

## HOLY CITY

*Amos Oz, Sari Nusseibeh, and Two Jerusalems*

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### I.

This paper is about Jerusalem, or more precisely, two Jerusalems—the Jewish Jerusalem and the Arab Jerusalem. For many years the Jewish and Arab populations have lived in different parts of the city, in different neighborhoods, separated by human contact and sense of community as well as by religion.

Looking at the city's long history, we can think of many more Jerusalems, Jerusalems identified by historical period, for example, or political control, the national origins of its people, or the visions of the three faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—which see the city as a holy place.

My awareness of the two Jerusalems has been deepened by reading the memoirs of two men—our contemporaries—who were born and grew up in the city. Their memoirs tell how they remember the place, how it looked and how it felt. We will focus mainly on thirty years—1939 to 1969—and later years as well, a short period in Jerusalem's long history, but years critical for understanding the city today and into the future.

During that period Israel was born as a state—in 1948—and fought Palestinians and Arab countries in the first Arab-Israeli War. Then, nineteen years later, in the June or Six-Day War of 1967, Israel conquered territory controlled by Egypt and Jordan, including the west bank of the Jordan River. The Jewish people took control of all of Jerusalem for the first time since Biblical times.

Our guides to the city and these events are Amos Oz and Sari Nusseibeh and their memoirs. Amos Oz is an Israeli Jew, born in 1939, when Britain ruled Palestine under a mandate from the League of Nations. Sari Nusseibeh is a Palestinian, born in 1949, ten years after Oz, when Jordan governed Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Amos Oz is the internationally acclaimed author of novels and nonfiction whose work has been translated from Hebrew into many languages. His memoir is *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, published in 2003, when he was 64.

Sari Nusseibeh's memoir is *Once Upon a Country*. It was written with Anthony David, and published in 2007, when Nusseibeh was 58. Nusseibeh is professor of philosophy and former president of Al-Quds, a Palestinian university in Jerusalem, and was for many years active in efforts to resolve the Palestinian- Israeli conflict.

Nusseibeh and Oz are friends, drawn together by a desire for peace and the establishment of two independent, sovereign states in the land they both consider their own. Oz and Nusseibeh have very different family histories and have lived very different lives. I'm not sure either believes that Jerusalem is a holy city.

Sari Nusseibeh, flying to Boston after Yasser Arafat's funeral in 2004, read Amos Oz's memoir, which tells of Oz's childhood in Jerusalem. Nusseibeh discovered that he—Nusseibeh—"was raised no more than a hundred feet away from where Oz lived out his childhood, just on the other side of the fortified 'No Man's Land ' established in the wake of the . . . Arab-Israeli War" of 1948.

In that time, Nusseibeh writes, "many Jews didn't know Arabs . . . [Oz's] descriptions of a parallel city on the other side of the conflict startled me. . . . there were hardly any Arabs in his story, and not a hint of the world I knew as a child." He "knew nothing of the ancient cobbled lanes of the Old City"; he did not know the Temple Mount.

The Temple Mount, also called the Noble Sanctuary, is sacred to Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Located in what is known as the Old City, the Temple Mount is a raised area of about 35 acres and the site of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, and the Western Wall.

The Western Wall is a remnant of the Second Temple and the holiest site in Judaism. The golden Dome of the Rock, visible from most parts of the city, tops a Muslim shrine marking the place from which the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven. In Jewish tradition it is here that Abraham, progenitor and first patriarch of the Hebrew people, is said to have prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac.

## **II. Amos Oz's Jerusalem**

### *Home*

Oz begins his story with these words: "I was born and bred in a tiny, low-ceilinged ground-floor apartment. My parents slept on a sofa bed that filled their room almost from wall to wall when it was opened up each evening." That room functioned as his parents' bedroom as well as the family's living and dining room, study, and library. "Life in our little apartment," Oz recalls, "resembled life in a submarine."

Oz's parents, grandparents, and other members of the family immigrated from Eastern Europe from 1919 into the early 1930s, settling in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. His mother, who had studied at Prague University and graduated from university in Jerusalem, tutored students for examinations.

His father had degrees from universities in Vilna and Jerusalem. He had scholarly ambitions, but worked much of his life as a librarian at the National Library. His father's uncle Joseph Klaussner, whom Amos and his parents visited often, was a renowned scholar, writer, and political radical whom Menachem Begin proposed as a rival candidate to Chaim Weizmann to be first president of Israel. Oz's childhood is filled with visits to the homes of prominent, learned European writers and intellectuals.

Books filled the Oz home. His parents spoke and read many European languages, but spoke in Russian or Polish when they didn't want Amos to understand. "Out of cultural considerations they mostly read books in German or English, and presumably they dreamed in Yiddish," Oz writes, "but the only language they taught me was Hebrew. . . . On my parents' scale of values, the more Western something was, the more cultured it was considered."

### *Neighborhoods*

Amos was an only child. He grew up in the Jewish neighborhood known as Karem Avraham—Abrahams's Vineyard, the setting of much of his fiction. He was jealous of the people in Tel Aviv, he writes: "In Kerem Avraham we didn't any celebrities or even brothers of celebrities. All we had were the Minor Prophets in our street names: Amos Street, Obadiah Street, Zephaniah Street, Haggai, Zechariah, Nahum, Malachi, Joel, Habakkuk, Hosea, Micah, and Jonah. The lot." Most of our neighbors were petty clerks, small retailers, bank tellers, cinema ticket sellers, schoolteachers, dispensers of private lessons, or dentists."

Because of the British curfew and political unrest, "the whole town was locked indoors at eight o'clock in the evening, and on evenings when there was no curfew, Jerusalem locked itself in of its own accord."

"Books were the slender lifeline that attached our submarine to the outside world. We were surrounded on all sides by mountains, caves, and deserts, the British, the Arabs, and the underground fighters, salvos of machine-gun fire in the night, explosions, ambushes, arrests, house-to-house searches, stifled dread of what awaited us in the days to come."

"The Jerusalem my parents looked up to [was far from] where we lived: it was in leafy Rehavia with its gardens and its strains of piano music, it was in three or four cafés with gilded chandeliers on the Jaffa Road or Ben Yehuda Street, in the halls of the YMCA or the King David Hotel, where culture-seeking Jews and Arabs mixed with cultivated Englishmen with perfect manners . . . . Or perhaps such a Jerusalem . . . . existed only in the dreams of [people] who lived in Kerem Avraham."

As the years passed Oz became aware that Jerusalem, under British rule must have been "a fascinatingly cultured city. It had big businessmen, musicians, scholars, and writers: Martin Buber . . . and other eminent academics and artists. Sometimes as we walked . . . , my father would whisper to me: 'Look, there is a scholar with a worldwide reputation.' I did not know what he meant. I thought that having a worldwide reputation was somehow connected with having weak legs, because the person in question was often an elderly man who felt his way with a stick and stumbled as he walked along, and wore a heavy woolen suit even in summer. "

Oz does not write much about Palestinians, but he provides a rich description of walking, when he was about age 8, from his neighborhood to the villa of a rich Arab family, "pressing on into the world of cypresses, grilles, cornices, and stone walls. This was the opposite Jerusalem, the Jerusalem I hardly knew, the Abyssinian, Arab, pilgrim, Ottoman, missionary, German, Greek, brooding, Armenian, American, monastic, Italian, Russian Jerusalem, thick with pine trees, menacing yet fascinating, with its bells and winged enchantments that were forbidden to you because they were alien and hostile, a veiled city, concealing dangerous secrets, heavy with crosses, turrets, mosques, and mysteries, a dignified and silent city, through whose streets ministers of alien cults shrouded in black cloaks and priestly garb flitted like dark shadows, monks and nuns, kadis and muezzins, notables, worshippers, pilgrims, veiled women, and cowed priests"

### *City of dreams*

Oz's family dreamed of a different Jerusalem. His grandfather, as young man in Odessa, wrote poems in Russian about a "Jerusalem whose streets are paved with onyx and jasper, an angel standing at every street corner, the sky above shining with the radiant light of the Seven Heavens."

After living in Jerusalem for years, his grandfather "penned passionate verses in Russian about the splendors of the Hebrew language, [and] the enchantments of Jerusalem, not the poverty-stricken, dusty, heat-stifled city of zealots but a Jerusalem whose streets are fragrant with myrrh and frankincense, where an angel of God floats over every one of its squares."

His words challenged by his young grandchild, "Grandpa Alexander, . . . furious at my impertinent words, . . .roared: "The real Jerusalem? What on earth does a little bed-wetter like you know about the real Jerusalem?! The real Jerusalem is the one in my poems.""

Years later Oz told David Remnick of *The New Yorker*, "my father and others would say to me, 'One day, Amos, not in our lifetime but in yours, this Jerusalem is going to evolve and become a real city. . .'"—like a European city,

"Deep down there was this longing and yearning. You walked in Rehavia, a kind of German-Jewish, fairly wealthy neighborhood of Jerusalem, you walked there on Saturday at siesta time,

when the streets were absolutely empty, and you would hear from many windows the sound of pianos. They were all craving Europe, whether it was Chopin or Mozart or Brahms.”

“Everyone in Jerusalem—Jewish Jerusalem—of those days missed something,” Oz told Remnick, “Other places, other cultures, other languages, other people. It was, for most Jews, an exile, a refugee camp.”

### **III. War and the Birth of Israel**

When Britain announced in 1947 that it would leave Palestine the following year, the United Nations proposed that the land be partitioned into two states, one Arab, one Jewish, and that Jerusalem be administered internationally. Jewish leaders accepted the partition plan; Arab governments rejected it.

On the night the UN voted to adopt the plan, the Karem Avraham neighborhood erupted in joyous celebration. Amos's usually distant father climbed into bed with his 8-year-old son. What did the vote mean? Oz remembers: "My father told me under my blanket in the early hours of November 30, 1947, 'Bullies may well bother you in the street or at school someday. They may do it precisely because you are a bit like me. But from now on, from the moment we have our own state, you will never be bullied just because you are a Jew and because Jews are so-and-sos. Not that. Never again. From tonight that's finished here. Forever.'"

A month later the Jewish parts of Jerusalem were under siege from Palestinian militants and guerrillas. When the British troops left in May 1948, Jewish leaders declared the State of Israel. Thousands of Arabs fled or were expelled. Arab armies invaded the new nation. "We lived in uninterrupted cavelike darkness, night and day," Oz writes.

#### *Armistice*

An armistice the next year divided Palestine between Israel and the neighboring Arab state of Jordan. Jordan took over the West Bank of the Jordan River, annexed East Jerusalem, and banned Jews from the Old City. Israel declared Jerusalem its capital. The city was officially divided.

"High concrete walls were erected," Oz says, "to block streets that were half in Israeli Jerusalem and half in Arab Jerusalem. Here and there corrugated iron barriers were put up to conceal passersby in West Jerusalem from the view of the snipers on the rooftops of the eastern part of the city. A fortified strip of barbed wire, minefields, firing positions, and observation posts crossed the whole city, enclosing the Israeli section" on three sides. Travel between East and West was limited to one gate or check-point; only diplomats and some foreign tourists were allowed to cross.

The war was hard on everyone. Jews and Arabs lost neighborhoods and towns. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs were displaced and Israel received hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Arab countries. In the home of Oz's uncle, "thousands of books . . . had been swept off the shelves and thrown on the floor or used to make barricades and shelters against bullets fired through the windows of the house, which had become firing positions."

#### IV. Nusseibeh's Jerusalem 1949-1966

There is a Palestinian word for the war of 1947-48 and the creation of Israel. Palestinians call it "Nakba," meaning "the catastrophe." Sari Nusseibeh's father wrote about it. The son describes his father's account: It was a nightmare in which normal life disintegrated "into madness and chaos as professors, doctors, and shopkeepers on both sides manned checkpoints and traded fire with people who under different circumstances would have been houseguests, not targets. The moorings of civilization were uprooted, and military logic governed the thinking of two otherwise peace-loving peoples."

Sari Nusseibeh was born in 1949, ten years after Amos Oz. "The year of my conception, 1948," Nusseibeh writes, "witnessed the collapse of the Palestinian dream. It was a year that left Father fighting for his life in a Beirut hospital from bullet wounds in his legs [sustained in the war]; my mother huddled in a cramped Damascus apartment, where she eventually gave birth to me; and her family along with seven hundred thousand Palestinians driven from their homes. An ancient way of life had come to an end."

##### *Home and family*

Nusseibeh may have grown up near Oz's childhood home, but otherwise the two lived in different worlds. Nusseibeh's home in East Jerusalem, in his words, "had an old-world feeling to it, with Persian carpets, gold-embossed academic degrees on the wall, crystal decanters for after-dinner drinks, and dozens of finely buffed tennis trophies." Across the street was the American Colony, then (and now) a hotel, but formerly home to a group of devout Christians led by a couple who moved to Jerusalem in 1881 from the Lake View neighborhood in Chicago.

Sari was the youngest of six children. The Nusseibehs were one of a small group of Arab families who comprised the Jerusalem aristocracy. Sari's father was a prominent Palestinian lawyer and judge under British rule. After the 1948 war he served the government of Jordan as secretary of defense, governor of Jerusalem, and ambassador to England. Sari's mother's family had wealth and position, owning property in Jerusalem and rural Palestine, where King Abdullah of Jordan was a frequent guest.

Sari was raised, he writes, "surrounded by . . . a timeless and magical landscape. When my ancestors arrived in Jerusalem from Arabia thirteen centuries ago, the city's history was already

so hallowed by time — and of course by the ancient Jewish prophets who once roamed its streets — that it left the newcomers from the desert in awe. . . . After snatching the city away from the Byzantine Empire in the seventh century, Omar the Great made our family's ancestor High Judge of Jerusalem, and from that point on my family has served the Holy City as judges, teachers, Sufi sages, politicians, and as doorkeepers to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher."

As a child Sari "watched my uncle's camels graze among ruins of . . . Goldsmith's Souk, which had belonged to the Nusseibehs from time immemorial , . . I watched a different uncle, the doorkeeper of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, take a foot-long skeleton key and, . . . unlock a door thick enough to withstand a battering ram."

### *Another city*

Nusseibeh loved to explore the city. His walks, he says, "took me into the warrens of the Old City, full of smug shopkeepers with their golden pocket watches, old women hawking wares, and sweaty rooms of praying men or, if I was lucky, some whirling dervishes. The cafés resonated with the bubbling sounds of people smoking water pipes. I could spend hours skulking around the graveyards outside the Lion's Gate, or among the sacred sites on the Noble Sanctuary, and then out again on the other side. There I entered the dense, tangled streets of the Moroccan Quarter, dating back seven hundred years . . . Saladin's son built a mosque there in 1193 , and I got a thrill each time I saw it, because this was the spot where the Prophet had tethered his wondrous steed before his ascension.

"Hardly a day would go by when I didn't spy into the streets beyond No Man's Land. Sometimes I saw strange-looking buses and vehicles plying their way along the narrow streets. Sometimes a knot of black-clad men appeared from behind a corner and walked a short distance along a narrow street before disappearing again around another corner. . . What did I know of the Other Side? "

By 1963, Nusseibeh writes, "Jerusalem had recovered much of the life it had lost in 1948. . . [and] had reasserted its role as the world capital of religious pilgrimage . . . . If you could ignore No Man's Land and the refugee camps, it was as if nothing had ever happened."

## **V. The Six-Day War**

By the mid-1960s Amos Oz had been away from Jerusalem for many years. His mother died in 1952, a suicide; she was 38, he was 13. When Amos was 14½ he left his father and Jerusalem and moved to a kibbutz. In his own words, "I killed my father and the whole of Jerusalem, changed my name, and went on my own to Kibbutz Hulda to live."

He was Amos Klausner no longer. He was now Amos Oz. Kibbutz Hulda, a communal settlement in central Israel, became his home for more than more 30 years, and there he found

his true self in poetry and literature. Three times, in two wars, he served on active duty in the army. After his first period of army service, the kibbutz sent him to Hebrew University to study literature, because the kibbutz school needed a literature teacher. In 1960 he married a woman of the kibbutz.

1967 was the year of the Six-Day War, also called the June War. Israel was attacked or threatened by Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Israel counterattacked and in six days won a sweeping victory. It captured territory from all three countries, including the West Bank of the Jordan River and all of Jerusalem. Israel then annexed East Jerusalem, including the Old City, and bulldozed much of the Moslem quarter. Jubilant Israelis called its actions "liberation;" inflamed Arabs across the Middle East called it an "occupation." The Jewish people now controlled all of Jerusalem.

Oz emerged as a political actor just two months after the end of the 1967 war. Writing for a Labor newspaper, Oz called for the government immediately to begin negotiations with the Palestinians over the West Bank and Gaza. He predicted moral and political disaster if Israel retained the territories.

Oz began publishing books in the 1960s. In 1985, at age 46, he left the kibbutz and moved to the town of Arad in the desert hills overlooking the Dead Sea.

Sari Nusseibeh says that before the 1967 war he did not know any Jews or Israelis. He was at school and college in England from 1966 to 1973, but spent summers at home. He set out to learn about the "other side." He participated in an Israeli archeological excavation on Temple Mount, began to learn Hebrew, and for a month worked on a kibbutz.

Looking back to that time, he wrote later, "I no longer had a country, and the old ruling class my father represented had been plunged into a crisis from which it would never recover. The children of the privileged and educated, including all five of my siblings, began heading for the exits. . . . [from] the war-scarred, embattled, poor, and occupied city of Jerusalem."

Nusseibeh received bachelor's and master's degrees from Oxford. He worked briefly in Abu Dhabi for an oil company, married an English woman, and then moved to the U.S. to study philosophy at Harvard.

## **VI. Nusseibeh's Jerusalem after 1978**

### *Back home*

After living overseas for twelve years, and with a Harvard doctorate in hand, Nusseibeh moved home to Jerusalem in 1978. He and his wife took teaching jobs at Birzeit, a Palestinian

university, where he taught the humanities and philosophy for a dozen years. He also taught at Hebrew University.

I think Nusseibeh had no idea the turns his life would take. As a child he had listened day after day to political talk, and thought he wanted none of it. His intent was to become a professor of philosophy. But he was also an Arab Palestinian, in a time of national turbulence, with a strong awareness of the history of his people. He also had enormous respect for his father and his father's sense of public responsibility. Sari Nusseibeh found himself drawn into the public life of his country.

On his return to Jerusalem, Nusseibeh wrote later, "I relished the prospect of returning to a land of contrasts. I pictured [Israel-Palestine as one country] . . . with its population of Muslims, Jews, and Christians, with its invigorating clash of opposites, as an ideal place to engage in the sort of open dialogue that had frequently churned up renaissances in culture in the past. And as a teacher at both an Arab and a Jewish university, I could. . . help forge the Jewish-Arab state of my dreams."

The professors Nusseibeh moved into an apartment in the Muslim Quarter, in "the snarled lanes of the Old City," he writes. "Our new home . . . was on the Via Dolorosa, less than a hundred meters from the Antonia fortress where Jesus was brought to trial before Pontius Pilate."

The Muslim Quarter is one of four sections of the Old City, a walled area of 220 acres inside contemporary Jerusalem. The other quarters are Jewish, Christian, and Armenian. Nusseibeh says his English wife "was enchanted by a place that [in 1978] retained much of its Oriental charm. Camels still grazed in empty lots, peasants dressed as they had done for centuries, and the old stone buildings were redolent of distant epochs. Our main sitting room, which had once served as an Islamic court, had a high, wooden ornamental ceiling. Next to the courtyard at the back of our house was a medieval minaret, and next to that was one of the gates to the Noble Sanctuary."

Nusseibeh and his wife opened a café and art gallery, the Lemon Tree Café. "It was," he says, "to be a café and hostel where backpackers could mingle with the young Palestinian intelligentsia." During this time Nusseibeh and his wife drove to Arad to meet Amos Oz for the first time.

### *Disillusionment*

But within a year of his return to Jerusalem, as Israel expanded its control over East Jerusalem, Nusseibeh writes, "my optimism for the natural evolution of [a Palestine-Israel state] started to crumble." He became convinced that "the long-term Israeli plan was to degrade Arab Jerusalem into a ghetto of a greater Jewish city." He now supported an "independent Palestinian state, under PLO leadership with Jerusalem as its capital." He resigned his position at Hebrew University.

"The social fabric of the Arab city was decaying," Nusseibeh writes. Palestinian leaders boycotted elections and, in Nusseibeh's view, did little to defend their rights in the Old City or to promote its development. More than six thousand Arabs had been driven out of their homes, and Arabs were forbidden to live in the Old City. By contrast the Jewish Quarter was overflowing its historic borders. Nusseibeh believed that the spread of Jewish settlements in and outside the city "both precipitated and followed Palestinian terrorism."

As Arab Jerusalem declined, he shut down the Lemon Tree Café and moved out of the Old City. "Our new apartment was in . . . a village on a hill just beyond the Mount of Olives," he says. "From the balcony . . . we could see in the distance the luminous splendor of the Dome of the Rock."

### *Political action*

Other people frequently sought Nusseibeh's support in behalf of the Palestinian cause, and he gradually became active in public life. He led formation of a staff union at the university, and in the larger arena he brought people together, built alliances, and negotiated manifestos. He stayed in touch with Israeli friends. With no political ambitions, he risked embarrassment and failure and experienced both.

Over the years Nusseibeh was involved in complicated dealings with Palestinians in all walks of life, and with Israeli officials on both the political right and left. He worked off and on with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), led by Yasser Arafat, with mixed feelings. Palestinian activists as well as Israeli governments were deeply divided among themselves, and Nusseibeh's efforts were often torpedoed, frequently by people supposedly on his side, with sweeping public and private threats and denunciations, and by the Israeli army as well.

He was not exempt from violence himself. On one occasion, after a classroom lecture on John Locke, liberalism, and tolerance, Nusseibeh was cornered and severely beaten by a cadre of students at the university; he suffered head wounds and a broken arm. Not long afterward the Israel army closed Birzeit; it did not open again for four years.

During the Iraqi war in Kuwait, known to us as Desert Storm, Nusseibeh was arrested by Israeli soldiers at his home and sentenced to prison for six months (later reduced to three). He had been detained, he later discovered, for "collecting security information for Iraqi intelligence," a charge he dismisses. His imprisonment did not change his political views; he and an Israeli political scientist co-authored a book describing what a two-state solution might look like.

After Desert Storm, Nusseibeh helped develop the Palestinian position for peace negotiations led by the United States, and he devised a shadow government for a future Palestinian democracy. When Israel and the PLO agreed on creation of the semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority, Arafat asked Nusseibeh to join the new government. But Nusseibeh, still an academic, felt he

had done his public duty, and went to Washington for a sabbatical year at the Smithsonian Institution.

The following year he became president of the fledging Al-Quds University in Jerusalem and served for almost twenty years. He launched joint Palestinian-Israeli academic and scientific projects, tried to keep the peace among students on a combative campus, and resisted attacks on the university by both the Israeli government and the Palestine Authority.

Meanwhile, many Arabs who lived in East Jerusalem but outside the Israeli-defined municipal border were losing their rights as residents. The Nusseibehs were potential victims. "Only one wall of our home was within the Jerusalem municipal borders," Nusseibeh says. "We slept in the West Bank and had breakfast in Jerusalem. . . . The Israelis could claim that we didn't actually live in Jerusalem." So the Nusseibehs moved to a suburban neighborhood that was clearly inside the city limits.

Nusseibeh spent a year on leave at Harvard in 2004-2005. When he returned to Jerusalem for meetings at the university, he was shadowed by two bodyguards. He retired as president of Al-Quds in 2014.

## **VII. Oz, Nusseibeh, and Jerusalem Today**

Today Sari Nusseibeh, still living in suburban Jerusalem, continues his association with the university. He still believes that Israelis and Palestinians can find a way to agree on a governmental structure that serves the interests of both peoples. "Like it or not, we have a shared future," he says.

Amos Oz now lives in Tel Aviv. He goes to Jerusalem reluctantly, "professionally or to see friends," but rarely stays overnight.

Metropolitan Jerusalem sprawls over a large area. In 1950 it had 121,000 people. The estimated population today is more than 900,000. About 64 percent are Jewish, 34 percent Muslim, and 2 percent Christian. About 3.5 million people visit Jerusalem as tourists every year.

Israel controls the entire city, but the United Nations, the European Union, and most countries do not recognize Israel's jurisdiction in East Jerusalem nor do they recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital.

There are still two Jerusalems. Palestinians and Israelis, by and large, still live in different parts of the city. Jewish West Jerusalem is prosperous and full of new buildings, including high-rise luxury apartments; Palestinian East Jerusalem is poor, lacks permits to build new homes, and suffers from a shortage of schools and inadequate sanitation services.

Many people living in Jerusalem are not citizens. The status of some 300,000 residents of East Jerusalem and adjacent areas is “permanent resident.” Many Palestinians still do not accept Israeli sovereignty. There are no Palestinian elected officials.

A few concluding words from our guides:

Many things have happened in Jerusalem, Amos Oz points out. "The city has been destroyed, rebuilt, destroyed, and rebuilt again. Conqueror after conqueror has come, ruled for a while, left behind a few walls and towers, some cracks in the stone, a handful of potsherds and documents, and disappeared. Vanished like the morning mist down the hilly slopes. Jerusalem is an old nymphomaniac who squeezes lover after lover to death before shrugging him off her with a yawn, a black widow who devours her mates while they are still in her."

Nusseibeh describes his memoir "a chronicle of a life lived in a broken and violated land." The only hope," he concludes, "comes when we listen to the wisdom of tradition, and acknowledge that Jerusalem cannot be conquered or kept through violence. It is a city of three faiths and it is open to the world. . . . In Jerusalem's tangled, ancient alleys, wonder and surprise are always lurking around the corner ready to remind you that this is not an ordinary place you can map out with a surveyor's rod. It is sacred."

Nusseibeh likes recall one of his father's proverbs: rubble often makes the best building material.

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