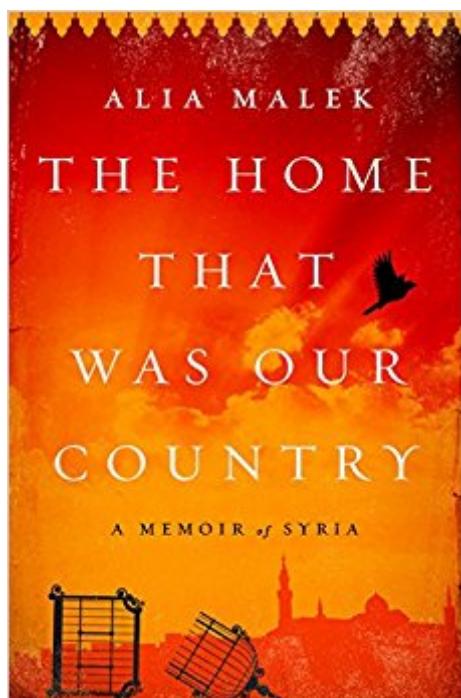


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# The Home That Was Our Country: A Memoir Of Syria



## Synopsis

At the Arab Spring's hopeful start, Alia Malek returned to Damascus to reclaim her grandmother's apartment, which had been lost to her family since Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970. Its loss was central to her parent's decision to make their lives in America. In chronicling the people who lived in the Tahaan building, past and present, Alia portrays the Syrians—the Muslims, Christians, Jews, Armenians, and Kurds—who worked, loved, and suffered in close quarters, mirroring the political shifts in their country. Restoring her family's home as the country comes apart, she learns how to speak the coded language of oppression that exists in a dictatorship, while privately confronting her own fears about Syria's future. *The Home That Was Our Country* is a deeply researched, personal journey that shines a delicate but piercing light on Syrian history, society, and politics. Teeming with insights, the narrative weaves acute political analysis with a century of intimate family history, ultimately delivering an unforgettable portrait of the Syria that is being erased.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Nation Books; 1 edition (February 28, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1568585322

ISBN-13: 978-1568585321

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.2 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 50 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #79,766 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in Books > History > Middle East > Syria #56 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Middle East #109 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Middle Eastern

## Customer Reviews

"In *The Home That Was Our Country*, Alia Malek masterfully weaves together the personal and the political, and in so doing creates an unforgettable portrait of modern Syria in all its complexities and tragedies. Malek renders multiple generations of family, friends and neighbors vividly but unsentimentally, and what emerges is a portrait of a great people held back by tyranny. As Syria suffers through its darkest days, she reminds us of the humans behind the statistics. Completely

engrossing and lucid, the book explains Syria's devolution better than anything I've read."•Dave Eggers"What Alia Malek has done in *The Home That Was Our Country* is nothing short of extraordinary. With deep love and clear-eyed honesty, she weaves together the story of a family and the history of a country. Malek addresses the personal and the political like no other writer I have read recently. This book is an urgent and necessary read."•Laila Lalami, author of *THE MOOR'S ACCOUNT*"Alia Malek's beautiful, arresting portrait of a Syrian family over generations takes you straight to the heart of that country's agony. Malek brings you inside the intimate world of a Damascus apartment building, while weaving in her own experiences as a journalist-laying bare the struggle for freedom like no other work I know. The Syrian war is perhaps the most profound moral and political crisis of our era, and this unforgettable book will forever change the way you see it and the Middle East."•Anand Gopal, author of *NO GOOD MEN AMONG THE LIVING*"Alia Malek has written a beautiful, nuanced account of Syria recalling its complex political and social history, its many peoples, and her own family in this vividly detailed memoir. For a deeper understanding of the past and of the present Middle East, read this book. It offers not easy answers, but the "rougher edges of truth" that allow for a more profoundly humanistic portrait of the region and the causes of the current unrest. I missed home as I read: the hospitality and customs and cuisine; the diverse inhabitants that make up the rich tapestry of the old cities and villages; the women, of all socioeconomic backgrounds, who form the backbone of family life-the way it once was."•Micheline Aharonian Marcom, author of *THREE APPLES FELL FROM HEAVEN*"Alia Malek takes us on a journey through time as she travels from her birthplace of Baltimore to the country from which her family hails, Syria. There she rediscovers her own family history through the renovation of her grandmother's home. She finds the meaning of what it is to be Syrian through the diverse characters that lived in her grandmother's building in Damascus. But as Malek restores her grandmother's home she watches her country fall apart with the Syrian conflict unfolding in the background. She tells the story of violence engulfing Syria as a brutal war shatters the mosaic of ethnicities and faiths that make up the Syria she'd always known. A beautiful, nuanced and human memoir that weaves the tale of Syria's history through Malek's own family and leaves the reader with the vivid sense of loss, alienation and fear likely common to all Syrians trapped in this conflict."•Leila Fadel, Middle East Correspondent, NPR "Moving and insightful, Malek's memoir combines sharp-eyed observations of Syrian politics, only occasionally overdone, with elegiac commentary on home, exile, and a bygone era. Provocative, richly detailed reading."•Kirkus Reviews "Malek's multigenerational memoir is a brilliant combination of geopolitics and family history...Malek courageously tells the stories of unforgettable family members and friends, including

underground humanitarian aid workers who continue despite the risk of torture and execution."•Publishers Weekly "Malek's writing vividly captures the personalities of her family members and friends as well as her own impressions of Syria, allowing readers insight into the personal stakes of the ongoing war."•Laura Chanoux, Booklist "The Home That Was Our Country, is one of the finest examples of this new testimonial writing... Malek's memoir will remain essential reading in the emerging body of literary reportage from Syria in English... Such stories couldn't be more urgent."•New York Times Book Review "Alia Malek has penned a powerful and necessary read that sheds light on and helps our own understanding of the people behind the crisis in Syria."•The Toronto Star

Alia Malek is an award-winning journalist and civil rights lawyer. She is the author of *A Country Called Amreeka* and editor of *Patriot Acts* and *EUROPA*. Her reporting has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *Nation*, and *Christian Science Monitor*, among others.

This is the book we NEED in 2017. A human account of Syria which gives context to the current crisis. Definitely a must read.

Alia Malek, using the reconstruction of her grandmother's home as a framework, offers an introduction to Syria, not only its political history but also its social organization. The reader marvels along with the author at her reacquaintance with an enormous extended family. One feels like a bystander reading vivid evocations of a social network embracing neighbors of differing faiths. And one feels outrage at the deliberate destruction of such a caring community. Malek's peculiar blend of citizenships has allowed her both the intimacy of access and the perspective of detachment. This is a beautiful book.

I just finished reading this book. To say I enjoyed it would be too simple. It was at times enjoyable and at others painful. I never thought I would have to stop reading a book for 3 days just to recover from the sadness I felt. The author used the story of her grandmother and a house to masterfully tell the history of the Levant from before WW I, the beautiful culture of the region, the events that shaped the turmoils the region lives today, and the atrocity of the Syrian war. It is simply amazing that a US born and educated person can immerse themselves in the Middle East and Syrian culture so well and weave a story with so much detail... you simply live in Syria with her. This book is a must read if you are an immigrant from the ME. You would feel like Alia is telling your story. It is also a MUST

read for anyone wanting to learn about the Syrian war, its roots, implications, and more importantly the human factor. Thank you for this great work. I am telling all my friends about it. I hope we all will get to enjoy Syria again, and if not us, hopefully our descendants.

This book was very well written and gave a deep and troubling perspective of life in Syria now.

I thought parts of the book were riveting, while others not so much. I liked that the author described the very palpable fear and despondency evident in Syria today. Initially, I thought that the fact that she was Christian would lessen the impact of the book, but I was surprisingly mistaken.

EVERYONE is affected by the Assad regime in negative ways. I didn't care for the long-winded history of her own family at first, because I wanted to read about the misery the people were feeling. But again, I appreciated the fear that she expressed, being that this reporter/attorney--the daughter of expat parents--took great risks to return home. So I learned to appreciate that she shared her unique lineage with us because it added a nice texture to the narrative. Even her family experienced loss as the regime arrested (and killed?) one of her family members. No one is safe, is the message. My most favorite chapter was the one where she sits in on a group therapy session in Damascus where very revealing role playing is used as a vehicle for the participants to express their frustrations with the current situation there. I also liked the chapters where she visits a refugee camp and the West Bank. Very interesting read.

I read a dozen portions of recommended books about Syria, but only this personal and thorough telling of Syria's past and present promised the sort of journey I craved. And Alia Malek did not disappoint. Her writing is captivating, transparent and enormously informative. Some day I will travel to Syria and see it for myself.

I want to thank Alia for allowing me to experience, through her amazing family's stories and homes, the wonders and complexity of Syria and the surrounding region. Unfortunately we will now never experience it personally thanks to despots like the al-Assad family and ISIS who have destroyed not just the buildings, but the very fabric of a society and culture. This deeply personal story is indeed a tragic history of Syria. This history is told viscerally through the characters and strength of the Malek family and the peoples who live in their buildings affected by the political shifts of their respective times. Do you remember having that one great teacher who so enthralled you, you didn't realize you were learning? Reading this book is much like that. I have read it twice now. I was engrossed

and enlightened by this balanced, well-researched and beautifully written documentary. If you are a life long learner you have to read this book. If you like spy novels and adventures stories you will love this book, and if you love well written poignant stories you will not be able to put this book down.

I love being transported into the Syria of the past. Alia grabbed my imagination and threw me back into the streets of Hama and Damascus. Her descriptions of the neighborhoods and people reminded me of my time living in Istanbul. I have a memory of a bitter orange tree that I can recall, despite never having physically been on Salma's terrace. I never want the book to end, so I read just a chapter or two each evening, although sometimes I cheat, because I don't want to put it down. I rarely re-read a book, but I already know I'll travel through these pages once again because there is so much beauty and heartache to take in. Thank you, Alia. xx

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