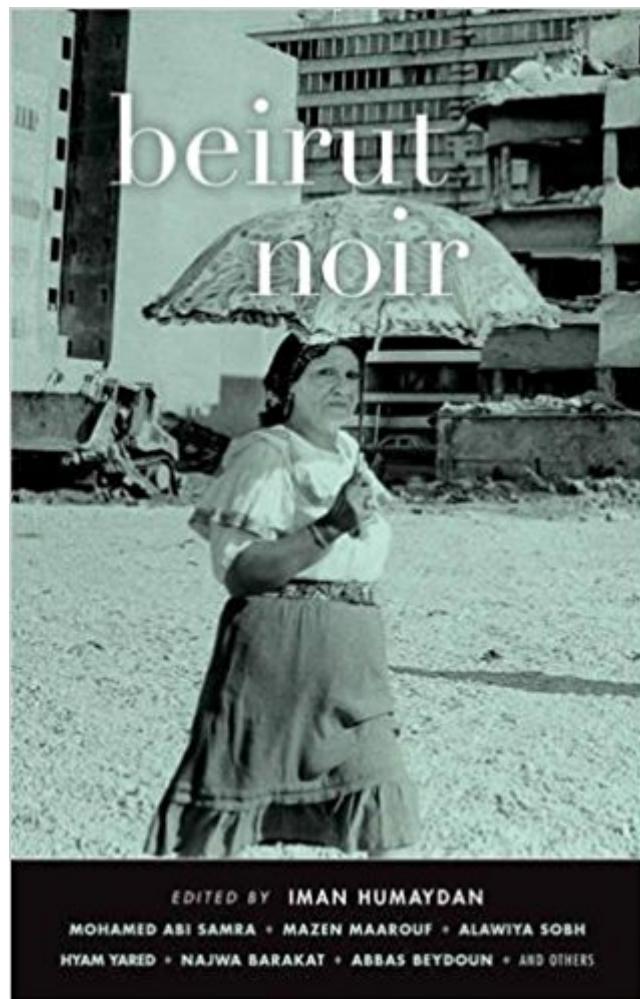


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# Beirut Noir (Akashic Noir)



## Synopsis

"Humaydan writes in her introduction to this haunting anthology that 'all of the stories are somehow framed by the Lebanese civil war, which lasted from approximately 1974 until 1990....' The crimes in this Akashic noir volume are often submerged in the greater tragedy of a beautiful city constantly torn within and without by violence."--Publishers Weekly "The stories' individual approaches to noir are as diverse as the Beirut landscape, its residents and exiles."--Middle East Monitor "In Beirut Noir, Iman Humaydan has selected a beautiful and often heartbreaking jigsaw portrait of its eponymous city....These are writers, multiple generations of Beirut, who live and breathe the neighborhoods of their capital, and each seems to care about even the worst of it. And there is occasional humor to be found in the darkest of its spaces. Beirut, as Humaydan explains in her introduction, is a 'city that dances on its wounds.' This is a book that transcends its place in a series and stands on its own as something terrific."--World Literature Today "The Lebanese authors featured in the collection draw from a much broader palette of Beirut life, and, true to the genre, they tap into their city's dark past and uncertain present. Some stories are absurd and humorous, but almost all are haunted in some way by a nagging memory, a war, a death."--The National Translated by Michelle Hartman. Akashic Books continues its groundbreaking series of original noir anthologies, launched in 2004 with Brooklyn Noir. Each story is set in a distinct neighborhood or location within the city of the book. Featuring brand-new stories by: Rawi Hage, Muhammad Abi Samra, Leila Eid, Hala Kawtharani, Marie Tawk, Bana Baydoun, Hyam Yared, Najwa Barakat, Alawiyeh Sobh, Mazen Zahreddine, Abbas Beydoun, Bachir Hilal, Zena El Khalil, Mazen Maarouf, and Tarek Abi Samra. Most of the writers in this volume are still living in Beirut, so this is an important contribution to Middle East literature--not the "outsider's perspective" that often characterizes contemporary literature set in the region. From the introduction by Iman Humaydan (translated by Michelle Hartman): "Beirut is a city of contradiction and paradox. It is an urban and rural city, one of violence and forgiveness, memory and forgetfulness. Beirut is a city of war and peace. This short story collection is a part of a vibrant, living recovery of Beirut. Beirut Noir recovers the city once again through writing, through the literary visions of its authors..." From within this collection of stories, a general attitude toward Beirut emerges: the city is viewed from a position of critique, doubt, disappointment, and despair. The stories here show the vast maze of the city that can't be found in tourist brochures or nostalgic depictions of Beirut that are completely out of touch with reality. Perhaps this goes without saying in a collection of stories titled Beirut Noir. But the 'noir' label here should be viewed from multiple angles, and it takes on many different forms in the stories. No doubt this is because it is imbricated in the distinct moments that Beirut has lived through and how they

are depicted in the stories."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The ArabLit count in 2014, which attempted to be global, was 7/40, or 17% by female authors. All of this excludes anthologies, which are more likely to be egalitarian. For instance, the excellent 2015 Beirut Noir anthology, ed. Iman Humaydan, featured more than half women's work."--Your Middle East"No book could possibly describe the different faces of 21st century Beirut better than Beirut Noir. This anthology of short stories by Lebanese writers living in different neighborhoods of Beirut covers the spectrum of the city's paradoxical moods and colors--urban, rural, glorious, broken, traditional and liberal Beirut. Edited by Iman Humaydan Younes and including stories by Rawi Hage, Muhammad Abi Samra, Leila Eid and others, Beirut Noir forsakes nostalgia and exposes the city with crude honesty. This book will not sugar coat Beirut, but will show you the city in all its vulnerability and let you fall in love with it as it truly is."--The Culture Trip"The fifteen new stories of Beirut Noir were assembled by Lebanese novelist Iman Humaydan and deftly translated by Michelle Hartman. They were written in all of Lebanon's three main languages--Arabic, English, and French--and they approach the noir genre in markedly different ways. But they are united by loss: their characters have been left behind after so many countrymen have fled for the Lebanese countryside, Canada, the Gulf, the United States, South America, and Europe."--Qantara

Iman Humaydan is a Lebanese writer, creative writing teacher, translator, editor/publisher, and

journalist. Her novels *B as in Beirut*, *Wild Mulberries*, *Other Lives*, and *The Weight of Paradise*, all written in Arabic, have been translated and published internationally. She is the cofounder of the Lebanese chapter of PEN, and splits her time between Beirut and Paris. She is the editor of *Beirut Noir*.

This is chilling, moving, and lovely, all in one. I was captivated.

NOTE: This review contains the names of all authors featured in this short story collection. In my experience browsing similar books online, this valuable information is not prominently displayed. As a reader with a strong interest in exploring Lebanese and other Arabic literature in [English] translation, I had been looking forward to the release of *Beirut Noir* for many months. After reading a copy I received through LibraryThing's Early Reviewer program, I can say my high expectations were satisfied. This collection featured authors whose fiction has been translated and with which I was previously familiar such as Najwa Barakat (author of *Oh, Salaam!*) and Abbas Beydoun (*Blood Test*). Also included was Lebanese-Canadian novelist Rawi Hage, who has written several critically acclaimed novels in English (*De Niro's Game*, *Cockroach*, *Carnival*). I was pleasantly surprised, however, that every other writer featured was unknown to me despite my relatively frequent searches for new and existing translations of modern Lebanese literature. So, I have now read twice as many Lebanese authors thanks to Akashic's Noir collections' *Beirut* edition. It's worth noting that the collection is edited by another excellent writer whose originally Arabic fiction is already available in English -- Iman Humaydan (sometimes credited as Iman Humaydan Younes, I think).. In addition to the authors already mentioned, this collection includes stories by:--Tarek Abi Samra;--Zena El Khalil;--Bana Beydoun;--Hyam Yared;--Leila Eid;--"The Amazin' Sardine

This is an anthology of stories written by different Lebanese authors. As no surprise, these war stories were, at times, painful to read. However, some stories were poetic. There is the mention of numbers, the soul, dolls and numbers. Beirut is also seen as a "companion of death" and as the "city that dances on its wounds." Although those descriptions made me fall back and regroup, I did not want to add the city of Beirut to my bucket list as a place to see. I only became excited about the city after reading about the lives of the characters. Their lives made me want to look at the photos and bios of the authors at the back of the book. I wondered did their faces in some way match the character in the story? I wanted to read why they had chosen the plot. Was it a true incident they had experienced, or was it one the author had heard from a friend? I did learn that Alawiya Sobh

had a deep interest in issues that women faced. Hyam Yared's interest is that no author should face oppression due to what he or she has written. This is his freedom fight. Hearing about Beirut on the news throughout the years was another reason why I wanted to read these stories. Each author chooses to portray the war in the finest detail. In "Sails On The Sidewalk," by Marie Tawk, the dead father is remembered just by a cough. In this story, I also learned that our personal lives can become entwined very tightly with the war. So tightly that we use the war as the reason for taking a certain action. I did not expect to care so deeply about the characters. I also thought the war would add a ho-hum background. I am glad to say Beirut Noir edited by Iman Humaydan surprised me. Thank you for the tour of a city.[akashicbooks.com/catalog/beirut-noir/](http://akashicbooks.com/catalog/beirut-noir/)

I loved this book. In fact, so far, this has been my favorite in the Noir series. I did wonder at times what may have been lost in translation between Arabic and English but that did not deter me from continuing to read nor did it detract from my enjoyment of this book. I think the editor made excellent choices in the material. It represented sections of the city of Beirut and while war was an important theme, and how could it not be given the sheer number of years that conflict has permeated the landscape, it was not the only theme. One of the fun aspects was understanding the experience of natives who both stayed in the city and those that left and returned after time away, often in former colonial enclaves. It was great to see the influences of all the cultures and religious experiences that have shaped Beirut. My picks? "The Bastard" by Tarek Abi Samra; "Beirut Apples" by Leila Eid; "Rupture" by Bachir Hilal; and "The Thread of Life" by Hala Kawtharani. My least favorite was originally written in English and is called "Dirty Teeth" by the Amazin' Sardine. Still, the writing was very poetic and I have to say, there were some very beautiful endings to some of the stories. There is a certain poetry and movement to Arabic writing that once you get into the flow (as in the flow in English) you come to appreciate it. I was also happy to note the role even tangentially, that Australia played in a few of the stories. Having lived in Australia and made several Lebanese friends, I was able to look at and appreciate things they had shared about being Lebanese and being Australian. Loved it. Recommend it. Keep an open mind and an open heart while reading it.

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