

Beirut Fragments

by Jean Said Makdisi

Makdisi sketches the slick process that violence plays on the psyche, morale, and values of the middle class non-militant Lebanese.

How can I write about Beirut? How can I collect it all into one volume: the years of pain; of watching a world collapse while trying to stave off that collapse; the layers of memories and hopes, of tragedy and even sometimes comedy, of violence and kindness, of courage and fear? Above all, how can I express my strange love for this mutilated city; how to explain, both to myself and to others, the lingering magic of the place that has kept me and so many others clinging to its wreckage, refusing to let go, refusing to abandon it? (p. 19)

In **Beirut Fragments**, Makdisi's writing about coping with war is perceptive and entails a vision that is worthy of the dignity of a people who have survived glory and defeat, life and death during the fifteen years covered in the book. She sketches the slick process that violence plays on the psyche, morale, and values of the middle class non-militant Lebanese. Thoughts, feelings, questions and decision-making processes involved with every encounter of war violence are skillfully described. Cues are noted starting with little adrenaline-loaded moments such as listening to the opening tune of a news bulletin, to the trembling of the earth caused by shelling of her home while she, her family and other tenants of the apartment building hid in the shelter. Of the most interesting descriptions are those recounting discussions that search the words and ideas of others for an assessment of the violence and its potential increase or decrease. You can almost hear the exhaustion and the giant efforts to ignore as well as cope with the conditions.

Jean Makdisi's style discloses inner thoughts and feelings heartfelt by those who witnessed the war. Makdisi pays special attention to language used during the war. There are terms that took a critical dimension in saving the lives of many Lebanese and ordering their socio-political and demographic perceptions of survival. **Beirut Fragments** also includes a detailed chronology of the events.

Jean Makdisi has an outstanding way of describing the atrocities of war and; therefore, presenting a case for peace without actually touching on politics, giving the concept, the personal is political yet another dimension. Through her personal account, Makdisi traces migration and violence inherent in the history of the Arabs without addressing politics. It is a real life account of educational and multicultural experiences, which takes the author from Palestine to Cairo and, then, to Lebanon, passing through Western countries, notably the United States.

Beirut Fragments is an exploration into the lives of those who have experienced war. It takes you into the macro and micro dimensions of every day life, of survival. It is truly a woman's perspective, which reveals Makdisi's inherent struggle to save her sanity and virtues in the midst of violence.

It is a timelessly crafted portrait of life in a war torn city (The Kansas city star). an impassionate cry against indifference (New York Times Book Review) and its greatest accomplishment is that, through Makdisi's eyes, it is possible to rid one's mind of all the cant and rubbish that has been spoken about Beirut (Los Angeles Times Book Review).

— R.A.H.