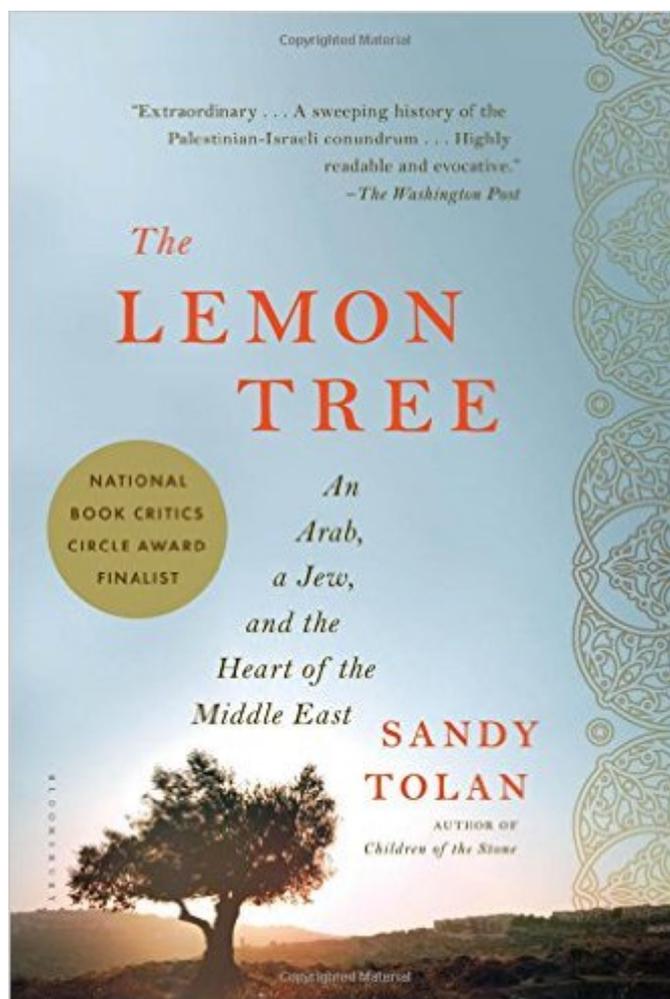


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The Lemon Tree: An Arab, A Jew, And The Heart Of The Middle East



Synopsis

In 1967, Bashir Khairi, a twenty-five-year-old Palestinian, journeyed to Israel with the goal of seeing the beloved stone house with the lemon tree behind it that he and his family had fled nineteen years earlier. To his surprise, when he found the house he was greeted by Dalia Eshkenazi Landau, a nineteen-year-old Israeli college student, whose family left fled Europe for Israel following the Holocaust. On the stoop of their shared home, Dalia and Bashir began a rare friendship, forged in the aftermath of war and tested over the next half century in ways that neither could imagine on that summer day in 1967. Sandy Tolan brings the Israeli-Palestinian conflict down to its most human level, demonstrating that even amid the bleakest political realities there exist stories of hope and transformation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In my 56 years, I've read several books that have changed my life--brought me greater understandings, taught me things I didn't know, mesmerized me so much that I took the books with me everywhere I went--even reading at stop lights! The Lemon Tree is right up there with The Haj, Hawaii, and Night. This history fills in all the gaps of my previous knowledge. So many people have questions about the Middle Eastern conflicts and all of those questions are answered in this book. My friends and I agree that we all SHOULD know more about the Middle East situation, but rarely do we want to sit down and study a history book. This book is full of facts, but it's a page turner!! I could hardly put it down. My life was on hold. One day I was reading The Lemon Tree and I actually started crying. There were heart-stopping moments, too. Very exciting! A thriller! I want to meet the

real people in the book so much. They are so brave, both Arabs and Israelis, Muslims and Jews. I love how Sandy Tolan showed Israel through different view points, e.g. al-Ramla through Arabic eyes and Ramla through Israeli eyes. It helped shift my thinking as I was reading. Everyone simply has to read this book, both sides, all sides!

Who has a heart large enough to contain compassion both for the longing for Zion, for sanctuary, for homeland, of the Jewish survivors who emigrated to the nascent Israel after WWII, and at the same time the longing for return, for justice, for homeland, of the Palestinians who were expelled from the homes they had occupied for generations to make room for what was to become Israel? Sandy Tolan, author of *The Lemon Tree*, has, and when you read this remarkable book your heart, too, will stretch until it is large enough to encompass the whole. If you don't know the history of Palestine and Israel, read this book. It is a true story, but it reads like a novel. It's a page-turner that tells "Everything you ever wanted to know about the history of Israel and Palestine, but were afraid to ask." If you know the history, but you find the subject difficult to discuss with others, read this book for back-up. Every event is documented in the extensive source notes. Arab accounts of what occurred around 1948 have long been available. Israeli Army reports of the same events were declassified only 50 years after the fact. Only since then have the disparate narratives begun to intertwine into one coherent story of what happened in 1948 and after. All of the historic phenomena are documented here from both Israeli and Palestinian sources. If you follow the news of the region, and therefore you despair, read this book. You'll discover that hope prevails -- in the care of those who sneak across borders to knock on doors, and those who, having considered and rejected more conventional responses to presumed enemies, instead answer, "Yes. Please come in."

This book is both a "must read" and at the same time it is deeply flawed. If you are seeking an emotional and decidedly gripping account of the Middle-east conflict this is an excellent choice. It will also serve admirably to put a face on both sides of the conflict. It should challenge the everyone who already associates themselves with a position on the matter to question their beliefs and to seriously consider the point of view of the other side in a meaningful way. That said, where this book falls down is in the objectivity department. Put simply the author clearly attempted mightily to be unbiased and balanced but still allowed personal bias and spin to infiltrate the book. In its weakest form, the author's bias makes him much more likely to credit accounts favorable to the Palestinian Arabs and hostile to the Palestinian Jews* (Hereafter "Israelis"). He often sites sources and historians with a known and recognizable agenda, as well as "fringe" sources. However, this is

largely forgivable because he sometimes also provides a balancing point of view to compensate or at least admits when facts are in significant dispute. However, a worse failing is the tendency to systematically "spin" information to the detriment of Israel. For example, in a later chapter on the 2nd Intifada (the riots, or uprisings, or terrorist acts, or insurgency -depending on who you ask- of 2000 and following years) he mentions the Israeli accusation that Palestinian gunmen operated from behind a screen of civilians, usually children. He goes on to say that a UN investigation revealed that this was "the exception rather than the rule." This is a case of "spin" when one considers that the UN actually confirmed that the Israeli accusation was founded in fact. To call it the "exception" is casting the evidence in light as favorable to one side as possible. In other cases, he presents facts that are generally very well established and corroborated by neutral sources or even the Arabs as "Israeli assertions." For example, he mentions villages that the Israelis cleared after capturing them in the 6 Day War because "Israelis claimed" they had participated in attacks on Jewish forces during the 1948 War. He does not mention that the NY Times and the Jordanian Army also confirmed that fact. To add the phrase "Israel claims" etc. indicates that the following may not be true; it can and should be used when there is real doubt but not when all reputable (Arab, Jew, and Other) sources agree on a fact. Nor does he mention that these villagers were compensated at the time. I am not saying that there was justification for that act, which is certainly debatable, but it is revealing that it was not mentioned. It robs several of the hard questions of balance. Other times, he ignores inconvenient evidence from highly reputable or significant sources. This is a pity because often I would have liked to see his assessment of the ignored evidence. One such piece of evidence that would go to the actual heart of his book was Israeli claims that they expelled the Arab inhabitants of Lyda or Lod (a town next to the one in central to his narrative and one he discusses on multiple occasions) only after they turned on the Israelis after having surrendered to them. After that catalogue of problems, perhaps it is surprising that I honestly recommend this book as one of two that a person MUST read in order to understand the historical context of the conflict. The other, FYI, is O'Jerusalem which, I admit, leans a bit towards the Jewish side. I also do praise the author for attempting balance even if he does not always succeed. Ideally the two books should be read one after the other as they will give the reader a very balanced view of the problem with one leaning a little towards the Arabs while the other leans a little towards the Jews. The Lemon Tree is a gripping, if flawed, personal account of the struggle that continues to have terrible ramifications 60 years after the UN voted to create a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine. *The Jewish population of the region were commonly referred to as "Palestinians" or "Palestinian Jews" until the creation of the Jewish State in 1948, at which point they began to be referred to as Israelis. Sorry about the nitpick, but

terminology is important.

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