

THE LAST WORD

Jerusalem, My Beloved City

I have lived fifty years – practically my entire life – in Jerusalem. I don't believe that my father or his father lived anywhere else. Not sure when the first Meo (previously Bartolomeo) settled in Palestine, but I am told that it was centuries ago, possibly even a millennium ago. You would think that with this track record, I would have impunity to live indefinitely in Jerusalem. I'm afraid that is not the case. Like every Palestinian who lives in Jerusalem, I am officially a permanent resident of Jeruzalem, Izrael (excuse the misspelling!). Actually "permanent" resident is not really accurate since, if I live outside the city limits for a period of seven years, my Israeli identity card, which allows me to live in Jerusalem, gets revoked and I lose my residency, permanently! That law naturally does not apply to a Jewish immigrant who comes from a village near Addis Ababa or from Gdansk, for that matter.

I know, it could be worse. I could have been born in North Korea and, apart from living under a repressive regime, I could have had the same hairstyle as everyone else. I could have been born in Afghanistan and live in constant fear of American drones. I could even have been a Copt trying to earn a living in Libya. Jerusalem, however, is my beloved city, and it is my battlefield. Please do not take this literally! In my book, injustice is absolute. It really doesn't matter where or when it takes place; any decent human being should at least raise his or her voice against it when it occurs.

My beloved city is changing, and not in a natural way. For almost five decades, it has been denied its natural development. I'm not sure which Arab city I can compare it with, but I expect that it could have looked something like a combination of Amman and Beirut. A mixture of the Middle East with a touch of liberalism and *joie de vivre*. Had it not been for wars and occupation, Jerusalem could have most definitely been the holy city that welcomes with open arms literally everyone on the globe to come and pray, to visit the ancient sites, to meet the most wonderful people on earth – the living stones – and yes, to live in as well. Sadly, Jerusalem today is cold; even hostile. It is open to some and denied to many, even if they live in its vicinity. As glamorous as they try to make it, it remains hollow and without a spirit.

I don't have the faintest idea where to go from here, but the Israelis could probably benefit from a little soul-searching. They could question the path they're on. Is it sustainable? Will it bring peace and security? Is it possible to deny not only the internationally recognized rights of Palestinians but also their basic human rights forever? It would be helpful if they could realize that "the other" is not about to vanish into thin air but will remain here till doomsday.

**Warmly,
Sani P. Meo
Publisher**

