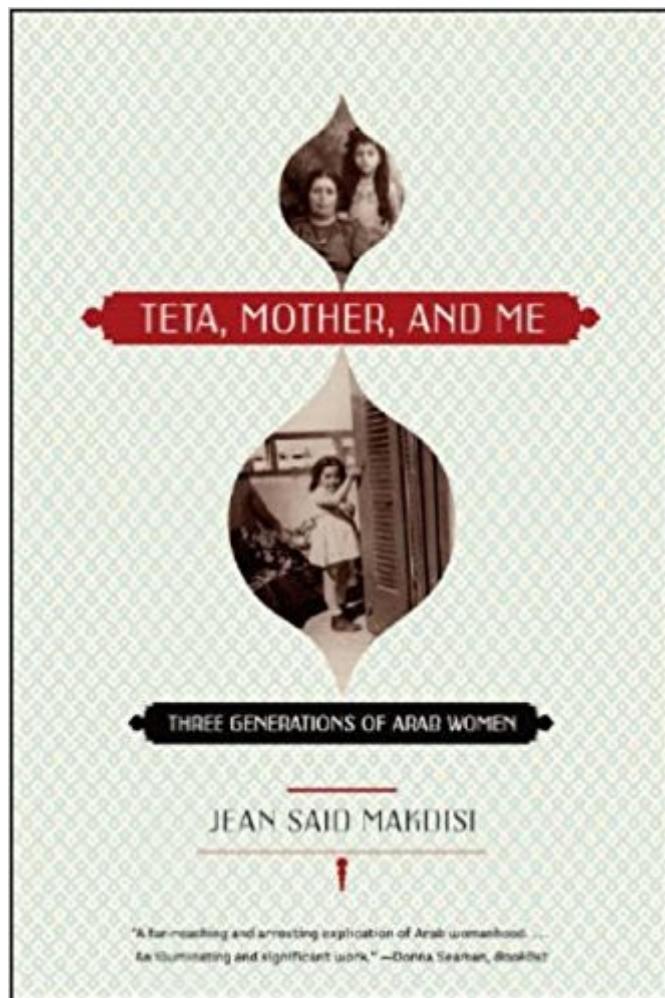


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Teta, Mother, And Me: Three Generations Of Arab Women



Synopsis

Rich in warmth and insight, a personal and cultural history of three generations of Arab women. In this "beautifully written memoir" (Publishers Weekly), Jean Said Makdisi illuminates a century of Arab life and history through the stories of her mother, Hilda Musa Said, and her Teta, "Granny" Munira Badr Musa. Against the backdrop of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of Arab nationalism, the founding of Israel, the Suez crisis, the Arab-Israeli wars, and civil war in Beirut, she reveals the extraordinary courage of these ordinary women, while rethinking the notions of "traditional" and "modern," "East" and "West." With a loving eye, acute intelligence, and elegant, impassioned prose, Makdisi has written "much more than a memoir," rather "an embrace of history and culture" (Cleveland Plain Dealer). 16 pages

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company (June 17, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393329658

ISBN-13: 978-0393329650

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.1 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (5 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,061,989 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #79 inÂ Books > History > Middle East > Lebanon #11656 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Women #27843 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Memoirs

Customer Reviews

The impetus for this lively, emotionally engaging exploration of three generations in Makdisi's maternal line came from her conflicted feelings about feminism and the traditional domestic-centered woman's role as well as the friction between the two cultural influences in her life - East and West. Her father was an affluent Christian Palestinian who immigrated to the US and became an American citizen. He returned to Jerusalem to honor his mother's dying wish, "but never really forgave her for deflecting him from what he had seen as his destiny in the New World." Her mother was Lebanese and Palestinian, the daughter of a strict Baptist minister and his European-mission educated wife (Teta) who was, in turn, daughter of an Evangelical pastor. Makdisi and her siblings (which include the late Edward Said, professor, writer and pro-Palestinian activist,

and the historian and writer Rosemarie Said Zahlan, who was also a pro-Palestinian activist) grew up with American passports, though she was born in Jerusalem in 1940 and grew up in Cairo. "Until 1948, and the Palestine war, our family moved regularly between Jerusalem and Cairo. For Palestinians, the year 1948 was a time of movement, of scattering, of families breaking up and moving apart. It was a time of breakdown, of entropy." Though a child and sheltered somewhat from outside events, she recalls the upheaval in their Cairo home as a stream of relations - distraught refugees - moved through. "In 1948 the heart of our family was torn out, and the centre of our existence was broken....It is only recently that I have come to understand how deeply affected we have all been by the Palestinian experience, how we have lived our lives in its shadow.

The wife of Edward Said grew up, like her brother, among the richest of the Arab elite, the Bourguise that had come up with the Arab Awakening following the Arab revolt in 1917. This was a class of wealthy, European educated, mostly Arab Christians who became not only nationalists but highly knowledgeable about the world. Because of their connections and the fact that they were inter-related with Arabs across the middle east they were very worldly. The Said family were two generations removed from Baptist Arab converts in Lebanon who had immigrated to Palestine and then on to Egypt. They had summer homes both in Jerusalem and Lebanon. Theirs was a life of luxury and western ways, western dress, western values and eventually western self hate. This memoir covers the period 1940-2000. We are given insights into life after the flight from Palestine in 1948, life in Beirut during the war and insights into the arab world. Despite being a 'housewife' Mrs. Said is not really immigrating to Lebanon when she marries a Lebanese instead she is merely returning to her homeland. This is where the memoir is problematic. It covers up the very unique status of the Said family trying instead to put them in a larger arab morass which they do not exist in. There is little difference in the upbringing, wealth and outlook of the Saids and their western counterparts in the richest sections of London or New York. This is not an account of Arab women because 99.99% of Arab women do not live like this jetting between capitals and conversing in multiple languages. Despite attempts at portraying her family as refugees one has only to compare the memoir with the truth of the many homes of the family to see a more complete picture.

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