

Room To Read Group: The Little Coffee Shop In Kabul – Deborah Rodriguez. Report By Karen Teasdale

The group met on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and there was in the main a less than warm welcome for the book. It was released in 2013 and there was a general opinion that it was firmly aimed at the American market who are very ignorant of what was happening in Afghanistan. One has to accept that over a decade has elapsed since the book was written and much has changed in the fortunes of Afghanistan and this in some ways affects the way one views the story now.

The Author spent five years living in Kabul and owned a coffee house, she also married an Afghan.

The story is about five very different women who form unlikely friendship meeting in the cafe that gives the book its title. Interwoven into the story are male protagonists who provide some of the love interests. The main characters in the story are as follows:

American Sunny (possibly modelled on the author) who runs the coffee shop who moved to Kabul with a boyfriend after 9/11.

Sixty year old, widowed, modernist muslim Halajan who owns the building also remembers life before the Taliban took over.

Yasmina, a pregnant widowed young Afghan who was kidnapped by drug lords but saved by Sunny who now lives and works in the cafe but her pregnancy is being kept as a secret.

Wealthy American Candice who left her husband for an Afghan man.

Isabel a freelance journalist who writes about drug lords and opium addiction.

The story transports you into a world that is not easy to understand from a western perspective, you feel the warmth and hubbub of the cafe - that said there are shocking parts to the story that brutally cover the horrendous treatment of women and highlight the challenges that females face through no fault of their own.

Although the overwhelming opinion was negative it generated interesting discussion points amongst the group. People felt it had potential which was not developed and there was a feeling that it contained too many story arcs. There were plot points that could have been expanded but these disappeared or were terminated too quickly. The ending of the book was too convenient being tied up in a "pretty bow" which was not in any way realistic.

Overall it is a "nice" book to pass an afternoon or beach holiday with but could have offered so much more.

The "scores on the doors" were 4 stars for Book Groups and 2 stars to recommend to a friend.