

RETURNING عائد الى حيفا TO HAIFA

BY GHASSAN KANAFANI

ADAPTED BY NAOMI WALLACE AND ISMAIL KHALIDI

DIRECTED BY SAMER AL SABER

APRIL 12–MAY 4, 2024

POTRERO STAGE, SAN FRANCISCO

GOLDENTHREAD.ORG

**GOLDEN
THREAD**
PRODUCTIONS



Welcome to our special Season for Palestine

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As of this note, we are witnessing day 183 of Israel's genocide in Gaza. Over 30 thousand killed, with an average age of those killed just 5 years old. Thousands remain missing. More than half of Gaza's homes have been destroyed, leaving over 75% of the population displaced and an estimated 2.3 million people facing catastrophic levels of starvation.

In times of such overpowering oppression, we, artists, bear a responsibility to utilize our agency and privilege to speak out against the unthinkable injustice and uplift the voices and stories of those suffering from it. Golden Thread has long been committed to uplifting the Palestinian perspective amid decades of systematic cultural erasure and silencing of Palestinian voices and history. This season, we continue to stand firmly on the side of humanity and the oppressed, deliberately choosing to provide crucial historical context to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, countering the false narratives that seek to distort and minimize the scope of the injustice endured by Palestinians. Theatrically speaking, there's nothing more impactful than the powerful storytelling of Ghassan Kanafani to do so, whose writings and voice unapologetically reminds us that resisting oppression is a fundamental right.

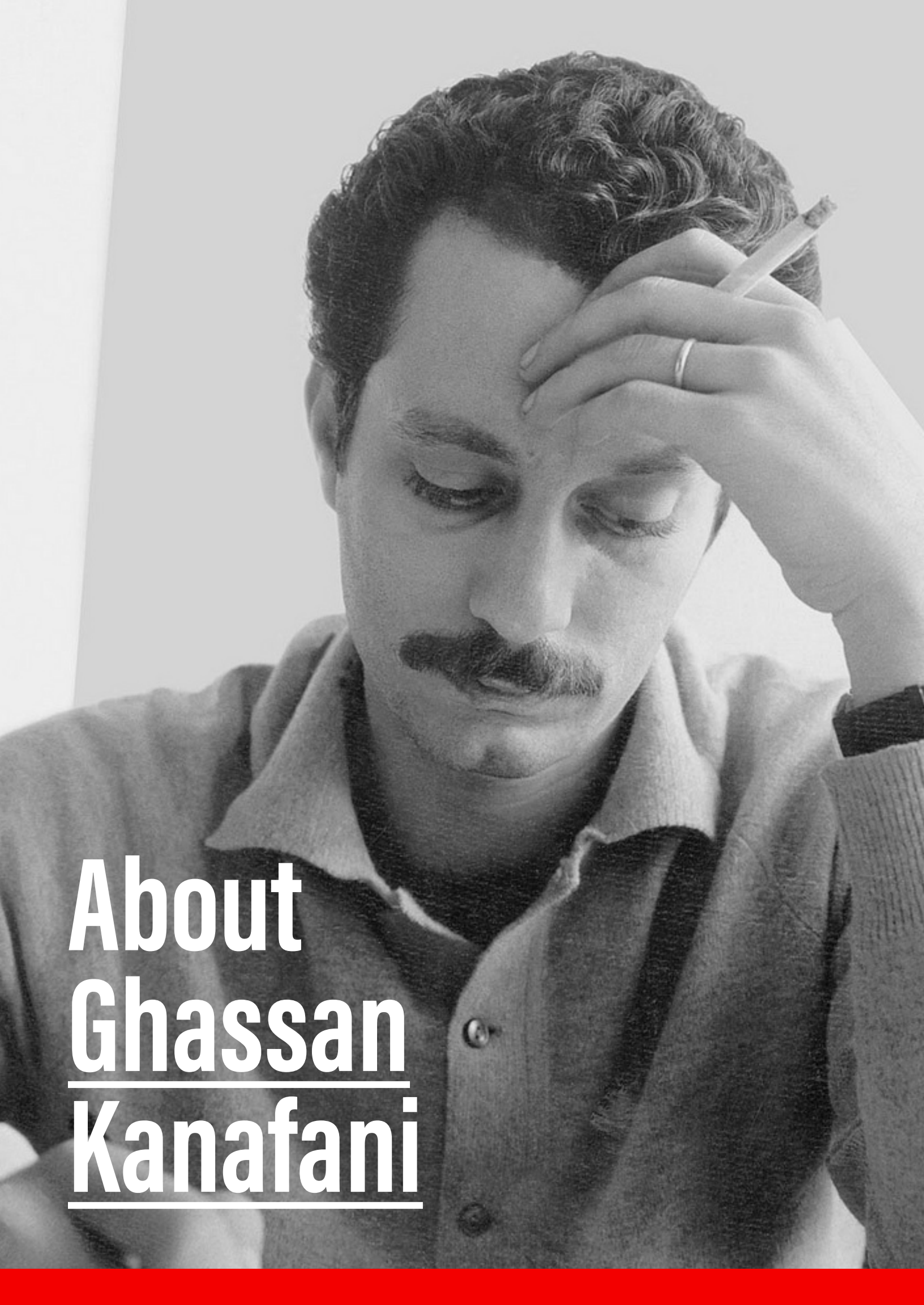
RETURNING TO HAIFA, beautifully adapted by Naomi Wallace and Ismail Khalidi, and captivatingly brought to life by Samer Al Saber, takes us back to pivotal moments in 1948 and 1967 and, through a profoundly humane story, elucidates the Palestinian struggle for liberation.

If there is one message from the play that I hope resonates deeply, it is what Kanafani says via Said: "The greatest crime any human being can commit is to believe, even for one moment, that the weakness or mistakes of others give him the right to exist at their expense." May this play serve as a catalyst for reflection, dialogue, and action, reminding us of our shared humanity and the urgent need to stand against injustice in all its forms.

In solidarity and with gratitude,

Sahar Assaf,
Executive Artistic Director





About Ghassan Kanafani

Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972) was a Palestinian writer, journalist, and a prominent figure in the Palestinian national liberation movement. Born in Akka, Kanafani witnessed the Nakba of 1948, during which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced following the establishment of Israel. He joined the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) and later became a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In 1956 he moved to Kuwait to work as a teacher of art and sports and also became involved with the weekly magazine of ANM. He left Kuwait for Beirut in 1960 to become one of the editors at the Arab weekly Al Hurriya. Ghassan edited the Palestinian affairs of the magazine.

Described as “a commando who never fired a gun” in an obituary in Lebanon’s Daily Star, Kanafani played a crucial role in the Palestinian resistance. As a writer, Kanafani is well known for his short stories, novels, plays, literary studies and political essays. His works often explore the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, the impact of displacement, and the complexities of identity. Some of his notable works include “Men in the Sun” and “Returning to Haifa.”

Tragically, Ghassan Kanafani’s life was cut short. On July 8, 1972, he and his young niece, Lamis, were killed by Israeli agents in a car bomb explosion in Beirut. By the time of his death, Ghassan had published eighteen books and written hundreds of articles on culture, politics, and the Palestinian people’s struggle. His literary works have been re-published in several editions in Arabic and translated to 28 languages and published in 30 different countries. Despite his untimely death, Kanafani’s literary legacy continues to be celebrated and remembered in the context of Palestinian literature and the broader struggle for justice and human rights in the Middle East.

Ghassan
Kanafani

Cultural
Foundation
(GKCF)

Ghassan Kanafani Cultural Foundation was founded as a Lebanese NGO on July 8, 1974, on the second commemoration of the assassination of Ghassan Kanafani.

In addition to publishing Ghassan Kanafani's literary works, the Foundation has established and runs six kindergartens for young children, two habilitation centre for children with special needs, four libraries and art centre and three clubs, in six Camps for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

More than 1,400 children and youth benefit yearly from GKCF's projects. Around 12,000 children have so far graduated from the Foundation's kindergartens since 1974.

**Words
From Our
Playwrights**
Naomi Wallace
and
Ismail Khalidi

Lifting up Palestinian voices in the face of an active genocide and overtly racist censorship is imperative. We are grateful Golden Thread is taking up this moral obligation with courage and integrity.

The fight for liberation in Palestine brings together, simultaneously, resistance against multiple forms of oppression: colonialism, apartheid, white supremacy, Islamophobia, militarism, war profiteering, ecocide and forced displacement.

And as the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé reminds us, the genocide in Gaza did not start in the last few months. An 'incremental genocide' has in fact been going on for nearly a century. Furthermore, what is being done to Palestinians has been done previously to others elsewhere, including in North America. Tragically, those carrying out and sponsoring the mass slaughter today in Gaza are eager not only to profit from the destruction being wrought, but to test the limits of what horrors can be visited upon other marginalized communities around the world with impunity.

There is hope to be found, however, in the fact that Palestinian freedom is linked to our collective freedom, and millions are waking up to that fact. Kanafani knew this all too well, just as he knew that art and culture were crucial fronts in the battle for liberation and for life itself. Kanafani's story is a light to see by, to guide us. It is a call for us to not only bear witness but to act.

It has been an honour to co-adapt this formidable novella, and our collaboration has been an ongoing learning and a joy. A special thanks to the Kanafani family, who welcomed us to this project and gave us sustenance along the way.

We believe ***RETURNING TO HAIFA*** is a map towards mutual liberation, carrying with it a fierce vision for a world where we are all counted, where all our names are written down, where we are all free.

**Words
From Our
Director
Samer Al-Saber**

RETURNING TO HAIFA is a story that emphasizes one of the foundations of the contemporary Palestinian condition: the right of return. Ghassan Kana-fani's novella, and now this play, marks a pivotal moment when one's dispossessed living room is not only fresh in memory but also reachable, though not yet attainable. The Wallace/Khalidi rendition brings artful theatricality to a traumatic classic that embodies the heart of Palestine's struggle: home. In ***RETURNING TO HAIFA***, we witness a couple entering their home after a nineteen-year exile; however, this bittersweet return is accompanied by the realization that a return without self-determination leads to the affirmation of the struggle for liberation.

As you watch our production, consider the current realities of Palestine and its people and the conditions of the 1948 Nakba as well as the 1967 Naksa. You will notice fragmentation, longing, and despair, all paired with steadfastness, resourcefulness, and fortitude. On our stage tonight, Palestinian characters encounter all the influences that concertedly expelled them from Palestine: colonial powers, military forces, and false narratives. In each step of the confrontation, Said and Safiyya do not know what the next moment holds for them. They initially encounter hope, then confront war, soldiers, displacement, loss, refugee life, exile, and eventually, the transformation of their greatest hopes into a nightmare. They must argue their way out of defeat and toward liberation.

Our space, set, lighting, sound, and props selectively highlight memorable and fragmented remains. The playwrights take us on a journey that reminds us of how Palestinians felt in 1967, only 19 years after the Nakba. The ensemble embodies a moment from the past that must be honored in order to comprehend the present traumas of Palestine. Tonight, over a short period of time, one Palestinian family and its home represent the story of millions, their parents, and their descendants. Like a portrait, it renders a Palestinian reality, its moment and discourse. Will you, the audience in the United States, receive it with empathy or...

Tonight, we... you... are trying to find out...

RETURNING TO HAIFA

عائد إلى حيفا

BY GHASSAN KANAFANI

ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY NAOMI WALLACE
AND ISMAIL KHALIDI

CAST

DIALA AL-ABED

AMAL BISHARAT

JACOB HENRIE-NAFFAA*

LIJESH KRISHNAN

MICHELLE NAVARRETE*

**Member Actors Equity*

Returning to Haifa was first presented by Lynne McConway Productions in association with Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre, London, on February 27, 2018, directed by Caitlin McLeod. By arrangement with Knight Hall Agency Ltd. in association with Gordon Dickerson. *Returning to Haifa*, the novella © The Heirs of the late Ghassan Kanafani.

The US premiere was presented by Pangea World Theater in Minnesota in April 2022.

Funders:

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Production Team

Director: Samer Al-Saber

Scenic Designer: Carlos Aceves

Costume Designer: Madeline Berger

Lighting Designer: Cassie Barnes

Sound Designer: Derek Schmidt

Props Designer and Associate Painter: Samantha Alexa

Assistant Director and Dramaturg: Marina Johnson

Stage Manager: Karen Runk*

Assistant Stage Manager: Paige Weissenburger

Production Manager: River Bermudez-Sanders

Production Associate: Wendy Reyes

Technical Director and Associate Painter: Lev Collins

Lead Scenic Painter: Bernadette Flynn

Graphic Designer: Navid G. Maghami

Board Operator: Camille La'akea Wong

Production crew: Shy Baniani (Electrician)

Load-in crew: Trent Martinez

Load-in crew: Olivia Prink

Front of House support: Tracy Legacion and Sarah Dunnavant

** Member Actors Equity*

A note on *Returning to Haifa* Dramaturgy by Marina Johnson

"My political position springs from my being a novelist. In so far as I am concerned, politics and the novel are an indivisible case and I can categorically state that I became politically committed because I am a novelist, not the opposite."

— Ghassan Kanafani

What does it mean to make theatre in times of genocide?

This is a question to which I have returned almost daily for the past six months. Golden Thread Productions' Season for Palestine is an act of resistance in a world where many theatres have taken a "business as usual" stance while a genocide, funded by United States tax dollars, is perpetuated. To make art is always political since the stories we choose to highlight and the worlds in which we spend time are not a luxury, a category to which the arts are often relegated—they illustrate our values, and what we value, reveals our politics. The author of the novella on which this play is based, Ghassan Kanafani, was emphatic about his role as an artist and activist. In Kanafani's quote above, he illustrates the intertwined nature between art and politics. It makes sense that Juliano Mer-Khamis, one of the founders of Jenin's Freedom Theatre, and the son of a Palestinian father and an Israeli mother, famously theorized that—"the third Intifada will be a cultural one."

A Note on Time Periods:

The playwrights describe the world of the play as "minimal and not realistic. Always a feeling of disjuncture, rupture, but also of worlds unexpectedly intertwined and haunting one another." The time periods of the play, 1947, 1948, and 1967, blur together, allowing the past and the present to both exist simultaneously and in juxtaposition to each other. In doing this, *Returning to Haifa* reminds us that the genocide in Gaza and the events that preceded it date back to at least 1948. Below is a very brief summary of each time period seen in the play. The plot description as relevant to the characters is italicized while the historical events are not.

1947

The characters *Said and Safiyya* have just gotten married and have moved to Haifa. The earliest time period portrayed in ***RETURNING TO HAIFA***.

Palestine is occupied by the British who are planning their withdrawal. Jewish immigrants continue to arrive en masse to Palestine as Zionist leaders continue to use the phrase “a land without a people for a people without a land” to describe Palestine.

1948

While Said is out of the house running errands, Safiyya is at home with their five-month-old son. Born and raised in a farming family, Safiyya still isn't used to city life in Haifa. Terrified by the panic in the streets, she leaves home searching for Said, and is swept away in the chaos caused by the British troops' early withdrawal and the violence of the Haganah, the Zionist military organization.

Known as the Palestinian Nakba, this time refers to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and was marked by violent displacement, dispossession of land and property, destruction of society and culture, and the denial of Palestinian political rights and national aspirations. At least 500 Palestinian towns and villages were depopulated and more than 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes. The term also encompasses ongoing persecution and displacement of Palestinians by Israel.

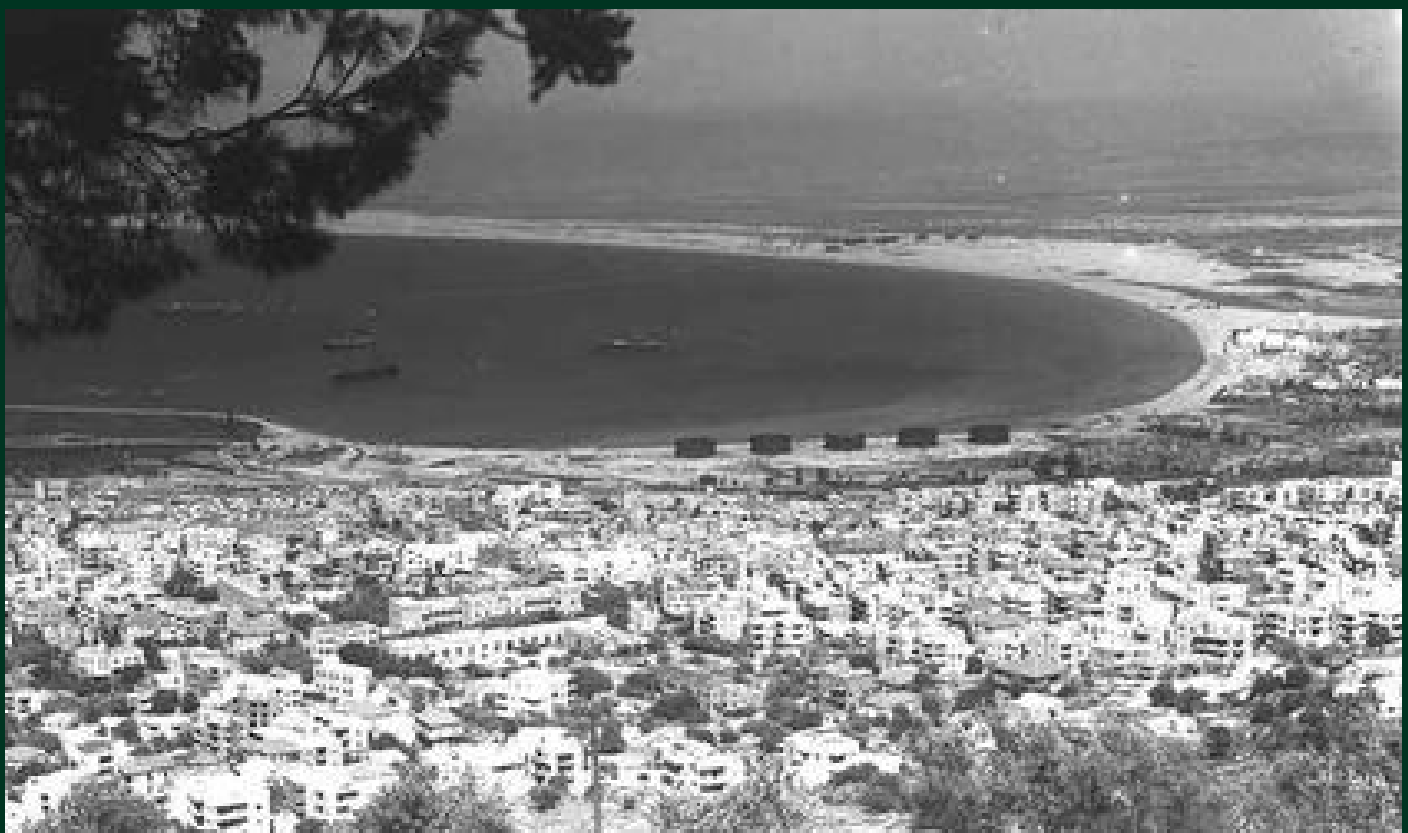
1967

In 1967, twenty years after they fled their home, Said and Safiyya return to Haifa to see what has become of their home and their son.

In the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel occupied territories including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. This led to further displacement of Palestinians, many of whom had already been internally displaced following the Nakba. When Israel opened the borders in 1967, after the occupation had taken place, some Palestinians attempted to return to their homes or lands from which they had been displaced. In some cases, Palestinians were met with resistance or violence from Israeli authorities or settlers. Instances of Palestinians being shot or facing violence during attempts to return to their homes were common.



Homes in Haifa, ~1920; Source: Palestine Remembered



The Port of Haifa, ~1930; Source: Palestine Remembered

The Rhetorical Argument in *Returning To Haifa*

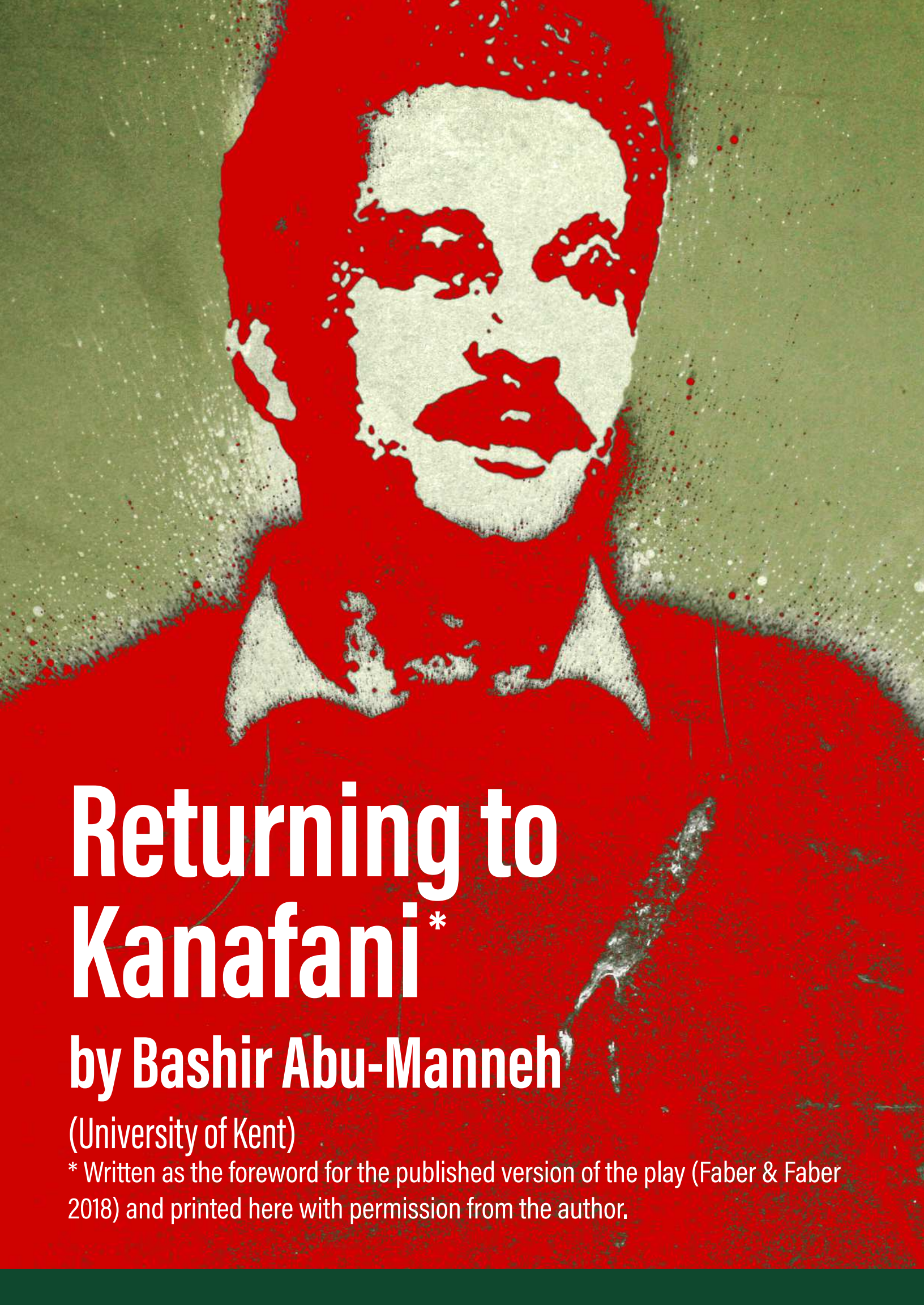
The second half of *Returning to Haifa* features a rhetorical argument about Dov/Khaldun's biological Palestinian identity and his acquired Jewish identity. In his argument, Dov uses the phrase "a man is a cause," which his Palestinian father, Said, agrees with—in fact, he says he had just been thinking the same thing. The phrase encapsulates a central theme related to personal responsibility and the consequences of individual actions within the context of broader social and political circumstances.

The statement "man is a cause" encapsulates Jean-Paul Sartre's notion that human beings are not passive entities shaped by external forces but rather active agents who define themselves through their intentional acts and engagements with the world. Individual actions can have far-reaching consequences, impacting not only one's own life but also the lives of others and the broader societal context. In the novel by Kanafani, the actions and decisions of individuals—both Palestinian and Israeli—have reverberating effects on the lives of those around them and contribute to the perpetuation of the conflict. This phrase underscores the interconnectedness of individuals and their actions within the larger tapestry of history and politics, highlighting the profound impact of personal choices on the collective fate of peoples and nations.

With its richly drawn characters, nuanced storytelling, and timeless themes, *Returning to Haifa* invites audiences to bear witness to the human cost of war and occupation, while also offering glimpses of hope, resilience, and the possibility of reconciliation. As the characters navigate the complexities of their intertwined destinies, the play challenges us to confront our own perceptions of identity, belonging, and justice in a world torn apart by division and strife.



Graffiti tribute to Kanafani in the Palestinian territories, 2004; Source: Wikipedia



Returning to Kanafani*

by Bashir Abu-Manneh

(University of Kent)

* Written as the foreword for the published version of the play (Faber & Faber 2018) and printed here with permission from the author.

Much ink has been spilt on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But most of it is not of the right kind. Rather than explaining or illuminating the root causes of national antagonism and contradiction, it obfuscates and obscures by invoking timeless notions of ancient hatreds and evil terror. Such language gets in the way of real historical understanding and, ultimately, reconciliation.

No one understood this basic fact better than Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972). Forced out of Acre in 1948, he roamed the Arab world in search of a secure abode. In the process, he became Palestine's most famous writer and activist intellectual: a journalist, playwright, novelist, satirist, political and historical analyst, and spokesperson for a Palestinian resistance group. His core objective was to construct a language that captured the essence of Palestinian existence as a 'complete human symbol,' both of misery and challenge. Because he succeeded, Israel cut his young life short and killed him (with his niece) in a car bomb in Beirut on 8 July 1972. As his obituary in the Daily Star concluded: he was a 'commando who never fired a gun': 'his weapon was a ballpoint pen and his arena newspaper pages. And he hurt the enemy more than a column of commandos.'

Kanafani, then, understood that language has the potential both to corrupt and exploit and to emancipate. A blind language (to use a phrase he dubbed) only serves the powerful and suffocates those who seek change. To defeat it, what he needed was an effective strategy premised on self-examination and self-critique. A new language had to be imagined: critical, evaluative, and rational. If blind language encourages lamentation and resignation, his language would empower the circulation of democracy throughout the body politic of the Arab world. As a precursor to the Arab rebels of the present, Kanafani understood that only democracy unleashes the buried potentials of repressed and denied lives: 'what is required of us,' he said in 1968, 'is that we transform the democratic spirit into a daily practice at all levels.'

Returning to Haifa (1969), adapted here to the stage by Ismail Khalidi and Naomi Wallace, should thus be read in the context of Kanafani's struggle against a politically exploitative language. His novel is distinct in Palestinian fiction for staging a genuine political dialogue between a holocaust survivor

and Palestinian refugees whose home she ends up occupying. Contra to what Kanafani calls 'a dialogue of the deaf,' here stories are traded, motivations explained, suffering recounted. Clash and communication intertwine to produce one of the most memorable encounters of enemies in the annals of both Palestinian and Israeli fiction. What adds to the complexity is that Miriam Koshen, the Israeli protagonist, also inherits the Palestinian couple's infant child Khaldun, who they were forced to abandon during the chaotic events of their expulsion from Haifa twenty earlier. Now in 1967, after Israel's occupation of the rest of Palestine, their child Khaldun stands in front of them as Israeli soldier Dov. What can result from their tense and tragic meeting?

Kanafani's skills as a literary realist and humanist are in full swing here. Enemies are humanized (even saved from ideologized - Zionist - versions of themselves), the injustice of dispossession is confronted head on, and a universal morality is formulated in order to protect all parties to the conflict. By staging a moral confrontation between adversaries (rather than a violent one), Kanafani plants potential seeds of future reconciliation. The moral cause that this Palestinian articulates is one where the weak are not exploited and their mistakes are not used against them. His imagined homeland would live in the universal, and shuns the destructive particularism of nationalism and ethnic strife.

Kanafani is rigorous enough to acknowledge that such universal justice can only be achieved as a form of reciprocity and mutuality between equals. For that, struggle is required. But it is the kind of struggle that Israelis can participate in, so long as they seek to work for a humanist outcome in which all can share. Returning to Haifa is internationalist that way, and yearns for all-round transformation. If war is to be avoided, then a politics of justice has to succeed.

There is no better way to mark seventy years to the Palestinian catastrophe (the nakba) than to remember that Palestinians like Kanafani offered a vision of peace and justice for all. It has long been overdue for Israel to abandon its violent blind language and speak humanism.



CAST



Diala Al-Abed (she/her) is a Palestinian actor born in the North Carolina mountains. It is in North Carolina that she obtained her BFA in Theatre Performance and Dance Studies at UNC Charlotte where she trained in various disciplines including but not limited to: modern dance, aerial arts, and Commedia dell'arte. Performing in shows like *The Long Christmas Ride Home* and *Servant of Two Masters*. She would later go on to train in film acting techniques and scene study under the teachings of Lon Baumgarner in a Stanislowski style approach, as well as on camera techniques and stage acting through the training of Kevin Patrick Murphy. Her love for acting stems from her fascination in human connection and a scenes ability to enforce the confrontations of one's own emotions and self. When she's not in a class or doing scene work, you can find her on a nature walk, thrifting, or working on film photography.



Amal Bisharat (she/her) is a Palestinian American multidisciplinary artist: a theatre director, theatre maker, producer, actor, musician, and photographer. Bisharat holds a BA in Music and Theater from Minnesota State University-Moorhead and for 12 years worked as a director and music director in partnership with San Francisco Unified School District. Currently she works with Golden Thread Productions, recently co-producing and directing for their signature program ReOrient Festival of Short Plays (2023), and directing an online reading of "The Gaza Monologues" by Ashtar Theater (2023). Bisharat is also in the process of creating her first musical, "Morning in Jenin Musical", a Palestinian refugee story adapted from the internationally best-selling novel by the same name by Susan Abulhawa. After many years hiatus from acting, she is thrilled to be returning to her roots this year to play the role of Safiyya in GTP's production of "Returning to Haifa" by Ghassan Kanafani, adapted for the stage by Naomi Wallace and Ismail Khalidi. Bisharat is a grateful recipient of the Theater Bay Area Arts Leadership Residency Grant (2022-2023), Theater Bay Area CA\$H Creates Grant (2022), and San Francisco Arts Commission Artist Grant (2023). Bisharat believes in the transformative power of art and storytelling whether on a stage, in a photograph, or in the stories we tell ourselves.



Jacob Henrie-Naffaa*

is a Bay Area native actor, writer, director, educator, singer and dancer. He began performing professionally at the age of seven and has been seen performing on stages around the Bay since 2009. Favorite theatre credits include Sonny in *In The Heights*, Tulsa in *Gypsy* and Bullshot Crummond in *Bullshot Crummond*. In 2019, Jacob began exploring into the world of camera acting, and has appeared in a large assortment of commercials and short films, favorite credits including Izzy in the Robert Cuccioli-directed *She's Blown Away*, Charlie in Samsung's *SmartThings 2023* commercial and Me-Time Guy in Jolibee's 2024 Jolibee Family Deals commercial. Jacob is also regularly seen on the popular YouTube channel *Illumeably*, appearing in multiple roles in various skits and short films. Jacob has a baritenor range and is trained in Hip-Hop, tap, jazz, ballet and modern dance styles. Jacob's goal in life is to get an EGOT or die trying. He can next be seen as Cliff in CenterRep's *Cabaret* this coming summer.

**Member Actors Equity*



Lijesh Krishnan grew up in Kuwait and India and spent a decade in the Twin Cities before making San Francisco his home. In the Bay Area, he has acted with African American Shakespeare, Crowded Fire, Golden Thread, Marin Shakespeare, Aluminous, Altarena, Those Women Productions, Ninjaz of Drama, Theater of Others, and others. He is honored to be part of this cast and crew.



Michelle Navarrete* (she/her) is a Theatre Artist, both on and off the stage. Born and raised in San Francisco, she fell in love with the performing arts and storytelling at an early age. After receiving her BFA in Acting from Marymount Manhattan College, she continued her career in NYC performing and producing theatre. In the Bay Area, Michelle has worked with SF Playhouse, Cal Shakes, TheatreFirst, Custom Made Theatre Co, Bay Area Children's Theatre, Impact Theatre, Faultline Theatre, Theatre Cultura, to name a few. As a performer, educator and activist, she has made theatre and the performing arts part of her life and message. Thank you to my fighting Irish dad for being my biggest fan. Miss you pops!

** Member Actors Equity*

PLAYWRIGHTS



Ismail Khalidi is a playwright, director and screenwriter. His plays include Truth Serum Blues, Tennis in Nablus, Foot, Sabra Falling, and Dead Are My People. He has co-adapted two novels for the stage with Naomi Wallace; Ghassan Kanafani's Returning to Haifa and Sinan Antoon's The Corpse Washer. Khalidi's work has been published in numerous anthologies and he co-edited the collection Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora. His writing has been featured in American Theatre Magazine, The Kenyon Review, Guernica, Al Jazeera, The Dramatist and ReMezcla among others. He is currently a Directing Fellow at Pangea World Theater.



Naomi Wallace's plays have been produced in the United States, the U.K., Europe and the Middle East and include *One Flea Spare*, *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *In the Heart of America*, *The Breach*, *Things of Dry Hours*, *The Fever Chart: Three Vision of the Middle East*, *And I and Silence*, *Night is a Room*, *The Return of Benjamin Lay* (co-written with Marcus Rediker) and an adaptation of *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani and *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon (both adaptations co-written with Ismail Khalidi). Awards include the MacArthur Award, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Fellowship of Southern Writers Drama Award, Horton Foote Award, Obie, Arts and Letters Award in Literature, and the inaugural Windham Campbell prize for drama. Wallace is currently writing the book for the Loretta Lynn musical, and new John Mellencamp musical *Small Town*. Wallace is presently co-writing a new play with Ismail Khalidi for Ashtar theater in Ramallah.

CREATIVE TEAM





Carlos Antonio Aceves (**Scenic Designer**) is a Bay Area based designer and theatre maker whose practice centers on new works and social justice theatre. Selected designs credits include: Justice, Marin Theatre Company; The Displaced, Crowded Fire Theatre; Little Women, American Conservatory Theatre YC; Walls, San Francisco Mime Troupe; PrEP Play or Blue Parachute, New Conservatory Theatre Center; Dream Hou\$, Shotgun Players; ReOrient Festival of New Plays, Golden Thread; Cruzar la Cara de la Luna, West Edge Opera; Tiny Fires or Scavengers At The End Of The World, Custom Made; Cyrano, Aurora Theatre Company; Bees and Honey, Marin Theatre Company; and Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Shotgun Players. Carlos extends his heartfelt gratitude to Golden Thread and the entire creative and production team of Returning to Haifa for their unwavering commitment and tireless efforts. CarlosDesignsSets.myportfolio.com



Samantha Alexa (**Props Designer**) is a San Francisco-based multidisciplinary artist specializing in theatrical props design, film, and contemporary art. She has collaborated with numerous theater companies in the Bay Area, including Magic Theatre, Brava Theatre, Golden Thread Productions, Custom Made Theatre, SF Playhouse, and Aurora Theatre. She is also an accomplished filmmaker, with an art department focus. She received her training at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and holds a BA (Hons) degree in Contemporary Performance. With experience as both a performer and a set fabricator, she has seamlessly transitioned into the immersive and experiential industry and brings a unique perspective to all of her artistic endeavors.



Samer Al-Saber (**Director**) is an Assistant Professor of Theater and Performance Studies at Stanford University. He is affiliated with the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity and the Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies. His work appeared in Theatre Research International, Alt.Theatre, Performance Paradigm, Critical Survey, Theatre Survey, Jadaliyya, Counterpunch, This Week In Palestine, and various edited volumes, such as Palgrave's Performing For Survival, and Edinburgh Press' Being Palestinian. He is co-editor of the anthology Stories Under Occupation and Other Plays from Palestine (Seagull Press/University of Chicago Press) and editor of To The Good People of Gaza (Bloomsbury Press). Directing credits include Betty Shamieh's As Soon As Impossible, Hasan Abdelrazzak's The Prophet, Arthur Milner's Facts, and a Palestinian adaptation of A Midsummer Night's Dream (in Arabic). As Playwright, most recently in 2023, he wrote and directed Decolonizing Sarah for Chicago's Uprising Theater. He is currently directing Ismail Khalidi and Naomi Wallace's adaptation of Ghassan Kanafani's Returning To Haifa for Golden Thread Productions in San Francisco.

Shy Baniani (**Production Crew: Electrician**)



Cassie Barnes (**Lighting Designer**) is a Resident Artist for Golden Thread Productions and a resident Lighting Designer for San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Diablo Ballet, Bayer Ballet Academy, and Applegate Dance Company. She has also designed for Shotgun Theatre Company, Magic Theatre, Crowded Fire Theatre, Cutting Ball Theatre, and NCTC. She's been working with Golden Thread since 2015 and has cherished her time with the company.



Madeline Berger (**Costume Designer**) is thrilled to be joining the Golden Thread Community and designing such an incredible piece with such incredible artists and collaborators! Madeline is a multifaceted costume designer and wardrobe stylist based in the East Bay. Her work can be seen around the Bay Area from The San Jose Stage to Shotgun Players. Madeline currently runs the Bay Area's first full-service costume design house and collective located in Berkeley to provide support and community for Bay Area costumes. For more visit: madelinebergerdesign.com



River Bermudez-Sanders (**Production Manager**) (they/them) is a multi-disciplinary Bay Area theatre artist. They have worked in companies around the Bay Area including SFBATCO, Cutting Ball, Ray of Light, Palo Alto Players, Children's FairyLand, the Oakland Theatre Project, SPARC, Townhall Theatre, NCTC, and Theatre Rhinoceros. Recent work includes Cutting Ball's Variety Pack (Performer, Various Roles), Ray of Light's Rocky Horror (Phantom), and Hillbarn Conservatory's Mean Girls (Choreographer). Other credits include a staged reading of Justin P. Lopez' The Re-Education of Fernando Morales (Town Hall Theater, Director) and Bad Hombres (Theatre Rhinoceros, Director). They are currently a Producing Fellow with PlayGround, and a teaching artist with

Hillbarn Conservatory. They are the author of an award-winning thesis that explores the ways Latiné theatre artists advocate for equity in the theatre industry. They are deeply invested in creating theatre that openly challenges white supremacy culture in content and process. BFA Musical Theatre, Emerson College.



Lev Collins (**Technical Director**) is thrilled to be the technical director for *Returning to Haifa*. Lev is a fourth year student at UC Berkeley, studying computer science. He works as a scenic painter and carpenter for UC Berkeley's theater department, as well as for a variety of theaters in the Bay. While not building things or coding, Lev co-leads UC Berkeley's Jewish Voice for Peace chapter.



Bernadette Flynn (**Scenic Painter**) is a scenic artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area, and holds a Masters in Fine Arts in Theatre Arts technical design, from San Francisco State University. Companies she works with are Custom Made Theatre, A.C.T., The Speakeasy, Opera Parallele, SF Playhouse, University of San Francisco Performing Arts department, San Francisco Recreation and Parks Cultural Arts Division, Young People's Teen Musical Theatre Company, Deborah Slater Dance Theatre and Menlo School. She has worked with Mabou Mines and Trick Saddle Theatre company on *Imagining The Imaginary Invalid*, at La Mama etc theatre in NYC.

Bernadette was nominated for best set design for *When We Were Young And Unafraid* at Custom Made Theatre from the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle in 2019. She is delighted to be working with Golden Thread Productions on *Returning to Haifa*.



Navid G. Maghami (**Graphic Designer**) (he/him) is an independent art director and multi-disciplinary designer and visual artist. He has worked widely in a variety of disciplines and media including branding, visual design, motion graphics, print & digital publishing, gaming, theater, music events and video production. Navid holds an MFA in design from California College of the Arts in San Francisco. He has been with Golden Thread Productions since 2008.



Marina Johnson (**Assistant Director and Dramaturg**) is a Ph.D. candidate in TAPS at Stanford University (M.F.A in Directing, University of Iowa). Her dissertation research focuses on Palestinian performance from 2015 to the present. Johnson is the co-host of Kunafa and Shay, a MENA theatre podcast produced by HowlRound Theatre Commons, and they are also a member of Silk Road Rising's Polycultural Institute. Johnson's work has appeared or is forthcoming in Theatre/Practice, Arab Stages, Decolonizing Dramaturgy in a Global Context (Bloomsbury), Milestones in Staging Contemporary Genders and Sexualities (Routledge), Women's Innovations in Theatre, Dance, and Performance, Volume I: Performers (Bloomsbury). Prior to her Ph.D., she was a Visiting Assistant Professor at Beloit College for three years. Most recently, Johnson directed The Wolves at Stanford University, dramaturged two plays in Golden Thread Productions' ReOrient Festival, and directed The Shroud Maker with the International Voices Project. www.marina-johnson.com



Camille La'akea Wong (Board Operator)

(they/them) is thrilled to be working at Golden Thread Productions again! Camille is a Bay Area based theatre maker and teaching artist. Recent projects include Shidaiqu (Stage Manager, SFBATCO) and School of Rock (QLAB operator, Royal Theatre Academy). Camille would like to thank their friends and family for their support. They would also like to thank Golden Thread for the opportunity to be part of their Season for Palestine. #FreePalestine!



Trent Martinez (Load-in crew) is a multi ethnic nonbinary transgender bay area transplant of Mexican, Cherokee, and German decent from the east coast. Prior to working in theater they worked as a barista, a janitor, and a landing support specialist in the United States Marine Corps. They enjoy assisting with set load ins and strikes because it reminds them of building 3d puzzles. In their off time they engage in hobbies such as crochet, drawing, painting and listening to music.



Olivia Prink (Load-in crew)

is a long time bay area resident, born and raised. She has 15+ years of experience in the world of theater and production. Currently, she is a stagehand with Local 107 I.A.T.S.E. , a carpenter with Rooster productions and a freelance electrician. With a wide range of skills in the field, she has worked with many companies in the SF bay area and passionately continues to explore the art scene and community.



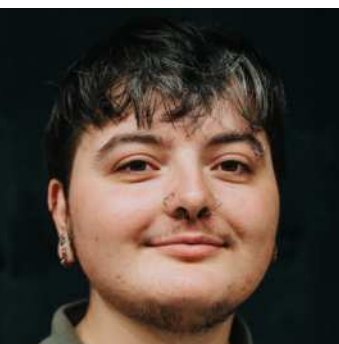
Wendy Reyes (**Production Associate**) (she/ella) is a Mexican-American multimedia artist with a Bachelor's degree in Media Studies from the University of San Francisco. With her exceptional skills in video and audio production, Wendy is passionate about creating engaging stories that raise awareness about social injustices while promoting a healthier, more just path for marginalized communities. Currently based in the Bay Area, Wendy brings her technical expertise to Golden Thread's team, contributing to the realization of their artistic endeavors. Additionally, she is a participant of KALW Public Media's year-long Beat Reporting Fellowship, further expanding her impact within the realm of multimedia storytelling. Comment end

Karen Runk* (**Stage Manager**) moved to SF with the intention of only staying for a few months... Well over two decades later she's still here! This is largely due to the talented folks at the SF Mime Troupe, Word For Word and thanks to Golden Thread Productions where she has been a Resident Artist since 2018 (aka the before times) - but mostly it's due to rent control! Runk has also stage managed with Word For Word, Magic Theater, SFShakes, Intersection for the Arts, African American Shakespeare Company and SF Mime Troupe.

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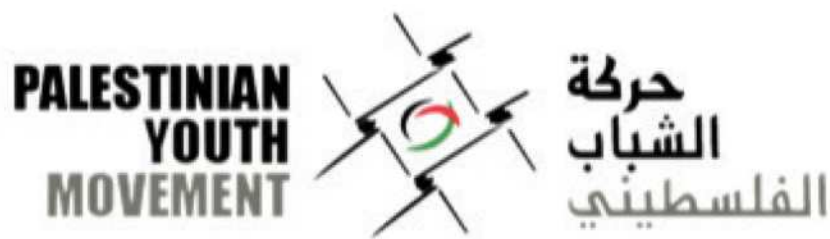


Derek Schmidt (**Sound Designer**) is a composer, songwriter, sound designer and educator living in San Francisco. He has performed and released music in various genres, bands, and solo projects, from electronic pop to chamber folk. In 2018 Derek received a grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission to perform and release the first iteration of the solo work Major Arcana -a song cycle interpretation of each of the 22 trump cards of the tarot deck. He graduated from California State University, East Bay in 2020 with his Master's degree in composition and now teaches music in SF, where he lives with his wonderful drag queen/performer/writer/activist partner and their two cats, Nim and Aleister.



Paige Weissenburger (**Assistant Stage Manager**) is a multidisciplinary theater artist with focus on stage management, electrics, and storytelling. New to the Bay Area, they are a recent graduate from UC Santa Cruz, with origins from the bottom of the Central Coast. They love to create, consume, capture, and share the legend of art with those who care.

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Season Community Council*



Amal Bisharat, Director, Writer, Musician, Actor

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Maya Nazzal, Actor

Arielle Tonkin, Parabbinic Artist and Educator

*The role of the Community Council is to support Golden Thread's community engagement efforts through advocacy and promotion, guidance, networking, and evaluation.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO

Anni Kanafani, wife of Ghassan Kanafani, and
Gordon Dickerson, the literary agent for the dramatic rights of the works of Kanafani, for their support of this production.

Deep gratitude

To Mona Masri, Jumana Muwafi, and Hassan Fouda for organizing and leading a gofundme fundraising campaign to support this production.

To the following community members for their dedication and efforts to support our Season for Palestine: Zeiad A Shamrouch, Amer Budayr, Lara Kiswani, Seth Morrison, and Nadya Tannous.

THANK YOU

Liz Lisle and Gracie Brakeman from Shotgun Players
The Workers at Rainbow Grocery Cooperative
San Francisco Mime Troupe
Michael Kelly
Eleanor Suraya Stalcup

Special Thanks from Naomi Wallace

Thank you to my mother, **Sonia DeVries**, for her passionate support for this adaptation and thanks to **Neil McPherson** at the Finborough Theater.

Special Thanks from Ismail Khalidi

Thanks to my family, namely my parents **Mona** and **Rashid**, and to my two beautiful kids **Nur** and **Elias**, for whom I write.

Native Land Acknowledgement

Potrero Stage, as well as our headquarters, are located on the ancestral home of the Ramaytush Ohlone. The Bay Area is the homeland of the Multiple Ohlone Tribes, including the Ramaytush in San Francisco, the Chochenyo and the Karkin Confederated Villages of Lisjan, Him'ren, Ohlone Tribe, Inc and Muwekma in the East Bay, along with the Bay Miwok, Plains Miwok in Contra Costa, the Yokuts in the South Bay and Central Valley. We are committed to supporting and celebrating our Native communities in partnership with The Friendship House in San Francisco, and the Intertribal Friendship House and the Sogorea Te Land Trust in Oakland. We acknowledge and are grateful to WeSeeYouWAT and the Intertribal Friendship House for their help in developing these statements.



Potrero Stage is a 99-seat state-of-the-art performance space located in the heart of San Francisco's Potrero Hill neighborhood, operated by PlayGround, and serving as home to some of the Bay Area's leading new play developers and producers, including PlayGround, Crowded Fire, Golden Thread, and Playwrights Foundation, among others. For more information or to inquire about rentals, email info@potrerostage.org or call (415) 992-6677.



Actors' Equity Association (AEA), founded in 1913, represents more than 49,000 actors and stage managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. The Equity emblem is our mark of excellence. Actorsequity.org

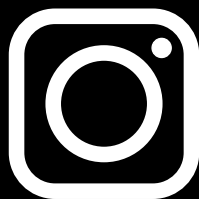
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MIDDLE EAST CENTER STAGE

Golden Thread Productions, founded in 1996, is the first American theatre company devoted to the Middle East. We produce passionate and provocative plays from or about the Middle East that celebrate the multiplicity of its perspectives and identities. We are a developmental catalyst and vibrant artistic home to artists at various stages of their career. We bring the Middle East to the American stage, creating treasured cultural experiences for audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

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