Introduction

WAR, FROM THE SOUTH

شمس تشرق من الجنوب
Ash-shams tashriq min al-janub.
[The sun rises from the South.]

—A leftist call to arms and resistance during the bloody days of war in the South in the 1970s and 1980s

“RAIN OR SHINE”

Dusk falls in hues of rust and mauve in a borderland hamlet in South Lebanon, and the family, having completed the tasks of the day, gathers after the sunset prayer in the cool stone courtyard of their home. The first star appears overhead. Words, sweet hot tea, and cold grapes from the vine, still sour, are shared. This July evening at the peak of tobacco season, we are talking about what everyone talks about when anyone talks about anything around here: war. Of course, war is never mentioned. Still, it is present in the persistence of poverty, the absence of sons, the border that snakes past nearby, the female labor of tobacco, the earth and sky, their plenitude and limits, blessings and dangers, the sharp, swift rush of time, its breathless pauses, the risks and pain of love and care, and the unrelenting grip upon anything that proves viable, reliable, resistant, steadfast. This is how war is lived here, most of the time.

Hajj Bou Sahel and his sweet-faced wife the hajji Im Sahel are the elders of this household. They center this evening’s gathering of daughters, neighbors, and anthropologist—another kind of daughter. Stocky and strong, Bou Sahel’s shock of white hair contrasts brightly with his
sun-weathered skin, and one of his eyes has a squint, giving him a perpetually mirthful look that can belie his weighty words. Bou Sahel was born in this tiny village in 1931, during the French mandate, when the border between the areas of French and British control freshly separated the nascent states of Lebanon and Palestine. He was a teenager during the Palestinian Nakba in May 1948, when thousands of Palestinians, forced out of their villages by armed Zionists, fled over the hills of Galilee and into Lebanon. Many Palestinians from neighboring Galilee took refuge that first summer and fall, and through the winter rains, in the laurel and olive orchards of the Lebanese border villages awaiting the right moment to return to their hastily abandoned homes just there in Palestine, clutching their keys. Im Sahel remembers this vividly as the delight of a little girl with new playmates her own age everywhere. But the Palestinians, too close to home in South Lebanon, were soon rounded up and sent to refugee camps scattered across the Lebanese coastal cities. They continued to await their return as wars erupted and raged. They waited through massacres. They waited as many took off to farther shores, refugees once again. Still they wait.

The hajj and hajji married in the 1960s, when Palestinian guerrillas roamed the borderland; they had ten children (one died in childhood) through the ‘60s and ’70s, as the guerrilla war with Israel, with its many conflagrations, intensified. The family, small children in tow, was displaced from their home during Israel’s first land invasion of Lebanon in 1978. They lived in a Red Cross camp in the coastal city of Sur (Tyre) for a spell and then moved to the outskirts of Beirut, where they, along with other displaced southerners, built homes on squatted land near the capital’s only public park, in the swelling “belt of misery” surrounding the city (now its southern suburbs, al-dahiye). A few years later, soon after the second Israeli invasion (1982), which would become its twenty-two-year occupation of the borderland (and in the middle of the Lebanese civil war),2 Bou Sahel and his family returned to their village. “The first thing I did when I returned here is to plant fruit trees in my garden,” the old hajj says, pointing to the ground with a hand that now trembles, but with a defiant lift of his chin. “I planted myself here and never left again!” Like many, Im and Bou Sahel sent their two older sons out of the occupation
zone well before they came of age to avoid their conscription into Israel’s proxy militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), which pressed the young men of the 150 occupied Lebanese border villages into its ranks. Their youngest son eventually left for Brazil to work, sending home remittances. Their daughters one by one married and moved to their husbands’ homes and villages nearby. Young women who did not marry, like my friends Khawla, Nawal, and Zahra, stayed at home with their aging parents and carried on. The women farmed tobacco, tended to their goats, their olives and vines, some grain, their fruit trees and kitchen gardens, unheroically, stoically resisting the vicissitudes of war by staying—like their fruit trees—rooted through rough seasonal war storms. Bou Sahel says to me:

First Lebanon was under the Ottomans and then the French, and then when the French left Lebanon became a great place where MEA [the Lebanese national airline] brought passengers from all over the world. Then the Nakba happened and the Palestinians all came here. And Beirut and the South were swimming with money. Those were good days. And then the Palestinians left and Lahd (SLA) came, and again the area was swimming with money and income. But these days are gloomy. These days we are marginal, poor, and no one cares about us. There is no money, everything is expensive, and the municipality is split bickering between political factions who are so taken up with their petty disputes that the village has no water and no electricity and people have to buy water from a nearby Christian village at 30,000 LBP a delivery and in order to watch Nur [a popular Turkish soap opera] my daughters have hooked up our TV to a battery.

Bou Sahel is well loved and deeply respected in the village. He is known for being idiosyncratic in his views but always direct, honest, and fair. He shakes his head at my earnest questions and sighs. “Ya binti, my daughter,” he says to me about the years and years of war, displacement, and occupation that he has lived in this place, “Some things were better and some things were worse.” A murmur of muffled protest ruffles the gathering, some respectfully disagreeing with such a measured appraisal of desperate times. A more adversarial, militant stance is generally preferred. But Bou Sahel remains grounded, equanimous, stubborn, brutally honest. Fanning his fingers through the air and knowingly eyeing the heavens, the old hajj describes the ongoing play of life and war as “rain or shine.”
RESISTANT ECOLOGIES, OR THE WORLDS THAT GROW IN WAR

This book is about the worlds that grow in war. It explores the life that goes on in the midst of enduring conflict by examining what I call resistant ecologies: vitalizing, more-than-human relations that persist and make life amidst returning seasons of devastation. In this work, I source a theory of war from the South. Unfolding as a journey through landscape (theorized below), I ask how life is lived in a place of war. South Lebanon is an agricultural borderland that since 1948 is also a battlefield. Life in these parts, for the most part, revolves around tobacco farming, olive cropping, goat herding, and other forms of agriculture that generate subsistence and income and make viable an ongoing presence in place. The southern borderland is also deeply entangled in an ongoing condition of war that cyclically erupts, disrupts, destructs, and (re)constructs and has done so for generations. War in South Lebanon is by now a part of the living environment; it is generative of a kind of life that continues to be lived here.

In a place like South Lebanon, it is impossible to parse war and life; they are copresent, they coexist. In South Lebanon, war’s subjects, infrastructures, economies, technologies, geographies, and temporalities coalesce into ecologies of living in an agricultural borderland that is also a battlefield. The processes of cultivation and harvests, the profits as well as the risks involved, are always entangled with the ongoing condition of war, despite intermittent periods of calm. This is not a matter of choice but of survival. In this seasoned battlefield, agricultural cycles and seasons of war are interwoven, enmeshed, and together they shape the lived world: agriculturally based livelihoods premised on known and predictable agricultural seasons and harvests, mawasim zira’iyi, are sustained across and through seasons and harvests of war, mawasim harb. In South Lebanon, life and war are rooted in the land, and hence landscape, as the environment (Sloterdijk 2009)—medium and substance—of both living and warring, is the portal and method of this inquiry into the life of war. Described by Ingold (1993, 156) as “the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them,” landscape attunes us to the ways in which war is lived and the
lived worlds that war creates, without coloring war solely with the brush of violence. I chose the medium of landscape—or perhaps it chose me—for its varied tempos and different textures, its gathering qualities, its fragmented, manifold natures. This heterogeneity is key. Landscape as encountered and unfolded from a “dwelling perspective” (ibid.) allows me to weave together an object of analysis across multiple scales, temporalities, affects, and dimensions and to keep in view a lived—and loved—world. In this book, war is the object, landscape the medium and method. It is hard to press a single narrative into landscape⁴ (although perspectival painting tried!), which remains to its dwellers the substance and place of life, the various ecologies that make it in every season, tangles of affective and vitalizing relations. Landscape as medium diversely anchors being and becoming within and across the twin forces of destruction and creation, threading a continuous fiber through seasonal storms, rain and shine. Similarly, war is never a singular story of destruction. For those who

Figure 1. White horse in a tobacco field in late summer. The tobacco has been denuded of its leaves, and the stalk is crowned by the pale-pink tobacco flower.
live it, as many do in the Global South, war is also the colorful and complex, contradictory and challenging environment of living.

Like dew upon a stalk of tobacco at dawn, this study condenses into what I call resistant ecologies the vitalizing, more-than-human “survival collectives” (Tsing 2015) that sprout around agricultural (and other) practices sustaining life in frontline villages through seasons of conflict. These “ecologies of practice,” a hopeful and open-ended attention to subaltern life and its radical possibilities, I borrow from Isabelle Stengers (2005). In South Lebanon they include ordinary arts such as cultivating the “bitter crop” of tobacco (chapter 3), traipsing with goats through deadly (and delicious!) borderland minefields (chapter 4), enshrining the landscape and honoring its lively spirits (chapter 5), and collaborating with human and other beings across a variety of borders to resist and survive (chapter 6). “Resistant ecologies” are those life-sustaining practices that “become with” (Haraway 2016) and thus—unexpectedly, to northern

Figure 2. The sacred and the profane: olive trees are eternally rooted amidst the fleeting cash crop of tobacco.
theory—thrive within, the deadly environments of war. Life and war are not ontologically opposed. My focus on life neither normalizes nor romanticizes war. It consciously and pointedly recognizes the way in which war is lived by those with no available exits.

I call these diverse relations ecologies to emphasize their vitality and rootedness, and I describe them as resistant because I theorize their ability to thrive in necropolitical worlds as such. Additionally, I call them resistant to recuperate the relevance and utility of resistance for scholarly theory and for a politics of life in South Lebanon and other “unlivable” worlds of the Global South far removed from our metropolitan comfort zones.

**MUQAWAMA/RESISTANCE**

A song entitled “The Lebanese National Resistance,” composed in 1985 by Ziad Rahbani, lists the many ways in which the suffering of those who live in war is summoned and instrumentalized—in songs, in poems, in political speeches—by those at a safe distance from those worlds. A child’s plaintive voice sings: “Those who speak today / Are not the ones who have died / The wretched of the earth are always the same.” The song, named for the leftist coalition of Lebanese and Palestinians that heroically resisted the (1982–85) Israeli invasion and occupation, reclaims resistance for all those who live/d it. The song, simultaneously a lamentation and a celebration, is a Brechtian (and Fanonian) recognition of the unacceptable gap between history as lived and history as narrated and mobilized to various ends. The song having said this, suddenly closes with these words: “This is not a song / This is simply a salute/ That’s all.” The song (which is not a song but a salute) points to the place where silence is (Trouillot 2001); it enacts a gesture of respect toward those who have lived resistantly and died resisting. In another song, entitled “Speak Up!” (1981), Marcel Khalife sings: “Our story is not written in History / It is lit up in the sah-rat, nights, of people with no histories.” The song continues: “We aren’t waiting for someone to write it! Our story, we will speak it!” It is hopeless to try to wash off the stain of “those who speak today.” Instead, I will offer this: This is not a book! It is a salute. It begins and closes in the lit sahrat of those who have lived and died in South Lebanon.
Resistance in South Lebanon is not one thing. It is much more than a political ideology belonging to this or that group. In South Lebanon, resistance remains a military reality, but more importantly, resistance is a vital existential orientation to the consuming and annihilating realities of capitalism, nationalism, and war. Locally grown armed resistance in South Lebanon (Kassir 1985; Chomsky 1984) successfully expelled the Israeli occupation (Norton 2000), an unprecedented historical event. But—and this must be spelled out—the ability of life to persist in these farming villages amidst ever-returning gusts of war is also (key to that) resistance. Resistance *is* staying rooted through the thickness of adversity, like Bou Sahel’s beloved trees. They famously call it *sumud*.

As Ian Shaw (2016) has pointed out for Vietnam, resistant military capabilities and ordinary village life cannot be disentangled; they are an inextricable social-military ensemble that feed each other (in many ways literally). Sahel, Bou and Im Sahel’s eldest son, constantly invokes these genealogies and similarities as he strives to show me how war is ordinarily lived here:

> It is the same here as it was in Vietnam: the farmer who is planting his rice is also carrying his gun. When he finds it is time to use his gun he uses it, and when he finds it is time to continue planting he continues planting. The farmer considers that the planting of rice and the gun are twin weapons. And in South Lebanon it is the same.

Not only do frames of trauma, suffering, and degradation (or their opposite: resilience and endurance) fail to contain the pugnacious multispecies vitalities ensnared in necropolitical materialities that “pulsate” (Lyons 2016) through waves of war, but southern villagers still proudly refer to their continuing presence in place and to their sustainable life-making practices in the face of apocalypse as resistance, *muqawama* (which includes steadfastness or *sumud* as a kind of stubborn being). I refuse to take this from them. Resistance can be politically and analytically subsumed (and too often is) under the mantle of Hizbullah, the “Resistance” and current political and military hegemon, but I think that it should not be. Hizbullah actually draws on home-grown and heterodox genealogies and various vernacular practices of resistance as a vital source of its ongoing social and military fluency and continuing power and sali-
ence. As I show in chapter 5, through the long years of war in South Lebanon, armed resistance was taken over and is by now almost entirely dominated, monopolized, instrumentalized, and narrated for political and military purposes and ends by Hizbullah (Norton 2014; Blanford 2011; Saad-Ghorayeb 2002; Qassem 2012), who are known as the Resistance, al-muqawama. But when summoned by frontline villagers in reference to their lives, resistance, muqawama, shakes free of the lofty political signifier and is once again humbly and variously rooted in life ongoing—and oriented toward defiant life. It is existentially and affectively important to many villagers (who are largely a vulnerable demographic of elders, women, children—the rural poor) to own the power, dignity, and praxis of muqawama and the hope for a better world that comes with it. Neither politics nor scholarship can take that from them—nor should they. My insistence upon resistance as a meaningful frame and banner for the humble (yet heroic) life of war acknowledges and respects its continued local currency, returns it to its manifold histories and multiple presents, wrests it from both singular political/ideological uses and recuperates it from the wastepaper basket of scholarship.

Like my interlocutors in frontline villages, I am convinced that resistance remains empirically, analytically, and morally illuminating about the ways in which life carries on in the battlegrounds of South Lebanon—and I resistantly hold on to this assertion. Lila Abu Lughod (1990), in her seminal piece “The Romance of Resistance,” questions an enduring and dated attachment to a term that may analytically misdiagnose the actual workings of power. Similarly, Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins, in Waste Siege (2020), suggests that “resistance” does not exactly account for the ordinary ways in which life is cobbled together by Palestinians in Gaza within the toxic environment of the Israeli occupation and endless war. I agree that one must not adhere to a simplistic understanding of resistance as that which stands up to crushing power: I am fully cognizant, as this book will show, of the deep roots of resistance, of the complexity of power, and the many gray zones within which inhabitants of war make lives. In this book, resistance (in South Lebanon today) is both of the following: it is the Resistance/al-muqawama (the military resistance, its politics and ideology), and it is the multiple, layered, and deep genealogies of resistance against war and occupation but also poverty, neglect, and oppression.
Resistance is not one or the other but rather both. Yet the resistance I am consciously committed to (as are my friends in South Lebanon) is that which exceeds/escapes all-consuming (and annihilating) processes and systems such as the nation-state, capitalism, and war. Resistance is not a political slogan; it is the grounds (and the very possibility) of life. This understanding of life as resistance applies to more than warzones.

The creative, more-than-human ability to stay alive in such conditions—and not merely despite them—is what I am calling resistance (not resilience or endurance!). War as a lethal environment (like other lethal environments of capitalism and the Anthropocene) must be actively resisted by all of those who live it—and it is. This flips the approach from the depressing and defeatist optics of death and degradation to the hopeful commitment to defiant life against all odds. And in this vital struggle on this doomed planet, humans are by no means alone. Resistance is premised on what I call ecologies (perhaps because my battlefield is a bucolic one), which is another way of saying all kinds of relations, connections, friendships, collaborations: the standing fight to stay alive. By carefully attending to the agency and life-making strategies innovated by all of those who have no choice but to continue to live in blasted and deadly worlds, another theory of life and war rises, from the South.

Life during the occupation was dreadfully hard, but since they were a household of two elders and their unmarried daughters, Bou Sahel and his family were mostly left alone. They adapted their everyday routines and rhythms to the harsh limitations on life under military occupation: curfews, restriction on movement, random searches, abductions, detentions, torture, roadblocks, military operations, bombardments, and the generalized thuggery or “terror as usual” (Taussig 1992) of military occupation and militia rule. Bou Sahel tells me:

When the boys were in Beirut we would send them from here semolina and oil from the orchard. We would work me, and the girls and the hajji, and so we stayed. Any work requires effort, Ḩayya ‘amal baddo jahid. With Ḩayya, ploughing, one ploughs in the freezing and in the cold and the rain to plant the ground, and one harvests in the heat! But we chose this difficult path
because we wanted to continue to live here. And it wasn’t only us who stayed! Those who could, stayed.

During the occupation, the family, like many others in the border strip continued to farm tobacco for the Régie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs, the Lebanese state-owned tobacco monopoly. One of the hardest rules to live with during the occupation was the Israelis’ strict interdiction on movement from sundown to sunup, because it meant that they—and all the inhabitants of the occupied strip who depended on this cash crop—could no longer harvest tobacco in the cool, damp darkness of dawn. “The Israelis would kill anyone violating their rules. We could not leave the house before sunrise, and so we had to pick tobacco in the blazing heat of day. We got roasted alive! It made our hands bleed! But we did it—we had to,” recalls Khawla, the eldest of the unmarried sisters with whom I am close. “Harvesting in daytime was also bad for the tobacco leaves, which immediately wilted in the heat,” she adds. What is bad for humans is also bad for their plants, that is clear—but together plants and humans persisted, and in staying collaboratively alive, bitterly resisted.

The battlefields of South Lebanon are the landscapes of everyday living and of livelihood. An ethnography of life and war must approach this matter-of-factly, just as southern villagers do, and with a conscious commitment to carrying on, to living, as Nazim Hikmet, the poet whose words open this book reminds us. Sahel says:

War is something that people have gotten used to and have come to live with and perceive as normal. If you say that Israel is there on the border and that there will be wars every now and then, this is something that has come to be normal here, something like the wind. Say the wind will blow from this direction today or there will be bombing, it is the same thing. It is a consideration that the person here will take, to plant this piece of land rather than the other one in response to the direction of the wind or the bombs.

In illuminating war as a place of life and the active agency of its dwellers in resisting this deadly condition through ordinary arts and acts of living, I source a theory of war from the South. I color war with the brush of life, while retaining a stark, lived understanding of its brutal, deadly intention. As ‘Am Dawud, who lives in the shadow of an Israeli outpost in a nearby village,
sputtered in exasperation as I kept asking him about the buried 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!10 That is simply the way it is. Min il bahr lal Mrtleh, min hon la akher m'ammar allah. From the sea to Metulla!11 From here to the very end of God’s earth! Khalas, what can you do?” (In the meanwhile, I have come to share ‘Am Dawud’s impatience with me.) Far from illustrating a fatalism often ascribed to “passive” peasants, the quintessential subalterns (Scott 1990), or more famously the “weak” (Scott 2000), such “acceptance” of the dimensions of surviving in this place, the “making do” (Certeau 2013) of just continuing to live here demonstrates an active form of life making. This is the everyday “art of doing” (ibid.), the cultivated capacity of ordinary people on the margins of the nation–state, of history (Trouillot 2001), and of the social, the economic, and the political, but too often at the center of violence, to navigate, inhabit, and in this way resist, an always precarious, enduringly lethal terrain that remains the primary place and source of life and living. The risks are known; they are managed, domesticated, inhabited, and thus resisted. War becomes a part of the lived world.

In Sahel’s words:

Now look here at the southern farmer who plants tobacco and olives and wheat and lentils and beans and grapes and figs. If you live in a city and you have a young child you tell it “mama, watch out for cars and don’t play with glass or you will get hurt!” Here when we were small and began to go outside to play on our own, to pasture with the goats, or to the tobacco fields, our parents wouldn’t tell us to watch out for cars because here there aren’t many cars—we ride on donkeys and mules! They would tell us instead: “Watch out you don’t step on a mine!” or “Don’t go near the border fence or the Israelis will shoot you!” They fed us this with our mother’s milk—that this is an enemy who will not spare you. So that is why I say that our understanding of war is an education that we absorb from childhood and thus we come to believe that our fight is a duty for honor and humanity.

DECOLONIZING WAR, ECOLOGIZING WAR

For those who must live in war, resistant life carries on in its midst. I do not want to normalize war here—far from it. While I begin in the presence
of war, this is not a naturalizing move: it is an ethnographic and a political one. Again, I must stress: I am not naturalizing war. The way in which I describe how those who live in war inhabit it may appear to be naturalizing because I ethnographically depict war as a structure that is generative of lifeworlds. If bombs are like the wind, then considerations must be taken in relation to these realities (wind or bombs) to optimize life within them and in this way resist them. “Naturalizing” war draws our attention to war beyond the event and shows us how war nests within violent structures and infrastructures such as capitalism, nationalism, and empire. We naturalize these latter violent structures all the time – they generate the very worlds we inhabit, and we struggle to make meaningful lives within them and simultaneously to resist them. War is no different. Except that war remains far from the experience of most in the Global North, as it has been outsourced to other, “savage” worlds since the end of the Second World War.

In this book, I want to describe life in war without rendering war as other, an exotic elsewhere, a negative space where the social is suspended and violence and chaos rule. Instead, I grasp the stubbornness of life from within the lethal realities in which it grows, and I argue for an ecological and thus decolonized understanding of lifeworlds of war. To ecologize war is to approach it differently (Guarasci and Kim 2022). When it is wrought from the worlds of those who must live it, war becomes more than militarized destruction viewed from afar: it becomes an environment of living. War targets life and life’s vital environments (Sloterdijk 2009). Ecology here refers to sustainable and strong and vitalizing relationships that nurture life (in deadly environments). When one must exist in war, one strives with all relationships and resources available to live. To successfully stay alive is to resist the necropolitics of war (and capital and other modern disasters). In Out of the Dark Night (2021), Achille Mbembe defines decolonization as “an active will to community” (2), which he says “is another name for what could be called the will to life” (3). Thus to think of life in war as rooted in resistant ecologies is not to romanticize but rather to decolonize, by insisting—counter to more common framings—on the (resistant) will to life in war and of that life as a source of a theory of war. Here we shake off war’s persistent cloak of death, of exotic otherness, of singular violence, savagery, and barbarity and insist that war must be
analyzed and resisted (by those who must live it) like other annihilating processes of capital and modernity.

Experiencing war, its rearrangement of the world, its lethal impact on mortal lives, is a shock to the senses. Yet this shock says more about the researcher’s expectations and habituated, normalized sensibilities than it does about those who experience and inhabit cycles and seasons of war, especially over lifetimes. For those who inhabit war, it manifests and is experienced differently. Of course, this is not to say that the event of war is not terrible, or to underplay its vexed and lethal qualities; war is terrible and must always be resisted. The political and intellectual task is to recognize (decolonize, unsavage) war as a process integral to the “normal” workings of capitalism and the nation-state. Our awareness of the violence of war (which, unfortunately, is most apparent to us when it happens to those we see ourselves in) should be grasped as an obscured and removed dimension of our more comfortable, normalized realities. Life on this planet continues to be waged amidst the ongoing violence of war, industry, capitalism, nation-state, and empire. War (like violence) must be placed at the heart of our “peaceful” worlds—and in this way more accurately grasped and more effectively resisted.

In *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Veena Das (2007) writes:

In contemplating . . . much recent work on violence, I am struck by the sense voiced by many scholars that, faced with violence, we reach some kind of limit in relation to the capacity to represent. Often this argument is staged through the trope of “horror.” We are then invited to consider how human beings could have been capable of such horrific acts on such large scales, as in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia . . . . It appears to me that we render such acts as shocking and unimaginable only when we have a given picture of how the human subject is to be constructed. Thus these descriptions serve to reaffirm the boundaries between civilized and savage, while allowing our picture of the human subject to remain intact. (79)

The hidden domination of a normalized (and legally recognized) human subject centered on the experience of the privileged and the hegemonic—which we shorthand and bundle into the “West” or the “Global North”—obscures the reality of the many who live in war. Too often, war is narrated from its other (imperial) end (Wool 2015; Stone 2018; MacLeish 2013).
War is dominated by the accounts of those who wage it (who are the agents of empire more often than not; just think of US wars in Vietnam and Iraq—faceless, nameless millions of Iraqis and Vietnamese are at best irrelevant to but mostly just absent from the dominant narratives). A theory of war must be sourced from where it is lived and not from worlds far removed from the action. We must decolonize our epistemic terrain, adjust our political stakes, source our theory and ground our ethnography and other representational genres in worlds and words that do not comfortably inhabit hegemonic imperial geographies and tropes (Connell 2019). This is a tricky task for those of us in the heart of empire, who write too comfortably from that location, as was recently pointed out by Bulushi, Ghosh, and Tahir (2020). Plus, as important as it is, this is hardly a new realization—calls to decolonize through new ways of thinking and writing in anthropology have been ongoing (Said 1979; Trouillot 1991; Harrison 1997; Cooper and Stoler 1997; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Yet even as it appears that decolonization is coming into its own and rearranging the intellectual and political terrain (Appadurai 2021; De Sousa Santos 2018; Mignolo 2018), some things, sadly, remain the same. We are still more or less mired in a conceptual and ethnographic topography that is coherent with empire, as was pointed out by Edward Said back in 1989 in the article “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors”: “There is an almost total absence of any reference to American imperial intervention as a factor affecting the theoretical discussion. It will be said that I have connected anthropology and empire too crudely, in too undifferentiated a way; to which I respond by asking how—and I really mean how—and when they were separated. I do not know when the event occurred, or if it occurred at all” (214). Clearly, this event still has not occurred. And despite the calls everywhere to decolonize everything—right now!—scholarship remains insidiously beholden to empire, despite its better intentions.

Since the end of the Second World War (with the exceptions of Northern Ireland and the Balkans and now Ukraine) wars have largely been confined to the Global South. Although they are as globalized (and as unequal) as any process in capitalism—and apart from the unwelcome migrants and refugees they generate—militarized conflicts, “hot” wars, have been successfully outsourced to other worlds and hence are not
immediately experientially and imaginatively accessible to those of us complacently inhabiting more “cold” or “peaceful” quarters in the Global North. The ways in which this riven reality has shaped war as a conceptual object is profound and has not been sufficiently acknowledged—or adequately corrected. The naturalized fact that wars take place in far off elsewhere determines how war is thought about, researched and written, felt. Writing from worlds where wars actually take place and having lived through actual wars, I want to think and write about war differently. Living and writing and speaking from the Global South, where wars are real life struggles shaping being and time and driven by ongoing imperial and capitalist projects, contests, and interests, I insist that war—as experience, as analytical object—must take its place alongside other more recognized sites of modern, industrial violence and ruin that many beings have little choice but to inhabit and thus contend with as part of their lot on this damaged, dying earth. War is not an elsewhere. War is here and now and fellow beings makes lives in war every day.

So with the aim of pushing anthropology (of war) beyond its persistent Northern bias and enduring epistemological trench, I take up Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s call for an anthropology (of war) beyond the savage slot. Trouillot (1991) writes, “We owe it to ourselves to ask what remains of anthropology . . . when we remove this slot—not to revitalize disciplinary tradition through cosmetic surgery, but to build both an epistemology and semiology of what anthropologists have done and can do” (39). He continues, “At the very least, anthropologists can show that the Other, here and elsewhere, is indeed a product—symbolic and material—of the same process that created the West. In short, the time is ripe for substantive propositions that aim explicitly at the destruction of the savage slot” (40). This book on war shapes my refusal of anthropology’s “savage slot” for the “irreducible historical subjects” (ibid.) of war. War should not be safely relegated to “other” worlds (and conveniently forgotten about until refugees wash up on Northern shores)—war should be grasped as a globalized process—just as capitalism and industry (and now climate change) are. Bulushi, Ghosh, and Tahir (2020) remind us: “Alongside and in relation to the plantation, there is the colony, the reservation, the borderland, and the garrison, among others, each with its specific mechanics, logics, and forms of overwhelming colonial and imperial violence and linked by
systems of racial capitalism, imperialism, and white supremacy.” Through loving, engaged ethnography grounded in an active warzone (a familiar place), I want to show that war is a human experience that is continuous and coherent with the worlds we comfortably inhabit—even if these worlds of war appear temporally, spatially, existentially removed from ours. It is politically relevant—especially to those of us researching, writing, and living in such worlds—to show that our ethnographic subjects are much more than mere illustrations of our academic arguments and stepping stones in our illustrious careers. Inhabitants of war are fellow beings with whom we share this wretched earth. They are us. Their lives matter.

The object of war that I hold and behold in this book is an ethnographic composite of intimate experience (mine and others) and engaged scholarly labor. By shining light on life in war, I want to explode the boundary between civilized and savage, to decolonize hegemonic understandings of

Figure 3. With Im Sahel, her granddaughter, and great-granddaughter in the warm embrace of their village home.
war (and peace!) To decolonize war we must source our theories from war’s lived experience and not our untheorized, normalized distance from the killing fields. As Richards (Richards and Helander 2005) writes “The best analytical approach to war as process is through the ethnography of the actual practices of war and peace” (12). Alongside innovative scholarship on violence (Feldman 1991; Das et al. 2000; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2007), the experience of imperial soldiers (Wool 2015; MacLeish 2013; Stone 2018), and the suffering of victims of war (Nordstrom 1997; Gourevitch 2004), we must also pay attention to how those who continue to live in war actively make their lives within it (Lubkemann 2008; Hoffman 2011). When we understand war as a condition emergent from the same social, political, economic, ecological processes that make “our” peaceful worlds, only then can we recognize our shared humanity, our collective vulnerability, and our complicity and begin to grow a collective (decolonized!) politics that can challenge this insidious, unequal ranking of life (Fassin 2009) and humanity (Asad 2003). This is what it is to decolonize in this moment. Decolonizing war has implications for all of us dwelling on a damaged planet amidst swirling, layered violent systems that we are only beginning to recognize as deeply interconnected and existentially threatened and threatening. For those who inhabit it, war is—whether they want it or not—a living environment on our earth today. In such a lifeworld, one always hopes, but one can never be sure that the sun will rise tomorrow. The creative survival strategies that grow in these deadly worlds of war are the resistant ecologies that underwrite life and that grow in all of modernity’s wreckages. For a large number of those we share this planet with, who are less fortunate than us, the end of the world is nothing new.

WAR AS OBJECT

In Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, the Congo, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Colombia, El Salvador, Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia, Chechnya, and other locales where it spans generations, war is experienced as an enduring condition that makes worlds even as it destroys them—worlds
that continue to be lively, if also deadly. Indeed, war must be counterintuitively understood as generative—and not merely destructive—of life. While the violent spectacle of war monopolizes our attention and fuels our imagination, this book understands war beyond the violent event. Recent important work on worlds of war in the region transform war into a more stable and recognizable object: war is illuminated as structure (Hermez 2017) and infrastructure (Nucho 2016; Stamatopoulou-Robbins 2020; Bou Akar 2018); it is embodied and gendered (Aciksoz 2019; Yildirim 2021); it is grasped through the lens of public health and governmentality (Al-Dewachi 2017), understood through the materiality and logistics of capital and globalized trade (Khalili 2020), and sensed through nonhumans (Navaro et al. 2021). The resistant art of living in the world extends itself across the existing, existential terrain, melding the false-binary categories of war and peace. And war—like peace—is ethnographically and analytically graspable (with a little imagination) as a place for life, and not only its destruction. Herein, though, lies the paradox that feeds the qualifier resistant: if modern warfare is understood as targeting the environment of life, and when life insists on thwarting that purpose by finding ways to carry on within lethal environments, then that life—the relationships it is premised upon—is resistant.

Sourced from my experience of life in war, drawing upon years of fieldwork and friendship in the enduring warzone of South Lebanon, and building on recent studies of war from the region, I approach war as a habitable place not because it is a desirable or a “natural” habitat, but because for those who live in it, it has to be (a habitable place). I demonstrate how war, a key dimension and driver of capitalist industrial modernity (Sloterdijk 2009; Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017; Grove 2019; Bond 2022), is lived—and in this way (often bitterly) resisted—by those who do not have available alternatives or easy exits. In the following chapters, this book turns to the lived detail of this observation by considering war as a living environment. By insisting on war as a lived environment I foreground the vital dimensions of worlds of war—humanizing them—while still recognizing war as violent event and force of destruction. The copresence of forces of destruction and creation generates the peculiarities of life in war (but also elsewhere). In a place like South Lebanon, where a condition of war has simmered and exploded across generations now, impacting
life and land even in times of calm, it is only fitting that war is analytically and ethnographically treated as continuous with life. It is lived that way in the (Global) South.

Because of its spectacular qualities, violence in its destructive capacities most often takes center stage in accounts of war. In such framings, violence becomes the dominant frame of analysis, coloring all else: agency and action, subjectivity, space and time. Indeed, as Nordstrom, an ethnographer of the war in Mozambique argues, “it is in the act of violence . . . that the definition of war is to be found” (Nordstrom 1997). Violence has—to some—come to saturate war’s very definition, to exhaust its essence, to constitute its very nature. To Nordstrom the very presence of violence entails a qualitative transformation, a dismembering or an “unmaking” of the world. She writes: “war is about existing in a world suddenly divested of lights. It is about a type of violence that spills out across the country and into the daily lives of people to undermine the world as they know it. A violence that, in severing people from their traditions and their futures, severs them from their lives. It hits at the heart of perception and existence” (132). War, according to Nordstrom and others, negates the possibility of life, of being. I disagree with this rendering. War, like life, is full of light (and not only darkness).

Foregrounding violence gives us a picture of war that is dominated, driven, saturated by “violent things,” argues Lubkemann (2008). “Processes (such as war) that are so implicitly and interreferentially inter-twined with violence tend to be discursively constituted as analytical objects of a particular sort. Violence is not only highlighted as their central feature, but the analytical framing itself is more often than not imperceptibly altered so that the object considered seems to coincide only with that part of itself that is violent” (10). Furthermore, the violence-riveted gaze on war not only highlights “the most acute, outrageous manifestations of violence” but also illuminates “only certain capacities of violence, most notably its capacity to unmake and undo—to hyperactively disorder, disorganize and destabilize—with little if any reference to other possible effects” (11). I do not want to lose sight of violence of course, but like Lubkemann I do not want to see everything through its fractured prism. What about the many other processes that necessarily, ordinarily continue throughout wartime, such as cultivating, nurturing, learning, loving, living? In such framings, they are subsumed, effaced, overwritten by the fixa-