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WAR FANTASIES: MEMORY, TRAUMA AND ETHICS IN ARI FOLMAN'S WALTZ WITH BASHIR

*This paper explores the relationship between memory, trauma and ethics in the Israeli war film *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008). I argue that *Waltz with Bashir* highlights a traumatic rupture between history and memory, and points to the decline of national collective memory in Israel. In the film, the war is represented as the private memory of a distinct social group—soldiers who fought in the First Lebanon War—and is no longer a collective memory, a lived and practised tradition that conditions Israeli society. The film is constructed as a kind of *lieu de mémoire* that houses repressed traumatic events that have been denied entry into the nation's historical narrative, and which the protagonists feel duty bound to remember. This detachment from the national collective memory draws the film into a timeless world of dreams, hallucinations and fantasies. The film does not aspire to reveal the true details of the war. Rather, it is concerned with memory and the very process of remembering, as well as with the ethical questions that they pose to both the film's protagonists and its viewers. These questions are reflected both in the film's narrative and in its unique aesthetics.*

Reviewing the past

Ari Folman's 2008 Israeli film, *Waltz with Bashir* (*Vals im Bashir*)—which won the 2009 Golden Globe Award and was a nominee for the Academy Award in the category of Best Foreign Language Film—describes the journey taken by the filmmaker, who is also the film's main character, in pursuit of his lost memories of the First Lebanon War (1982). The film is a hallucinatory quest into the depths of director's consciousness as he tries to reconstruct three days the war that have been entirely erased from his memory. Specifically, Folman attempts to locate his repressed traumatic memory of the massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. The film is an animated documentary—an animation based on documentary video footage—comprised of conversations that Folman conducted with friends and journalists who took part in the war, as well as with psychologists who specialize in post-traumatic stress disorder and who tried to help the filmmaker reconstruct those missing days from his distant past.

The First Lebanon War left painful scars on the Israeli national memory and was the longest and most controversial of all Israel's wars. It began in 1982 with what was meant to be a short two- or three-month operation—euphemistically called “Operation Peace for Galilee” (*Mivtza shalom haGalil*)—with the objective of protecting Israel's northern settlements from attack by Hezbollah. It ended three years later, in June 1985.

However, it was only after 18 years that the Israeli government declared a final withdrawal of all IDF forces from Lebanon. When the war began, it enjoyed wide public support, but this diminished as the extent of the battles, their true objective (bringing about a new political order in Lebanon and the Middle East), and the number of casualties came to light. It was a political war that weakened the Israeli right and led to Menachem Begin's resignation as Prime Minister and his departure from the political scene. As the IDF became embroiled ever deeper in the problems of Lebanon's internal politics, public opposition intensified, reaching its peak after the massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. The war would later be known as "a war of choice" and "the other war".¹

This is not the first time that the First Lebanon War has been represented on the Israeli screen. It has featured in a number of films, such as *Ricochets* (*Shtei etzbàot metzidon*, dir. Eli Cohen, 1982), *Fragments* (*Resisim*, dir. Yossi Zomer, 1989), *Cup Final* (*Gemar gavia*, dir. Eran Riklis, 1991), and *The Cherry Season* (*Onat haduvdevanim*, dir. Haim Buzaglo, 1991). Generally, these films were critical of the Zionist national narrative and the Israeli government's belligerent policies, and aspired to offer a "leftist" political portrayal of the war that had exacted a heavy price from both sides of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. However, some of them were ultimately subjugated to a pro-Israel "liberal-humanist" ideological perspective by which these films by-and-large described the Israeli soldier's psychological deliberations and pangs of conscience. This soldier was represented as an "enlightened" occupier who "shoots and weeps"—sensitive to, and identifying with, the Palestinians' suffering, and who feels and sees himself as persecuted.

The film *Ricochets*, for example, purports to demonstrate the Israeli soldier's moral supremacy. On the one hand, it sketches out an optimistic fantasy of the relationship between the Israeli soldier and Lebanon's Shiite refugee population: Effi (Boaz Ofri), one of the soldiers, gives some chocolate to a Shiite woman, who gives him some cherries in return. On the other hand, the film also portrays the political situation as a dead end. In one scene, Georgie (Alon Aboytboul), the army cook, explains the complexities of the situation in Lebanon to Gadi (Roni Finkovitz), the new officer:

The Christians hate the Druze and the Shiites—so do the Sunni and the Palestinians. The Druze hate the Christians, the Shiites and the Syrians . . . The Sunni hate whoever their bosses tell them to hate, and not only do the Palestinians hate everyone else, they hate each other as well . . . And they've all got one thing in common: they all hate—and you've no idea how much—us Israelis.

This comic representation of Lebanon's socio-political dynamics leads to the final conclusion that Israel is the innocent victim of the Arabs' irrational hatred.²

Other films such as *Cup Final* and *The Cherry Season* were more radical in their critique of the First Lebanon War. As the Israeli film scholar Nurith Gertz argues, "just as *Ricochets* portrays the justice of the Israeli cause and *Cup Final* repudiates it, *Cherry Season* portrays Israeli justice as utterly irrelevant and the war as utterly perverse".³ And yet, Israeli cinema of the 1980s and early 1990s represented the embarrassment and helplessness of the Israeli left following its recognition of the existence of the Palestinian other than as the victim of Jewish-Israeli oppression. Rather than telling the Palestinian story, these films tried to ease the liberal conscience of their directors, who belonged to

the Israeli peace camp, as well as that of the audiences who watched their films. Indeed, the failure of the war, and the traumatic events associated with it, were not fully addressed and mourned by Israeli cinema at that time.

The film *Waltz with Bashir*, as well as other recent Israeli documentary and feature films such as *Wasted* (*Mebuzbazim*, dir. Nurit Kedar, 2006), *Beaufort* (*Boufor*, dir. Joseph Cedar, 2007) and *Lebanon* (*Levanon*, dir. Samuel Maoz, 2009) revisit the traumatic recollections of the First Lebanon War. These films mark one of the most interesting phenomena in contemporary Israeli cinema: films that explore repressed traumatic events from the First Lebanon War, events that have been denied entry into the shared national past.⁴

The documentary film *Wasted* presents the war memories of eleven soldiers who had served at the Beaufort outpost six months before the IDF's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000. The soldiers are haunted by the ghosts of the war: they remember the sights and sounds of battle and recall a war in which they did not ever see the enemy. At the centre of *Wasted* stands the trauma of the destroyed male body of the killed or wounded soldier. In one of the scenes, a soldier relates his personal memories of the war:

When I'm treating their wounds, at some point I have to touch the wounds, expose them . . . You're covered in blood, and then you take out your bandage to bandage him up, you try to open it but it's slippery from the blood, and you put it in your mouth to rip it, and you've got the taste of your friend's blood in your mouth.

In between the soldiers' chilling confessions, in which they tell about the shocking images of the pounded and lacerated male body, the filmmaker, Nurit Kedar, inserts clips of potent men wearing khaki pants and tight black tank-tops over their well-toned muscles. These male bodies crash to the floor, twisting and writhing against the background of phosphorescent lighting—similar to military flares—and quiet and threatening music that simulates the hell of the battlefield. The dancers' beautiful, perfect and whole bodies stand in contrast to the horrifying images of the shapeless, pulverized and helplessly wasted body described in the soldiers' testimonies. *Wasted* does not focus on the catastrophic event itself, but rather on the traumatic emotions and experiences as remembered by the soldiers, and on the ways that the interviewees express them. For instance, one of the soldiers recounts, "It's unbelievable that you're there, and that's what you're seeing. Sometimes I see myself going up to my position, I don't remember everything that happened there, but I want to remember". Another soldier explains, "It's like becoming part of a film, really, a film"; or, "Basically what you see there is like stuff from the films . . . war films". Another testifies: "I'm running for my life and I'm unable to run". For the soldiers, the battle is remembered as a nightmare or as a war film. Like a viewer at the cinema, the soldier sees himself trapped in a sequence of horrifying images that unfold before his eyes.

The feature film *Beaufort*, which won the Silver Bear at the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival and was a nominee for the 2008 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, also tells the story of a group of soldiers posted at Beaufort in the months leading up to the withdrawal from Lebanon.⁵ The film portrays the soldiers' daily routine as they are incessantly bombed by the enemy, and where their only task is to try to stay alive in the face of the perpetual horror and fear of the battlefield.⁶ In *Beaufort*, the period of the withdrawal from Lebanon is represented as a traumatic

event for the soldiers, who feel that they have been abandoned by the army and the state, as well as by the Israeli public. These combatants, who were brought up on the heroic myths of sacrifice and death, feel that their national mission has lost its way and its purpose, and that they have been forgotten on foreign soil. They feel like victims of a national and political conflict, with nothing to do but wait for the political echelon to determine their fate, while the enemy kills them almost daily. Their individual traumatic experiences and memories of the war were silenced and cast out of the national historical narrative by the hegemonic Israeli ideology.

The spatial layout of the Beaufort outpost reflects the soldiers' feelings of helplessness, entrapment and isolation. The film distances itself from the historical reality of the war, and thus from the concrete national narrative, by representing the Beaufort outpost not only as an historical site—an actual place—but also, if not primarily, as a site detached from specific time and space, a twilight zone in between reality and myth, past and present, life and death. The outpost is composed of an intricate network of narrow and winding underground corridors. As they make their way through them, the soldiers resemble laboratory mice running through a twisting and claustrophobic maze. The soldiers sleep in beds hanging from the ceiling of a long container that they call the “submarine”—a name that highlights their detachment from the external world. As in a submarine, the soldiers are dependent on technological equipment in order to maintain contact with the outside world. Above ground, the outpost is comprised of a large number of concrete layers that have been added over the years and that appear to bury the soldiers alive. The concrete walls block the cinematic frame that closes in on the soldiers, restricting their movement in space. Much of the time the outpost is cloaked in heavy fog, which impedes the soldiers' visibility and their spatial orientation. It also gives a sense of antirealism to a place that is simultaneously constructed as real and imagined, that exists and does not exist.

The films *Waltz with Bashir*, *Wasted*, *Beaufort* and *Lebanon*⁷ are less concerned with the history of the First Lebanon War, and more with the private and subjective experiences and memories of the soldiers who fought in it. They describe combatants for whom time has stopped, who are haunted by the horrifying images of the battlefield, sometimes even after the war has ended. Their emphasis on the subjective dimension of memories and



FIGURE 1 The claustrophobic space in *Beaufort* (Joseph Cedar, 2007). Courtesy of Joseph Cedar.

experiences of the war distances these films from the war's historical context which, though present, is represented only partially and sometimes hazily, and leads them to an atemporal zone marked by symbols and hallucinations. Drawn away from the continuities of national history, the films enter an ambiguous world of individual allusions, a mysterious world signified by the displacements and repetitions that characterize dreams and fantasies.⁸ These films point both to the need to remember and the difficulty of remembering and representing one of the most traumatic wars in the history of the State of Israel.

The specific form of memory in these films—that is, the distance between memory and history, the subjective and personal nature of memories, and the difficulty of representing and capturing the past—has been analysed, albeit in a different context, in an article by the French historian, Pierre Nora, entitled “Between History and Memory” (*Les Lieux de mémoire*, 1989).⁹ Despite its title, the article is less an analysis of the relationship between “history” and “memory”, and more a melancholic reflection on the loss of the tradition of national historical memory.¹⁰ “Memory is constantly on our lips,” Nora claims, “because it no longer exists.”¹¹ In analysing why memory “no longer exists,” Nora describes a number of stages of loss. He begins with “primitive” or “archaic” societies, whose memories were “real” and through which values were transmitted from one generation to the next. These were societies that connected people with their ancestors and to “the undifferentiated time of heroes, inceptions, and myths”.¹² With the collapse of these societies and the subsequent “acceleration of history”, people were detached from “real” memory and forced to enter the world of history. Here, Nora contrasts history and memory:

Memory is life, always embodied in living societies . . . History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is always a phenomenon of the present . . . History is a representation of the past . . . [it] calls for analysis and critical discourse. Memory situates remembrance in a sacred context . . . Memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image, and object. History dwells exclusively on temporal continuities, on changes in things and in the relations among things. Memory is absolute, while history is always relative.¹³

Despite the basic distinction between them, Nora argues that the traditional idea of the nation enabled proximity between history and memory. He believes that national historical memory—or what he terms “history-memory”—provided a sense of unity and continuity, a dimension of “sacredness”, that had previously characterized the “real” memory of traditional societies. All aspects of the nation, “the political, the military, the biographical, and the diplomatic were all pillars of continuity”.¹⁴ However, with the disintegration of the idea of the nation as a sacred entity, based on shared values and traditions, and the rise of the secular multicultural society, historical memory lost its national role. As a result of the decline of the idea of collective national identity, history lost its mission, its pedagogical purpose and its sacredness. History was no longer the essential link between the past, the present and the future; it ceased to be imbued with the “collective consciousness”. It no longer served the nation: “history became a social science; and memory became a purely private phenomenon”.¹⁵

Private memories replaced collective national memory. These memories express the experiences and ensure the continuity not of the nation but rather of various

social groups. These groups—which are united through common historical experience, or by religious or ethnic affiliation—are dependent on private memories for their communal identity and solidarity. When memory departs from the realm of the nation, Nora argues that it undergoes a shift “from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual . . . As a result of this psychologization, the self now stands in a new relation to memory and the past”.¹⁶ While the historical memory of the nation offered a spontaneous connection with the past, today people depend on private memories in order to make sense of their identity, and thus experience memory as a duty. This duty to remember drives people to create archives, “places of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*) aimed at preserving each and every trace or fragment of the past. Paradoxically, however, these places—from museums and monuments to symbolic ceremonies and festivities—distance us from the past. Places of memory stop time, thus creating a discontinuity that separates us from what came before. “Places of memory,” writes Nora, “have no referents in reality; or, rather, they are their own referents—pure signs. This is not to say that they are without content, physical presence, or history—on the contrary. But what makes them *lieux de mémoire* is precisely that which allows them to escape from history”.¹⁷

Nora’s description of modern memory is largely applicable to the structure of memory in *Waltz with Bashir*. I would like to argue that *Waltz with Bashir* highlights and exposes a traumatic rupture between history (or historical national memory) and memory, and points to the decline of national collective memory in Israel. In the film, the war is represented as the private memory of a distinct social group—soldiers who fought in the First Lebanon War—and is no longer a collective memory, a lived and practised tradition that conditions Israeli society. The director, Ari Folman, constructs the film as a kind of *lieu de mémoire* that preserves repressed traumatic events that have been denied entry into the nation’s historical narrative, and which he and the other soldiers feel duty bound to remember. This detachment from the national collective memory draws the film into a world signified by the constant blurring of historical context, as well as by private and subjective images, a timeless world of dreams, hallucinations and fantasies. The film does not aspire to reveal the true details of the war. Rather it is concerned with memory and the very process of remembering, as well as with the ethical questions that they pose to both the film’s protagonists and its viewers. These questions are reflected both in the film’s narrative and in its unique aesthetics.

Disremembered memories

Waltz with Bashir is an animated autobiographical film created in the style of a documentary. Its narrator is Ari Folman, who goes back 26 years to his forgotten traumatic memories from the period of the First Lebanon War. In particular, Folman tries to reconstruct three days that have been repressed from his memory, during which he witnessed the massacre of Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Shatila. Similar to other traumatic events experienced by soldiers during the fighting in Lebanon, this catastrophic event has been excluded from the national collective memory, and Folman feels a personal duty to try to remember the muted past. He sets out on a journey in search of this lost time in which he carries out a series of interviews and conversations with friends and

acquaintances who had taken part in the war, and some of whom he has not seen for decades. Fragments of Folman's repressed past resurface during these conversations, as well as other traumatic memories of events experienced by the soldiers during the war: a commander's death, the loss of one's brothers-in-arms, evacuating the wounded and the dead, being abandoned on the battlefield, hiding from unseen snipers, fighting against children, and the murder of civilians.

According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is an unrepresentable experience. Trauma, she writes, is "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event".¹⁸ One of the central features of trauma is its belatedness: the trauma victim cannot grasp or represent the traumatic event at the time of its occurrence, and so the traumatic experience continues to haunt the victim over and over. In other words, there is a repetition of the traumatic event, which can only be represented, understood or known a moment too late. Trauma is thus a crisis of knowledge and representation.¹⁹ The traumatic event is not repressed, but returns in a deferred action to consciousness. The Freudian concept of "deferred action" (*Nachträglichkeit*) refers to a figure, an experience or a secondary scene that comes too late, that reenacts the scene that has already taken place, thereby constructing it as a scene that is emotionally important or meaningful. In other words, trauma is established through a relationship between two events: a first event, which at the time does not seem to be traumatic, because when it occurs it is still too soon to comprehend its full significance; and a second event that may not be inherently traumatic in itself but that triggers a memory of the earlier event, which is only then filled with traumatic significance.

The film opens with a nightmare dreamt by Boaz Rein—one of the interviewees in the film who had fought alongside Folman during the war: in his nightmare, Boaz sees a pack of menacing and slaving dogs dashing down Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard on a stormy night. The dogs stop at the building in which Boaz lives and bark loudly. Boaz stands at the window and watches them. When they meet at a pub in the Tel Aviv port



FIGURE 2 Ari Folman remembers the nightmares of the First Lebanon War in *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008). Courtesy of Transfax Productions.

on a rainy evening, Boaz tells Folman about his nightmare, which has been interrupting his sleep every night for the past two years. Boaz links his nightmare to a traumatic memory from the days of the First Lebanon War: Boaz, who found himself unable to kill people, was forced by his commander to shoot 26 dogs so that they would not give away the presence of IDF forces in the area prior to battle. The event of massacring the dogs returns, unwittingly, to Boaz's consciousness and is only signified as a traumatic memory in a different temporal and spatial context. The nightmare of the dogs reenacts his memory of the war, which now, in a deferred action, assumes a traumatic meaning. Boaz wanted to forget, not to know, not to remember the catastrophic experience of the murder at the time it took place, and so the threatening event continues to haunt him and to return in his dreams.

Boaz's traumatic past also reactivates Folman's only remaining memory from the Lebanon War, that now, in a deferred action, is understood and acknowledged as a traumatic memory. Folman's memory is part real, part fantasy: along with two other soldiers, only one of whom he recognizes, Folman is swimming naked in the sea off a Beirut beach. The soldiers leave the water, put on their uniforms, and gaze at the flares that color the Beirut sky a pale shade of yellow. The memories of the other soldiers in the film are also interwoven with dreams and hallucinations, for instance, the erotic fantasy of a seasick soldier, who has a hallucination of an enormous naked woman emerging from the water and carrying him in her arms; or a fantastic scene of a soldier "dancing" a waltz with his submachine gun in the streets of Beirut as bullets whistle past, against the background of a huge picture of the murdered Christian Lebanese leader, Bashir Gemayel.

The soldiers' recollections do not necessarily consist of linear relations of cause and effect between the traumatic event and its representation in memory, between the referent in reality and the sign that represents it. Instead, fantasy and the unconscious play a crucial role in the formation of the traumatic historical past.²⁰ Janet Walker coined the term "disremembering", which describes the connection between reality and fantasy in cinematic representations of traumatic memory:

The process described by psychological literature as that of conjuring mental images and sounds related to past events but altered in certain respects shall be termed "disremembering". Disremembering is not the same as not remembering. It is remembering with a difference . . . Disremembering can become urgent when events are personally unfathomable or socially unacceptable. Disremembering . . . is a survival strategy par excellence.²¹

The soldiers' traumatic memories in *Waltz with Bashir* are "disremembered" memories; they are fragmented memories, constructed through forgetting and marked with traces of fantasy. Disremembering enables the soldiers to talk about and represent events that are too threatening to be experienced directly. Such memories indicate the very unrepresentability of the events that the soldiers are trying to recall. Moreover, these memories of disremembering also testify to the very struggle of the film to reenact the silenced traumatic events of the First Lebanon War—events that have not been included in the Israeli national memory. In this sense, the film exposes a deep rupture, or traumatic discontinuity, between the past and the present—between history and memory—and points to the decline of historical memory in Israel.

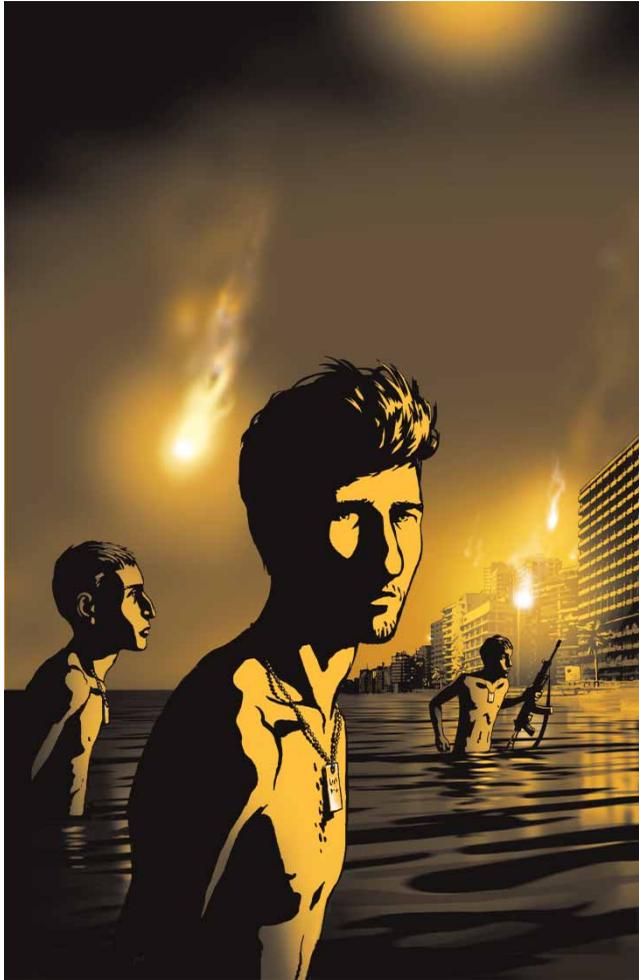


FIGURE 3 Disremembered memories: swimming naked in the sea off a Beirut beach in *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008). Courtesy of Transfax Productions.

Trauma, ethics and aesthetics

Folman knows that his hallucinatory memory is related to the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, but cannot remember details of the event, including where he was when it took place. Through animation he embarks on a quest for his lost memory, in an attempt to decipher the events of that night. On the night of 16 October 1982, several tens of Christian militiamen, seeking to avenge the murder of their leader Bashir Gemayel, entered the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in the heart of Beirut and massacred 3250 Palestinians, most of them women and children. The Israeli army was encircling the camps at the time. The flares Folman saw in his memory had been fired by IDF forces, and they lit up the camps while the massacre was taking place. Folman, only 19 years old at the time, was one of the soldiers who launched the flares into the air from a tall building. The following day, he was one of

the first to see the atrocities that had taken place only a few hundred yards away from where he had been. Folman repressed this memory.

In the film, he visits his psychologist friend, Ori Sivan, in the hope that he can help him solve the riddle of the lost memory. According to Sivan, Folman repressed the memory of the massacre because he identified himself with the murderers. In his imagination, Folman, the son of Auschwitz survivors, has become the victimizer, which explains his terrible guilt. Unlike him, argues the film, the military and political leaderships—and especially the then Minister of Defence, Ariel Sharon—knew about the massacre, but felt no guilt or responsibility for it. In one of the scenes, journalist Ron Ben-Ishai tells Folman that he called Sharon in the middle of the night to tell him what was happening in the refugee camps. Sharon thanked him and went back to sleep. After clarifying the details about the night of the massacre, Folman understands that he did not take an active part in the massacre, yet in the film he nonetheless poses the question of his ethical responsibility and, to an extent, that of the viewers as well, for the repressed catastrophe. The ethical responsibility that he wishes to examine is that of the very repression of memory: what is the meaning of not wanting to remember? What is the meaning of not wanting to see? What is the meaning of not seeing in time?

Following Jacques Lacan's analysis of a dream that appears in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Caruth discusses the relationship between trauma and ethical responsibility.²² The dream is about a father whose son fell ill and died. The son's corpse catches fire from an accidentally overturned candle. After the son's death, unconscious of this burning in the next room, the father dreams that his son is holding onto his arm and pleading with him: "Father, can't you see that I'm burning?" The father wakes from his dream and discovers that his son's body is on fire. According to Freud, the child's appearance in the dream represents the father's wish to see his son alive once again. This wish is related to the desire of the father's consciousness itself to sleep, not to wake up to his son's burning body in reality.

For Jacques Lacan, in contrast, the dream itself, the son's supplication to look upon his terror, is a protest against the unwillingness of the father's consciousness to see catastrophic reality. The dream forces the father to awaken to repetitive death in reality. In this sense, argues Caruth, Lacan points to awakening as a site of trauma. At the same time, however, it also represents the inability to respond in time to the other's death, which has already occurred in reality. Therefore, according to Lacan, this traumatic awakening, the necessity to respond and the simultaneous failure to respond in time, carries an ethical responsibility. The immediate responsibility, the ethical affinity to tangible reality, is to talk about the trauma that we could not see in time.

The 26 dead dogs who return to haunt Boaz 26 years after the war not only seek to avenge their murder; they also command him to take ethical responsibility for the terror that he inflicted upon them. The raging dogs demand that Boaz wake up from his dream to reality and talk of the trauma that he repressed and did not see in time. Boaz's trauma, and that of Folman himself in the context of the massacre of the Palestinian refugees, is that they repressed the trauma of the Other and saw it too late. Boaz and Folman are attempting to emerge from their blindness and accept moral responsibility in reality. The moral responsibility required of the protagonists is to speak about the meaning of their blindness to the massacre. The traumatic events in the film (the murder of the dogs and the Sabra and Shatila massacre) are not referential events—that is, they do not directly refer to reality. They allude to the protagonists' psychic reality, to

their memories, their dreams and their hallucinations. The demand that they wake up from their dreams to take ethical responsibility for the trauma of the Palestinian Other comes from the protagonists' own dreams; and so their very own subjectivity is connected with, and founded on, the loss of that Other.

The repression of the traumatic event and the question of ethical responsibility for it are also reflected in the aesthetics of the film. Similar to fantasy, because it is an iconic sign—that is, a sign that maintains a relationship of similarity with reality—animation enables the film to represent the traumatic events of the past, which are too awful and shocking to be represented directly. Folman creates a distance for himself and for the viewer that makes the traumas of the war and the massacre accessible. In other words, because of the protagonist-director's post-trauma, as well as that of at least some of the viewers who have also repressed memories of the massacre, directly approaching the trauma through traditional photographic documentary footage would have been too shocking and threatening. The iconic animation, which resembles reality but is not reality itself, enables a representation that is related, and even similar, to the catastrophic event, but is not the actual event.²³ In a media interview prior to the film's release, Folman said: "In order to get back to being who I am, to understand myself . . . I had to be drawn, and thus find myself again, to understand who I am."²⁴ In one of the scenes in the film, Folman visits Carmi Canaan, a friend of his from the period of the war who now lives in Holland. He is one of the two other soldiers who appear in Folman's hallucination. Carmi does not remember their swimming naked together, just as he remembers nothing at all about the massacre: "The massacre isn't in my system," he says, quoting Folman, who had made a similar comment earlier. Folman asks if he can draw Carmi, who says: "As long as you only draw me and don't photograph, it's OK".

The film sees the photographic image, in contrast to animation, as overly threatening and as dangerously close to the reality that Carmi is struggling, or refusing, to remember. Only at the end of the film, after Folman's deferred acknowledgment of his memory of the massacre, does an archival photographic documentary sequence



FIGURE 4 "As long as you only draw me and don't photograph, it's OK": Carmi Canaan (right) and Ari Folman (left) in *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008). Courtesy of Transfax Productions.

of events at Sabra and Shatila appear on the screen. This footage exposes us to shocking images of the slaughtered bodies of Palestinian men, women and children. The documentary footage represents Folman's repressed memory. In contrast to the iconic animation, the photographic archival sequence is an indexical sign—that is, a sign that results from a causal relation with the object in reality. The index is a sign caused by reality, an effect of reality: the photographed image is the effect of the process whereby light is reflected off an object in reality and chemically inscribed on film.²⁵ Film scholar Laura Mulvey has noted that both photography and trauma share the characteristics of the indexical sign: "Trauma leaves a mark on the unconscious, a kind of index of the psyche that parallels the photograph's trace on an original event".²⁶ In trauma, memory is forgotten, stored away in the unconscious and given meaning only through deferred action. Cinema (like photography) preserves the moment at which the image was registered; it inscribes reality into a representation of the past that is only revealed to us later. In other words, the sign of trauma and the sign of light both need to be deciphered retrospectively across delayed time.

The documentary sequence in *Waltz with Bashir* contains traces of the catastrophic reality and preserves it. It houses the ghosts of the repressed traumatic past, which is now made present and exposed again in a deferred manner during the screening. This sequence, in which the present is haunted by the past, haunts the viewers; it forces us to emerge from the film's animated reality, from the dream, into the memory of death that returns to us through the archival footage, showing us what we did not want to see and what we had hoped to forget. The sequence demands that we accept ethical responsibility for the terror that we did not see in time; it commands us to carry the memory of the slaughtered body of the Other into reality itself, to talk about the forgetting of the catastrophe and our inability to cope with it, to talk about the meaning of our blindness to the traumatic story of the massacre at Sabra and Shatila.

The identity of the victim

However, one can also critique Folman's ethical discussion in the film. *Waltz with Bashir* does not deal with the trauma of the Palestinian victim but, rather, with that of the Israeli bystander. The French Historian Dominic LaCapra argues that we must distinguish between the victim of historical trauma as an ethical-political category and the category of psychological trauma, which can afflict both the bystander and the perpetrator. He writes:

[T]he distinction between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders is crucial. "Victim" is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political and ethical category. Victims of certain events will in all likelihood be traumatized by them, and not being traumatized would itself call for explanation. But not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma which must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices. Such trauma does not, however, entail the equation or identification of the perpetrator and the victim.²⁷

Unlike this important distinction between perpetrator and victim, *Waltz with Bashir* equates the victimizer and the victim by linking the massacre at Sabra and Shatila to the Jewish trauma of the Holocaust. According to the film, Folman was an innocent youth, the son of Holocaust survivors, who was suddenly a witness to the horrifying sights of the massacre. The intergenerational trauma of the Holocaust prevented him from working through the trauma of the massacre. As his friend, Ori Sivan, tells him,

Your interest in what happened in those camps is actually your interest in what happened in those other camps. You are interested in the massacre at Sabra and Shatila not because of your responsibility for it, because you witnessed it, but because it reminds you of another massacre, where you were the victim.

In other words, the only way Folman can show any interest in the Palestinian victim is by creating a linkage with the Jewish victim. Folman's position as a victim does not allow for the possibility that Israeli Jews are themselves responsible for creating non-Jewish victims. "You were cast in the role of the Nazi against your will," adds Sivan. "It's not like you weren't there. You were there. You launched flares. But you didn't carry out the massacre". Folman's character in the film is constructed as an "innocent victim" of history who, "against his will", became a bystander at traumatic events. The film thus ignores the circumstances that brought the IDF into Lebanon; they are seen as "natural", as "taken for granted", or even as "fate". The notion that Folman only "launched flares"—that is, that he was a passive witness-observer and not an active witness-participant—absolves him, in this sense, of responsibility and guilt for the Palestinian trauma.

References to memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War appear in other scenes as well. In conversation with Folman, the journalist Ron Ben-Ishai relates that the terrible sights he saw at Sabra and Shatila reminded him of the Warsaw Ghetto. The film asks us to identify with the victims of Sabra and Shatila by appropriating the Palestinian trauma to the catastrophe of the Jews. In another scene, Folman talks about his Holocaust survivor father's memories of the Second World War. His father told him about some Russian soldiers who were given a short furlough from the front, but they only had enough time to embrace their lovers who were waiting for them at the railway station before returning to the train and the war. The father told this story to put his son's mind at rest after he had been given 24 hours' leave from Lebanon. The film draws a parallel between father and son, and between the First Lebanon War and the Second World War. Hence, the son is identified with the victim through his identification with his father, and through its association with the Second World War the First Lebanon War becomes a defensive and "just" war rather than a controversial "war of choice". These reversals between perpetrator and victim, and between traumatic events that took place in different historical contexts, enable Folman to absolve himself of responsibility or guilt for the creation of the Palestinian victim.²⁸

Waltz with Bashir returns to the traumatic space of the First Lebanon War to position the protagonist as a victim and redeem him from his tribulations. The horrifying archival images of slaughtered Palestinian men, women and children at the end of the film are then detached from their historical and political context and provide a kind of catharsis for the protagonist: now he remembers and is released from the trauma that had been haunting him; now he is cured and redeemed from the wounds of the past and can

apparently carry on with his life. Folman is acting out the trauma of the Jewish victim and seeks redemption that will release him from moral responsibility for the traumatic events of the massacre.

Notes

1. On Israel's First Lebanon War, see, for example, Rosen, *Milhemet Levanon*; Rosenthal, *Mishpachat ha'boufor*; Ruzental, *Levanon*; Schiff and Yaari, *Israel's Lebanon War*. On the Israeli media coverage of the first Lebanon war see Gertz, *Myths*.
2. On the representation of the First Lebanon War in Israeli cinema in the 1980s and early 1990s, see also Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 256–60; Loshitzky, *Identity Politics*, 148, 164.
3. Gertz, "The Medium that Mistook Itself for War", 53.
4. The First Lebanon War has also appeared in contemporary Israeli films that do not directly deal with the war, such as the adolescent films, *Summer Story* (*Sipor kayitz*, dir. Shmuel Haimovich, 2003) and *Lost Islands* (*Iyim avudim*, dir. Reshef Levy, 2008).
5. For a full analysis of this film, see Yosef, "Traces of War".
6. Both *Wasted* and *Beaufort* are based on a best-selling novel by Ron Leshem, *Im yesh ganeden* (If There is a Heaven, 2005), which is itself based on the memories of soldiers who served at Beaufort in 1999–2000.
7. The film *Lebanon* (*Levanon*), which won the 2009 Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival, is based on the memories from the First Lebanon War of the scriptwriter-director, Samuel Maoz. *Lebanon* portrays a single day in the lives of an Israeli tank team. The soldiers are trapped in a Lebanese village, surrounded by Syrian commandos. The film documents the distress and anxiety of four soldiers: Asi (Itay Tiran), the tank commander, who loses control during the battle and succumbs to shell shock; Shmulik (Yoav Donat), representing the filmmaker, the inexperienced artilleryman, who has difficulty firing on innocent women and children; Herzl (Oshri Cohen), the signal operator-loader, who is more experienced than the others and who takes control of the tank; and Yigal (Michael Moshonov), who wants to go home to his mother. Every now and then they are joined by other characters: Jamil (Zohar Shtrauss), the tough infantry commander; a Syrian captive (Dudu Tassa); and a Christian Lebanese Phalangist fighter (Ashraf Barhom), who is supposed to lead the tank to safety. Similarly to *Beaufort*, the Israeli soldiers are imagined in *Lebanon* as lost children, helpless victims trapped in a tank in hostile surroundings. Most of the film takes place inside the tank. The soldiers observe the horrors of the battle outside through the tank's gun sights. Trapped with them in that iron machine, the viewers experience a physical sensation of suffocation and claustrophobia.
8. Dorit Naaman also points to the ways recent post-Oslo Israeli cinema has distanced itself from reality and from realism as a style. Naaman argues that this distance ignores the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and avoids charting a clear notion of borders (Naaman, "Elusive Frontiers").
9. This is the introductory article to a multivolume collaborative project directed by Nora on the national memory of France.
10. For critiques of Nora's romantic nostalgia for national collective memory, see, for example, Greene, *Landscapes of Loss*, 130–58; Huyseen, *Present Pasts*, 96–7.
11. Nora, 1.
12. *Ibid.*, 2.

13. *Ibid.*, 3.
14. *Ibid.*, 5.
15. *Ibid.*, 6.
16. *Ibid.*, 1.
17. *Ibid.*, 19.
18. Caruth, *Trauma*.
19. On trauma as a crisis of representation, see Felman and Dori, *Testimony*; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.
20. On the role of fantasy in the construction of traumatic memories in cinema, see Radstone, "Screening Trauma"; Elsaesser, "Postmodernism"; Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*.
21. Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 17, 19.
22. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 91–112.
23. According to Charles Sanders Peirce, iconic sign is a mode in which the signifier is perceived as *resembling* or imitating the signified, being similar in possessing some of its qualities like a portrait or a cartoon. In contrast, in the indexical sign the signifier is *directly connected* in some way (physically or causally) to the signified. See Hartshome and Weiss, *Collected Papers*; Hoopes, *Peirce on Signs*.
24. Cited in Shargal, *Vals im Bashir: Hadevarim mehem asuyim hahayim* (Waltz with Bashir: the things life is made of).
25. The sensitivity of film to light makes it the bearer of the trace—that Peirce referred to as the indexical sign (the footprint, the weathervane), differing from other types of sign in that it is physically *caused* by its object.
26. Mulvey, *Death 24X a Second*, 65.
27. LaCapra, *Writing History*, 79.
28. For a similar critique of Waltz with Bashir see, for instance, Duvdevani, *Yorim umetzayrim*; Schnitzer, *Vals im Bashir*; Raya Morag, *Hagibor niteka bagiluyo*.

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