

“Between Gaza and Jaffa,” Yara Shahine Gharablé, political activist, 22.7.2025

Introduction

Hello everyone, and welcome to “Eyes on Gaza,” our daily gathering that combines protest and learning, aiming to understand the realities in Gaza as well as the broader context and the ways to resist them. Today, we are joined by Yara Shahine Gharablé, a political activist from Jaffa and a student at Tel Aviv University. She will speak about the connections between Gaza and Jaffa. Yara will speak for eight minutes, followed by a short discussion. If anyone wants to ask a question, please write it in the chat, and I will read it to Yara after her talk. Welcome, Yara, and thank you for joining us!

Lecture

Hello and welcome! I am happy to be here with you, though I know it might be challenging to cover everything in just eight minutes. So, I want to start from the end rather than the beginning. Due to time constraints, I didn’t prepare a presentation, but perhaps that is a good opportunity to engage in political imagination—or simply imagination. I want to talk briefly about Jaffa, Yaffa in Arabic.

Anyone familiar with Jaffa knows the al-Ajami neighborhood, the southern quarter of what is now Tel Aviv. In al-Ajami, at the heart of the neighborhood, there is a public garden. Those familiar with the area know it as “Gan HaShnaim” in Hebrew (“the Garden of the Two”). Okay, I see nods—good. But I’ll reveal a secret, known to Palestinian Jaffans today: the garden has never been called “the Garden of the Two.” In Arabic, we call “the Garden of the Gazans.” This name is embedded in our consciousness and daily speech, even if discussions seem non-political. Jaffans simply call it the Garden of the Gazans.

Why is this important? Because we’ve always referred to it by this name, yet rarely pause to ask: why “Garden of the Gazans”? I remember asking my grandmother once: “Grandma, why is it called that?” She explained as if we were floating back in time: “You probably won’t believe it, but this garden used to be a bus station with direct lines from Gaza to Jaffa and back.” There was also a lively taxi station nearby, including shared taxis—“service taxis” as we call it in today’s terms. The fact that one could travel from Jaffa to Gaza so easily is fascinating. I was astonished. Is it reasonable? Not just geographically—Jaffa is about 65 kilometers from Gaza—but in practical terms, in certain ways, it could feel closer than the distance from Jaffa to northern Tel Aviv during rush hour. Incredible!

When did this name change, and why is it significant? Before the First Intifada, connections between Jaffa and Gaza remained strong. Then came the Nakba: Jaffa fell, over 60% of its residents became internal refugees in Gaza, and many Palestinians in Gaza today are originally from Jaffa. This is more than statistics—it shows that families were torn apart. Almost every Jaffa family has at least one relative or acquaintance in Gaza. My personal example: my father is from Gaza, and my family currently lives there. This is not random. If we conducted exhaustive research, we would find connections in every family, through relatives or friends—a real network, not imaginary. I don’t know my father’s extended family from Gaza—not because of personal estrangement but due to colonial bureaucracy, surveillance, and systemic obstacles. Before the First Intifada, life was heavily monitored; we shouldn’t romanticize the past. After 1948, Gazans still came to Jaffa, seeing it as a vibrant hub for work and trade. Connections were both economic and familial, with people moving, marrying, and settling across Gaza and Jaffa.

After the First Intifada, sanctions increased, and the space became even more controlled. A pivotal moment changed how the area, including Jaffa, was perceived: a stabbing incident in Jaffa. A Palestinian from Jaffa intervened without knowing the victim’s identity—Jewish or Arab—and both were killed. Tragic. Subsequently, the garden’s name shifted from “the Garden of the Gazans” to “the Garden of the Two,” symbolizing coexistence, Jewish-Arab coexistence—though one might

question the nature of this coexistence and the city council's intentions, especially in light of evictions and the ongoing horrors in Gaza. To conclude: first, the connection between Palestinians—whether in Jaffa or Gaza—remains alive. Second, the institutional perspective, whether manifested in the municipality or the systematic erasure of oral and physical historical memory, is crucial to understand.