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## Of Goats and Bombs

How to Live (and Die) in an Explosive Landscape

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**ABSTRACT:** Goats remain the most viable livestock in the warzone of South Lebanon because of their compatibility with wartime environments and ordnance. They can survive periods of scarcity during active war, occupations, or invasions by foraging for food and eating almost anything. Most crucially, goats are small and light and can graze in the borderland's many minefields without setting off the hidden explosives designed to kill humans, who are not as light-footed. In this essay, Munira Khayyat explores how an enduring, explosive military technology is both domesticated and resisted by a homegrown, anti-mine survival assemblage.

**KEYWORDS:** Borderland; Goats; Minefields; South Lebanon; War

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# Of Goats and Bombs

## How to Live (and Die) in an Explosive Landscape

MUNIRA KHAYYAT

### INTRODUCTION

The southern borderland of Lebanon is a fertile landscape whose dwellers make a living from the land: farming tobacco for the Lebanese state-owned tobacco monopoly the Regie Libanaise de Tabacs et Tombacs, cultivating olives, keeping goats, and depending on subsistence agriculture for their daily fare.<sup>1</sup> This bucolic borderland is also a seasoned battlefield. Since 1948, inhabitants of the frontline villages of South Lebanon have been weathering seasons of war. Like the seasons, war is a part of life here. In South Lebanon life and war are inextricably entangled.

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1 Many families are also partially dependent on remittances sent by relatives from abroad, but in terms of everyday livelihood they depend on the land.

This chapter explores the resistant ecology of goat herding that practically assembles life-making processes and enduring technologies of death in an artful and resistant *pas de deux* that is nevertheless not infallible. In what follows, I ethnographically explore the double-edged dimensions of living in militarized worlds where those who must carry on do so amidst recurrent war storms and the ‘slow violence’<sup>2</sup> of war’s enduring material remains.<sup>3</sup> What I call ‘resistant ecologies’<sup>4</sup> are vitalizing practices that ‘become with’ the dangers inherent to a lifeworld of war.<sup>5</sup> They are the more-than-human relations that bind humans, animals, plants, minerals, and spirits into hardy and durable ‘survival collectives’ that persist across and through seasons of conflict, underwriting life, survival.<sup>6</sup> Through these resistant ecologies, tangles of practice that compose a dwelt landscape,<sup>7</sup> I elucidate an affective understanding of life in war that does not exclusively attend to war’s tragic dimensions, but also actively recognizes acts of living that

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- 2 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
  - 3 Yael Navaro-Yashin, ‘Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15. 1 (March 2009), pp. 1–18; David Henig, ‘Iron in the Soil: Living with Military Waste in Bosnia-Herzegovina’, *Anthropology Today*, 28.1 (February 2012), pp. 21–23; Eleana J. Kim, ‘Toward an Anthropology of Landmines: Rogue Infrastructure and Military Waste in the Korean DMZ’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 31.2 (2016), pp. 162–87 <<https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.2.02>>.
  - 4 Munira Khayyat, *A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival in South Lebanon* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).
  - 5 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, *Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
  - 6 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
  - 7 Tim Ingold, ‘The Temporality of the Landscape’, *World Archaeology*, 25.2 (October 1993), pp. 152–74.

persist and resist amidst the debris and destruction of war. In this way, war can be recognized alongside other ruins of industrial modernity where beings strive to creatively and stubbornly hold on to life amid the wreckage.

Before war became seasonal to South Lebanon, inhabitants of Jabal 'Amil and Galilee relied on various kinds of livestock: camels, mules, donkeys, horses, cows, and goats. The use of transport and pack animals declined with the fixing of borders and the rise of motorized transport; and since the advent of war in the area, cattle have become an investment liability (too expensive to buy and feed and difficult to protect in times of active war), yet goats have continued to thrive. Goat herding continues to be practised across the borderland, and goats remain the most viable livestock in this volatile and explosive warzone because of their compatibility with wartime environments and ordnance: they are flexible and movable and can survive periods of scarcity during active war, occupations, or invasions by foraging for food and eating almost anything. And most crucially, goats are small and light and can graze in the borderland's many minefields without setting off the hidden explosives that are designed to kill humans, who are not as light-footed. This is well known among locals who send their goats to gone-wild, delicious, and deadly mined pastures. This is how an enduring, explosive military technology is both domesticated and resisted by a homegrown, anti-mine survival assemblage.

Being hardy, light, relatively inexpensive, reproducible, replaceable, and movable have enabled goats to flourish in this landscape of war. Humans have aligned their life-ways with the resistant features of these clever beasts and together these more-than-human assemblages find a way to inhabit the explosive landscape. Technologies of death are resisted by the lively multi-species ecologies of the bor-

derland but making-live by tricking mines is by no means an easy art or an accurate science, and the threat of danger and death remains (Figure 1). Goatherds are frequently 'kidnapped' by the Israeli army on border patrol and taken in for questioning; their flocks are confiscated; they are regularly accused of covering for guerrillas; they are also often shot at if they wander too close to the border fence. One goatherd put it to me thus: 'Because of the places we frequent, we are distrusted by everyone.' It's a hard life, but a life nonetheless.

#### THE LANDSCAPE AS WEAPON

During the 2006 'July War' between Israel and Lebanon, and especially right as it came to a close with both sides claiming victory,<sup>8</sup> Israel rained on South Lebanon — villages, towns, roads, valleys, fields, orchards, gardens, homes — 4.6 million cluster bombs, seeding the landscape with deadly explosives.<sup>9</sup> Many of the submunitions came from expired stocks inherited by Israel from the Vietnam War, a large number of which failed to explode upon impact, remaining in the earth as 'a deadly legacy of unexploded duds that continue to kill and injure civilians on

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8 The jury is still out on which side 'won' this war but in the wake of the scathing report of the Winograd Commission, Israel is seen as the greater bungler. Hizbullah is being studied in military circles as an innovative and effective fighting force (Andrew Exum, *Hizballah at War: A Military Assessment* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006)), and since 2006 they have regrouped, re-armed, and re-entrenched themselves in their South Lebanon battlefield. In 2008 Ehud Barak, the Israeli defence minister who replaced the disgraced Amir Peretz, stated that the conflict did not achieve its aim of disarming Hizbullah.

9 Cluster bombs were first developed during World War II. They are dropped in a large canister from a plane, spraying a large area with submunitions, or 'bomblets', with the designated intention of impeding an advancing army.



Figure 1. Tractor with pilfered 'Danger Mines' sign. Author's photo.

a daily basis and impede efforts to rebuild lives and livelihoods in the wake of conflict'.<sup>10</sup> TeKimiti Gilbert, head of the UN Mine Action and Coordination Center (UN-MACC), whom I met in 2009 at the UNIFIL headquarters

10 Human Rights Watch, 'Flooding South Lebanon: Israel's Use of Cluster Munitions in Lebanon in July and August 2006', 16 February 2008 <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/02/16/flooding-south-lebanon/israels-use-cluster-munitions-lebanon-july-and-august-2006>>.

in Naqura, a highly fortified barracks surrounded by blast walls and metal watchtowers, said to me:

If you listen to the Israelis they will tell you they were targeting Hizbullah sites and Hizbullah positions. That is what they tell us is the reasoning behind where they strike. However, if you look at the ground there are a lot of areas that you can tell there were no Hizbullah positions there.

To be fair there were a lot of rockets, *katyushas* being fired from orchards although I don't think that explains everything. Obviously, there was a balance; yes the Israelis were targeting Hizbullah sites, however the cluster bombs came in the last three days. So up until then there was a lot of fighting, a lot of bombs, a lot of naval gunfire, a lot of ground fire, ground fighting especially in Maroun al Ras and Bint Jbeil. But up until then, there was very limited use of cluster bombs. But in the last few days there was a curfew imposed by the Israelis saying that anyone out on the streets is a target so stay in your homes, don't move — and so people weren't moving anywhere. And the cluster bombs came in the last few days. Given the contamination we experienced after that I find it very unlikely that these cluster bombs were targeting only Hizbullah. My personal opinion is that there were three days left, the Security Council agreed on August 4th, 8 pm local time fighting stops. So both sides were taking the opportunity to inflict as much damage and destruction as they could before the ceasefire.

I think the Israelis held off using cluster bombs until the end because they weren't sure whether they were going to have their own forces moving into these areas. However, once the ceasefire had been agreed to they knew that things are going to stop. So they knew that okay, three days to go. Let's just saturate the country with cluster bombs. They pointed their guns in the direction of Lebanon and then — fire!

In the words of an Israeli soldier who headed a rocket unit posted in Lebanon during the war: ‘What we did was insane and monstrous, we covered entire towns in cluster bombs.’<sup>11</sup> Israel’s ‘excessive’ cluster bombing of South Lebanon did ‘not appear to have had any significant impact toward the military aims stated by Israel during the war. The massive and widespread use of cluster munitions across South Lebanon doesn’t seem to accord with any recognizable military strategy.’<sup>12</sup> The head of the Danish demining outfit (DCA), who described Israel’s use of cluster munitions as ‘excessive’, told me: ‘There is no strategic pattern to cluster contamination. It is pure contamination, pure obstruction of land. When you block the land, you block the farmer’s livelihood.’ A former military man, the Danish deminer insisted that this cluster bombing of the landscape was excessive of military purposes. ‘It is pure terror what they have done, the resistance [Hizbullah] was not in such huge areas. It is pure terror to block access to the land that is so important. A farmer’s plantation or orchard is not a battle tank! *Everything* is contaminated.’<sup>13</sup>

No, an orchard is not a battle tank, but the ability of the southern farmer to continue to exist in this enduring battlefield is a critical dimension of the resistant nature of life across seasons of conflict in South Lebanon. By flooding the landscape with explosives, Israel sought to

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11 Meron Rappaport, ‘IDF Commander: We Fired More Than a Million Cluster Bombs in Lebanon’, *Haaretz*, 12 September 2006 <<https://www.haaretz.com/1.4865651>> [accessed 12 November 2022].

12 Thomas Nash, *Foreseeable Harm: The Use and Impact of Cluster Munitions in Lebanon*; 2006 (London: Landmine Action, 2006).

13 After the July War, an international movement against such weapons gained steam and a global treaty banning cluster munitions came into force in 2010 requiring signatories to stop the use, production, stockpiling, and transfer of the weapons. More than one hundred parties signed on, but Israel, China, the US, and Russia did not: they manufacture, sell, and stockpile most of the world’s cluster munitions.



transform the living environment into a deadly weapon.<sup>14</sup> By the logic of environmental warfare, Israel targeted the landscape to disrupt the living ecologies it sustains and contains. This ‘flooding’ or ‘seeding’ of southern land with bombs accords with a strategy that has more to do with disrupting the resistant ecologies of living across the southern borderland. In the immediate aftermath of the war, more than forty people were killed and nearly three hundred were injured by land mines and unexploded cluster bombs. A dark affective cloud clung to the landscape, the source of life and now a place of death and danger.<sup>15</sup> Shortly after the war, a humanitarian campaign was launched to clear away the cluster bombs and about two hundred thousand were removed, but since then the clearing effort has petered out due to lack of funding because humanitarian relief has a short attention span.<sup>16</sup> As Gilbert said to me:

We know there are around a thousand minefields along the Blue Line, which equates to around 357,000 mines along the Blue Line, based on records. So the situation we have now is that there

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- 14 Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, trans. by Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e); distributed by MIT Press, 2009); Ian G. R. Shaw, ‘Scorched Atmospheres: The Violent Geographies of the Vietnam War and the Rise of Drone Warfare’, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 106.3 (2016), pp. 688–704 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2015.1115333>>; Chris Pearson, ‘Researching Militarized Landscapes: A Literature Review on War and the Militarization of the Environment’, *Landscape Research*, 37.1 (2012), pp. 115–33 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2011.570974>>.
- 15 Munira Khayyat and Rabih Shibli, ‘Tobacco Olives and Bombs: Reconfiguration and Recovery of Landscape in Postwar Southern Lebanon’, in *The Right to Landscape: Contesting Landscape and Human Rights*, ed. by Shelley Egoz, Jala Makhzoumi, and Gloria Pungetti (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 263–76.
- 16 Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

are still cluster bombs in the South and there's a lot less than when we first started back in 2006, and it's been almost three years now of clearance and there's been a lot of clearance conducted, a lot of money has gone into this. Around 190,000 cluster bombs that we know about that have been located and destroyed, which is a joint effort from the Lebanese Army, the UNIFIL teams and the civilian organizations that we have working here. The job isn't finished, there's still work to be done. But like everything else, Lebanon is now falling off the world's attention. Until the next conflict, whenever it happens. And that's the reality. The international community loses interest. In 2007, at the height of mine clearance activity, we had 61 cluster teams, in 2008 they dropped to 44, and in 2009 at the start of this year, we started with 40 and we've now dropped down to around 27 teams now, so it's a third of the team we had back in 2007.

More than one million cluster bombs, not counting landmines, remain in the earth of South Lebanon. According to the mines expert, relatively speaking and despite its 'postage stamp' size, Lebanon is the country worst affected by cluster bombs worldwide in terms of contamination density. Cluster bombs and mines as physical remnants of war become entangled with the lives and livelihoods of the borderland's inhabitants even in periods when wartime violence is not acute. Dwellers of the southern borderland must contend with the deadly nature of the land to continue to live there. This is where dangers arise. Gilbert stressed that mines and cluster bombs become a problem when people use the land:

Up until May 2000 the mines weren't a really big problem. Because [of the Israeli occupation] people weren't using the land extensively. Relatively speaking there was less agriculture going on ... However, after the withdrawal, as you can

imagine, there was a lot of happiness and people came flooding back to the South and they were confronted by these minefields. And there were a lot of accidents that occurred just after the withdrawal because people were unaware of the mines and people were desperate to cultivate the land and get their livelihoods restarted again. [Because of the enduring war condition] the Lebanese government excluded a number of areas [from mine clearance]: the Blue Line and minefields north of the Litani River. The people who are suffering are the villages on the Blue Line [the borderland villages] because during the occupation they were denied their land. The Israelis left nine years ago now and nine years later, they are still in the same situation as when the Israelis were occupying the South. The villagers can't use their land and land is valuable in the South and not only for agriculture but also for grazing. So every meter of land for them is of use and value. If we could clear that land of minefields and release the land back to the people it would be so much better for them.

As Brennon Jones, the author of a *New York Times* article entitled 'Southern Lebanon's Deadly Crop' writes:

Deny farmers their land and they'll risk life and limb. It's the same in southern Lebanon today as it was in South Vietnam in the early 1970s. In Vietnam, where I was a journalist and social worker in the early 1970s, I saw farmers forced off their land by American and South Vietnamese bombing and corralled into refugee camps to keep them from returning. [...] But many of these rural Vietnamese [...] were desperate to return to their land and to farming, the only livelihood they had ever known. They broke out of the barbed-wire encampments and rushed for home, only to be maimed and killed by the cluster bomblets that littered their land.

History is now repeating itself in the cruellest ways in southern Lebanon. It's the farmers once again who are bearing the greatest physical and economic toll from unexploded cluster bomb submunitions. An estimated one million such bomb-lets now contaminate the farmland and residential areas of southern Lebanon — a deadly calling card left by Israeli forces as they departed Lebanon at the end of this year's 34-day war.<sup>17</sup>

The villagers across the farming villages of the southern borderland who have been living through wars for generations now and do not have many alternatives to fall back on are literally taking matters into their own hands. They cannot passively accept the lethal weaponization of the landscape, the major source of their livelihoods and subsistence, and although there are risks involved, they continue to pursue their livelihoods amidst militarized ecologies, 'becoming with' the deadly technologies that seek to disrupt their lifeways.

Eleana Kim's work on mines as 'rogue infrastructure' in the Korean DMZ illuminates the interaction of mines and humans who find ways of living with them. 'Mines can function effectively as area-denial weapons when their existence is discovered, most tragically after someone has been killed or injured. [...] Yet the ability of mines to deter human trespass is also viewed as a form of social control, surveillance and dispossession, which some villagers resist, especially as they will not let perfectly good land remain uncultivated.'<sup>18</sup> The interactive agency of explosives and humans and goats in the South Lebanon setting is productive of resistant, more-than-human ecologies and

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17 Brennon Jones, 'Southern Lebanon's Deadly Crop', *New York Times*, 12 October 2006.

18 Kim, 'Toward an Anthropology of Landmines', pp. 177–78.

landscapes that refuse the military impositions of deadly technology aiming to enforce limits and controls on life and movement. These lively and affective ecologies shape resistant life in this explosive borderland.

#### DOMESTICATING BOMBS

We plunge into the deep valley enclosing freshwater springs and ‘health fortifying’ forests and follow the thalweg that sinks down in a green zigzag between two level plateaus facing each other on either side of sheer cliffs, north and south. The valley transforms into a defensive trench during times of conflict as it gashes across the north-south trajectory of offensive and defensive warfare: shallow and wide along the coast in the west, it narrows as it cuts east and then widens again as it approaches a village nestled in a crook at the head of the rift, but the plains on either side increase in elevation as they march away from the coast. During the occupation, this valley formed a part of the northern border of the occupation zone. Thus, for twenty-two years it was rife with resistance activity (surveillance, reconnaissance, and infiltration), UNIFIL activity (observation and obstruction), and Israeli offensive bombardment. Due to its geography and location, this leafy valley was off-limits to villagers and a place of wilderness and war. Since the occupation ended in 2000, villagers have reclaimed parts of it, especially where the freshwater spring bubbles out of the earth, even venturing farther into the woodland. But after the 2006 war, the valley once again became a place of danger and death as the Israeli air force peppered it with cluster bombs to discourage villagers as much as guerrillas from frequenting it. Still, inhabitants of the surrounding villages will not be thwarted. Families picnic, swim, and wash in the stream, and some — out of necessity — venture even farther, taking the valley’s explosive nature in stride.

Following a dusty dirt track leading past a chalk quarry on our left, we soon come upon villagers cooling off by the rock pools to our right. Families with small children sit and play in and around the green water. We continue along the dirt path, cleaving to a passage on a ledge against the sheer northern face of the valley wall, plunging deeper into the undergrowth crowding upon us in a friendly, pushy way from either side. Soon we realize that we have stumbled across a network of foxholes, bunkers, and dugouts — active or defunct? Not clear, but most likely the latter. The ones we recognize seem to be in a state of disrepair — hence we recognize them! Plastic pipes stick out in odd places from under the earth. Under canopies of bouncy greenery, wooden planks reinforce a foxhole entrance and discarded pieces of olive-coloured ammunition boxes are strewn here and there. Soon the path ends in a pile of rocks across the way, and the undergrowth surges beyond us, indicating the way forward — but not for us. A rash of poisonous pink oleander brightens the forested foot of the valley, following where the water runs and where we can only go with our eyes. We look up toward the lip of the gorge and the sky and note along the way several black cave mouths silenced with twigs and branches like fingers lifted to mouths: *shhhhhh*. We silently turn back.

This valley is the everyday haunt of goatherds and their flocks of nimble goats. Beginning at the entrance of the valley at dawn, the goats and their human companions, *israh*, wander slowly up the valley along the water source, spreading out to browse and graze along the flanks of the valley as it deepens. Goats and goatherd ‘heft’<sup>19</sup> to the hills with

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19 John Gray, ‘Open Spaces and Dwelling Places: Being at Home on Hill Farms in the Scottish Borders’, *American Ethnologist*, 26.2 (May 1999), pp. 440–60.

a 'centaurian synergy of human and beast' and together encounter the war objects nestled in the geography.<sup>20</sup> The valley is an ideal grazing ground: due to heightened military presence and sensitivity it is uncultivated, wild and overgrown. And since it is not private property, the grazing of the goats can proceed without trespass.

At the head of the valley path, in the clearing by the rock pools, we meet Abu Bilal, a Bedouin goatherd, with his goats. Sun-wizened, spare, and wiry, and bent at the hip in a perpetual upward gait, he resembles the goats he spends his days with. A bit of twine pokes out between the buttons of his grubby shirt and he holds a black nylon bundle in the crook of his arm: lunch. Every morning, as the sun makes its way up the antemeridian sky, he makes his way up the valley from a village toward the west with his twenty goats and ten cows. The cows he leaves near the water in the lower levels of the valley to cool off as the day warms, and he continues along the steep flanks of the borderland hills with his sprightly and nimble goats. Inhabiting these hillsides for all of his life, Abu Bilal has an intuitive sense and practised knowledge of its characteristics, features, flora, and fauna. This is why he does not fear the potentially dangerous landscape he treks through with his goat companions, as long as the sun is in the sky. He knows the landscape well: the wild pigs stay in the foot of the valley and emerge only at night. The hyenas remain high up in the craggy peaks and if one approaches, the goatherd tells us he holds a rock high over his head and shows no fear until the hyena backs off.

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20 Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, 'Introduction', in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, ed. by Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1–20 (p. 12).

We 'Arab, we Bedu are history and geography because we have been living for generations in this land. And the son of the wilderness, *barr*, doesn't fear, he stays brave. He walks in the night and he walks in the day and he doesn't fear. I walk in the night and my step is sure. I submit to nobody except God who created me. The brave man is not shaken, not by wind and not by a mountain. I am *bajiss*, courageous! I don't fear the wilderness or anything in it — except perhaps those.

He points, and sure enough, at his feet near a pink oleander *difla* is a small, perfectly spherical cluster bomb (Figure 2). The bomb has been surrounded by rocks and marked with blue spray paint by demining crews. Abu Bilal the goatherd says that he is constantly on the lookout for bomblets while wandering with his goats. 'They are all over the *wa'r* [wilderness]. When I find a bomb, I surround it with rocks and cover it with a bigger rock so that I don't trip on it' — he crouches down close to the small, spherical bomb to demonstrate and I instinctively take a step back. Straightening up, he continues, 'I try to remember the location of the bombs I have encountered to avoid stepping on them as I walk.' Abu Bilal's method is surely not infallible, but it does not hinder him from venturing forth. For one who intimately and deeply inhabits this geography and who makes a living, and a landscape, by traveling through it, the bombs — and other war-related objects, structures, beings, networks — must be managed. As a long-term dimension of war, explosives in the landscape shape an affective ecology that must be inhabited by some. Bombs entangle with the lifeways of goats and humans in this warzone, making a difficult life even more precarious, and yet they do not entirely hinder the pursuit of life and livelihoods as resistant, multi-species assemblages find ways to co-exist with them.





Figure 2. Abu Bilal points to a cluster bomb. Author's photo.

Because the uncultivated land is low priority in terms of demining, there is little chance that it will ever be cleared, and the cluster bombs remain hidden there year after year as volatile, explosive secrets in the undergrowth and soil. In the meantime, Abu Bilal has little choice but to continue to make a living; his and his goats' affective relationship to this valley tempers somewhat the danger of the bombs,

and so feet and hooves continue on their daily pathways as they walk together through the warscape (Figure 3). 'With such a close, centaurian synergy of human and beast, it is difficult to assign agency unequivocally to one side or the other. [...] [Pastoralists become in effect] human-animal hybrids whose combined feet and hooves move in unison and whose perception is attuned to features of the world of common concern to such compound beings', write Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst.<sup>21</sup> This multi-species hybrid incorporates the presence of the bombs into their intimate, practised knowledge of the landscape. By navigating bombs, they domesticate them as a part of their habitat. Bombs become features of this 'centaurian' lifeworld. Bombs have been drawn into the realm of the ordinary object goats and goatherds encounter and navigate, like poisonous plants, hyenas, and wild pigs. They are as constitutive of their geographies, their everyday worlds.

One of the primary reasons that goats thrive in the minefields of the South Lebanon warscape is that they are too light to spring mines. Back at his office, Gilbert showed me a mine and explained how it works — most interestingly, how it works against humans (and cows) but not against goats:

Gilbert: I will show you an example of a mine here. This is a number 4 anti-personnel mine, Israeli-made. That's all it is: a plastic casing. This used to be a live mine but the explosives have been taken out — two hundred grams of explosives connected with a fuse. As you can see here it has a lid, a collar. The collar sits on the firing pin and it is laid under the ground like this, around two to three inches below the surface and the pressure of a person standing on that pushes the lid down

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21 Ingold and Vergunst, 'Introduction', p. 12.



Figure 3. Goats and goatherd walk alongside the mined border. Author's photo.

which pushes the collar away which lets the firing pin go forward and it explodes — and it all happens within a flash. A millisecond.

Me: It's so small, huh?

Gilbert: Yeah, but it is powerful. Two hundred grams of explosives is enough to take your leg off. But because goats are relatively light compared to a person, these things can often take five to seven kilograms of weight but that depends on the depth of the mine, how deep it has been laid. So

generally, goats are not heavy enough to set off one of these mines and the farmers know this. And they also know that the good grazing land is inside the minefield fencing. The grass there is a lot better and so they let the goats go inside and then, taking the risk that, you know, these goats aren't heavy enough. However, every now and then cows get inside and cows set things off. So, we had a number of accidents with cows losing their legs and then they're sitting in the minefield and the farmer goes into the minefield to get the cow and gets killed.

The practice of herding is a key landscape practice tying people to place and one that becomes more difficult as commons are privatized and national borders harden.<sup>22</sup> In the case of South Lebanon, the limits on movement are not so much due to the enclosing and delimiting of private property but instead to the lethal presence of unexploded mines and cluster bombs, especially in the pasturelands along the Lebanese–Israeli border and frontline. But Abu Bilal and his goats adapted their pastoral pathways to encompass those deadly remnants in the land. Abu Bilal continues walking with his goats and underfoot, a landscape and lifeworld resistantly unfolds. Their path has not yet been interrupted by bombs (or other war-related difficulties); for Abu Bilal and his goats these are navigable. He is fearless, *bajiss*, confident in his knowledge, and with his goats his step is sure. These encounters with bombs in the landscape domesticate them, tame them, bring them into a practised lifeworld. Goat herding along the Lebanese–Israeli border is a precarious practice, yet some are not as fortunate as Abu Bilal and his goats have been thus far.

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22 Gray, 'Open Spaces and Dwelling Places'; Kenneth Olwig, 'Performing on the Landscape versus Doing Landscape: Perambulatory Practice, Sight and the Sense of Belonging', in *Ways of Walking*, ed. by Ingold and Vergunst, pp. 81–92.

OF MINES AND MEN<sup>23</sup>

It is Sunday in this small border village, the day when families, dispersed across the generations, gather. Abu Nimr sits in the courtyard of his home in the midst of many: his grown children, their spouses, and their children. He looks lost — forlorn and quite alone despite the cheerful hubbub around him. The low buildings around the central space are an eclectic mix of old and new, used and abandoned, ruined and maintained. The older structures were used as enclosures for a flock of hundreds of goats but today there is no trace of their former inhabitants apart from the empty troughs lining the sides of one wall, carved into the mud plaster. These structures are now filled with golden loops of tobacco hanging from the wooden rafters. I sat and spoke for a long time with the *tarrash*, the old goatherd, who had sold off his entire flock — the last animal just two months ago — and given up his lifelong practice after the death of his son Ali only a few years ago.

Ali was Abu Nimr's fifth child and the only one among his ten siblings who had left school and instead learned from his father (and their goats) how to walk the warscape. 'Ali had it in him,' the old man says, rubbing his reddening eyes, which made the blue of the irises stand out even more brightly. 'Ali was interested in the work. The moment he learned how to walk he was walking with me with the *ma'za* goats. Ali learned to communicate with the beasts and he had the stamina to be out in the *wa'r* wilderness under the sun all day.' Ali continued to accompany his father and

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23 Goat herding in South Lebanon is predominantly the domain of men. There is the occasional female goatherd, but I did not have the opportunity to work with them. In my forthcoming book, *A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival*, I examine several ecologies, one of which, tobacco farming, is predominantly engaged in by women.

their flock of more than five hundred goats through the borderland pastures in the landscape around their village; they would often run into trouble. More than once they were shot at. The old man took a bullet in his arm and was detained for questioning by Palestinian guerrillas and then by the Israeli Army on several occasions.

Goats are nimble, intelligent, yet 'anarchistic and whimsical' beings who browse the landscape for edibles, climbing up rocks, cliffs, and even trees to grab a nibble.<sup>24</sup> They communicate well with their human companions, who sense their mood and work with it, communicating through a combination of sound and movement as they alternately follow and lead them through the landscape. Abu Nimr found that his goats' nervous temperament and light-footedness worked well in the militarizing milieu. Together, human and animal adapted to the military realities of their habitat. 'Goats sense danger before humans do, they would always tell me when something was not right — whether it was a snake in the bushes or Israeli infiltrators or guerrillas.' Abu Nimr continued goat herding even during the difficult years of the Palestinian guerrilla war along the border, up until the 1978 Israeli invasion. After the 1982 Israeli invasion barrelled over the hill and through their village and by the time the Israeli occupation had entrenched itself in 1985, things were relatively easier for Abu Nimr and his goats, as the lines of battle had settled farther away from their village and pastures, north of the international borderline that ran all along the southern edge of the village. 'During the occupation, there were clear limits as to where we could go and when we could be at pasture', Abu Nimr says. During

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24 Pernille Gooch, 'Feet Following Hooves', in *Ways of Walking*, ed. by Ingold and Vergunst, pp. 67–80 (p. 70).

this time, one of his sons served as soldier in the SLA. This necessary sacrifice allowed the family some breathing room to continue to live within the occupation. As the rest of his sons neared adulthood, they left for Beirut to avoid conscription. There, one became a policeman, another a schoolteacher, and another a journalist while Abu Nimr, Ali, and the goats continued to walk the borderland. After the end of the occupation, Ali and his father continued to walk with their goats, selling kids, manure, milk. It was a decent living, bringing in, according to Abu Nimr, about twenty-five million liras a year.<sup>25</sup> Yet the warscape shifted once again when the Israelis suddenly withdrew from South Lebanon in May 2000. New realities came to define the geography — the border between Lebanon and Israel was once again a front slicing along the southern edge of their village.

On the day he died, Ali was walking along the main strip of road which runs parallel to and is barely twenty meters removed from the Lebanese–Israeli border. This would have been impossible during the occupation, when any movement on the main road, which was priority access for the Israeli military and their allies, was strictly circumscribed and often violently controlled. In the wake of the Israeli withdrawal, new freedoms and new restrictions emerged. There was a period of uncertainty and trial and error as people gingerly came to get a feel for this new ground, this new reality that was overwriting but not quite replacing the order of the occupation. This space of rupture, both political and physical, is where Ali died. Having inhabited the occupation order since he was six, he was familiar with its dimensions, dangers, and limits. It was in the more unfamiliar (if relatively less encumbered) period

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25 The equivalent of sixteen thousand US dollars.

that followed that he lost his footing and stumbled upon a mine the occupiers had left behind.

As his father greyed, Ali began to take over more and more of the strenuous work. One bright cold day in November 2005, Ali was heading back home alone with the flock after a long day at pasture. The goats swarmed along the main road leading toward the village that runs adjacent to a well-known minefield. Heading east with the setting sun at his back, Ali came up behind as the goats fanned out to the left of the road where the land rose into a gentle slope. To the right, where the minefield snaked along, accompanying the goatherd and his flock, the land fell steeply into a shallow plain beyond which the technical fence defining the northern limits of Israel bluntly truncated the landscape. Suddenly, a goat lost its footing and stumbled down the short ledge to the shallow grassland that hid mines. Although there were no markings to indicate a minefield, Ali knew too well what this stretch of earth concealed and moved quickly to help the goat regain its footing. Ali's instinct for danger was correct but he acted in haste. Stepping off the asphalt to urge the goat back to the road, he stepped on the mine that the goat had probably trod on and did not trigger. In his instinctive rush to guide his goat to safety, Ali met his death. He was thirty-three years old. He left behind a wife, two young children, and an unborn child. His widow sits in a drift of green tobacco as Abu Nimr tells the story. She is dressed in black from head to toe. Her two daughters, who are now five and three, help with the work of *shakk*, threading the tobacco leaves, and the boy, who is about seven, hangs around listening to his grandfather talk (Figure 4). After Ali's early death, Abu Nimr tried to take up goat herding again, but could not manage. After falling and breaking his arm, he was urged by his wife and children to give up goat herding and soon he



had no choice but to give in. His body was no longer able. Little by little he sold his flock of seven hundred, and now, after lifetimes and generations, this family's goat-herding practice has come to an end. 'I am left alone without my son, without my goats.' Although Abu Nimr continues to exist here on earth, there is something hollow, something lifeless in his demeanour and presence. In fact, the old man does look lost. He wanders over to thread some tobacco with the women and children, but he does it half-heartedly and soon drops the thread and begins to cry. His grandchildren clamber around him, accustomed (but not oblivious) to his mournful demeanour. He lights another cigarette.

None of Abu Nimr's descendants will walk with goats along the southern borders of Lebanon again. His living sons are employed and live in the cities, and apart from the eldest, who owns the village gas station, have established lives away from the village. Generally speaking, once someone leaves the village and a rural way of life, there is no turning back. Education, employment, and urban dwelling are considered a step up in life and hence few return. These days Abu Nimr spends most of his time sitting in the village square with other old men, smoking hand-chopped tobacco from their own fields. The income lost by the end of his flock is now gained by leaning more heavily on the tobacco that the women (wives of sons, granddaughters) of his household work; he sometimes helps the women and children in threading, something a young man would never consider doing. So, although years have passed since Ali was killed by a mine, this old man cannot stop crying over his death: at once the death of a son and a practiced livelihood — a lifeworld and a landscape.

Bereft of his son and his flock, Abu Nimr has nothing more to say to me today. Choked with sobs, he shuffles off to sit among his household's women and children. His



Figure 4. Abu Nimr, his grandchildren, and the widow of his son Ali. Author's photo.

living sons — some of whom are here today — take up the thread of the conversation when their father stops. They have set up a shrine to their lost brother in their home. They take me up there to have a look. As I gaze into the photographed face of Ali, a spare young man with the fair complexion, bony face, and light eyes of his father, I think about how, as certain rural livelihoods become harder to maintain, tobacco, the bright green cash crop, almost always takes their place. As people let go of long traditions

of practice in the face of insurmountable war-related obstacles, tobacco is often all that remains. Tobacco, the 'bitter crop' is a cash crop and resistant ecology continues to underwrite the possibility of life in the South Lebanon war-zone because it thrives within the conditions of poverty, and through seasons of war.

In my work, I draw attention to war as a place of life and to the combined agency of its human and more-than-human dwellers in resisting this deadly condition through ordinary acts of living. As 'amm Dawud, a frontline villager, sputtered in exasperation as I kept asking him about the mines while he described to me in loving detail how he cared for his beloved olive trees along the borderline: 'ya binti, al mawt bi rizq al insan! Daughter, death is in human livelihood! That is simply the way it is. *Min il bahr lal mtulleh, min hon la akher m'ammam allah*. From the sea to Metulla! From here to the very end of God's earth! *Khalas*, what can you do?' Far from illustrating a fatalism often ascribed to peasants, the quintessential subalterns, the 'weak',<sup>26</sup> such 'acceptance' of the dimensions of surviving in this place, the 'making do' of just continuing to live here demonstrates an active form of life-making.<sup>27</sup> It shows us the everyday 'art of doing',<sup>28</sup> the deft ability of ordinary people on the margins of the nation-state — of history,<sup>29</sup> of the social, the economic, and the political but too often at the centre of violent action — to navigate, inhabit, and in this way resist an always precarious, enduringly lethal

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26 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

27 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall, 2nd pr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

28 Ibid.

29 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 5th pr. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001).

terrain that remains the primary place and source of life and living.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Sometimes life is stranger than fiction. On 5 July 2017, Abu Nimr, after decades of cohabiting with technologies of death, stepped on a mine while herding his beloved goats and died. He had returned to goat herding soon after I saw him in 2009. His wife and children relented and allowed him to re-establish a smaller, more manageable herd, as they saw that he truly could not live without his goats. On the day he died, a kid had wandered away from the flock and into the minefield. Like his son before him, he followed her and in doing so stepped on a mine that the goat most likely trod on and did not spring. When I first heard the tragic news, I couldn't believe it. It was an ending that seemed almost scripted, but there was nothing fictional about this. Mines are an enduring legacy of war that continue to kill and maim, long after war is over.

This essay ends on a tragic note as a reminder of the lethal remains of war, its slow violence, its *longue durée*. Still, in my work on resistant ecologies in a landscape of war, I focus on life and its creative strategies within this militarized milieu. The daily practices of those inhabiting wars are dominated by the fight for life every day. Some may lose this war, but some win.

Munira Khayyat, 'Of Goats and Bombs: How to Live (and Die) in an Explosive Landscape', in *War-torn Ecologies, An-Archic Fragments: Reflections from the Middle East*, ed. by Umut Yildirim, Cultural Inquiry, 27 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2023), pp. 139–66 <[https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-27\\_7](https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-27_7)>

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