



Bethlehem Road Murder

By Batya Gur
ISBN: 9780060954925

Introduction

Chief Superintendent Michael Ohayon is on the case again. This time, a young, once-strikingly beautiful Yemenite woman is bludgeoned in the attic of an abandoned Bethlehem Road house. As fate would have it, Michael's high school sweetheart, Ada, the new owner of the building, is the one who discovers the body. Michael and his team need to first find out the identity of the victim, and then track down all leads to the murderer. With racism and prejudice running deep within these ancient streets of Jerusalem, the complex homicide investigation follows several possible suspects who jointly encapsulate the entire Israeli experience in miniature. Set against the backdrop of tensions between Ashkenazim and Mizrahaim, hostility between Jews and Arabs, the controversial kidnapping of Yemenite babies at the end of the 1940s, and the al Aqsa Intifada, Ohayon solves the mystery, and dramatically reveals the subtext of Israeli society today.

Questions for Discussion

1. Most people who are not familiar with Israeli society assume that the tension is primarily between Arabs and Jews. Were you surprised to discover the many different tensions, between blacks and whites, Ashkenazim and Mizrahaim, and even neighbor against neighbor?
2. Why does Bality get so upset with Michael for buying a home? Why does he take it so personally?
3. Ada and Michael try to pick up where they left off, with Ada being the initiator. After they rekindle their romance, Ada fumes at Michael for not chasing after her all those years ago. She says it's the man's role to initiate and to run after the girl. Did you find her tirade hypocritical?
4. In an argument before her death, Zahara quarrels with her brother Netanel for trying to be Ashkenazi, and for marrying Hagar, a blonde-haired blue-eyed perfect Israeli. Ultimately, when we discover that Zahara had been having an affair with Yoram for many years, the hypocrisy of her criticisms becomes apparent. Do you think her hatred of Ashkenazim stems more from her forbidden relationship with Yoram or because of own personal experiences as a dark-skinned Jew?
5. There is a lifetime of bad blood between the Basharis and Beinishes. Even their children are forbidden to speak to one another. They say that the feud stems from infringements to each other's property. What do you think is the real reason for their feud?
6. Did Yoram try to kill Nessia because he discovered she had Zahara's purse, or because he realized she was the only one who knew about his affair with Zahara?
7. When Michael confronts Eli about his conversation with Orly Shushan, Eli says "She really is a bitch." Michael answers, "She's just your average survivor. She does her job, she thinks it's what they want from her and she goes for it with all her might, just like us." [pg 321] Regardless of where they came from, how are all the characters in the story survivors?
8. Why is Eli so jealous of Sergeant Yair?
9. Did Danny Bality have any redeeming qualities? How did he reveal his better side in the story?
10. Everyone in the story has secrets: Yoram and Zahara had a secret relationship; Nessia has a secret stash of stolen goods; Ada never revealed to Michael how much she liked him; Eli doesn't tell Michael how hurt he is by him; Rosenstein has this secret deal with Zahara about the apartment; and the Basharis have a daughter that was taken from them that they never speak of. Why is there so much secrecy in this story?
11. On page 334, Efraim Beinish speaks to Michael about trying to give Yoram everything a child could possibly need. He says, "But it didn't help, Mr. Ohayon. Believe me, you can't know . . . When the air is full of hatred—what can possibly grow there?" How does this statement apply to the plight of Israel today?

About the Author

Batya Gur was a literary critic for *Ha'aretz*, Israel's most prestigious paper, and the author of four other Michael Ohayon mysteries: *Murder Duet*, *The Saturday Morning Murder*, *Literary Murder*, and *Murder on a Kibbutz*. She earned her master's in Hebrew literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and taught literature for nearly twenty years. She passed away in the spring of 2005.