

# The Unholy City

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**I**N ITS LONG and checkered history, Jerusalem has been occupied by dozens of conquerors.

Babylonians and Persians, Greeks and Romans, Mamluks and Turks, Britons and Jordanians—to mention just a few.

The latest occupier is Israel, which conquered and annexed Jerusalem in 1967.

(I could have written “East Jerusalem” – but all of historical Jerusalem is in today's East Jerusalem. All the other parts were built in the last 200 years by Zionist settlers, or are surrounding Arab villages which were arbitrarily joined to the huge area that is now called Jerusalem after its occupation.)

This week, Jerusalem was in flames—again. Two youngsters from Jabel Mukaber, one of the Arab villages annexed to Jerusalem, entered a synagogue in the west of the city during morning prayers and killed four devout Jews, before themselves being killed by police.

Jerusalem is called “the City of Peace”. This is a linguistic mistake. True, in antiquity it was called Salem, which sounds like peace, but Salem was in fact the name of the local deity.

It is also a historical mistake. No city in the world has seen as many wars, massacres and as much bloodshed as this one.

All in the name of some God or other.

JERUSALEM WAS annexed (or “liberated”, or “unified”) immediately after the Six-day War of 1967.

That war was Israel's greatest military triumph. It was also Israel's greatest disaster. The divine blessings of the incredible victory turned into divine punishments. Jerusalem was one of them.

The annexation was presented to us (I was a member of the Knesset at the time) as a unification of the city, which had been cruelly rent asunder in the Israeli-Palestinian war of 1948. Everybody cited the Biblical sentence: “Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together.” This translation of Psalm 122 is rather odd. The Hebrew original says simply “a city that is joined together”.

In fact, what happened in 1967 was anything but unification.

If the intent had really been unification, it would have looked very different.

Full Israeli citizenship would have been automatically conferred on all inhabitants. All the lost Arab properties in West Jerusalem, which had been expropriated in 1948, would have been restored to their rightful owners who had fled to East Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem municipality would have been expanded to include Arabs from the East, even without a specific request. And so on.

The opposite happened. No property was restored, nor any compensation paid. The municipality remained exclusively Jewish.

Arab inhabitants were not accorded Israeli citizenship, but merely “permanent residence”. This is a status that can be arbitrarily revoked at any moment—and indeed was revoked in many cases, compelling the victims to move out of the city. For appearance's sake, Arabs were allowed to apply for Israel citizenship. The authorities knew, of course, that only a handful would apply, since doing so would mean recognition of the occupation. For Palestinians, this would be paramount to treason. (And the few that did apply were generally refused.)

The municipality was not broadened. In theory, Arabs are entitled to vote in municipal elections, but only a handful do so, for the same reasons. In practice, East Jerusalem remains occupied territory.

The mayor, Teddy Kollek, was elected two years before the annexation. One of his first actions after it was to demolish the entire Mugrabi Quarter next to the Western Wall, leaving a large empty square resembling a parking lot. The inhabitants, all of them poor people, were evicted within hours.

But Kollek was a genius in public relations. He ostensibly established friendly relations with the Arab notables, introduced them to foreign visitors and created a general impression of peace and contentment. Kollek built more new Israeli neighborhoods on Arab land than any other person in the country. Yet this master-settler collected almost all the world's peace prizes, except the Nobel Prize. East Jerusalem remained quiet.

Only few knew of a secret directive from Kollek, instructing all municipal authorities to see to it that the Arab population—then 27%—did not rise above that level.

KOLLEK WAS ably supported by Moshe Dayan, then the Defense Minister. Dayan believed in keeping the Palestinians quiet by giving them all possible benefits, except freedom.

A few days after the occupation of East Jerusalem he removed the Israeli flag which had been planted by soldiers in front of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount. Dayan also turned the de facto authority over the Mount over to the Muslim religious authorities.

Jews were allowed into the Temple compound only in small numbers and only as quiet visitors. They were forbidden to pray there, and forcibly removed if they moved their lips. They could, after all, pray to their heart's content at the adjoining Western Wall (which is a part of the compound's ancient outer wall).

The government was able to impose this decree because of a quaint religious fact: Orthodox Jews are forbidden by the rabbis to enter the Temple Mount altogether. According to a Biblical injunction, ordinary Jews are not allowed into the Holy of Holies, only the High Priest was allowed in. Since nobody today knows where exactly this place is located, pious Jews may not enter the entire compound.

AS A result, the first few years of the occupation were a happy time for East Jerusalem. Jews and Arabs mingled freely.

It was fashionable for Jews to shop in the colorful Arab market and dine in the “oriental” restaurants. I myself often stayed in Arab hotels and made quite a number of Arab friends.

This atmosphere changed gradually. The government and the municipality spent a lot of money to gentrify West Jerusalem, but Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem were neglected, and turned into slums. The local infrastructure and services degenerated. Almost no building permits were issued to Arabs, in order to compel the younger generation to move outside the city borders. Then the “Separation” Wall was built, preventing those outside from entering the city, cutting them off from their schools and jobs. Yet In spite of everything, the Arab population grew and reached 40%.

Political oppression grew. Under the Oslo agreements, Jerusalemite Arabs were allowed to vote for the Palestinian Authority. But then they were prevented from doing so, their representatives were arrested and expelled from the city. All Palestinian institutions were forcibly closed down, including the famous Orient House, where the much admired and beloved leader of the Jerusalem Arabs, the late Faisal al-Husseini, had his office.

KOLLEK was succeeded by Ehud Olmert and an Orthodox mayor who didn't give a damn for East Jerusalem, except the Temple Mount.

And then an additional disaster occurred. Secular Israelis are leaving Jerusalem, which is rapidly becoming an Orthodox bastion. In desperation they decided to oust the Orthodox mayor and elect a secular businessman. Unfortunately, he is a rabid ultra-nationalist.

Nir Barkat behaves like the mayor of West Jerusalem and the military governor of East Jerusalem. He treats his Palestinian subjects like enemies, who may be tolerated if they obey quietly, and brutally suppressed if they do not. Together with the decade-old neglect of the Arab neighborhoods, the accelerated pace of building new Jewish neighborhoods, the excessive police brutality (openly encouraged by the mayor), they are producing an explosive situation.

The total cutting-off of Jerusalem from the West Bank, its natural hinterland, worsens the situation even more.

To this may be added the termination of the so-called peace process, since all Palestinians are convinced that East Jerusalem must be the capital of the future State of Palestine.

THIS SITUATION needed only a spark to ignite the city. This was duly provided by the right-wing demagogues in the Knesset. Vying for attention and popularity, they started to visit the Temple Mount, one after the other, every time unleashing a storm. Added to the manifest desire of certain religious and right-wing fanatics to build the Third Temple in place of the holy al-Aqsa Mosque and the golden Dome of the Rock, this

was enough to create the belief that the holy shrines were indeed in danger.

Then came the ghastly revenge-murder of an Arab boy who was abducted by Jews and burned alive with gasoline poured into his mouth.

Individual Muslim inhabitants of the city started to act. Disdaining organizations, almost without arms, they started a series of attacks that are now called “the intifada of individuals”. Acting alone, or with a brother or cousin whom he trusts, an Arab takes a knife, or a pistol (if he can get one), or his car, or a tractor, and kills the nearest Israelis. He knows that he is going to die.

The two cousins who killed four Jews in a synagogue this week—and also an Arab Druze policeman—knew this. They also knew that their families were going to suffer, their home be demolished, their relatives arrested. They were not deflected. The mosques were more important.

Moreover, the day before, an Arab bus driver was found dead in his bus. According to the police, the autopsy proved that he committed suicide. An Arab pathologist concluded that he was murdered. No Arab believes the police—Arabs are convinced that the police always lie.

Immediately after the Synagogue killing, the Israeli choir of politicians and commentators went into action. They did so with an astonishing unanimity—ministers, Knesset members, ex-generals, journalists, all repeating with slight variations the same message. The reason for this is simple: every day the Prime Minister's office sends out a “page of messages”, instructing all parts of the propaganda machine what to say.

This time the message was that Mahmoud Abbas was to blame for everything, a “terrorist in a suit”, the leader whose incitement causes the new intifada. No matter that the chief of the Shin Bet testified on the very same day that Abbas has neither overt nor covert connections with the violence.

Binyamin Netanyahu faced the cameras and with a solemn face and lugubrious voice—he is a really good actor—repeated again what he has said many times before, every time pretending that this is new recipe: more police, harder punishments, demolition of homes, arrests and large fines for parents of 13-year old children who are caught throwing stones, and so on.

Every expert knows that the result of such measures will be the exact opposite. More Arabs will become incensed and attack Israeli men and women. Israelis, of course, will “take revenge” and “take the law into their own hands”.

For both inhabitants and tourists, walking the streets of Jerusalem, the city which is “joined together”, has become a risky adventure. Many stay at home.

The Unholy City is more divided than ever before.