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BETWEEN PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE: HUMANITARIANISM AND DARK TOURISM IN TONY KUSHNER'S *HOMEBOY/KABUL*

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Abstract

Colonial adventures and imperialistic travels have taken a new pattern as in the cases of humanitarian travel and dark tourism in the twenty-first century. Dark tourism not only satisfies Western individual's hunger for orientalism labeling the touristic site a marginal and exotic landscape, but also uncovers the touristic undercurrents involved in the voyage. In this article, by utilizing the immediacy of the theatre genre, I argue that dramatic literature shares similar ambivalent spatial relations with humanitarian travel in that they both locate themselves between proximity and remoteness in their relation to the other. Similarly, by staging metatheatrical aspects, Tony Kushner's 2001 play *Homebody/Kabul* underlines the spectral feature of theatre blurring the distinction between reality and performance, distance and closeness. Thanks to this self-referentiality, the play creates a distance between the actress and the spectator and, simultaneously, establishes a bond through the protagonist's endeavor to present a remote story that instigates empathy from the audience. Written in two sections, my article first explores the concept of dark tourism and the genre's overlap with this ambiguous relationship between distance and proximity in humanitarianism, and then does a close reading of Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*.

Key words: Humanitarian travel, Human rights drama, Dark tourism, Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*

UZAKLIK VE YAKINLIK ARASINDA: TONY KUSHNER'IN *HOMEBOY/KABİL* OYUNUNDA HÜMANİTARİZM VE KARANLIK TURİZM

Özet

Sömürgecilik döneminde yapılan emperyalist seyahatler, 21. yüzyılda hümanitarizm seyahati, insani yardım ve karanlık turizm olarak yeniden şekil almışlardır. Karanlık turizm, yalnızca Batılıların oryantalizme olan açlığını bastırmakla ve bölgeyi marjinal ve egzotik olarak tanımlamakla yetinmez; aynı zamanda bu seyahatteki turistik amaçları da ortaya koyar. Bu makalede, tiyatro türünün doğrudanlığından yola çıkarak, tiyatronun, tıpkı karanlık turizmde olduğu gibi, ötekiyle olan ilişkisinde yakınlık ve uzaklık arasına sıkışmış çelişkili bir uzamsal ilişkisi olduğunu tartışacağım. Bu bağlamda, üstkurmaca kavramını sahneleyen Amerikalı yazar Tony Kushner'in 2001 yapımı oyunu *Homebody/Kabil* tiyatronun görselliğinin altını çizer ve gerçek-kurmaca ve yakınlık-uzaklık arasındaki bir ilişkinin sınırlarını daha da bulandırır. Bu özgöndergelilik sayesinde oyun, hem aktris ve izleyici arasında bir uzaklık yaratır, hem de seyirciden empati bekleyen uzaktaki bir hikayeyi anlattığı için ikisi arasında yakınlık kurar. İki bölüm olarak yazılan bu makale, ilk önce karanlık turizm kavramını ve tiyatronun onunla nasıl

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örtüşüğünü irdeleyecek, sonra da Tony Kushner'in oyununun bu kavramlar ışığında detaylı bir okumasını yapacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hümanitarizm ve seyahat, İnsan hakları tiyatrosu, Karanlık turizm, Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabil*

1. INTRODUCTION

The close affinity between colonialism and imperialistic travel that pervaded the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the Anglophone world has acquired a novel shape in the twenty-first century. As globalism intervenes, international campaigns to help the poor and the victimized in the underprivileged parts of the world abound. Moreover, as Western celebrities engage in humanitarian work as in the cases of Madonna and Angelina Jolie, the scope of imperialism and dark tourism widens and becomes a more attractive entity, a commodity, in popular culture.

Upendra Baxi's *The Future of Human Rights*, for instance, contests the commodification of human suffering and human rights markets by foregrounding the human rights packaging that satisfies the pornographic and voyeuristic needs of an individual (Baxi, 2002: 125). It is through the marketization of human suffering and mobilization of empathy that the human rights markets profit from. In his book, he elucidates the link between human rights markets and the commodification of human rights services as such:

This is a moral problem, to be sure; but it is also a material problem. Of necessity, markets for human rights concentrate on this aspect of the problem, if only because when compassion dries out, the resource for the alleviation of human suffering through human rights languages also stand depleted. This intersection registers the necessity for human rights entrepreneurs to commodify human suffering; to package and sell it in terms of what markets will bear. (Baxi, 2002: 125).

As human rights markets demand for human suffering and vulnerability, more human rights goods and services are designed so as to incite empathy and awaken responsibility in line with the law of supply and demand in marketing. According to Baxi, human rights markets are almost required to take its consumers into account and the human rights goods and narratives are molded in conjunction with the demands of the reading public. Therefore, this leads to the proliferation of human rights narratives and agitation that sap the feelings of empathy and compassion from the Western viewers.

A similar idea of arousing empathy through its face-to-face interaction does play a vital role in human rights theatre. Florian Becker, Paolo Hernandez, and Brenda Werth's edited volume on human rights drama, namely *Imagining Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Theater* underscores "publicity" and "public imagining" as the specific characteristics of theatre that pertain to human rights (Becker et al., 2013: 3). What makes theatre and human rights align is the former's publicity and immediacy that will endorse the latter's attempt to create public awareness. It is this public awareness and urgency that the theatre genre supplies that paves the way for a wider range of human rights markets.

In this article, by utilizing the immediacy of the theatre genre, I look at the notion of travel to dark tourism sites undertaken by Western individuals so as to engage in humanitarian intervention. I argue that dark tourism not only satisfies the Western individual's hunger for orientalism labeling the touristic site a marginal and exotic landscape but also uncovers the touristic undercurrents involved in the voyage. By reading Tony Kushner's play *Homebody/Kabul* closely, I further claim that the staging of metatheatrical aspects in the play underline the spectral feature of theatre blurring the distinction between reality and performance and distance and proximity. The metatheatricality and the emphasis on performance in *Homebody/Kabul* solidifies the eccentric humanitarian connection between fact and fiction, and near and far. Thanks to this self-referentiality, the play creates a distance between the actress and the spectator and, simultaneously, establishes a bond through the protagonist's endeavor to present a remote story that requires empathy from the audience. Written in two sections, my article first explores the concept of dark tourism and the genre's overlap with this ambiguous relationship between distance and nearness in humanitarianism, and then does a close reading of Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*.

2. DARK TOURISM AND STAGING A HUMANITARIAN PERFORMANCE

Humanitarian travel conducted by non-governmental organizations from the First World sustains a bearable distance to the vulnerable. The entire experience of humanitarian travel ties in with the old notion of imperial travel that has maintained an ambivalent and unequal relation between the Western world and the Global South. Similar to neo-imperialism, it is a polished and novel way of constituting a power hierarchy with the other and an up-to-date phase of displaying one's superiority over the other.

In *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Caren Kaplan argues that travelers engage in shaping their romanticized and distorted version of the travel experience. According to Kaplan, the voyagers produce "the mythologized narrativizations of displacement without questioning the cultural, political, and economic grounds of their different professions, privileges, means, and limitations. Immigrants, refugees, exiles, nomads, and the homeless also move in and out of these discourses as metaphors, tropes, and symbols but rarely as historically recognized producers of critical discourses themselves. Euro-American discourses of displacement tend to absorb difference and create ahistorical amalgams" (Kaplan, 1996: 2). It is this tendency to eliminate difference and set up similarities with the new culture that lies beneath the Euro-American discourse of travel experience. Humanitarian travel, today, nourishes from this very same tendency. Historically speaking, it is not uncommon when travel writing incorporates a distorted version of the travel experience, as Kaplan argues in her book (1996: 2-3). Similarly, an exotic and an orientaling depiction of the city travelled, can be seen in travelogues such as Lucy Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt*, Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa*, and Julia Sophia Pardoe's *The City of the Sultan* and in fiction such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*. The Western traveller inclines to annihilate difference and form similarities between her home and the new cultural expedition. The composition of a fictional version of travel and the travel experience further aligns links to the narrative and romanticized version of the voyage.

An extensive criticism on the romanticized and voyeuristic experience of the traveler in a non-Western setting and the perpetuation of superior attitudes portrayed in fiction and travel writing have been frequently discussed by scholars.¹ In *Tourists with Typewriters*, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan argue that “*travel writing frequently provides an alibi for the perpetuation or re-installment of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to ‘other’ cultures, peoples, and places*” (Holland and Huggan, 1998: 7). Likewise, in the twenty-first century, this colonial phenomenon has molded into humanitarian aid and travel, which emphasizes the superiority of the Westerner over the impoverished and the vulnerable. Moreover, it is these superior attitudes that Holland and Huggan underscore that mark why humanitarian travel and travel writing are worth critiquing. Furthermore, different from colonialism and the imperialistic endeavors during the Victorian Period, for instance, Western individual’s contemporary engagement with the other and his/her portrayal of compassion and empathy situates him/her in a more – seemingly – benign position as the protector of the needy.

Though slightly deviating from Holland and Huggan’s argument, Jonathan Culler takes a varying but equally valid perspective on travellers and tourists in *Framing the Sign*. In Chapter 9 “The Semiotics of Tourism,” Culler warns about the authenticity markers that the tourists and travelers fall victim to (Culler, 1989: 159). According to Culler, the will to visit the authentic markers and the interest in buying authentic souvenirs not only make up those markers but also lays out the clear-cut distinction between a traveler and a tourist (Culler, 1989: 159). Furthermore, he claims that they are heavily coded and are only viable within the parameters of multinational capitalism. Establishing this organic bond between authenticity markers and multinational capitalism, he writes: “*Like tourism, this capitalism seeks to make the world a series of accessible sites, equivalent as markets for goods and interchangeable as sites of production according to the momentary advantages of wage scales and local conditions. ... Tourism reveals difficulties of appreciating otherness except through signifying structures that mark and reduce it*” (Culler, 1989: 167). The play discussed in this chapter highlights the difficulty of understanding the other and building up a genuine connection with him. Discourses of marginality and vulnerability are foregrounded in similar travel experiences and they are transformed into intellectual commodity.

Despite the extensive criticism on travel and the encounter with the other in fiction and travel writing, little has been written about the similar experiences of travelers in dramatic literature. Only recently it has become an area of interest with the publication of Emma Willis’ *Theatricality, Dark Tourism, and Ethical Spectatorship*. In her book which discusses the interactions among tourism, theatre, and voyeurism, she raises a challenging question on whether this spectatorship is socially responsible witnessing or self-serving voyeurism. Moreover, in her book in which she takes the roles of a tourist, a scholar, and an artist, she proposes theatricality as a vital medium to grasp the underlying factor beneath the interest to dark tourism sites:

An ethics of spectatorship to such sights might be said to begin with the acknowledgment that, despite an arrival that is never completed, and a lack of presence, we are nonetheless located within a shared ethical space. That is, by our own emplacement – our appearance – we acknowledge our responsibility

¹ See Blunt and Mills.

towards the disappeared, towards those who have exited. Furthermore, by our presence we are dramaturgically implicated in the ethical and representational breaches that mark the sites. (Willis, 2014: 8)

Willis's argument on shared ethical space has its roots in Emmanuel Levinas's theory of face-to-face interaction.² It is this shared space that imposes responsibility that enables the spectators to act out their ethical responses. Moreover, the Westerner's interest in visiting dark touristic sites and the efforts of humanitarianism stress the spectacle aspect of this interaction and thus becomes a fitting venue for theatre and its interaction with the audience. Through this proximity that the genre of theatre provides, actors are in a more privileged position to relay their ideas and build empathy for the viewers. It is through our adjacency to the vulnerable and our "bad conscience" – or *mauvaise conscience* in Levinasian terms - that is aware of the shared ethical space that makes humanitarian efforts inevitable (Levinas, 2009: 83-4). Moreover, applied to the theatre genre, this closeness is further shortened, in terms of sharing the actual physical space, and thus theatre paves the way for a mutual understanding of the self and the other through its face-to-face interaction.

Kelly Oliver defines the process of witnessing as requiring an address and a response in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Oliver, 2001: 7). Introducing the two terms, address-ability and response-ability as integral aspects of witnessing, Oliver argues that subordination or trauma undermines the possibility of subjectivity, which also diminishes the possibility of witnessing. Arguing that address-ability and response-ability are inherent parts of witnessing, Oliver states, "If we conceive subjectivity as a process of witnessing that requires response-ability and address-ability in relation to other people, especially through difference, then we will also realize an ethical and social responsibility to those others who sustain us. ... Witnessing is the heart of the circulation of energy that connects us, and obligates us, to each other." (Oliver, 2001: 19-20). Bearing witness stands out to be a significant entity that resist violations and puts a burden on the shoulders of the witness (Oliver, 2001: 20). Therefore, the witness gains importance in this role of witnessing.

In a similar vein, theatre as a genre provides a venue for witnessing thanks to its publicity and immediacy. It is situated at the crossroads of witnessing, face-to-face interaction, and preserving a closeness to the audience. The theatre genre, itself, goes hand in hand with humanitarian travel since they both have similar eccentric relations between contiguity and distance. In Willis's discussion of dark tourism, she underscores the fact that individuals are more interested in and beguiled by witnessing atrocities and its aftermath done elsewhere. Witnessing it from a short distance and in one's

² French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's theory of face-to-face interaction has been of great interest for scholars who specialize in human rights theatre. Basing his arguments on Husserl's intentionality of consciousness and Sartre's theory of the Other, Levinas introduces his theory of face-to-face relations and foregrounds the non-intentionality of consciousness as being the driving force behind an individual's recognition of his responsibility for the Other. The connection to the face, he writes, appears through different masks and precedes the self-consciousness (Levinas, 2009: 82-3). Furthermore, he states: "The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question. Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along" (Levinas, 2009: 83). Accentuating *mauvaise conscience* as a vital portion of being and as fostering responsibility, Levinas argues that the human being is inescapably responsible and this responsibility lies in "the anteriority and uniqueness of the non-interchangeable" (Levinas, 2009: 84).

home country might be unbearable or too difficult to witness; therefore, they need both space and a certain closeness to human rights violations. Analogously, the theatre genre provides a prosperous setting for a similar experience. On the one hand, it caters to the tastes of Western audience to have the experience of witnessing an atrocity and of humanitarian travel. With its fake sense of urgency and simulated environment, theatre audience attains this compassionate stance toward the violation. On the other hand, its artificial nature and fictional theatricality retains a distance that enables them a safe climate. Once they feel their safety to the event and are able to keep it, the viewers are intrigued by the atrocity and are eager to bear witness.

3. THE SAFE DISTANCE AND HUMANITARIAN TRAVEL IN TONY KUSHNER'S *HOMEBOY/KABUL*

Tony Kushner's clairvoyant pre-9/11 play *Homebody/Kabul* deals with similar issues of humanitarianism and the act of bearing witness to suffering. Set in London and Kabul in 1998, the play underscores human rights abuses and atrocities in Afghanistan and opens with a lengthy monologue of an armchair traveler Homebody, who is reading about Afghan history and culture from a guidebook in her apartment in London. As she is reading from the book and absorbing the conventions and exoticism listed in it, Homebody is immersed in herself and her own life.³ Along with her reading it out loud, she narrates the incident of her visit to a hat shop run by Afghan refugees in London and recounts her experience with one of them in particular. However, her self-consciousness and obsessions with her own life – her boredom, parties, husband etc.- fall short of her eagerness to visit Kabul and help others. Even her superstitious statement "*ours is a time of connection,*" stressing the need to connect with others makes her a more caricaturized protagonist (Kushner, 2002: 11).

The play's platitude opening and the narration of Homebody's encounter with the man at the hat shop not only perpetuates the superior attitudes towards the local cultures, as Holland and Huggan argue in *Tourists with Typewriters* (Holland and Huggan, 1998: 7), but also nourishes the idea that multinational capitalism is tied with tourism (Culler, 1989: 166). The fact that she buys hats from the poor man out of pity delineates Homebody's short-sighted enthusiasm to engage in the East (Minwalla, 2003: 33). The hats she purchases at the shop have a commodity value and represent entities that she can possess through her credit card (Kushner, 2002: 17). However, these items do not move beyond becoming useless after a certain time as she states: "*You know, Third World junk. As I remember, as my mind's eye saw, through its salt crust, Afghan junk. That which was one Afghan, which we, having waved our credit cards in its general direction, have made into junk*" (Kushner, 2002: 17). On another level, she also confesses that the hats purchased from an Afghan refugee, whose fingers are cut probably by Taliban, is a vivid symbol of suffering and by buying the hats and coming closer to the Afghan refugee, Homebody is embracing her witnessing of the suffering. She states:

Looking at the hat we imagine not bygone days of magic belief but the suffering

³ In "New Forms for New Conflicts: Thinking about Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* and the Theatre du Soleil's *Le Dernier Caravanserail*, Judith Miller further supports the idea that Homebody is using the guidebook as a mask to escape into her dream world. Her world comes forth as being more valuable and important (Miller, 2006: 213).

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. (Kushner, 2002: 17)

The symbolic hats provide a commodity value for Homebody and are tied with her interest in watching suffering. However, they still provide that safe distance that Homebody will expect to have. Through this action, she is both emotionally relieved to have helped the Afghan refugees to ease her guilt complex and maintaining her distance from atrocities and violence at the same time.

In *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Graham Huggan argues that marginality has turned into “a valuable intellectual commodity” and that the Western consumption of non-Western products has become the new norm (Huggan, 2001: viii). Defining “the exoticist production of otherness” as having conflicting interests such as “providing the rationale for objects of rapprochement and reconciliation, but legitimizing just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest,” Huggan lays out the reciprocal interest involved in the production of commodity but cautioning the normalizing effect of imperial endeavors (Huggan, 2001: 13). In a similar way, Homebody’s insistence to buy hats from an Afghan refugee and later her daughter Priscilla’s eagerness to see Cain’s grave initiates a power relation that perpetuates their superiority over the other and over time, it even becomes a normal act.

In line with the authenticity markers that provide a safe distance for Homebody, the same aloofness is preserved when Homebody reads from the guidebook that leads her preserve her remoteness from the events and the city of Kabul. Her act of reading turns out to be a metanarrative move that puts a distance between herself as the reader and the author himself. As the opening stage directions state: “A woman is sitting in a comfortable chair, in a pleasant room in her home in London. A table stands nearby, a lamp on the table. On the floor near her chair, a shopping bag. She is reading from a small book” (Kushner, 2002: 9). The metatheatrical opening of the play goes hand in hand with the *Homebody/Kabul’s* play with spatial relations. As Homebody depicts herself as being immersed in history different from the actor herself, she is adding a tertiary level to the act of narration with her play-within-play. The image of a fictional Western tourist reading from a guidebook on stage promotes an ekphrasis impact and underscores the play-within-play atmosphere on stage. Through a metatheatrical effect, Kushner not only forces his spectator to question reality and acting but also makes them reflect on the self.

After the monologue, Homebody’s husband Milton and daughter Priscilla preside the following scene in Kabul in their search for Homebody’s supposedly dead body with the help of local people. From Milton, who takes it for granted that Taliban minister Durranni will take bribes, to Durranni who is adamant that “Kabul is not a city for Western tourist women” (Kushner, 2002: 132-35), from Munkrat’s hostility towards women, to Mahala, the ex-wife of an Afghan man, the play itself bears a mix of characters, who are in most of the time stereotypically represented. For instance, when Mahala announces to Priscilla that “I must be saved by you,” Kushner is further interested in highlighting stereotypes (Kushner, 2002: 87). He sets up a binary that acknowledges the unbalanced roles of the Western savior and the non-Western victim.

Apart from the rest of the characters, Priscilla does not easily yield to

categorizations, but rather seems to have a more ambivalent posture throughout the play. On the one hand, she attempts to disprove stereotypical statements by repeatedly saying that she is British, not American and reprimanding her father's patronizing attitude towards the locals. On the other hand, she takes over her mother's place as a tourist and wanders through the streets of Kabul in search for Homebody, who is said to have been tortured and murdered. Haphazardly, she becomes that adventurous woman, who is ready to go out and explore Kabul. Moreover, she follows her mother's guidebook and searches for authenticity markers when she visits Cain's grave and hopes to explore the exotic land and feel compassion. Desperate to find reproductions of authenticity, she is cautioned by the Tajik poet, who states: "*You have to take home with you nothing but the spectacle of our suffering*" (Kushner, 2002: 114).

Despite her laborious endeavor to convince locals that she is not complicit in what happened in Afghanistan, her later dialogue with the Tajik poet manifests her latent condescending attitude towards Mahala: "*I can't save her ... She'll just ... die. She's just one of the people who dies, and no one minds, she's a ... a corpus vile. That's a body, alive or dead, of no regard to anyone*" (Kushner, 2002: 114). The breach between two women and two cultures abounds when Mahala is first introduced to her along with a translator, who serves as a medium to bridge the gap between the two women.⁴ Therefore, Priscilla stands out as a Western tourist who drops her mask of humanitarian aid upon finding out that her mother is dead. In the play, Kushner composes two Western tourists who are engaged in humanitarianism and are interested in bearing witness to victimization. However, their caricatured portrayals make them less of a humanitarian, especially when Priscilla states that Mahala will just die.

In a similar vein, in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, Judith Butler raises provocative statements on how grief and grievability are categorized and how losses are deemed to be recognizable and highlights the various frames leading to a war. In her definition of the frames, she writes:

Frames structure modes of recognition, especially during times of war, but their limits and their contingency become subject to exposure and critical intervention as well. Such frames are operative in imprisonment and torture, but also in the politics of immigration, according to which certain lives are perceived as lives, while others though apparently living, fail to assume perceptual form as such. Forms of racism instituted and active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable. (Butler, 2009: 24)

Tony Kushner in *Homebody/Kabul* portrays a stereotypical framing of lives and grievability that Butler would agree upon. By presenting Priscilla, who is not genuinely interested in Mahala's well-being, he does set up a critical point on grievability in his play. In a response to Priscilla, in Act II Scene 6, Mahala, rants about her deep-rooted hatred of the Americans. As a scene that appears right after Milton's soliloquy on how

⁴ For a wider discussion of multilingualism and translation in *Homebody/Kabul*, see Erith Jaffe-Berg's "Babel, Babble and Multilingualism in Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*" and Jenny Spencer's "Performing Translation into Contemporary Anglo-American Drama."

“the barbarians, ... the ruthless creatures of a culture, ... a culture of betrayal and brutality and dissembling” present themselves as being vulnerable asking for pity from the Westerners (Kushner, 2002: 78). However, despite Kushner’s stereotypical depiction of a vulnerable Afghan, Mahala reverses his presupposition through her frustrated dialogue with Priscilla: *“We must suffer under the Taliban so that the U.S. might settle a twenty-year old score with Iran. ... English, America, no difference, one big and one small, same country, America say, British do, women die, dark-skin babies die,”* (Kushner, 2002: 83-4). In this quotation, Mahala raises a similar question that Butler asks and highlights why and how Priscilla and Milton imagine Afghan lives ungrievable.

The play’s ambiguous ending further validates the hegemonic Western discourse as it depicts Mahala as successfully passing as Homebody and Priscilla being resentful of her decision to smuggle her to London. Beguiled by the locals, Priscilla affirms that Taliban is what Afghanistan needs (Kushner, 2002: 139) and states that the Afghans deserve what they have right now. In *“ ‘The Spectacle of Our Suffering’: Staging the International Human Rights Imaginary in Tony Kushner’s Homebody/Kabul,”* Elizabeth Anker critiques Milton and Priscilla as *“humanitarian crusaders”* and argues that *“the humanitarian sentiment that inspires Milton and Priscilla is tainted by multiple kinds of self-interest. ... [and] egoistic longings for atonement also consolidate humanitarianism as an ideology”* (Anker, 2013: 215-217). Naming Homebody *“an armchair humanitarian,”* Anker proposes links among humanitarian travel, capitalism, and marketing strategies (Anker, 2013: 211). Furthermore, by depicting a failed humanitarian and her unsuccessful replica, Priscilla, Kushner portrays the hypocritical nature of Western humanitarianism that feeds upon settling into binaries and power relations.

The final scene with Priscilla’s mantling Homebody’s imperialist perspective solidifies the short-sighted view of savior Westerners. The abrupt ending of the play combined with the pessimistic status-quo substantiates some of the preconceived notions of Western superiority over the Non-Western other. The fact that Mahala needs to be salvaged further authenticates the *“civilizing mission,”* the Euro-American humanitarian discourse of saving the victim, and the savage-victim-savior metaphor proposed by Makau Mutua.⁵ Moreover, Homebody’s former life and London are offered as ideal entities allotted to the privileged further justifying the Western savior’s mission to rescue the victim. In their touristic adventures, Homebody and Priscilla metamorphose into humanitarian crusaders and wish to conserve their mythologized narrativizations in Kaplan’s terms. Despite its drawbacks and stereotypical delineations of Western and non-Western characters, Kushner’s play stands out in its endeavor to lay out a more emancipating play to challenge the binary oppositions as essentialized and unifying entities.

4. CONCLUSION

Karen Malpede coins the term *“Theatre of Witness”* to define *“a new ritual poetic theatre whose substance is the inner life as lived in the presence of history – a form ... which by becoming cognizant of the extremity of the twentieth-century violence poses the question: what does it take to be human in such an age as that?”* (Malpede,

⁵ In *“Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,”* Makau Mutua argues that the Western understanding of human rights and humanitarianism is based upon a triangle that is made up of a local savage, a non-white victim, and a white Christian savior; all of which are mutually dependent on one another.

1996: 122). Breaking with classical tragedy and building on Brecht's anti-Aristotelian theatre, theatre of witness "takes form which connects self to deeper, previously hidden layers of self; connects self to the other; and provides a renewed connection to the social world ... and the audience becomes not only witness to the testimony, but witness to the witness of testimony" (Malpede, 1996: 134 and 132, respectively). It is this renewed connection to the social world that provides a unique place to theater among other genres to publicize conflicts and wars, to call for bearing witness and ethical responsibility, and to build up a new model of spectatorship, which resists empathy and the cathartic experience. Moreover, this double witnessing combined with metafictional elements further solidifies a play's engagement in inciting awareness. Similarly, *Homebody/Kabul* questions dark tourism and ethical spectatorship through its use of metatheatricality as a medium to emphasize the ambivalent spatial relations that a Western humanitarian travel has towards a Third World setting. It utilizes theatre genre to reflect this ambivalent position that a humanitarian traveler has towards his/her relation to atrocities. As she keeps that distance and shows interest to suffering at the same time, *Homebody/Kabul* reflects a complementary ambiguity in its portrayal of humanitarianism and travel.

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