



Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life

Sari Nusseibeh , Anthony David

Download now

Read Online 

Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life

Sari Nusseibeh , Anthony David

Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life Sari Nusseibeh , Anthony David
Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life

Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life Details

Date : Published March 29th 2007 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

ISBN : 9780374299507

Author : Sari Nusseibeh , Anthony David

Format : Hardcover 560 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography

 [Download Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life Sari Nusseibeh , Anthony David

From Reader Review Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life for online ebook

Pamela says

A very useful book for Americans who want to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through Palestinian eyes. Nusseibeh is not perhaps your typical Palestinian activist--he fully acknowledges the right of Israel to exist, is in favor of Western-style democratic institutions, and is forcefully and consistently anti-violence. He describes himself as the dreamy academic type (he is a professor of philosophy in Jerusalem) but has been drawn into Palestinian politics since early adulthood. His father was a prominent Palestinian diplomat.

I don't agree in some significant ways with Nusseibeh's interpretations of key historical events. The Israelis went on a big land grab in 1948? Um--what about the part where the Arabs attacked the newly created state in that year, refusing to accept the UN plan that gave both Palestinians and Jews a state? Yes, the Israelis did claim some new land in that conflict, as often happens in a war--in this case a war not of their own making. Similarly, in 1967, the Israelis should have somehow known that the five Arab armies that were massing to attack Israel were just "grandstanding." Hm. But despite my objections here and elsewhere, I found myself incredibly moved by this book. When so much has gone wrong--when there is so much hatred on both sides--it's incredible that one man refuses to quit fighting for Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and peacemaking, in big ways and small (Nusseibeh was one of the figures behind the creation of a Palestinian-Israeli version of *Sesame Street* that aired for some years.)

This book is something of a companion volume to Amos Oz's amazing *A Tale of Love and Darkness*--in fact, the Israeli Oz and Nusseibeh are friends and were born in the same year. You won't get the literary and emotional experience you get from Oz here--this is more of a workaday narrative. But it's well worth reading. Nusseibeh seems an unusually admirable political actor and man.

Ron says

Written by Palestinian peace activist Sari Nusseibeh, this book is an immensely readable personal and political memoir - an account of a life lived in a "broken and violated land." Descendant of a patrician family in Jerusalem, tracing its history back to the seventh century, the author was educated in England and, following in his father's footsteps, devoted his years to advocating reason and nonviolence in the resolution of Arab-Israeli conflicts. A student and later a professor of philosophy, he first believed that Arabs and Israelis could live together as citizens of a single nation. Then, after the 1967 war, he came to the conclusion that a two-nation solution was in the best interests of both peoples.

Over the years, in his account, he has watched both of those objectives resisted and undermined by the objectives of those with political power - the Israelis through a campaign of seizing territory in the West Bank for Jewish settlements, and the PLO by demanding the return of all occupied lands. Meanwhile, moderates such as himself are cast as "dangerous," and his efforts at building bridges between Arabs and Jews are often frustrated. When the intifada of the 1980s flares up, Nusseibeh plays a strategic role in secretly writing and publishing materials that provide it with a voice and direction, channeling the energy of street demonstrations away from violence. And he is instrumental in building a nation-building organization to set the stage for Arafat's return from exile in Tunis to govern the West Bank and Gaza. At the same time, he is reaching out to peace activists among Israelis, even while the second intifada surges to life and Arab extremists begin to have a deadly impact with suicide bombs.

The entire story - which brings us to the present with the building of Sharon's walls and the victory of Hamas in Palestinian elections - is a continuing account of hopes raised and then crushed. While it can be read as an indictment of Israeli policies against the Palestinians, it portrays the PLO as ridden with corruption and the Islamist Hamas organization as blindly and dangerously irrational. Moved deeply by visions of Jeffersonian democracy, Nusseibeh is confronted over and over again with the extreme difficulty of seeing reason prevail in the service of government, diplomacy, and building social institutions. What he falls back on at the end is a belief that the fundamental decency of humans - as reflected in sacred scriptures - will eventually lead people to see the folly of their ways. This is a fine book for portraying a moderate and measured history of the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1948 to the present. Readers may also enjoy Jeffrey Goldberg's "Prisoners: A Muslim and a Jew Across the Middle East Divide."

Andrew Rosner says

I read this book from my perspective as a supporter of Israel, so I wasn't sure what to expect. Nusseibeh establishes himself as a decent and thoughtful observer of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. On the whole, I'd say it's a relatively balanced view, although his recollection of specific incidents should be buttressed by further reading for the curious. For example, his account of the 1967 war is subtly flawed. He writes that Egypt's blockade of the Straits of Tiran "was for Israel, an act of war"; by law, though, it is an act of war. His recounting of how Jordan became involved in the war is correct in several respects (e.g., King Hussein's reluctance to become involved) but he also gave me the impression that Jordanian soldiers were firing potshots at Israel, when they in fact launched 6,000 shells at Jewish Jerusalem.

Later on, he cites the Mohammad Al-Dura incident as an article of faith, although as a result Philippe Karsenty's recent successful appeal regarding the France 2 camera footage, that incident was almost certainly staged. To be fair, though, the book was published before this judgement was handed down, although he could have at least acknowledged the ongoing controversy surrounding this incident.

In the grander scheme of things, Nusseibeh deserves credit for his courage and his willingness to challenge the Palestinian establishment's sacred cows, like the right of return.

If the book has one major flaw, it's that Nusseibeh doesn't connect the failures of Palestinian society with the failures of Islamic societies as a whole. Even if you believe that everything he writes concerning the history of the region is gospel, it does not entirely explain the Palestinian predicament. One might believe that suicide bombing is the product of "hopelessness", but then how do you explain 9/11, or Bali? There's more than just despair at the root of this phenomenon. Nusseibeh can't quite bring himself to make this leap, although there are times in the book when I thought he might.

In the end, it's still a worthwhile read, and one that hopefully inspires people to read more about the Middle East.

Baljit says

Sari presents a frank account of his life in Palestine, his philosophy, his role as an activist and politician. Despite the breakdown in peace talks over and over again, he remains ever hopeful that Israel and Palestine will achieve a two state resolution. What is amazing is the way Sari challenges fellow Palestinians to think differently. Palestine certainly could do with more thinkers like him.

Catherine Richmond says

When the Palestinians opened a casino, it clicked: I know this story. It's a story of Europeans claiming a new place, disregarding property rights of current residents, marginalizing and dehumanizing the residents until violence erupted into war. It's the story of Native Americans.

The Nusseibeh family arrived in Palestine in 638 AD. The family tree includes judges, mayors, orange-grove owners, and the keepers of the key to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The author has a front-row seat on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He ties together and provides context for episodic events in the news.

Most Israelis and Palestinians want peace. But some politicians feed the ongoing war. Some who fuel the violence were victims of ethnic cleansing in another country. Instead of empathy and compassion, they are dominated by hatred and fear. *Once Upon a Country* is highly recommended to increase understanding of the conflict and the pathway toward peace.

Tariq Mahmood says

It's my first book on the struggle for Palestine and boy was I happy with my decision. Sari has really demonstrated a dignified and courageous approach to freedom struggle. I particularly enjoyed his analogies of the most acrimonious dispute in the world. I also gained a great understanding of the regional politics between Israeli, Hamas and Fatah. If only there were more statesmen like Sari the Arab world would be so much better. I found the book the world very engaging and deeply insightful, filled with one liners and anecdotes. My only criticism is at times the author seems slightly vain glorious. He seemed to know every Israeli move in advance and pointed out every flaw in PLO, almost too intuitively. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't, but parts of the book seem like a self appraisal to me at least in the true Middle Eastern fashion.

Bookmarks Magazine says

Sari Nusseibeh is the ultimate insider, and he draws on that vast experience to shed light on the prospects for peace in the Middle East. He patiently examines complex issues and offers enough nuances to please readers who want to understand the ongoing conflict on a deeper level. The author's relatively evenhanded stance (despite a less-than-flattering portrayal of former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, as well as some contested historical details) distinguishes *Once Upon a Country* from other, more agenda-driven efforts, as does its call for nonviolent resolution and compromise. Nusseibeh, echoing Voltaire's notion that "the wisest course of action is surely to tend to your own garden," casts a critical eye on both sides. The result is "a deeply admirable book by a deeply admirable man" (*New York Times Book Review*).

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Afaf says

This one is supposed to be an unbiased view of the conflict from the Palestinian side. The author is an intellectual with very deep roots in Jerusalem. He does a good job in describing the history of the conflict. This is a good book to get an overview about this complex conflict and the different events in history which shaped it. That was my favorite part, where he delves into the history of this ancient land. He describes living and growing up in Jerusalem, then starting his family there. Its interesting to read about the day to day of someone growing up and living in the middle of the conflict.

You always get a sense of a hopeful optimism from the author, even when things are completely falling apart around him in his city. He talks about looking ahead and working through the obstacles. The book did run a little longer than I would have preferred. But overall a very informative book and I learned a lot.

Fazackerly Toast says

a really useful informative educational book, especially for an ignoramus like me, who knows so little about the Palestinian situation and how it got to the state it is in today. I marvel at Nusseibeh, his courage, integrity, sanity, determination and patience.

Sarah Lameche says

This is the first book about Palestine that really delves into the reasons as to why certain groups came into power. Sari certainly doesn't shy away from the truth and it makes a refreshing change to read about where BOTH sides made mistakes. Many of the books I have read regarding Palestine are written about the effect the occupation has had on that person and sometimes their family too. This book is rather different in that though his family life is touched on, it's more about the politics of the region. Don't get me wrong, it's an extremely interesting book. In fact though other books were more moving this book really made me feel like I understood more of why certain things did (or didn't) happen. The Occupation could have and should have been over a long time ago. Choices were made from both sides that prevented this from happening. However that doesn't mean that it can never happen. Yet only once lessons are learned and more importantly once the outside world steps in to stop this atrocity continuing, rather than averting our eyes.

Douglas says

This is a remarkable book. The collaborated autobiography of a Palestinian Arab born around 1949 whose family have been aristocrats of Jerusalem for 1300 years. Sari is very much a moderate and with Oxford and Harvard degrees exposes the extremists on both sides of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as being the problem in the way of a settlement. He sees two independent states, each with capitals in Jerusalem, as inevitable and the hardliners have delayed this process by twenty years. The Palestinians have to give up the right to return and in return Israel has to give them their own state. He is a professor of philosophy trained to demolish fixed ideas at Oxford with an interest in how Arab philosophy underlay the Renaissance. He has been dragged into political life at times but is happiest in his role as President of the Arab University in Jerusalem which he did much to create. The extraordinary life of a remarkable man and long may he survive to moderate.

Elona says

it was the first non-fiction book I read in a while and I really enjoyed holding the hardcopy book and reading more about the history of the region from a source with so much memory of the events.

some of the passages that struck me:

"Freedom is not some innate quality stamped on our foreheads like a product bar code; nor is it something external like a particular passport or the right amount of money on the bank. Freedom is an expression of the will, and the amount you have of it, is in direct proportion to your mastery of your fear and egotism. By exercising the will, the individual carves out a distinct identity. [...] like an individual, a nation has to forget its identity through constant acts of the will."

"Islam's message to Man is that he's on his own; he can no longer count on miracles or divine revelation or the deus ex machina. [...] The time had come for Man to throw off the training wheels and look to Reason for future deliverance."

"Thinking and fear go together. The secret is not to stop fearing: it is to learn how to live with it."

"Violence was therefore the key. Israel often used violence as a tactical step to provoke a violent reaction, which it then used as an excuse for further violence in pursuit of its political end. [...] keeping focus on the guerrillas provided the perfect cover for preventing a functioning government from developing in the West Bank. The war against PLO 'monsters' permitted a permanent state of emergency. All civil dissent within the Occupied Territory was therefore cast as an extension of the international terrorist war of extermination against the Jewish state."

"Often it seemed that the Israeli military occupation fought terror only to promote it, because their real enemies were moderates. [...] there arose a strategy of blaming moderates for the acts of extremists, crushing the moderates, and leaving the extremists intact-just in case they needed them as an excuse to smash the next crop of moderates in the future."

Sherri says

I had high hopes for this book, but was somewhat disappointed. I like Nusseibeh, and it is clear from the book that he has worked tirelessly to try to find a peaceful resolution between the Israelis and Palestinians. I admire him for that and for keeping hope in a situation that appears hopeless. The problem is that his book just isn't very good. It is disjointed and choppy. He often doesn't give enough background or information to help someone who does not live in those countries understand what he is discussing. More character development would have helped me understand the players and their motivations a little better and would have given the book more emotional impact. I read it because I wanted to understand the Israeli/Palestinian conflict from the perspective of a Palestinian. I think the book did help me with this, although it was more difficult --even tedious--than it had to be.

I do think this conflict would end quickly if there were more reasonable people like Nusseibeh on both sides. I hope for that in the future.

Benjamin says

His descriptions of his childhood in pre 1967 Jerusalem were interesting as a period piece, and the guy's obviously a talented writer with stories to tell. I was unimpressed, however, with his historical analyses. He omits anything that reflects badly on the Palestinians, who are always just, and the Israelis are always in the wrong.

His view of Abu Jihad was laughable and either intellectually dishonest or overly naive. He claims Abu Jihad was a gentleman and basically never inflicted harm on anyone. But the next page he would recount how, anytime anyone tried to intimidate the author, Abu Jihad would quickly step in and the intimidators would immediately back down. I wonder why that was?

Al says

I feel like this book has done more to help me understand the heart of the issues in the Holy Land than anything else I have been exposed to. He is uniquely involved, and is indeed a very important voice. On the logical level of debate, his ideas ring true in my ears. On the philosophical level of the human experience, his arguments resonate with me as well. If you have any interest in the human experience at all, you really must read this book. Thank you to my Goodreads friend, Elisa, for recommending it.
