

The Lemon Tree Study Guide

The Lemon Tree by Sandy Tolan

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Plot Summary

In 1967, Bashir Khairi and two of his cousins travel to their hometown, Al-Ramla, which they have not seen in nineteen years ever since Arabs were driven from their homes and forced to live as refugees. In the same home that Bashir abandoned, a Jewish girl named Dalia Eshkenazi is grateful for a place where her people can be safe after the horrors of the Holocaust. Both their families have suffered, and both have lived in fear of the other's people, viewing them as the enemy. However, when Bashir visits his old home and asks for a chance to look around inside, Dalia feels an instinctive connection with him and lets him into the home. Despite their differences, Bashir feels the same connection and invites Dalia to visit his family in their new home in Ramallah, though he never expects to hear from her again.

Moved by her encounter with Bashir, Dalia begins asking questions about assumptions she has made about the Palestinian people and her own peoples' role in driving them from their homes. She takes Bashir up on his offer to visit in Ramallah and is moved by the generosity and hospitality his family shows her. Dalia and Bashir discuss their different points of view, and though they do not see eye-to-eye on everything, both are encouraged by their ability to understand more about the other side's ideas more than they ever have before.

Circumstances intervene, and Dalia and Bashir do not see each other again for some time. Bashir is arrested for his alleged role in violent attacks made by Palestinian forces, and Dalia feels betrayed by this, believing that conversation and understanding are the way to make change, not violence. However, she still feels compelled to write to Bashir to remind him of their previous friendship and express her views. Bashir writes in response, and respect is maintained between the two, even though they still do not always agree. Dalia maintains contact mostly with Bashir's family through the years, since Bashir is in and out of prison, though they do have the chance to come face-to-face again and marvel at how much they have meant to each other over time.

Dalia's parents die and she is left the house that once belonged to the Khairi family. Ramla is still a dangerous place for Arab families to live, so the Khairi family cannot return. Instead, with Bashir's blessing, Dalia donates the home to become a school where Palestinian and Israeli children can learn together side-by-side and attempt to build a better future. The lemon tree, which the Khairis planted in the backyard and which has become a symbol of their heritage, dies; the students at the school plant another one next to it, symbolizing their hope for the future. Bashir and Dalia are no longer in contact with one another, but continue to respect each other and honor the bond between them.



Section One - First Words, Maps, Introduction, and Chapter One

Summary

The author spends some time establishing the reality of the story he's about to tell. In First Words, he describes directions that one would take to find the house depicted in the book and the lemon tree alluded to in the title. In the author's note, he goes on to describe the research that went into creating the book, authenticating every fact included in the narrative. The author is careful, however, to distinguish that the book should not be taken as a complete authority on the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In the section "A Note on Spelling and Punctuation," the author goes on to detail the significance of spellings of names, and his reasoning for choosing certain spellings over others when depicting places and people in the book. Often this choice is based on the character who is telling the story at that point in the narrative, though certain choices have been made to help English readers with pronunciation. Maps of Palestine/Israel are also included which show some of the differences in territorial disputes that have occurred over the years.

In the Introduction, the author explains his connection to the material and how he came to learn the story and the families concerned within the narrative. He was assigned to cover the anniversary of the first Arab-Israeli War and wanted to know how it impacted ordinary families on both sides of the conflict. After extensive research, he encountered the story of the Khairi and Eshkenazi families. Tolan describes growing up in a culture where the Israeli side of the conflict was usually focused on and sympathized with, with the Arabs painted as villainous or pathetic or somewhere in between. Tolan wanted to uncover a history which was more complicated and interesting. He summarizes the evolution of the story and peoples' responses to it, both positive and negative, and suggests that it is necessary to tell both sides of the story to achieve a true understanding.

In chapter one, the stories move back and forth between Bashir and Dalia. It is July, 1967, and Bashir is a young Arab man traveling with his cousins back to his hometown, Al-Ramla, from which he and his family have been in exile for almost two decades. Bashir recalls some of the territorial issues which kept him from returning all this time. The trip is still dangerous, and the three cousins take precautions to stay safe, even as they are overwhelmed with emotion at being able to return. In many ways, it is familiar, but it is also very foreign and strange. They try to visit Yasser's old home but the woman currently living there threatens to call the police, though they are able to visit Ghiath's old house, which has become a school. Bashir finds his previous home and knows his reception there will depend on who is living there.

Dalia recalls at about the same time that life has finally returned to normal for her and her family, after many air raids and threats of violence. Her own family escaped to Israel



from Bulgaria after the Holocaust and they believe they are destined to own the home they are in now; the Arabs who used to own it abandoned it and ran away some time before. Dalia reflects on the hardships faced by her people in the past. As she sits, unaware, Bashir approaches the house and rings the doorbell.

Analysis

Much time and energy is devoted to establishing the credibility, or ethos, of the author. In a fictional story, an author might include a brief foreword to explain any research performed, or might even include maps or pronunciation guides if the story takes place in a place that might be considered exotic by the reader, or if worlds or names have been invented by the author; however, an author might also choose not to include these things, instead relying on the story and characters. For a non-fictional story, including these items is more of a necessity, as authors must often provide evidence of the accuracy of the story being told.

This is particularly important in a story such as this, which tackles the controversial subject matter of the Jewish and Arab struggle for the Israeli/Palestinian territories, which over the years has resulted in wars, violent political attacks, and countless casualties. Not only the author's credibility, but the credibility of the book and the themes it conveys, will be challenged if any of the facts prove to be incorrect or misinterpreted. By making his research transparent, or easy to follow, the author is trying to show the thoroughness of his research, and thus allow the reader to feel safe in believing the story as it unfolds.

Tolan makes mention that he is unable to provide a complete history of the conflict between the Jews and the Arabs in this region, though he does offer quite a bit of detail about the tension experienced. He does so by interweaving these events with the focal characters, Bashir and Dalia. The main purpose of this is to help the information feel less like textbook exposition--e.g., a mere list of facts and dates--since it is directly related to the characters who are experiencing the story. However, this is also why the author must be careful to explain that the book is not a comprehensive guide to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since it focuses on the aspects that will most directly affect Bashir and Dalia.

The lemon tree is immediately introduced as one of the main symbolic touchstones of the story, which will be returned to again and again throughout the narrative. The symbolism of the lemon tree shifts somewhat throughout the course of the book, but overall it is meant to represent a shared hope between Dalia and Bashir, and on a larger scale, a shared hope between their people about a possible peace in the future. Dalia and Bashir might have different hopes for how this peace will be accomplished, just as they have different memories of the lemon tree; in the end, however, it is the same tree, just as ultimately Dalia and Bashir are hoping for the same peace between their people.



Discussion Question 1

How does knowing the story is based on real events and people change the way a reader might approach it? Is there a difference in the way the author presents the information and characters than he might with a fictional story?

Discussion Question 2

Is the author accurate when he suggests that the Jewish side of the conflict is usually treated with more sympathy? Is this reflected in examples other than the ones provided by the author in the introduction? (Anne Frank, Exodus the film, etc.)

Discussion Question 3

How does the author introduce Dalia and Bashir and their different sides of the story? Does switching back and forth between their points of view impact the way they are perceived by the reader?

Vocabulary

depicted, bustling, trinkets, elusive, intractable, tangible, exile, refugees, embarked, navigate, alien, shrines, atrocities, disintegration, slaughter, inattention, vanquish, municipality, remnants, admonitions, agitated, haste, outcome, veranda, contentedly, jacaranda, rapping



Section Two - Chapters Two and Three

Summary

In 1936, Bashir's father, Ahmad, builds the house where most of the novel will take place, in the town of Al-Ramla. The Khairi family can trace their ancestors in this land back to the Ottoman Empire. In 1936, the British have a strong hand in overseeing Palestine; in 1917, England pledged to help find a new homeland for Jewish people. Ahmad is married to Zakia, and the family owns the local cinema. His uncle is mayor of the town and has to oversee the growing conflicts between Arabs and Jews, which causes some to see him as sympathizing too much with the British. Ahmad, a furniture maker by trade, focuses on building his dream home, which will include a lemon tree in the backyard. Zakia is pregnant, and the family hopes for a son. Despite the turmoil around them, the family tries to live normally.

At this time, many Jews and Arabs work alongside each other in the town in various occupations. Most of the Jews speak Arabic and are considered part of Palestine. The history of the town, as a center of commerce, is provided. In 1936, the environment of Europe has changed due to Hitler and the Nazis taking power in Germany and displacing Jews from their homes. In Palestine, Arabs worry when Jews begin buying up available land, and soon selling land to Jews is decreed an act of treason. Many Arabs begin to take up arms to protect their lands, and Jews fight back. War breaks out in Europe, and in midst of this environment, Bashir is born.

In 1943, Bulgaria, Dalia's father, Moshe, finds a wallet on the road and turns it in to the police. They're so impressed with his honesty that one of the policemen reveals that the Jews will soon be deported from the town. Moshe and his wife, Solia, travel to her family's home in Silven. There they receive a letter from the Bulgarian authorities, telling them to gather their belongings and be prepared to take a journey. They wait for orders to leave, which never come, thanks to the intervention of many Bulgarian citizens. The war ends, and Solia becomes pregnant with Dalia, born Daizy, in 1947.

In 1943, Bulgaria belongs on the same side as the Axis powers, including Hitler, and many Jews have been sent to working camps, had their citizenship revoked, and have occasionally been jailed, though so far their treatment has not been as bad as it is in Germany, Poland, etc. Some Jews, such as a rabbi's daughter named Susannah Behar, have formed a resistance. Jewish families are gathered up and ask their Christian neighbors for help. The country has a long history of protecting Jews, and many of the citizens refuse to stand for their ill treatment. A stipulation is signed for the expulsion of 20,000 Jews, but news of this is leaked to Jewish citizens, who begin to make plans to save themselves, aided by many sympathetic neighbors, who stand for their cause. Asen Suichmezov, a shop owner and friend to many Jews, journeys with a delegation to meet with the vice-president of parliament, Dimitur Peshev, who joins with them to help persuade his higher ups to suspend the deportation order. Further measures are taken by citizens to protest the treatment of the Jews.



Analysis

A lot of background information is revealed in this section, not only about the tensions between Jews and Arabs, but also the background of the different families, the town of Al-Ramla itself, the treatment of Jews in Bulgaria, and the various environments created by World War II. While this may at times feel like a gratuitous amount of information that may be difficult to remember, the author is attempting to establish that the current tensions in Israel are not merely the result of two religious groups arguing over territory, but a plethora of events throughout the world that have shaped the state as it exists today.

Unlike the first chapter, in which Dalia and Bashir are introduced alongside each other, Tolan chooses to separate the backgrounds of their families and their people into two distinct chapters. This may have been done, in part, to help distinguish between the vast amount of background information being provided in this section; it may also reflect a recurring theme within the novel, which is to show how different things are before also revealing how similar they are. Though the reader has very little idea at this point in the novel how Dalia's and Bashir's fates will intertwine, the common location of the lemon tree and the recurring references to this point continue to bring these two people and their families together, even during these chapters where Tolan details how different their backgrounds are.

The symbols of the wallet and the Star of David are introduced in chapter three. The yellow Star of David is a symbol commonly associated with Jews in World War II, as it was used by the government to distinguish Jews from other citizens and was meant to be worn as a badge of shame. However, this sometimes backfired, as it created sympathy for Jews from non-Jewish citizens. A symbol more directly related to Dalia's family is the wallet which her father found in the street and returned without taking any of the money, which came to stand as a symbol for his honesty and integrity, and which was afterward passed down as a family anecdote to indicate the kind of man Moshe was.

Much of chapter three is devoted to showing the difference of how Jews were treated in Bulgaria than in other Axis power countries, much of which was caused by the intervention of their non-Jewish neighbors, who united together against what would have otherwise resulted in a mass deportation and potential annihilation of Jewish citizens. This co-mingling of religious backgrounds is one of the integral themes of the novel; though the focus in modern-day Israel is more on the relations between Arabs and Jews, the intervention of Christian neighbors and friends in Bulgaria indicates that there can be a healthy fusion of different religious backgrounds in a society if people will overlook their differences and choose to stand for what is right.



Discussion Question 1

Some of the details about the Khairi family in 1936 seem strangely normal, considering the conflict taking place around them. Does war stop peoples' lives from happening? How can these normal, day-to-day tasks help to keep people from being afraid?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the author include stories from so many different families during this time period instead of just Bashir's and Dalia's families?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the different ways that the Gentiles (or non-Jews) in Bulgaria help out their Jewish friends and neighbors? Have there been other times in history where people have seen something wrong being done in their country and risked their homes, jobs, and even lives to help? Does this happen today?

Vocabulary

pockmarked, blunted, exclusive, discreet, essence, restive, envisioned, interaction, unassuming, coexisted, luxury, communal, aqueduct, irrigate, manifold, commerce, garrison, periodic, fervor, maturity, liquidated, martyr, reprisals, sporadic, municipal, dissidents, expulsions, deported, fruitless, delegation



Section Three - Chapters Four and Five

Summary

In 1942, Palestine, Bashir's family travels together to take him to a mosque for his blessing. Bashir is doted on by his family, and turns three as the war ends. Another boy, Bhajat, is born to the family. Bashir is known for being shy and reserved. The family is shocked when they learn their hometown, Al-Ramla, will be on the border of a new Jewish state being formed in Palestine. Near their home, attacks are made and people are killed. Refugees from other cities begin flooding into town. Al-Ramla soon becomes a battlefield. Ahmad is nearly killed by a bombing in town and removes his family to safety. War wages in the town, and eventually the Israelis conquer the territory, driving out all the Arab residents.

On the other side of the issue, Solia's cousin, Yitzhaki, immigrates to Jerusalem and is told he is not welcome. During the course of his journey, he is attacked, and narrowly misses being killed by Arab militias. His family back in Bulgaria believes him to be dead.

Palestine has thrived during the war, since the British have used it as a staging area for the conflict in North Africa. The economy is thriving. Jewish refugees immigrate to Palestine, mostly illegally, though once details about the Holocaust emerge, pressure is put on the British to open their borders. Jewish leaders in Palestine fight to expel the British, as more immigrants come into the country. It is suggested that Palestine be divided into Arab and Jewish states. Arabs protest, and the first attacks begin, with those on both sides taking up arms. A few Jewish and Arab neighbors attempt to keep peace with each other. As British forces leave the country, all-out war begins to be waged. Negotiations are attempted but go nowhere.

In Bulgaria, Dalia's family prepares to immigrate to Palestine, unable to take anything of value, though some people sew jewels and coins into their clothing. Many Jews have encouraged staying in Bulgaria to try to rebuild it, but the country is impoverished and bargains with Palestine to let Jewish refugees travel there. Moshe and Solia debate going or staying, but communist influences in Bulgaria will make earning money to support their family difficult. Learning of the Jewish state in Palestine, Bulgarian Jews celebrate. Moshe and Solia make the difficult journey to the new state of Israel. They arrive and are directed to a town called Ramla.

Analysis

The author continues to show both sides of the issue and how it unfolds from different perspectives, particularly in combining Bashir's family's account of the formation with the new Jewish state in Palestine with Dalia's cousin, Yitzhaki, fighting on the other side, as well as the hopes of Dalia's family back in Bulgaria. This continues the idea that the territorial dispute is a complicated issue, with both sides suffering casualties and losing



possessions, homes, and loved ones. Providing depictions from family members on both sides of the war also helps to personalize the vast amounts of background information provided; the author shows these issues not only affecting both peoples as a whole, but individual families, which helps to make it more relatable.

In the first chapter, Dalia recalls hearing a story of the family who used to live in their home in Ramla fleeing like cowards. This story is revisited again in chapter four, this time from the perspective of Bashir's family, threatened by bombs and an approaching army, of whom it is said they are known for murdering and raping Arab citizens. This is one example of how one side of a conflict will sometimes paint the other in a negative light (as cowards, etc.) to dehumanize them. It is easier to hate and despise someone if there is no way to empathize with them. Though it is true that Bashir's family fled, understanding the details of their circumstance makes their story much more sympathetic.

Religion continues to play an important role in the formation of this conflict. Both sides are driven by a religious belief that they are meant to hold the lands in question, which is part of what makes the conflict so difficult. As many examples in previous chapters have shown, religion can be a powerful force to compel people to do good; however, it can also prompt people to be more unmoving on an issue than they might otherwise be, especially if they believe their actions are sanctioned by their religious beliefs.

One religious reference that is made by the Zionist movement is that of Moses needing 40 years to help his people find the promised land. This refers to the book of Exodus in the Bible, in which Moses rescues his people from mistreatment by Egyptians and travels with them through the desert for 40 years before finding the promised land where they will be safe. The Zionists use this allusion because they believe their circumstances to be very similar: the Jewish people, having been mistreated in their homelands across Europe, need to travel to a new land where they will be safe. Much like Moses's journey, they believe this will take some time and hardship, but will be worth it in the end.

Discussion Question 1

Is it tempting to find one side or the other to be at fault in the situation? How does the author attempt to prevent this from happening?

Discussion Question 2

Some of the Israeli troops later apologize for their behavior during the battle for Al-Ramla. Do people behave differently in times of war than they normally would, for better and for worse? What are some examples of this?



Discussion Question 3

Why is it difficult for Moshe and Solia to decide to leave Bulgaria, even though the country faces so many problems?

Vocabulary

imam, mosque, prescribed, ceremony, tidings, overseer, extremist, expel, benefactors, tactical, oblivious, abundance, wary, fundamental, abstaining, partition, mobilizing, infrastructure, militias, haven, transit, revered, scarce, aftermath, caravan, convoy, anguish, agitation, surplus, sovereign, token, equitable, embargo, armistice

Section Four - Chapter Six and Seven

Summary

One hundred thousand Arab refugees are going hungry, sleeping in the streets, succumbing to outbreaks of diseases, and some have been separated from their families. Ahmad and Zakia have managed to find a room and Ahmad has been going back and forth between al-Ramla and Ramallah to bring his family food. Zakia sells her jewelry to feed the family. Some of the citizens of the town taunt the refugees, calling them cowards for leaving their homes. People resort to begging and eating trash. Arab soldiers demand retaliation against the Jews. The people feel abandoned by the king and by army leaders, who know if they divert troops to Ramallah that other towns will suffer the same fate as Al-Ramla. Israeli policy makers don't want Arabs to return, even after the war is over; some claim that no Arab inhabitants were not forced to leave, but went on their own.

Some Arabs return to Al-Ramla to get their possessions, and many are shot on sight. Leaders on both sides prepare themselves for war. The UN, Red Cross, and other countries send food for the refugees. Territory issues continue to be disputed. A UN worker is assassinated by a Jewish Terrorist Group. Ahmad and Zakia decide to move their family to Gaza, where war wages with Egypt and Jordan. Bashir becomes obsessed with taking revenge for his family. Ahmad's uncle, Sheikh Mustafa, dies, but is unable to receive the usual funeral rites. A cease fire is called in 1949, with Israel now in control of 78% of Palestine. Gaza is now under joint control of the Egyptians and the UN, who refuse to let Arab refugees form political groups. Refugees begin to lose hope of ever returning home. Bashir's school is attacked, and his friend is killed; later, his teacher is killed for his political beliefs. Bashir becomes focused on revenge. The Khairi family moves back to Ramallah.

In 1948, busloads of Jewish immigrants arrive in Ramla, including the Eshkenazi family. Immigrants are allowed to enter Arab homes and claim which one they want. Moshe and Solia choose the house with a lemon tree in the backyard. Arab street names are replaced by Jewish war heroes and historical figures. Arab belongings are sold off. Jewish immigrants look for work to get by, and soon the town begins to thrive. The family is reunited with Yitzhaki, learning he wasn't killed after all as they believed. Citizenship is offered to any Jew who settles in Israel. After so many years of being displaced in Europe, they feel they have finally found a safe haven. Most of the Arabs have been expelled from Ramla, but some continue to remain in town. Many are held as prisoners of war and put to work in fields. Others petition to get their homes and jobs back.

Dalia's family settles into their new home. It is a peaceful time, with visitors and music and laughter. Several years pass. Many immigrants come to Moshe for help, who does his best to aid people when he can. Dalia recalls many of their neighbors being from different places, speaking strange languages, and some seeming sad and traumatized



by their memories. Dalia learns about what has happened to other Jews in Europe and is furious at God. Dalia learns the history of Israel: that Arabs stole the land from the Jews but ran away and deserted their homes when the Jewish armies returned. Playing as children, some of Dalia's friends begin to distinguish between white and black or Oriental Jews, who they no longer want as playmates. Dalia shames her playmates for this behavior. New immigrants struggle to feel a sense of belonging with other Jews from so many different backgrounds, especially Holocaust survivors. Dalia graduates high school and begins to attend university. Threats from Arab forces continue, especially when it becomes clear they will only regain their territory through force. Dalia fears war is inevitable.

Analysis

The difference in histories is again highlighted in this section, particularly at Dalia's school, where she learns that not only did Arabs willingly abandon their homes, but that they originally took the lands in Palestine from the Jews to whom they rightfully belonged. This radically differs from Arabic beliefs about their place in Palestine, and again helps explain why each side feels so passionately about their right to own the land. Beyond just believing each side rightfully owns the land due to their religious beliefs, each side has also been indoctrinated to believe that they are owed the land because of historical entitlement, which makes the conflict run even deeper.

Dalia is troubled when she sees the sign of the stars and the crescent in her home, recognizing it as a symbol of Islam. Many countries that are predominantly Arabic feature this symbol on their flags and coins. Dalia's distress at seeing this symbol is not due only to the symbol itself, but perhaps because she subconsciously realizes that the history of Ramla is more problematic than she has been taught in school. She claims to tear down the symbol because she wants the house to be recognized as a Jewish one, not an Arabic one; but she is also battling with herself, and the questions she has about her family's place in Ramla and in their home.

This section also introduces another symbol: the idea of the New Jew. Though many seem to sympathize with the Jews who have survived the Holocaust, it is also suggested that some shame surrounds these survivors, who are accused of being weak and passive and not fighting back when their people were being destroyed during the war. Wanting to counter this idea, the symbolic idea of a New Jew is formed to suggest a people who are strong and victorious, and who have taken back land which is rightfully theirs.

This connects to many of the prejudices and hierarchies which Dalia notices beginning to form in her community, and which has begun to plague Israel as a whole. Israel is meant to be a safe haven for Jews after surviving the atrocities of the war, and in many ways-- as Dalia's fond memories of her childhood suggest--it has done so, allowing communities to prosper and thrive. However, even at the level of the playground, Dalia sees prejudice occurring between Jews with different skin tones and with different cultural backgrounds. This occurs amongst adults as well. Jews from different countries



who speak different languages have all come to the same place seeking refuge, yet despite their main religious commonality, people continue to be afraid of what they don't know, choosing to trust the familiar--i.e., those who look, speak, and think like them--over that which is foreign and strange.

This will come to play as Arabs and Jews continue to battle over the land. Although the author strives to show that in many ways, their families and beliefs are not so different, people continue to cling to the things which separate them instead of seeking out the things which make them the same.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Christian Arabs have been considered less of a threat and allowed to stay in their homes? How does this further complicate the religious strains in the history of Palestine/Israel?

Discussion Question 2

The author describes that the hardest part for the Arab refugees was being homesick and suffering the indignity of dispossession. How can these things be more difficult than physical hardships like hunger and sickness?

Discussion Question 3

Based on the history of the Jews, what assumptions can be made about the beautiful woman who looks like Elizabeth Taylor who visits the hairdresser and always looks so sad, or the children in Dalia's classroom who seem so afraid?

Vocabulary

emaciated, legion, retaliation, inclined, siege, oasis, disdain, imminent, relinquish, expulsions, delegate, ghetto, laden, battalion, loot, infiltrators, endanger, reap, infinite, hostility, prospect, malnourished, mediator, advocate, uprooted, adequate, consolidate, conviction, attentive, chafed, resettlement, armistice, provisions, martial law, subsidies



Section Five - Chapters Eight and Nine

Summary

1967 - Bashir is now 25 years old and a lawyer. In Ramallah, refugees are not allowed to build permanent housing because it will seem like an admission from the government that they will not be returning home; neither are they receiving permanent funding from the UN for the same reason. Bashir believes force will be the only way to get back his peoples' lands and dedicates himself to this pursuit. He is inspired by Egypt's President Gamal Nasser, who argues for a great Arab nation. People begin undergoing secret guerrilla training. Various attacks are orchestrated which force King Hussein (of Jordan) to become involved despite his policy of peaceful coexistence, though many Arabs still believe it is not enough. Retaliations by the Israelis cause them to lose support from foreign powers. Syrian and Israeli forces begin to fight one another. Nasser is pressured into closing the Straits of Tiran, essentially declaring war on Israel. King Hussein joins forces with him. Foreign powers, such as Russia and the United States, are drawn into the fray, attempting to avoid war.

Dalia's family prepares for war by blacking out their windows and car headlights. The town of Ramla similarly prepares with shelters, trenches, and blood drives. People are living in fear. Arabs make threats over the radio stations. Bashir's family sees this as a chance to return home, while Dalia's family sees it as an attempt to have their home taken from them. The war begins, and Arab refugees celebrate. Israel holds off Egypt and warns Jordan that they won't fire the first shot, but will fight back if attacked. Because of the pact with Nasser, Hussein orders Jordan to enter the fray. Israeli troops conquer them. Bashir hears troops fighting near Ramallah, which is overtaken by Israeli forces. To Bashir, this is a devastating blow; Dalia sees it as a miracle from God. All of Palestine is now under Israeli command, including the holy sites of the Arab people. Life in Ramallah is transformed, with new refugees being forced in and Israeli police patrolling the streets, throwing many Arab men into prison. Bashir organizes a strike for Arab lawyers, who refuse to appear in court with an Israeli flag flying. Thousands of men sign up to become freedom fighters to liberate Palestine. Israeli occupation makes it easier to travel back to Al-Ramla, so Bashir and his cousins make the trip back, to the house where Dalia now lives.

Dalia answers the door and recognizes Bashir and his cousins as Arabs. Bashir asks if they can look at the house. Dalia worries about letting in three strangers; Bashir worries she will turn him away. Dalia senses kindness in them, and lets them into the garden while she fixes up the house. Bashir is overwhelmed by memories of his previous home. Dalia takes them on a tour through the house. Dalia is moved by how much it means to him. Bashir leaves, and Dalia tells him that she hopes they will meet again. Bashir invites her to visit him in Ramallah.

Bashir and his cousins return home. He tells his family everything that happened. Ahmad's father is overwhelmed and leaves the room. Similar conversations happen in



other Arab families, as other refugees make pilgrimages back to their homes. Bashir and his younger brother make a second trip back. Many refugees grow restless, and more attacks are organized, led by Yasser Arafat. Bashir continues his strike, hoping the occupation will be over soon. Bashir is jailed and interrogated by Israeli forces. Territories continue to be disputed, and a new liberation faction--the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine--is led by George Habash, who is seen by refugees as a hero, though Dalia fears and loathes him. Public opinion in the rest of the world begins to turn against Israel. Many Israeli soldiers begin to feel disillusioned.

Dalia goes to visit Bashir in Ramallah, accompanied by an English would-be suitor, Richard. They ask for Bashir and are told where he lives. Bashir explains he was in prison and tells her it may not be safe for her to be there. Dalia refuses to be dictated by her own army and goes inside for a visit. Dalia is overwhelmed by the family's hospitality, though she is taken aback by how transient their home feels. Bashir explains how hard it has been to leave their family home. He shows her the lemon which they have kept since their last visit home. They discuss their different points of view on who truly belongs in the land. They do not come to an agreement, but feel as though they are beginning to understand each other better.

Analysis

One symbol that is returned to in this section is that of the numbers that Dalia notices on the arms of some of her Jewish neighbors, indicating that they are survivors of Holocaust camps. Though by many people, Israelis are viewed within this chapter as bullies and thieves, this symbol acts as a reminder of the atrocities suffered by Jewish people during World War II, and why so many felt the need to find a place that would be a safe haven to them. Here, the author indicates yet again that the issue of Israel/Palestine is not black and white, but contains many shades of gray, which will be returned to again throughout the book and within this same section.

One way in which this is addressed is by continually returning to the differing viewpoints which Dalia and Bashir have of the same events taking place. When the Six Day War comes to an end with Israeli troops emerging triumphantly, to Bashir and his people, this is a disheartening disappointment; Dalia recalls viewing it as a miracle that has saved her people and her home.

This idea continues when Bashir visits Dalia's home and goes into his old bedroom to see a poster of the New Jew (one of the recurring symbols of the book) hanging over Dalia's bed. This image means something very different to Dalia than it does to Bashir; to Dalia, it provides inspiration for the strength that her people aspire to in order to overcome the adversity of the past. To Bashir, this New Jew represents the soldiers who have driven him and his family out of their ancestral home and have overrun their new home, bullying his people and taking what does not belong to them. The reversal occurs in how Dalia and Bashir view the Arab leader of a liberation movement, George Habash. To Bashir, he is a hero who is fighting to take back what rightfully belongs to the Palestinians; to Dalia, he is an enemy who inspires revulsion.



The symbol of the lemon tree is returned to again in this chapter. Not only does Bashir see the lemon tree for the first time in nineteen years, but he takes back some of the fruit after his second visit to Dalia. He later describes his nearly blind father holding the lemon in his hands and weeping. To some, it might be just a lemon, but to Bashir's family, the lemon represents a connection to their history, their memories, and the home which has been taken from them.

As Bashir's visit continues, his memory differs from Dalia's in what refreshments are served. He remembers it as lemonade, she as Turkish coffee. This is a small detail, but acts as a parallel to their vast differences in viewpoint. For instance, Dalia welcomes him as a guest to the home, though Bashir wonders how he can be a guest in a home which belongs to him and his family. Later, they address these differences directly, as they discuss what should be done to redress the current strain between their people. Bashir and Dalia do not see eye-to-eye on what should be done to ease the conflict between their people, but are still able to accept the other as a friend and not an enemy, and begin a conversation as equals even though their viewpoints differ. Even though their problems have not been resolved, it is an important step forward, since communication cannot happen between people who refuse to view their enemies as people.

Discussion Question 1

Leaders are often thought of as the people who make decisions for countries, but what are some ways in this section that leaders are pressured into making decisions by the people? Should leaders have the final say, or is it more important to do what the people want?

Discussion Question 2

What does Dalia mean when she says it was as if she'd always been waiting for them when she first sees Bashir and his cousins?

Discussion Question 3

Bashir describes his experience of returning home like going to a holy place. Are there places that can become sacred to a person because of their experiences there, even if the building isn't designed to be a place of worship?

Vocabulary

guerrilla, autonomous, relative, foil, thwarted, communique, detachments, stabilizing, fatalistically, moderate, domestic, regime, gravest, jeopardy, memorandum, disaffected, dictated, militant, provoked, imperialist, sporadic, antagonizing, lackey, divert, intoned, collective, annihilation, perpetual, excruciating, furtively, serene, bravado, impede



Section Six - Chapters Ten and Eleven

Summary

February 21, 1969, an attack is made on an Israeli supermarket. Dalia learns that Bashir has been accused of being a part of it, because of his connection to the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), who have been responsible for other attacks as well. Bashir is imprisoned and tortured to try to get a confession out of him. This is one of many instances of this kind of torture taking place. Bashir's family tries to find news of him but can't. Police force his sister to listen to him being tortured in the next room. Bashir refuses to acknowledge any part in the attacks. The Palestine resistance gains some victories and give Arabs renewed hope. Some draw connections between the spirit of these fighters and the Vietcong against the U.S. in Vietnam, and leftist idealists take up their side as well. Some believe this hurts their cause, since they are now grouped with radicals. A plot is made to hijack planes headed to the U.S. and hold American passengers as hostages. King Hussein engages a war against the rebels. A cease-fire is signed and Nasser passes away, sending many Arabs into mourning.

Dalia is sickened by the actions of the rebels and wonders how Bashir could be a part of this. Bashir is still imprisoned and his family is not allowed to see him. Ahmad and Zakia visit Dalia's family in their old home. Bashir is convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Dalia cuts off connection with his family and renews her involvement with Pro-Israeli organizations. She begins teaching in a school right next to Bashir's prison. More attacks occur, on both sides. Bashir refuses special treatment from his family in prison, wanting to be one of the people. Dalia thinks of him but cannot forgive him. Bashir creates political artwork in prison and pressures authorities for better conditions. The new Egyptian president withdraws his support and is assassinated. Bashir thinks about Dalia while he's in prison. He is finally released and his family and neighbors celebrate his return. Ahmad passes away and Bashir gets married and has a son. Dalia's parents have also died, and she owns the house with her husband. She continues to think of Bashir and wants to make things right. She arranges to meet with Bashir, and they arrange to have the house become a preschool for Arab children.

Three years after he's released, Bashir is imprisoned again. Israeli forces now control schools, courts, health care, taxes, and business matters. More attacks, strikes, and demonstrations occur, including the rise of the intifada and the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas. Palestinians begin to be seen in a new light by the Western world. Arab prisoners, like Bashir, are scheduled to be deported. Dalia has been diagnosed with cancer, but also learns she is pregnant, and refuses treatment. Her husband suggests she writes on behalf of Bashir, but she feels too overwhelmed. Bashir is deported and told he will be killed if he ever returns. The deportations are unpopular worldwide, as well as with some Israelis. Dalia writes a letter to Bashir which is published in a newspaper, telling their story and begging him to reconsider his politics, as well as denouncing her government's actions in deporting him.



Hundreds of Palestinian civilians are slaughtered in refugee camps in Lebanon, seemingly with the sanction of the Israeli government. Dalia and other Israelis protest this and demand a formal inquiry. Bashir and the other deportees make camp on the border of Lebanon and Syria and set up a protest, which draws media attention. Bashir and the others insist on returning to their homes. Bashir travels to Greece, where he will board a ship for Haifa, symbolically proclaiming Palestinians' right to return. Bashir reads Dalia's letter for the first time. The boat is destroyed before it can sail. Bashir is exiled in Tunis. Bashir's sisters visit Dalia in the hospital. Their families continue to debate their issues but part on good terms. Dalia has her son.

Further negotiations take place with territory disputes, complicated by interference from the United States and a removal of support by the Soviet Union. Still in exile, Bashir protests the "compromises" suggested by the United States. He lives alongside fellow refugee Salah. Bashir continues to think of Dalia's letter, trying to find the best way to respond. She finally receives a letter in response. Bashir explains his position and tells of a time as a child that he played with booby-trapped toys that had been scattered by Zionists for Arab children. It exploded in his left hand and took off many fingers. Dalia is shaken and returns to Ramla. She meets with a former Arab refugee now living there again. Together they open the kindergarten in Dalia's and Bashir's former home and called it Open House.

Analysis

One symbol introduced in this section is the idea of King Hussein as a "paper tiger." This idea comes from a Chinese phrase and refers to something that on the surface might seem like a threat, but is actually ineffectual and easy to destroy. This phrase first took on popularity in 1946 when Chinese leader Mao Zedong used this to describe the United States. Hussein earns this title because many Arabs feel that he is good at making promises but rarely follows through on them. Though Jordan could potentially be an effective ally in allowing Arab refugees to regain their land, in most instances they do not follow through, and instead chose to compromise with the UN and Westernized foreign powers.

Part of these harsh feelings toward Hussein can be attributed to another symbol addressed in this section: Black September. Black September initially refers to a battle that takes place in September of 1970 in Jordan, in which Hussein asked for Israeli help against Palestinian rebel forces and Syrians. Over eleven days, thousands of Arabs are killed on both sides (some estimates suggest between 3,000-5,000), and the battle is remembered as Black September. Later, in honor of those who were killed in this battle, an Arab rebel force names itself the Black September Organization. Thus, those who died in the original battle become a symbol for future rebels as they continue to fight for control over their homeland.

Another symbol used in this section similarly memorializes an event and people, but in a way which is less positive. After President Nasser of Egypt dies, the new president, President Anwar Sadat, withdraws his support from the Palestinian cause. Afterward,



his name-- altered now to Sadati--is used to describe people who are weak or cowardly, or who choose their own personal glory over the glory of the people.

Earlier in the book, recognizing the symbol of the star and crescent as an Arab symbol, Dalia removes it from her home. She acts in fear and ignorance at the time; later, as she comes to know Bashir and his family, and to recognize the struggle of his people, she regrets removing this symbol, and wishes that she could restore it to the home. Dalia never physically places the star and crescent symbol back in the home, but she does so symbolically when she turns it into a preschool for Arab children, opening up the home to Arab people and cultures once again.

The author makes reference to a shift in perspective that takes place within this section. Earlier, Western accounts of the war over Palestine/Israel painted Israel in the favorable light, often comparing them to David in the fight against Goliath. This refers to a story in the Old Testament, in which a young boy is chosen to fight against a giant named Goliath, armed only with a sling, and miraculously manages to win. Later, Israel is shifted to the role of Goliath, the giant and bully. Israel also comes to represent an anti-colonial movement, similar to the original founders of the United States driving the Native Americans from their lands. Arab's struggle to reclaim their home is also compared to various country's war for independence from a colonial power. Ironically, this comparison can be extended to the United States both as a David and a Goliath figure; the United States was like David when it went to war against Britain for its independence. Later on--particularly, in this text, in comparisons to the war with Vietnam--United States becomes the Goliath or the bully.

Another shift that takes place in this section can be seen in comparisons between ships. When many Jews first tried to come to Palestine on a boat called the Exodus, they were blocked at the port by British officials and refused entry. Now, several years later when Bashir and his fellow deportees try to return peacefully to Israel by boat, Israeli forces (presumably) destroy their ship so they are unable to obtain entry, echoing how their people were once denied being allowed into their Holy Land.

Discussion Question 1

The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine argues that the struggle is not against Jews, but against Zionism. What is the difference? Does this claim seem more reasonable?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Bashir realizing he's being held in a jail that was built on his family's old lands?



Discussion Question 3

How does Bashir's experience with the mine disguised as a toy help to shape his view of Zionists? How does Dalia's view of Zionists differ?

Vocabulary

incarceration, precision, internal, hijackings, association, exceptional, memoir, respiratory, memoirs, foreword, oppression, methodically, rogue, sanctioned, prolonged, confinement, realms, brutality, induce, passively, vast, acute, yielded, disavowed, incursions, idealistic, recourse, tactics, nationalist, rhetoric



Section Seven - Chapter Twelve

Summary

April, 1996. Bashir returns to Palestine with his sister Khanon. Secret talks have been taking place about territory disputes. Israel's minister of defense, Yitzhak Rabin, agrees to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, and Palestinians hope these talks will lead to them getting their own state, as well as other important negotiations. Palestinian refugees begin to return, amongst them Bashir, who is glad to come back, but who fears that Palestine may have negotiated away ever gaining their country back completely. He will get to see his family again, but they will still not have their home in Al-Ramla back. His family eagerly awaits him and welcomes him home.

Others agree with Bashir that the new treaties have sacrificed too much. Tensions have been high since recent attacks, including an attack on a mosque, a civilian car bomb in an Israeli town, and suicide bombers. Suspected terrorists are arrested and tortured. Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat is viewed by many a a traitor doing the dirty work for Israel. Negotiations are made to remove Israeli troops from Palestinian villages. Though many disagree with Rabin, Dalia is hopeful that his willingness to discuss terms with Arafat show progress. She has seen progress herself at Open House, where Arab and Israeli children are learning side-by-side. Dalia believes all can co-exist together, but each must be willing to give up something. At a peace rally, Rabin is assassinated. Dalia believes Rabin could have brought peace. Bashir isn't as optimistic, but comes to Open House and learns how the Arab teachers have been faring there. He misses his home.

In 2000, peace negotiations are held at Camp David in the United States. Tensions run high and Arafat is unwilling to compromise on what he believes is owed to his people, particularly many of the holy sites in Jerusalem. The summit is ultimately deemed a failure, believed by many to be caused by America's favoritism toward Israel. In response, more protests are held, and Palestinians are killed by Israeli forces. Palestinians retaliate by attacking Israeli troops, and uprisings take place in several cities. Dalia is approached to participate in brainstorming ideas to improve the conditions for Arabs in Israel. More talks are held, and more people are killed, as the upcoming elections for Israeli prime minister approach. Prime Minister Barak is voted out and Ariel Sharon is voted in.

2001. Bashir is arrested and taken to prison again. Assassinations occur on both sides, and Sharon declares war on the Palestinian Authority. More attacks occur on both sides. Arafat makes a bid for peace, but Sharon suspects him of orchestrating the attacks and continues the war. Suspected Palestinian's houses are destroyed. A man detonates a bomb on a public bus near Dalia's home, narrowly missing killing her son. Arafat condemns attacks against civilians. Dalia's husband goes to America to try to solve the problem from without. Dalia will not leave because she wants to help bring about peace.



Analysis

As events in the story come closer and closer to modern day, it may be easier to understand how truly complex this issue is. Reading about wars and attacks taking place after World War II and on, it can be tempting to dismiss these actions and problems as belonging to a different time. However, when these problems begin to be referenced against familiar names--such as Bill Clinton--and familiar events-- such as September 11th--it becomes clear that the struggle for Palestine/Israel is still very much in effect today, and that this isn't just an issue that can be read about in a textbook.

Showing the United States' role in events also creates an interesting dynamic, in that Western sympathies have shifted dramatically back and forth throughout the conflict. At times, Israel has been dealt with more sympathetically; at others, Palestine has been more in favor. The inclusion of foreign powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and so forth, may also suggest how much more complex this issue actually is. It is not only Palestine and Israel fighting over territory, but other outside forces which are influencing the outcome--or, at least, attempting to do so.

Throughout the novel, the author has made a point to show how important homes and land are to Palestinians. The retaliation approved by Prime Minister Sharon to destroy the houses of suspected Palestinian rebels may seem like a strange one, but taking into account this sense of importance, it becomes clear that this is a tactic not only to destroy property, but to break the Arab spirit. This is reflected when Bashir returns to Open House and is witnessed to be gazing upon his old home with sadness. Bashir was six years old when he left his home, but to his family, it means so much more than just a building. It is their honor, their heritage, and their history, which is why Bashir feels he cannot rest until his homeland is returned to his people.

Discussion Question 1

What are the implications of the poster portraying Israeli Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin in a Nazi uniform? Is Dalia correct when she says there are limits to freedom of speech?

Discussion Question 2

What does Yitzhak Rabin mean at the peace rally when he says that the nation must be prepared to "take risks for peace"? How can peace be a risk?

Discussion Question 3

What role did the Americans play in the peace treaty talks at Camp David? How did a potential bias come into play? Why is it important to approach an issue like this with an understanding of both sides?



Vocabulary

sentry, diversions, accords, entity, renounce, transitional, immensely, delirious, tangible, sovereignty, profound, attainable, ambivalence, capitulation, inherent, detaining, prominent, modestly, juxtaposition, casualties, chafed, diaspora, mandated, retained, jurisdictions, truncated, plummeted, cadres, carnage



Section Eight - Chapters Thirteen, Fourteen, and Afterword

Summary

2004. Dalia returns to Bulgaria and reunites with the relatives who remain there. She visits the tombs of Christian bishops who fought to save Jews during the Holocaust. Bashir is now out of prison, where he was never charged with anything or even questioned. Bashir continues to mourn the loss of his old home. Palestinians continue to be targeted and killed, as well as humiliated and refused medical treatment. Bashir's sister Nuha believes the key is to convince America of the Palestinians' right to return to their homes. Her husband, Ghiath, believes that fighting is getting them nowhere.

Dalia travels illegally to Ramallah. In 2002, a wall was erected along the West Bank. Dalia and Bashir meet again for the first time in years. They catch up and speak of their children. They continue to debate the differences between their people. Though they still care for each other and respect each other deeply, the two continue to have different views of what solution should be reached.

In 1998, the lemon tree dies. The students attending school there decorate it and use it until a storm blows it away and leaves behind only a stump. Dalia wants to plant a new tree with the Khairis, but decides to plant a new one on a Jewish holiday for new trees to honor the children now living there. Bashir hears of it by telephone and says he is pleased, and hopes someday he can see it for himself.

In 2011, Bashir's home is raided by Israeli special forces and he is arrested again. He is questioned for four days. One of his questioners has read about Dalia and Bashir and is touched by their friendship. Bashir is eventually released. In 2013, Bashir recounts how visitors have come to see him to ask about Dalia. They are still in touch, but Bashir believes she has retreated. At dinner, Dalia spots Muslims traveling through Israel. They are part of a group called Arabic for Walking, who go to a different site each week to reclaim, for a few moments, their heritage. Dalia claims to have tried to be in contact with Bashir, but has received no response. There have been some misunderstandings between them over the years. Matters between Israelis and Palestinians continue to be strained, with no compromise in sight. Dalia believes there is still hope; she and Bashir are like family now.

Analysis

The theme of different religions living peacefully together is returned to in this section, which begins with Dalia returning to Bulgaria to pay tribute to Christian church leaders who fought for the rights of their Jewish neighbors and prevented them from being deported and most likely killed in the Holocaust. It is perhaps because Dalia has grown



up witnessing this kind of peaceful co-existence between religions that she continues to hold hope for a peaceful reconciliation between Arabs and Jews in Israel/Palestine. Bulgaria was particularly noteworthy in that Christians would not allow their Jewish neighbors and friends to be sent to concentration camps; Dalia has grown up hearing these stories and thus sees the best in how people can live together.

The theme of "appearances" is also highlighted in this section. According to one telling of events, Bashir is released from prison even after he refuses to sign a statement of guilt because Israeli guards compromise that if he just stands with them for a moment and appears as though he's cooperating, they will let him go. Bashir does not confirm or deny his story, but it contains some parallels to his continued use of holding his left hand in his pocket with the thumb out to cover the fact that there is no hand there. Bashir does this to keep up the appearance of having a hand; though, again, he never fully explains why he hasn't gotten an artificial hand, Bashir uses this appearance of a hand to fool even some very close friends, including Dalia, for years until they discover the truth. Sometimes keeping up the appearance of a thing is more important than the thing itself.

At one point, the author notes that the lines have blurred between what is considered terrorism. Even many Israelis would be hard-pressed to term what the Arabs are doing as terrorism, particularly since so many more Palestinians are killed each year than Israelis. This ties into the idea of perspective, which is so important throughout the text. What may be seen by one as terrorism can be seen as another as a rightful act. For instance, in the 18th Century, the American guerrilla forces may have been deemed as terrorists at the time by the British; from the perspective of the Americans, they were noble freedom fighters, gaining their rightful independence. That is perhaps why the author felt it was so imperative to include two different perspectives throughout the novel, in order to keep from appearing biased to either side.

The symbol of the lemon tree reaches its conclusion in this section of the book. The old lemon tree dies, and is replaced by the planting of a new tree. Although this event actually occurred, it carries with it deep symbolic meaning. The lemon tree has been used throughout the text to signify a sense of memory, history, and home for the Khairi family; it is the memory of this lemon tree which allows them to believe that they will one day be able to return home. The death of the lemon tree indicates that this dream may not be able to be realized as they originally conceived it; however, the planting of the new tree offers a new hope. The tree is planted by the students at Dalia's school, some of whom are Arab, some of whom are Israeli, and who are learning to live side by side peacefully. Their tree has been planted alongside the old tree, suggesting that while the land may never fully be what it was again, these new hopes can live in harmony with the old ones.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Dalia giving Bashir a lemon cake as a gift?



Discussion Question 2

Ghiath talks about how much maps have changed over the past 100 years, and how they may yet alter beyond recognition in the next hundred years. Is this an ominous statement, or is there something hopeful in the idea?

Discussion Question 3

What does Dalia mean when she says "our enemy is the only partner we have"?

Vocabulary

evoked, commentators, undercut, fueled, erect, erecting, sole, emanating, apartheid, guise, constitutes, breaches, obligations, humanitarian, annexing, in lieu, concurred, forum, confiscate, extend, dismantling, affluent, intently, interdependence, amends, inflicted, perpetuate, syndrome, fray, enshrined, viability



Characters

Bashir Khairi

Bashir Khairi is one of the two main characters of the book, which both deals with Bashir's individual story, and with his role as a member of Palestinian refugee society. Through Bashir and his family, the reader learns about the experience of Arab refugees and their continuing struggle to return to their homes and regain the land that has been taken from them. Bashir's story is of particular significance because of how it intersects with the Israeli woman who was raised in the house his family was forced to leave. Their friendship does not end Bashir's quest to return home, but perhaps changes his perspective on the enemy and helps to humanize them in his eyes.

Bashir is six years old when his family is forced to leave their home in Al-Ramla. He is the first boy born to a family of nine sisters and is remembered by them, even from a young age, as being quiet, serious, and thoughtful. One sister compares being in his presence to being in the presence of a holy man. Bashir has deeply internalized the plight of his family and his people to return to their homelands. He becomes involved with various revolutionary movements, though how deep his involvement runs is never fully answered.

Bashir remains a private person who does not disclose his life fully. One anecdote that explains this is the loss of his hand as a young child that he disguises by always making it seem as though his hand is in his pocket. He puts up such a good show of this that even some friends he has known for years remain unaware of his missing hand. Perhaps part of this reticence comes from Bashir being arrested and tortured many times throughout his life, even into his elderly years.

Bashir carries deep resentment for the Israeli government and what they have done to his people, but through his friendship with Dalia he becomes more cautiously hopeful that people on an individual level can be different. Bashir's loyalty remains first and foremost to his people, but his connection with Dalia allows him to be open to different possibilities.

Dalia Eshkenazi

Dalia Eshkenazi's family were Jews who lived in Bulgaria during World War II. Her family was more fortunate than many Jews during the Holocaust, in that many Bulgarian people refused to let their Jewish friends and neighbors be sent to concentration camps. After the war, Dalia's family relocates to Israel, where they encounter an abandoned town full of formerly Arab homes. Dalia ends up in Bashir's former home, and she grows up believing that the Arabs were cowards and willingly abandoned their land.

Dalia is described as being beautiful, kind, and curious. As she grows, she begins to question what she has always been told about Arabs and to wonder what the truth



actually is. When Bashir shows up on her doorstep and asks to see his old home, Dalia is afraid, but also feels a sense of instinctive connection to Bashir. In opening up the home to him, she also opens up her mind to understanding the "other," or someone who is different from herself.

Dalia continues her friendship with Bashir over the years, visiting him in his home and writing him letters to continue to try to understand his perspective, as well as open his mind to her own. Dalia is perhaps more idealistic than Bashir, believing in a peaceful resolution and becoming disappointed in Bashir when she believes he has pursued more violent tactics. Despite various attacks from both sides over the years, Dalia continues to hold out hope for peace.

Dalia pursues this peace in her own small way by donating the house that she grew up in and that once belonged to the Khairis to become a school where Arab and Israeli children can learn together and come to understand each other's cultures more. Dalia believes that even though she has been part of the problem, she can also be a part of the solution as Israel moves forward.

King Hussein

King Hussein is a historical figure referenced often throughout the text because of his influence on the events that take place throughout the course of the book. Hussein rules over Jordan during Palestine's transition into Israel. Though he presents himself as an ally to the Palestinian cause, many Arab refugees--including Bashir--believe that Hussein doesn't do enough for them and is too willing to capitulate to Western forces and the United Nations. Hussein gives the order for Black September, in which Jordan troops attack other Arabs, causing many Palestinians to resent him deeply. He is referenced as being a "paper tiger," or someone who looks dangerous from a distance but is actually weak and ineffective.

President Nasser

Gamal Abdel Nasser is President of Egypt during much of the events of the novel. He is held by many Arabs as the ideal leader of a pan-Arab movement that transcends country or nation, largely due to his efforts to restore Palestinian refugees to their homes. He maintains a philosophy of revolution and calls for the united efforts of a Great Arab Nation to return Palestine to its rightful state. Even after his death, he is revered as a great leader and proponent for the cause of the Palestinian people.

Yasser Arafat

Yasser Arafat is the leader of various Palestinian organizations, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Palestinian National Authority, and the Fatah political party. He becomes a heroic figure to many Arabs, as well as a figure of terror and dread to Israelis. Arafat insists that the actions of his people cannot be termed terrorist actions,



but rather as violent political actions meant to bring about change. Eventually he becomes part of an attempt for peace treaty talks that are ultimately unsuccessful, though he wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his attempts.

Ahmad Khairi

Ahmad Khairi is Bashir's father. A devout Muslim, the loss of their family home in Al-Ramla hits Ahmad perhaps more than the other members of his family, as Ahmad carries the shame of losing his family home, even though he did so to save his family. Ahmad eventually goes blind and dies without returning to the family home, though Bashir continues to live out his legacy in trying to get the family land restored to them and the rest of their people.

Zakia Khairi

Zakia is Ahmad's wife and Bashir's mother. She is described as being quiet, discreet, and loyal, as well as a good housewife and mother. Though Ahmad's family traditionally marries within its own clan, he married outside of the clan with Zakia, who was quickly accepted into the family. Over the years, Zakia, along with the rest of the Khairi family, befriends Dalia and welcomes her into their home with warm hospitality, even though she is an "enemy." It is partially through this kindness that Dalia begins to understand the full plight of the Palestinian people.

Moshe Eshkenazi

Moshe Eshkenazi is Dalia's father. Moshe is known for his honesty and integrity, exemplified by a story that occurs back in Bulgaria, in which Moshe finds a wallet on the street and returns it with all the money intact. After hardships faced by his people during World War II, Moshe makes the decision to move his family to Israel. Moshe is a devoted husband and father, and believes in the Zionist movement, even though he is not particularly religious.

Solia Eshkenazi

Solia is Dalia's mother and Moshe's wife. Moshe and Solia meet at a party, where Solia is described as being beautiful and full of life. They have to wait seven years to have Dalia and treasure her deeply. Solia has lived under the shadow of threats against her people and fears that the Holocaust will mean the end for her family. To her, Israel represents justice for her people after everything they've suffered.

Yehezkel Landau

Yehezkel is Dalia's husband and an important Israeli lawyer. Yehezkel often encourages Dalia toward making moves that will help her connect with Bashir and continue their friendship, suggesting that he is more open-minded than many of his contemporaries. Ultimately, Yehezkel decides that he will be of most use working toward peace for Israel in the United States. He and Dalia have one child: a son named Reuben.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Lemon Tree

The Lemon Tree represents different things to different people throughout the novel. When Dalia's family moves into the Khairi's home, the lemon tree at first serves as a reminder that other people used to own the home that they have essentially taken over. For the Khairi family, the lemon tree represents a sense of heritage; fruit from the tree stands as a reminder to them of what they have lost and what they wish to reclaim. Ultimately, the lemon tree comes to represent hope for both sides, encouraged at the end of the novel when a new lemon tree is planted in place of the old by students who are both Arab and Israeli, suggesting the peace which they hope will eventually be possible between their people.

The Yellow Star

The yellow star was a symbol used throughout World War II in some countries controlled by Axis powers to signify people of Jewish heritage. These markers were made in the shape of the star of David, which was historically used as a symbol of Judaism, much like the cross is used as a symbol for Christianity. The yellow star was meant to be a badge of shame for the people who wore it, made even worse by the fact that it used a shape that was meant to be sacred to its people and turning it into something derogatory. Those who wore the yellow star become objects of scorn and hostility, and many were eventually deported to concentration camps and killed.

The Wallet

Moshe Eshkenazi, Dalia's father, is known as a man of honesty and integrity, partially because of a story that has been passed down about him. In his native Bulgaria, Moshe finds a wallet in the street and returns it to the police, who are surprised to find all the money still intact inside. This untouched wallet becomes a symbol of Moshe's honesty; one police officer is so moved by it that he forms a friendship with Moshe, and warns him to take his family and leave the city, since bad things are planned for the Jews who remain.

Coffee

One of the most difficult things for the displaced Palestinians is a sense of shame they feel at being removed from their homes. Hospitality is a major part of Arab culture, as can be seen when Dalia visits the Khairi home in Ramallah and is overwhelmed by the kindness and thoughtfulness of her hosts. At one point in the book, Bashir's father, Ahmad, professes frustration at being unable to afford even buying his friends a cup of coffee. This may seem insignificant on the surface, but in the Khairis' culture, coffee



symbolizes this Arab hospitality. Coffee is such a small, day-to-day occurrence that to be able to offer someone a cup of coffee is to essentially be able to make them feel at home, and Ahmad's inability to provide this symbolic gesture leaves him with a deep sense of shame.

Star and Crescent

Before Dalia gets to know Bashir and his family, she is aware that Arabs have lived in her home before she arrived there, but views their culture as being different and strange. One day she notices a star and crescent displayed in her home, leftover from when the Khairis used to live there. Recognizing this as a symbol of Islam, Dalia is uncomfortable seeing it there--which she later recognizes as a feeling of shame for having taken someone else's home--and removes the star and crescent so she'll no longer have to be reminded of it. Later, as Dalia becomes more sympathetic to what the Palestinians have suffered, she regrets removing the symbol and wishes she could put it back. Merely putting back the symbol into place will not give the Khairis back what they have lost, but this would be a symbolic gesture to show that she is aware of their family's history in her home. Dalia makes up for this as best she can when she turns the home into a school where Arab children are encouraged to attend--again, symbolically returning the Islamic influence that she previously removed from it.

The New Jew

Though many Jews suffered horrible fates during the Holocaust, the aftermath of war has left many feeling a sense of shame and guilt, and has resulted in many in the world viewing them as cowards or weaklings for not fighting back. Wanting to counter this terrible notion, a new idea began to be formed of a "New Jew," or Sabra, who is handsome, bold, and courageous, and who bravely fights for what his people deserve. Having survived something horrifying, many Jews look to this new ideal Jew as a hope for the future and a promise that they will never suffer the same again. Dalia initially embraces this ideal as well, even having a poster hanging over her bed, which she is embarrassed to have Bashir see when he tours the house, knowing that to him the New Jew means something radically different; to Dalia, the New Jew symbolizes a hope for the future, while to Bashir, the New Jew is the face of his peoples' oppressor.

Numbers on Arms

Dalia recalls seeing various neighbors and schoolmates in Ramla who have tattooed numbers on their arms. At first she does not recognize this, or why so many people around her seem to be so afraid and have such haunted expressions, but she later comes to understand that the numbers on the arms is another symbol for the survivors of the Holocaust. The war might be over, but these people quite literally continue to bear the scars which are permanent and will never be removed, no matter how much time has passed. This is why she claims her people are so afraid, and why they respond to



threats and violence with such brutality; they have faced annihilation once already and are terrified that it will happen again if they are not vigilant.

Paper Tiger

King Hussein, leader of Jordan during a vast majority of the timeline which the book covers, is considered by many Arab people to be a "paper tiger," which is a symbol for someone who seems like a threat from a distance but up close is actually quite ineffective and weak. This idea was initially used by Chinese leader Mao Zedong, who referred to the United States as a paper tiger that he and his people had no need to fear. Hussein is given this title because he often gives in to pressures from the United Nations, the British, and the United States, instead of standing firm behind the Arab cause and offering the support to his Palestinian neighbors that they feel they are due.

Black September

Black September is a battle which took place in Jordan in 1970, in which King Hussein asked for the help of Israeli soldiers to defeat Palestinian and Syrian forces, effectively turning on his fellow Arabs. Many were killed in this battle, and it came to be symbolic of the need for Palestinian retribution. Later, a small rebellious group forms and calls themselves the Black September in honor of this event. The Black September go on to perform various violent political acts, including the assassination of the Prime Minister in Jordan, as revenge for what happened in 1970.

Sadati

Anwar Sadat became president of Egypt in 1970, and soon became despised by Palestinians for betraying their cause. The previous president of Egypt, Nasser, was a strong ally and promoted the pan-Arab cause, meaning all Arabs working together regardless of their nationality. When Sadat took power, he withdrew his support from Palestine, and he became so violently loathed by the Palestinians that his name began to be used to describe a traitor. Even today, sadati refers to someone who is weak, cowardly, and betrays the cause of his people for personal gain.



Settings

Al-Ramla, pre-1948

At the beginning of the book, Al-Ramla is described as an Arab town with about 11,000 people in it. It is between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea, and it is named for the Arab word *raml* which means "sand." Though it is predominantly Arab, Bashir's sisters recall some Jewish people living in the town, owning businesses and going to school with them. Many farmers live in this area, growing crops such as citrus fruit, olives, bananas, lentils, sesame, barley, wheat, cabbage, cucumber, tomatoes, figs, grapes, and melons. Many people, like the Khairis, live in compounds that connect individual family homes together with walls so that women can travel between without covering themselves, since modesty is a very important part of Arab culture. The Khairi family traces their ancestry in this town back to the 16th Century, and before being driven from their home, they own the local cinema, and Ahmad's uncle is the mayor.

Ramla, 1948-now

After the Arabs are driven from Al-Ramla, Jewish families move in and go about making the town more tied to their own heritage, such as naming streets after Jewish heroes and historical figures, and renaming the town simply "Ramla." Though a few Arabs remain in town, most of these have converted from Islam to Christianity; the majority of the people now living in Ramla are Jewish immigrants from various parts of Europe, many of whom have survived the Holocaust. New signs are put up in Hebrew, with most of the Arab lettering now removed except in a few places. When Bashir and his cousins first return, they recognize a butcher shop belonging to an Arab man which has not changed much, though almost everything else has been altered. Some homes have been converted into schools or businesses, and--at least in the case of Dalia's home--the star and crescent symbols have been removed. Over time, some Arabs move back into town, though the population is still mostly Jewish.

Ramallah, 1948

After they are displaced from their homes, several thousand Arab refugees flee to Ramallah, which means "Hill of God" in Arabic. The town was formerly a small Christian settlement, but more than a hundred thousand Arabs retreat here and set up temporary camps in schools, churches, shelters, and so forth, as they wait to return to their homes. Far from home and without jobs, money, or supplies, these families are forced to rely on goodwill provisions, beg, steal, and sometimes starve. Eventually, people begin to make the town their own, setting up businesses, hotels, and even a summer music festival, though the refugees living in town are once again drawn into chaos when Ramallah becomes the headquarters for Jordan's forces, and are eventually overtaken by Israeli



forces. Several hundred thousand more refugees arrive, and Israeli forces take over the police and judicial court system.

Bulgaria, 1943-1948

Dalia's family comes from Bulgaria during World War II. Though the country belongs in an alliance with Axis powers--which include Germany, Austria, and other countries ruled by the Nazis--the people of Bulgaria seem to have uniquely tolerant viewpoints of religions co-existing together, perhaps formed in part because historically Bulgaria has been where people fled to escape religious persecution. Though Bulgarian leaders are under orders from the Nazi party to deport all the Jews to concentration camps, non-Jewish citizens refuse to allow this to happen, saving their friends and neighbors from potentially terrible fates.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem dates back to ancient times and is considered a holy place for three major religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. According to Jewish tradition, King David made this city the capitol of Israel, and it is where the first temple was built, as well as many other holy sites. For Muslims, it is the site of first Qibla, or focal point for Muslim prayer; it is also where the prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven to speak with God, along with other important holy events throughout history. For Christians, many accounts of Jesus' life occur here, including his crucifixion. For all three religions, followers often make pilgrimage to Jerusalem to see the holy sites. Because so many groups lay claim to it, it is often the site of violent conflict.



Themes and Motifs

Peaceful Co-Existence

The theme of peaceful co-existence between members of different religions appears many times throughout the book. One of the first instances of this is experienced by Dalia's family and other Jews in Bulgaria. Though Nazis were pressuring leaders of the government to deport all the Jews to concentrations as was happening in other places throughout Europe run by Axis powers, Bulgarian citizens refused to quietly allow this to happen to their Jewish neighbors. In some instances, Jews found refuge in Christian churches, and Christian church officials protested the deportations and intervene by appealing to government officials.

This is a vast departure from some other Nazi-occupied countries, in which former neighbors and friends sometimes turned on each other. Others attempted to help by hiding Jewish people in their homes and aiding them in escaping the country, but Bulgaria stands out as an exception with how vocal the people were in uniting together against what they knew to be wrong. This example of peaceful co-existence between Jews and Christians not only helps keep many Bulgarian Jews alive, but also fosters a sense of hope in Dalia that the same sort of peace can be achieved in Israel between Palestinians and Israelis. Later, Dalia makes pilgrimage back to Bulgaria to a monastery where two Orthodox priests, who went above and beyond to help their Jewish peers, are buried. Even though Dalia does not share the same faith as these men, they share a common humanity, which helps them to overcome their differences.

Before they were removed from their home in 1948, Bashir's sisters recall Al-Ramla as being a town where Jews and Muslims lived side-by-side. Many Jews owned shops and other businesses in town, and the children all attended school together. This shows that co-existence was once possible between the two people; it is not necessarily in their natures to despise each other, but rather circumstances that have encouraged them to be enemies.

One of Dalia's and Bashir's major disagreements is the possibility of a peaceful co-existence in Israel between Palestinians and Israelis. Bashir believes the only way peace can be achieved is for the Israelis to leave and for his people to reclaim their rightful homes. Dalia continues to hold hope that the two people can someday learn to live side-by-side together, as exemplified in their friendship and in the school she has opened which teaches Muslims and Jews alongside each other.

Appearances

Another theme that recurs throughout the book is that things are not always as they appear. One of the most obvious examples of this is Bashir's hand. Bashir always keeps his left hand in his pocket; it isn't until many years into their friendship that Dalia learns



most of his hand is missing due to mines that Israeli soldiers left behind that were disguised in toys. Bashir keeps up the appearance of having a whole and healthy hand by posing with his hand in his pocket, perhaps so that he is not viewed as being weak or frail in any way, or perhaps because it is too traumatizing to remember what happened to him as a child and he does not wish to repeat the details more than once.

Appearances also occur within the references to the symbol of the paper tiger, which is what King Hussein of Jordan is accused of being. Hussein puts up the appearance of being on the side of the Palestinian refugees, but when actually threatened with danger, many Arabs believe he is too quick to surrender and turn on his people. The idea of the paper tiger is that it appears to be a formidable opponent from a distance, but up close it is revealed to be weak and flimsy, which is how many Palestinians view Hussein.

After World War II, some people in the world view the Jews who have survived the Holocaust as being victims; others accuse them of being weak for not fighting back. Wanting to change their appearance and the way they are perceived by the world, Israelis adopt the idea of a "New Jew," a symbolic figure who is strong, handsome, and a warrior who will not be bullied by anyone else. Many Jewish people, including Dalia, look to this as a sense of strength and hope, since he gives off the appearance of being so healthy and strong when they have felt weak and afraid for so long.

Perhaps partially because of the idea of Jewish people being victims, initially many world powers take their side in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. All of the Palestinians' efforts to reclaim their land are viewed as terrorist attacks and treated as such. However, as time passes and more and more people become aware of the plight of the Arab refugees and realize how much they have lost and continue to lose, appearances shift from them seeming like the aggressors to becoming the victims of the story--or, in terms of Jewish ideology, they shift from the appearance of being Goliath to the appearance of being David.

The Other

Many references are made throughout the text to the idea of coming to understand "the other." The other is defined as anyone who is not the same, whether the same nationality, the same culture, or the same religion. From the beginning of the book, the author claims that people are often uncomfortable hearing from the perspective of the other. It is easier to surround oneself with people who think the same ways and live the same kind of life; however, by refusing to listen to the perspective of the other, a person may become blind to other ways of thinking, which is how hatred can develop.

One of the reasons that the Jews are so mistreated during World War II is because they become the scapegoat of being "the other." Everything that goes wrong in society is blamed on them, simply because they dress differently, follow different religious and cultural practices, eat different foods, and speak in a different language. Instead of attempting to understand these differences, many people allowed themselves to



become afraid of them, which made them feel justified in turning against their Jewish friends and neighbors and allowing terrible things to happen to them.

Bashir has a strong experience of becoming the other when he returns to his hometown with his cousins after 19 years of being in exile. Realizing that they will now be strangers in the place that used to be home, Bashir and his cousins take precautions not to draw attention to themselves, such as sitting in different parts of the bus and not speaking their native language with each other. Even so, they draw attention on the streets because people instinctively realize they are different, from the way they dress to the way they look. As they try to visit their former homes, at one place the people living in the house are so afraid of this otherness that they scream and threaten to call the police.

The author forces these opposing points of view to come together by intersecting accounts of Israel/Palestine's history with different points of view--chiefly Bashir and Dalia and other members of their family, but also political accounts, important figures, and other people living in the community. For some people reading this book, it may be their first time being exposed to either culture, which may have seemed strange and foreign in the past until the reader began to recognize that Bashir, Dalia, and the others were simply people just like them, even though they come from different cultures; for others, they may have previously sided with one side or the other, but now are invited to see how the two different viewpoints have experienced these events, and may perhaps understand how the other side thinks and feels in a way they could not before.

Individuals

One of the important themes of the novel is learning to see people on an individual level instead of as a group. This ties to the idea mentioned above of the other; one way to stop viewing a group of people by their stereotypical traits is to stop seeing them as a group, but to realize how different and important the individuals are separately. Conversely, in looking at the specific details of another person's life, one may come to understand how much he or she has in common with this other individual, despite their differences in background.

This is the main focus behind the friendship between Bashir and Dalia. When they first meet, Dalia at first only sees the cultural background that Bashir and his cousins belong to; she recognizes them immediately as being Arabs, and is worried about what might happen if she lets them into her home. However, as she begins to recognize some of the individual characteristics that make up who Bashir is, she notes that he looks quiet and serious, and feels a sense of connection to him. Because of this, she opens her doors to him, and also opens her mind to the possibility of an understanding between them. Without this, their friendship would not have been possible.

As Dalia and Bashir continue to get to know each other, they learn that their ideas do not always line up with one another. One of the struggles for Bashir is that, while he can recognize that Dalia is an Israeli and that as an individual she is a good person, as a



whole, he still wants the Israeli people to leave so that his own people can reclaim their lands. Coming to know Dalia on this individual level allows him to gain respect for her and her beliefs in a way that is not possible for him in viewing her people as a whole; Dalia continues to hold out hope that someday it will do so.

The author continues this theme by interweaving other peoples' personal accounts into the narrative. At times, Dalia or Bashir may not have been present for an event that he is describing in the book; instead, he interviews other individuals who were present who can give a first-hand account of what they saw, heard, and felt as they experienced these things. This helps the reader to experience the conflict on a more individual level as well. For example, it may be hard to fully sympathize about nameless numbers of Jews in Bulgaria being frightened about being driven from their homes and threatened with deportation; the author still gives these facts, but also tells events through the eyes of a young girl named Susannah, which helps the story to resonate on a much more personal level.

The Past and the Future

The history of Israel/Palestine is given throughout many years, as well as the histories of the Arabs and Jews living these lands and the personal histories of the Khairi and Eshkenazi families. At times it may seem strange to include so much background information instead of focusing on the story between Dalia and Bashir as it unfolds; however, one of the main themes of the book is that the past shapes the future. If the past is ignored, then the future will often repeat the same mistakes; it is only through learning from those mistakes that a new future can be achieved.

One example of this is in Bulgaria, where Jews are treated much more kindly during World War II than many other places in Europe controlled by Axis powers. Part of this is due to the history of the country; in 1490, when Jews were exiled from Spain, the Ottoman emperor not only opened his country to them, but even sent ships to help them arrive. He is quoted as saying, "They say that Ferdinand of Spain is a wise man, but he is a fool...For he takes his treasure and sends it all to me" (pg 29). This reception of Jews sets a precedent that they are valued citizens of the country, and this feeling travels down through the ages. Of course, it is not the only reason that Jews are saved from exile and extermination, but it is one instance where the people of a country learn from the lessons of the past.

Dalia also hopes to build a better future by learning from the past. She recognizes her role as being part of the problem in the country, since Israelis drove the Palestinians from their lands and took their homes; however, she believes that driving the Jews from their current homes can't right this wrong, either. She believes the true solution is to learn from the past, and to build a new future of understanding and hope. Learning from the lessons of her own relationship with Bashir, Dalia opens a school where Palestinian and Israeli children are encouraged to study alongside each other, and in the process begin to understand one another and value each other's differences instead of being frightened or resentful of them.

Styles

Point of View

The book is written in third-person omniscient narration, with a few minor exceptions in which a character's thoughts are revealed; however, because this is based on actual events and people and the author is so careful to maintain that the story has not been manufactured by him, most of these personal thoughts by characters are often accompanied by qualifying terms. For example, on page 27, the author writes, "Years later, recounting the events to her daughter, Dalia, she would vividly recall the feeling: This is the end." The author is careful not to impose his own thoughts or feelings onto the characters, or his ideas of what they might have been thinking or feeling, which is why he substantiates most of these thoughts by making these kinds of qualifying statements ("recounting the events to her daughter, Dalia, she would vividly recall the feeling") instead of merely writing, "This is the end, she thought." The author even makes a note of this in his introduction to show that all of his dialogue and inner monologues have been researched and are not part of his imagination or creative licensing.

To accomplish this, the author sometimes will introduce a new character who is not directly tied to Dalia's or Bashir's story, but who can provide insight to a particular event or moment in history that Dalia and Bashir did not personally witness. For example, the author gives some background of the Bulgarian underground movement, and does so through the perspective of a young woman named Susannah Shemuel Behar. Susannah is not part of Dalia's immediate circle of family or friends, but she has witnessed a portion of history that Dalia did not observe, and is able to provide some personal insight into the events to give them more significance. Otherwise, most of the characters referenced throughout the novel belong to Dalia's or Bashir's families or are close friends.

Language and Meaning

The book uses some advanced language, but for the most part is written in a simple, straightforward manner that attempts to clearly explain some rather difficult historical and political concepts. Most of the more advanced language comes in the form of government documents or political statements which are being quoted within the text. Despite this, the text may seem difficult to comprehend for some young readers, not because of the way it is written, but because of the density of the subject matter, which contains various place names, political figures, and historical dates. This also includes the use of Arabic and Hebrew words which may be unfamiliar to many westernized readers. These words are often italicized in the text and accompanied by an explanation to make them more understandable.



Remembering names of people may be particularly difficult for some young readers; not only will many of the names seem unfamiliar, but since the characters of the book are real historical figures, there are sometimes multiple people with the same name. The inclusion of so many dates, place names, and battles may also be difficult for young readers to keep straight. The inclusion of the maps at the beginning of the book may be a helpful resource, as well as creating a timeline of events.

Structure

Though the book maintains a somewhat linear through-line which gradually progresses through time, he also often takes small detours which move backward and forward in time to elaborate on a certain point or event. The book begins with Bashir and his cousins traveling to Al-Ramla in 1967. It then moves backward in time to explain the history of Bashir's family and why this return is so momentous. It also gives the history of Dalia's family and how they end up living in the Khairis' previous home. Once Dalia and Bashir meet, their storyline moves forward in a mostly chronological manner, though again, occasionally the author makes a brief detour to explain a particular event (e.g., Dalia and Bashir might be having coffee in 1967, but the author will detour to 1939 to explain why Dalia's family has always preferred this particular brand of coffee).

The book begins with an author's note, maps, and an introduction; 14 chapters; and an afterword. The author's note and introduction serve to mainly outline how the author has done the research for the book, as well as providing explanation for how the author came across Dalia's and Bashir's story and why he wanted to tell it. The afterword was added as an addendum to previous publications of the book and brings the reader up-to-date with what has happened with Bashir and Dalia since the original publication in 2007.



Quotes

Not everyone is comfortable hearing the story of the Other.

-- Author (Introduction)

Importance: This sentence captures one of the main ideas that the author suggests being the cause of the continuing conflict in Palestine/Israel, as well as the root of what he believes a solution could be. The entire story of Dalia and Bashir is the story of two people who have been raised to know only their peoples' side of the story encountering an "other" who forces them to open their mind. Becoming more familiar with the other may not change their mind completely, but they can at least begin to acknowledge the humanity in their enemy, which is perhaps the only way that real change can take place. It is uncomfortable to do so, particularly when hatred and resentment runs deep, and genuine wrongdoing has occurred on both sides. Yet though it may be easier to refuse to see the humanity in those who are different, it is also blinding oneself to the opportunity to grow and change.

Everything depended on the reception, Bashir told himself. You can't know what the outcome will be, especially after what had happened to Yasser. 'It depends,' he said, 'who is on the other side of the door.'

-- Bashir (One)

Importance: This quote encapsulates one of the most pivotal parts of the story between Bashir and Dalia, and sets in motion everything that takes place between them and their family. Thus far, Bashir and his cousins have attempted to visit two other homes. At one, they are screamed at and forced to leave; at the other, the home has been drastically altered into a public school and is virtually unrecognizable. Along the way they have also been harshly treated by various Israeli citizens. Bashir cannot yet know that behind the door will be Dalia, who will come to mean so much to him as a friend and who will share a mutual relationship of questioning past prejudices and seemingly insurmountable differences. However, the fact that Bashir still chooses to knock on the door, not knowing what the outcome will be, indicates that he has hope that this sort of outcome is possible. It may be easy to forget this as the narrative progresses and Bashir becomes more and more jaded, but his story with Dalia really begins with an act of hope on his part.

The act of planting was thus an act of faith and patience."

-- Narrator (Two)

Importance: The symbol of the lemon tree is one of the most important throughout the book. This symbolism can take many forms, as at times, it is meant to represent a sense of connection to home and heritage by the Khairi family. However, as the narrative progresses, the lemon tree also begins to represent the idea of bridging two cultures and a hope for a better future. From the beginning of the tree's planting, the author indicates that this tree will come as the result of hope and patience, that it may take a long time to grow, but that its fruit will be worth the wait. The same can be said



for a peaceful resolution to this conflict: that it may take a long time to develop, but that it will ultimately be worth the wait.

None of this would have happened without what the Bulgarian-French intellectual Tzvetan Todorov calls 'the fragility of goodness': the intricate, delicate, unforeseeable weave of human action and historical events.

-- Narrator (Three)

Importance: The background of the Bulgarian Jews is deeply important to understanding Dalia's persevering hope for peace between Arabs and Israelis, and also perhaps the author's implied hope for the same. Though Jews were still targeted in Bulgaria, they were saved from many of the atrocities of the Holocaust because their neighbors refused to allow them to be deported and killed. This was the result of many neighbors from various backgrounds working together to help each other. Many of these neighbors profess to be Christian, and though historically this difference in religion may have been cause for the Christian neighbors to turn their backs and claim no responsibility for what happened to the Jews, in this instance, people were able to overcome their dissimilarities to find a common humanity. Dalia grew up hearing these tales and honoring those who were able to love so peacefully together, and this is why she is able to retain such hope that Israelis and Arabs can reach the same place if they truly begin to view each other as people instead of enemies.

Why, they asked, should their homeland become the solution to the Jewish problem in Europe?

-- Narrator (Four)

Importance: While historically, many have blamed Arabs for being unwilling to open their homes to displaced Jews who have survived the Holocaust, the effort of this narrative is to show both sides of the conflict. Great Britain and the United States both refused to allow a mass influx of Jews into their countries, and the United Nations refused to take responsibility for where to direct them. A return to Israel may have seemed like a solution to their problems, and these Western superpowers were probably happy to paint it in this light to absolve themselves of responsibility; however, it was at the cost of Arab homes and lands, a fact which is often ignored in the discussion of this issue. Two wrongs don't make a right, and Bashir and many of his people feel that they have been wronged in order to attempt to right a wrong that was done to the Jews, over which they have no control.

It would avenge the Palestinian defeat; it would restore his family's dignity; it would repair the loss his father, mother, and siblings had suffered. It would wash away the shame of dispossession.

-- Narrator/Bashir (Six)

Importance: To truly understand the point of view of Bashir and the other Arabs, it is imperative to understand that the issue is not just having lost houses or possessions. These things would be bad enough on their own; but as Bashir reiterates throughout the text, homes are tied to a sense of heritage and history for Arab people. In America,



people may move homes several times throughout their lives, and this will not necessarily be a traumatic experience. Many Arab homes, in contrast, belong to families for long periods of time, or are chosen because they are close to ancestral lands or holy sites. Losing these homes has caused many of the Arab refugees to not only feel a sense of displacement or loss, but also a deep sense of shame at having lost that rich cultural and family heritage.

As she grew older, she learned about the atrocities in Germany, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. She found this truth indigestible. For God to allow this to happen, she would recall thinking, is utterly unconscionable. She was furious. 'You have created human beings!' she would shout to her Creator. 'You have to take responsibility for Your creation! You have to be more active in preventing such things!

-- Narrator/Dalia (Seven)

Importance: Dalia's understanding of her heritage as a Bulgarian Jew has greatly shaped the way she views the conflict in Israel/Palestine, but so has her learning of what happened to Jews in other parts of the world during the Holocaust. Dalia sees evidence of this in some of her classmates and neighbors, and is horrified when she learns the truth for herself. It is because of these injustices that Dalia cannot condone sending her people back to where they were harassed, dehumanized, and murdered by their former countrymen and neighbors. Her questioning of God's role in everything that took place may indicate a crisis of faith, but it may also suggest that Dalia is beginning to suspect it will be up to human beings to negotiate through their differences instead of relying on intervention from a higher being.

In a community where people were still walking around with numbers on their arms, Dalia believed, 'one had to take sick fantasies seriously.

-- Narrator/Dalia (Eight)

Importance: Though for the most part, it is Arabs who have lost their homes and suffered the most casualties in this conflict, Dalia explains the environment that has caused her people to be so frightened. Though threats over the radio to "drive all the Jews into the sea" may seem small in comparison, most of these Jewish people are living with the legacy of similar threats and resentment which resulted in the mass extermination of their people. They are certainly not innocent of the conflict happening in Israel/Palestine and have done their part to perpetuate the violence and hostility, but paint them as mere bullies oversimplifies the situation.

The only language which the enemy understands is that of revolutionary violence.

-- George Habash (Ten)

Importance: George Habash was the leader for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and this quote reflects what many Arabs believe to be the only solution to regaining their lands. To Bashir, George Habash is a hero; to Dalia, he is a terrorist. There are many who would agree with his position, even in matters not pertaining to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. History has shown many times that the only way to exact true change is through a show of force and aggression. Dalia and others would argue that



change is only possible through communication and coming to understand the "other," which cannot take place when two sides are at war with each other.

It showed that 'personal relationships meant nothing in the face of collective forces. If national interest comes before our common humanity... then there is no hope for redemption, there is no hope for healing, there is no hope for transformation, there is no hope for anything!

-- Dalia (Ten)

Importance: Dalia feels betrayed when she believes that Bashir has been involved in rebellion activities which have taken peoples' lives. Bashir never confirms that he was involved in these activities, though the Israeli government certainly seems to think so, arresting him on numerous occasions throughout his lifetime. If he was involved, Dalia feels that this is a betrayal to the friendship that they have built and the understanding they have begun to form. The two sides will never begin to fully understand one another if they stop viewing each other as individuals and think of each other only as "others." She believes that these one-on-one conversations, and the coming together of their two families, is what will ultimately save both of their people.

If we make space for that other, then it truly helps us make it possible to weave together a reality that is much more splendid than the reality we can envision alone.

-- Dalia (Twelve)

Importance: This reiterates Dalia's ideas about learning from the other, but also takes it a step further, suggesting that not only is peace possible with the other, but a better future than could have been envisioned by one side alone. This may seem difficult to believe considering all the death and destruction that has taken place between the two sides of the conflict, but Dalia puts this vision into practice in her Open House school by putting Arab and Israeli students together, to learn and grow side-by-side. Dalia certainly seems to feel as though her own life has been enriched by her friendship with Bashir and his family; even though opening herself up to the point of view of the other may not have always been easy, it has helped her gain a fuller perspective of the world around her and allowed her to hope for a better future instead of living her life in fear.

I am part and parcel of this complexity. I am part of the problem because I came from Europe, because I lived in an Arab house. I am part of the solution, because I love.

-- Dalia (Twelve)

Importance: Dalia acknowledges herself as both part of the problem and solution in Israel. To deny the role of herself or her people in the current conflict would be short-sighted; however Dalia continues to hold out hope that she can be part of the solution as well. To her, removing Jews from Israel together is not an option. The wrongs that have been done in the past cannot be erased. All people can do is move forward and learn to do so with empathy and respect for one another. Dalia believes that because she has love in her heart for both sides of the conflict, others can learn to do the same, and it is only through this love and common humanity that peace can ultimately be reached.