

العنوان:	تصادم الحضارات في مسرحية توني كوشنر : هوم بدي / كابول
المصدر:	فكر وإبداع
الناشر:	رابطة الأدب الحديث
المؤلف الرئيسي:	المتولي، هالة سيد أحمد
المجلد/العدد:	ج51
محكمة:	نعم
التاريخ الميلادي:	2009
الشهر:	مايو
الصفحات:	1 - 46
رقم MD:	154072
نوع المحتوى:	بحوث ومقالات
قواعد المعلومات:	HumanIndex, AraBase
مواضيع:	الادب الانجليزي، صراع الحضارات ، كوشنر ، توني ، مسرحية هوم بدي / كابول، هانتينجتون ، سامويل، المسرحيات الإنجليزية، الادباء الأمريكيون، النقد الادبي، الدراسات الادبية، كابول، افغانستان، الرفاهية، مستخلصات الأبحاث
رابط:	<a href="http://search.mandumah.com/Record/154072">http://search.mandumah.com/Record/154072</a>



## **The Clash of Cultures in Tony Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

**Dr. Hala Sayed\***

A civilization is a cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity. It is the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of, that which distinguishes humans from other species. Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion and people define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and, at the broadest level, civilizations. "People use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity. We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against" (Map 2).

In class and ideological conflicts, the key question was "Which side are you on?" and people could and did choose sides and change sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is "What are you?" That is a given that cannot be changed (Huntington 21).

---

\* Lecturer of English Literature Faculty of AI Alsum , Ain Shams University.

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

Prior to the end of the Cold War, societies were divided by ideological differences, such as the struggle between democracy and communism. During the Cold War, the bipolar world order enabled countries to identify themselves as either aligned or non-aligned. In the post-Cold War world order, countries have become no longer able to easily categorize themselves and have entered into an identity crisis. The years after the Cold War witnessed the beginnings of dramatic changes in peoples' identities and the symbols of those identities. Global politics began to be reconfigured along cultural lines.

In the post-Cold War world, "The most important distinctions among peoples are no longer ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural" (Huntington 21). Differences in power and struggles for military, economic and institutional power are one source of conflict between the West and other civilizations. Differences in culture, that is basic values and beliefs, are a second source of conflict. New patterns of conflict are expected to occur along the boundaries of different cultures and patterns of cohesion are liable to be found within the cultural boundaries.

The *Clash of Civilizations* theory introduced by Huntington was hailed as a prescient analysis of how international relations were likely to pan out. He has provided six causes for Clash theory: real and basic differences between civilizations, increased intercivilizational interaction invigorating differences and animosities, the rise of religious

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

fundamentalism, the growth of civilization consciousness in response to Western dominance. the tenacity of cultural characteristics and differences, and the rise of economic regionalism. On the other hand, Huntington divides the world's cultures into seven current civilizations, Western, Latin American, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu and Slavic-Orthodox (26). These civilizations seem to be defined primarily by religion with a number of exceptions.

To cope with this crisis, countries started "rallying to those cultures with similar ancestry, religion, language, values, and institutions and distance themselves from those with different ones" (Huntington 26). Hence, the new structure of civilizations has become centred on a small number of powerful core states. "Culture commonality legitimates the leadership and order-imposing role of the core states for both member state and core external powers and institutions" (Huntington 27).

Although nation states remain the principal actors in world affairs and their behaviour is shaped as in the past by the pursuit of power and wealth, such behaviour has become also shaped by cultural preferences, commonalities, and differences. "The most important groupings of states are no longer the three blocs of the Cold War but rather the world's seven or eight major civilizations" (Map 3).

Non-Western societies, particularly in East Asia, are developing their economic wealth and creating the basis for

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

enhanced military power and political influence. As their power and self-confidence increase, non-Western societies increasingly assert their own cultural values and reject those imposed on them by the West.

In this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations. The rivalry of the superpowers is replaced by the clash of civilizations. "In this new world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities"(Map 7). Further, the philosophical assumptions, underlying values, social relations, customs, and overall outlooks on life differ significantly among civilizations. The revitalization of religion throughout much of the world is reinforcing these cultural differences.

Cultures can change, and the nature of their impact on politics and economics can vary from one period to another. Yet the major differences in political and economic development among civilizations are clearly rooted in their different cultures. The West is and will remain for years to come the most powerful civilization. Yet its power relative to that of other civilizations is declining. As the West attempts to assert its values and to protect its interests, non-Western societies confront a choice. "Some attempt to emulate the West and to join to 'bandwagon' with the West. Other Confucian and Islamic societies attempt to expand their own

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

economic and military power to resist and to 'balance<sup>1</sup> against the West" (Coen 5). A central axis of post-Cold War world politics is thus the interaction of Western power and culture with the power and culture of non-Western civilizations.

The moment of euphoria at the end of the Cold War generated an illusion of harmony, which was soon dissipated by the multiplication of ethnic conflicts and ethnic cleansing, the breakdown of law and order, the emergence of new patterns of alliance and conflict among states, the resurgence of neo-communist and neo-fascist movements, and the intensification of religious fundamentalism. Huntington elaborates on this point saying:

Two Worlds: Us and Them. While one-world expectations appear at the end of major conflicts, the tendency to think in terms of two worlds recurs throughout human history. People are always tempted to divide people into us and them, the in-group and the other, our civilization and those barbarians. Scholars have analyzed the world in terms of the Orient and the Occident, North and South, centre and periphery. (10)

Depending upon how the parts are defined, a two-part world picture may in some measure correspond with reality. The most common division, which appears under various names, is between rich-modern, developed-countries and poor -traditional, undeveloped or developing - countries. Historically correlating with this economic division is the cultural division between West and East, where the emphasis is less on differences in economic

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

well-being and more on differences in underlying philosophy, values, and way of life.

The September 11, 2001 attacks and subsequent events including the Afghanistan and Iraq wars have been widely viewed as a vindication of the Clash theory and have been seen to confirm the first claim in Huntington's thesis: culture does matter, and indeed matters a lot, so that religious legacies leave their distinct imprint on contemporary values.

Theatre artists have responded to Sept. 11 in a wide variety of ways, from personal accounts to documentaries of heroism on site. Some have found the greatest resonance in metaphoric restaging of Greek tragedy; others have delved into the event's repercussions, with plays probing soldiers' experiences or the loss of civil liberties at home, especially for Arab or South Asian Americans.

Tony Kushner (1956- ) is one of the most prominent contemporary playwrights in America who is known for the political themes of his works. Unlike most American dramatists who look inward, Kushner has always gazed outwards. "His characters step out to remake the world, or at least their broken selves, where others sit miserably in an interior chamber room, both psychologically and geographically" (Siegal 101). Kushner is a true innovator in dramatic form, and his work expresses deeply his personal concerns, politics, and the cultural discontents of his time. "The diversity of his plays, the varied and complex themes examined in them, and the historical, literary, and political

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

influences irradiating through them are singular" (Fisher, *Understanding* 1). In many ways, Kushner's own background reflects clashing cultures within America, and his work in turn is a reflection of his background. "In the shattered world of post-9/11, Tony Kushner may have found his time. Kushner has long embraced the often scorned label of 'political playwright,\* always searching in the work of others and in his own work for the socio-political armature that girds character and theme" (Rabkin, par.1).

Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* (2001) was the winner of the Dramatists Guild Hull-Warriner award for best play of 2001 and received an Obie Award in 2002. Indelibly linked now with the events of 9/11/01, Kushner's play has been widely declared eerily prescient. "Kushner's astonishingly prescient *Homebody/Kabul* is the most politically astute, theatrically engrossing and greatest work of drama. Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* is the most remarkable play in a decade . . . without a doubt the most important of our time" (Heilpern 3). And not the least remarkable fact about *Homebody/Kabul*, written well before the events of last September, is that it attempts to embrace and explain the history, culture and ethos of Afghanistan. The play's New York debut which came close on the heels of the disastrous September of 2001, covers themes about religion that are familiar to Kushner, and also delves into clashing cross-cultural customs in pre-9/11, Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The play is set in London and Kabul, Afghanistan in the late 1990s.



**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

However, *Homebody/Kabul* is not only a play about Afghanistan and the West's historic and contemporary relationship to that country but also a play about travel, about knowledge and learning through seeking out strangeness, and is about trying to escape the unhappiness of one's life through an encounter with Otherness. Kushner's play, "confronts a broad range of intercultural topics spanning from social to economic to linguistic, using Afghanistan and England as contrasts. These are tools he uses to broach the subject of cultural friction caused by intolerance and ignorance of peoples who differ from one's self (Evans 6).

*Homebody/Kabul* offers a mature playwright's compassionate, illuminating and provocative take on the East/West tensions which animate the lives of various inhabitants of Kabul. "It's a suspenseful and intriguing drama which bears witness to their struggles to make sense of lives caught in the cross-fire of an historical ordeal" (Heilpem 3). The play is a dynamic portrait of lives in chaos which evokes a dangerous collision between cultures. *Homebody/Kabul* is about lost civilizations and unsolvable paradoxes, furious differences and opposites and disintegrating, rotting pidgin cultures. "It's about desolation and love in land-mined places, child murderers and fanatics, tranquilized existence and opium highs, travel in the largest sense of the word-travel of the mind and soul'XHeilpern 3). The play brings together a panorama of lost souls in a clash of cultures, situations and realities.

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

In fact, *Homebody/Kabul* is a deeply compassionate, thought provoking and vital look at global politics, cultural differences and complex personal political agendas, moral and ethical conflicts and compromises, and all manner of character revelation and personal unravelling. <sup>4i</sup>A major theme of this play is the corruption and disintegration of all institutions, political, social, marital and familial. The play focuses on a dysfunctional English family caught up in the conflicts in Afghanistan, testing their notions of security and exploring the underlying issues of Western Imperialism and economic dominance and exploitation of the Middle East.

At the heart of *Homebody/Kabul* is a family drama that happens to play out in a time and a place when connections between men and women, east and west, were particularly strained. The central drama is not about whether the Taliban was right or wrong, nor is it about the place of women in society - it's about finding connection.

"*Homebody/Kabul* strives to encompass the tragic history of Afghanistan through one of the strangest family sagas ever placed on stage. It is a multilayered intellectually complex journey into the tortured history of Afghanistan" (Fisher, *Understanding* 63). Set in Kabul, the play examines current-day Afghanistan, its history, and its long-tortured relationship with the West and its current complex political and humanitarian crisis. Kushner wrote the first part, *Homebody*, in 1998, as a seventy-five minute monologue; it's a sprawling

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

speech that shows a British woman sitting in a comfy chair and travelling in books, memory, and imagination to Afghanistan, to distant nebulae, to a hat shop in London, and back in time to the conquests of Alexander and Tamerlane. Later, Kushner added Kabul, a three-act detective story set in motion when the same woman travels by plane to Kabul, and disappears. Both parts were finished before September 11.

When she travels there and disappears, her husband and daughter follow to search for her, unprepared for the world that awaits them. The tale of an insatiably curious Englishwoman who disappears in Taliban-ruled Kabul, and of her bitter daughter's attempts to find out what happened to her, "is electrically charged with the clash of cultures and die-hard duelling imperialisms - political, economic, and religious - that have become the dominant strains of the early 21 st century"(Hurwitt 25).

The Homebody Englishwoman may be murdered, may be lost, or may be secretly married to a Muslim lover. In their quest for truth and closure, the lines between the real and the unreal, the political and the personal, the public and the private, the psychological and the sociological, are intentionally blurred. In the play, "Kushner expands the private into the public; his play is full of grief-stricken ruminations on the tragic fracturing of this mysterious city that is the product of both his research and imagination. Kushner's unique blend of geo-political treatise and domestic drama proves

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

arresting and ultimately rewarding" (Fisher, *The Theatre of Tony Kushner* xi). The marvel of the play is that it merges the global with the personal, conjuring parallel tales of grief in which a bewildered husband and daughter "mourn the Homebody, who may have met a violent death in Afghanistan, as the natives mourn the populated disaster that is their country" (Evans 7). The Homebody Englishwoman may be murdered, may be lost, or may be secretly married to a Muslim lover. "In their quest for truth and closure, the lines between the real and the unreal, the political and the personal, the public and the private, the psychological and the sociological, are intentionally blurred" (Anaya 13).

The play begins with an extended monologue by the Homebody, a wildly intellectual, deeply curious Englishwoman who is bored with her comfortable life and detached from her husband and child. Inspired by an encounter with an immigrant Afghan shopkeeper, the Homebody becomes obsessed with Afghanistan, idealizing its tragic past as exotic and mysterious. "Our story begins at the very dawn of history" are the first words spoken in the play setting the tone for an epic play that will take the audience from a cosy British house to the muck and mire of Afghanistan Billington underscores the brilliance of the first part saying, Admittedly the first third of this epic play, running well over three-and-a-half hours, is much the most startling. It consists of a lengthy monologue breathtakingly in which a London homebody reveals

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

her insatiable curiosity about history in general and Kabul in particular Through this "unregenerate chatterer", Kushner traces the history of a city that attracted empire-builders such as Darius and Alexander, was introduced to Islam in 652AD and has been occupied and fought over for centuries. Kushner not only offers us a portrait of a gentle-spirited, factually voracious, syntactically eccentric woman who claims "I love, love the world", he also establishes his main theme which is that Afghanistan has always been a vital intersection at the mercy of history, geography and spiritual absolutists. (14)

As the story unfolds the Homebody, a bored, emotionally imprisoned but wildly intellectual English woman, finds refuge and escape in the alternate world Afghanistan, which she exoticizes in her mind's eye with the help of an out-of-date tourist guide book. Anaya comments on the beginning of the play saying:

The play starts in London with the story of a woman-trying to forge an identity for herself beyond her marriage riddled with boredom and the alienated relationship with her daughter. With the aid of outdated guides to Kabul, this no-man's-land becomes her obsession. The city becomes a metaphor for impotency, the force of external power and searches for identity. (24)

The woman reads aloud from the out of date guide book to Kabul. She is fascinated by the city and its history and by words and concepts in their wider sense to a point way beyond eccentricity. 'The Downstairs Theatre takes us somewhere quite other'

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

via a heavily outdated travel guide" (Supple, par.1). The Homebody describes her state as "psycho panicky" (12). Her mind and ideas float and leap freely from an association to another in a dizzying and compelling display of language. "There emerges a sense of cultural dislocation and displacement and a wearisome understanding that 'the present is always an awful place to be' and that poetic imagination is the only power strong enough to restore one's faith in the beauty of life (35).

Kabul, on the other hand, is a place where the Homebody believes she must go to rediscover herself. Kabul becomes the symbolic backdrop for the story which finds father and daughter searching for the mother, presumed dead, though the mystery is never unveiled. "Kushner uses this family to explore what he regards as a particularly American aversion to bad news, discomfort, difference, and instability, whether real or illusory" (Anaya 15).

As the slash in the title indicates, the play splits into two parts. It opens with an Englishwoman's non-stop virtuosic monologue about the history, ethnography and geography of Afghanistan, and then suddenly switches to Kabul, where the woman's husband and daughter have gone to solve the mystery of her disappearance. She may or may not have been murdered in Afghanistan. The key item in the title is the slash, "for there really are two plays here joined at the heart. The first hour is a solo performance piece, fascinating on its own merits but immeasurably enriched by what follows, and what

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

follows is significantly enhanced by what precedes it"(Hathaway 4).

Homebody's own eccentric personal history lays the foundation for K.ushner's larger themes of loss, uncertainty and displacement of self.

The first act therefore; consists of an hour-long monologue spoken by an upper-middle-class Englishwoman, the Homebody of the title. She Speaks to the audience from a comfy living room chair and expounds for nearly an hour on her dual fascinations with words and with the city of Kabul. "It's a brilliant monologue, a symphony of digression in which the movements of ancient Asian tribes are juxtaposed with ruminations on language, thought and a seemingly mundane anecdote about going to buy some hats for a party"(Kramer 34). The opening monologue is undoubtedly dense with impeccably tight and perfectly chosen words. It describes the struggles of every-day modern life and the desire to find adventure, and meaning.

Gerald highlights the significance of the monologue saying:

Alone on stage, the eponymous "Homebody" segues into personal anecdote (mostly about encountering a disfigured Afghan shopkeeper who elicited an impulsive purchase of native hats) and cosmic ruminations about the paradoxes of love and lovelessness, mystery and familiarity, isolation and interconnection, permanence and corruption. Plotless, beyond realism, this elegant stream-of-consciousness is an hour of Beckettian brilliance, (par.6)

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

The Homebody's monologue takes place at her home kitchen in London, England where, in a dim-lit room complete with a glowing window, framed by black crepe curtains; a chair, a lamp, she remains seated in her reading chair surrounded by a crescent of recently purchased Afghan hats and explains her obsessive fascination with Afghanistan. "Kushner, a writer who is always on high alert to humanity as well as history, has in the Homebody, created a character-an 'impassioned, fluttery, doomed' character-who is timeless as well as timely" (Franklin 325).

Her days, it seems, consist mainly of sitting in her kitchen and perusing the outdated guidebook of Kabul, Afghanistan. The kitchen at the beginning is purposefully tiny: considering the seemingly hopeless state of affairs in Afghanistan, a country destroyed by its internal tribal strife and the incursion of capitalist and imperialist greed and war, she is poised at a safe and comfortable distance in her London living room. The Englishwoman has a desperate urge to flee the suffocating normalcy of life in London.

The embodiment of sheltered Western culture, the Homebody makes passing mention of an unhappy family life, remarking that she and her husband take different brands of antidepressants: "I frequently take *his* pills so I know what he's feeling" (15). As the story of her life is slowly unravelled, one discovers that it is a life in which she admits she is unable to understand the details of her husband's job, and unable to fathom the great need of her



**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

daughter: for whom life seems to keep getting worse. "This disconnectedness from her home life: of domestic stagnancy and unfulfilling relationships, propels her into a world of books, words and idea which then leads into an acute fascination with Kabul" (Fayetteville 19).

However, most of her knowledge of the country's history-its ancient empires and tribal wanderings, gardens and ruins-comes from the 1965 tourist guide to Kabul as well as from the odds and ends of contemporary news reportage. She explains her reading and research as "Impassioned, fluttery, doomed," and in her searches for historical information, she prefers the outdated text over the contemporary one. because she can't resist the "ghostly, the dreamy, the knowing what was known before the more that has since become known overwhelms" (9, 10). Out of the arcane of the second-hand bookshop and her own personal memories, she manages, "to weave a dizzying and linguistically virtuosic narrative about Afghanistan and her own personal unhappiness that powerfully conveys both the narcissistic dangers inherent in romanticizing the Other as well as the grief of the historical subject who is always helplessly solitary" (Fayetteville 19).

She then formulates significant questions about the dangerous precipice upon which the Western world stands in regard to developments in Afghanistan and its neighbours. She wonders how it is possible to interact with a culture so different from that of the West, and she questions whether it is

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

possible to comprehend these differences from her safe environs. Is she and, by extension, is the culture she represents "succumbing to luxury"<sup>9</sup> (10); she wonders if Western luxury is the most dangerous possibility of all in that it permits failure to understand the "other" and a demonizing of them, not only for true heinous acts, but for the differences they espouse. She wonders if it is possible to feel the pain of others from comparative safety. Fisher comments on Homebody's wonderings saying:

Can we only be moved by our own suffering? Do • terrorism and the rise of Taliban in the 1990s and, by extension, 9/11 result from a long history of American foreign policy decisions extending back to Vietnam? Why did Western powers fail to recognize the dangers lurking within Afghanistan and the extent . to which those dangers could lead to tragic outcomes? Is it inevitable that these deep divisions will remain, or will the world melt into one culture, one economy, and one .value system, depending upon which .cultural imperatives prevail? Is such a possibility desirable? Is it possible to learn to coexist with other cultures, especially those so alien? (*Understanding* 69)

Remaining seated, she gets increasingly caught up in her obsession and eventually describes a fantasy she has about finding herself in Kabul with the shop owner. The homebody imagines herself a fluent speaker of the Pashto language and' channels the man's anguish: "Look, look at my country, look at my Kabul, my city, what is left of my city . . . there is no life here only fear, we do not live in the

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

buildings now, we live in terror in the cellars in the caves in the mountains" (10).

Her fascination with Afghanistan is patently the result of her desire to find a place where she might belong. Kushner's title both connects her to Kabul and separates her from it. The Homebody's name is telling, for she is very much *not at home* in her body—she takes a variety of antidepressants and imagines her brain as a "pink-beige walnut-wrinkled nutmeat within a crystalliform quartzoid ice-white hoarfrost casing" (15), furthermore, she feels that she is always "imploding and collapsing" (14). The Homebody is a mass of contradictions "She slings around words such as *expegeses* and *antilegomenoi* and at the same time admonishes herself for doing so. We see a woman who is simply incapable of real communication, and whose life contains no joy whatsoever' (Bowen 3).

Then, in a passage of lyrical self-loathing, "Homebody reviles the moral condition of one whose nature it is, like her own, to remain perpetually hors de combat" (Kramer 36)

I love this guidebook Its foxed unfingered pages, forgotten words Its sorrowing supercessional displacement by all that has since occurred So lost, and also so familiar The home away from home. Recognizable: not how vast but how crowded the world is, consequences to everything; the Macedonians, marching east; one tribe displacing another: or one moment in which the heart strays from itself and love is gone<sup>9</sup> What after all is a child but the history of all that has befallen her ? What

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

else is love but recognition<sup>0</sup> love's nothing to do with happiness. Power has to do with happiness. Love has only to do with home. (27)

The second implication of *The Homebody's* name is that she is also bound to the interior of her London home, from which she launches escapes primarily through books-the reader as traveller. "At the same time, those very same books cross from somewhere *out there* into her psychic geography and stake their own claims, bringing about a kind of double-colonization, which is also a double-possession. *The Homebody* speaks in tongues and in hermeneutic languages" (Fayetteville 19). Her affectation appears as droll and charming as they are angry and abusive. Early in her monologue, she says,

I speak.. .I can't help myself. Elliptically. Discursively. I've read too many books, and that's not boasting, for I haven't read many books, but I've read too many... So my diction, my syntax, well, it's so irritating, I apologize, I do, it's very hard, I know. To listen. I blame it on the books, how else to explain it? My parents don't speak like this; no one I know does; no one does. It's an alien influence, and my borders have only ever been broached by books. Sad to say. Only ever been broached by books. Except once, briefly. Which is I suppose the tale I'm telling, or rather, trying to tell. (12)

Here the *Homebody* imagines her mind as a country unto itself and her beloved texts-"outdated guidebooks . . . old magazines, hysterical political treatises written by an advocate of some long-since

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

defeated or abandoned or transmuted cause" (9-10)-are the primary "imperia" of her identity. "She's a fascinating character, at once maddening and enchanting, and her far-flung erudition and idiosyncratic cast of mind would remind us of Kushner's own-except that she has a disability, a sort of wilful, self-conscious logorrhea"(Kramer 35). She can neither stop talking nor speak directly to the point of whatever it is she is trying to say. Perhaps she is afraid of silence or in love with words. If the latter, though, it's not for their own inherent beauty and power.

... I live with the world's mild censure, or would do were it the case that I ever strayed far enough from my modesty, or should I say my essential surfeit of inconsequence, to so far attract the world's attention as to provoke from it its mild censure; but I have never strayed so far from the unlit to the spotlight, and so should say rather that I live with the world's utter indifference, which I have always taken to be a form of censure-in-potentia. (13)

Her content vacillates between a story about buying Afghani hats and her reading aloud from the outdated guidebook about Afghanistan. This alternation repeats multiple times during the first act and thus draws attention to the contrasts between the true Afghanistan and the English-created version. "The readings from the guidebook highlight the many culture clashes that caused Afghanistan to change hands in the past. Also, they allow Kushner to sneak exposition into the plot. These readings thus

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

accentuate in turn the Homebody's complete lack of knowledge about Afghan culture" (Fayetteville 10). She even admits that the hats she purchased may not even have been made by real Afghans for all she knew. On the other hand, "With each one, the audience coos appreciatively until it becomes almost an audience participation part of the play, like the seventh inning stretch of a baseball game" (Hitchcock, par.4).

The story turns out to be about the proprietor of the shop where she went to buy the hats-an Afghan, she assumes-or her imaginings about him. Taking her receipt, she notices that some of the fingers on his right hand are missing, hacked off. In her fantasy, she asks what happened to his hand and imagines his reply:

I was with the Mujahideen, and the Russians did this. I was with the Mujahideen, and an enemy faction of Mujahideen did this. I was with the Russians...my name is in the files if they haven't been destroyed, the names I gave are in the files, there are no more files, I stole bread for my starving family, I stole bread from a starving family, I profaned, betrayed, according to some stricture I erred and they chopped off the fingers of my hand.  
(19)

Reality fuses with fantasy, as the Homebody imagines herself spontaneously fluent in Pashto. With that, she enters the shopkeeper's consciousness and by extension the whole tortured history of Afghanistan, riven by repeated conquests and betrayals. "Her language becomes that history, as it

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

collapses into a vortex of contradiction" (Finkle 5). When the hat merchant delivers his own monologue, where he compresses decades of oppressive Afghanistan history, and also details his existence as an exile living in London, during which he implores the Homebody, these are really The Homebody's words, The Homebody's imagined habitation of the consciousness of the Other and the Other's history, a gesture simultaneously "both immersed in history and drained of it" (Hawkes 141), both grandly empathetic and also desperate,

Look, look at my country; look at my Kabul, my city, what is left of my city? The streets are as bare as the mountains now, the buildings are as ragged as mountains and as bare and empty of life, there is no life here only fear, we do not live in the buildings now, we live in terror in the cellars in the caves in the mountains, only God can save us now, only order can save us now, only God's Law harsh and strictly administered can save us now, only The Department for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice can save us now, only terror can save us from ruin, only never ending war, save us from the terror and never-ending war, save my wife they are stoning my wife, they are chasing her with sticks, save my wife save my daughter from punishment by God, save us from God, from war, from exile, from oil exploration, from no exploration, from the West, from children with rifles ... (23)

Being an epic play, the narrative in Homebody/Kabul turns the spectator into an

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

observer, arouses his capacity for action and forces him to take decision. After an hour listening, the audience knows the Homebody - her hopes, her dreams, her flaws, and her soul. The monologue reveals the Homebody's persona not so much through direct revelation, but through her thought process and the way she expresses herself. It's alternately moving and hilarious and ultimately quite intimate.

Through her monologue, the Homebody is witnessed looking for a way to turn herself inside-out through an encounter with, and a subjection to, the foreign Other and even, to a foreign history which, nevertheless, brings her back again and again to herself. Kraft marks the significance of Homebody's monologue saying:

The Homebody's strange vocabulary, the use of those preposterously esoteric words attune our ears to a text which will incorporate French, German, English, Pashto and Dari—the Afghan version of Farsi, as well as Esperanto, sometimes translated, often not. Her self-effacement, often even self-dismissal, illustrates that self-doubt is at the core of all lost integrity, for people, between peoples, for nations. Her conflicts in understanding others, whether ancient regimes or her own daughter, remind us that the search for missing persons important to our lives is a central story-line toward mapping the unexplored territories of our own consciousness. When, at the end of her spectacular monologue, she leaves to actually



**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

journey to Afghanistan, it is the manifestation of all she has learned, and all she has just taught us. (26)

After such much discussion of her persona, her family's dysfunction which includes emotional estrangement from her husband and her troubled daughter, her love of books, particularly travel manuals, and language, and her fantasies that are partly fuelled by antidepressants, the Homebody concludes that it might be better to live among the oppressed and the suffering rather than to fade into a sense scene of ease and security promoting inactivity in response to ideas and events, to the presumption that change can be prevented, and to the arrogance of economic power. "Engagement-and a willingness to aid those of without luxury-is, for Kushner, a means to avoid this fate, although in the Homebody's case, it may lead to her own demise, for she resolves to go to this faraway, dangerous land and experience it for herself (Fisher, *Understanding* 72).

The Homebody disappears between this act and the second, and is never seen again. One can presume that the disappearance of the Homebody represents how she is no longer the character that one met. "When the Homebody ends her enchanting spiel, she rises, puts on her coat and walks into the ravaged but prosaic Kabul" (Finkle 5). An abrupt change of pace and style is the consequence of Homebody's departure from comfy London to Kabul where she apparently disappears. Her personal, inner quest is immediately followed by an outward but equally personal quest by her husband and daughter as they blunder into Taliban territory to find her in

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

their metaphorical neo-colonial hobnail boots. "The Homebody's departure for Afghanistan then prompts one of the play's most dynamic moments as the stage is transformed before our eyes into the war-torn city of Kabul" (Hoyt 1).

Act II takes the audience from the Homebody's comfortable London living room to various locations around the wounded city of Kabul, Afghanistan where Kushner plunges his "Western Everywoman" (Hoyt 1). Inevitably, all of Afghanistan opens into view, locating this Western woman, a tourist in Afghanistan gone missing, brings one into contact with all of the currents shaping Afghani society and the personal becomes the political and the local becomes the global. Kushner takes his audience into the heart of contemporary geopolitical darkness, "expanding the private into public and back again. Rife with grieving ruminations on an ancient and mysterious city now in rubble and despair, the play finds the city again at the centre of a violent conflict from which it may never recover" (Fisher, *Understanding* 73). The play's theme of communication becomes more pronounced in Kabul. Kushner addresses the complexities of communication and understanding between East and West on a large level.

After having journeyed to Kabul, as she has already hinted she was compelled to do, the curious Homebody vanishes and is thought to be dead. Her reluctant husband Milton Ceiling and impatient daughter Priscilla are in Kabul, Priscilla suspicious of the reports being given them of her mother's

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

demise, Milton ready to accept his wife's demise and get the hell out.

As the act begins. Homebody's husband and daughter are in a hotel room in Kabul, listening to an Afghan doctor describing, in horrifically precise medical terminology, exactly how the Homebody was killed. The Pashtun doctor reads the grizzly findings of an autopsy in terms so clinical as to be barely intelligible. 'The Homebody's hermetic, self-fascinated language gives way to the messy strivings of these English strangers in a strange land. Misunderstandings and misapprehensions abound, Requests and rebukes in Arabic, Dari and Pashto cloud the air" (Winn 5). \*T apologize if my English is . . . impenetrable," the doctor says after his only-too- vivid English-language account of the Homebody's purported murder. Having gone suddenly and mysteriously to Kabul (when? why? it is unclear), the woman from Act I is now suddenly and mysteriously dead.

The balance of the play concerns the efforts of the daughter to find out what really happened to her mother. The official story being given out is that while walking alone amid the ruins outside of Kabul-unescorted, bare-headed, carrying a symbol of Western luxury (a CD player)-she was set upon and torn to pieces by an anti-Western mob. The whereabouts of her body, however, are unknown. Having apparently been beaten "with wooden planks and stakes and rusted iron rebar rods" (32), her left clavicle was separated, limbs shattered, three fingers shorn off, one arm and one breast torn off, her left

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

eye "enucleated," and part of her head "sheared cleanly off" (33), leaving the the reports being given them of her mother's demise, Milton ready to accept his wife's demise and get the hell out.

As the act begins. Homebody's husband and daughter are in a hotel room in Kabul, listening to an Afghan doctor describing, in horrifically precise medical terminology, exactly how the Homebody was killed. The Pashtun doctor reads the grizzly findings of an autopsy in terms so clinical as to be barely intelligible. 'The Homebody's hermetic, self-fascinated language gives way to the messy strivings of these English strangers in a strange land. Misunderstandings and misapprehensions abound, Requests and rebukes in Arabic, Dari and Pashto cloud the air" (Winn 5). \*T apologize if my English is . . . impenetrable," the doctor says after his only-too- vivid English-language account of the Homebody's purported murder. Having gone suddenly and mysteriously to Kabul (when? why? it is unclear), the woman from Act I is now suddenly and mysteriously dead.

The balance of the play concerns the efforts of the daughter to find out what really happened to her mother. The official story being given out is that while walking alone amid the ruins outside of Kabul-unescorted, bare-headed, carrying a symbol of Western luxury (a CD player)-she was set upon and torn to pieces by an anti-Western mob. The whereabouts of her body, however, are unknown. Having apparently been beaten "with wooden planks and stakes and rusted iron rebar rods" (32), her left

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

clavicle was separated, limbs shattered, three fingers shorn off, one arm and one breast torn off, her left eye "enucleated," and part of her head "sheared cleanly off" (33), leaving the the meantime, the play takes a different turn: even though Reuters has reported the murder, no one knows where her body is. The rest of the play is mainly taken up with the daughter's obsession in finding that body, which she ultimately returns home without. "Priscilla is a much more social creature than her mother, and her peregrinations around Kabul open up the story" (Winn 5). Throughout Priscilla's dangerous, hypnotic search through Kabul, Kushner expands his exploration of cultural difference and emphasizes the journey to comprehension and connection the *Homebody* insists is essential both among nations and between individuals. The *Homebody* has not been able to achieve connection with her own family, so she seeks it within an alien culture. Sinatra's "Come Fly with Me," another favourite of the *Homebody*, becomes a central metaphor of *Homebody/Kabul*; a musical motif representing the varied journey's of its characters.

One of the play's most interesting characters is Khwaja the Afghan poet who writes in Esperanto, the once proposed universal language. Idealistically hoping to write in a language that can be understood by everyone, Khwaja, ironically, finds almost no one can understand his poetry. "Esperanto is a language free of the inherent cultural oppressions and burdens of history that drench other languages in blood" (Fisher, *Understanding* 80).

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

The poet introduces Priscilla to Mahala, a spirited Afghan woman who seeks a passage to London as an escape from Taliban rule. In depicting the Taliban, Kushner, "exposes the frightening face of religious fanaticism, demonstrating his aversion to fundamentalism and its inherent intolerance. At the same time, he humanizes other Afghan characters trapped within the harsh oppression of the Taliban" (Fisher, *The Theatre of Tony Kushner* xi). Mahala is a librarian who wants to go to London where she can resume the reading denied her under the ruling regime. Hicks comments on the character of the Afghan woman saying:

One Afghan woman has been driven to madness by Taliban repression. Uncertainty abounds concerning her true identity. Was she truly the former wife of the Homebody's rumoured Muslim lover? Is she a courier forced by the Taliban to take military information about the British and Americans to the Taliban's Northern Coalition in London? Is she a poetic messenger with the text of a mother tongue for all mankind? Is she a replacement for the Homebody or even a surrogate mother for Priscilla? We never know for certain. Kushner's play is indeed a magical world in which things do not appear to be what they really are. As Milton Ceiling says to Priscilla, "It's down the rabbit hole now." Just like events and characters in "Alice in Wonderland."(40)

Priscilla, growing in wisdom as she continues her journey through Kabul's streets, ruefully notes that Mahala "isn't mad, she is... furious. It is not at

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

all the same" (80), that a life of fear and oppression can only lead to total resignation or a fury that true survivors must have to fight on. "There are individual scenes of undeniable power-particularly the rejected Afghan wife's rage at the West's complicity in bringing the Taliban to power which contains the eerily predictive lines written *before* 9/11" (Rabkin, par.8): <sup>4b</sup>"We must suffer under the Taliban so that the U.S. might settle a 20-year score with Iran!...Don't worry, they're coming to New York!" (85)

In this act, where the play gains momentum, shaping a much different, darker story, a shadowy, volatile society filled with civil conflict and political intrigue is conveyed. The abrupt shift in action and tone as the play's setting moves from London to Kabul circa 1998, cements the impression given by the title that this is really two plays welded into one.

Kushner's characters speak in native Pashto and Dari languages, which sharply contrast the varying degrees of Cockney demonstrated by the Ceiling family. "These subtle nuances are brought to life through Vreeke's precise details, including uncomfortable, violent moments that are rarely believable in a staged environment" (Munch 5). In addition to English, the play includes lines spoken in Arabic, Dari, Esperanto, French, German, Pashto and Russian, as well as Latin phrases and an allusion to Farsi. The text of the play is predominantly English, translated to Spanish, but original sections in Dari, Arabic, Pashtun, French and Esperanto are respected. "The inclusion of multiple languages and

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

dialects succeeds in enhancing the sense of displacement between different realities and is true to the variety of characters and lost souls brought together on the stage" (Anaya 24). Expressed through Kushner's linguistic prowess, characters are simultaneously life-like and iconic and Kushner succeeds to layer his busy narrative with often fascinating historical fragments and observations on western and Afghan culture.

Indeed, the play includes many conversations spoken in foreign languages, only some of which are simultaneously translated into English. Kushner requires his audience and asks them to recognize that the failure to communicate is an essential part of what he's trying to say about the situation in Afghanistan. \*\*The play is about language and how language barriers and communication barriers create barriers between cultures. Most of the play is spent trying to communicate" (Hoyt 1).

On the other hand, various mysterious hints are dropped throughout the second half of the play that the Homebody has faked her own death. At one point, the Afghan guide-for-hire who has befriended the daughter tells her that her mother wants to convey the message that "though she is not dead, you must think of her as dead; for she has relinquished everything of that life which you know to live in another world" (91). Later, believing her mother is, in fact, dead, her daughter will say the Homebody suffered from cosmolatry, "Idolatrous worship of the world. . . She loved everything the world's forgotten" (115). "One could say, even to the



**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

point of death. Ultimately, the play seems to say, one cannot love history—the past—in this way, as a sensual object that can be touched. The past cannot be touched" (Levinas 57). Kushner's Homebody/kabul

Whether the Homebody is dead or alive is never confirmed, but this is not what interests Kushner. To Kushner, the focus is not the Homebody, who is merely a catalyst; it is the violent collision of cultures, as the Homebody explains it, "is what intrigues him: Ours is a time of connection; the private, and we must accept this, and it's a hard thing to accept, the private is gone. All must be touched. All touch corrupts. All must be corrupted" (11). she states, and it becomes evident that Kushner believes that this corrupting touch may eventually bring deeper understanding to the diverse forces that appear to be in permanent conflict. The corrupting touch is immersion in another world, another life; a plunge into a culture at once alien, inviting and frightening. Priscilla's yearning, desperate search is not only for her missing mother, but for comprehension and for the connection that the Homebody insists is necessary, both among nations and between people.

During the second act, the setting shows conflict between Muslim and secular societies; Westerners are punished for disrespecting Islamic laws that they didn't understand. The social difference in religions causes the gap to become violent. The Homebody was supposedly beaten and killed for not wearing the proper, traditional female

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

garb; Priscilla was almost beaten for the same exact reason. Indeed, the Homebody dragged the rest of her family into a culture they were unfamiliar with, causing many problems- Multiple Afghanis upset the Ceiling family by mistaking them for Americans, assuming they were the ones who had recently been bombing them. Individuals cause individual problems through ignorance. Kabul could not represent a more perfect metaphor for the failure, barbarism, hopelessness, and bitterness that exists in this play. The country is falling apart, as is the city, the Ceiling family, and the British diplomat they have entrusted their lives to.

Despite the fact that Homebody doesn't appear until the curtain call, she remains a palpable presence as each of her surviving kin struggle to make sense of their loss and figure out if she is even actually dead. Besides, there are rumours that the Homebody has abandoned her former identity and converted to the Islamic faith, marrying a Muslim in Kabul and forging a new persona. It is impossible news to imagine, that a citizen of the free world would betray her own culture, her carefree way of life, to assume the burdens of an oppressed woman in Afghan society. "Is it possible that a self-indulgent Westerner could willingly sacrifice their freedoms, their very identity, to become someone else, to embrace and assimilate to a culture and religion so far removed from their own?" (Munch 5). Like Priscilla, one is never quite sure who to believe-each character tells a different story of what has happened to the homebody. "Through perceptive

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

dialogue and enthralling characters, the play highlights the difficulties presented by colliding cultures and the ruthless influences of the West" (Matzner 2).

Act II is completely absorbing, as each character follows his own arc in understanding events: Priscilla learns about Afghanistan from the poet and meets Mahala, the Afghani woman seeking escape, while Quango introduces Milton to local culture in the form of opium. Quango wants Milton to let him court Priscilla.

Likewise, the third act climax takes place in Kabul, but the setting is different because the characters have changed -Priscilla, causes problems because she does not know Islamic laws. She dresses improperly, smokes in public, and she speaks when not spoken to. The Munkrat (a Taliban religious policeman), screaming in Pashto at Priscilla, walking uncovered on a street: \*'Zan putka! Ow segret-day watchawa! Mukh-kay lahagha cheh woo dey wah hoom! Pyow wah beysharmah khazah yay! T'pah hay zhey cheh day ayjahzah neshtah. Gwarla cheh woo wahal shey? Watchawah segret-day! Watchawah bahar, watchawah os!'"(132)

Quango forces Priscilla to bribe him with sex in order to get Mahala's border papers, just as Milton notes that the Afghani guards will take bribes: "I've been told you people take bribes" ( 132). Yet, at the same time, he was obviously British at some juncture in his life. His lack of social identity results in a seemingly overt lack of standard propriety: he wants sex as a bribe, and he takes multiple drugs.

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

These cause personal conflicts because Priscilla doesn't want him, Milton ends up taking drugs and disturbing his daughter, and Priscilla catches Quango pleasuring himself and is offended.

In what turns out to be his own farewell, the doomed Khwaja finally gets to speak in his poetic voice. He envisions an angel waiting in a garden. "The primal mystery of the angel's language hovers over this reverberant night of theatre" (Hicks 37): "Her voice is ravishing; and it is fatal to us," Khwaja intones. "We may seek her, or spend our lives in flight from her. But she is always waiting in the garden, speaking in a tongue which we were born speaking and spend of what we love to learn. Go home with care" (130).

In this act, Milton, the American computer scientist struggles to explain his work to Mahala, the Afghan woman. She speaks Pashto, Dari and French, among other languages, but knows only some patchy English. Milton tries out various terms about the electromagnetic spectrum on Mahala and then floats some metaphors about lanterns and pipes. Finally he concedes: "It's an unforgiving place, science. If you don't speak its language it spits you out peremptorily." Moments later, Mahala snaps at a military guard in Pashto, quarrels with another official about some poems written in Esperanto and winds up cowering on the floor with a rifle aimed at her head. Volleys of non-translated Pashto bolt across the stage as the cocked rifle stays fixed on Mahala. Now it's a horrified Milton who's left hopelessly out of the loop of comprehension. "That

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

polyglot crisis strikes to the heart of this remarkable, invigorating and deeply mournful drama. *Homebody/Kabul* is a mighty theatrical disquisition on language as both swarming chaos and collective hope" (Levy 9).

Despite the characters' efforts to communicate, they find it difficult to succeed. More optimistic is the relationship between Milton and Mahala, the Muslim woman and former librarian. Milton suggests that science is a language. He works in networking, which consists of joining opposites that are also alike. This an effective metaphor for communication between cultures. Mahala's view that the Dewey Decimal system is the only truly universal language, on the other hand, suggests education is the tool to advance world understanding.

Mahala doesn't speak English, needs papers to cross the borders, and is not the mother Priscilla wishes to find. Finally, in the <sup>i</sup>periplum\ "Mahala takes the place of the Homebody in England, representing somewhat of a resolution of differences between Afghani and English, Islamic and secular, and Western and non-Western cultures. The individual characters cause conflicts because of their ignorance of each other's cultures" (Hicks 36).

Without explanation Mahala is in Homebody's chair in London, rhapsodizing about a garden. The play ends with the Pashtun woman sitting in the same chair, by the same book-laden table beside which the Englishwoman sat in Act I. In contrast to the Homebody, Mahala wants to leave her native

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

land for England. Without ever determining whether the homebody is alive or dead and after enduring a number of humiliating experiences, Milton and Priscilla succeed in getting Mahala to England. There, she's seen sitting at the desk where the homebody sat, saying what the homebody has said about always agitating her family. The two women, very different yet very alike, have changed places. Holman explains how the final scene carries a message saying,

The final scene does offer some suggestion, however, that the mad Afghan woman has displaced the self of the Homebody. It's spring 1999 and she now sits in London in the chair previously occupied by the Homebody. She is learning English and reading the Koran. Priscilla returns home, sitting in a chair formerly vacant in her mother's drawing room. She talks to this new woman in her life. Realizing she has grown as a woman since attempting suicide as a young pregnant woman, she knows now that her mother had to leave England. Otherwise, she and Priscilla would have become lost in one another's worlds of uncertainty and despair. Through the loss of her mother, Priscilla can now understand her own life and the mad Afghan woman can now go into the garden and plant the magical greenery that even Paradise envies as the poetic imagery of life. History can't give us a full or certain account of life and it can't redress the ugly repression in life, but the strength of the human will to seek certainty and to be imaginative can sustain life and help us to discover the beauty in life.(34)

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

Priscilla has lost her mother and, after a harsh confrontation, her father too, but she matures through her plunge into the surreal recesses of Kabul. She takes responsibility for saving Mahala by getting her out of Kabul along with Milton. The Homebody's favourite song, Siantra's "It is Nice to Go TravPing," becomes Priscilia's mantra, and although the play ends without indicating what will become of Priscilla after her return to London, it is evident that she is transformed. Mahala ends up in London living in the Homebody's home and with the Homebody's husband enjoying the luxuries of the West, yet she appears not to be succumbing to them "Immersion in another world and another life is the 'corrupting touch' Kushner posits as a necessity for achieving a compassionate response to the 'other'. Fisher stresses this point saying:

Kushner suggests that the nearly demolished city of Kabul and the visiting Westerners are in a period of critical flux that will determine the future, for better or worse. Only Priscilla and Mahala, both of whom have been caught in the cross fires of conflicting cultures, seem to comprehend this flux as each begins the process of change made possible by the corrupting touch of their two worlds. (*Understanding* 78)

Meanwhile, Kushner, like the blighted Homebody herself, may be congenitally optimistic "It is wisdom's hand which switches on the light within," she says. Later on, excusing herself for what sounds "inexcusable and vague," she declares, "I love the world." (27)

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

In political terms, the play takes place in 1998 during the Clinton administration's attack on Taliban training camps. "Kushner has strengthened his Afghan characters, too, and he has balanced the grief and fear felt by the Ceilings as they search for their lost Englishwoman with the grief and suffering of the Kabul community under the rule of the Taliban"(Hicks 37).

The play opens the audience's eyes to the disquieting history of Kabul, powerless to do anything about the roles thrust upon it by international politics. The audience sees how personal and social conflicts are created by the culture gap through Kushner's structure, character, language, and content. The audience gains a picture of the world, is made to face something and is brought to a point of recognition "A tactical pawn which, caught in many cross-fires, has stumbled to fight for survival amidst its scars and destruction. Yet. *Homebody/Kabul* is thoroughly engrossing, resonant, and moving, intermittently, to send one out feeling catharsed, albeit in a rather quiet way" (Kramer 54).

Ultimately, *Homebody/Kabul* raises poignant, painful questions about love and connection, war, guilt, displacement, and the complex maze of history. Illuminating the treacherous present moments and the painful lessons the past has to teach, Kushner targets a need in his audience for "a way of addressing very deep, very intimate, very merciful and elusive, ineffable things in a communal setting like the theatre, for art at its best ends a



**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul***

---

certain kind of inner loneliness. Or it joins one's loneliness with the inner loneliness of many other people. And that can be healing" (Fisher, *Understanding* 81).

Politically, Kushner can hardly be accused of sitting-on-the-fence and his criticism of international policy which uses faraway territories as bloody playgrounds is potent. "*Homebody/Kabul* is rife with touches of theatricalism, allowing deconstruction of history and providing a means to inspire reconsideration of current circumstances and responses to them" (Fisher, *Understanding* 68).

In *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner argues for a deeper level of Western engagement with the struggles of the Afghan people. The *Homebody* insists that those living in comfort and luxury are obliged to assist those without the same level of security and ease, and that one must strive to truly comprehend the other. Indeed, Kushner proposes compassion, love and a willingness to take the journey toward greater understanding as the only hope for redemption and salvation. As Fisher explains:

Kushner has emerged as an exemplar of what the theatre can be at its most effecting and affecting. With *Homebody/Kabul*, he proves that the drama can be at the centre of national debate. The play offers pleas for compassion, understanding, and the insistence that we, as a society, must learn to live with differences, whether these differences reside within our own borders or outside (*Understanding* 69).

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

In today's world, there needs to be security for all or it exists for no one. Insecurity is a result of violence derived from the arrogance of the mighty on the one hand and the humiliation of the oppressed on the other. This in turn leads to discrimination, injustice and the utter loss of hope in the effectiveness of reason and justness in governing relations between countries. "It is through dialogue that the victory of smile over sword, compassion over hate, and justice over discrimination and injustice can be celebrated" (Khatami).

**Works Cited**

- Anaya, Rabkin. "Homebody/Kabul."\* *The Drama Review*. January 2, 2002, 13-24.
- Billington, Michael. "Homebody/Kabul." *Guardian*. May 23, 2002:18.
- Bowen, Joseph. "Homebody/Kabul." *Theatre Review*. August 31, 2003:3.
- Coen, Phelan. "Homebody/Kabul." *Theatre Journal*. Volume 55, Number 1, March 2003:5.
- Evans, Everett. "Ambitious Homebody/Kabul explores ancient land, modern family." *Houston Chronicle*. February 1, 2007:6-7.
- Fayetteville, Boles. "Homebody/Kabul." *Theatre Journal*. Volume 55, No. 2, May 2003:10-19.
- Fisher, James. *The Theatre of Tony Kushner*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- .....--. *Understanding Tony Kushner*. South Carolina:

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

University of South Carolina Press, 2008.

Franklin, Nancy. "Homebody/Kabul." *New Yorker*.  
May 2003: 325-327.

Frinkle, David. "Homebody/Kabul." *Theatre Mania*.  
December

27,2001:5. Hathaway, Brad. "Homebody/Kabul."  
*Potomac States*. March

**10,2004:COL.**

Hawkes, Terence. "On the Hither Side of Time:  
Tony

Kushner's Homebody/Kabul and the Old English  
Ruin.

*"Shakespeare in the Present*, London: Routledge,

2002. Heilpern, John. "Zounds! Kushner's  
Homebody/Kabul Is Our

Best Play In Last 10 Years." *The New York  
Observer*.

Januarys 2002:3. Hicks, Robert. "Tony Kushner's  
'Homebody/Kabul.'" *New*

*York Theatre Wire*. May 11, 2004:24-40. Hitchcock.

Laura. "Homebody/Kabul." *A Curtain Up Los  
Angeles Review*, August 15, 2008,

<[http://www.Curtain](http://www.CurtainUp.com)

Up.com> Holman, Curt. "Homebody/Kabul."  
*Theatre Review*. April 2,

2003:34-35. Hoyt, Eric. "Skepticism key to  
"Homebody/Kabul." *The Daily*

*Northwestern*. July 24, 2003:1. Huntington,  
Samuel. *The Clash of Civilization and the*

*Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon &  
Schuster,

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

1996. Hurwitt, Robert. "Tony Kushner's 'Homebody/Kabul.'" *San Francisco Chronicle*. September 10, 2006:25.

Khatami, Mohamed. "Dialogue among Civilizations."

UNESCO. 1999. Kleiman, Kelly. "Homebody/Kabul." *The New York Times*. September 9, 2002:25. Kraft, Jerry. "Homebody/Kabul." *Theatre Journal*. April 8, 2003:26. Kramer, Mimi. "Kushner's Homebody/Kabul" New York Press. February 19, 2002:34, 36, 54.

Kushner, Tony. *Homebody/Kabul*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004. Levinas, Hornby. "Tony Kushner's Homebody/Kabul." *The Hudson Review*. Vol. 55, No. 2, Summer 2000:57.

Levy David. *Homebody/Kabul*. *Boston Theatre Works*. April 29-June 4, 2004:9. Map, Clay. "Tony Kushner's prescient journey to Kabul." *Theatre Reviews*. April 28, 2002: 2-3. Matzner, Eli. "'Homebody/Kabul' highlights clash of cultures." *The Justice*. Feb. 10, 2009:2. Munch, Jolene. "Tony Kushner's 'Homebody/Kbul' at Woolly Mammoth." *Metro Weekly*. March 16, 2004:5. Philips, Michael. "'Homebody/Kabul': Theatre of Cultural War." *Times Theatre Critic*. December 20, 2001:58.

Rabkin, Gerald. "Homebody/Kabul." *Culture Vulture.net*. January 3, 2002. August 25, 2008. <<http://www.Cu!ture>

**The Clash of Cultures in Tony  
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul**

---

Theatre.net> Siegal, ED. "Homebody/Kabul."  
*Boston Globe*. May 5, 2003:

101-117. Supple, Augusta. "Homebody/Kabul."  
September 14, 2008.

September 15, 2008.

<<http://www.australianstage.com>> Winn, Steven.

"Finding the night words/Languages at heart of  
'Homebody/Kabul.'" *San Francisco Chronicle*. May  
26,  
2002:4-5.



## تصادم الحضارات في مسرحية توني كوشنر: هوم بدي / كابول

د. هالة سيد أحمد المتولي (\*)

يتناول البحث بالعرض والتحليل نظرية تصادم الحضارات التي قدمها المفكر سامويل هانتينغتون في التسعينات في مقال يحمل نفس العنوان والذي حظى بأهمية خاصة بعد أحداث الحادي عشرة من سبتمبر. وكان الكاتب الكبير قد تنبأ بأن الصراع بين الشعوب في أعقاب الحرب العالمية الثانية سيكون على مستوى الثقافات في المقام الأول قبل أن يكون أيديولوجياً أو اقتصادياً أو سياسياً.

ويتطرق البحث بعد ذلك إلى أحد أهم وأبرز الكتاب الأمريكيين المعاصرين وهو توني كوشنر والمعروف بأفكاره البناءة ونظرية المستقبلية. فهو الكاتب الذي يخرج بشخصيته من المجال الضيق إلى الأفق الرحيب لنشر آرائه السياسية المحايدة والجرئة.

ويؤكد البحث على أن مسرحية هوم بدي / كابول تعد مثلاً واقعياً وحقيقياً للتصادم بين الحضارات الذي ينشأ بين الشرق والغرب في المقام الأول نتيجة لعدم قدره ورغبة أي طرف للتقرب منه. ومما حول الأنظار لهذا الحمل الذي نشر في أوائل هذا القرن - وإن كان المؤلف قد بدأ في كتابته قبل أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر أنه قد تم اعتباره رؤية مستقبلية للهجوم الشهير الذي وقع على أمريكا.

فالعمل المسرحي يأخذ الشكل الملحمي وينقسم إلى ثلاثة فصول ويعتمد على السرد في فصله الأول المكون من خلال منولوج طويل للبطل تظهر فيه ولعها بالشرق المتمثل في مدينة كابول بأفغانستان ورغبتها في هجر رفاهية الغرب.

\* مدرس الأدب الإنجليزي بكلية الألسن، جامعة عين شمس.