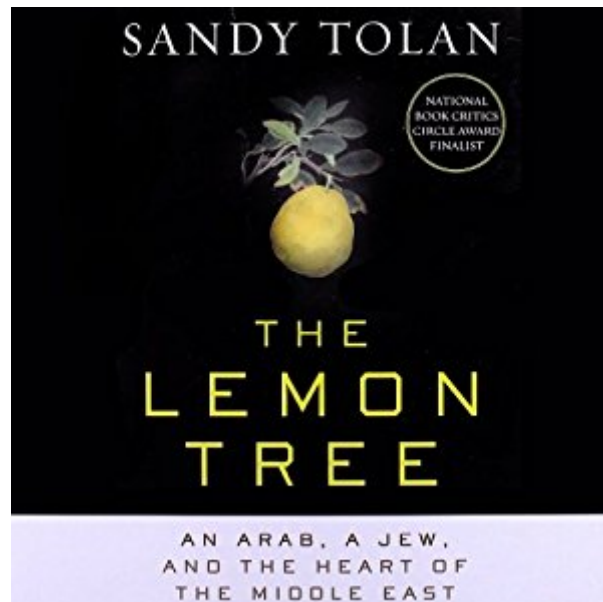




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The Lemon Tree



Synopsis

The tale of a simple act of faith between two young people - one Israeli, one Palestinian - that symbolizes the hope for peace in the Middle East. In 1967, not long after the Six-Day War, three young Arab men ventured into the town of Ramle, in what is now Jewish Israel. They were cousins, on a pilgrimage to see their childhood homes; their families had been driven out of Palestine nearly 20 years earlier. One cousin had a door slammed in his face, and another found his old house had been converted into a school. But the third, Bashir Al-Khairi, was met at the door by a young woman called Dalia, who invited them in. This act of faith in the face of many years of animosity is the starting point for a true story of a remarkable relationship between two families, one Arab, one Jewish, amid the fraught modern history of the region. In his childhood home, in the lemon tree his father planted in the backyard, Bashir sees dispossession and occupation; Dalia, who arrived as an infant in 1948 with her family from Bulgaria, sees hope for a people devastated by the Holocaust. As both are swept up in the fates of their people, and Bashir is jailed for his alleged part in a supermarket bombing, the friends do not speak for years. They finally reconcile and convert the house in Ramle into a day-care centre for Arab children of Israel, and a center for dialogue between Arabs and Jews. Now the dialogue they started seems more threatened than ever; the lemon tree died in 1998, and Bashir was jailed again, without charge. The Lemon Tree grew out of a 43-minute radio documentary that Sandy Tolan produced for Fresh Air. With this audiobook, he pursues the story into the homes and histories of the two families at its center, and up to the present day. Their stories form a personal microcosm of the last 70 years of Israeli-Palestinian history. In a region that seems ever more divided, The Lemon Tree is a reminder of all that is at stake, and of all that is still possible.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours and 20 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: February 4, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00HNE1LPE

Best Sellers Rank: #25 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Middle East #44 in Books > History > Middle East > Israel & Palestine #56 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Middle East

Customer Reviews

Sandy Tolan's "The Lemon Tree" was a thought provoking novel detailing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Tolan presented information from various points of views, creating an unbiased account of the conflict that allowed the reader to form their own opinions based on facts. This book was filled with historical accounts that revealed the background of the conflict and set the stage for the humanizing aspect weaved throughout the book. Tolan tells the emotional story of Dalia Eshkenazi and Bashir Khairi, and their struggle over the right to a home that has been unwillingly transferred from one to another. Their daily struggle over a home is symbolic of the moral struggle over a land that has been occupied by two different people groups who are unwilling to relinquish control. This personal account brings an emotional and personal angle to the often over-told and over-generalized struggle that many people have simply become accustomed to hearing about. It instills a sense of urgency in readers concerning the resolution of the topic, as it shows the daily struggle that the citizens of modern day Israel are experiencing. I would highly recommend this novel to anyone looking to understand more about the background of modern day Israel, the conflicts surrounding it, or the emotions that are so deeply ingrained in their cultures.

In a conflict like the Israeli-Palestinian one, the truth seems to always be elusive. It is more often than not a question of perspectives and beliefs. And beliefs are only stories that we keep hearing repeated again and again and which are being reinforced and strengthened because we tend to only see that which we already believe to begin with. Most Americans only know the Israeli side propagated by the powerful Israeli lobby that dominates US politics and so it is refreshing to come across a book that tells a different tale, or rather tales of both sides. It is only by putting ourselves in others' shoes that we can truly appreciate their suffering. Tolani does just that. His enormous compassion and talent as a historian and researcher serve him well in depicting the human dimension behind the conflict though I resisted feeling more hopeless than ever by the time I finished his book. The increasing tensions in the region and the mounting inflexibility of the current Israeli government combined with the impotence of the Palestinian Authority leaves no possibility for a viable two state solution. Ultimately, I believe the Palestinians and Israelis will be living in one secular democratic state. After all, basing a nation's identity on its religion - be it Islam, Judaism or

Christianity - stands against the progressive ideals of diversity, inclusion and freedom.

Except for the fact that I became depressed in the second half of the book, this is just about a perfect non-fiction book about the Palestinian-Israeli differences and all the historical deceptions and betrayals that have led them to their current, apparently insolvable differences. I read it in the context of an Interfaith book group. We have, collectively, had trouble finding books that are even-handed in their coverage of religious differences. We find books good from one point of view or another and learn from each, but rarely have we found such a just and comprehensive book as this. Tolan uses the lemon tree and the specific focus on one Palestinian and one Israeli to open up the entire history, but the focus allows us to read it almost as a novel. The book includes many things that we did not know, such as the story of the Jews in Bulgaria and the Bulgarians non-compliance with their Third Reich ally--very thorough historically, well-researched. The depression I referred to is about any hope for resolution. The absolute intransigence of one side or another, all the lies told, the holding on to resentment from one generation to another, all seem to mitigate against any solution. We need to know all about this and try to understand as a first step. Almost as much harm seems to have been caused by outsiders thinking they can force a resolution upon the parties involved as by any stubbornness from the parties themselves. I highly recommend this book, as a way to learn and understand, as a very readable first step.

When I purchased this book, I thought it was going to be more of a novel "the story of the two families. I was not prepared for the amount of historical detail and description. I almost gave up reading it several times as the history part didn't hold my interest and it was difficult to digest. But I am glad I persevered. With an upcoming trip to Israel, this gave me an excellent understanding of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict past and present. It certainly changed my viewpoint as well.

It's worth a read, especially if you would like some understanding from both sides of the conflict. I was frustrated about the excessive historical parts in the beginning, but as I got deeper into understanding it, it became very interesting and I wanted more and more. The writing style wasn't always smooth, but still very readable to me. After reading this book it gets me thinking, what's to stop the hundreds of different ethnic groups around the world from invading a region and claiming it as a land of their own because they believe they deserve their own private country? Every group has lived somewhere before right?

While the book started off great, I found it to be overloaded with repetitive, sometimes insignificant, details. It began to feel as though it needed a better editor. There were long, boring passages, and I found myself skimming over them without compromising the story. The characters were generally well-developed, especially Bashir and Dahlia, but I discerned a distinctly pro-Palestinian bias by the author, in his reluctance (avoidance?) to actually admit that Bashir was, indeed, a terrorist, responsible for much violence. This Israel-Palestine conflict is a highly-complex subject, and I got the feeling that the author felt the need to cram in all the facts that his research revealed, at the expense of the story.

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