

Gaddafi's Harem: The Story of a young woman and the abuses of power in Libya
by Annick Cojean.
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Mu-ammar Gaddafi was one of the more successful Arab dictators before the Arab Spring took hold, ruling his country with an iron fist from the coup that brought him to power in 1969 to his capture and death in 2011.

To the outside world he was a mass of contradictions, an increasingly unpredictable buffoon with a taste for outlandish clothing, absurd speeches and a bodyguard composed entirely of women, each more stunning than the last. He was a sustained supporter of international terrorism whom the West tried to kill in 1986, and who many believe was behind the bringing down of a Pan Am 747 on the Scottish town of Lockerbie in 1988. But he later renounced his support for terrorists, agreed to get rid of his WMDs and became more accepted by many Western countries.

Gaddafi's Harem does more than shine a bright light on the dark side of the dictator, (in any case all intelligent people would expect a dictator to have a dark side), and it reveals the depth of hypocrisy of a man who proclaimed a revolution in 1981 to liberate Arab women throughout the Muslim world.

Gaddafi's Harem is in two parts, the first, Soraya's Story, tells in the first person the experiences of a fifteen year old girl who was abducted and imprisoned in the dictator's Bab al-Azizia complex, and then physically and sexually abused by him to a revolting degree. She was not the only one to suffer this mistreatment, there were many others – Soraya puts the figure in the hundreds – whom he felt able to abuse at will. The second part, The Investigation, tells of the investigation by the senior French journalist Annick Cojean into the details of the story told her by Soraya, and to delve further into Gaddafi's depravity and sexual incontinence.

This is a powerful story that contributes yet another explanation to the revolution that toppled the dictator, a man's whose proclivities stopped at nothing, and who was willing to murder to get what he wanted.

Within a few years Mu-ammar Gaddafi will be but a bad stain on world history, but his victims will suffer through the indignities and abuse to which he subjected them long after he is forgotten.

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