than expected, it is not made public. At least not before it turned out that it has been worth it.

Even if someone fulfils all 'requirements' to become a fighting martyr, he will not become a shahid, and his face will not be placed on a poster if the party is not willing to do so. Had one of the Hezbollah fighters who was killed yesterday in the

South been killed three months ago, his image would have entered a martyr poster almost immediately after his death. Currently, this is not the case. But, this is not a new phenomenon, as we have seen that the early martyrs of the War in Syria were not announced as such by Hezbollah right away. Should Hezbollah 'win' the current war (as in 2006, Hezbollah will most likely present everything that is not a permanent Israeli presence in the South as a victory), we will probably see those who were killed lately as martyrs in posters. Yet, at the moment, Hezbollah's shuhada, who died recently, are in a latent state waiting to be revealed. Their current status is that of the empty frames in, Ouzaï, which we have encountered in ...A *Faraway Souvenir* (Fig. 4.25). Today, their martyr posters are in an invisible but present waiting position. We do not know if their images will ever emerge from that position; maybe this will happen in three weeks, maybe in a year, maybe never. However, this is true for ordinary martyrs only; the image of celebrity martyr Nasrallah has not gone into latency. He was proclaimed a shahid immediately after his death was announced on 28 September. And his images appeared instantly in Shia areas.

Nasrallah's person and image fit my conception of being an A-grade celebrity martyr. His killing by Israeli bombs, like those of Bachir and Hariri, elicited para-social grief among his followers; for example, an Al-Mayadeen news anchor had tears in her eyes when announcing his death. And like the other A-grade celebrity martyrs, Nasrallah is on the threshold between life and death. According to his supporters, 'Our leader is still among us with his thought, spirit, and sacred approach'.⁸³² Also, Naim Qassem, the new Hezbollah secretary general, gave a speech addressing Nasrallah in the present tense. Moreover, Qassem was sitting next to an image of Nasrallah, an act that reminds us of pictures of Bachir and Hariri next to their successors, which are used as legitimisation of the new leader.

One of Nasrallah's martyr posters shows a photograph of him smiling and in his usual appearance: a black turban, a white beard, and glasses. Below him we see dazzling Hezbollah-yellow with Nasrallah's handwriting in black on it that reads 'In His Name, the Almighty, We Will Definitely Be Victorious', followed by his signature. Behind Nasrallah, a yellow-white circle of light, possibly symbolising a moon, is visible on a night-blue background. These two elements remind us of a poster of Bachir that shows his face in a circle, which has a yellow-white frame, in the middle of the image that also has a night-blue background. Below Bachir's face, a map of Lebanon is visible, and from above, the rays of a sun fall on him.⁸³³ The almost same colour of the background and a rounded shape, symbolising light that frames the

⁸³² Dany Moudalal, Sally Abou Al Joud, and Ghadir Hamadi, 'I Would Have Preferred That It Was Me and Not Nasrallah: The Immense Grief of Hezbollah Supporters', *L'Orient Today*, 28 September 2024, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1428981/i-would-have-preferred-that-it-was-me-and-not-nasrallah-the-immense-grief-of-hezbollah-supporters.html>.

⁸³³ For Bachir's poster, see Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 62.



Hassan Nasrallah, Poster in the Dahiyeh, Al-Manar, 13 October 2024.



Kataeb (Designer Raidy), '14 September', Poster, 1980s, 47 x 66 cm, KBA 11, signssofconflict.com.

face of the shahid, which is placed in the middle of the image, appear in posters of two celebrity martyrs whose ideologies were not only fundamentally opposed to each other but who also died more than four decades apart. As we have seen throughout the book and again in this example, the anatomy of the martyr posters is comparable among all sects and has not significantly changed since the Wars.

Nasrallah's image in the rubble of the Dahiyeh makes me think of Bachir's image in the rubble of Gemmayzeh after the explosion (Fig. 4.52). Even rubble is on sectarian territory and is claimed as such via images of the dead. Gemmayzeh's rubble belongs to Bachir's Christian followers. The Dahiyeh's rubble belongs to Nasrallah's Shiite followers. While writing these lines, more rubble is created by Israeli bombs, and there is no end to the destruction in sight. Lebanon does not seem to have a future anytime soon. Despite, or maybe because of, its martyrs.