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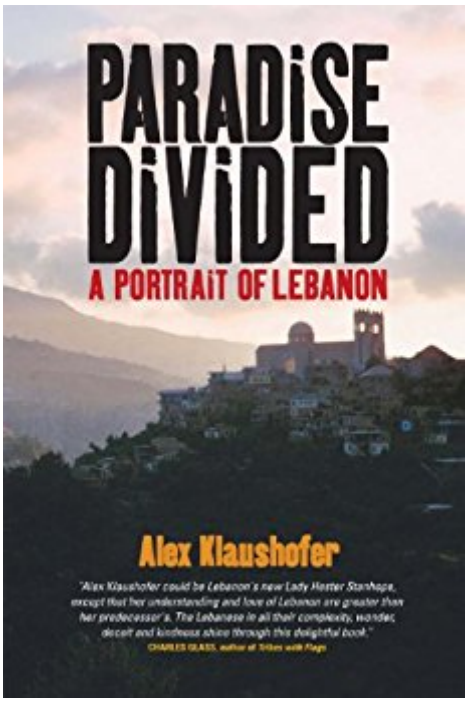
Paradise Divided



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Synopsis

This timely portrait of Lebanon exposes the fault lines that underlie the current crisis in the Middle East, and charts the countryÃ¢â ¬â„¢s attempts to rebuild a fragile peace after its long civil war and recent conflict with Israel. Part reportage, part travel narrative, Paradise Divided chronicles the delicate web of relationships that make up contemporary Lebanese society. Drawing on interviews with community leaders and relationships with ordinary people, it reveals a richly-textured social and religious fabric in which Sunni and Shia Muslims, Druze and Christians of all kinds, from Maronite Catholics to evangelical Protestants, strive to maintain a delicate balance. It offers an insight into how LebanonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s religious communities, their identities formed by history, landscape and their relationships with one another, came to be what they are todayÃ¢â ¬â •and how their different perspectives can lead to potentially destructive tensions. What emerges is a quintessentially Middle Eastern form of coexistence, poised between tolerance and sectarianismÃ¢â ¬â •a theme powerfully developed through the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s privileged access to the normally secretive Druze. The reader follows the countryÃ¢â ¬â„¢s changing fortunes after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the subsequent pro-democracy movement and withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanese soil. The final chapters examine the aftermath of IsraelÃ¢â ¬â„¢s military campaign and the emergence of the new battle dividing Lebanese society as opposing camps struggle to have their vision for Lebanon made reality. Paradise Divided opens a window onto a country little-visited by Westerners for decades, and one very different from the war-torn images of the Middle East that dominate our television screens. Offering a unique view of the struggle between sectarianism and tolerance, and the relationship between the Arab world and the West, it is a book which sheds light on some of the central issues of our time.

Book Information

File Size: 918 KB

Print Length: 320 pages

Publisher: Signal Books; 1.0 edition (November 26, 2010)

Publication Date: November 26, 2010

Sold by:Ã Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B004EBTI36

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #481,496 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #114 inÃ Â Books > Travel > Middle East > Israel > General #258 inÃ Â Books > Travel > Middle East > General #4251 inÃ Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers

Customer Reviews

I found this book in an English-language bookstore when I visited Beirut in October and was immediately intrigued by the interviews with a variety of religious, political, and academic leaders as well as ordinary Lebanese citizens from all walks of life (young women leaving their families to work in the city, families rebuilding lives destroyed by years of civil war, men torn between religious and societal expectations and the lure of emigrating to the West...). Alex Klaushofer takes us off the beaten path and into mosques, churches, refugee camps, and destroyed landscapes of this multi-faceted and complex country. I particularly appreciated the even-handed attention paid to Hezbollah and the 2006 Lebanon War with Israel. The interviews with ordinary citizens concerning the group's political actions gave me quite a bit to think about. And I guess that's a pretty good compliment to give a piece of writing, no?

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