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# Victim or Perpetrator? Uncovering the Nuances of Perpetrators in Graphic Narratives

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## Keywords

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# Victim or Perpetrator? Uncovering the Nuances of Perpetrators in Graphic Narratives

## _Abstract

Graphic narratives about genocide allow for different and unique ways of visualizing and imagining trauma and trauma-induced subjective experiences. In their attempt to initiate active reader participation in filling in the gutters with reader-induced closure, graphic narratives are unique as they work with emotion to mobilize their readers to act. This form of narrative also allows creators to expose the liminality of subject positions more easily.

Through an analysis of *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* and *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story*, this paper demonstrates that the dimensions of perpetratorhood are far from well-defined and that the perpetrator often resides in the ambiguity of what Primo Levi calls the 'gray zone.'[1] This zone describes a middle ground between good and evil which draws attention to complications in how perpetrators are judged as well as how victims are represented. Comics scholar Hillary Chute explains that the power of graphic narratives comes from their ability to "intervene against a culture of invisibility"[2] through the ethical portrayal of trauma.[3] This risk is displayed in the graphic novels *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir* as they both centralize characters that expose the hidden nuances of perpetratorhood.

Graphic narratives about genocide allow for different and unique ways of visualizing and imagining trauma and related experiences. The form of graphic narratives allows the reader to engage differently with the content than other forms of narratives, fostering a more direct character identification. It is through this form that the creator demands active reader participation through imagination, memory work, and performing the work of closure. Participation of this type, in addition to reader-inspired closure, where the audience uses their imagination to fill in the context missing between the panels, allows the reader to engage with characters in their own way. Gillian Whitlock suggests that "perhaps [comics] have extraordinary potential to — as Saïd suggests — free us to think and imagine differently in times of trauma and censorship."[4] In their attempt to initiate active reader participation in filling in the gutters with reader-induced closure, graphic narratives employ emotion to mobilize their readers to act. Emotional responses to overall content or that of each panel often demand action from the audience by creating strong bonds with characters or situations. Readers of graphic novels do the individualized work of drawing conclusions of what happens in the gutters (breaks) of the story line. The drawn form of comics also allows the reader to control the pace of consumption as the act of reading a graphic narrative is similar to what Berger writes about drawing, it, "[forces] us to stop and enter

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its time."[5] Unlike literary, cinematic, or documentary narratives of war and genocide, graphic narratives empower both the creator's and the reader's subjectivity and imagination, which enables different readings.[6] These narratives demand that readers create connections between the image and the text, thus bringing the readers' subjectivity into play.

Through an analysis of the graphic novels *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* by Jean-Philippe Stassen and *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story* by Ari Folman one can see that the dimensions of perpetratorhood are far from well-defined and that the perpetrator often resides in what Primo Levi calls the 'gray zone.' This zone describes "a middle ground between good and evil"[7] and will be discussed in depth further on. The 'gray zone' brings about complications in how perpetrators are judged as well as how victims are represented. It is important to note that Levi's use of this term was restricted to the Holocaust and the types of complicity existent in and around concentration camps. This paper serves to expand on Levi's concept. Comics scholar Hillary Chute explains that the power of graphic narratives comes from their ability to "intervene against a culture of invisibility"[8] through the ethical portrayal of trauma.[9] This risk is displayed in both *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir* as they both centralize characters that expose the hidden nuances of perpetratorhood.

Stassen's *Deogratias* portrays the time before, during, and after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It follows a Hutu teenager, Deogratias, who is shown to be psychologically, emotionally, and morally unstable and conflicted about the decisions he has made. Stassen's combination of scenes from the present day in addition to Deogratias' flashbacks allow the reader to observe that perpetrators cannot always be presented as pure evil. Present day and flashbacks are differentiated using different framing strategies. Stassen portrays scenes from the past with black outlined panels, where Deogratias is shown in dirty clothes, while scenes from the present day lack outlines and the characters are shown in clean clothes. Set largely in post-genocide Rwanda, the story presents many survivors who occupy ambiguous positioning as both victim and perpetrator. The use of temporal shifting between past and present allows the reader to sympathize with Deogratias' struggles between good and evil.

*Waltz with Bashir* follows Ari Folman, an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) soldier, in his quest to recover lost memories surrounding his involvement in the 1982 Lebanon War. Folman seeks out friends who also took part to figure out his role in the war.

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Folman eventually realizes that he was not directly involved in the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, instead "only" firing flares into the sky to illuminate the refugee camp for those perpetrating the mass killing. His amnesia in combination with the recovered memories leads to his conflicted feelings of guilt surrounding the massacres.

This article seeks to reflect upon the inefficiency of the binary thinking that separates the perpetrator from the victim as well as the inefficiency of these categories themselves. It questions the role of the perpetrator and seeks to examine whether it is morally wrong to condemn the perpetrator as evil. The first section explores the often ambiguously defined notion of the perpetrator. Through the analysis of specific examples from *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir*, this paper demonstrates how perpetrators of war and genocide challenge the victim/perpetrator dichotomy. These challenges show that such binary thinking is inadequate for the complex situations of genocide and war. The second part investigates how low-level perpetrators of violence reinforce their positioning within the gray zone. It counters the idea of the gray zone as a catch-all excuse from charges of moral responsibility. Finally, an attempt to analyze perpetrators of violence in *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir* follows to illustrate how these subjects cope with their self-representation in the narratives. Issues arising from the placement in the ambiguity of the gray zone will invite future research to study the role of the perpetrator more adequately in times of war and genocide.

Defining the perpetrator is often fraught with ambiguity or judgement requiring an examination of the term in relation to these narratives. A perpetrator is often defined as "someone who has committed a crime or a violent or harmful act."[10] As a strict black-and-white explanation, this definition does not account for the ambiguity of subjects who may present as also being a victim or a bystander. Violence most often occurs within a "complex network of social relations," which also clouds the clear-cut definition and singularity of the term 'perpetrator.'[11] It is the idea of this network that complicates the Manichean groupings of good and evil, making it difficult at times to differentiate between victim and perpetrator in times of genocide and war. The idea of groupings can be problematic and, in some cases, can lead to assumptions about those that belong to either group. Groupism is described as the "tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental

units of social analysis."[12] It contributes to complications in understanding how individuals come to decide whether they partake in violent acts through obscuring actions around killing. Though sociologist Rogers Brubaker argues against a distinctive grouping of perpetrators as we see in groupism, Dominick LaCapra maintains that this type of distinction is crucial. LaCapra distinguishes between traumatized positions:

> The distinction between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders is crucial. 'Victim' is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political, and ethical category […] but not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma which must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices. Such trauma does not, however, entail the equation or identification of the perpetrator and the victim.[13]

While LaCapra's distinction of categories is clear, I maintain that the perpetrators in *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir* may in fact be considered victims, as I examine throughout this paper.

Many perpetrators of genocide also present as victims, which results in a "gray area" of subjectivity. Introduced by Levi, "the concept of the Gray Zone applies to morally charged conduct in a middle ground between good and evil, right and wrong, where neither side of these pairs covers the situation and where imposing one side or the other becomes itself for Levi a moral wrong."[14] Those involved in war and/or genocide occupy complex subjectivities and forms of agency that do not fit neatly within the normative categories of 'victim' or 'perpetrator.' Levi reminds us that "against all logic, compassion and brutality can coexist in the same individual at the same time."[15] In bringing this point to light, we can see how Levi's gray zone works to trouble conventional morality as well as legal judgment and historical understanding through the way it breaks stereotypical categories of victims and perpetrators.[16] This also allows readers to better understand the obscurity of the ideas of direct and indirect perpetration of violence.

In *Waltz with Bashir* Folman highlights the complicity of the indirect perpetrator. Ari's complicity is highlighted not only through his participation in the war but also through "omission, silence, inaction, and failure to oppose the injustice."[17] Throughout the narrative Ari does not assume responsibility for his complicity in the Sabra and Shatila massacres. Folman also explores the moral gray zone that the IDF soldiers and their relationship to perpetration inhabit.[18] During an attack, Folman suddenly

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turns to what many would consider a 'victim' status, highlighting the ambiguity of his status as a perpetrator of violence: "We were so scared […] We were scared out of our minds."[19] During a discussion with his friend Sivan, a psychiatrist, Folman tries to work through his role of the Sabra and Shatila massacres. Sivan strives to complicate Folman's complicity and points out Folman's victim status. Through this conversation Sivan introduces a way to insulate Folman from the idea of being a perpetrator: "You feel guilty. Against your will, you were cast in the role of Nazi."[20] Sivan's words imply that Folman was not a perpetrator but instead became a victim of the war machine. Anderson explains that "[b]oth state and horizontal propaganda drive neutralization, but it may also occur in a very subtle fashion, when authority figures condone violence with statements such as 'it was understandable.'"[21] The idea behind the expression 'war machine' is explained through statements such as this one.

Deogratias' place in the gray zone is demonstrated intermittently throughout Stassen's narrative, which highlights how easy it is to inhabit the liminal gray zone that blurs victimhood and perpetration. Beyond the numerous portrayals of him as a dog, which acts as a defense mechanism against confronting the trauma of his complicity in the genocide, we see more specific instances of his liminal positioning. After being taunted by children about his 'becoming a dog,' Deogratias is shown wide-eyed and stunned recollecting his past actions: "My head's spilling out […] and sharp, sharp blades plunge into women's genitals."[22]

War has changed from the commonly understood battle between two distinct uniformed opposing forces into what has been described as *new war*. "New war, in its contemporary, multilateral, and multipolar form, has been defined by various scholars as typified by radical transformations."[23] These transformations challenge the common war binary of perpetrator/victim and work to blur other commonly encountered binaries related to war time including the distinctions of defense/offense, victory/defeat, and moral/immoral. Agamben reminds us that positions such as these should be seen as tensional which add to the ambiguity of all definitions put into play during times of war.[24] It is especially through *new war* that we see that the perpetrator/victim dichotomy is oftentimes destabilized as these roles become chaotic in times of war. The characters in *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir* also embody Rothberg's image of the implicated subject adding yet another aspect of confusion and blurring of clear-cut roles. Described as "neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in his-

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tories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles."[25]

The protagonists of *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir* demonstrate that certain subjects involved in war and genocide can in fact be placed in the groups of victims or perpetrators. Both graphic narratives provide a nuanced perspective of the perpetrator and both "demonstrate different ways of dealing with the moral implications of this role."[26] Many participants involved in war and genocide also move between categories, between killing and not killing, between victims and perpetrators, which positions them as implicated subjects that reside within the gray zone. Stassen illuminates this shifting of categories in his portrayal of Deogratias, who at times is a killer and at times the rescuer that attempts to save his Tutsi companions. Deogratias' conflicted positioning is further complicated when Bosco (a Tutsi officer of the Rwandan Patriotic Front) explains to him: "You're not all guilty, you lot. And you, you poor crackpot, you're not suspected of anything in particular."[27] Bosco's inference that only those directly involved in specific violent acts are guilty adds to the blurring of the lines denoting who can be considered a perpetrator.

The characters in *Waltz with Bashir* also demonstrate category-shifting, which leads to ambiguous positioning between victims and perpetrators. When Folman speaks to his psychiatrist friend Sivan about ways to fill in his memory gaps, we see fear arise in anticipation of the truth: "Don't you think it's dangerous? Maybe I'll discover things about myself that I don't want to know."[28] Often associated more with victims than perpetrators, fear and confusion are found frequently in *Waltz with Bashir* in other characters besides Folman. Folman's friend, Carmi, describes another attack: "With all the pressure and the fear, we start shooting like maniacs. I have no idea at what. Even after two years of training, there's nothing but uncontrollable fear."[29] Regardless of the character, many involved in war experience ambiguous subjective positioning. Fear often overtakes reason and can lead to feelings of 'victimhood.' This same fear encapsulated Folman, originating on the first day of the war. He demonstrates this fear by saying: "I don't know who we're shooting at. We're just firing like madmen till nightfall."[30] Fear allows for the ambiguous positioning of perpetrators and is often widespread during war, affecting all, regardless of their role.

War and genocide are complex events which complicate the subject positions of those involved. It is only through analyzing the connections between the victims and

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perpetrators of violence that we can work to "deepen responsibility toward the […] other's truth, and [heal] the rift in the fabric of the social order."[31] It is through the deep exploration of victim trauma and the lack of attention paid to perpetrator-focused trauma that solidifies the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. Only through a deeper analysis of perpetrator trauma can we challenge this longstanding binary and expose a more detailed overview of subject positions during war time. The binary thinking that places subjects into perpetrator/victim groups is inadequate in the face of the complexity of modern genocide and war. This is highlighted by the fact that agency is diffused in instances of structural injustices, to which I argue both war and genocide belong.

*Waltz with Bashir* and *Deogratias* question how perpetrators are related to by the reader, which gives rise to complications of the victim/perpetrator categorization. The graphic form lends itself to interaction with and the potential for an emotional response toward the character that may embody the role of both a victim and a perpetrator. It does this through impelling the reader to engage with what is shown and with their responsibility in the negotiating of meaning, a key task in understanding graphic narratives. This is an important responsibility to engage with the complexities involved in character formation. As In 't Veld explains, it is through the "engagement with the complexities of perpetrator behavior and reasons for participation" that this binary grouping is challenged.[32]

When approached by Augustine (a Twa man from the church), who is concerned about the welfare of his Tutsi friends, Deogratias attempts to justify the violent actions that he had undertaken. He says to Augustine: "They forced me, don't you see?"[33] Through this utterance he demonstrates how he can be seen by some readers as a victim, which complicates his portrayal as a perpetrator. Yet, at times, Deogratias is portrayed as a cunning murderer, as we see when he explains the more complex thoughts and emotions involved in the killing of Bosco: "For Bosco, I had to play it smarter…"[34] This scene shows how Deogratias turns the cultural customs of Rwanda to his advantage to trick Bosco into drinking poison.

Folman's subject position is complex, as demonstrated through the apprehension about his personal complicity, and he displays a troubled sense of self throughout the entire narrative. Confusion and conflicted emotions affect Folman when he is asked to dispose of deceased bodies: "Dump them [the dead]?"[35] After loading the bodies

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into his vehicle, Folman's confusion persists, and his role shifts from a confused victim to a confused perpetrator as he continues to lead his fellow IDF soldiers. One asked what they were supposed to do now and Folman's response speaks to his confusion and role switching: "Shoot […] I don't know. Just shoot."[36] The jump between the 'victim' and the 'perpetrator' positions is not always subtle. Frenkel's (another IDF soldier fighting with Folman) statement while involved in a firefight demonstrate this as well as his desperate need to regain some sort of power and control: "I needed a machine gun, a mag. I was born for the mag."[37] Statements such as these, in addition to feelings of fear, display the ease with which one can jump between the contrasting positions of perpetrator and victim. It is up to the subject to make decisions regarding which position they occupy at a given time.

Ethical decisions made by low-level perpetrators of violence reinforce their placement within the gray zone. Levi notes that the gray zone is "a hybrid category with undefined contours which has the ability to confound the reader's judgement."[38] Through an analysis of Stassen's and Folman's graphic narratives, we can also posit that this zone could throw the perpetrators' judgement into a state of confusion. We see how Ari was perplexed at his reaction and realize that trauma, whether inflicted by him or others, can profoundly affect even those considered perpetrators: "I was supposed to take over, but at that moment I didn't react the way I should have. We just sat in the tank."[39] At times decisions made by perpetrators are not arrived at easily, which explains the significance of the study of concepts such as Levi's gray zone in the context of violence and conflict.

Another issue that works toward placing perpetrators in the gray zone is moral blindness, explored by Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Donskis through the concept of adiaphora. Derived from the Greek *adiaphoron*, adiaphora is defined as a "temporary withdrawal from one's own sensitivity zone; an ability not to react, or to react as if something were happening not to people but to natural physical objects, to things, or to non-humans."[40] In other words, the concept of moral blindness relates to insensitivity as well as to the dehumanization of victims. Bauman clarifies that his use of *adiaphoron* is a secularized use which includes "acts [that] are those exempted by social consent (universal or local) from ethical evaluation, and therefore free from carrying the threat of pangs of conscience and moral stigma."[41] In this light, certain acts of violence are placed outside the axis of the 'moral/immoral,' which leaves them un-

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able to be subjected to moral judgement, therefore not allowing the perpetrator to be consciously limited in their actions. The concepts of moral blindness and adiaphora can lend characteristics to perpetrators such as insensitivity and lack of concern toward others to place them more easily within the ambiguity of the gray zone. As commonly used generalizations in analyses of violence, the terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator' do not adequately capture the ambiguity involved in these subject positions. Through the category of the implicated subject, one can better explore the notion of responsibility within Levi's gray zone.

Deogratias, to justify his unethical decisions to Brother Philip, refers to their coercive circumstances: "I had to kill them, Brother Philip, do you understand?"[42] This feeling of being forced into making decisions that involved killing people haunts Deogratias throughout the narrative. He later explains the circumstances of his complicity in the killings of Venitia, Benina, and Apollanaria (his Tutsi friends) to Brother Philip: "I had to kill them… They knew what the dogs do."[43]

Though the gray zone seems like an example of ambiguous grounds for the forgiveness of perpetrator violence, it remains more complex than that. Lee explains that "[n]or, finally and most fundamentally, is the Gray Zone a place to which all human beings — by the fact of human frailty — are granted access, since that would then enable them conveniently to respond to any moral charge with the indisputable claim that 'I'm only human.'"[44] It is through this assertion that one can safely assume that the gray zone remains an essential aspect of perpetrator trauma and confirms that it is not a catch-all escape from responsibility.

Rothberg points out that implication in violent acts does not require "consciousness of one's entanglement in injustice — in fact, implication is often unconscious or denied."[45] Folman's continuous perplexity in search of his actual role in the Lebanon war exemplifies this in *Waltz with Bashir*. What Folman demonstrates is that the implicated subject remains morally compromised, whether that is by choice or by coercion. This is "often without their conscious knowledge and in the absence of evil intent."[46] We encounter an example of this when Folman meets with his psychiatrist friend Sivan. Sivan explains that Folman's visions may not portray reality, but that they remain important within his consciousness. Memory combined with imagination works to reveal "things that might have otherwise remained hidden."[47] As the narrative progresses, we learn that these visions are in fact related to his childhood experi-

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ences growing up with parents, who survived the camps of WWII, and not to his actions during the war.

Boaz, another friend of Folman's, explains how he was made to shoot dogs: "They knew I was incapable of shooting people, so they said, okay Boaz… you go in first […] and take care of the dogs."[48] The ability to deny implication in unjust acts often comes easy to perpetrators who often invoke justifications of them 'following orders.' Recalling another incident, Folman remembers: "We dump the bodies mechanically, as if we weren't there. We wash out the APC, turn our backs… and drive away."[49] This scene could counter Folman's direct complicity as he was following orders, but it also highlights the compromise of morality through the imagining of mechanical movements and subsequently leaving the scene.

Behavioral boundary-crossing is a concept used by Aliza Luft in examining the behavior of the Hutu during the Rwandan genocide. Her work on this concept gives rise to a theory of action which explains the individual actions of those involved that allow for the discarding of assumed roles due to individual behaviors and categorical alignment. Perpetrators are most often seen as those performing violent actions and are therefore aligned into a single category following normative assumptions. Luft's work aligns well with the issues discussed in this paper as it demonstrates how easily those involved in perpetration of violence can switch between actions often used to distinguish between the roles of victim and perpetrator. Fujii points out that "[m]any participants move back and forth between killing and not killing, and they can straddle multiple social categories at once."[50]

In both *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir*, those representing gray zone positions display moral neutralization to allow themselves to grapple with their self-representation in violent situations. This is something adopted by many perpetrators that permits them to easily remain indifferent to the suffering of their victims. The form of the graphic narrative also allows for the recognition of the consequences stemming from the crimes of war and genocide which can complicate how the perpetrator is represented and received by the reader. As noted by Kent, *Waltz with Bashir* rejects "catharsis that might come of memory recovery, or […] psychological strategy that grants closure over the event, Folman refuses the possibility of completion."[51] The lack of closure in *Waltz with Bashir* showcases the ambiguity involved in Folman's position within the gray zone as well as allowing for a recognition by the reader of

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how the consequences of the acts of perpetrators can be represented within the graphic narrative form.

"In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi argues that it is unfair to judge the victims of genocide using moral tools that are appropriate to normal, everyday life."[52] In his analysis of Levi's gray zone, Lee explains that victims are often "so constrained that they truly reside in the gray zone, a place too horrific to allow for the use of the usual ethical procedures for evaluating moral culpability."[53] Like any instance of violence, one must remember that war and genocide have their own cultural, socio-political, and most importantly, historical context that affects all facets of the situation. Lee's work on clarifying the gray zone reminds the reader that situations of extreme violence (in his article he refers to concentration camps) require attentiveness to the surrounding circumstances. In reference to Karl Jaspers' *Sonderkommandos*, Levi writes that "the history of the 'crematorium crows' be pondered with compassion and rigor, but that any judgement of them be suspended."[54] He believed that, through extreme suffering and therefore insertion within the gray zone, judgement about what these prisoners were forced to do should be suspended. Jaspers supports Levi's thoughts on the unreasonableness of judging victims by contemporary values. Neither of these theorists condone the actions of perpetrators but instead recognize the complexity behind this position in some circumstances as well as the different forms of responsibility surrounding them.

Julius (a leader in the Hutu militia called the "*interahamwa*"), though he embodies the same perpetrator role as Deogratias, passes judgement upon Deogratias for his abandonment of their mission in the Turquoise Zone. Julius argues: "You can atone for your mistake by getting back to work with us."[55] This judgement is compounded as Julius accuses Deogratias of betraying his fellow soldiers. At times Deogratias attempts to downplay his moral culpability through his heroic actions when trying to protect his Tutsi friends. "I don't think you realize the risks that I'm running by hiding you here in my home," he explains to Benina.[56] When Benina attempts to flee to find her mother and sister, Deogratias responds as her protector again, implying that she is acting irrationally: "Since you don't want to be reasonable, I'll save you in spite of you: every morning I'll lock you up."[57] This statement taken alone helps showcase Deogratias' position in the gray zone. Stassen uses Deogratias' act of aid to

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his Tutsi friends versus the act of locking up an innocent girl to reveal the ambiguous subjectivity that he inhabits.

Multiple issues arise from those who are positioned within the gray zone. Some that stand out are indifference and apathy toward those who suffer; another being the perpetrator complex, described by Morag as the "gap between guilt feelings (characterized by evoking identification, melancholic narcissism, self-pity, and looking "backward") and a sense of guilt (motivated by empathy for the victims and characterized by assuming responsibility and looking "forward")."[58] Perpetrators, as already discussed, also face their own version of trauma. It is in and through this type of trauma that we can begin to understand the moral contradictions they face.

What is also seen, more specifically in *Waltz with Bashir* than in *Deogratias*, is moral and metaphysical guilt. Moral guilt can be conceptualized as a self-conscious emotion triggered by violating one's own moral standards.[59] Metaphysical guilt originates from a solidarity among people that implies co-responsibility for all injustices, especially those committed in one's presence or with one's knowledge.[60] Metaphysical guilt also encompasses deeds that involve following orders. These types of guilt "involve charges brought 'from within, by [the guilty party's] own soul."[61] Folman asks: "What difference does it make whether I fired the flares or just looked at a brightly lit sky that helped other people kill?"[62] His self-questioning concerning his role in the war and the difference between the indirect complicity involved in either firing the flares or remaining a bystander that only watches the events points toward Folman's moral and metaphysical manifestations of guilt. *Waltz with Bashir* also depicts indifference and apathy toward suffering through the introduction of Ariel Sharon into the narrative. Folman's narrative expressly points out Sharon's indifference through a conversation that takes place via phone as he replies to the caller: "Okay. Thank you for bringing it to my attention […] and went back to sleep."[63]

In *Deogratias*, we notice many instances of indifference toward the suffering of others. Deogratias takes part in revenge killings of those complicit in the genocide, whether directly or indirectly. It is apparent that his killings of representatives of former colonial forces came easier to him than those of his fellow Rwandans: "For the sergeant, he's white, so it was easy… I just put the poison in the beer bottle."[64]

Moral neutralization is a technique used to release the actor from a moral conflict by creating justifications that place their decision in a better light.[65] Derived from

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criminologists Gresham Sykes and David Matza, "techniques of neutralization create a state of drift in which people can move easily between delinquency and the mainstream."[66] These techniques require pre-existing beliefs of the affected population. Moral neutralization is essential, as Anderson explains, in that if violent acts are committed without neutralization techniques, the perpetrator is at risk of developing a 'deviant identity' which results in self-rejection. The practice of moral neutralization allows perpetrators to justify their actions in assuaging the associated guilt accompanying violent acts.

Deogratias displays this technique when killing those he previously considered friends. He had previously displayed no malice against Brother Philip, yet calmly and openly decides that it is time for him to die: "Now it's your turn to drink the poison […] Drink, Brother Philip."[67] Moral neutralization, indifference, and apathy concerning his murders of former friends demonstrates Deogratias' placement within the gray zone. The perpetrator trauma that affects Deogratias is made very clear by Stassen. This trauma contributes to stimulating reflections on the struggles relating to the perpetrator's integrity. Deogratias' transformation into a dog clearly indicates his struggles to cope with decisions that induce moral conflict.

Through the analysis of *Deogratias* and *Waltz with Bashir*, this article has explored the nuances of the perpetrator role. The graphic narrative form is unique in its ability to inspire reader participation, character identification, and their necessary role in attaining narrative closure. Analyzing the perpetrators within Stassen's and Folman's graphic narratives has also uncovered how easily characters such as these cross behavioral boundaries between the categories of 'victim' and 'perpetrator,' settling into what Levi calls the gray zone. As a zone that encompasses liminal subject positions that may blur the lines between victims and perpetrators, Levi's theory enables a better understanding of the perpetrators who are entangled in the complexities of war and genocide. It is critical to reiterate that the gray zone is not a place that enables the perpetrator to disavow the responsibility for wrongdoings; instead, it affords a nuanced positioning of perpetrators so they can be better understood. Though some perpetrators can be seen clearly inhabiting this liminal space, they often remain confused about their placement in society as they cope with how they are represented within this area. This paper has uncovered how concepts such as moral blindness, moral neutralization, and Levi's gray zone can help lead readers to a broader understanding of

the role of the perpetrator in times of war and genocide. Behavioral boundary-crossing is also an important part of understanding those whose position is not easily placed within a defined group, especially in relation to violence. These concepts can be applied in other fields to uncover further nuances within perpetrator studies to better understand the motivations of and the consequences for those who are complicit in violence.

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