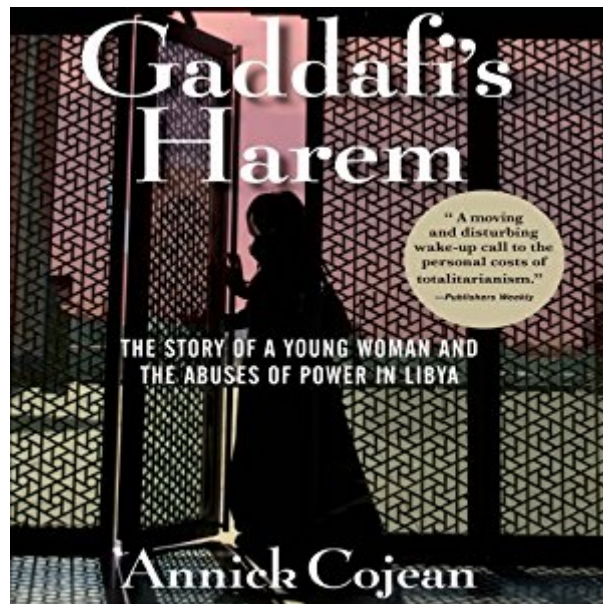


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Gaddafi's Harem: The Story Of A Young Woman And The Abuses Of Power In Libya



Synopsis

Soraya was just 15, a schoolgirl in the coastal town of Sirte, when she was given the honor of presenting a bouquet of flowers to Colonel Gaddafi, the "Guide", on a visit he was making to her school the following week. This one meeting, a presentation of flowers, a pat on the head from Gaddafi, changed Soraya's life forever. Soon afterwards, she was summoned to Bab al-Azizia, Gaddafi's palatial compound near Tripoli, where she joined a number of young women who were violently abused, raped and degraded by Gaddafi. Heartwrenchingly tragic but ultimately redemptive, Soraya's story is the first one of many that are just now beginning to be heard. But sex and rape remain the highest taboo in Libya, and women like Soraya (whose identity is protected by a pseudonym here) risk being disowned or even killed by their dishonored family members. In Gaddafi's Harem, an instant best seller on publication in France, where it has already sold more than 100,000 copies in hardcover, Le Monde special correspondent Annick Cojean gives a voice to Soraya's story, and supplements her investigation into Gaddafi's abuses of power through interviews with people who knew Soraya, as well as with other women who were abused by Gaddafi.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

To Star this book five stars as "love it" isn't quite accurate. It's difficult to love a subject as despicable as this. The book was authored by Annick Cojean who is a seasoned reporter/journalist. This is not a novel. The first "voice" we hear is from one of Gaddafi's victims. The trauma she

suffered at the hands of this monster is unspeakable, as are all his victims who survived. One important lesson from this horrific and disgusting episode in history, is that ALL dictators are ultimately patronized and supported by world leaders and politicians, including our own (there is absolutely NO mention of this in this book). This is merely this readers' viewpoint. Everyone should read this book and understand how appalling humanity is. It is without doubt that no dictator or regime (such as the Third Reich) could possibly flourish and survive without their supporters. And this is probably the most awful thing about our fellow humans. There are always those willing to drag on the coattails of the most despicable leaders purely for their own profit, greed and other sick modus operandi. Shame on humanity.

When the author, Annick Cojean, went to cover Libya post Gaddafi for Le Monde, she was struck by the absence of women among the rebels. Elsewhere in the Arab Spring, women had been present on the streets sharing the celebrations. She did come to learn that the Libyan women in fact had taken huge risks in passing information and supplies and hiding money. However, they were still trapped in a society that held the woman's place as in the home, guarded and hidden. Part of the origin of this seclusion was the fact of Gaddafi and his policy of rape to suppress rebel activity. Even more insidious was his harvesting of young women he saw in schools and ceremonies for his own sexual purposes. The double blind for the woman is that the shame remains for her even when forced against her will. Such was the fate for Soroya abducted at age 15 and forced to fulfill all of Gaddafi's fantasies and to help fulfill his giant sex drive. Gaddafi, unsurprisingly, found humiliation of women to be stirring, and kept a harem for his purposes. Rape and sexual exploitation is not new in the world of the dictator. Sexual humiliation is unfortunately an old tactic for the subjugation of people. As old a story as it is, it must be told again and again to bear witness and remove the stain of shame from the victims. At times this book lags, but I think to my own discomfort that this is because of the barrage of images has rendered much that is horrible common. The Libyan women have taken their places in society and are beginning to emerge to demand their place. But the role of the world as witness is far from over, and education such as this book is an important first step.

This painful story shows again how people believe the worst of the innocents held captive by tyrants. Much of the book contains the story of one woman, but her story is followed by information no one might know about in the patriarchal society that blames the innocent for crimes perpetrated against them. Tragic.

This book reads like a rambling and incoherent article/diary written by a teenager instead of an adult woman. A lot of it does not make sense or add up as there are a lot of conflicting things, and it suffers from translation, editing, and proof-reading errors. The adult woman Soraya who claims to have been raped and a sex slave had numerous chances to escape and even traveled to France to live, and even moved to Tunisia as well; but she actually went back to Libya and to be Gaddafi's so called sex slave many times which does not make any sense at all. She claims that Gaddafi had spies for him in other countries but offers no actual proof of this as it's just theory and speculation, and these people did not force her to return to Libya. I believe that Gaddafi did sexually abuse and kill people but a lot of this book does seem completely made up or embellished just to fit the agenda of the author or her claims. The author claims that Libya was some horrible place under Gaddafi and that nobody had any freedom. Gaddafi was a brutal and ruthless dictator; but Libyan people had a lot more freedom under him than they do now under Sharia law. The author also makes a lot of claims about certain world leaders, ambassadors, etc. that are not backed up with any evidence, proof, or facts. I am glad I did not pay for this book as my local library had it. It's a very quick read and you can finish it in two hours or I did at least.

This is such an important topic, but I felt it could have been handled better. I've come across articles about these girls and acutely felt for them and wondered about their fate. Even though they were abused against their will, due to religious and societal pressures, they were abandoned by their families and often forced to choose death or sell themselves. Ms. Cojean chose to start the book with one woman's account, chock full of salacious details. I wish she'd have opened with 'Part 2: Investigations,' which was stronger and would have established a better context. Ms. Cojean also admits that it was hard to track down these girls - now grown women - but I'd expect a good journalist to do exactly that. And she seems naive or unfamiliar with the Middle Eastern or Libyan culture, which might have limited her ability to catch the nuances and paint the full horror and injustices these girls suffered. For example, she marvels when a doctor destroys incriminating DVDs found in Gaddafi's apartment to protect the girls from coercion or blackmail in the midst of the war. "A strange reaction," she muses. "Were they not crucial forms of evidence? Shouldn't it be up to a court of justice to make such a decision?" Is she even aware what happens to a 'ruined' woman in an Islamic country or that the court system doesn't quite work the same way as in the West? In her encounters and interviews, she seems to have only scratched the surface before moving onto the next subject. Don't get me wrong - I am glad these women are finally heard, but the book could have been even better. A bit disappointed.

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