

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF THEATER PRESENTS:

# WHY ARE YOU KILLING YOURSELF?

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED  
BY ZAINA DANA '21

MAY 1 AT 8PM  
LIVESTREAM OF IN-PERSON  
SHOW

MAY 11 AND 12 AT 8PM  
RADIO PLAY LISTENING  
EVENT

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC  
WITH ADVANCE RESERVATIONS

VISIT  
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RESERVE

## Cast (in order of appearance)

Person	Raya Tuffaha '23
Boy / Mom / Jean Baudrillard / Taysir Alluni	Shail Modi '22
Supervisor / Boyfriend / Osama Bin Laden	Timothy St. Pierre '21
Slavoj Žižek	Jake Chanenson '21

## Creative Team

Playwright & Director	Zaina Dana '21
Set Designer	Zaina Dana '21
Sound Designer	Michael Nutt '23
Lighting Designer	James P. Murphy
Costume Designer	Laila Swanson
Dramaturg	Clare Grundstein '20
Stage Manager	Michael Lambui
Production Manager & Technical Director	Scott Cassidy
Assistant Stage Manager	Cynthia Ruimin Shi '23
Directing Faculty Advisor	Allen Kuharski
Sound Design Faculty Advisor	Elizabeth Atkinson
Publicity & Program Designer	Jillian Jetton
Publicity Assistant	Marie Inniss '23

*CONTENT WARNING: Suicide, terrorism, strong language and mentions of sexual violence.*

## Land Acknowledgement

The Swarthmore College Department of Theater acknowledges that we work, learn and live on the land of the Lenni-Lenape, and we pay respect to the Lenape People past, present, and future. To learn more and support the work of Lenape tribes, [click here](#). To find out what land you are occupying, visit <https://native-land.ca/> or text your city and state to 907-312-5085.

## About the Director / Playwright

Zaina Dana '21 is a Palestinian-American Honors Theater major with a concentration in Directing and Set Design. Now a graduating senior, her passion for directing began as soon as she came to Swarthmore when she worked as assistant director to Dir. Alex Torra on *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* in 2017. She went on to complete the directing concentration, directing an original cut of Arthur Miller's *A View From the Bridge* in 2019 and an original devised radio play, *Laryngospasm*. She has directed several shows for Drama Board's Playwright's Festival as well as produced RevFest, a massive festival dedicated to showcasing artists and performers of color on Swarthmore's campus. As a set designer, Zaina designed this year's Senior Company show, *Etta Jenks*, directed by Jack McManus '21, and she will be completing her honors design thesis on *The Skin of Our Teeth* by Thornton Wilder later this semester.

## Director's Note by Zaina Dana '21

I've had this show in my mind for the past year. The inspiration for it actually came from one of my favorite seminars I've taken at Swarthmore "Holy War, Martyrdom, and Suicide in Abrahamic Religions". Throughout the process of writing this show, people have asked if there are real world analogues to the characters portrayed on stage. There are so few Palestinian or even Arabs on stage that it's

worth clarifying that I'm not the girl on stage. I never had an ex-boyfriend like that and my mom is definitely not the mom on stage. I wrote a play about a Muslim, about a Palestinian girl that is not autobiographical, but rather a mirror on the insecurities that can fester in our communities.

For people of color who are second and third generation Americans, there is a severe bastardizing of our self-image that happens as a result of assimilation in America. And this isn't by accident. We have to remember that much of what we consume day to day is propaganda and that propaganda deeply impacts how we see ourselves and the rest of the world, whether our parents were born and raised in America or not. For younger people, like for example the age of my younger brother who grew up well after 9/11, they were born into a world order that's already in motion.

Combine this with deafening levels of information and stimulus. It's easy then, for young people—for young women—to get lost in all the information. There are so many forces that profit off our apathy and our self-deprecation, and it seems like there are an infinite number of ways to critique and cage women of color.

And many of us can't help being brought up in the United States, coming of age constantly pulled between religious, generational, inter-continental and gender divides. So what do we actually owe the policies of the past? And can we actually move past or perhaps heal from the trauma of our parents to reclaim our identities? And can we actually revolt against our real oppressors?

It's been 20 years since 9/11, and it feels like things haven't really changed all that much, even with a new president. The shifting of the world order is far too monumental for myself at least in my youth to perceive. But I don't mean to be a pessimist. In fact I'm very hopeful about the future.

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to put this piece together. It has been a privilege working with such talented and thoughtful actors and designers. My hope is that out of a play about apathy and violence that we can find one message of hope, of power, of faith, and another message to please stop doing plays about 9/11.

## Dramaturg's Note *by Clare Grundstein '20*

In his 2002 essay *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Jean Baudrillard describes terrorism as a “spectacle.” It’s a word we often reserve for our discussions of art and beauty, levied as a compliment towards the works that really *floor* us, consuming us wholly in a scene that’s bright and vivid. It’s a word that speaks to prowess, intention, and high-level execution — drawing stark contrast with the typical American perception of acts as terror as senseless and brutish. It’s simpler for us that way — to be positioned as the “sane” victims of an unhinged enemy who strikes randomly. This positioning shields us from culpability, from reflecting on our own national history of violence (which, of course, we deem “acceptable” — attached to a purpose we can clearly see and grapple with).

There’s something taboo, then, about using the language of “spectacle” to describe terrorism. Through this word choice, we’re asked to look at this violence anew — as violence that may *seem* senseless in scope, but is in fact too intensely specific in direction and execution to actually *be* this way. Osama Bin Laden, in his 2001 interview with Taysir Alluni, emphasized this fact: “As for the World Trade Center, the ones who were attacked and who died in it were part of a financial power. It wasn’t a children’s school!” His words pierce through to the heart of a great problem, and highlight the real internal logic of the violence in question — revealing it to be more choreographed spectacle than it is senseless spree. What does this mean for the world we know, for the harsh barricades we’ve constructed to protect us and our “good” violence against “bad,” othered violence? Why shouldn’t we self-destruct?

I believe that the team behind *Why Are You Killing Yourself?*, led by the incomparable and fiercely original Zaina Dana, has captured the essence and irony of this question with honesty, grace, and precision. A spectacle in its own right, the play beckons us to search — to mine for the answer to its central question in its symphony of big and little violences...to mine for kindness and connection in a system designed to subjugate and destroy.

## Who's Who

**Jake Chanenson '21** (Slavoj Žižek) is a computer science major and linguistics enthusiast. He has previously directed three shows for Swarthmore’s drama club organization and has recently found a passion for lighting design.

**Clare Grundstein '20** (Dramaturg) is a Swarthmore-based artist, and a 2020 graduate of the College. Clare received her B.A. in Theater and Psychology last spring, and has spent her time since exploring new ways to make and engage with art during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, she worked as the dramaturg for *How to Shave in 6 Easy Steps*, which premiered at the 2020 Philadelphia Fringe festival. She also performed dramaturgical research for Theatre Horizon’s upcoming *Our Norristown*, under the supervision of Nell Bang-Jensen '11. Clare’s Swarthmore credits include 2019’s *Bedroom Scene*, for which she wrote and directed, and 2019’s *Not Her Glass But You*, for which she acted, wrote, and devised alongside Zaina Dana '21 and Collin Spangler '20. Clare also appeared as Canary Mary in 2019’s *Fucking A*, Prospera in 2018’s *The Tempest*, Nurse in 2017’s *Romeo and Juliet*, and Phoebe in 2016’s *As You Like It*.

**Michael Lambui** (Stage Manager) is a Philadelphia-based set and lighting designer for theater. He has worked with companies like Headlong Dance Theater, Theatre Exile, The Arden Theatre Company, The Savoy Company, allendance, Birds on a wire Dance Theatre, Villanova Theater, Drexel Co-op Theatre, Azuka Theatre, and Lightning Rod Special. Michael is currently the Production Assistant for the Theater Department at Swarthmore, and has designed three shows for the department - *Glare*, *The End: A Queer Reckoning* and *The Pillowman*. He graduated from The University of the Arts with a BFA in Theater Design and Technology. To see more of his work, visit [michaellambui.com](http://michaellambui.com).

**Shail Modi** '22 (Boy/Mom/Jean Baudrillard/Taysir Alluni) is a Theater and Economics Major from the Bay Area. He has previously acted in Zaina's Directing II piece *Laryngospasm*, in last semester's Directing I Night of Scenes as a Nagg in *Endgame*, directed by Amaechi Abuah '21, and as Azdak (And Others) in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* directed by Alex Torra as part of Production Ensemble. His dream is to be attractive enough to be in Bollywood movies without knowing Hindi or how to dance.

**James P. Murphy** (Lighting Designer) received his BA in Technical/Design Theater from SUNY at Albany in 1981. Murph is beginning his 30th year here at Swarthmore and is thrilled to be working on live performances once again. Murph has worked as a Technical Director, Production Manager, and Lighting and Sound designer throughout the Northeast. He is the resident Lighting Designer for the Dance Department at Swarthmore, as well as the Theater Department's Lighting Design Instructor. He regularly designs Production Ensemble and occasionally Senior Company, as well as assorted thesis productions and Directing Workshop showings. Murph received a Barrymore Nomination for his sound design of The Arden Theater's production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. He has designed the lights for that same classic twice: for Mum Puppettheatre's 2005 production, and again for the Swarthmore Department of Theater's 2013 outdoor production in the Crum Woods. Murph's Philadelphia credits include 2004 Fringe Live Arts Festival for Sasha Welsh and Aryani Manring, and with Mum Puppettheatre as Lighting Designer for the critically acclaimed *Puppetmaster of Lodz*, *Madwoman of Chaillot* and *Seance*. Original dance lighting design include Lenny Seidman's *ARC*, *Last Train to Philly* for Doug Elkins and *Dance of our Ancestors* for Kariamuwelsh & Co.

**Timothy St. Pierre** '21 (Supervisor/Boyfriend/Osama Bin Laden) is a senior from Brunswick, Maine majoring in French/Francophone Studies and Political Science. He has previously appeared in *The Tempest*, several Yellow Stockings *Night of Scenes*, *Fool for Love*, *A View from the Bridge*, and the *Orientation Play*.

**Laila Swanson** (Costume Designer) is the Assistant Professor of Costume Design at the Swarthmore College Department of Theater. She previously taught classes in Set and Costume Design at Arcadia University, and has designed sets and costumes for productions in Scandinavia as well as in the US. Recent costume designs at Swarthmore College include *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The (24-Hour) Bald Soprano*, *Marie Antoinette*, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. Outside the college, Laila's collaborations include costume design for *The Three Musketeers* at Hedgerow Theater, *Mr. Burns* at Villanova University Theater, *Henry IV: Your Prince and Mine* for Shakespeare in Clark Park, and several Swarthmore alumni productions in the Philadelphia Fringe Festival. Her work as a scenic artist includes the movies of M. Night Shyamalan and other film productions in Philadelphia. Laila is a retired member of IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees), and received an MFA from Temple University.

**Raya Tuffaha** '23 (Person) is a Palestinian-American sophomore from Seattle, WA. One of her recent favorite roles was Catherine in Arthur Miller's *A View From The Bridge*. Her training includes Circle in the Square, Studio East, School of Amman Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, and more. In the fall, she will be heading to London to study at the British American Drama Academy.

This production is made possible by generous support from the Swarthmore College Honors Program. **Special Thanks** to Honors, James Magruder & Rania Qawasma.

## Department of Theater Faculty & Staff

**K. Elizabeth Stevens** Chair & Associate Professor  
**Allen Kuharski** Professor  
**Matt Saunders** Associate Professor, Resident Set Designer  
**Laila Swanson** Assistant Professor, Resident Costume Designer,  
Co-Chair of Production  
**Alex Torra** Visiting Assistant Professor

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**Elizabeth Atkinson** Visiting Assistant Professor, Sound Design  
**Quinn Bauriedel**, Visiting Assistant Professor, Acting  
**James Magruder** Visiting Assistant Professor, Dramaturgy  
**Jennifer Kidwell**, Associate in Theater Performance, Movement  
**James P. Murphy** Associate in Theater Performance, Lighting Design  
**Audrey Pernell**, Associate in Theater Performance, Voice  
**Adriano Shaplin** Associate in Theater Performance, Playwriting  
**Scott Cassidy** Production Manager/Tech Dir., Co-Chair of Production  
**Jillian Jetton** Publicity & Marketing Coordinator  
**Michael Lambui** Production Assistant  
**Jean Tierno** Administrative Assistant

## Lang Performing Arts Center Staff

**James P. Murphy** Managing Director  
**Tom Snyder** Manager of Operations  
**Melanie Leeds** Production Stage Manager  
**Scott Burgess** Sound and Media Supervisor  
**Dominic Chacon** Lighting Supervisor  
**Scott Cassidy** Technical Director / Production Manager  
**Jean Tierno** Administrative Assistant

## Upcoming Events

*Most events are free and open to the public with advanced reservations. To be sure to get an invitation when tickets are available, join our mailing list at [swarthmore.edu/departments-theater](https://swarthmore.edu/departments-theater).*

### HOLIDAY

*Playwriting Thesis*

Written by Amaechi Abuah '21

Directed by Vanessa Ogbuehi

Virtual Staged Reading

**May 5 & 6 at 8m**

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### WHY ARE YOU KILLING YOURSELF?

*Directing Thesis*

Written & Directed by Zaina Dana '21

**May 1, 8pm:** Livestream of in person show

**May 11-12, 8pm:** Radio Play listening event

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### SPRING NIGHT OF SCENES

Directed by Marie Inniss '23

**May 10-11 at 7:30 & 8:30pm**

**Frear Ensemble Theater**

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and [join our mailing list](#) to stay in the loop.