'Looking the Beast in the Eye': Screening Trauma in *Waltz With Bashir* and *Lebanon*

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> Having looked the beast of the past in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and made amends, let us shut the door on the past – not in order to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us.
> - Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report*.[i]

[Figure 1: Image from W*altz With Bashir*, dir. Ari Folman (London: Artificial Eye, 2008).]

It is the kind of place that we have all visited in our dreams: somewhere that at first seems

drearily familiar, a nocturnal cityscape perhaps, streets littered and rain-sodden. Until you see

the sky. Not black but a lurid yellow: a sickly light, the colour of phosphorous, an unnatural

illumination of the darkness. Then, as you knew they would, they come, all twenty-six of

them, snarling and slathering, sleek black coats gleaming in the rain, eyes bright as flares. All

night, they circle beneath your window, howl at you through your restless sleep, and though in the morning they will be gone, as dreams always are, you know that they will return – for this is what it is to be hunted by this particular kind of beast.

The beast that hunts the dreamer through the streets of Tel Aviv in these opening moments of the Israeli animated feature film *Waltz With Bashir* (2008, directed by Ari Folman) is a familiar animal in the landscape of the postcolonial imagination. It is what Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in his 'Foreword' to the *South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report*, termed the 'beast of the past': a traumatic legacy of suffering, both endured and inflicted upon others, that continues to hunt and to haunt the political present. While, for Tutu, the 'beast' of South Africa's past must be 'looked in the eye' in the service of 'forgiveness', 'making amends', 'truth' and 'reconciliation', however, the 'beast' that hunts Folman in *Waltz With Bashir* is an altogether different species. This past does not yield truth or moral certainty quite so easily; it is instead 'history' as Joyce's 'nightmare from which I am trying to awake':[ii] a damaged archive of partial memory, representational traces and uncertain meanings that surface through the realms of the unconscious mind, in which the dreamer is, in their own way, 'imprisoned'. As we see from the self-conscious stylisation of this opening scene to his film, then, Folman does not so much seek to look the traumatic political past in the eye as to screen the complexities of its representation – and in doing so, he invites us to reflect upon the broader ethical issues that accompany the Israeli subject's confrontation of their, and their nation's past. Turning to two recent Israeli films that dramatize the experiences of Israeli soldiers in the First Lebanon War of 1982, Folman's *Waltz With Bashir* and Samuel Maoz's 2009 film, *Lebanon*, it becomes possible to explore the ways in which the cinematic mediation of these soldiers' experiences through a discourse of trauma leads to an ambivalent 'screening' of the past in which the drive towards representation seems, also, to entail an aversion of the gaze from the 'beastly' moral and ethical complexities that surround this traumatic history.

What, then, is the past that these films purport to screen? Both *Waltz With Bashir* and *Lebanon* form part of a broader phenomenon which has emerged in Israeli cinema since 2007 whereby a number of directors have been granted funding by the Israeli Film Foundation to explore Israel's political relationship with Lebanon, and indeed have gone on to produce prize-winning films on the topic.[iii] Folman and Maoz belong to what has been termed the 'Lebanon generation': Israeli men, now in their 40s and 50s, who fought during the first Lebanese war, and both films draw on their directors' own memories of the roles they personally played in the invasion of 1982. During this period, Maoz served as the gunner of a tank crew in the first days of Israel's invasion of Southern Lebanon as tanks worked their way up towards Beirut, while Folman was a footsoldier also dispatched in 1982 who later found himself in Beirut at the time of Bachir Gemayal's assassination, and became one of the soldiers ordered to fire flares into the night sky in order to illuminate the way for the Christian Phalangist forces to commit their massacre of Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila. The latter of these events was the subject of investigation by the Kahan Commission, established by the Israeli government in 1982 to investigate Israeli complicity in the massacres. It concluded that Israel bore indirect responsibility for the massacre, while then-Defence Minister Ariel Sharon held personal responsibility for failing to prevent the inevitable bloodshed that would result in approving and facilitating the Phalangists' entry into the camps.[iv] Despite this apparently strident political confrontation of its military past, however, Israel would go on to elect Sharon as its Prime Minister in 2001 following an election campaign that directly inflamed renewed confrontation with the Palestinian population;[v] and in 2006, renewed attacks on Gaza and the Second Lebanon War would resurface as uncanny echoes of its past engagement with beleaguered Palestinian communities. Given the Israeli public's apparent amnesia surrounding the events of 1982, and the spectacularly repetitious nature of this history in the political present, how did Folman and Maoz find themselves able, indeed encouraged to construct cinematic screenings

of this past? The answer lies in their visualisation of this history through a familiar discourse in the Israeli psyche: that of *trauma*.

'Trauma', according to the theorist Cathy Caruth, 'describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena'.[vi] The 'sudden, or catastrophic events' that engender trauma may include physical or mental harm done to an individual, the witnessing of harm done to others, or even complicity in the infliction of that harm, and the question of whether a distinction should be made between the traumas of those who witness or suffer harm and those who exact it upon others remains contentious.[vii] Though trauma is now recognised and thoroughly integrated into medicalized discourse, where it tends to be treated (quite literally) as a primarily personal experience, its origins also lie in Freudian psychoanalysis, where Freud posited the possibility that psychic phenomenon might repetitively surface within a collective cultural or historical consciousness, as well as within the mind of the individual. According to Caruth's famous reading of Freud's essay *Moses and Monotheism*, for example, the repeated persecution of the Jewish people can be linked to an initial source of trauma: the murder of Moses, interpreted as a form of Oedipal crisis, the political and psychological consequences of which continue to resurface in repeated anti-Semitic episodes throughout history.[viii] Thus, for Freud, the very history of the Jews resembles the 'structure of a trauma'; a deep collective wounding that marks the cultural unconscious.[ix] Psychoanalytic theories of trauma have in fact proved deeply influential to the development of a cultural 'trauma theory' over the past several decades, particularly among theorists within the so-called Yale School such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub,[x] for whom the legacy of Freud retains a central presence, not least in the centrality that it affords Jewish persecution, specifically the Holocaust, as the pinnacle of 'unspeakable' personal and historical trauma. Both medicalized and cultural strands of trauma theory have been thoroughly absorbed into Israeli cultural

consciousness. According to a group of researchers at Ben-Gurion University, 'since the war

in Lebanon, Israel's military system has become more aware of the emotional responses that

might develop as a result of exposure to trauma', and has gone to extensive efforts to put

support structures in place.[xi] The Holocaust, meanwhile, retains a central position in Israeli

cultural consciousness, and trauma theory a prevalent paradigm in its discussion.[xii]

While these discourses of trauma have come to assume something of a

'transgenerational, psychohistorical, timeless' status within the medical and scholarly

academies, some critics have begun to question the apparently apolitical, ahistorical nature of

such discourses.[xiii] Jenny Edkins, for example, suggests that the 'medicalization of [trauma]

survivors' may operate as a powerful silencing of their 'political voice', 'accomodat[ing]

them once more to the social order',[xiv] while Michael Lambek and Paul Antze also argue that

'therapy…[displaces] historical trauma…by individual drama […] The political gains

conferred by a victim identity…are accessible only through expert discourses…which have

their own agendas and are themselves instruments of power'.[xv] More recently, critics reading

from a postcolonial perspective have also been keen to assert the latent politics (or political

erasures) of a trauma theory that remains always tied to the context of the Holocaust, and thus

to the position of the victim. As Susannah Radstone notes, 'the possibility of an identification

with aggression is markedly absent from [the work of]… Caruth, Felman and Laub'; instead,

according to the mimetic theory of trauma prevalent in their work, 'traumatised subjects are

neither fully in control of nor in charge of themselves':[xvi] they are a 'sovereign if passive

victim'[xvii] of their own past. These critical engagements with trauma raise many questions for

Folman's and Maoz's films. What kind of visual confrontation with history is obtainable

through a discourse of trauma? To what extent is the 'political voice' silenced for the

'sovereign if passive victim' in these films, and who might that victim be? Indeed, to what

extent does politicised, collective history crumble beneath the weight afforded personal

experience in these films? Turning now to more detailed scrutiny of the visual strategies and

representational politics at stake firstly in *Lebanon* and secondly in *Waltz With Bashir*, particularly as they relate to issues of 'witnessing' and 'remembering', some answers to these questions begin to come into focus.

The representational politics of Samuel Maoz's *Lebanon* is heavily mediated through a concept that lies at the heart of trauma theory: that of 'witnessing'. While, for Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, trauma is 'an event without a witness',[xviii] something that cannot be assimilated or fully known, it is also through the presence of a witness that the acts of testimony and remembering become possible: 'the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another'.[xix] In *Lebanon*, the director-as-traumatised subject appears to recognise this complex politics of witnessing, by at once acknowledging the impossibility of bearing witness to the original source of trauma, while engaging in a constant, if flawed and partial, drive towards its representation. In an interesting act of directorial distancing from the literal reconstruction of past trauma, Maoz recasts himself as Schmulik, a sensitive young twenty-year-old who has never shot a gun.[xx] While Maoz's directorial strategy serves in part to negate the expectations of 'truth' or 'realism' that tend to accompany autobiography, his filmic gaze also bears an intimate identification with Schmulik's perspective. Set entirely inside the tank in which Schmulik and his crew make their destructive passage up through the South of Lebanon, the film encourages its own witness, the viewer, to sees the world from the same limited perspective as Schmulik does: through the cross-hairs and cracked glass of his telescopic gun sight. This inherently militarized gaze leads to an interesting politics of witnessing in the film.

In her work *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins draws on the work of the Holocaust theorist Agamben, and notes that there are two kinds of witness: the first, a witness in a court of law, 'a third party who can produce neutral facts for a trial'; the second, 'the survivor, someone who has lived through something and can therefore bear witness to it'.[xxi] In both *Lebanon* and *Waltz With Bashir*, though, there is a third kind of witness:

someone who is both a 'third party' and a 'survivor', but who is also complicit in the violence to which they must testify. This is a much more difficult position to occupy, but it is one that *Lebanon* appears willing, at some level, to confront. We see this in the way that Maoz's film represents and hence bears witness to some of the controversial injustices committed by the Israeli army, which includes the use of illegal phosphorous, referred to evasively as 'flaming armoury' as a way of flouting international law; and he also acknowledges and indeed represents the killing of civilians, including women and children, as the tank progresses through villages that have been 'cleared' of PLO resistance fighters en route to Beirut. There is a sense in which Maoz remains unafraid to look his traumatic memories of inflicted suffering in the eye; indeed, in one scene, Schmulik meets the gaze of one of his victims: a Lebanese woman whose family he has just killed after firing a mortar on their house. We see her wandering through the rubble, asking, in shock and disbelief, where her daughter is, only for her dress to catch fire; an Israeli soldier rips it from her, leaving her literally stripped of all that she has; her home, her family, her dignity. At this moment, she pauses and stares into the barrel of the gun. Schmulik's gaze meets hers and there is an instant of recognition; he is visibly moved. Yet this gaze is of course one-directional: she cannot in fact meet his eye, hidden as he is within the protective armour of the tank. Reduced to the visual status of the victim and subaltern 'other', this woman is rendered unable to participate within the structures of testimony and remembering that might give voice to her own trauma. Instead, she comes to occupy the 'the status of a (suspended) origin in the production of a representation'[xxii] of trauma: a trauma that no longer belongs to her, but is claimed by Schmulik as his own.

Thus the film's focus on the interior of the tank becomes not so much a symbol of the shielded, blinkered gaze of the Israeli War Machine as a metaphor for the interior life and mind of the Israeli soldier. For Freud, trauma 'figures the consciousness as besieged and disrupted by alien, external forces',[xxiii] and in *Lebanon*, there is a mirroring process that takes

place between the infliction of wounds on those alien, besieging others through external military conflict, and the wounding of one's own psyche, resulting in psychological trauma. This trauma is visualised within the space of the tank itself, where black oil and silvery water drip from the walls, just as sweat and blood drip from the soldiers' bodies in the tank's blazing heat, and over the course of the film, the tank's iron exterior therefore becomes a visceral space, at once womb-like and reminiscent of the soldiers' own seething, traumatized unconscious, the soldiers' clean bodies and consciences gradually becoming tarnished and indistinguishable through their experiences.

[IMAGE FROM LEBANON HERE, COURTESY SONY PICTURE CLASSICS]

Indeed, it is notable that the gradual disintegration of Schmulik's psyche is projected through the increasing vulnerability of the tank as it gradually starts to malfunction, until it is no longer a protective layer and, hit by a grenade, one of his comrades in the tank crew is killed. The fully traumatic nature of death does not penetrate Schmulik's psyche until the end of the film, then, through his identification with the suffering of a similar 'self' rather than an 'other'. This is the point when the tank-as-Israeli War Machine is no longer the infallible aggressor but an isolated, vulnerable entity besieged by invisible enemies on all sides. Through this metaphorical shift, the troubling dynamics of culpability and ethics that circulate in the external political world are excised from the introspective gaze of Maoz's filmic testimony. Within the mind of Maoz-as-traumatized soldier, the disintegration of ethical codes and moral certainties[xxiv] are not evidence of the damage done *by* the Israeli War Machine, but *to* the militarized Israeli subject, cast here not as aggressor but as the victim of his external opponents, and also arguably as the subject of 'State abuse':[xxv] a naïve, unwitting puppet of the War Machine, and hence a 'survivor…pathologized as victim without political agency'.[xxvi] Melancholic and introspective as this vision may appear, however, there are also, as Lambek and Antze remind us, 'political gains conferred by a victim identity'[xxvii] – evident, not least, in the powerful international voice accorded Maoz's filmic vision through its State

funding. 'Psychohistorical' and 'timeless' as this screening of personal trauma may purport to be, then, a complex mesh of politicised and ethical issues evaded by Maoz's gaze continue to circulate just beyond the margins of the screen.

Like *Lebanon*, Ari Folman's *Waltz With Bashir* also locates the trope of the witness centre-stage in its own screening of trauma. While converted into animated visuals, the film was initially shot as documentary footage by Folman, who was granted early discharge from the IDF if he agreed to participate in a research project involving psychiatric counselling for soldiers: a process he began to document. As such, the film consciously locates itself within a discourse of medicalized trauma, and authoritative encounters with therapists and other traumatized subjects shape Folman's narrative. Yet Folman's own story is also mediated through an awareness of another central trope in trauma theory: 'memory'. Structured as something of a psychoanalytic detective narrative which revolves around Folman's quest to unearth what lies in the 'black holes' in his memory around his time in Beirut, the film is therefore unafraid to confront the flaws and fissures in the visual politics of witnessing. Dwelling on the complex relationship between remembering, forgetting and mis-remembering, Folman's film therefore offers an alternative visualisation of a traumatic history that is, as Caruth puts it, 'no longer straightforwardly referential'; instead, for Folman, as for Freud, 'history…'arise[s] where *immediate understanding* may not'.[xxviii] What alternative understanding of trauma, of history and indeed of the politics of witnessing might *Waltz With Bashir* therefore serve to screen?

A consciousness of the fallible nature of memory frames the whole of *Waltz With Bashir*, including its representational strategies. As Lambek and Anze note:

> Although memory is surely a temporal phenomenon, these metaphors tend to transform the temporal into the spatial and are intensely visual. Layers are excavated, veils lifted, screens removed.[xxix]

Waltz With Bashir projects this intensely visual nature of memory through its own layering of image, which overlays the documentary footage originally shot by Folman with a

combination of Flash, 3-D and classic animation techniques, and intersperses these portions

of documentary footage with highly stylized episodes of dream sequence and imaginative

drama, which rise and fall like shutters throughout the non-linear narrative, colliding and

overlapping, blurring the boundaries between the 'real' and 'imagined', past and present.

This distinctive aesthetic means that, for example, Tel Aviv comes to assume the aura of *film*

noir, while animated footage of the bombing of Sidon is delivered with the visual slickness

and soundtrack of a music video. In one sense, this lends the film an air of self-conscious

cool ideally suited to its exploration of young male bravado; yet in another, the film's intense

visuality also operates as a deliberate nod to the fraught act of bearing witness to trauma. We

see this in an episode in the film in which a therapist, Professor Solomon, tells Folman about

a particular coping strategy developed by another soldier she met after the 1982 Lebanon

War:

> In 1983 I had a patient who was a photographer and I asked him: 'How did you
> survive that gruelling war?' He replied: 'Simple! I saw it as nothing but a day-trip.'
> He told himself: 'Wow! What fantastic action scenes!'…He saw everything as though
> he were viewing it through an imaginary camera…Then something happened. The
> camera broke [and his experiences] became traumatic. He had used the camera to
> remain outside the real event – as if you were watching the war on film. This
> protected him. Once he was forced to see…with his own eyes he could no longer
> deny reality. The horror consumed him.[xxx]

It is possible to read this soldier's 'disassociative' behaviour as analogous to Folman's own

use of animation of this film: as an aestheticization of experience that enables him to evade

its head-on confrontation – something which may not only be too traumatic for him, but

which may also exceed the representational capacities of film or indeed any form of

testimony. This view of trauma as something that exceeds the boundaries of representation

permeates *Waltz With Bashir*, and is particularly evident in its screening of memory and

history through dream.

   Waltz With Bashir affirms a classically Freudian view of memory and trauma

whereby events too horrific to be registered by the conscious mind are found to resurface

through hallucination, dream and displaced imagery,[xxxi] meaning that trauma is registered as

a 'painful *remembering* of experience'[xxxii] accompanied by an inevitable forgetting. We see this in the opening scene, for example, in which Folman's friend Boaz tells him of a recurrent dream of his in which 26 wild, frenzied dogs race through the streets of Tel Aviv and come to surround him beneath his bedroom window. This dream, it turns out, is a manifestation of Boaz's memories of the war, in which he was given the role of shooting the dogs who might alert the townspeople to the presence of Israeli troops. Boaz's killing therefore testifies to broader military violence. Yet Boaz is also given this role because his troop knows that he is unable to shoot people, and in this way, the memory also testifies to Boaz' ethical nature (an uncanny – or perhaps telling – echo of the young gunner Schmulik's hesitance to pull the trigger in *Lebanon*). Indeed, true to the nature of dream, the imagery of vicious packs of dogs also resonates with another image in the film – that of the violent, virulently masculine Christian Phalangists who would later be allowed to tear through the camps at Sabra and Shatila. This displaced imagery therefore serves an ambivalent function in the film, both acknowledging and recirculating the burden of memory and of guilt.

This displacement also takes place in the film's most important act of remembering, which relates to Folman's role in the Sabra and Shatila massacre. As Caruth writes, 'to be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image of event',[xxxiii] and throughout the film, Folman is haunted by a recurrent memory that he is unable to contextualise: an image in which he is floating naked in the sea, staring at what seem to be shooting stars above, before he and his comrades emerge from the water, don their uniforms and walk into the city. The film returns to this memory repeatedly, constructing it as a repressed origin of trauma that reflects Zizek's characterisation of trauma as something that never be adequately represented, only '*encircle[d]* again and again […] *mark[ed]* in its very impossibility'.[xxxiv] This surreal memory, it turns out, does indeed bear a repressed truth; for the sea, which facilitates the act of psychic cleansing, of a disassociative floating away, of discarding one's uniform and hence one's militarized identity, is in fact a metaphorical site of displacement for a more

troubling reality. The flares overhead, it transpires, are those fired by Israeli troops to illuminate the way for Christian Phalangists to enter the camps and commit the massacre of up to 3000 Palestinian refugees. Folman, it seems, was a witness, indeed implicated in this massacre, one of the soldiers firing the flares, and by piecing together his memory and memories of others from a number of interviews, Folman finds evidence from journalists and army generals that the Israeli forces were indeed aware of what the Christian Phalangists planned to do in the camps, and failed to intervene. Yet just at the point when Folman seems to have recovered his memory, he radically disrupts the authority of his own status as witness by acknowledging the boundaries of his own representational capacity. We see this in a dramatic shift in visual strategy that takes place at the end of the film.

At this moment, Folman returns, once again, to the origin of his trauma: his encounter with the Palestinian women returning to their camps to discover the corpses of their husbands, fathers, sons and the many others unable to escape the massacre. In animated footage, we see Folman standing in the street, seemingly unnoticed by the women who swarm past him, uttering unbearable howls of grief. In the final animated screen, we see Folman's face, his gaze faltering, unable to register what he's seeing as his status as filmic witness breaks down. It is as this point that Folman shifts from animation to documentary footage, unmediated by any narrative overlay, in which we see Palestinian women asking where the Arabs are to protect them; see courtyards piled high with bodies and, from amidst the rubble, see a child's head protruding. There are no words, no excuses or explanations for these images. Instead, they are allowed to circulate, to contrast in stark fashion with the slick and stylish animation that precedes it. It is with these images that the film ends, descending finally into silence and blackness. Thus this footage is constructed as Folman's final recognition of 'the real': that which, according to Lacan, 'resists symbolization absolutely' and exists outside of, beyond, the symbolic order.[xxxv] It is at this moment that Folman appears to recognize the problematic partiality not only of memory, but also of witnessing and of

trauma; for these images reveal that trauma is not only his, but exists in lives and memories that have been destroyed, that no longer bear the capacity to testify, and for which he cannot adequately speak. These, then, are the actual silences, the black holes in his film; the spaces in which the humanity of the 'other' as an unknowable 'self' begins to surface, and these are selves and stories that Folman cannot recover or complete.

Both *Lebanon* and *Waltz With Bashir* therefore engage with the complex representational politics of 'witnessing' and 'remembering': two vital elements in the confrontation of past trauma. For Freud, though, there is a third element integral to the treatment of trauma that must follow the acts of 'witnessing' and 'remembering': 'working-through'. For Freud, 'working-through' describes the final stage in the treatment of trauma whereby re-enactment would give way to memory and 'the language of remembrance…take[s] the place of the compulsive rehearsals of the past'.[xxxvi] To what extent, then, do these films work through the traumas of Israel's military action in the First Lebanese War? At an individual level, it could be said that they achieve this very effectively, allowing the directors creative space in which to confront and work through their own traumatic memories, and in the case of *Waltz With Bashir*, to interrogate the nature of witnessing and the capacities of representation. At the levels of collective memory and cultural consciousness, these films also present an important opportunity for Israeli society to 'work through' their relationship to the State and to their nation's history; for these portrayals of trauma can, in one sense, be read as damning indictments of a state that purports to be founded on the provision of sanctuary for its Jewish inhabitants, but that emerges as complicit in their traumatisation. Thus these films act against the collective amnesia surrounding war and other forms of State-sanctioned violence within Israeli cultural consciousness in a way that can, on its own terms, be considered the exercise of a productive, if inward-looking 'political voice'. Beyond these introspective lines, though, the effectiveness of these films at working through the traumas they appear to screen is questionable.

If 'screening' is to be interpreted in a dual sense, as both a drive towards visual representation and as a shielding from sight, then it might be said that these films are very successful indeed at 'screening' the traumas associated with the 1982 Lebanon War and the horrific Siege of Beirut. Despite the loaded political backdrops to both films, their visual construction of these soldiers' involvement in such events as a source of trauma, and hence as the politics of the *personal*, operates as a representational elision of the ethical, moral and political dimensions to such actions, and of the complexities that such dimensions raise when it comes to questions of complicity, agency and guilt. There is something deeply ironic, after all, in these films' presentations of State-sanctioned military violence as an assault on the bodies and minds of Israeli citizens rather than Lebanese and Palestinian civilians. Consequently, the careful framing of these films within what have come to be recognized as the formal criteria for 'authentic' trauma narratives – including the use of narrative interruption, compulsive telling and retelling and experimental, often postmodernist strategies[xxxvii] – also constructs a level of prescriptive certainty about the 'truth' that we are to find in these narratives, as tales of suffering and victimhood that hark back to a much longer history of persecution for the inhabitants of the nation of Israel. Thus these films' reliance upon the inherently introspective, seemingly apolitical 'other-oriented ethos of trauma theory', which renders '(self)-critical scrutiny of complicity'[xxxviii] so difficult, ultimately serves to screen and shield the Israeli soldier, the viewer and, by implication, the Israeli State from any visual confrontation with the underlying *politics of the collective and historical,* as well as of the personal, that underpin the experience of trauma.

Waltz With Bashir and *Lebanon* therefore reveal that there is in fact a latent political dimension to the politics of trauma theory, and this is a recognition that has also been made by those within a discipline that emphasises the need to confront the political as well as personal nature of acts of aggression and domination: postcolonial studies. In her assessment of the complex relationships between these fields, Irene Visser argues that it is vital to retain

a level of 'historical particularity' in the critical engagement with trauma since 'conciliatory'

and 'healing' processes *between* cultures can only be achieved if dimensions of complicity,

guilt and agency within a particular historical context are acknowledged.[xxxix] Similarly, Stef

Craps looks to the context of post-Apartheid South Africa and concludes that

> …traumatic histories of subordinate groups have to be acknowledged on their own terms and be considered in relation to traumatic histories of people in socially dominant positions for trauma studies to have any hope of redeeming its promise of ethical effectiveness.[xl]

There is, in other words, a political and intercultural dimension to trauma, particularly when

enacted through structures of State-sanctioned violence designed to subordinate and control

another culture, and as South Africa teaches us, 'truth' and 'reconciliation' must not be

considered impossibilities but desirable outcomes from such confrontations with trauma.

Ironically, though, it is Cathy Caruth, one of the most canonical trauma theorists, who

reminds us of the necessity of confronting the historical dimensions of trauma when she

writes that 'history, like trauma, is never simply one's own … history is precisely the way in

which we are implicated in each other's traumas'.[xli] Though this reciprocal recognition

teeters right on the edges of *Lebanon* and *Waltz With Bashir*, it ultimately evades its grasp,

leaving it up to others to fill in the 'black holes' that surround the traumas incited in others

through the actions of the Israeli State and its soldiers.

   It could be argued that this failure to represent the trauma of the 'other' is no more

than evidence of the impossible double-bind facing these directors: according to Agamben,

after all, testimony to trauma exists in the 'aporia between speaking and not speaking,

between the compulsion to bear witness and the impossibility of doing so'.[xlii] Rather than

remaining content with the screen as an aporic space of silence, though, turning to other

screens and other gazes may begin to engender something of a dialogue around these

representational 'black holes'. There is, after all, another 'Lebanon generation' that remains

unseen in either of these slick State-funded films, but which does appear in a low-budget

documentary entitled *Children of Shatila* by the diasporic Palestinian director Mai Masri.[xliii]

Compiled from film footage taken by two children living in the Shatila camp in Beirut who were born shortly after the massacres, the film offers glimpses of this next generation's attempt to come to terms with their past, and to live with the enduring traumas embedded within their communities. In one scene, we see the children asking their friends what they dream of becoming when they grow up: 'a doctor', replies one girl; 'a spaceman', says one boy. What this film cannot show us, though, are their dreams not of the future but of the past, which we can only begin to imagine. But let us, for a moment, try to do so.

It is the kind of place that we have all visited in our dreams: a nocturnal cityscape – no, not quite a city; instead, the winding streets and narrow alleys, littered and rain-sodden, that have been familiar to all of your family since their exile. Then, as you knew they would, they come - not beasts but real humans that hunt, their eyes bright with flares. When she wakes in the night, her mother soothes her: it was only a dream, it was not real, it is all in the past. She tells her daughter this, though she knows it may not be entirely true – for when there has been no asking or granting of forgiveness, no making of amends, no reconciliation, history has a habit of repeating itself. She suspects it will always be so, until the beasts of her past find it in themselves to gaze into the mirror and look themselves in the eye.

Notes

[i] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, 'Foreword by Chairperson', *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 1. Accessed online: http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/commissions/1998/trc/index.htm. Chapter 1, Paragraph 93.

[ii] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922; London: Penguin, 2000), p.42.

[iii] Other films include *Beaufort* by Joseph Cedar (2007) winner of four Ophir awards and the Silver Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival. For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Ryvka Bar Zohar, 'Waltz With Bashir: A Case Study on the Complicity of the Israeli

Cultural Industry with Israeli Apartheid', *Rethinking Marxism*, 17th March 2009,

http://www.rethinkingmarxism.org/cms/node/1235.

iv See Kahan Commission, '104. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the events at the

refugee camps in Beirut, 8th February 1983', *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Accessed

online:

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign%20Relations/Israels%20Foreign%20Relations%20sinc

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1984/104%20Report%20of%20the%20Commission%20of%20Inquiry%20into%20the%20e.

v During this election campaign in 2000, Sharon visited the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif,

site of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, accompanied by over 1000 armed

security guards, and made a declaration that the Complex would always remain under Israeli

control. This event was extremely provocative to Palestinians, for whom the Dome and

Mosque are not only extremely holy sites but symbols of their national aspirations and

identity. Protests were met with the use of massive firepower by Israeli forces. These events

are perceived by many to have been a direct impetus for the outbreak of the Second ('Al-

Aqsa') Intifada. See Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History

With Documents*, Sixth Edition (Boston: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2007), pp.512-515.

vi Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History', *Yale French

Studies* 79 (1991), pp. 181-192; 181.

vii In *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003),

Jenny Edkins writes that 'taking part in violence oneself can evoke a similar shame [to that of

the witness or survivor of violence] – as was the case with Vietnam veterans – though this of

course is *not at all to be equated with* witnessing violence done by others', p.4.

viii Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience', pp.181-192.

ix Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in

Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.7.

[x] See for example Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[xi] Yoram Ben-Ya'akov, Marianne Amir, Ronit Arzy and Moshe Kotler, 'Trauma in Military and Civilian Settings', *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy* 12 (2005), pp.1-9; 7.

[xii] See Dominic LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), particularly Chapter 3, 'Historicizing the Holocaust'.

[xiii] Irene Visser, 'Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47:3 (2011), pp.270-282; 275.

[xiv] Edkins, 'Trauma and the Memory of Politics', p.9.

[xv] Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, 'Introduction: Forecasting Memory', in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.xi-xxxviii; xxiv.

[xvi] Susannah Radstone, 'Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics', *Paragraph* 30:1 (2007), pp.9-29; 14-15.

[xvii] Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.10.

[xviii] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p.75.

[xix] Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', p.11.

[xx] In the notes that accompany Sony's release of the film, Maoz indicates that the character is modelled extremely closely on himself and his experiences. Nevertheless, this link is not signposted as clearly as it might be by Maoz, indicating a level of dramatic licence and directorial distancing. See 'Writer-Director Samuel Maoz's Notes on the Film', *Sony Classics: Lebanon*, http://www.sonyclassics.com/lebanon/lebanon_presskit.pdf.

[xxi] Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics,* p.205, paraphrasing the work of Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p.17.

[xxii] Radstone, 'Trauma Theory', p.11.

[xxiii] Anne Whitehead, 'Introduction' in *Theories of Memory: A Reader*, ed. Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2008), pp186-191; 187.

[xxiv] In interview, Maoz states that 'talking about morality in war is ridiculous…the war confronts you with a situation in which you have to make a decision, either to protect your life or hold to a moral code. There are no other options'. Leonard Quart, 'Dramatizing Traumatic Memories of War: An Interview With Samuel Maoz', *Cineaste* (Spring 2010), pp.34-37; 36.

[xxv] Edkins, Trauma and the Memory of Politics, p.7.

[xxvi] Stef Craps, 'Wor(l)ds of Grief: Traumatic Memory and Literary Witnessing in Cross-Cultural Perspective', *Textual Practice* 24:1 (2010), pp.51-68; 56.

[xxvii] Lambek and Antze, 'Introduction: Forecasting Memory', p.xxiv.

[xxviii] Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience', p.182.

[xxix] Lambek and Anze, 'Introduction: Forecasting Memory', p.xi.

[xxx] Ari Folman, *Waltz With Bashir*, DVD release (London: Artificial Eye, 2008), Chapter 6. See also Garrett Stewart, 'Screen Memory in *Waltz With Bashir*', *Film Quarterly* 63:10 (2010), pp.58-62 for an interesting discussion of the self-reflexive filmic consciousness at work in Folman's film.

[xxxi] See particularly Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating, Working Through', in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, Volume 12 (London: Vintage 2001), pp.145-156 and 'Fixation to Traumas – The Unconscious' in *The Complete Psychological Works*, Volume 16, pp.273-285.

[xxxii] Visser, 'Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies', p.273.

[xxxiii] Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p.5.

[xxxiv] Slavoj Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), p.272.

[xxxv] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-4*, trans. John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.66.

[xxxvi] Maud Ellman, ed. *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (London: Longman, 1994), p.8.

[xxxvii] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp.88-89.

[xxxviii] Visser, 'Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies', p.276.

[xxxix] Visser, 'Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies', p.277.

[xl] Craps, 'Wor(l)ds of Grief', p.53.

[xli] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.24.

[xlii] Giorgio Agamben summarized in Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics,* p.117.

[xliii] Mai Masri, dir., *Children of Shatila* (1998) in *The Films of Masri and Chamoun: Frontiers of Dreams and Fears and Children of Shatila*, DVD release (Seattle: Arab Film Distribution, 2001).