

# Navigating Distorted Territories: “Trauma, Memory and History”

in

## Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*

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### ABSTRACT:

This paper sheds light on the traumatic history associated with Afghanistan, one of the most war-torn places in the world, through the analysis of Tony Kushner’s remarkable play *Homebody/Kabul* (2001) in the light of “trauma and memory” studies. Being a Brechtian- politicized playwright who aims to engage the reader/spectator in other people’s sufferings, Kushner dramatizes the traumatic events that the Afghans have witnessed and experienced during many years of colonialization and their aftermath through the lens of a British, middle-class housewife and the eyes of other Afghan characters. In *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner seeks to engage the Western reader in the trauma of the subjugated “Other” by navigating from one place to another, endeavoring to reflect on the historical, political and traumatic reality of a blighted territory.

**KEYWORDS:** Kushner, Brecht, Afghanistan, trauma, memory, history.

## الإبحار في الأرض اليباب: "الصدمة والذاكرة والتاريخ" في مسرحية

هوم بدي/كابول للكاتب المسرحي توني كوشنر

مقدم من

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### الدالة اللغة العبة

يلقى البحث الضوء على المجد القديم والحاضر المؤلم المرتبط بأحد أكثر البلاد خطورة في العالم من وجهة نظر الغرب وهي أفغانستان، وذلك من خلال قراءة عميقة وتحليل دقيق لمسرحية هوم بدي/كابول (٢٠٠١) للكاتب المسرحي الأمريكي توني كوشنر من منظور العلاقة الوثيقة المتشابهة بين "الصدمة والذاكرة والتاريخ". يجسد كوشنر معاناة الشعب الأفغاني من خلال سيده بريطانيه في منتصف العمر لم يطلق عليها اي اسم سواء "هوم بدي" وهي كلمة بالانكليزية تعني ان جسدها داخل المنزل بالرغم انها ترغب في الهروب من هذا المنزل الذي يشكل عبئا نفسيا عليها وذلك بسبب العزلة والوحدة التي تعاني منهما بسبب توتر العلاقات مع زوجها وابنتها الوحيدة. تهرب بطلنة العمل المسرحي "هوم بدي" من عزلتها بالانغماس في قراءة التاريخ القديم لأفغانستان والغزوات والحروب التي تعرضت لها هذه المنطقة الثرية بحضارات متنوعه ولغات مختلفه وتخييل انها تقابل بائعا أفغايا وتصدم عندما تجد ان ثلاث اصابع من يده اليميني مبتروه ويروي لها المعاناه المريره لشعبه بسبب غزو الأتحاد السوفيتي في الماضي ومساعدة الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية لتنظيم طالبان للوصول للحكم لتصبح افغنستان اليوم رمزا للارهاب والتطرف الديني الأيديولوجي. وينقل كوشنر القارئ في الفصول المتتالية للمسرحية الى أفغانستان حيث تقرر "هوم بدي" الرحيل من لندن والذهاب لكابل عاصمة افغانستان وفي هذه الأرض الخربة يستمع القارئ للكثير من القصص المؤلمه التي تعرض لها الأفغان بسبب الحروب التي شنتها قوي الغرب الإمبريالية على أفغانستان والتي تكشف التاريخ السياسي و الأيديولوجي المؤلم المرتبط بهذه الأرض اليباب.

الكلمات الدالة: كوشنر، بريشت، افغانستان، الصدمة، الذاكرة، التاريخ.

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To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (Caruth, *Trauma* 4-5)

[T]he Present is always an awful place to be. And it remains awful to us, the scene of our crime.

(Kushner 11)

Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul* (2001)<sup>1</sup> presents a complex blend of different times and various traumatic images of ruin, death and atrocities in Afghanistan. In this play, Kushner deeply reflects how the traumatic events that the Afghans have been subjugated to throughout many years of colonial domination and their aftermath are unceasingly intruding and severely affecting their present. Sara Freeman argues that “[Homebody/Kabul]” is a “grief-filled” dramatic work of art that is “laden by many. . . losses that require mourning” (67).

The paper seeks to bring to light the sufferings of the Afghans after the Soviet Union’s invasion in 1979 and the United States’ deliberate intervention from 1979 to 1989 for the sake of backing up Mujahedeen against Russian forces for the sake of “geo-strategic goals” (Ahmadi 11)<sup>2</sup> and global hegemony regardless of the destiny of Afghan people. In this paper, the image of the Afghan refugees

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and trauma survivors in Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* is reread and reapproached through the lens of "trauma and memory" studies. In addition, there is a thorough reflection on the importance of Tony Kushner in the political theatre and his great interest in exploring the traumatized subject through adopting Brechtian didactic approach and dramatic techniques.

Since the emergence of contemporary trauma studies, trauma has been inexorably entangled and engaged with both memories and histories of nations; particularly the oppressed and the victimized who have been exposed to invasions, dispossessions, displacements and genocide during the colonial eras. In its original sense, "the notion of 'trauma' has no straightforward definition. . . [It is] derived from the Greek 'traumatizo,' meaning to wound. . . [T]rauma signified a blow or shock to the bodily tissues which led to injury or disturbance" (Leydesdorff et al. 1). Historically speaking, "[t]he origin of contemporary trauma studies can usefully be dated to 1980, when post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first included in the diagnostic canon of the medical and psychiatric professions . . . [as] the result of sustained political campaigning by Vietnam veterans, US who organized agitation groups against the continuation of the war" (Whitehead 4). Then, in the early 1990s this medical term has been extended to entail other cultural, social, ethical, visual and literary fields; particularly with the increasing violence in "the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" and the "displacement of vast numbers of people around the world" (Ward 4). As a result, numerous literary works in various fields which tackle the detrimental repercussions of the traumatic experiences resulted from "the Jewish Holocaust, . . . , the apartheid regime in South Africa, the Algerian war, genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia, [and] Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (4-7) have emerged.

Being deeply influenced by Sigmund Freud's studies which marked a significant change in the field of psychoanalysis and

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trauma, Cathy Caruth (like Freud) has asserted that trauma is no longer an injury inflicted on the body of the individual only; it is

the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—[which] is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event. . . . [T]rauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wounded [person] that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. (*Unclaimed Experience* 4)

She also adds that this deep, unavoidable “wound” imposes itself belatedly and insistently on the mind, psyche and life of the individual via repeated flashbacks, nightmares, unbidden repetitive images, “intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the [traumatic] event” (*Trauma* 4). So, the traumatized subject always suffers from “the freezing of time” because he/she is often imprisoned “in the past moment of trauma” (Outka 26). From here, the haunting effect of the trauma and its lingering repercussions on the victimized are inevitable. As Wendy O’ Brien puts it, “[t]raumatic events haunt the individual . . . One becomes *lodged* or *stuck* in the time of trauma. The moment(s) is repeated over and over again” (212-13; emphasis added). In a broader context, the traumatized subject “[lives] in the space of timeliness” being imprisoned in “a story that [he/she] can’t forget and can’t tell” (211, 14). He/she fluctuates between “two worlds: the world of [his/her] traumatic memories (a kind of everlasting present) and the real world (the concrete present)” (Amir 44); and it is indeed the “world of traumatic memories” that haunts the traumatized most. Hence, trauma is an unremittingly, “intense personal suffering” (Caruth, *Trauma* vii) that is “characterized by its spectral return” (Gildersleeve 1). It engulfs the traumatic survivor all over his/her life.

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Crucially, colonized nations like Indians, Pakistanis, Vietnamese, Afghans, et cetera that have been subjected to long history of imperialism and injustice see in recollecting and writing their concealed traumatic experiences a form of “resistance” to the Orientalist reductionist discourses which have deliberately and unceasingly attempted to perpetuate and fix images of them as threatening, demonic races. Though most of trauma narratives are narrated by writers who have been exposed to victimization, it is important to mention that there are impressive, rebellious intellectuals, writers and artists such as Noam Chomsky, Eugene Gore Vidal, Naomi Wallace, Tony Kushner and others who have sought through their resisting writings to “speak the truth to power” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* xiv) by questioning and revealing “lost truths of pain” (Caruth, *Trauma* 9) and voicing the victimized. In this light, the writings and callings of these writers coincide with what the Palestinian-American cultural critic Edward Said has maintained in his seminal study *Orientalism*:

I have been arguing. . . that the notion there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically “different” inhabitants who can be defined on basis of religion, culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly debatable idea. I certainly do not believe the limited proposition that only *a black can write about a black*, a Muslim about Muslims, and so forth. (322; emphasis added)

Succinctly speaking, these writers have endeavored to “[cross] to the other side” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*) embodying the trauma of colonized nations imbued with “an enigma of survival” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 58). They insistently “uphold. . . eternal standards of truth and justice that are precisely *not* of this world” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* 5; emphasis in original). And this is what Tony Kushner has attempted to reflect in *Homebody/Kabul*.

Being deeply moved by the traumatic history of Afghanistan and believing that “theatre can be a useful part of [the] collective and individual examining” (Kushner, Afterword 143), the Jewish-American political playwright Tony Kushner (1956–) attempts to unmask the traumatic history of the Afghans and illuminate how it has often been connected with haunting histories and consecutive bloody wars which have obliterated the true identity of Afghanistan and have molded its nation in an endless cycle of negative stereotypical images of aggressiveness, fanaticism and terrorism. In the play, the Afghan characters “[oscillate] between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of unbearable nature of event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 7). He also expounds how the individual suffering of his characters stands for the historical, cultural and transgenerational trauma of the Afghan nation who has been denied voice and visibility at various domains. Even the white characters in the play (like the main protagonist the Homebody and later her daughter Priscilla) harbor ambivalent feelings: their “Western desire” for superiority and power over the “Other,” and their sense of guilt and lamentation regarding the Afghans’ miserable conditions. In the afterword to his play, Kushner points out that “*Homebody/Kabul* is a play about Afghanistan and the West’s historic and contemporary relationship to that country. It is a play . . . about a human catastrophe, a political problem of global dimensions. It’s also about grief” (142).

As previously-mentioned, though testimonies of war and the grave sufferings inflicted upon its survivors are usually written by writers who have survived such events and have been profoundly affected by them and though Kushner has never travelled to Afghanistan, his play *Homebody/Kabul* expresses his preoccupation with other people’s agonies and plights. Lara Stevens says, “influenced by his personal experiences of social marginalization as homosexual and Jewish, Kushner’s dramatic works share a common concern with social and political exclusion” (“Tony Kushner’s

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*Homebody/Kabul*" 52). Also, when Amy Barrett in her interview with him in October 2001 asked him if his status as gay and marginalized drives him into expressing the sufferings of "Others" who are invisible and voiceless, his answer was as follows: "Yeah, everybody has their own personal history, and you bring that with you when you address the world. And people who have suffered oppression can recognize oppression when it appears in a very different context" (23). Accordingly, Kushner is a prolific dramatist who is deeply affected by "this plea by another who is asking to be seen and heard" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 9).

Before delving deep into reading *Homebody/Kabul* through the lens of "trauma, memory" studies, light will be shed on the significance of Tony Kushner in the American literary landscape, the Brechtian influence on him and the importance of the dramatic work of art at hand. Tony Kushner is a left-wing political American playwright and screenwriter, whose prominence in the theatre lies in his audacity in voicing dissenting viewpoints against the imperialistic Western intervention in the Middle East in general and the United States' destructive foreign policy in particular. He is regarded as "one of the most incendiary and polarizing political voices of our time" (Moore). He is a representative of many voices and currents of opposition in the United States of America that repudiate wars and uncover the American administration which, as stated by Dunca Campbell in "US Artists Dam 'War Without Limit'", "is promoting its own agenda on the back of the attacks" (qtd. in Abdel Hafeez 57). Indeed, Kushner's interest in the politics of war and its sinister effects on nations has basically started when he was an undergraduate student at the University of Columbia as he participated in the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations (Salamon E00001). The thematic thread in most of his plays such as *Bright Room Called Day* (1985), *Slavs* (1995), *Angles in America* (1993), *Only We Who Guard the Mystery Shall be unhappy* (2003) and *Homebody/Kabul* (2001) focuses on intriguing political issues—

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notably, power relations, social marginalization, human rights, atrocities of wars and economic globalization.

In *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner motivates the Western audience to think about the play in a broader context rather than political issues regarding the West's troubled relationship with Afghanistan. He reflects on broad social issues and historical events not from an American stance but from the "knowledge" that "his country" is responsible for the current miserable conditions of the Afghan people. As contended by Karen Nylund,

Kushner is writing as an American within the context not only of the American bombings [as he mentioned in the notes to his play] but also with the knowledge when it supplied weapons to the Mujahedeen with whom Osama bin Laden fought during the 1980s Soviet occupation to overthrow Russian forces regardless of the destiny of the nation. (70)

Kushner—in his play—voices the Afghans who are traumatized, victimized and forgotten. Instead of representing Afghanistan as an exotic, alien "Other", he alienates himself as a Western writer by delineating the devastating impact of war on Afghanistan through his Afghan characters and their narratives. He weaves together the past and the present, old Afghanistan (as recounted in the tour guide book the main white character reads from) and the newly-created Afghanistan, myth and documentary to crystalize in-depth the traumatic events that the Afghan people have witnessed and survived, and their nostalgic yearning for a glorious past and their desire for a safe present. He also calls for interrogating the accountability of Western political practices including the Soviet Union's invasion and the United States' intrusion in Afghanistan. He proclaims,

I didn't imagine, when I was working on the play, that by the time we produced it the United States would be at war with Afghanistan. My play is not a polemic; it

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was written before September 11, before we began bombing, and I haven't changed anything in the play to make it relevant to current events. It was my feeling when writing the play that the more arrogance, more aggression, more chaos and more bloodshed were the last things needed in addressing the desperate situation in which the Afghan people find themselves. (Afterword 142)

He believes that [g]reat historical crimes reproduce themselves. One injustice breeds new generations of injustice. *Suffering* rolls on down through the years, becomes a bleak patrimony, the only inheritance for the disinherited, the key to history" (146; emphasis added). Hence, *Homebody/Kabul* is written from the perspective of a dramatist who acknowledges his own responsibility to bring to light the trauma and agony of a nation tormented at the hands of Western forces—thereby “[mining] the many [. . .] tensions only exacerbated in the wake of 9/11” (Anker 209). Kushner rereads and revives a ruinous history via the lenses of the Afghan characters. At the heart of the Afghans’ varied and complex stories, there is “a historical testimony to . . . [traumatic] wartime experiences” (Whitehead 40) and their aftermath.

It is worth mentioning that Kushner was greatly inspired in his writings by the German playwright, theatre director and Marxist theoretician Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) both thematically and technically. Brecht believes that the function of theatre is not to make audience *feel*, but to make them *think*. Brecht’s Epic Theatre sought to . . . foster understanding of the social forces that shape our lives” (Saddik 18; emphasis in original) so that the audience leaves “the theatre with a clearer idea of what the problems in society [are] and how they could be solved” (Shepherd-Barr 49). In an interview with Kushner, (entitled “I Always Go Back to Brecht”), he states:

[I]n the second semester of my freshman year at Columbia University. . . I read the *Short Organum*, which is the point at which I fell completely in love with Brecht. I read all of *Brecht on Theater*. The *Short Organum* was a kind of revelation for me. It was the first time I believed that people who are seriously committed political intellectuals could have a home in the theatre, the first time I believed theater, really good theater, had the potential for radical intervention, for effectual analysis. (105-06)

Thematically, Kushner holds the Brechtian views and didactics in his tendency towards reflecting on impressing social and political themes; and “rejecting the mimetic aesthetics that have for so long dominated the western tradition” (Ramadan 21). Believing that the theatre plays a crucial role in “radical” change, Kushner weaves arts and politics together. For him, they are entangled and inseparable – thereby, drawing upon Brechtian didactic approach; and this is greatly manifested in the target dramatic work. In *Homebody/Kabul*, he historicizes the narrative in the sense that he places the dramatic situation in Afghanistan within a socio-political, historical context. He raises questions regarding the accountability of Western forces for the ceaseless turmoil in Afghanistan—as described by the Western protagonist:

Awful times, [. . .], our individual degrees of culpability for said awfulness being entirely bound-up in our correspondent degrees of actions, malevolent or not, or in our correspondent degrees of inertia, [. . .]. We shall most of us adjudged guilty when we are summoned before the Judgment Seat. But guilt? Personal guilt? (24)

To expound, the dramatic narrative in *Homebody/Kabul* moves from delineating a damaged personal life of a British woman and the banal events of her daily life to a detailed historical and political

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account of the today’s war-torn Afghanistan. So, being influenced by Brecht, Kushner intertwines both arts and politics together to address serious conundrums and critical issues in today’s world. As Stevens puts it,

[Kushner] invents a variety of ways to tackle complex ethical and political problems. Just as Brecht claims that ‘Petroleum resists the five act form’. . ., Kushner adapts and changes his formal and linguistic experimentation to suit different socio-political contexts . . . I suggest that Kushner’s [*Homebody/ Kabul*] can usefully be described as having a Brechtian dialectical aesthetic given the ways in which [it situates] the present-day conflicts in Afghanistan within the long history of Western economic and military involvement in the region.

(“Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*” 52)

Regarding the remarkable experimental dramatic form of *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner resists the traditional dramatic structures following Brecht’s convictions that “[t]he proper way to explore humanity’s new mutual relationships is via the exploration of the new subject-matter. . . simply to comprehend the new areas of subject-matter imposes a new dramatic and theatrical form. . . petroleum resists the five act form” (29)<sup>3</sup>—that is a “deliberate contrast to the linear plots of standard ‘dramatic’ theatre” (Innas 151) which dominated the theatre in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. *Homebody/Kabul* is divided into three acts varying between a very long monologue at the opening of the play and short, quick episodic scenes in the rest of the drama. Additionally, Kushner breaks away from the traditional Aristotelian unities of time, place and action, utilizing the Brechtian “zigzagging” structure as a means of intensifying the traumatic experiences of the Afghans (Stevens, “Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*” 67).<sup>4</sup> More explicitly, as the narrative of the play

is non-linear moving from one place to another (from a cosmopolitan western country to an eastern devastated terrain) and from one scene to another unexpectedly, from historical to personal and shifting from the awful present to the unrecoverable past and vice versa, the characters' personalities and speeches are fragmented and disjointed (full of pauses and silences as Kushner has underlined in the notes on the play);<sup>5</sup> thereby consolidating the severe traumatic experiences and horrors of wars the characters have experienced.

Like Brecht, Kushner employs and incorporates various forms of metadramatic devices such as “[t]he play within the play,” “[l]iterary and real-life reference” and “[s]elf reference” (Hornby 32) into the dramatic fabric of the play. According to Richard Hornby, “metadrama can be defined as drama about drama; it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, drama itself” (31). He also adds, “[g]reat playwrights” seek to utilize “metadramatic devices” in their works of art to “[alter] the norms and standards by which his audience views the world” (32). This is greatly manifested in the imaginative story of the Afghan hat merchant which Kushner integrates into the main incidents of the play to crystalize true image of the traumatic history of Afghanistan. Moreover, the incorporation of various “translated regional [Afghan] languages” such as “Pashtunistan” and Tajiki (Srikanth 28); and some other languages like Arabic and French into the play accentuates his potential for ruminating about every detail. He craves to know more about this condemned region which is a “site of a richly variegated history of diasporas” (Ramadan 28). In the “Acknowledgments” of his play, Kushner credits the “translated. . . lines” into “Dari and Pashun” to his Afghan translator “Nisar Ahmad Zuri” who “provided [him] with invaluable information about Afghanistan” and who “shared with [him] his experiences in Kabul” (vii). In doing so, Kushner “[distances]” himself as a Western writer “[engaging] in [a] non-Orientalist research on Afghanistan prior to writing the play” (Nylund 70) to present a

realistic image to the Western reader/spectator via an Afghan perspective. One final point worthy to mention is that like Brecht whose plays often "end with open-ended questions to stimulate intellectual engagement with the play's moral and social issues" (Saddik 20), the mysterious disappearance of Kushner's protagonist, the Homebody, remains irresolvable till the end of the play to inspire the audience to think profoundly about the various compulsions that shape our lives.

Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* (2001) is a thought-provoking play that occupies a unique place in the political American theatre. Significantly, the play was mainly written with reference to "the American bombardment of the suspected terrorist training camps in Khost, Afghanistan, August 1998" (Kushner 5) which missed Osama bin Laden who announced the responsibility of Al-Qaeda for the bombings of the American Embassy in Tanzania and killed innocent people instead of him. Originally, when *Homebody/Kabul* was written, it "consisted" solely of the "opening monologue" which "Kushner wrote in 1997 for the actor Kika Markham" (Tracy 95). Afterwards, "[a]n expanded, three-act version" of the play "opened in [December] 2001 in a production by the New York Theatre Workshop" (95), just three months after the 9/11 attacks. What was really startling for many critics at that time is Kushner's shocking lines in the play which were articulated by one of his distraught Afghan characters to the Western Priscilla: "You love the Taliban so much, bring them to New York! Well, don't worry, they're coming to New York! Americans!" (85).<sup>6</sup> In this respect, the play was published, read and performed in a highly charged political atmosphere.

In the epigraph to his play *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner writes the following words articulated by an Afghan woman in *New York Times* in October 13, 2001: "[w]e lost everything, our house and property,' [. . .]. 'We are so afraid of the attacks we have forgotten our names and can't even understand what we say to each other'"

(8). These poignant words which Kushner has chosen to open his play with sets the overall tone of the play. They stimulate the reader/spectator to explore a traumatic history that that needs to be uncovered, revisited and rewritten.

In *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner presents two central and interwoven narrative threads. The first thread opens with the “Homebody” (a middle-aged, unhappy English housewife) in 1998, who delivers a rambling epic monologue for nearly an hour or more and who never leaves her enclosed space: “A woman is sitting on a plain wooden chair next to a table in the kitchen of her home in London. [ . . . ] She is reading from a small book” (9; emphasis in original). The spectator never knows her by any other name except the “Homebody.” In fact, several interpretations regarding Kushner’s calling his protagonist the “Homebody” have been provided by literary critics and writers. For instance, Elizabeth S. Anker sees that Kushner’s choice of giving his protagonist the name of the “Homebody” betokens [the Western] conservative fixation on security” (211). Even her fixed setting underscores the Western woman’s preference to “[remain] confined to ‘the safety of [her] kitchen,’ or firmly ensconced within the domestic. This setting, combined with her self-referential reflections, enacts Western self-enclosure” (211). Freeman writes that “the term *homebody* more commonly suggests that a woman is unattractive (i.e., homely), timid, or lacks ambition and for these reasons does not venture into public space” (62). From my close reading of the play, I see that being a traumatized individual who is haunted by her painful personal experiences and tormented by psychological isolation (which will be illustrated in detail later) the white protagonist is intimidated to leave her comfort zone. She even informs the audience that her “borders have only ever been broached by books” (13)–implicitly consolidating the West’s refusal to confront either the reality of itself or the reality of the “Other” except via its own imagination and ideologically constructed claims.

The Homebody informs the spectator about the glorious history of Afghanistan and its recent ruins from an antique guidebook entitled *An Historical Guide to Kabul* (1965). She informs the reader how Afghanistan has been a crossroads for hundreds of people, cultures and religions over thousands of years because of its distinctive location. It has also been subjected to relentless invasions, there is "an irrefutable" account of "armies, births, deaths, and the perpetual transfer of peoples from one location to another" (Minwalla 30). Stevens proclaims that "[b]y the time *Homebody/Kabul* was performed in New York in 2001, The Homebody's descriptions of centuries of incessant invasions into the region now known as Afghanistan were unavoidably comparable to America and Britain's latest invasion, 'Operation Enduring Freedom'" ("Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*" 67)<sup>7</sup>—thereby offering a springboard for questioning the culpability of the West for the "ruinous effects from invasion" (Al-Badri 120) on Afghans.

In her monologue, the Homebody's "narrative" is both disjointed and convoluted often interrupted by her own "erratic interjections and tangential commentary" (Stevens, "Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*" 55). She abruptly wanders from one idea to another in a non-linear, "zigzagging" manner. She suddenly and unexpectedly takes the reader from her readings about the history of Afghanistan's conquests at the hands of Persians, Mongols, British forces in the nineteenth century and Russian forces in the twentieth century to her traumatized personal life. She tells the spectator about her unhappy marriage life with her husband Milton who "cannot bear . . . [her] sound [ . . . ] and has threatened to leave on this account" (13), her unsuccessful relationship with her only daughter Priscilla and her chronic depressions. She is addicted to anti-depressants. So, her personal life is "dispersed and fragmented" (Whitehead 85) like her speech which is rambling and fragmented—as she describes it: "I speak . . . I can't help myself.

Elliptically. Discursively. [. . .] So my diction, my syntax, well, it is so *irritating*” (12; emphasis in origin). In addition, this abrupt fluctuation from “past” to present, “then back to the past” (O’ Brien 214) denotes how the traumatized Homebody here is suffering from “a loss of a sense of . . . place, of space and of time” (212). There is “a breach” in her soul. Hussein Al-Badri points out that “[the Homebody’s] perplexed language truly reflects the overwhelming sense of alienation in which she lives” (124). Further, Anker sees that the allegorical “parallel” Kushner draws between the Homebody’s “[neglected] needs” at the hands of her husband and her daughter and the abandoned Afghanistan stands for “a long trajectory of diplomatic ineptitude (most notably the Cold War arming of the Taliban) that directly fostered the dire circumstances warranting Afghanistan’s present-day occupation” (219). Thomas Blake comments on the same point saying: “As Afghanistan has been craved and re-craved by outside influences, . . ., Homebody has been shaped and re-shaped by the pressures of [a family] and a culture she considers alien” (258). In other words, the Homebody finds her comfort zone only in being detached from the painful experiences; she endeavors to live on the borders of the imperial world she is forcibly attributed to. As argued by Eileen Joy: “the very home itself, within which she feels is suffocating. For her, it is the *heimlich* which is frightening and strange, and . . .intolerable to her” (180-81).<sup>8</sup>

It is also worth noting that the Homebody’s “erratic” shifts emphasize the influence of Brechtian didactical views and techniques on Kushner’s writings—as the stage directions reflect: “(*She looks up from the guidebook*)” (12; emphasis in original). Significantly, the Homebody’s long monologue at the opening of the play; in addition to her sudden, unpredictable wanderings from reading in her guide book to addressing the audience create what Brecht called “A-effect”, “a term that comes from the German word *Verfremdungseffekt*, variously translated as “‘alienation effect’, ‘estrangement effect’, or ‘defamiliarisation effect’” (Saddik 21;

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emphasis in original). In adopting Brecht's dramatic techniques, Kushner seeks to shatter and blur the "fourth-wall" between performance and audience to distance the Western audience from any kind of emotional involvement with the white protagonist so that they could be able to "think about and [analyze] what they have "[seen] on stage" without any biased perception about the traumatized history of Afghanistan and the complex geopolitical factors which have changed it into a ravaged country.

The incurable isolation which the Homebody suffers from, and her attempts to "[reach] for the Other, who is always unknown, yet not absent" (Joy 184) and who torments her conscious "frees her imagination" (Minwalla 36). She imagines herself leaving her fenced-off, safe space and going to an "exotic" antique shop in an unnamed street in London to buy festive hats in honor of her overachieving husband (Fisher 189). There, she encounters "the scene of [their] crime, the place of [their] shame" (11)—stories of displacements, casualties and agonizing deaths that are not narrated in the historical guidebook. To give a space for the traumatized others, even if they are imaginative, to narrate the harrowing experiences they have been exposed to and express their pain and suffering, Kushner has skillfully manipulated metatheatrical devices by interweaving the fictionalized encounter between the Afghan hat merchant and the Homebody with the main action of the play. In more explicit words, he incorporates "the inset play" of the hat merchant and his traumatic life events "within play" (Hornby 33) to unmask wrenching events and agonizing stories that the mainstream Western policies "[try] to keep invisible and silent" (Stevens, "Networks of Resistance" 37). He attempts to reflect on what has been deliberately hidden in the Western media about Afghanistan and the sinister effects of war on its people—thereby, engaging the Western spectator into the trauma of the marginalized subject and motivates him/her to question what has been undebatable and unquestionable since ages. It is this imaginative encounter between

the Homebody and the hat merchant that engenders and underpins the play's successive events.

The shop that the Homebody imaginatively goes to is run by an Afghan refugee whose face is "broken by webs of lines inscribed by hardships, siroccos and strife, battle scars" (23) and whose right hand has three missing fingers. The Homebody is shocked by his mutilated hand that she poignantly says: "Here, in London, that poor ruined hand. Imagine. I know nothing of this hand, its history, of course, nothing" (21). In this imaginative shop, she encounters a more painful reality than the one recited in the outdated guidebook. The Homebody asks the Afghan hat merchant to relate the story of his hand. In a touching, self-reflexive tone, he recites: "I was with the Mujahedeen, and the Russians did this. I was with the Mujahedeen, and an enemy faction of Mujahedeen did this" (23). He explains to her how the Afghans are facing a never-ending process of stigmatization and demonization. The traumatized refugee and his "hacked off" (21) hand crystalize the traumatic history of Afghanistan and "more largely, the East" (Joy 183). As explained by Marwa Ramadan, "[t]he hat merchant offers an image of contemporary, war-torn Kabul different from that described in [the Homebody's] guidebook. His monologue, . . . , reveals the dilemma of the present-day Afghanistan and condemns the multiple parts responsible. . . for finally creating Afghanistan dominated by the Taliban as well as by western exploitation" (25). Also, Framji Minwalla considers "the merchant an embodiment of Afghanistan, and the sliced hand transmutes into a symbolic marker representing all those imperial incursions and slicings of territory that the guidebook catalogues but never fleshes out" (36).

The Afghan shopkeeper remorsefully cries out:

*Look, look at my country Kabul, my city, what is left  
of my city? The streets are as bare as mountains now,  
the buildings are as ragged as mountains and as bare  
and empty of life, there is no life here only fear, we*

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*do not live in the buildings now, we live in terrors in the cellars in the caves in the mountains, only God can save us now, [ . . . ] You will never understand. It is hard, it was hard work to get into U.K. I am happy here in the U.K. I am terrified I will be made to leave the U.K. I despise the U.K. I voted for John Major: I voted for Tony Blair: I did not, [ . . . ], the people who ruined my hand were right to do so, they were wrong to do so, my hand is most certainly ruined, you will never understand, [ . . . ].*

(23-24; emphasis in original)

According to Whitehead, "[t]he more traumatic event [experienced], the more fragmented the narrative becomes" (36). Manifestly, the hat merchant's perplexed speech reflects "posttraumatic reaction to the grief, loss, suffering, and violence [he and his nation] have endured" (Freeman 67). His unpredictable shifts from talking about his disfigured hands and his war-torn country to an imperialistic place where he now dwells echo the real voice of the victimized Afghan and mirror both the sense of displacement and the disruption of time that the "post-colonial subject" suffers from (Minwalla 37). He lives in the space of timelessness, incapable of transcending painful memories of the past. In this respect, the traumatic experiences are "preserved, frozen and timeless" (Amir 44). Additionally, his ambivalent feelings of love and hate elucidate the devastating effects of the war and dislocation experiences on the psyche of the subjugated "Other." These feelings reflect how these traumatic memories are internalized by him. Also, his "uncontested claim" (Tracy 96) that the Homebody "*will never understand*" accentuates the idea of the West's self-centralization and enclosure; and its inability to perceive the "Other" via the lens of humanitarian values. However, the Homebody will "*understand*" the deeply traumatic experiences that he and his people have gone through.

Now, the Homebody feels penitence for her safe physical rootedness in her apartment while others are losing their lives. She knows that she is inextricably tied to an imperialistic system that has evaded the responsibility after creating strife-torn Afghanistan. Kushner remorsefully describes her feelings as follows:

Where stands the homebody safe in her kitchen, on the culpable shore, suffering uselessly watching others perishing in the sea, [. . .], oh, oh. Never *joining* the drowning. Her feet, neither rooted nor moving. The ocean is deep and cold and erasing. But how dreadful, really unpardonable, to remain dry. Look at her, look at her; she is so unforgivably dry. [. . .]. She does not drown, she . . . succumbs. To luxury, she sinks. Terror-struck, down, down into . . . um, the dangerous silent spaces, or rather places, [. . .], down into the terrible silent gardens of the private, in the frightening echoing silence of which a grieving voice might be heard, chattering away, keening, rocking, shrouded, trying to express that which she lacks all power to express but which she knows must be expressed.

(28; emphasis in original)

Indeed, the imagined encounter with the Afghan man and his traumatic experience makes the Homebody's fenced-off borders now "broached" by more than just "books"—the suffocating cruelties of imperial and neocolonial domination.

In poignant words, the Homebody delineates how even the hats in this Afghan merchant's shop embody the misery of his nation. Allegorically speaking, these hats are not just physical objects; they allude to an unspoken speech "on human history, on guilt and causality" (Brustein 69). The British protagonist articulately describes them:

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Looking at the hat we imagine [. . .] the suffering behind the craft. This century has taught us to direct our imagination however fleetingly toward the hidden suffering: evil consequence of evil action taken long ago, conjoining with relatively recent wickedness and wickedness perpetuated now, in August 1998, now now now, even if I speak and speak and speak. [. . .] The hats are beautiful; relatively and inexpensive; sinister if you've a mind to see them that way; and sad. As dislocations are. And marvelous, as dislocations. Always bloody. (17-18)

Karen Nylund maintains that "[t]he hats represent the people of Afghanistan dislocated from their country and culture by Western imperialism and Capitalism" (76). In a similar vein, Minwalla sees that "[t]he hats as emblems of the picturesque fail to remain just hats. They become objects with their own diasporic history, attaining a generic refugee status embedded in the politics of global capitalism" (33). Therefore, the painful traumatic memories are even entrenched, registered and concretized in inhuman objects (the "sad" hats) as if they speak for the traumatized, postcolonial dispersed subject.

Being deeply inspired by Brecht's insights about the important role of the theatre in political and social change, Kushner has skillfully succeeded in exploring Brechtian ideologies at the end of the first part. The first part of the play ends with the Homebody departing London willingly and venturing to Kabul. In crossing the deeply-seated boundaries between the powerful West and the oppressed East, the Homebody attempts to heal her tormented soul and "assuage [the] feelings of. . . guilt" (Gingrich 94) that torment her because of being attributed to an imperialistic world. Kushner makes the Western Homebody navigate to a condemned part of the world endeavoring to discover the historical and political reality of a place that is mysterious and exotic to her,

seeing the trauma of a nation that casts its dark shadow over a blighted land and hearing the lamentation of the traumatized subjects about a past that would never be retrieved and their condemnation of a present that they could not escape from. In a television interview with Charlie Rose (2001), Kushner elucidates that the relationship between the tormented British house wife and Afghanistan represents the way “people use other countries as a metaphor for their inner misery.” He admits, “our inner life is always speaking very directly and transacting with great vitality with the outer world and the world of politics and history.” It is in this sense that “the suffering of one cannot. . . be separated from the suffering of the other” (Al-Badri 133-34); and this points out why the Homebody has chosen to venture to a devastated terrain. The last time that the Homebody appears in the play is when we see her reciting a poem written by the seventeenth-century Persian poet Sa’ib-I-Tabrizi in which he expresses how he is “touched by [the] strangeness and beauty” (30) of Kabul. Concisely, “[t]he Homebody began the monologue safe in her living room, reading from guidebook. She ends on the threshold of Afghanistan, . . . , ready to plunge into a cold, deep sea” (Minwalla 40). She leaves her safe zone and navigates to a distorted territory.

Like trauma narratives in which time sequence is always disrupted and events are unpredicted, the reader/spectator finds himself/herself jarringly and unexpectedly moved to a real purgatorial setting—that is Afghanistan; particularly Kabul, where past traumatic events hover over the whole place. We come to know that the Homebody has disappeared in Afghanistan. Unlike the first part which is a lengthy monologue articulated solely by the white protagonist, the narrative thread in the subsequent scenes is multi-voiced. The second and third parts of the play are overwhelmed by various realistic narratives—some by her husband Milton and her daughter Priscilla who travel to Kabul searching for the body of the Homebody after hearing contradictory stories about her destiny; and others by traumatized Afghan characters:

the former socialist poet Khwaja who has experienced the collapse of his country at the hands of both Soviet Union and United States of America, and who has agonizingly witnessed the violent death of his family by mortar shell; the former librarian Mahala who is the wounded protagonist and the dominant voice in the second part, and "who has lived her entire life in the shadows of the Taliban" (Al-Badri 129). The ensuing scenes embody a physical Middle Eastern site in which realistic world situations are mimicked and emotional suffering is disclosed. Kushner ushers the reader into the present-day Afghanistan while reflecting on its past and a series of traumatic events that the Afghans have been subjected to. It is a navigation from safety and security to chaos and danger, from an atmosphere of luxury to that of devastation and mourning, from "imagined future adventures" (Stevens 64) to true historical events; and this points out the "/" in the title. It represents "[t]he deep disjuncture between the two halves of the play—the imaginative and lyrical monologue and the grim events of the realistic second act" (Sauer 381-82). So, the "/" points out the deep-seated gulf between the secure West in which *Homebody* lives and the insecure Afghanistan to which she has chosen to navigate seeking relief for her tormented soul in the most endangered places in the world.

In the following scenes, Kushner portrays the traumatized Afghans obsessed by their old magnificent history and fixated to their haunting traumatic memories. Whitehead explains such fixation as follows: "The traces of unresolved past events, or the ghosts of those who died too suddenly and violently to be properly mourned, possess those who are seeking to get on with the task of living" (6). Their stories also illuminate "the fragmentation of chronological linearity" which is one of "key elements" in traumatic narratives (Monaco 229). In other words, the traumatized stick to the irretrievable past, unable to transcend "the psychological wounding caused by an event so extreme"

(Gildersleeve 3) to be transcended or healed. Throughout multiple perspectives and discourses, they unveil a surviving personal and collective traumatized history of civilian casualties, atrocities, bloodshed, losses and displacements. Kushner expounds how the Afghans have been deeply traumatized by the Western forces' consecutive intervention in Afghanistan and by their current miserable conditions. It is a never-ending cycle of violence, brutalization and victimization.

The second part of *Homebody/Kabul* opens in a hotel room where Milton converses with a religious Mullah Aftar Ali Durrani, Qari Shah (a medical doctor) and Quango Twistleton (an unofficial liaison for the British government in Kabul) regarding the mysterious destiny of the Homebody in Kabul. The dialogue between them divulges that Homebody has been cruelly killed in Kabul and that her mutilated body is lost. Mullah justifies the motivation behind Homebody's brutal killing as follows: "Since last week President Clinton have bombed the people in Khost, many killed, the people are very angry against Western aggression-disregard-disrespect for Afghanistan. And also she have [sic] been carrying openly this thing" (33). According to Mullah's words, the attackers of the Homebody have mistaken her as an American; they were reacting against United States' foreign policy and military incursion in Afghanistan. In fact, Mullah's perspective coincides with dissenting viewpoints against American administration in the Middle East, particularly after 9/11—as expounded by the American philosopher and political activist Noam Chomsky in many interviews who regarded the practices of the United States as an act of "[self-immunization] against international law and conventions" (35). And here, the Brechtian influence on Kushner is traced ideologically as Kushner endeavors to engage the Western forces into "[working] through the wounds of colonial history" (Monaco 229) that have gravely affected the all the colonized subjects. He

is attempting to give voice for the faceless and voiceless subjects in the mainstream Western media.

Obsessed with discovering the real destiny of her missing mother as there are also rumors that she might have eloped with a Muslim man, Priscilla hires Khwaja Aziz Mondanabosh (an Afghan man) who serves as her “mahram” while navigating the ravaged streets of Kabul in hope that she might find her mother alive. While wandering the unsafe streets of Kabul, Priscilla discovers the Afghans’ anti-Western feelings generally and anti-American sentiments particularly. Though she at the beginning treats them with disdain and contempt refusing to adhere to Taliban’s laws of wearing “burqa” and accusing Afghans of being barbaric, uncivilized and menacing threat to Western people—as she provocatively admits: “YOU NASTY [. . .] PIG, WHERE IS MY MOTHER WHERE IS SHE?” (77; emphasis in original), she later (after engaging in several verbal conversations with traumatized Afghans) sympathizes with them. She sees how indescribable pain and suffering are collectively experienced by them. Like her lost mother, Priscilla feels guilty towards the Afghans because of being a member of the imperialistic Western culture. And here the skeleton of the second part of the play is divulged as the reader/spectator hears realistic stories of colonial and neocolonial domination which embody a detailed image of the torture that the Afghans were harshly exposed to at the hands of Western forces in the past; and the ruthless treatment they are suffering from in the present because of Taliban-controlled regime. So, unlike the first part which is replete with imaginative images, Kushner in the second part voyages with his reader/spectator to today’s Afghanistan. In this distorted territory, the reader confronts not only the crisis of the past traumatic events that hover over the whole place and haunt the traumatized individuals, but the “crisis of survival” (Caruth, *Trauma* 9) in such a threatening environment as well.

Priscilla encounters the Pashtun Afghan Mahala who used to “*walk down the streets,*” “*to go to parties,*” and “*to read*” a lot of books in different languages (88; emphasis in original) before fanatic regime. Now, Mahala is an embittered librarian who has witnessed the libraries closed and was coerced to leave her job. She feels nostalgia for a time when Afghanistan “[was] once in advance of the West in knowledge” (86). Once Mahala meets Priscilla, she vociferously “decries the successive states apparatuses that have ruled Afghanistan” (Dickinson 433) and condemns the West’s military and political interference for its own interests. Priscilla’s relationship with this Afghan librarian signals the radical alternation in her perception of Afghans. In a moving scene, she delineates to Priscilla the anguish inflicted upon the Afghan people by Taliban as follows:

Des femmes, elles se meurent tout autour de moi, je les entends mourir dans leurs maisons quand je regarde furtivement par la fenêtre, quand je me promène dans ma burqa. Ma cousine, sa fille, elle s’est pendue. Ma vieille amie Ziala Diazangi, Hazarra de Bamiyan, s’est jetée du toit de—(*Women are dying all around me. I can hear voices when I peek out the window, when I walk in the burqa. My cousin, her daughter, she has hanged herself. My old friend [ . . . ] threw herself of the roof—*) [ . . . ] This one dies, that one starve [sic], that one exploded, shot, rape, rape, die, die, die, die, die [ . . . ].

(88-89, translation in original)

Significantly, Mahala’s overt multilingual ability in the play underscores her nostalgia for the glorious past when the Afghans used to be “[s]cholars! Poets! Les peintres, les compositeurs, les philosophes, les mathématiciens [ . . . ] *Painters, composers, philosophers, mathematicians*” (86; emphasis in original) before the Taliban control. More poignantly, the repetition of the word “die” in her speech intensely reflects the suffering embedded in

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the land and the death atmosphere shrouding the whole place. Kushner reinforces these anguish experiences and distressing memories by referring metaphorically to the legend of the "Grave of Cain"<sup>8</sup> in Kabul:

I was moved by the fact that the city of Kabul was Cain's resting place. In the play I suggest that he was, perhaps, murdered there. Over the centuries, so many people have died in Kabul, in Afghanistan, the number of the slain in the last four decades perhaps exceeding all those who had fallen in the centuries before. (Afterword 148)

In this sense, like the "Grave of Cain," "Kabul too has become a kind of grave" (Ramadan 28) imprisoning its inhabitants in "a pattern of suffering that is inexplicably persistent in [their lives]" (Caruth, *Unclaimed experience* 1).

As a traumatized subject whose life is haunted by bitter reminiscences, Mahala (like the Homebody) suddenly shifts to the atrocities of past wars repudiating Priscilla's words that she is "English," not American (85). She bursts out in anger saying,

*The CIA sends these bastards funding through Pakistan, where the military high command, it's all Pashutni-wallahs, these madmen and terrorists, they'll turn on their masters sooner or later, and still the U.S. pays them money and sends them guns. America buys this, bombs, from Communist Chinese to sell in secret to Taliban through (h Pakistan. Afghanistan kill the Soviet Union for you, we win the "Cold War" for you, for us is not so cold, huh? [. . .] (So that Iran can be bested! We must suffer under the Taliban so that the U.S. can settle a twenty-year-old score with Iran!). (84-85; emphasis in original)*

By retelling these traumatic historical references, the Kabuli Mahala here drives the Western Priscilla into navigating from her enclosed Western space to a ruined terrain to recognize the culpability of the Western forces for the immutable, war-torn state of Afghanistan. In the same vein, Khwaja vehemently condemns Priscilla: “What have you ever brought us besides *misery*? Gharbi? Ferengi? The West? And many among us would like to give you your misery back to you. [. . .] You have to take home with you nothing but the *spectacle of our suffering*. Make of it what you will” (115; emphasis added). In fact, both Mahala’s and Khwaja’s words explicate how the excruciating effects of the traumatic past events imprison its wounded Afghan inhabitants in an endless cycle of despair, hopelessness and frustration. Their losses are unrecoverable; and their wounds are unhealable. In detaching himself as a Western writer, Kushner here has succeeded in giving the space to Afghan voices to throw light on “previously overlooked histories and to bring hitherto marginalized or silenced stories to [Western] consciousness” (Whitehead 82).

Like the Homebody whose sense of estrangement from her native culture drives her into navigating to a blighted terrain, Mahala craves for fleeing from the “unheimisch”<sup>9</sup> as a means of salvation from the oppressive atmosphere she is detained in. As contended by Dale Tracy, “Mahala emerges in the play as one such ‘dual’ for the Homebody, for the women are clearly positioned as a pair of ‘two things which are alike but also opposite’” (99). Literally speaking, though separated by place and by culture, both suffer from ruptured, traumatized souls in their lands seeking survival in different territories. To alleviate her sense of guilt towards the Afghan people and after being deeply affected by Mahala’s touching words, Priscilla takes the risk of assisting the former Afghan librarian to smuggle out of such a condemned place to the cosmopolitan, liberal West where she can again enjoy her freedom and restore her self-dignity.<sup>10</sup>

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Priscilla feels "ashamed" of herself "[a]fter all" she "[has] seen"; she "[needs] to be forgiven (139, emphasis in original). This undeniably underscores Kushner's thematic perspective and concerns in this play—that is the West's culpability for today's Afghanistan and its role to rescue the Afghans from the miserable conditions they live in. The victimized Afghans fluctuate between unrecoverable past, miserable present and unknowable future.

Kushner ends the play with a scene entitled "Periplum"—an iconic term that he has borrowed from Ezra Pound's *The Pisan Cantos* and which signals "a 'tour' that returns to its beginning" (Bouchard 307). Laurie Fyffe points out that "Pound uses periplum to describe not history from a historian's or a philosopher's elevated point of view, but rather from the poet's point of view where the poet is a voyager navigating history personally" (117). Erith Jaffe-Berg also maintains that "[Kushner's] *Homebody/Kabul* can be seen as an articulation of the inner dynamics of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in a world still reeling from 9/11 and still in conflict" (197). In *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner acts as a navigator who "takes [the reader] round [in] a tour then back again" ("Author's Notes" 8). The reader moves from Kabul and is taken back to "*the Homebody's Kitchen again, as in Act One*" (136; emphasis in original). However, the Homebody is never back to the stage again and the mystery of her death remains unresolved; it is Mahala who takes her place. The reader sees Mahala "[adjusting] her hair and clothes, becoming a modern English woman" (136); she attempts to adjust to the new community she has been brought to. So, the politically-minded dramatist takes his audience in both "literal and metaphorical journeys" (Freeman 73) as a means of engaging them to think profoundly about a forgotten, traumatic history that needs to be revisited and reconfigured.

Mahala's last words to Priscilla are: "It has been difficult for me. But it is lovely here. [. . .] I have planted all my *dead*"

(137, 40; emphasis added) mirror the rehabilitation and healing of her wounded soul from the intrusive “ghosts of the past” (Whitehead 85). She succeeds to transcend the frozen memories of the past and the excoriating experiences she has been exposed to. As Tracy argues, “[s]uch regeneration. . . [could be seen] on the more abstract level of humanity. . . [as the only] hope the play. . . suggests” (108)—the sole hopeful image Kushner has depicted.

In conclusion, being a Brechtian-politicized dramatist, Kushner’s originality in *Homebody/Kabul* lies not only in unearthing the true history and identity of a nation that the imperialistic Western forces have eradicated, but also in calling for new rules to govern the universe—norms founded on “ethical accountability and moral responsibility” (Afterword 145) and in presenting remedies for the West’s past actions based on great dedication to reconfigure and reconstruct what has been ruined at their hands. He calls for questioning, rereading and reconsidering historical events and Western narratives that have been perpetuated and established since ages. Kushner’s final words in the afterword are: “Repentance preceded world” (149); for him, the only means for healing the wounds of the traumatized “Other” is by repenting and bearing “responsibility.” Succinctly speaking, Kushner in *Homebody/Kabul* (via his politicized ideas, dialectical approach and innovative dramatic techniques) tries to involve a family story within the context of the Western political involvement in the Middle East and the trauma of colonialization; hence, stimulating the Western readers to leave their restricted borders and navigate to “agonizing territories of trauma” (Srikanth 29), where they can excavate mysteries of the past and bring to light hidden history and untold stories.

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## ENDNOTES

1. In the afterword to his play, Kushner stated: "[*Homebody/Kabul*] was written before 9/11" (144); and it was premiered at New York Theatre Workshop in December 2001—three months after the attack. The version I am using in this paper is the final revised version that was released in 2005.

2. For more comprehensive view about the history of Afghanistan, see "Neglectful Archives" by the Afghan-American scholar Wali Ahmadi.

3. Glenn A. Odom points out Brecht's words "petroleum resists the five act form" by saying that Brecht uses this expression "to say that shifts in social structures require shifts in theatrical structures. Brechtian theatre, while precise, is able to alter itself to account for the new conditions in ways that a traditionally structured-five act realistic drama cannot" (64-65). For more insightful information about Brecht's theatre, see Odom's "Theatre and politics" in *World Theories of Theatre*, pp. 54-78.

4. See also p. 56 in Stevens's "Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*."

5. See the notes on *Homebody/Kabul* pp. 5-6.

6. In addition to what he wrote in the afterword of *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner has accentuated that "[w]hile [this] play has been revised and trimmed in recent weeks, the changes, . . . are unrelated to recent events. Still, it is the product of astounding timeliness" (qtd. in Phillips).

7. As noted by Eric Larson and Bogdan Savych in their article "Operation Enduring Freedom," "Operation Enduring Freedom was the name given to military operations conducted in support of the U.S. global war following the September 11, 2001 ("9/11") terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C." (125). For more information about this operation, see the previously-mentioned article in *Misfortunes of War*.

8. There is a biblical reference in Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* to the grave of Cain. In the afterword of the play, Kushner says: "I was moved by the fact that the city of Kabul was Cain's resting place. In the play I suggest that he was, perhaps, murdered there" (148). Kushner raises a number of questions: "Did Cain die violently in Kabul? Is the city in some sense cursed?" (148). For extensive knowledge about the role of Cain's death story in Kushner's play, read Tracy's "Cain and Culpability in Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*."

9. As noted by Sigmund Freud in his article "The 'Uncanny,'" "The German word . . . *heimlich*" denotes the "'familiar,' 'native,' 'belonging to the home'; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar" (152). Literally speaking, the home is, for the British protagonist in *Homebody/Kabul*, the "unheimisch"—the most unhomey and suffocating place. For more information about heimlich and unheimlich, read Freud's article "The Uncanny", pp.152-67.

10. In fact, the play's ending has aroused conflicting viewpoints among many critics and writers. For instance, Elizabeth S. Anker sees that the "[liberation]" of "Mahala (arguably a representative of Afghan women as a whole) vindicates European preeminence" (219). It also enables "Milton and Priscilla to play [the role of the white] savior" (219). And here Kushner could not transcend the Orientalist perception regarding the role the "Self" plays in the destiny of the "Other;" he unconsciously emphasized that the salvation of the "Other" should be at the hands of the "Self." On the other hand, Karen Nylund believes that the play's ending suggests that there should be an "on-going conversation between West and East" (87), regardless of "the part the West has played in [Afghanistan's] fate" (87).

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