

The Anatomy of Exile

Zeeva Bukai

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In Zeeva Bukai's novel *The Anatomy of Exile*, a Jewish Israeli mother struggles to reconcile herself to a tragedy from her past while watching a similar situation unfold for her own daughter.

Tamar's sister-in-law, Hadas, is killed in what at first seems to be a terror attack. In actuality, Hadas had a hidden relationship with a Palestinian man that precipitated the violence. Tamar's husband, Salim, is both Arab and Jewish; in the wake of his sister's murder, he moves his family to the US, determined to start over. When a Palestinian family moves into their building, Tamar's daughter Ruby falls in love with one of their sons, Faisal, but all Tamar can see is history threatening to repeat itself, which she is determined to prevent. Her actions have unexpected, unintended consequences, impacting the two families and those around them.

Its characterizations nuanced and complicated, the novel reflects deep cultural mores and customs from both Palestinian and Israeli cultures. The tensions between the two families, as well as the internal tensions within Salim, play out in both action and conversation. And each scene is fleshed out with explicit and implicit details: about the way Tamar found out about the Yom Kippur War starting; the way Faisal's mother makes her coffee like Salim's sister used to; the way Tamar cannot understand Faisal's family in the way that Salim can; and the ease in which Tamar and her family walk through Jaffa in a way that Faisal and his brother cannot.

How history is dealt with in the present matters in *The Anatomy of Exile*, a novel that lays bare human complexities with tentative, wistful hope.

JAIME HERNDON (January / February 2025)

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