

4. Appropriating and Questioning Images of the Sectarian Martyr in *Nancy*

In this chapter, I explore how *Nancy* questions and appropriates the posters of the martyrs of the *Wars* and in doing so shows us how these images are constructed. In each part I focus on one particular aspect.

First, by referring to theories of semiotics, and linking the posters of the *Wars* to the posters of *Nancy*, I will analyse how the play appropriates the martyrdom-related logos, symbols, and slogans of the parties involved in the *Wars*. Furthermore, I will argue that the play reveals that all groups equally used these elements in their imagery.

The next part sheds light on how the play reflects on the photographic image in the martyr poster. Aided by photo theories of the index and by relating *Nancy* to other artworks, I will show that *Nancy* demonstrates that truth claims in martyr posters should always be questioned. Alongside this, I will show that the play reflects on modes by which an existing photograph is turned into the picture of the martyr and therefore becomes a symbolic currency, the price in humans that a party was willing to pay. I will also discuss images depicting graphic scenes and suggest that many posters of martyrs can be linked to a counter-image that shows the deceased not as a hero, but as a defeated other.

This analysis is followed by a discussion of how *Nancy* reflects on the hierarchical distinctions between the visual memorialisation of martyrs and the oblivion of other deaths. Through an examination of selected posters from the play along with the accompanying text, and in connection with posters of the *Wars*, other artworks, and secondary literature, I will argue that *Nancy* establishes a theoretical discourse on the construction of the martyr and the missing—the people who disappeared during the *Wars*, and who are not considered as martyrs. At the same time, *Nancy* reflects on the differences between ordinary martyrs and celebrity martyrs and reveals that the images of celebrity martyrs are—regarding quantity and time—more present and lasting than those of ordinary martyrs, because each celebrity martyr has the power to evoke strong emotions as he embodies a dream of how Lebanon should be in the future.

Next, through an analysis of selected posters in combination with the text of the play, considerations of underlying images, theories from psychology, and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, I argue that a set of posters from *Nancy* reflects

gender roles performed in martyr posters of the *Wars*. I further claim that findings on hypermasculine commercials can be applied to martyr posters, as they are also circulated to persuade.

I will then focus on depictions of the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower in the posters of *Nancy* and connect these two ruins of the *Wars* to the poster of the martyr. I also discuss the rumours and potential histories that often surround shuhada. Aided by secondary literature and an essay by Walid Sadek, I will argue that the Holiday Inn and Murr Tower, like the posters of the martyrs, render unfinished business past instead of acknowledging the *Wars*' present protraction.

Finally, considering Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology, I discuss the spectral qualities of shuhada. The martyrs in the posters are neither fully dead and invisible nor entirely alive and visible, and they point to both the past, where they died, and the future, where the dream they died for should be realised. However, *Nancy*, in my reading, only partially embodies Derrida's ghosts. This is why I focus in this last part on the artwork *Faces* (2009), by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, which, in my reading, illustrates the spectral qualities of the martyr. By resorting to other theories of present-absent images, I will also clarify that the martyrs do not embody a latent absence and are not images that have withdrawn past a surpassing disaster but can be grasped best when thought with Derrida.

The concluding aim is to make clear that *Nancy* thoroughly investigates the construction of the sectarian martyr and the fabrication of its image, which is used not only for commemoration, but also as a means of visual politics.

4.1 The Sectarian Use of Logos, Symbols, and Slogans

Nancy reveals that the parties that took part in the conflicts equally used martyrdom-related symbols, slogans, and party logos in their posters during the *Wars*. The play therefore demonstrates that the anatomy of the martyr poster, which I envision as a 'body', was very similar among the groups.

My thinking of the poster as a body is inspired by Guffey's understanding of the medium as an anthropomorph, which I mentioned in 2.1. It also links with the work of visual semiotician Sandra Moriarty, who claims that an image consists of codes that must be decoded in order for meaning to be extracted, in a process that is similar to that of a doctor looking for a patient's symptoms before making a diagnosis.²⁷⁸

278 Sandra Moriarty, 'The Symbiotics of Semiotics and Visual Communication', *Journal of Visual Literacy* 22, no. 1 (2002): 20–25.