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Profile: “Remnants of a War,” directed by Jawad Metni

Documentary Review

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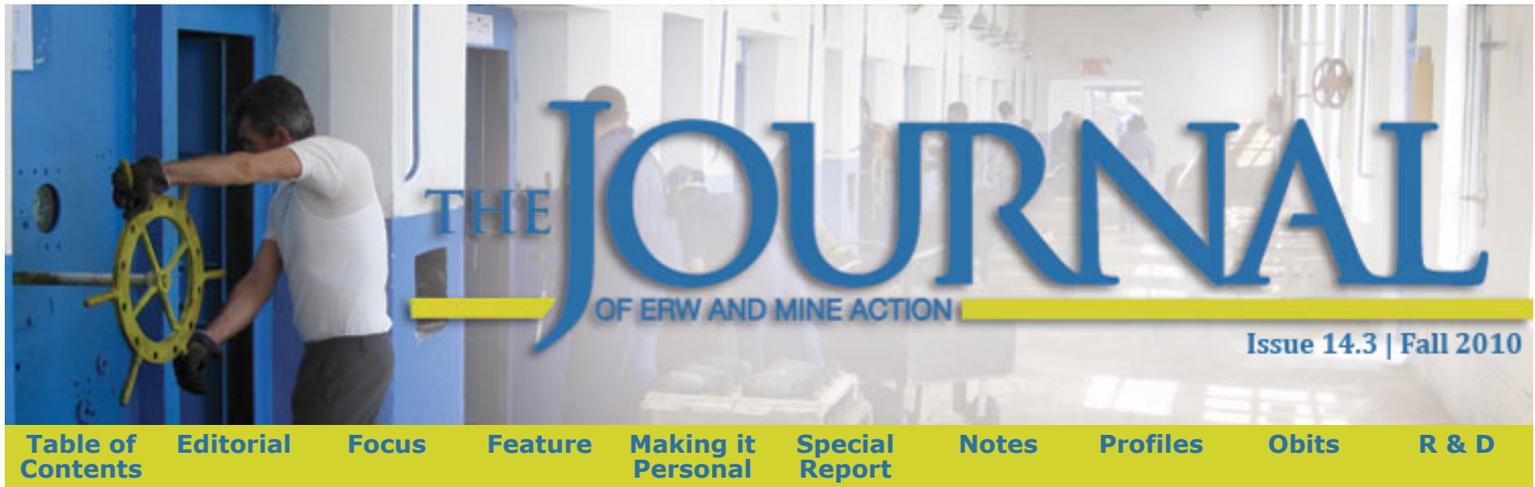
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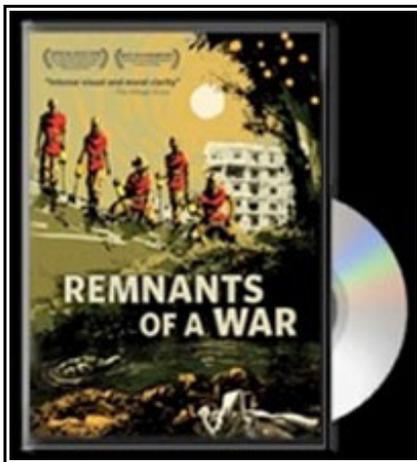
Pinhole Productions

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Available through www.iTunes.com, www.hulu.com and www.remnantsfilm.com

by Meghan Wallace [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]



During the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War, Israeli forces dropped more than four million cluster munitions on Southern Lebanon. By conservative estimates, these bombs fail to detonate 30 percent of the time. This rate, when coupled with a 2009 stall in the funding process, has left more than 12 million square meters (2,965 acres) of land threatening the safety and lives of local residents. Responding to this danger, Director Jawad Metni uses his film, "Remnants of a War," to document the trained, local deminers of Southern Lebanon as they diligently work to remove the remaining munitions more than three years after the wars conclusion. Examining the long-standing devastation caused by weapons of war through both historical accounts and personal perspectives, "Remnants of a War" provides a first-hand look into the issues surrounding cluster bombs and the importance of cluster-munitions removal.

Cluster bombs, which disperse multiple, smaller bombs (called submunitions) over a large area, have become a controversial subject in recent years because of their intense destructive power and poor detonation rate. When dropped, the bomblets can remain intact long after the conflict ends—stuck in trees, resting on

or buried in the ground—causing civilian casualties. They are a threat to children who often think the submunitions are toys.

Taking the viewer on a photojournalistic expedition of this problem with high-quality cinematography, detailed personal narratives, and subtitles when necessary, Metni shows the many ways individuals and communities suffer from injuries, deaths, and the lasting presence of these weapons while also offering a realistic snapshot of their proactive and optimistic attitudes.

In one instance, the film focuses on the many Southern Lebanese who have turned to demining after losing their jobs as a result of the war or forsaking arable land due to safety concerns. Employed by organizations including Danchurch Aid and Armor Group, these individuals are able to make a living and improve the safety of their villages. In addition to demining, the film follows the deminers as they engage schoolchildren and village residents in munitions-risk education.

Many of the deminers interviewed express the sentiment that the benefits of gainful employment and the opportunity to reduce the threat of these weapons on their fellow citizens overshadows the inherent risk of cluster-bomb removal. A recently divorced woman discusses how her passion for the work has led her to ignore social norms by conducting

demining activities alongside a mostly male team. Additionally, the film introduces a farmer and his family whose orange grove is contaminated by cluster bombs; a Palestinian medical worker who responds to the death of a British deminer; a village mourning the death of a 6-year-old boy from a cluster bomb and a young couple who demine to save money for their wedding.

Seventy-five minutes in length, this documentary takes a candid approach, offering an unscripted, educational look into the issues surrounding cluster munitions in Southern Lebanon. This film is an excellent selection for those interested in cluster-munitions research, those working in the field who seek a broader perspective and anyone who would like to be a more informed world citizen.

The British Independent Film Festival named "Remnants of a War" the 2010 Best Documentary, and the movie was a 2009 Official Selection from the New York Human Rights Watch Film Festival, the Beirut Docudays International Documentary Festival, the Vancouver Amnesty International Film Festival, the Newport Beach Film Festival, and the San Francisco Arab Film Fest. It is a film well worth watching. ↴

This article was compiled by CISR staff member, Meghan Wallace. Contact her at maic(at)jmu.edu.



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