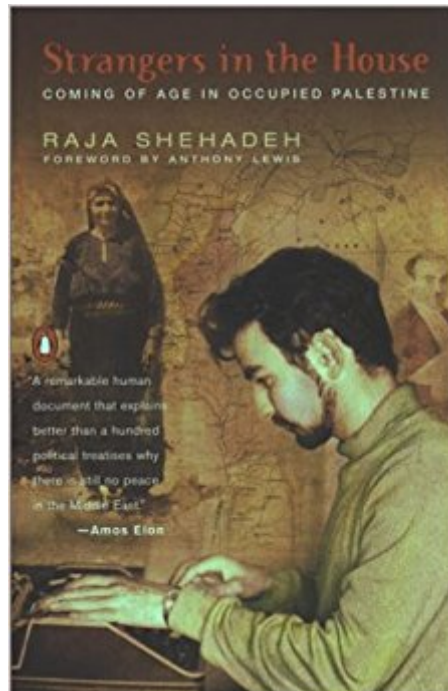




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# Strangers In The House: Coming Of Age In Occupied Palestine



## Synopsis

"This is not a political book," Anthony Lewis asserts in his foreword to this revealing memoir of a father-son relationship set against the backdrop of more than thirty years of life under military occupation. "Yet in a hundred different ways it is political. . . . Shehadeh shatters the stereotype many Americans have of Palestinians." Three years after his family was driven from the city of Jaffa in 1948, Raja Shehadeh was born in Ramallah. His early childhood was marked by his family's sense of loss and impermanence, vividly evoked by the glittering lights "on the other side of the hill." He witnessed the numerous arrests of his father, Aziz, who, in 1967, was the first Palestinian to advocate a peaceful, two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He predicted that if peace were not achieved, what remained of the Palestinian homeland would be taken away bit by bit. Ostracized by his fellow Arabs and disillusioned by the failure of either side to recognize his prophetic vision, Aziz retreated from politics. He was murdered in 1985. The first memoir of its kind by a Palestinian living in the occupied territories, *Strangers in the House* offers a moving description of daily life for those who have chosen to remain on their land. It is also the family drama of a difficult relationship between an idealistic son and his politically active father, complicated by the arbitrary humiliation of the "occupier's law."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Palestinian perspectives on the Middle East conflict don't often reach the West and today they are more relevant than ever. In this fascinating memoir, leading Palestinian lawyer Shehadeh offers a chilling and moving view of life inside the Occupied Territories. He was born into a prominent family

around the time of Israel's establishment in 1948. As Shehadeh recounts his relationship with his parents, his first love, intellectual experiments in college, world travels, law career and human rights work, his struggles under Israeli occupation distinguish his story. Shehadeh names his father, Aziz, also a prominent attorney, as the first Palestinian in the late 1960s to advocate recognizing Israel and adopting a peaceful two-state solution. The author gives a gripping narrative regarding Aziz's murder and the Israeli authorities' sluggish investigation; it's widely assumed that Aziz's killer was a Palestinian who disapproved of his willingness to compromise with Israel. More broadly, Shehadeh deftly renders the Israeli government's systematic harassment and humiliation of the Palestinians, ranging from constant surveillance at checkpoints to random searches in homes and offices. Such situations, Shehadeh makes clear, account for the powerlessness, frustration and anger experienced by most Palestinians. His deliberate analysis of the expansion of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories, a major obstacle to the peace process, is especially intriguing. The author argues that these settlements are illegal under international law, but have slowly and surely been aligned with Israeli legal statutes. Anyone seeking a nuanced view of Palestinian experience should read this brave and lyrical book. B&w photos. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this autobiography of a Palestinian living in Israel, Shehadeh, a lawyer and founder of Al-Haq, an affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists, reminisces about growing up "in the shadow of home" and coming to terms with the political situation in which he was born. It wasn't until he was an adult that he finally understood the work of his father, Aziz, an early advocate of the two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict who was murdered in 1985. In a strong voice that is without diatribe, melodrama, or anger, Shehadeh describes the uncertainties of life during a period of national difficulty. Readers will get a glimpse into the emotional and political turmoil of the region and possibly form a better understanding of the troubles in the Middle East. This book also shares the insight of one man's journey and the maturity that allowed him to see his life in context. Recommended for public and academic libraries with Middle Eastern collections or biography collections that extend beyond the famous. Naomi Hafter, Enoch Pratt Free Lib., Baltimore, MD Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An exceptional narrative. Raja Shehadeh is one of my favorite authors for his honesty and for the lyrical quality of his prose. It was so painful to read about his father's tragic death and then the

subsequent futility in regard to bringing justice to the killers. Shehadeh manages to convey the occupation in all its depravity and still maintain his humanity. One of the most poignant and powerful Palestinian voices today.

Wonderful perspective -- growing for justice in Palestine. Shehadeh expresses the fear and hopes of the people of Palestine in his dramatic relationship with his father.

The best book I know about Israel's occupation of Palestine.

An absorbing read about a Christian Palestinian writer,(who I happened to know well). How the Israeli occupation has affected the lives of all Palestinians but showing that family life is the same worldwide.

Raja Shehadeh is from a once-affluent Palestinian family that in 1948 fled from its principal house in Jaffa to its summer home in Ramallah in the West Bank. They thought the move would be temporary, but with the collapse of Palestinian and Arab military forces, it became permanent. Raja was born in Ramallah, and, with the exception of schooling abroad, has lived his life as a stateless Palestinian, since 1967 in the occupied West Bank. Raja's father Aziz was a distinguished Palestinian lawyer, who early on advocated a political resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli schism, specifically a division into two states. He was scorned by both Arabs and Israelis. Raja eventually became a lawyer also. He was one of the founders of Al Haq, which was associated with the International Commission of Jurists, and documented and publicized human rights violations and attempted to establish the rule of law in the occupied West Bank. STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE consists of three interrelated stories. First, there is the plight of the Palestinians: the "Nakbeh" ("the catastrophe" or the events of 1948), the stateless life in the West Bank, followed by occupation by the Israelis after 1967, followed by the continuing encroachment of Israeli settlements and alteration of millennia-old terrain. Second is Raja's story of the friction, even hostility, between him and his father, which is curious given Raja's relative success and his choice of his father's career. The two never reconciled before Aziz was murdered, most probably on the behest of the party on the opposite side of a legal case he was handling. (The book strongly implies that the Israelis never brought the murderer to justice because, on other matters, he had acted as a secret agent for the Israelis.) The third and least interesting aspect of the book is a sort of personal memoir of Raja, extending beyond the events of occupied Palestine and his relationship with his father -- including,

for example, his relationship with an American girl and his years as a student in London. The book jumps around quite a bit; it is a little scattershot in nature. The writing at times is formulaic; at other times, it is overly emotional. I sense that Raja Shehadeh is not sufficiently disciplined intellectually. Upon embarking on his legal career, he vowed to practice law during the day and spend evenings on his written work. My guess is that he was not as polished in either endeavor as he could (and probably would) have been had he devoted his attention to just one of those careers. *STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE* is not a political screed, and I believe it is relatively objective (allowing for the fact that Shehadeh was a Palestinian living through and coping with the Occupation). It is not shrilly condemnatory in nature, and fault for the eventual muddle is ascribed to Palestinian/Arab leaders as well as to the Israeli government. Still, I have nagging reservations concerning Shehadeh's political analysis because I fear he is not sufficiently hard-headed, that he is too emotional. (That said, I recognize that few, in the same circumstances, could be expected to conduct themselves more nobly than he has.) *STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE* is one of many books well worth reading on the Israeli/Palestinian dilemma, but standing alone it is neither definitive nor great. One nice passage, about the day-to-day stolid determination and endurance of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, something which Shehadeh finds difficult to communicate to Palestinians or Arabs living abroad and who are fired with romantic notions of violent resistance: "How could I tell them that we were heroic not because of the great risks that we were taking but because of our perseverance in the face of small, daily, persistent harassments and obstructions to our life, none of which on their own amounted to much? Just bureaucratic hassles that everyone, even in the best of democracies, encounters sometimes. But in our case they were not random, occasional, or intermittent. They were persistent and constant, part of a policy to make the life of Palestinians so difficult that it would seem better to leave than to stay and suffer. In our determination to stay put lay our heroism, not in our acts of daring or even in military operations taken in resistance to the occupation. These were carried out by the smallest minority. The majority was resisting through staying put." (Surely this is a brand of heroism and resistance that many Jews should be able to identify with.)

fascinating story

The author effectively tells the Palestinian-Israeli story from a civilian's perspective. Too often in war we forget about the innocent bystanders in a conflict. Most of the time the vast majority of people living in an area, caught up in a war, are just trying to live and raise a family. Shehadeh helps us understand that the vast majority of Palestinians are trying to do just that, but they can't since they

have been displaced. Heart-wrenching.

This is a very interesting book for those that believe in the "Palestinian" BS. For all others ... it is not worth the price of a pizza. The victimhood game has no takers any longer, not even among Arabs who are looking to a more decent future after the endless internecine wars of the 21st century. Raja Shehadeh could do much better for himself and his family by converting to, say, Catholicism. He could move to Italy or France and start life anew, far from the terrorists that are trying to dominate the entire Middle East - so far unsuccessfully. Palestinians is a term invented by Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO, the notorious terrorist organization that dominated the Arabs living in Cisjordan. Upon his death (due to AIDS since he was gay but married pro-forma to an Arab woman), PLO became extinct and replaced by 15, yes 15, terrorist groups and organizations that enslaved the Arabs under their control and stole their money and, much worse, their future. As of lately, crying "Allahu Akbar" impresses no one, not even devoted Muslims. A radical change in tune might, just might, help improve the destiny of future generations. Playing the victimhood game is quite a disgusting posture that no civilized person would adopt. Having failed many times to destroy the newly minted State of Israel, the "Palestinian" terrorists are presently desperate since their income has dwindled and they have no perspective of blackmailing anyone, least of all Europe who is fed up with Islamic terrorism, regardless of shade and color.

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