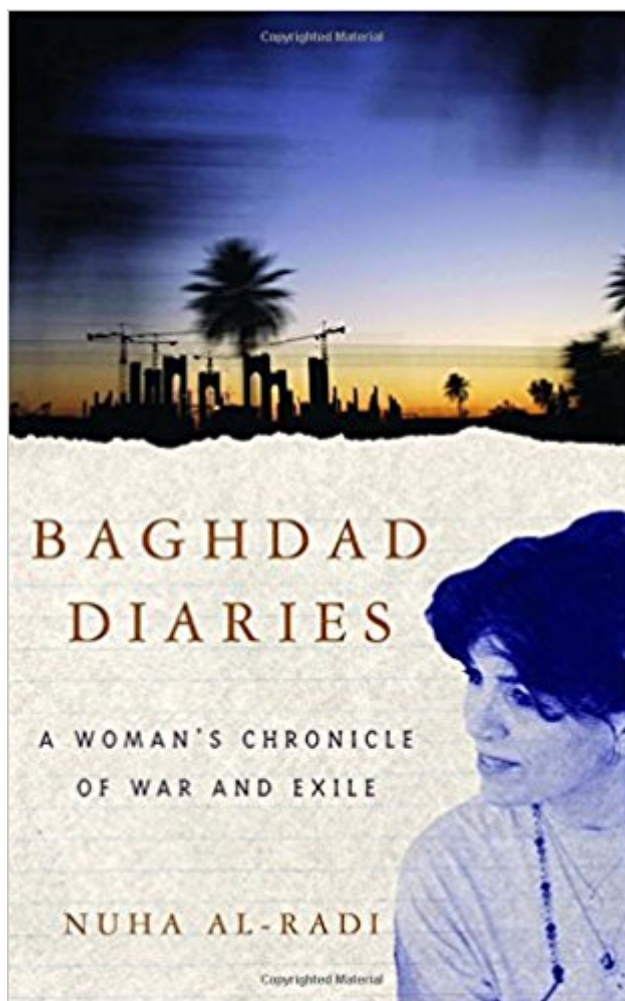


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Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle Of War And Exile



Synopsis

In this often moving, sometimes wry account of life in Baghdad during the first war on Iraq and in exile in the years following, Iraqi-born, British-educated artist Nuha al-Radi shows us the effects of war on ordinary people. She recounts the day-to-day realities of living in a city under siege, where food has to be consumed or thrown out because there is no way to preserve it, where eventually people cannot sleep until the nightly bombing commences, where packs of stray dogs roam the streets (and provide her own dog Salvi with a harem) and rats invade homes. Through it all, al-Radi works at her art and gathers with neighbors and family for meals and other occasions, happy and sad. In the wake of the war, al-Radi lives in semi-exile, shuttling between Beirut and Amman, travelling to New York, London, Mexico and Yemen. As she suffers the indignities of being an Iraqi in exile, al-Radi immerses us in a way of life constricted by the stress and effects of war and embargoes, giving texture to a reality we have only been able to imagine before now. But what emanates most vibrantly from these diaries is the spirit of endurance and the celebration of the smallest of life's joys.

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Customer Reviews

A London-educated Iraqi woman, al-Radi, recounts 10 years in her life, covering the Persian Gulf War in 1991, then the Western embargo on Iraq and finally the years she entitles "exile," which she spent primarily in Lebanon, occasionally visiting the United States. Al-Radi, an artist by training, writes powerful but not ostentatious prose, with abrupt, fragmented and simple sentences as she

interweaves the violent, chaotic effects of war with everyday incidents. One may feel the urge to skim the detailing of run-of-the-mill events regarding, say, al-Radi's dog and his adventures. And the artistry and authenticity of al-Radi's voice will be marred for some by her ardent anti-Israel and anti-American sentiments. The author rightly addresses the devastation of war, the inevitable violence wrought on innocent civilians. But she does not address the context in which the Gulf War and the embargo took place. Mention of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and ruthlessness toward his own people is reduced to a bare minimum. Al-Radi singles out Israel for criticism of its policies regarding Lebanon and the Palestinians, at one point comparing Israeli policies to Nazi tactics. There is no question that war is brutal, and al-Radi touchingly portrays the Iraqi plight, but in her eagerness to cast blame, she loses sight of the bigger picture. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

“I searched for recent books about Iraq that described it as a real country. I found only one, the excellent Baghdad Diaries.”
• Edward Said
“I hope many people will read this book and note the futility of war and perhaps do something about it; all my life I have cherished this hope in vain, but we must not stop.”
• Mary Wesley, author of *Harnessing Peacocks* and *A Sensible Life*
“Something of what sanctions mean for ordinary Iraqis. . . records the day-to-day struggle for survival.”
• Times Literary Supplement
“Insouciant, charming and witty, with much black humour. Al-Radi writes poignantly.”
• The Independent (London)

Much too late reading this book, but now I have confirmation of everything my instincts had been telling me. When will we humans become enlightened to the fact we are such a tiny speck in the grand scheme of universes and work together for mutual survival instead of mutual destruction? I sincerely hope many more will come to read these words from a cultured woman and understand: every single, living being has the right to exist.

I love this book so much! It's one thing to learn from a text book written by a diplomat that lived in the country, but it's something completely different reading about the experiences of a woman who lived everyday through the defrosting freezers and bare tires, the sudden drop of the Iraqi dinar, and the struggles of a family torn apart.

I didn't expect to like this book, I thought it would be full of sadness, which it sometimes is, or

depressing, which it never is. It's actually rich with Nuha's sharp wit and wisdom, her incredibly smart take on the ironies in all of our lives, based on her experiences in Iraq during the first bombings. Read this--you will be so surprised to learn how much we all have in common. You will learn the best about human beings. Nuha's story-telling is authentic and lovely and amusing and endearing. Each turn of her pages reminded me of my own family, reminded me of all of us. She was one of us--we humans who struggle to navigate a complex world so often out of our control--but Nuha did it with such grace and elegance. Nuha was a creative, educated, and often Avant Garde Artist. Through her eyes I viewed an Iraq that I had never heard about in the Western news: An Iraqi culture cultivating Art and the finer intellectual pursuits-- an intelligence rarely if ever described in Western media. Nuha Al-Radi writes of her world, one the West hardly knew existed--it's an enlightenment reading her stories of daily life there, under the worst conditions possible. I sit back now and wonder, what would her stories have been if things had been different--more stable, more peaceful? She'd probably be showing her work in New York or Paris or Lebanon and we'd all be clambering to get tickets and following her on Facebook. Nuha Al-Radi and her ilk will always be welcome at my table. It would be a great honor. Okay, you just wanted a book review: this book is AMAZING, you'll love it. Then you'll start googling for her Art work and find some of her pieces, but you'll want to find more--like the show she did with figures with removable heads. Buy or borrow this book and start your search for something wonderful.

Ms. Al-Radi gives an amazing play-by-play of how the war (the massive bombing campaigns by the US and allied forces in Baghdad and neighbouring cities and the ensuing embargo) unfolded before her and the people of Iraq. I couldn't put it down. Ms. Al-Radi has a knack for turning a seriously tragic situation into an almost funny account through her matter-of-fact statements. Still, somehow she manages to not lessen the impact of the tragedy. Ms. Al-Radi does not paint an "Oh woe is me," picture but she invites the reader to walk by her as she takes us through the experiences of the people of Iraq, (her friends and neighbours, and even her dog Salvador Dali and his "friends," etc.). She paints vivid images of the various stages of the war. For example she describes, in the beginning of the war, how the Iraqis had filled up their freezers to the hilt with meat and vegetables and anything they could fit in there fearing the onset of war. But, as the first bombs hit taking out the electrical plants and leaving Iraq without power, in total darkness and every refrigerator and freezer unfreezing, the Iraqis are left gorging themselves as their food begins to rot inside their quickly defrosting freezers. Ms. Al-Radi then takes us into bowels of the war itself describing the massive bombs that obliterate and take out innocent human and animal lives by the hundreds (at any given

time). She finally steps into the final blow of the war (pun intended) -the cruel and unusual punishment of the embargo and the ensuing anarchy that it creates, in addition to the odd occurrences in nature. Her trees die, her vegetables don't grow, strange insects never before seen take a hold of the trees and shrubs struggling to live, birds die by the thousands for no "apparent" reason, the cancer rates go up immeasurably, etc. This is a much needed book. The human face of Iraq has all but been eliminated and replaced with the menacing one of Saddam which in turn justified/s the punishment that the people had to endure(are still enduring)as a result. It is a wonderful book. It is sad that a book of this sort had to be written in the first place.

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