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"Weak Seed and a Poisoned Land: Slow Violence and the Toxic Infrastructures of War in South Lebanon"

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Six years after the cease-fire that halted the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel, southern Lebanese indicted the remains of Israel's weapons for contaminating their lands, stunting their crops, and making them sick. Against local and international discourses claiming inconclusive evidence and uncertainty about the toxic effects of the war, my southern Lebanese interlocutors insisted on causally linking Israel's weapons to the perceived surge in cancer, infertility, and environmental degradation since 2006. Their insistence that war was causing this ongoing bodily and environmental malaise exposes the slow violence of war and challenges the liberal idea of war as a temporary event and paroxysm of violence. Taking southern Lebanese accounts seriously reveals how the liberal idea of war keeps Israeli weapons, toxic environments, and embodied pathologies causally separate and restricts what gets counted as a casualty of war. Based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork, this article approaches the confirmed and suspected toxic remnants of war as toxic infrastructures that sediment and distribute war's lethal potential, years after the last bomb was dropped. Building on local accounts of the 2006 war that emphasize enduring environmental toxicity and its gendered effects, this article argues that southerners deployed their embodied knowledge of toxic infrastructures to contest the uncertainty about Israel's weapons and to produce new truths about the war. Southerners thus disputed liberal assumptions about the end of the war, challenged normative understandings of war casualties, and enacted new ethical frameworks for recognizing the belated injuries of the 2006 war. (Text from author's abstract)

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