



We're building a world where Palestine is liberated and all are free

The breath-taking port city of Haifa rests along the coast of the Mediterranean and is home to nearly 300,000 residents, with Palestinians making up only 10% of the city's population today after being ethnically cleansed in the Nakba of 1948. Haifa is in the boundaries of historic Palestine, also known as '48—a reference to the land stolen in 1948 and claimed today by the state of Israel. Despite the colonization of Haifa, the city's identity bears the richness of a 3,000+ year history. It was constructed on a mountain historically known as Jabal Mar Ilyas. Haifa stretches about 25 square miles over the Bay of Haifa and lies about 56 miles north of occupied Yaffa ("Tel Aviv").

Haifa's incredibly rich history is still visible throughout, despite the different attempts to destroy or erase its Palestinian Arab identity. Its recorded history shows settlement in the city as early as the 14th century BCE in a town known as Tel Abu Hawam, which was a tiny port and fishing village. The port served as an important component of what would eventually grow into a city. During the Roman occupation of Haifa in the 3rd century CE, evidence of Jewish presence in the city became abundant through the remains of Jewish burial caves and purple dyes used for Jewish prayer shawls. Following the Byzantine rule of Haifa, during the early Muslim period, Haifa began to develop into the larger port city that still stands today. Arab Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together in the city and pursued commerce and trade with a particular focus on glass production and dye-making.

After the First European Christian Crusade, the Jewish population of the city dwindled and the Christian population rose dramatically. By the time Ottoman rule began in Palestine, 40% of the city's population identified as Christian and the rest of the population was Muslim with a small minority of Jewish inhabitants

remaining. This changed as European Jewish settlers began to colonize Palestine under the British Mandate in the early 20th century. At this time, the Palestine Electric Company had established the Haifa Electrical Power Station which made it possible for Palestine Railways to build its main workshop there. Despite attempts from Palestinian Arabs to oppose the ethnic cleansing of Haifa, Jewish militias with the support of British imperial forces, massacred *at least* hundreds of Palestinian Muslims and Christians, if not thousands. The real number of Palestinians killed in the colonization of Haifa may never be known, but only about 4,000 out of the ~70,000 pre-colonization Palestinian inhabitants remained in the city. Thousands fled after seeing their fellow Palestinians massacred in conjunction with the psychological war waged on Palestinians by Jewish militias. Some Palestinians who escaped these militias eventually returned to Haifa.

Today, the original Palestinian inhabitants of the city are largely concentrated into specific neighborhoods, including Wadi Salib. The Palestinians who returned were refused building permits by the newly established colonial state and, as a result, Wadi Salib developed as an Arab ghetto in what was once a prosperous and promising multi-religious city. For more about what Palestinian life looks like in Wadi Salib today, check out the interview below with Khulood, the founder of Khashabi Theatre in Wadi Salib.

A CONVERSATION WITH KHULOOD BASEL FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF KHASHABI THEATRE



Wadi Salib is a ruined Palestinian neighborhood that was central to the historic Haifa city. The Zionists bombed and occupied the neighborhood during the Nakba and expelled its residents. The remaining buildings were confiscated by Israeli authorities. In 2015, almost seven decades after the loss, Khashabi Theatre reclaimed a historic house that once belonged to the Al-Khattib family and made it home to the independent Palestinian theatre and cultural maker. Khashabi (which means both wood and stage in Arabic) co-founded by Khulood Basel, is now a Palestinian space resisting the continuous Judaization and identity erasure since the Nakba.

"The Israeli occupation fragmented the Palestinian people by applying different colonial tools," explains Basel. "Palestinians who remained within the 1948 borders face the Israeli project that continuously works to erase their existence and [their] cultural and political identity. It is a colonial system that works day and night to reshape our minds and create a new hybrid creature disconnected from its history and people. My own city, Haifa, got reshaped and does not look like my grandpa's stories anymore. It is a daily fight to find our place in this city. This is why this traditional Palestinian house was a natural space for us to start creating, freely and independently, [including] financial independence from Israeli-complicit funding sources. Simply, we chose to pave the road for building a home where we create freely and where our community is our main partner."

"Simply" is not financially simple at all. Khashabi is funded only by outside grants and ticket sales. And Basel and the Khashabi crew believe there is no other way, posing the question: "Can a colonizer be a part of the colonized [peoples'] cultural creation?"

Basel goes on to explain how the idea for the theatre was born. "Our idea was born in Haifa," she says, "the city where Palestinians of '48 meet and engage. After the Nakba, all of our historic cities were demolished, and the Palestinian villages were left without civic space to engage in. It is a severe cultural loss for any nation. Until today,

our first social and cultural interaction with our own community outside of the villages happens mainly in Israeli universities. Haifa is a central city and an important historic one that still attracts Palestinians from the Galilee and other regions of Palestine. For us, it is very important to provide a place where Palestinians freely practice art and creativity as a natural right and strive to renew its cultural identity by placing independent culture in the center. We created a free space where people can imagine themselves independently, separate from Israeli institutions. In addition to our role within the community, we also target [for recruitment] the newly enrolled Palestinian theatre students. One of our goals is that Khashabi can become a home for their first professional careers.

"Essentially, Khashabi Theatre is a physical house of an independent Palestinian institution. We hope that similar spaces can be built across Palestine. And we believe that this is a step forward towards reclaiming our homeland."

Register now at the link below to hear more from Basel, who will be joining Eyewitness Palestine for our next webinar, the Haifa Virtual Delegation on Wednesday, May 29th at 12pm ET/7pm Palestine time. In the meantime, if you would like to learn more about the Khashabi Theatre, please [check out their Instagram here](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

LIVE FROM HAIFA: VIRTUAL DELEGATION

Wednesday, May 29th
12pm ET



VIRTUAL DELEGATION



Featuring

Khulood Basel
Founder & Executive Director
Khashabi Theatre

Visit the occupied city of Haifa to learn about how the Nakba and events of the past still haunt the city & the impact it has on the Palestinians remaining there today.

Donate what you can.
Participation is free. Link in Bio.



Join Eyewitness Palestine on **Wednesday, May 29th at 12PM ET** for our **Live from Haifa webinar**, featuring a special virtual delegation led by Khulood Basel, who will take us around Haifa on a custom tour of the city. Khulood will take us around the Palestinian neighborhood of Wadi Salib, where families who remained during the Nakba and those who were able to return from forced displacement re-settled. Don't miss this special virtual delegation to see the remarkable and ancient port city and learn more about its incredibly rich history with a uniquely qualified Palestinian native tour guide!

[REGISTER FOR THE LIVE FROM HAIFA VIRTUAL DELEGATION HERE](#)

Please continue to support Eyewitness Palestine's efforts by donating, as we navigate through these dark times in order to educate, facilitate and collaborate!

VISIT HAIFA

When you're ready to visit Haifa make sure to check out these attractions, recommended by Eyewitness Palestine Staff!



Khashabi Theatre

From Khashabi Theatre's website: Khashabi is an independent Palestinian theatre in the city of Haifa. It was founded in 2011 by the artists' collective known as the Khashabi Ensemble. In 2015, the group successfully acquired a physical space in the neighborhood of Wadi Salib, which was forcibly emptied of the majority of its native Palestinian inhabitants in 1948. Khashabi provides space for artists to freely experiment, create, research, and perform alternative forms of theatre and art, and space where social, political, and artistic taboos can be challenged, creating an invigorating creative environment based on cooperation and mutual support.



Baha'i Gardens

Only eight of the original thirteen Baha'i Garden Temples constructed remain standing today and one of these eight is located in Haifa, occupied Palestine. These temples, with their brilliantly lush gardens, were constructed in the vision of the founders of the Baha'i faith hailing from Iran. The Haifa location's construction began in 1909 with the Shrine of the Bab, which holds the burial site of the Baha'i prophet who announced the arrival of the religion's founder in the 1840's. The surrounding gardens are comprised of 19 stunning terraces which were the vision of Iranian architect, Fariboz Sahba. The construction of the gardens began in 1987 and were officially open to the public in 2001.



Ein el Wadi Restaurant

Once you have toured the Baha'i Gardens in Haifa, head back to the largely Palestinian neighborhood of Wadi Salib to dine at Ein el Wadi Restaurant. The menu offers a wide selection of classic mezza (appetizers) including, rolled grape leaves (dawali), kibbeh (a beef and burghul croquette), and hummus. If you're looking for more than just quick snacks, then you're in luck as Ein el Wadi offers a variety of homestyle Palestinian classics. You can try some chicken maktubeh, which literally translates to "upside down," referencing the process of flipping the cooked rice dish onto a platter once it is ready to serve. They also include regional Arab favorites like mansaf (a dish of lamb cooked in dry fermented yogurt sauce) and qoosa mahshee, a stuffed zucchini dish cooked in an aromatic tomato sauce.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HAIFA



Recommended Watch: *My Haifa*

About the film: *My Haifa* is a film produced and directed by Lubna Dajani. Although it is not officially classified as an oral history film, the documentary relies extensively on oral history recollections of Palestinians expelled from Haifa during its violent colonization on what Haifa means to them. Although the film focuses on Haifa natives, their personal stories and emotions are representative of all Palestinians who were forced to flee their homes or face the very real threat of death by Zionist militias. The testimony of Haifa natives in this film is largely centered around their childhood memories of Haifa and their forced exodus from their home in the Nakba of 1948. These testimonies are priceless in value as they document the stories of Palestinians born as early as the late 1910's, a generation of whom very few remain today. The importance of this documentation is exacerbated by the fact that historical records of Palestinians prior to the Nakba were (and still are) often intentionally destroyed by Zionists as they attempt to ensure that any evidence of Palestinian existence prior to 1948 disappears.

The [film is available here for free on YouTube](#).



Recommended Read: *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani

About the book: Nestled in a collection of stories, *Returning to Haifa* is a novella published by famous political and fiction writer, Ghassan Kanafani. Drawing from his own personal experiences, Kanafani's book, like many of his works, speaks to the Palestinian experience more broadly. Kanafani speaks through the story's main characters, Said and Safeyya, who fled the violence in Haifa in 1948 with their five-month-old son left behind. When they are allowed to return to Haifa after 20 years, they find their home occupied by Jewish settlers who have parented their lost child, Khalidun (renamed Dov by his "adopted" Jewish parents). Khalidun was raised to believe he is a Jewish Israeli, and his actual parents return to find him dressed in the uniform of Occupation Forces. The book jumps back and forth through time while chronicling the pain of Palestinians through the colonization of their homes. The novella was adapted many times into a play and some of its many iterations can be found online. Kanafani's novella was praised for wedding the literary and the political in a heart-breaking but relatable story that still speaks to the Palestinian experience even 76 after the beginning of the occupation of their homeland.

The novella is available for purchase [here](#).



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(Unsubscribing is not supported in previews)