

AN EXPLORATION OF HOW FILM PORTRAYS PSYCHOPATHOLOGY: THE ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY FILM WALTZ WITH BASHIR, THE DEPICTION OF PTSD AND CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS

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SUMMARY

With the inauguration of the UK's first ever Medical Film festival MedFest in 2011 there has been resurgence in the interest of the association between psychiatry and film. The festival in 2012 was titled "HealthScreen": Understanding Illness through Film and its aim, according to the founder Dr Kamran Ahmed, was, 'To stimulate debate of the social, political and ethical implications of portrayals of health and illness on our screens' (1).

Waltz with Bashir is a 2008 Israeli animated documentary film written and directed by Ari Folman. It portrays the protagonist (Folman) in search of his lost memories of his experience as a soldier in the 1982 Lebanon War and his attempt to both decipher them and reconcile himself with them.

2012 marks the 30th year commemoration of the Sabra and Shatilla tragedies. *Waltz with Bashir* vividly depicts the massacres of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Beirut through the lens of an ex-IDF serviceman and the harrowing effects that PTSD has on him. *Waltz with Bashir* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film however despite the popularity of the film and much critical acclaim it is officially banned in Lebanon.

The authors are mindful of the devastating effects that the atrocities have had on the mental health of all those who were involved, the Lebanese, Palestinians and also the Israelis. The purpose of this presentation is to explore how the film *Waltz with Bashir* portrays PTSD and how it has influenced cultural perceptions.

Key words: film – psychiatry - post traumatic stress disorder

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BACKGROUND

Identity is a difficult issue to describe in an article. The first part of this article is written by one of the authors in the first person to explain his own feelings of a complex identity which strongly influences the rest of the text.

'Where are you from?' is a question that is quite often posed at me. It is a question that evokes a degree of consternation in fact for it isn't really so straightforward to answer. Does where I'm from mean where I was born? Or does it mean what passport I am the bearer of? Or is the interrogator alluding to my ethnicity (which invariably tends to be the case)? Perhaps where you are from depends on which football team you 'root' for in the World Cup (no pun intended)? In order to appease all those concerned my spiel is something along the lines of, 'I was born in Northern Ireland, lived in England for most of my life, I am of Lebanese descent and I support Jamaica in the world cup (when they make it through the preliminary stages of course and when they don't I am so lugubrious that I miss the World Cup all together-surely the hallmark of patriotism?).' But the question of identity is seldom that simple. What role does religion play in all of this? And how about the

language that one speaks? The platforms are too many to count.

I spent my formative years in Lebanon and the hand that reared me is a Lebanese one; this ineluctably has an effect on my identity. Although I am proficient in Arabic and French, my first language is English and I subscribe to the tenets of Islam (as best as I can, but I can assure you I am no bastion of that way of life and hence stake no claim in being worthy of representing it albeit I unreservedly declare that it does accord me with tranquility and provide me with the blueprint to live in harmony with my surroundings whenever I do abide by its teachings). In short, I am too Western to be Eastern and yet too Eastern to be Western. Does that leave me in a state of limbo? There are those who have an identity crisis and this can render those individuals distraught, cause distress of mind and precipitate psychopathology. In a day and age when interfaith and interracial marriages are becoming the norm and rates of migration are high, the matter of identity is becoming increasingly complex; a matter that all those concerned in the provision of mental healthcare should at the very least be familiar with.

So how do I, with all of the above in mind, grapple Ari Folman's animated documentary film *Waltz with*

Bashir, a motion picture that deals with a very sensitive (even taboo according to some) subject matter? Some of my closest friends and family are of Palestinian descent. The individuals that transformed my life and without whom I would never have qualified as a doctor (because of their unconditional kindness, unrestrained generosity and unlimited philanthropy) are of Israeli descent. How do I reconcile these disparate dimensions?

I have come to a crossroads in my life where I deem it incumbent upon myself to foster a curiosity towards other ways of being and to approach all matters with an open mind. And this exposition is no exception. For the purposes of this manuscript I intend to remain balanced and detached as best as I can throughout. Any inaccuracy, fault or bias is entirely of my own making and I apologize in advance for my shortcomings.

INTRODUCTION

When Empire magazine give a movie a five star rating, it is not becoming of a self-proclaimed movie buff to allow this to pass. When a motion picture is nominated for an Oscar for Best Film in a Foreign Language, it becomes all those who are fanatic about film's priority to watch that movie. When the events that inspire the motion picture are in fact true and when those events deal with something that has shaped the history of the land where my forbears dwelled and explain my trajectory in life, it becomes my self-imposed duty to watch that movie (Operation Peace for Galilee is, after all, why my parents and millions of other Lebanese migrated to greener pastures and how I ended up being born in beautiful Belfast. It is noteworthy that due to this exodus, there are more Lebanese expatriates than there is Lebanese living in Lebanon and there isn't a part of the world we haven't inhabited and indeed flourished in. I hear the Mexican magnate Carlos Slim, who is of Lebanese descent, is doing rather well for himself- if rather well for yourself means that you have amassed a fortune that makes you the richest person in the world, a hint of serendipity?). Add on top of that my favorite passion of all: exploring the portrayal of psychopathology in film than watching Waltz with Bashir really becomes a given.

But why should people in general show an interest in this film? The Civil War in Lebanon and the 1982 Lebanon-Israel War (dubbed Operation Peace for Galilee) had far reaching ramifications in the world stage. For the US Administration, the killing of 200 American Marines in the Lebanon due to a suicide explosion was viewed at the time as one of America's largest losses outside of the Vietnam War. The participation of the multinational forces (MNF) for peace-keeping operations kept the international community involved in these affairs. The events that unfolded have had a profound effect on all of the parties involved, the Lebanese, the Palestinians and the Israelis. 2012 marks the 30th year commemoration of the Sabra and Shatilla tragedies (the names of the Palestinian

refugee camps in Beirut where thousands of Palestinian souls perished). Memories of those dark days have not faded and have influenced discourse and attitudes even today.

Our exposition then deals with the delineation of psychopathology in film in general by broaching on the Royal College of Psychiatrist's Minds on Film and then on the UK's first ever medical film festival Medfest. We then provide the reader with a superficial overview on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and then we analyze and discuss the depiction of PTSD in Ari Folman's critically acclaimed and Academy Award nominated animated documentary film Waltz with Bashir. It is noteworthy that despite the film's positive reviews Waltz with Bashir is banned in the Lebanon for reasons that will be posited later on.

But first some further information. It is not in my intention to denigrate or condone any of the parties involved, the Lebanese, the Palestinians or the Israelis. From the outset, I would like to make it clear that it is the shared opinion of the authors that the killing of any human soul, particularly non-combatants and innocent civilians is tragic. 'The tears that Jewish and Muslim children shed when they have discovered that their families have been killed are the same' is a quote that I chanced upon and one that, I feel, does have a certain resonance that emphasizes our commonality. After all, the voice of the human heart needs no translation...

There are, of course, some accounts of what took place in Beirut that are more nuanced than others. Take for instance the Angel of Beirut Dr Ang Swee's moving memoirs From Beirut to Jerusalem which chronicles her experiences as a doctor providing emergency orthopedic services in the Lebanon in 1982 to the casualties of the conflict (Dr Ang Swee was later decorated with the Star of Palestine from Yasser Arafat, the highest award for valor for services rendered to the people of Palestine) or the journalist who has received the highest number of awards for foreign correspondence Robert Fisk's magnum opus Pity the Nation (entitled after the Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran's mystic work). If Waltz with Bashir views the occurrences in Beirut in 1982 through the lens of an Israeli veteran, the aforementioned works provide narratives on what took place from the Arab point of view and the two positions, unsurprisingly, have very little in common.

FILM AND PSYCHIATRY

"If you really want to understand a man, you have to slip into his shoes and walk around in them..."

Atticus Finch, To Kill a Mocking Bird

That cinema wields a colossal power is indisputable; it offers an unrivalled medium for entertainment, but also a unique interface for education. Indeed public opinion is heavily influenced by vivid images in the form of adverts, documentaries, and feature films (www.medfest.co.uk). It should come as no surprise

then that policy makers are not oblivious to this phenomenon and that the ministry for health has utilized motion picture for promoting public health campaigns. Notwithstanding this, film, as alluded to in the epigraph of this article, can provide viewers with an insight into the psyche of people with psychopathology so that we may “Slip into their shoes and walk around in them”. By virtue of cinema, we can learn more about what mental illness is like from the inside and this in turn can help us to understand what it is like to have a psychiatric disorder, be that the narrowing of repertoire in Autism as depicted by Dustin Hoffman in *Rainman* or Schneider’s First Rank Symptoms of Schizophrenia as portrayed by Russel Crowe in *A Beautiful Mind*...

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS: MINDS ON FILM

With the above in mind, The Royal College of Psychiatrists created a section on its website on psychiatry and film which was entitled *Minds on Film*. According to the website, ‘Minds on Film is a monthly blog that explores psychiatric conditions and mental health issues as portrayed in a selection of readily available films’ (www.rpsych.ac.uk). Dr Almeida FRCPsych consultant psychiatrist authors reviews on films with a psychiatric theme from the motion picture *Aviator*, a biographical film about the American billionaire, Howard Hughes that presents a thoroughly well researched and accurate portrait of the development of his obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) (the director Martin Scorsese actually consulted an OCD specialist in order to verify the veracity of the portrayal of the protagonist’s psychopathology and to ensure that the representation was as realistic as possible) (www.rpsych.ac.uk) to *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* which tells the true life story of *Elle* magazine editor-in-chief, Jean-Dominique Bauby, who suffered a brain stem cerebrovascular accident and consequently developed locked-in syndrome (www.rpsych.ac.uk). Each article has an introduction, a brief description of the film and the relevance that the film has to the field of mental health (www.rpsych.ac.uk).

MEDFEST: THE UK’S FIRST EVER MEDICAL FILM FESTIVAL

With the inauguration of the UK’s first ever Medical Film festival *MedFest* in 2011 there has been resurgence in the interest of the association between psychiatry and film. *MedFest* was founded in 2011 as the UK’s first ever Medical Film Festival and is run by a group of trainee psychiatrists under the auspices of the Public Education Committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. *Medfest* 2011 explored “The Image of Doctors in Film” and was warmly received at 9 Universities throughout the nation. The festival in 2012 was titled “HealthScreen”: Understanding Illness through Film

and toured 16 universities throughout the United Kingdom. The success of *Medfest* 2012 was built upon that of 2011 (www.medfest.co.uk). Indeed, such was the reaction to *Medfest* that it also had the distinguished honor of being reviewed in perhaps the most prestigious medical journal of them all, *The Lancet*.

The purpose of *Medfest* is to explore the relationship between medicine and cinema and in doing so, to challenge preconceptions people hold about psychiatry and psychiatrists. The aim of the 2012 festival was, ‘To stimulate debate of the social, political and ethical implications of portrayals of health and illness on our screens’ (www.medfest.co.uk). When rose-tinted, the lack of veracity in the inaccurate portrayals of psychopathology in film can perpetuate myths, propagate falsehoods and promote stigma. But when correctly presented, they have the potential to inform the public, empower patient groups and dispel prejudice (www.medfest.co.uk).

MedFest was the brainchild of Dr Kamran Ahmed who, amongst his other accomplishments, was the winner of the prestigious Morris Markowe award in Psychiatry for his essay ‘Beards and Bow Ties’. Dr Ahmed sees strong parallels between his works as a psychiatrist and the art of film making and storytelling. As a movie buff, Kamran is fully aware of the impact that portrayals of doctors in film and the media have on public perceptions (www.medfest.co.uk). His short film (which was an adaptation of his award winning article accessible on YouTube) was, in the words of the *Lancet*, “A charming animated short film... that sets out to dispel the many myths that apparently prevail about psychiatrists (www.thelancet.com).”

PTSD: A SUPERFICIAL OVERVIEW AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a severe anxiety disorder which may develop as a result of exposure to any event which results in psychological trauma. This event may involve the threat of death to oneself or to another person, or to the patient’s own physical, sexual, or psychological integrity. The point is that there is a challenge to a subject’s integrity as a person, which overwhelms the person’s ability to cope.

Classic symptoms of this condition include re-experiencing the original trauma(s) through flashbacks or nightmares, the avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, and increased arousal, including difficulty falling or staying asleep, anger, and hypervigilance. The DSM and ICD diagnostic criteria require that the symptoms last more than one month and cause important impairment of social, occupational, and other important areas of functioning (American Psychiatric Association 1994).

War is a frequent cause of combatants developing PTSD. The Croatian and Bosnian wars of the 1990s led to large numbers of persons developing PTSD. Many

papers were written about the epidemiology of PTSD in these countries, and how to treat it.

PTSD can be treated using psychological methods such as CBT and Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) (Devilly 1999, Bisson 2007, Seidler 2006), as well as medical treatment with combinations of antidepressants and antipsychotics (Kozarić-Kovačić 2009, Kozarić-Kovačić 2008). There have also been attempts at group therapy using group analysis (Britvić 2006, Britvić 2012). In Bosnia, groups using the patient's religious principles have been used to help these patients (Hasanovic 2011). It is known that sophisticated armies, such as that of the USA (Marx 2009), do suffer important rates of PTSD. Interestingly and controversially, the British Army does not appear at present to suffer severe rates of PTSD, although it has very high rates of drinking alcohol to excess (Fear 2010). It is not only combatants who suffer from PTSD. A recent study of children displaced during the Bosnian War showed that the highest incidence of PTSD was in Srebrenica, where the notorious massacre occurred, while a lower incidence of PTSD where the fighting was less intense (Hasanovic 2012).

AN ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY FILM, WALTZ WITH BASHIR

The opening scene of *Waltz with Bashir* is that of rabid dogs racing down the streets of a neighborhood, acrid saliva drooling down their jaws and their eyes a dangerous red with terrifying intent. They are running purposefully in a pack and in what appears to be formation. They then suddenly stop running and start barking incessantly at a window of an apartment wherein resides a middle-aged man whose face betrays a petrified expression as if he were expecting them to come for him, that their howling in unison, all 26 of them, was the sounding of his death knell.

We discover that this is actually a metaphorical nightmare that has been haunting Boaz, an Israeli veteran, for years. Boaz is describing his nightmare to his friend, Ari Folman a fellow veteran who served a tour of duty with him in Lebanon in 1982 and the protagonist of the film. He explains to Ari that the number of dogs in his dream is symbolic for it is the exact number of dogs that he killed when he and his regiment were patrolling the terrains of Lebanon in Operation Peace for Galilee. He was ordered to kill them, albeit reluctantly, because the dogs were signaling the Israeli forces presence which would jeopardize their lives. He was assigned this task because the leader was aware that this man did not have it in him to kill humans so instead Boaz was ordered to kill these beasts. It transpires that the nightmares that Boaz has been having is evidence that although he followed the command that was given to him, it was against his nature to kill not

only humans but any form of life, even feral dogs. Ari embraces Boaz prior to bidding him farewell and as he walks off, he turns around and notices that Boaz is stood motionless staring blankly into the tempestuous Mediterranean Sea with his back turned towards him. It is a sad scene which makes apparent the distress of mind that Boaz's actions have caused him and how indeed his very own mind has punished him for his crimes he committed on the barren fields of Lebanon and for defying his own human nature. It was as if his mind were castigating him for bearing the memories that he created, memories that no human mind should carry. The soldier must make the decision; the man must live with the consequences.

During this opening scene Boaz asks of Ari if he can help him. Ari is at a loss, he can't seem to understand how he, a filmmaker and not a psychiatrist, can help him in any way. Boaz then responds emphatically, 'Can't films be therapeutic?'

This encounter with Boaz triggered in Ari the first flashbacks of what happened in Lebanon 20 years ago, of what took place in West Beirut, in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla.

We join Ari in this flashback and the audience is transported in time and place. It is 1982 and we are in Beirut, Lebanon. Effigies of Bashir Gemayel are ubiquitous. Ari and his fellow soldiers are submerged fully naked on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea amidst a backdrop of flares falling from the night sky. The expression on Ari's face is sullen. The audience, as well as Ari, is still not aware of what is taking place. The music is melancholy; the color of the night sky is a golden bronze due to melding of pitch black and the fire of incandescent flares, the look in Ari's eyes and the lineaments of his face, the atmosphere, ambience and the animation all create a foreboding of imminent tragedy.

'Our minds fabricate things to fill in the holes' Says Ori, a fellow veteran and companion. Ari feels compelled to talk to someone about his flashback and Ori, who was also in the Lebanon at the time, he feels is the perfect person and indeed as the movie progresses it becomes apparent that Ari couldn't have been more right. 'Isn't it dangerous, will I not remember things that I don't want to know' Ari says to Ori when the latter suggests that he go in search of his lost memories.

But Ori assures Ari that 'We don't go to places unless we really want to go; a human mechanism prevents us from entering dark places. Memory takes us where we need to go.' And so Ari embarks on his quest to decipher the phenomena that has seized him and the meaning of his flashback.

Ari discovers that his friend in Holland, Carmi, a man of vast wealth who accrued his money from selling Falafel in continental Europe and who was also in Lebanon with Ari, also appears to have forgotten what took place in Sabra and Shatila (he himself noticed this when his son was playing with a toy gun and

nonchalantly and innocently asked his father if he ever killed anyone when he was in the army).

The audience is transported to the south of Lebanon at a time when the Israeli troops first arrive there, to the ancient Phoenician port of Sidon in 1982. *'Out of pure fear and anxiety we start shooting like lunatics. Despite two years of training there is an uncontrollable fear. A terrible silence of death ensues. And lying in the car were the bodies of a whole family'* utters a voiceover, chillingly, Carmi's voice as he attempts to understand and explain to Ari his state of mind at the time. At that point Carmi asks Ari quite bluntly why he came to Holland, as if warning him about the ghosts that he may uncover, a malevolent entity that will haunt Ari to the grave. At this point Ari responds to Carmi's effrontery and confesses that he has lost his memory, that he can't remember anything about the war in Lebanon, except for one flashback, a flashback with Carmi himself in it.

When Ari asks Carmi if he was there too, Carmi answers by saying that it is hard to say because he can't remember anything about the massacre. Carmi remembers being in Beirut when the massacres took place, but he doesn't remember the actual massacres. Carmi states stolidly that *'The massacres are not stored in my system'*.

In the following scene, we see Ari cogitating, cupping his chin with the palm of his hand. He looks morose. And then as he glances outside the window of the taxi taking him to Amsterdam airport it happens, suddenly and with no alarm bells warning him, the memories of Lebanon come flooding back, not a hallucination, not the subconscious, but the first day of the war, he was barely 19 and he hadn't even started shaving yet.

We see Ari when he was 19 in the cockpit of the tank commanding his colleague to shoot, to shoot at anything and his colleague obsequiously obeys his command and they shoot indiscriminately. We can see them unloading the dead (from the tank) mechanically, as if they weren't even present and then they turn around (unceremoniously, perfunctorily) and drive back into the wilderness and the audience can sense that these soldiers, these human beings are starting to relinquish their humanity, their souls without being aware of it, they are becoming lifeless.

A song with the lyrics illustrates the tragedy and even the senselessness of the war, *'I bombed Sidon today, I bombed Beirut today, and I bombed Beirut everyday'*. *Sure we kill some innocent people along the way.'*

'Is it possible that I didn't remember such a dramatic event' Ari asks the psychiatrist.

'We call them dissociative events' answers the psychiatrist Professor Zahava Solomon expert on post traumatic stress disorder. *'It is when a person is in an experience but feels outside it'* she continues. When Professor Solomon asked a photographer how he got through Beirut, he said, *'It was easy he just saw every-*

thing through an imaginary camera. But then the camera broke down and the consequences were catastrophic. He then said that the situation turned traumatic for him when they arrived in the vicinity of the stables in Beirut. The hippodrome, they saw a huge number of carcasses, of slaughtered Arabian horses, it broke his heart he said, to see those horses, 'what had they done?' He had used a mechanism to stay outside of the events, as if watching the war through film instead of participating. This protected him. Once he was pulled in the events he no longer could deny reality, horror surrounded him and panic engulfed him.'

We then enter a scene where we notice teenagers doing what teenagers do: smoking, partying, playing games. Everyone appears to be happy except for Ari, who is unkemptly dressed in his uniform walking, disheveled as he is, solemnly through the interminable streets. Despite being surrounded by peers of his age, he appears desolate and estranged; such were the psychological effects that war was already having on him.

We see Ari in the bar, drinking alcohol with his mate in real time, reminiscing about way back when. Ari says to his friend that the memories are coming back, that he almost has the full picture after having met with people whose paths converged with his, people who served with him during his sojourn in Beirut.

He recalls arriving in a villa on the once opulent outskirts of Beirut during Operation Peace for Galilee. Ari describes a corpulent officer who was perched on a chair in front of the TV ordering Ari to insert a video into the video player *The Plumber Comes 2* (a pornographic film). The officer then orders his men to keep vigil on the streets for any would be terrorists. In the pitch black darkness of the night, the officer phones the sentry and tells him that Bashir is dead. *'Bashir Gemayel'* he exhorts, *'the elected president of Lebanon, a brother an ally, a Christian, murdered.'* His voice is incredulous.

When Ari arrives in Beirut Airport he is excited. He sees hotels and beaches and the airport is full of airplanes from different airlines. Airfrance, British Airways. He wanders through the Duty Free and sees jewels, tobacco, perfume, alcohol; he then looks outside the window of the Duty Free and the reality dawns on him, he is disabused of the illusion at once and the image changes from what Beirut was to what Beirut has become, what Beirut is.

Ari regards the debris of all the aircraft and that the planes have been reduced to rubble and bombed out shells. And that the shops are empty and they have been looted a long time since. He starts to hear sounds and voices he hears shelling from the city and bombing from the air force. And slowly he begins to realize where he is and he is afraid of what will happen next. They start walking from the airport to the city, the high rise hotels hovering above them with the sea to one side. They walk along a promenade towards a junction. They then come under sniper fire and all hell is let loose.

A soldier then grabs hold of a weapon and makes a drastic move: he moves away from the periphery where he is relatively sheltered in a pit beside a concrete wall and enters the junction where innumerable shots are being fired at. At this very moment we notice his movements are very similar to a certain dance, as if he is dancing to the tune of a waltz, firing his weapon indiscriminately and the camera is twisting and whirling, and we see a gigantic effigy of the assassinated president elect Bashir Gemayal and the soldier continues to dance the waltz, to waltz with Bashir. In the meantime, the followers of Bashir were preparing their revenge only 200 yards away: the Sabra and Shatila massacres.

We meet Ari in real time sat next to Carmi on a bench in his ranch in Holland (only this time the sun is shining at its zenith and the flowers are in full bloom). Ari tells his friend that he is starting to remember more and more, that he has heard stories from people who were with him that he didn't want to believe. We discover that Ari is assembling the fragments of memory that are returning to him as he would do the pieces of a puzzle. The actual massacre still eludes him and what Ari has assembled is akin to a tapestry of deceit. Ari says to Carmi that he can remember everything except for the day of the massacre itself. Carmi says to Ari that he doesn't understand why people were so surprised that the Phalangists committed the massacres that he knew all along how ruthless they were.

'Bashir was to them what David Bowie was to me' says a voice over soporifically. 'A star, a prince, an idol; I think they even felt eroticism for him. Their idol was going to become king; we were the ones who were going to crown him. The next day he was murdered. It was obvious they would avenge his death in some perverse way. It was as if their wife had been murdered. This was about family honor which runs deep.' Says Carmi.

Ari has returned to Israel and meets up with his good friend Ori. Ari says to Ori that he has reached an impasse. He can't find anyone who was with him at the massacre. No one with him has any solid memories of the days of the massacre and it is vexing him to the point that he has almost come to the end of his tether. He only has this one flashback of the massacres. Ari says to Ori that Carmi, the only person with him in this flashback, denies being there.

Ori maintains that the flashback is still real. Ari says it is only a vision and then Ori offers to explain...

'What does the sea symbolize in dreams? Fear, Feelings. The massacre frightens you, makes you uneasy. You were close to it.' Says Ori in an avuncular tone. Ari retorts by saying that that doesn't help much

'Your interest in the massacre developed long before it happened. Your interest in the massacre stems from another massacre. Your interest in those camps is actually about the "other" camps. Were your parents in those "other" camps?'

'Yes' answers Ari. *'Auschwitz.'*

'So the massacre has been with you since you were six' says Ori. *'You lived through the massacre and those camps. Your only solution is to find out what really happened... In Sabra and Shatila, seek out people. Find out what really happened, ask who was there. Get details and more details that way then maybe you can find out where you were exactly and what role you played.'*

'A soldier was informed that the phalangists would enter the camp and we would provide them with cover. Once they had purged the camps (purged of Palestinian terrorists) they would seize control.' Says an Israeli veteran during an interview with Ari. The camera then returns to Beirut and the night sky is littered with flares.

We hear a voice over, *'The next morning, they bring out civilians. The civilians were led out of the camps in a long line. The phalangists watched on constantly shouting at them and occasionally shooting into the air. There were women, old people walking in a line to the stadium.'*

The audience then sees old and haggard people attempting to get into the back of a van and a child with a forlorn expression on his face as if he were aware of his horrid fate.

When Ori asks Ari if he fired the flares he responded by saying, *'Is that important? Does it make any difference if I fired them? Or if I just saw the flares that helped people shoot others.'*

'You know that picture from the Warsaw ghetto?' the illustrious journalist Ron Ben Yisha rhetorically asks Ari in an interview with him *'the one with the kid holding his hands in the air? That is just how the long line of old woman and children looked.'*

We join the journalist as he forays into the camps with wailing lugubrious woman mourning the deaths of their loved ones, their screams penetrating your soul and Ari standing at the end of the road beholding the spectacle before him utterly stupefied. And his search for his lost memories comes to an end.

The animation stops and we see real footage of the massacre that took place, corpses and carcasses strewn on the streets piled on top of each other, dismembered, disemboweled, old men, woman and children. There is a deafening silence that cannot be stifled with words...

CONCLUSION

It wasn't easy trying to maintain equanimity whilst watching the animated documentary film *Waltz with Bashir*. We surmise that the Lebanese authorities banned the film from being screened in Lebanon lest we sympathize with an Israeli veteran. Radicals on either side cannot help but vilify their adversaries. Truth be told, I cannot but help feel a kindred spirit towards Ari Folman for his breathtaking depiction of the events that took place and the harrowing effects PTSD had on him.

The world cannot deny that the victims of these onslaughts were the murdered and the massacred Palestinians themselves. Here we have a sorrow, in the words of John Steinbeck, that weeping cannot symbolize. The psychological wounds rendered are just too deep to heal. There is something sinister here, something pernicious about the dark side of the human condition that can allow misery to flourish. But pointing an accusing finger may exacerbate and not alleviate human suffering and the tragic toll that the Sabra and Shatila massacres have had on our humanity already.

On this 30th year commemoration our thoughts go out to all the victims of the Sabra and Shatila tragedies.

Film has provided us with that crucial insight and as Boaz emphatically pronounced can be therapeutic. We posit that film can be therapeutic by validating human suffering. We, as a species, after all derive solace from shared experience.

With regards to ongoing wars that Britain is engaged in at the moment, the more aware we are of the catastrophic consequences that conflict can bring, the more it should serve to strengthen our resolve to prevent it from happening in the first place or from deploying troops to conflict zones. If policy-makers were reminded of the far-reaching effects of conflict, the disastrous impact it can have on our physical and mental well beings perhaps they would be more willing to consider diplomatic channels before resorting to a call to arms. However, as mental healthcare providers, ours is not the realm of politicians. Our message to those who do render psychiatric services is that the portrayal of psychopathology in film can help us to better understand service users and the harrowing effects that psychopathology can have on them. The animated documentary film *Waltz with Bashir* provides us with a unique insight into what it is like to suffer from PTSD and this may allow us to empathize more with the troops returning from tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan who may have developed this debilitating disease.

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