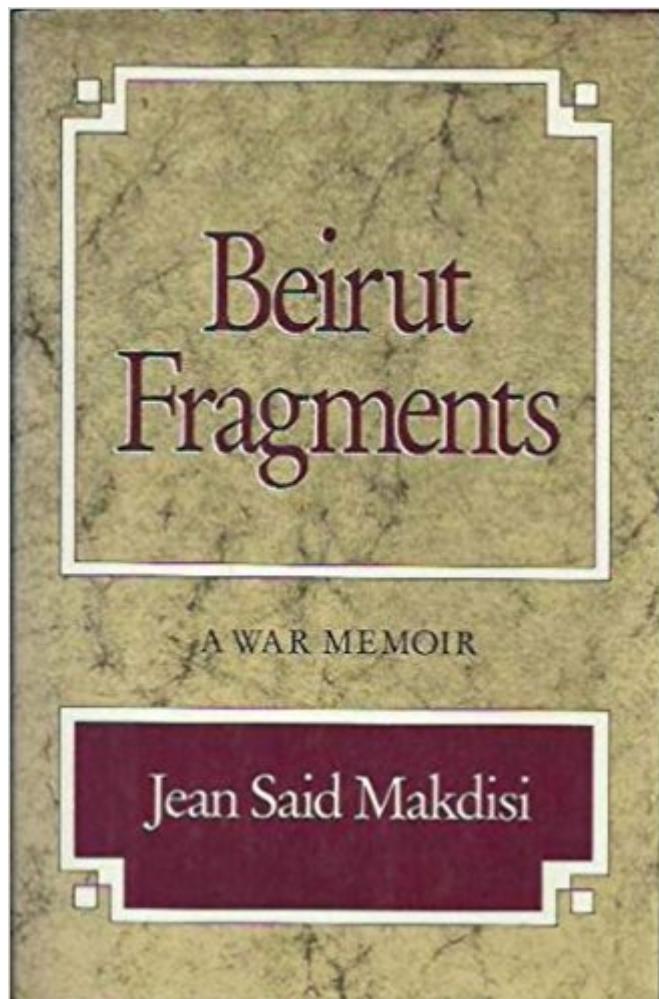


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# Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir



## Synopsis

A new edition of the widely acclaimed account of the civilian experience of fifteen years of war in Beirut- "a profound, heartbreaking book" (Los Angeles Times Book Review), "an impassioned cry against indifference" (New York Times Book Review), "a work ringing with truth and insight" (Arab Book World)-now with an Afterword about the postwar years. A New York Times Book Review Notable Book An intensely personal yet timelessly crafted portrait of life in a worn-torn city, Beirut Fragments spans the years of the civil war in Lebanon, 1975-1990. When thousands fled, Jean Said Makdisi chose to stay. She raised three sons, taught English and Humanities at Beirut University College-and she wrote. She records the breakdown of society and the physical destruction of Beirut, the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, the Israeli Invasion, everyday acts of terrorism, the struggle to maintain ordinary routines amid chaos, and the incredible spirit of a people. A Palestinian, a Christian, a woman who has lived in Jerusalem, Cairo, the United States, and Beirut, Jean Said Makdisi uses the migrations of her own life as a paradigm which helps elucidate many of the conflicts in the region. The new afterword covers the postwars years, from the last ceasefire to the present day. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Born in Jerusalem, raised in Egypt, educated in England and America, Makdisi married a Lebanese man and settled in Beirut in 1972. Despite the 1982 Israeli invasion and 15 years of civil war, the Makdisis are still there, "clinging to the wreckage" and maintaining a "strange love for this mutilated city." The author of this beautifully crafted memoir delineates the lives and emotions of those who

chose to stay, emphasizing the *joie de vivre* of friends and acquaintances despite frequent shellings, aerial bombardments and fighting in the streets. Told from the point of view of a self-described housewife, this is apparently the first detailed account by a civilian of daily life in the cockpit of the Middle East war. A sensitive and perceptive observer, Makdisi also writes of the ruthlessness of Israeli troops in '82--which will shock readers. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This eyewitness report of the still-continuing war in Beirut conveys both the moving struggle to preserve the threads of daily life and the ever-present fear and rage at the destruction of the once-lovely city. Makdisi records her determination to survive the shelling, bombing, and killing that started with civil war in 1975 and accelerated by Israeli invasion in 1982. Huddled in shelters and faced with intermittent supplies of water and electricity, Makdisi and her neighbors grew increasingly angry at the callousness of the political leaders--Lebanese, Arab, and Western--who prolonged the fighting. This well-written memoir will appeal to all who are concerned with human survival, and also to those who need to be reminded of the cost of big-power politics.- Elizabeth R. Hayford, Associated Colls. of the Midwest, ChicagoCopyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Not told from the high-brow, moralizing perspective of journalists, or reduced to dry politics or the dissertations of historians. Get a view of modern urban war from the vantage point of the ordinary citizen who must send their children to school and decide whether to risk the drive to work based on whether the local fighters are wearing combat fatigues or snoopy tee-shirts. The author writes in a down-to-earth style, but also soars at times with well-turned prose and gut-wrenching observations - mostly reads like a personal daily to weekly diary of the war (sometimes from the perspective of the apartment building's lower car garage that doubles as a shelter for tenants when the bombs begin to fall. Not just for the war buff or historian of the region, but also for those who want insight into the human condition. I highly recommend this book!

Beirut Fragments is the only work on the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) that covers the lives of ordinary Beirutis. Whereas almost all other books are loaded with interviews with politicians and analysts and are decorated with conclusions trying to understand the causes of the war and assess its consequent destruction, Jean Said Makdisi, the sister of the late famous Palestinian writer Edward Said, describes with skill her daily stressful life in Beirut during the Lebanese capital's dark days. Where did people go when the different militias endlessly battled and exchanged

bombardment with no apparent reason behind such behavior? How did people manage their daily lives? In Lebanon, answers to these questions are abundant and people talk about them anecdotally and sometimes with nostalgia. Yet, Makdisi offers the most remarkable written testament on the issue. One of the book's most intriguing statements occurs toward the beginning of the book when Makdisi tries, in vain, to interpret the behavior of the warring factions as she comes up with the conclusion that the scene of the Lebanese civil strife was an incomprehensible kaleidoscope. This marvelous book, however, includes a chapter about Makdisi's childhood days with her family in Egypt. The chapter, which belongs more to a book of memoirs or an autobiography, looks very much out of place and irrelevant. Another drawback is Makdisi's apparent intention to capture the feelings of the people who survived the war in an absolute sense rather than offering a descriptive report about the days of this war as seen from the eyes of a regular citizen like Makdisi. Her attempt to keep the book empty of any names or dates - perhaps in order to keep the book away from inter-Lebanese sensitivities - strips the book of any context. Even though I was born and raised in Ras Beirut during the civil war, I could hardly imagine the places or tell the dates the book refers to, except for the Israeli invasion and the so-called War of Liberation. This severe anonymity made Makdisi keep out even the names of her sons or immediate family members save for a single name, that of her husband Samir, which appeared without such restriction. The book is a lovely read and Lebanon certainly needs more similar books with more names and dates that would describe the suffering of the daily lives of the Lebanese during that period.

Makdisi's book is a remarkable testament to a shattered city that was raped, pillaged, battered, dismembered and physically left to die as a result of the civil war that raged from 1975 to 1990. The beauty of her writing lies in her heart wrenching simplicity and descriptive account of those terrible years seen through the eyes of a mother and teacher who witnessed the slow and lingering death of a city that she had grown to love. Every page is a testament to the people of Beirut who lived through the conflict and yet quite remarkably the passion that Makdisi feels for Beirut is heightened to dramatic effect whilst at the same time deplored the wages of war and how the city had become a playground for terrorist activities by larger players on the world scene. The people of Beirut were simply forgotten by the world and yet her love of humanity and how her hope remains unremitting is a shining example to mankind, amidst the carnage. A remarkable book, gripping and vivid, and a testimony to the belief that the human spirit can transcend all conflicts.

I was born in Beirut after the war started and left for the US just a few years after it ended. A few

years ago I came across this book in a used-book store (sadly now closed) in Boston. It is incredible how well it captures the life and feelings of the people who stayed on in the city through those days. The day to day decisions, the scheduled cease-fires, the love of life that permeated through all the killing. If you ever wondered what it was like living through the lebanese civil war, this is where you will find not just an account but a full recreation of a world slowly healing.

Beirut Fragments is a first hand account of the tragedy of war in Lebanon. The unwarranted invasion of Lebanon by Israel in 1982 is yet another Israeli action that turned neutral attitudes into hatred. I lived and worked in Beirut during the civil war that began in 1975. When I read Jean Said Makdisi's account of the 1982 invasion it revived in me all the memories I harbored about my experiences. The author's portrayal of events and the affect it had on the people who lived there during this invasion is a story that should be read by everyone.

In 2002 I wrote a review of this book but for some reason its private so I am posting a brief review. At the time in 2002 I said that I had never written a book review before but I really wanted to recommend this book -- so the book was so good and captivating that it merited my first review! :-D I have never been to Lebanon but some Lebanese friends said the book struck home for them and it described for them how they remembered Lebanon from their childhoods. When I read the book in 2002 I did so in 2 or 3 days -- it was so good that I couldn't really put it down...

I have read many books about the Lebanese civil war but Ms. Makdisi's book is by far one of the best. It helps provide a unique perspective and a much-needed understanding of the Lebanese civil war and a generation which lost everything that the rest of the world takes for granted. Indeed, war only looks easy from far away.

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