



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

One of the largest, oldest cities in historic Palestine, Lyd (also known as Al-Lyd or Lydda), is located 38 km northwest of occupied Jerusalem (Al-Quds), and 16 km southeast of occupied Yaffa (referred to in colonial terms as “Tel Aviv”). As part of a larger attempt to Judaize Palestine and manufacture a timelessness of the Zionist state’s existence, Zionists changed Lyd’s name, like they do with most other occupied Palestinian cities. Today, a mixture of Palestinians and Jewish residents inhabit it, after the majority of its Arab inhabitants were ethnically cleansed in 1948 by Zionist militias that pre-date the Israeli Occupation Forces. Of the roughly 50,000 Palestinians who lived there and surrounding rural areas before the colonization of Palestine, a little over 1,000 were able to avoid exile and death to remain in Lyd. Palestinian Arabs make up approximately one third of the population, and Jewish residents, including recent settlers and descendants of Zionist settlers, make up most of the rest of the population. Lyd’s ancient history is marred by the more recent history of the massacres of Palestinians, which are often used as a starting point to discuss the colonization and ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

While the history of Lyd during the Nakba is incredibly important in understanding the city today and the Palestinian struggle for liberation more broadly, Lyd is a city that is over 5,000 years old. The city was once thought of as Palestine’s gateway to the rest of the world. It was sought by tourists and served as the de facto capital of the region as early as 636 AD. Prior to the Nakba, Lyd was home to Christian Palestinians, who lived harmoniously with their Muslim neighbors. Following the ethnic cleansing of Lyd, there is no notable Christian population in the city. Today, the city’s ancient history sits largely in the backdrop, overtaken by frequent reporting of gun violence and drug addiction. Palestinians in Lyd, despite being absorbed into the Israeli state, are also subject to home demolitions and settler

attacks. This is expounded by racism and other systemic forms of violence that make it harder for Palestinians to overcome socioeconomic hurdles. There have been many attempts to analyze and document the root causes of drug addiction and violence in Lyd, including creatively. In the interview below, Tamer Nafar, a Palestinian hip-hop artist, actor, creative, and Lyd resident talks with Eyewitness Palestine about life in Lyd today. Check out the interview below for more.

A CONVERSATION WITH TAMER NAFAR OF HIP-HOP GROUP DAM FROM LYD, PALESTINE



By Moureen Kaki

Tamer Nafar wears many creative hats—he’s a hip-hop artist, a screenwriter, and actor. Nafar is probably most well known as a member and founder of the first and still-leading Palestinian rap band, DAM. Readers should know that the Son of Palestinian Hip-Hop doesn't give very many interviews. He says what he needs to say through his arts: "I chose hip-hop because it gives me a verse of 64 lines," he says. Nafar and the band have released well over 100 songs through single-releases and three albums. They primarily rap in Arabic but will often integrate English and Hebrew. They’re not just known for their music, though, but the resistance-nature of their work. DAM’s music is riddled with themes of Palestinian identity, resistance, and culture. According to Nafar, the band’s founder, the music itself is less a form of resistance and more “resistance-adjacent.”

"Well, nowadays when you have more than 30,000 people killed and art is not stopping it, I'd say that art's role is documenting. I don't think it rescues lives, but I think it's documenting--it's the soundtrack of a revolution. I try to document my life and the lives of Palestinians like me. When you say 'Palestine,' people think of Gaza or the West Bank, but not a lot of people understand what life is like for Palestinians who have an Israeli ID, so I took the initiative to document us. Art is a medicine, but like Advil. It's a certain kind of medicine. It can help but it cannot cure. But to create real change is an economic thing, a power thing, it's a militant thing and lobbying this. This is where change happens. If revolution were a movie, I think art would be mentioned in the credits, not as the main force of change."

If Nafar is right and the arts are indeed more of a method of documentation than resistance, then it might be fair to call Nafar a sort-of experiential historian, too. Beyond the work of DAM, his solo

work and film experience tell the many stories of Palestinians in Lyd and beyond. Nafar stars in [Junction 48](#), for which he also did the screenwriting. *Junction 48* tells the story of Palestinian rapper from Lyd who's trying to "make it" in the industry, crossed with the unique struggle of being treated like an outsider in your own homeland, as all Palestinians are treated in Lyd by the Israeli majority. It incorporates challenges that are unique to Lyd: identity crisis and confusion, gun violence, and drug trade and addiction. Those familiar with Nafar personally would be forgiven for thinking the story was loosely based on his own life as a Lyd-based Palestinian rapper. But the film captures a narrative much bigger than any one person. It tells Lyd's unique story of the generational consequences of Zionism in Palestine.

In a different world, one in which Palestine was never colonized, Nafar would have likely never been a Lyd resident. His father's family fled there in 1948 when they were exiled from Yaffa by Zionist militias. They were supposed to leave for Jordan but found what they thought would be temporary refuge in Lyd. The family stayed and eventually, Nafar was born into the Lyd scene. Nafar succinctly and concisely defined Lyd and its possibilities: "[Lyd] would have been the best, most beautiful salad in the world if the chef weren't racist." The effects of that kind of systemic racism are apparent in Lyd's massive drug market and related gun violence. Its history and socio-economic problems often compared with the systemic destruction of Black American communities throughout the United States. Nafar, like many others, has lost community members, including his cousin, to gun violence.

On top of the gang-related violence in Lyd, Palestinians are doubly threatened by armed settlers and the state. Because of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, tensions are particularly high in the mixed Palestinian-Jewish city. Nafar says that the current situation reminds him of 2021, when Occupation Forces attacked Gaza during the Great Return March. But coupled with the increased rise of the extreme Israeli right-wing and power of settlers this time, he says, feels slightly different, "you feel it with the silence. Something that is not tangible. We're not used to the silence." While the situation remains grim, Nafar says that there's only one way for him to find solace.

*"With what is happening now in Gaza and the way they managed to silence the Palestinians in Israel, and with the rise of the extreme [Israeli] right-wing, and me losing my cousin, I'm too emotional right now to give you a thoughtful message for good or bad. I know that people want a happy, optimistic view, but our comfort now is just acknowledging the darkness. All of our comfort now is just finding people to sit with us in the darkness. This is my aim now, just finding people in the darkness to share that moment with. I personally don't want to feel good. My people are dying. Why the f**k should I feel good?"*

Nafar's blunt honesty goes further. When asked about the future of Lyd his response is succinct: "khara," the Arabic word for sh*t. Sure, it might be pessimistic, but to Nafar's point, many Palestinians, the rapper included, are exhausted by a life dictated by Zionism. It feels unreasonable to expect a rosy, hopeful outlook on the future when so much of Palestinian life is rife with injustice. Nafar lost his cousin to gun violence in Lyd. His family lost his ancestral home. Even the landscape of his life is riddled with these reminders. When shooting a music video for his song, the [Son of Lyd](#), Israeli police stopped him and the video crew *six different times* while they were trying to record all because they were using a Palestinian flag as a video prop. Nafar explained that he had to go out of his way to cut scenes in the video to ensure that the police did not make too much of the final cut because he wants viewers to know that there is more to Lyd than the drug market and violence.

*"There were two videos released [for the Son of Lyd song]. In the '[Making of the Son of Lyd](#)' video, what we did is we attached a Palestinian flag to a motorcycle and I got stopped six times by the cops. You can see it. It's all documented. And the funniest part is that while the cops were busy pulling me over, there were drug deals happening around us and they didn't give a f**k. They were so obsessed with the flag. The second time we were stopped and [the police were] issuing me a ticket and had the police car with the lights flashing. So, I used the moment to record for the video and that ended up being the main part of the video--the part with me rapping to the police car with lights in the background and we set a release date and I loved that video. But I had that weird*

feeling that I wasn't happy about it and I didn't know why. A day or two before the release, I canceled the release. I realized that the police took over my video and that's what bothered me. So now in Lyd, the city I wanted to show--my city that I wanted to represent, it's all about police and crime and this is not what I wanted. Yes, the police are part of my city, but there's a huge identity that I wanted to show that was missing, so I reduced the police presence in the video and replaced it with a way to show my love for the city. I don't want to romanticize my city, and say there's a 'beautiful struggle' here, but it is a unique place with a unique struggle."

For more of Nafar's work, check out his [social media](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Live from Gaza: Arts as Survival



LIVE FROM GAZA: ARTS AS SURVIVAL

Join us to hear from the Delia Arts Foundation whose mission is to help musicians fulfill their dreams. Delia Arts' goal is to help these rising stars take their talents to the next level and form full-time music careers. Although their center in Gaza is gone, they are currently providing shelters for artists in Gaza.

Featuring:

Joelle Khayat
Executive Director



Ayman Jamal Mghamis
Program Manager
Gaza, Palestine



Donate what you can.
50% of proceeds will benefit Delia Arts.
Participation is free. Link in Bio.



Delia Arts
Foundation

REGISTER FOR THE LIVE FROM GAZA WEBINAR

Live from Lyd: Virtual Delegation

Join Eyewitness Palestine on **Wednesday, March 27th at 12PM ET** for our **Live from Lyd webinar**, featuring a special virtual delegation led by Tamer Nafar, who will take us around Lyd on a custom tour of the city. Lyd, like many Palestinian cities, is an ancient city that's been home to multiple civilizations over its 5,000-year history. It was the site of one of the most grueling massacres of the Nakba and remains haunted by the injustices brought on to it. Today, the community of Lyd--one of the few cities with an integrated Palestinian and Israeli Jewish population--is marred by addiction and gun violence. We'll hear from Lyd residents about the resilience and struggles they face in the community.

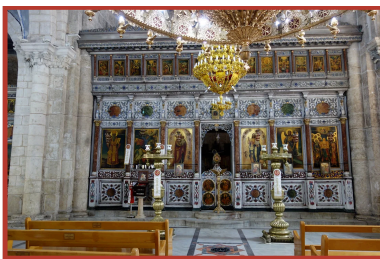
[REGISTER FOR THE LIVE FROM LYD WEBINAR HERE](#)

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

[DONATE TO EYEWITNESS PALESTINE](#)

VISIT LYD

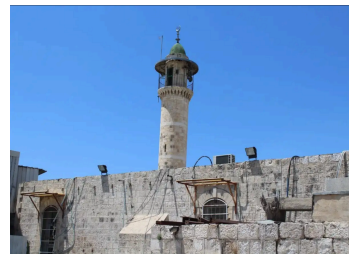
When you're ready to visit Lyd make sure to check out these attractions, recommended by Eyewitness Palestine Staff!



[St. George's Tomb at the Greek Orthodox Church](#)



[Al-Salam Restaurant](#)



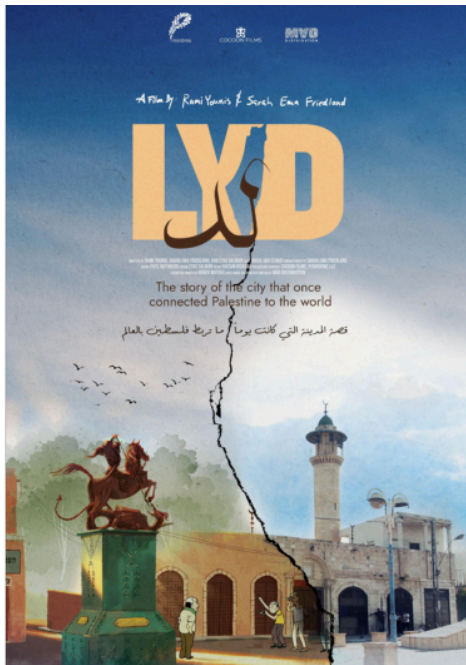
[Dahmash Mosque](#)

The Greek Orthodox Church in Lyd, also known as the "Church of Saint George, the Dragon Slayer" is where the tomb of the Christian martyr, Saint George, is located. It was first established by the Byzantine empire in the fifth century. The Church was destroyed in the seventh century, though its ruins remained until the early twelfth century when the Crusaders built a cathedral atop the same exact location, even reusing some of the remaining materials from the original church. When the Mamluk Empire controlled Palestine, a part of the original Byzantine structure remained and the Mamluks converted an old basilica into a mosque, which is now called the Grand Omari Mosque and remains adjacent to the Church to this day. The Grand Omari Mosque, like the Dahmash Mosque, was used by Palestinians for shelter during the Nakba before their eventual forced removal.

With a hilltop view of Palestine and great food, very little else is needed! Visit Al-Salam Restaurant on your next visit to Lyd for a Palestinian street-food experience that will be hard to forget. They offer the traditional items like hummus, tabouleh, and kibbeh. Al-Salam offers more homestyle dishes such as warak dawali (stuffed grape vines) and fattet hummus, a dish that takes hummus to the next level by adding freshly fried bread for a crunch, a tahini sauce, and a variety of toppings such as minced lamb. Diners will be cozy in the simple oriental-style restaurant, where visitors will find wide windows, comfortable sofas, exposed walls and much more in the outdoor seating area.

Although it might not be the most visually impressive mosque in Palestine and beyond, the importance of this particular masjid is found in recent Palestinian history. When Lyd was attacked by Zionist militias in July of 1948, Muslims and Christian Palestinians were forcibly separated--Christians sought shelter in the Greek Orthodox Church and Muslims sought shelter in the local mosques, mostly the Dahmash Mosque. Although no formal surrender by Arab forces, droves of Palestinians exited their homes with white flags after Zionist militias descended on Lyd. Despite this, Palestinians were killed and taken captive. Of the 426 Palestinians killed in the massacres of Lyd, at least 100 were killed in the Dahmash Mosque after Zionists threw a grenade into the mosque and subsequently fired machine guns on detainees and non-combatants.

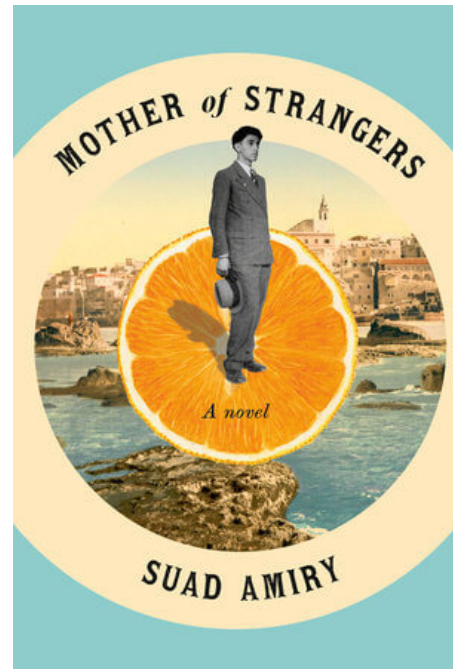
LEARN MORE ABOUT LYD



Recommended Watch: *Lyd*

About the film: This month's film recommendation varies from previous ones. *Lyd* is an experimental film that bridges the wide gap between science fiction and documentary. The science fiction classification comes from the film's use of computer-generated images (CGI) to imagine what Lyd would look like if the Nakba and colonization of Palestine never occurred. An imagined, uncolonized future is juxtaposed with the stark reality of past events. The film oscillates back and forth between never-before-seen archival footage that documents some of the horrors of the Nakba and an animated fantasy, using interviews from Lyd residents, Nakba survivors, and even from Zionist soldiers who participated in the massacres of Palestinians at Lyd.

The film is not yet available to stream, but will make its way through various film festivals. Keep an eye on [the film's website here to know when it will be available for public streaming](#).



Recommended Read: *Mother of Strangers* by Suad Amiry

About the book: Based on the true story of two Jaffa teenagers, *Mother of Strangers* follows the daily lives of Subhi, a fifteen-year-old mechanic, and Shams, the thirteen-year-old student he hopes to marry one day. In this prosperous and cosmopolitan port city, with its bustling markets, cinemas, and cafés on the hills overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, we meet many other unforgettable characters as well, including Khawaja Michael, the elegant and successful owner of orange groves above the harbor; Mr. Hassan, the tailor who makes Subhi's treasured English suit, which he hopes will change his life; and the very mischievous and outrageous Uncle Habeeb, who insists on introducing Subhi to the local bordello. The story then takes the reader to Lyd, describing stories of expulsion, refugeehood within their own homeland, and the effects of colonization.

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