

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Haifa Fragments

Khulud Khamis

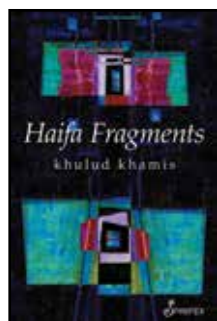
**New Internationalist, 2015,
173 pages, \$18.00**

*Reviewed by Mahmoud Muna,
The Educational Bookshop, Jerusalem*

Haifa Fragments is a series of snapshots from the daily life of a Palestinian woman in search of herself and her identity amid the complexity of life in the present-day city of Haifa. The story is multi-layered and intertwined between Palestinian political history, social and religious traditions, and the super-complicated, different yet shared realities of the Palestinians living across the divide in the historical land of Palestine.

It traces the life of Maisoon, a Palestinian Christian feminist and jewelry designer, who is trying to define her relationship with her Muslim boyfriend. All is put into question when she meets a young and playful girl from the other side of the Green Line. Maisoon is also trying to accept the normality of her growing business with the Jewish woman who is giving Maisoon the opportunity to sell to the outside world her art pieces that exhibit traces of Palestinian symbolism.

But perhaps what is most captivating in Maisoon's story is her attempt to define her own identity through the newly discovered diary and writings of her father at the time when he was a young political activist. By refusing to be the "Israeli" of today, she tries to understand the "Palestinian" of the past. But how would her father react to her attempt investigate his past, which he was so adamant to forget and move on from.



Khulud Khamis, a resident of Haifa herself, has written the book with authority, keeping the right balance of passion and thought. She has successfully managed to visit the most hard-hitting issue for Palestinians who live inside pre-1948 Palestine, namely, identity. Using the form of a novel, she does so with dignity and delicacy, maintaining a sense of humanity throughout, and avoiding unnecessary and complicated academic jargon.

Her fresh style is decorated with poetry, and easy-to-follow remnants are written in short chapters and ordered chronologically, forming an alluring storyline. Each chapter starts with a different Arabic letter, giving the reader a nice introduction to the sounds and shapes of Arabic letters. Furthermore, the text is rich with common colloquial Arabic expressions, and the book includes an expanded glossary for reference.

Haifa Fragments is a book of hope, delusion, and pain; it is a most welcome addition to Palestinian literature, especially as it sheds light on subjects often considered taboo. It must be read by anyone who wants to understand the social and cultural mechanism of a fragmented society that lives under several layers of oppression, both old and new.