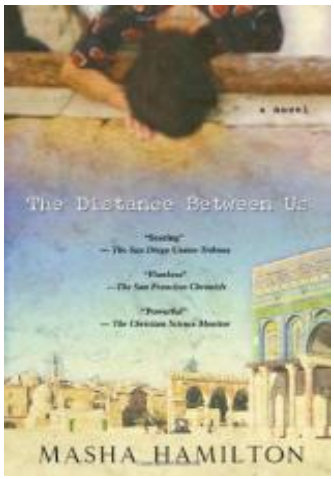
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The Distance Between Us

by Masha Hamilton



About the Book

An exclusive interview with an elusive Lebanese crime king and thug --- the kind of opportunity that every journalist lives for in the war-torn Middle East. But for Caddie Blair and her colleagues en route to just such an assignment, things are off-balance from the start. Not long into the trip, their Land Rover is ambushed by a band of radical militiamen, and photojournalist Marcus Lancour --- Caddie's colleague, friend, and lover --- is shot and killed in an assignment gone awry.

So begins this engaging account of an impassioned journalist who believes that getting the story --- while remaining detached from the situation and the people involved --- is everything. As Caddie says, if you get too close, you feel too much. And when you feel too much, you're sunk.

But her world soon begins to unravel when these long-held beliefs in objectivity and fairness ultimately lead to great personal loss. What follows is a sometimes unsettling yet always compassionate look at Caddie's tenuous struggle between a desire for revenge and freedom from the guilt she feels for having survived as she learns to incorporate her losses and recast her life.

In her latest novel, Masha Hamilton, a seasoned journalist herself, gives readers an insider's perspective about the decisions that war correspondents sometimes face and the impact these decisions have on their lives. **The Distance Between Us** allows readers to reconsider their own judgments and views about reporting, knowing that objectivity and detachment often come at a substantial cost.

Discussion Guide

1. The essence of this book is in its title. Distance exists in the political landscape of this novel as well as in Caddie's life. What are some of the historical and cultural differences that create distance between the Palestinians and the Jews in this

story? How does creating distance influence Caddie's relationship with Marcus? her professional colleagues? her friends? her community? herself?

2. In an instant, Caddie loses the two elements of her life most dear to her: Marcus and her professional detachment. How has reporting about violence in the past affected her?

3. After Marcus's death, Caddie finds herself drawn closer and closer to dangerous situations, putting herself at increasingly greater personal and professional risk, as if she were invincible. What drives this reckless behavior? What other professions encourage similar forms of escape? Does escaping become addictive?

4. What is behind Caddie's strong attraction to Goronsky? From the beginning, he is not honest with her yet she continues to rely on him.

5. Lingering thoughts of revenge plague Caddie. Did you expect this? How do her experiences with Goronsky, Avraham, Halima, and others affect her attitude?

6. The female characters in this novel --- including Ya'el, Sarah, Halima, Anya --- are diverse women who represent many cultures and values. How does each affect Caddie's actions and influence her decisions?

7. Memories of Marcus's death haunt Caddie. Is she in any way responsible for his death, or is she struggling with her own guilt for surviving the ambush? How does Marcus's journal --- and perhaps his death --- help her to heal?

8. Sarah tells Caddie, "Two kinds of people find their way to this place. Those who leave, and those who stay." Does Caddie's decision to stay surprise you? Will her personal and professional losses reshape her reporting style?

9. This fictional account of violence in the Middle East parallels many real-life, contemporary scenarios, both at home and abroad (for example, the war in Iraq, September 11, Columbine High School, Kosovo, Sarajevo, and Sudan). What motivates the kind of coverage given to these events? Is the reporting informative or voyeuristic, merely feeding the general public's appetite for violence?

10. This book is dedicated to Kevin Carter, a photojournalist who won a Pulitzer Prize for his disturbing photo of the famine in Sudan. In the picture, a gaunt Sudanese child crouches low to the ground while a vulture lurks nearby. Not long after winning the Pulitzer, Carter took his life. As a strict observer, journalists sometimes may have to let violence and brutality occur because if they become involved, they may change the outcome of the event or the public's understanding of a situation. Are there situations when a journalist should become a participant or is it better to remain an observer?

Author Bio

Masha Hamilton is the author of five acclaimed novels, most recently WHAT CHANGES EVERYTHING, which the *Washington Post* praised for its "elegantly wrought prose (which) conveys terror as well as tenderness" and 31 HOURS, which the *Washington Post* called one of the best novels of 2009. In October 2013, she finished 16 months working in Afghanistan as Director of Communications and Public Diplomacy at the US Embassy.

She is currently working as Communications Director for Concern Worldwide. She also founded two world literacy projects, the Camel Book Drive and the Afghan Women's Writing Project. She is the winner of the 2010 Women's National Book Association award, presented "to a living American woman who derives part or all of her income from books and allied arts, and who has done meritorious work in the world of books beyond the duties or responsibilities of her profession or occupation."

She began her career as a fulltime journalist, working in Maine, Indiana and New York City before being sent by the Associated Press to the Middle East, where she was news editor for five years, including the period of the first intefadeh, and then moving to Moscow, where she worked for five years during the collapse of Communism, reporting for the Los Angeles Times and NBC-Mutual Radio and writing a monthly column, "Postcards from Moscow." She also reported from Kenya in 2006, and from Afghanistan in 2004 and 2008.

Critical Praise

"Engaging from first page to last.... I could endlessly quote passages of glorious prose from this book, but won't. I'll let readers discover Hamilton's gifted way with words for themselves. The author has given us the scents, sights, and sounds of Jerusalem, the sorrows shared by Israeli and Arab cousins. And she's put starkly realistic faces on human weaknesses and strengths. Unbridled Books has picked a winner here."

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