



'FIFTY YEARS ago, a dramatic change occurred when suddenly, one day, the two cities (east and west Jerusalem) became united into one.' (Reuters)

# From the sacred city to the capital city (and back again?)

• By DORON BAR

I was born two years prior to the Six Day War, when Jerusalem was still a divided city, with barbed wire and concrete walls separating the two sections. Jerusalem totally changed by the time I grew up. It became a city without borders, an exciting and fascinating place whose spaces were accessible to everyone. One could experience the city on a personal, one-to-one basis. My urban encounter spanned the entire city. It included not only Zion Square, King George Street and the Mahane Yehuda market in the western part of the city but also the Arab bagel vendors who stood by Damascus Gate, the Armenian pizza shop by the Kishle police station, and the alleyways of the Christian and Muslim quarters in the eastern section. My Jerusalem also included areas outside of the city (in what is now known as the West Bank or Judea and Samaria) such as the Cremisan Monastery, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Wadi el-Unkur near Hebron and the various paths throughout Wadi Kelt. The history and geography of all these places fascinated me and aroused my curiosity. My favorite topic in school was the geography and history of the land of Israel.

Since then I have matured, learned much and my attitude toward Jerusalem has become more complex and critical. My outlook is based upon a combination of academic education, research and writing over many years, and primarily my own personal life. My family's history resembles that of Jerusalem over the past 150 years, and Jerusalem's history is also my history.

I am the scion of two families (Baumgartner-Beer), whose roots were established in Jerusalem almost 200 years ago. The founding father came from the region of Moravia and settled in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem in 1837. The family, which was religious and belonged to the Old Yishuv, lived in the Old City of Jerusalem for many years. Subsequently, they moved to the new neighborhoods that had been established in the western part of the city – Mea She'arim, Batei Ungarin, Geula and Givat Shaul.

Nevertheless, today neither I nor my two brothers live in Jerusalem. We left the city and live nearby, carrying on a love-hate relationship with it. We live both inside and outside of the city. Our work, entertainment and shopping are carried out within the city but we sleep

outside of it. What does my personal story reveal about the overall development of the city during this time span?

During the past 150 years Jerusalem changed drastically. From a small city (of about one square kilometer) with a population of 20,000 inhabitants the city now encompasses over 130 sq.km. and a population of almost 900,000.

Fifty years ago, a dramatic change occurred when suddenly, one day, the two cities (east and west Jerusalem) became united into one. This development brought with it mixed blessings and the city of Jerusalem was completely transformed within two generations. The city also paid a heavy environmental price. The valley where I played as a child became the Begin Highway. The city's romantic skyline, which had been dominated by church spires and steeples from the end of the nineteenth century, disappeared and is now overshadowed by towering office and apartment buildings. I still visit, enjoy and teach my students in the Old City, however Jerusalem in general and the Old City in particular are now filled with physical and imaginary borders. The city's unification is, to a great extent, an illusion and not a reality.

For most of its history, Jerusalem was not a capital city. As opposed to its sanctity, the city's capital status seems artificial. Only during a few unusual and specific periods in its history did Jerusalem serve as a capital city for the land of Israel: during the rule of David and Solomon, during the Hasmonean period and during the Crusader period. In opposition to all military and political logic, they decided that their kingdom would be ruled from Jerusalem. Nevertheless, during most of its history other cities served as the capital of our region – Caesarea during the Roman period, Ramlah during the early Muslim period, Acre during other periods, etc.

In this respect, the past 100 years in Jerusalem's history were quite dramatic. The Ottomans, who ruled the city for 400 years, did not view Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. Still, the conquest of Palestine by the British during WWI and their decision to declare Jerusalem the administrative center was highly significant and sealed its fate.

Initially, the Zionist movement and the nationalist Arab movement did not make any decision in this matter. However, due to the increasing British activity in Jerusalem, they began to be more involved in this issue.

The decision to declare Jerusalem the capital of the State of Israel in 1949 was therefore completely logical and evident. During the next 19 years, up until the Six Day War, the city's symbolic character became more established. Not only were the Knesset, government offices and the Supreme Court located in western Jerusalem, but also there was an endeavor to bury the remains of Benjamin Ze'ev (Theodor) Herzl on Mount Herzl.

Thus, the results of the Six Day War – the conquest of east Jerusalem and the city's unification – can be seen as a direct continuation of the endeavor to establish Jerusalem as the country's capital, a process which commenced with the establishment of the State of Israel. Still, the Six Day War and the unification of the city highlighted the Israeli-Zionist contradictory attitude toward east Jerusalem.

Even today, 50 years after the Six Day War, the imbalance between the two parts of the city is clearly visible. While the majority of Jewish sacred and historical sites are located in the eastern part of the city (many in the Old City), the "sacred" national Israeli sites are located in the western part. True, the general headquarters of the Israel Police is located in the eastern part of the city as well as a small number of governmental offices and local courts. Still, the majority of the official governmental institutions, such as the Knesset, most governmental offices, the Supreme Court and the Israel Museum are located in the western part.

The tension between the city's sanctity and its classification as a capital exists not only in a geographic sense but also among the city's population. During the past few years, with the numerous changes in the composition of the city's population, it is clear that the majority of residents are uncertain as to the city's status as the capital. Most of the population are either Arabs or ultra-Orthodox Jews while the secular and traditional residents are a minority.

Ironically, although the city's establishment as the capital has almost been realized, most of the inhabitants do not identify with Jerusalem's social values. In fact, they are not involved and even feel totally alienated from this issue.

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