



## Fallen city

by [Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi](#)

Five years ago, this present intifada was sparked by a highly provocative intrusion by Ariel Sharon, then Israeli opposition leader, into the Aqsa Mosque. That Jerusalem should have been the source of five years of heavy fighting seems almost impossible to comprehend now that the city has fallen in a way I have never witnessed before.

Physically, psychologically, socio-economically and demographically, Jerusalem has been divided and subjugated in a way that even its actual occupation in 1967 did not achieve. Settlements in and around Jerusalem are expanding at pace; the wall has separated the city from its West Bank hinterland and some of its own communities; and city planning within the Israeli-defined municipal borders is separating the remaining communities from each other.

What is happening in Jerusalem today is, in fact, more similar to what happened in 1948. The city is being cleansed of its population, and the remaining population is being relieved of its rights. The Absentee Property Law is being invoked again, and those who find themselves outside the wall, but with property in Jerusalem, stand to lose that property to the Jewish state, just as those who fled or were forced to flee the fighting in 1948 saw their property confiscated according to this law, which barred them any recourse to law.

On the ground, Jerusalem is being strangled in several ways. Quite literally, the eastern part of the city, denied any semblance of equality in the dispersal of municipal services, is crumbling. Meanwhile, the withy the city cut off from its main economic hinterland in the West Bank unemployment and poverty are rising along with taxation, leaving more and more people completely dependant on social security from Israel.

Emasculated and isolated, Palestinian Jerusalemites, especially after the death of Faisal Hussein and the closure of Orient House, find themselves powerless and without leadership to confront the Israeli occupation and assert their identity. And, to make matters worse, the Palestinian Authority has provided neither an example nor leadership for Jerusalem. In such a position, it is little wonder that Jerusalem was long ago subdued and has remained quiet.

There is only one thing that gathers people and which might draw them out into the street, and that is religion. Islam has become a new focal point, and this is true in general of this intifada. The role of Islam, both rhetorically and politically, has increased in power and allure even as the focal point of the last intifada, nationalism, has seen its star wane.

In the case of Jerusalem, the role of Islam resonates far and wide. Even though the Muslim world is itself divided and conflict-torn, Jerusalem will always remain Islam's third-holiest site. That will never be taken away, and as the national and secular leaders fail again and again to provide inspiring leadership, not only on Jerusalem, but in the West Bank and Gaza, it is only natural that the constants in life will be sought. People will turn to Islam.

But it is a turn in desperation. There is little vision in this intifada outside anger. People are no longer sure what they are fighting for--a secular Palestine; an Islamic state; one or two states; Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank including the right of return--but they are sure what they are fighting against. They are fighting against oppression and occupation and a solution that is being imposed on them. They are fighting against a world unwilling or unable to uphold their rights. They are fighting against an Israel determined to not only to safeguard the Jewishness of Israel and establish it unalterably in Jerusalem, but to subjugate any possible future Palestinian state, either to itself or to Jordan, in a modification of the Jordan option that Sharon has never given up on.

In Jerusalem, Palestinians are unable to fight but equally unable to accept any imposed solution. Five years down the line, I'm afraid the situation will be exactly the same

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