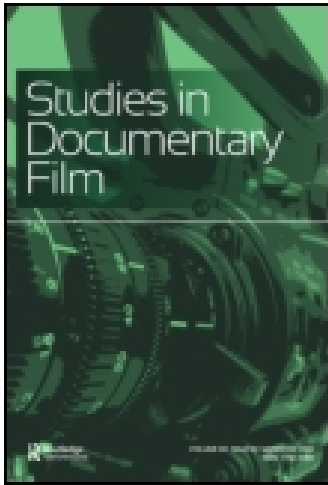


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Publisher: Routledge

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## Studies in Documentary Film

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsdf20>

### Waltzing with Bashir: perpetrator trauma and cinema

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Published online: 02 May 2014.



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To cite this article: Bill Nichols (2014) Waltzing with Bashir: perpetrator trauma and cinema, *Studies in Documentary Film*, 8:1, 81-85, DOI: [10.1080/17503280.2014.900954](https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2014.900954)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2014.900954>

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differences in how they approach their craft. Yet, even though there are radical differences in their documentary style, many of the documentarians interviewed appear to share similar demographic backgrounds and social locations. Without reflexive moments in the book, this lack of representation is not contextualized. With some additional diversity in who was interviewed the book could have addressed a larger scope within documentary practice. Indeed, the politics of representation could have been more diverse. The book does, however, succeed in demonstrating the directors' diversity in not only locale and subject matter but also attitudes and tactics.

While *This Much Is True* could exhibit broader representation in terms of the directors interviewed and additional analysis or reflection following the interviews would be useful, overall the questions posed throughout the interviews are valuable for documentary directors and spectators alike. The book is a fitting read for an emerging documentary filmmaker or director seeking to learn about the diversity of theories, approaches and practices in the industry. With no one method prioritized or favoured, the process from pre-production to post-production is never defined by or diminished to any one approach. In *This Much Is True* James Quinn produces a documentary-style text that is ideal for both educational purposes and casual reading.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2014.901475>

**Waltzing with Bashir: perpetrator trauma and cinema**, by Raya Morag, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, New York: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2012, US\$ 96.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-78076-264-7

A trickle of earlier works on perpetrators such as *Eichman Trial* (Hurwitz 1961), *The Specialist* (*Un Spécialiste: portrait d'un criminel moderne*) (Sivan 1999), parts of *Shoah* (Lanzmann 1985), and *Hotel Terminus* (Ophüls 1988), are nearing flood level when we add to *Standard Operating Procedure* (Morris 2008) *S 21* (Panh 2003) *Duch: Master of the Forges of Hell* (Panh 2012), *The Missing Picture* (Panh 2013), *Enemies of the People* (Lemkin and Sambath 2009), and *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer 2012), the several dozen recent Israeli films (fiction and documentary) examined by Raya Morag in this outstanding book. These films are quite disparate in style and aim, but do raise some general questions: what is our relationship to and responsibility for those who commit terrible deeds? How can we represent the trauma they might experience and what does it signify?

Such questions can take us down different paths. A large literature and a number of films address the trauma of American GIs who served in Vietnam, and more recently, in Iraq or Afghanistan. Most of this work centers on the events that brought on trauma, the aftermath and effects of PTSD, and efforts at recovery by various means. This work generally fits within the paradigm of what Morag describes as the psychological dimension to trauma where she locates both psychoanalytic theory and clinical therapy. Her own focus lies elsewhere. What is

the ethical dimension to trauma, for the perpetrator and for us when we encounter representations of this dimension in film particularly but also literature? And what if the doer of terrible deeds – atrocities, descent into the abject – acts in the name of the state or other institutional/organizational frameworks that recruit, indoctrinate, train, legitimate and protect the doer? How can we understand the mechanisms related to modern or what Morag calls ‘new war’ that increase the likelihood that ‘atrocious producing situations’ will occur? What responsibility must those who produce the figure of the perpetrator bear? To what extent might we, as citizens, be complicit with this process? How, primarily, do Israeli films represent these issues, knowing full well that such representations will be both specific to the Israeli situation and rich in application to many other situations as well? And how, then, even if our role is that of bystander, are we to address this larger social context and the profoundly ethical dilemmas (as well as the political and ideological issues) that arise?

The perpetrators Morag finds in the films she examines are not the psychopaths of much popular culture. Like them they appear normal on the surface and come from familiar social milieus, but unlike them, they do not conceal a darker shadow side of murderous impulses. They learn to commit atrocities and come to accept them as either the byproduct of a broader, legitimate task, in the case of the average soldier, or as the fulfillment of their dedication and belief, in the case of the suicide bomber. Responsibility is shared with the organizational frame that makes atrocity producing situations such as humiliation, torture, rape, and mass murder not only possible but routine, even acceptable as ‘standard operating procedure’. The challenge then arises of how to represent this complex figure/ground relationship and our own complicity with it.

For Morag these questions and issues reach crisis proportion in response to the second Intifada (roughly 2002–2004), a crisis that engendered what she calls a ‘new wave’ of Israeli cinema. This cinema responds not only to the military actions in the Occupied Territories (Gaza and the West Bank) during the second Intifada but also returns to the many previous wars and the atrocities that occurred within them and explores these from the perspective of the perpetrator rather than the victim. *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman 2008), for example, returns to the Lebanon War of 1982 and examines the traumatic experiences of Folman and others he knew who served in the Israeli Defense Forces and bore indirect responsibility for the massacre of thousands of civilians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

What the second Intifada period brought home was the rise of what Morag terms ‘new war’. Such warfare heightens the probability of atrocity producing situations since civilians are now deemed a primary target of military action. A shift of degree more than kind, the result is nonetheless dramatic. Villages are razed and destroyed, the residents dispersed; civilians enjoying some time in cafes or restaurants become targets, their bodies recovered in fragments, intermingled with those of their assailant. Armies, battlefields, defensive lines, offensive attacks all blur into a vaguely defined war zone for which no rules of engagement prove adequate. No longer conducted in that famous ‘fog of war’ that accounts for mistakes, confusion, faulty communication and miscalculation, war now becomes a direct encounter with the abject. The body itself becomes a weapon, either in the form of the suicide bomber who passes among us undetected until that fatal, deadly instant or in the all too obvious form of the armed and armored soldier who looms conspicuously above

us as an instrument of destruction. It is, then, the body as corpse that brings us into the most direct encounter with the abject. The litmus test for cinema is whether it too can confront the abject – the body, the corpse – and begin the arduous process of moving beyond trauma for victim and perpetrator alike. A number of new wave films such as *No. 17* (Ofek 2003) and *To See If I'm Smiling* (Yarom 2007) do precisely this. They show how trauma revolves around the figure of the corpse, what it signifies, and to come to terms with it.

The shift from the trauma of the victim – the backbone of trauma studies and of related theories of memory and recovery – to the trauma of the perpetrator, a new terrain opened up in Israeli cinema by former perpetrators themselves – calls for a reconsideration of many assumptions centered on the figure of the victim. *Waltz with Bashir*, for example, tells us little of the suffering and pain experienced by the survivors of the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps but a great deal of the belated guilt and enduring trauma of Ari Folman as a result of his indirect complicity. The trauma of victims opens a black hole, a tremendous lack. Victims initially do not know what hit them or how to get beyond it. Ideally, the gradual process that revolves around *Nachträglichkeit* (the retrospective act of memory and narrativization) allows them to do so. Victims struggle to find their way to shaping a narrative to which they can bear witness and go on with their lives.

But the trauma of perpetrators goes largely suppressed and denied. They are, after all, chosen agents of the state or some other entity. *Nachträglichkeit* becomes deferred by a social context that treats the perpetrator as a hero, or martyr, or at least a decent person doing a difficult job to preserve the social order, for Israelis, or change it, for Palestinians. The new wave of Israeli cinema represents an awakening, as if from the nightmare so well depicted in *Waltz with Bashir*, in which perpetrators struggle to come to terms with their own trauma and the related question of responsibility. What strikes the victim as a sudden, traumatic blow is for the perpetrator the outcome of a process that began long before that decisive, traumatic moment. It incorporates that moment into an ongoing narrative of duty, service, and redemption. The trauma that committing atrocities produces for the perpetrator must overcome its legitimating or at least tolerant frame to generate a questioning that extends beyond the individual perpetrator to the social structure that produces him, or her. It took Ari Folman 26 years to reach this point and it was the second Intifada that provided the proximate stimulus to do so in Morag's view.

A large measure of what leads to atrocity producing situations involves another shift entailed by new war. For Morag this is the shift from soldier to cop with its inevitable slide to perpetrator as the impossibility of serving and protecting people when trained to kill or be killed sets up situations in which atrocities take place. Like an Escher drawing, the soldier oscillates between two conflicting figure/ground relationships. Keep the peace, protect the people/ Distrust the people and destroy the peace.

This key insight into the double bind produced by new war could be expanded somewhat further. Once there were warriors, a discrete group whose relation and value to the larger community was well understood. Passage through the warrior stage, or others such as shaman or seer, often served as a transition to full adulthood. This figure persists primary at an ideological or mythological level. The 'detonator' (Morag's term for the suicide bomber as detonator and organism) and the perpetrator (the soldier who commits atrocities) belong to a different order of things

where the murder of civilians rather than fellow warriors becomes routine. This shift and its crazy-making implications bring forth the perpetrator as a recurring and often traumatized figure. The larger social frame takes pains to deny perpetrators and their atrocities or to treat them as bad apples and exceptions, but for some, such as the makers or subjects of new wave Israeli films, atrocity and trauma become an undeniable burden. Such subjects are haunted (as were the French torturers of Algerians treated by Frantz Fanon in his role as psychiatrist and discussed in the final part of his landmark book, *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961]). The new wave films are a vital part of an effort to get beyond trauma and guilt. Such an effort involves hearing the confession of the perpetrator, assigning responsibility at every level, and finding ways to reintegrate the traumatized perpetrator back into the social fabric that produced him or her.

What blocks this process of acknowledging perpetrator guilt and the traumatic events/atrocities that produce it? For Morag, it is a ‘time trap’ engendered by ‘pre-memory’. Haunted by the ghosts of wars past, and that horrific ur-event, the Holocaust, subject to a seemingly endless series of chronic traumas, time takes on a new quality for Israelis. The dominant ideology, recapitulated in Israeli fiction films far more than documentaries, it seems, denies perpetrator trauma; it creates a screen memory, or a state of pre-memory that cannot fully resolve victim trauma or address perpetrator trauma. The ‘persecuted perpetrator’, the figure who acts as if to overturn a long history of persecution, must confront these ghosts from the past and lay them to rest. The time trap hinders this effort. Time splits between that slender, sudden, traumatic moment of destruction and the interval before it repeats. A thin sliver of now, pivoting on a fulcrum between no longer and not yet, erases duration and the time necessary for *Nachträglichkeit*. The time trap of endless trauma hurriedly cleansed, erased and avenged stands as a barrier to the time of post-traumatic recovery. The interval, those moments of respite, possesses a ‘negative circularity’, as it revolves around the already happened and the yet to happen again. Fear, the dark knight of modern political manipulation, takes root in the conception of time itself.

Morag’s discussion of the time trap is one of the most insightful aspects of this remarkable, paradigm-shifting book. Moving beyond this trap is what the new wave films begin to do. She finds this movement in literature as well, perhaps most strikingly in Noam Chayut’s *My Holocaust Thief* (2009). One day, Chayut, a member of the IDF patrolling the Occupied Territories, sees a young Palestinian girl who does not see him as cop but as a soldier bringing terror and destruction. She freezes and stares at him with ‘black eyes’. He goes on to write,

... she is the one who stole my Holocaust... [this girl] took from me the belief that there is *absolute evil* in the world and the belief that I am avenging and fighting it. For this girl, I am *absolute evil*. Though I was not as cruel as the *absolute evil* I was nursed on, grew up with, and matured on.... The moment I internalized that I myself was the *absolute evil* in her eyes, the *absolute evil* that had governed me until then began to dissolve. And since then I have been bereft of my Holocaust. (*italics* his; cited on p. 205)

He goes on to experience a condition of profound loss at every level from personal to national identity. In this wrenching moment of self-discovery and the abandonment

of fetishized beliefs, perpetrator trauma breaks through the time trap to make the process of recovery possible but hardly inevitable.

Interestingly, it is a set of three minute short films that capture this movement most compellingly. Although by many standards fictions that involve imagined situations, they can also be treated as conditional documentaries in the same spirit as Peter Watkins's *The War Game* (1965). In such cases the events depicted have yet to occur but may well follow, inevitably, from the current rules of the game (nuclear deterrence as a military strategy in Watkins's case, the ramifications of the second Intifada in Morag's case). For example, *Just Not Another Suicide Bomber* (Drori 2004) covers what we begin to believe are the final three minutes before that sudden traumatic instant on a bus when a bomb explodes. The film ends before it does; its drama is in what we come to anticipate and fear during this lulling interval. *Three Minutes to Four* (Lilti 2002) presents 10 speakers who describe what happens to them after the explosion that occurs at four o'clock. They speak from a proleptic time and space of the already but not yet happened.

The effect of these and two other similar three minute films is deeply unnerving. They confront the body and corpse in distinctly discomfoting ways. Like the soldier/cop who must straddle demands for service to the public and assumptions that within the public lurks the enemy, these films straddle the impossible divide between fiction and documentary and generate much of their disturbance by doing so. Although discussed in the middle of the book they make a fitting summation of Morag's call for a prolonged look at new war, the time trap, new wave Israeli cinema and the large, social implications of the perpetrator trauma now coming to light in any number of films. The new wave films, like this book, are a challenge to us to acknowledge the paradigm of the perpetrator's new found empathy for his victim, to confront our own complicity with that which makes atrocity producing situations more acceptable, and to act to reverse that complicity.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2014.900954>