

Representation of Racism in Gilman's *Spinning Into Butter* and Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*

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Both Rebecca Gilman (1965-) and Tony Kushner (1956-) are investigating into social and political questions in order to find out some of the truths about racism in the 21st Century. As a socialist , Kushner has long been an open critic of his national policies . By comparison, the American feminist, Rebecca Gilman believes that considerations for individuals are occasionally substituted by prejudice for race. But, in choosing to explore the two playwrights with articulacy, it is noteworthy to say that Kushner's plays are intended to be part of a political movement; they are dealing with moral concerns during critical periods. On the other hand , Gilman presents a portrayal of racial policies as practiced by liberal intellectuals. As a result, it is assumed that the two contemporary dramatists will occupy an established place in future research for their critical documentation of world events. Accordingly, the aim of the present research is to carry out an analytical as well as a critical evaluation of two different representations of racism as manifested by Gilman's *Spinning Into Butter* (2000) and Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* (2002).

Rebecca Gilman's unexpected accomplishment of success and, consequently, her sudden attainment of fame justify her allegiance to the art of theater. Gilman was first employed as a clerk to keep records in an accounting office in Chicago. This secretarial work helped her to earn her own living at Middlebury College, Vermont. After that, she was graduated from Birmingham Central College and at last joined the University of Iowa. Therefore, at the beginning of her professional career,

Gilman was beset with many obstructions that stood in her way. In fact, She had personally gone through a discriminatory experience. In response to these obstacles, Gilman renders the following valuable advice to young dramatists in an interview with the *American Theater's* reporter:

Q: What advice would you give to your colleagues?

Gilman: It's always important to offer encouragement when people are trying to be creative. There are a lot of things working against you when you're trying to be an artist. So, at the very least, be nice (2).

Within the last few years, Gilman has been transformed into one of America's popularly talented and commonly liked dramatists. Commenting on the recently established position of Gilman in theater, Chris Jones remarks: "...Theaters are fighting for the rights to do her plays, and the Goodman has put up two of her works in a space of no more than nine months" (1).

In comparison, though very little critical assessments have been made of Tony Kushner's place in theater, he, too, is generally regarded as one of America's most outstanding and prominent dramatists. Kushner is best known for the open exposure of political concerns and the powerful observation of American Republican policies in his plays. Besides, he criticizes America's reluctance to be fairly aligned to worldwide issues. For example, in 1993, Kushner became a Pulitzer prize winner for his masterpiece, *Angels in America* which examines the individual's ethical duty during Ronald Regan's period of office. Again , he openly censures President Bush's government for its local as well as its foreign policies which are described by him as a "big lie" (Kushner's "*Notes about Political Theater*",10). As a whole , his plays are concerned with one's moral obligations during oppressive times . For that reason, Kushner intends to

write plays for audiences that are willing to 'change' and to develop themselves. He comments on the kind of audience he is addressing: **"I am a playwright who wants an audience of over-educated dilettantes and winnable intellectuals-people like me, in other words. I want an audience of people who want to be students for ever,..."** (*A Modest Proposal*, 6). As a socialist writer, who is brought up in Louisiana and educated at Columbia, Kushner looks forward to politically committed theater. He is fully engaged to theater that shares in the struggle for equality, justice, tolerance and a transformation to better life conditions. That being so, Kushner unmask the decay of moral principles and the impairment of human integrity. Since he visualizes the stage as a rostrum for public speaking, **"Kushner has proved himself a prophet as well as a dramatist,..."** (Iris Fanger, 2). Accordingly, Kushner is an ardent supporter of the power of theater to teach and reform. He further comments on the power of theater to mirror its times in the following lines:

I continue to believe in the usefulness, and effectiveness, of this increasingly marginalized profession and art. But I believe that for theater, as for anything in life, its hope for survival rests in its ability to take a reading of the times, and change (*Notes*, 10).

Similarly, Gilman's theater is a great place to explore personal thoughts as well as communal concerns. Actors communicate a live experience to their audience and, thus, 'ideas' are of central worth. Gilman's work offers an insightful look at class conflict and at feminist problems. Moreover, She claims responsibility for the youth whose lives have been misshapen by stronger societal forces. Such being the case, both Kushner and Gilman can see in Brecht's plays what the fusion of drama and politics has to present. The American Theater's reporter asks Gilman:

Q: If you could see only one more play, what would it be?

G: *Mother Courage*. I've never seen it. I love Brecht. I think about that play a lot. *Mother Courage* is offered so many opportunities to change and she never does,...(3).

Thus, the German dramatist and poet, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) constitutes a key influence on the two dramatists. This is due to the fact that Brecht wrote a number of instructive works, the most established of which are *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), *The life of Galileo* (1930), *The Good Person of Setzuan* (1940), and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941). In these plays, Brecht exhibits a world of discontent, dissatisfaction and loneliness. His world is frequently emptied of sympathy and compassion which denotes an inherent sense of futility. However, Man can find out the reality of his existence by becoming fully cognizant of his real surroundings. Even so, Brecht never forces his notions upon the recipient. His plays' conflicts continue and his drama offers his audience an advocacy to share in this eternal struggle for survival. Nonetheless, Brecht's drama awakens the individuals' spirit and impels them to confront their contemporary political context. Ergo, Brecht becomes the tangible representative of the *Lehrstück* (teaching play) which shows sufficient evidences of his depth of vision and his greater concern for Man's destiny. Raymond Williams estimates Brecht's literary achievements in the following remark: "...It is a major originality, not because it enters a new world, but because it values an old world differently..." (331).

In a similar vein, it is immensely useless for Kushner to write a dramatic piece without any association to either previous or current political crises. Kushner admits Brecht's influence on him in the next assertion:

I decided in college that playwriting was

a dignified and worthy occupation only after reading Brecht, and I wanted to be a playwright like Brecht, who, while writing plays, articulated a theory of the theater for which those plays were indebted....(Notes, 6).

Through playwriting, Kushner can render a warning as well as an advising note that might inform of coming dangers in one's society. Hence, he expresses his disapproval of Americans' aversion to accept any educational process in theater: "...and **Americans reject the pedagogical function of theater. If it wants to teach something, it had better make sure that it never gets caught in the act...**"(Notes, 7). Like Brecht, Kushner's body of work invites audiences for a careful reconsideration of American past intellectual history which is usually part of a wider political framework. Kushner's drama inquires into everlasting and eternal issues like religion, mortality or immortality and race. To Don Shewey, "**Tony Kushner likes big plays, big subjects, big ideas...**"(1). In *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner scrutinizes the political and social disorder in Kabul as well as the racial struggle between the east and the west.

Homebody/Kabul opened in December, 2001 at the New York Theater Workshop and it later received The Dramatists Guild hullwarriner Award for Best Play in 2002. The play was written as a reaction to American missile assault on Kabul in 1998. Though the play's opening night started after the events of September 11, there were ample evidences that it was finished long before that date. To illustrate, two provincial theatrical companies produced *Homebody/Kabul* before these catastrophic events. First, Trinity Repertory Company produced the play in March and, subsequently, Berkely Repertory Theater performed it in April. Still, the play is the cultural product of the time as it is coming at the right moment. Nowadays, more than ever, the play raises some of the most urgent, political issues of our

present time. Iris Fanger says: "Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* is no less current than the daily reports from the war in Afghanistan, even though the play was four years in the writing and finished before September 11 "(1) . During the play's performance, heavy losses of the Afghan war had just occurred both in the American forces and the Afghan people. Jr.Reston admits Kushner's politicization of his dramatic themes :

EARLY IN THE SECOND ACT of '*Homebody/Kabul*', Tony Kushner's brilliant play about Afghanistan , I gave up on my quest for a purely artistic evening . Foolishly , I had tried to imagine what this theatrical experience might have been if September 11 had never happened;...(1) .

On the other hand, *Spinning Into Butter* is based on Gilman's previous experience at Middlebury College. She stayed at Middlebury to get her M.F.A. in playwriting from the University of Iowa where she witnessed the double standards that were frequently associated with the intellectual's ostensible dedication to freethinking and tolerance. Gilman's drama presented a perceptive vision of what actually happened in 1983 when a black student started to receive racist *comments* at his room door on a college campus in Vermont. Kenneth Warren hints at the warm reception of the play:

***Spinning Into Butter* resonated deeply with viewers, It received widespread media attention, and after each performance during the Chicago run, often as many as a third of the audience members stuck around to participate in a moderated discussion....(1).**

In *Spinnig Into Butter*, the play's main character is Sarah Daniels who is the young tolerant dean of her students. At first,

she seems to share her students' feelings and problems. Conversely, this apparently supportive character admits her own latent prejudice when she is told about a racist notice on the room door of one of the black students. The liberal dean, Sarah, is obliged to face her guilt in the next confessional sentence: "... I cherished how badly I felt. I had been a racist. And I had **repented**"(74). Gilman's aim is to show that liberal officials usually pretend to accept 'differences' while, in reality, they lack the true sympathy for or faithful involvement with minority groups in their society.

In the same way, Kushner's play displays another incident of racism. The first part of the play, which takes place in London-1999, is a monologue delivered by an unnamed housewife or 'The Homebody'. The play unfolds the story of this lonely and frumpy woman who is bewildered with an out-of date travel guiding book about Afghanistan. She is altogether under the spell of a place she has never seen in her life. This bewilderment with Kabul is illustrated by her extracts from Nancy Hatch Dupree's *An Historical Guide to Kabul* : "...the great hymnic epic poem of the Aryan peoples , is written down , several verses retain the memory of the serene beauty of the valleys of the **Kabul River** "(10). In point of fact, the woman reads with zeal and enthusiasm about valiant and courageous heroes in the long history of Afghanistan. Equally, Dupree's guiding book reminisces Afghanistan's long tradition of devastation and bloodshed. Concurrently, the woman moves from Nancy Hatch Dupree's sentences or stylish prose to her own distressing life. The Homebody starts to insinuate about her own irritable family life that includes her unsympathetic husband and her childish self-willed daughter. Jr. Reston accurately sets the opening situation of the play : "... , the **Homebody sits alone in the absence of her waspish , uptight , priggish scientist-husband Milton and her screwed-up daughter Priscilla (in whose adolescent horrors the mother acknowledges responsibility and guilt**" (5) .

Gradually, The Homebody goes through the experience of buying pakools from an unnamed London street. The pakools' shop is run by an Afghan shopkeeper who has three of his fingers cut. Afterwards, the dramatist elaborates the piece to a full-length play. After the woman's visit to the Afghan shopkeeper, she imagines herself an eloquent speaker of Pushtu. She declares: "**While I am signing the credit card receipt I realize all of a sudden I am able to speak perfect Pushtu, and I ask the man,...;I ask him to tell me what has happened to his hand...**" (*Homebody/Kabul*, 23). In this way, the play starts to focus more and more on the refugees' miserable conditions.

The second part of the play's events takes place in Kabul; it tells the story of the lady's quest for a new life. The Homebody finds out that there could be more realistic and historic details about other societies than mere mistaken beliefs or false impressions from travel guiding books. Milton and Priscilla come after her to search for her. Instead, they are exposed to the tumultuous life in Afghanistan. The daughter, who has the same feelings of discontent and uneasiness akin to her generation, is noticeably infuriating and irritating. She estimates her own character as "**dissatisfied and passive**"(76). The husband shows the same weird intolerance and extraordinary inflexibility of his own social category. Milton's superciliousness and haughtiness are echoed in his speech with his daughter in the hotel room: "**...Your poor mum. We were incompatible but I did grow to love her...**"(*Homebody/Kabul*, 77). Apparently, the two characters' search for The Homebody will prove futile.

Comparatively, Rebecca Gilman seems distinguished mainly for her assumption that Man is simply a defender of his own hereditary or acquired preconceptions. In 2001, Mark Steyn states the play's central theme: "**Miss Gilman likes 'issue'**

plays: last year's *Spinning Into Butter* (at Lincoln Center) was 'about' a liberal new England college dealing with race..."(1). Gilman's play is an original episode about racism on an outwardly perfect and peaceful college campus. The main character, Sarah Daniels, starts to face her bias and suspicions while also disclosing the artificiality and untruthfulness of her colleagues. This unexpected turn of the story brings to light the implication of the play's title - *Spinning Into Butter*. Dean Strauss sheds light on the figurative implication of the play's title: "...The tigers just kept chasing each other, faster and faster around the tree. They began spinning and spinning until they were just a yellow blur, and they spun so fast, they spun themselves into butter..."(*Homebody/Kabul*,90). Furthermore, Kenneth Warren comments on the twofold portrayal of Sarah's character: "WHAT IS doubly crafty about the way Gilman sketches the character of Sarah is that the dean is revealed to be as much a creature of campus race-relations management as she is a critic of it..."(2).

Accordingly, Gilman invites her viewers to trace the threads of racial favoritism by evincing a distressing portrayal of a 'local' community in which individuals are unable to regard each other as real human beings. For that reason, *Spinning Into Butter* turns to be one of the highly representative plays of modern drama. Kenneth Warren adds:

Where *Spinning Into Butter* hits a bull's-eye is in its portrayal of racial politics on campus. In the play, as the administration responds to the news of the racist notes, it revs up its race relations management apparatus, a phenomenon maddeningly familiar to anyone who recently has spent time in an academic setting. That mechanism churns out pro forma expressions of concern from administrators and faculty members, reflexive scheduling of campus wide meetings, and other public gestures aimed at

demonstrating that a college's administration cares deeply about its students of color and that it deplors bigotry (2).

Paradoxically, in *Homebody/Kabul*, characters cross their 'local' borders to journey from London to Kabul. This transition is tremendously significant as Elizabeth Pochoda remarks: "Thematically, the shift makes sense. As the father and daughter struggle to understand the Homebody's act, they are able, by the end, to move from their domestic hurt to the universal disaster of Afghanistan..."(2). Throughout this journey, the dramatist ponders over Man's innate readiness to go living amidst the most difficult life conditions and the urgency of cordial human relations. On the other hand, Chris Jones regards *Spinning Into Butter* as "Gilman's controversial play about racial issues on a college campus..."(1). In this brilliant and thought-provoking new drama, Gilman writes about a highly polemical and disputable issue. She touches overtly and unhesitatingly upon the serious consequences of discriminatory policies in an educational establishment. To Richard Zoglin, the play's main theme is "about the ramifications of a racist incident on a college campus..."(1)

In a similar way, Kushner's play best typifies the strife between other two contradictory or opposing environments-London and Kabul. Above all, it examines people's very limited capabilities to come into contact with each other peacefully. And so, the play meditates upon the theme of family commitment. Plus, *Homebody/Kabul* considers the significance of the past for a collapsing nation. Over and above, the play portrays the negligible state of individuals who are living under an oppressively colonial system. ("The author says in his Afterword[...The fate of the people of Afghanistan is, again, in the hands of the U.S., and there are ominous signs that we are beginning to lose interest...]") (Kushner,145). This misuse of power evidently results in a predominant state of moral

deterioration. For all that, the urgency of living could take the place of indispensable ethical duties. In brief, the play centers around so many themes as present day Kabul, important moments in its past history and its painful struggle with the western colonizer. It also deals with the very noticeable horrors and coercions that threaten life in both Kabul and Europe.

Therefore, theater could sometimes provide a stimulus behind 'change'. Kushner's theatrical output confers special advantages on the underprivileged groups; it expresses the views of the common people and the dilemma of the needy. This, in itself, could exert a deep impact on forming a body of fundamental or governing principles and laws in any society. So, *Homebody/Kabul* reverberates Kushner's critical voice about current political and global issues. On the other hand, Gilman denounces the alleged political infallibility among seemingly open-minded academicians. Those apparently moderate intellectuals usually pretend to believe in the condition of being 'different', but often lack the true sympathy towards "others". Sarah talks to Patrick, the Nuyorican student, about the racist members of the college's scholarship advisory board: "**I think they tend to see the world in very...limited terms, as black or white or re...(She stops herself)...racially divided along solid, clearly delineated lines**"(9). Naturally, Gilman's characters are never separated from such environmental forces. Gilman seems to perceive the strong hold of these forces on her characters' awareness. In addition, Gilman's view of racism exhibits a strong sense of life's paradoxes and contradictions. Sarah discusses with Ross, the art history professor, these discrepancies between words and deeds: "**But in my humble opinion, all you do is talk about racism and then you have this collective sigh of white guilt and then everybody feels better and then they drive downtown to their Saabs and buy sweaters**"(36). Impressive speeches and insincere language usually veil people's truthful feelings towards each other. To illustrate, Kenneth Warren envelops the play's purpose in the

next exclamatory question: "...Underlying both Sarah's mindset and Gilman's choice is the question: Is it possible for blacks and whites to talk to each other honestly about race?"(1).

Moreover, Gilman faces the dilemma of dramatizing the lives of black characters on stage since they come from a totally different racial environment. Yet, in trying to unravel this mystery, Gilman reaches at the conclusion that any racial group possesses its own idiosyncratic traits. Furthermore, to explore any minority group, the dramatist has to garner sufficient information to be familiar with this group. In spite of that, Warren adds: "...Paradoxically, then, by assuming black approbation of her decision not to portray any black characters, Gilman is representing a black opinion..."(3). Still, Gilman may be relinquishing the dramatist's basic duty by deciding not to embody key characters on stage. Yet, her reluctance to undertake this responsibility could be her most apt way to avoid false depiction of another race (Warren, 3).

Similarly, Tony Kushner raises other spellbinding and perplexing questions about another racial group. Though little has been heard from contemporary dramatists on Afghanistan, Kushner puts on view two portraits of a country whose future has recently been remodeled by powerful nations. The first part of the play stresses the attractively bizarre and unique past of Kabul. In act one, scene one, The Homebody quotes the following verse lived by the Persian poet, Sa'ib-I-Tabrizi about the charm and mystery of the city. The lines read:

*Oh the beautiful city of Kabul wears a rugged mountain
Skirt
And the rose is jealous of its lash-like thorns.
The dust of Kabul's blowing soil smarts lightly in my
eyes,
But I love her, for knowledge and love both come from*

her dust.

I sing bright praises to her colorful tulips,
The beauty of her trees makes me blush.
Every street in Kabul fascinates the eye.
In the bazaars, Egypt's caravans pass by.
No one can count the beautiful moons on her rooftops,
And hundreds of lovely suns hide behind her walls.
Her morning laugh is as gay as flowers,
Her dark nights shine like beautiful hair.
Her tuneful nightingales sing with flames in their throats,
Their fiery songs fall like burning leaves.
I sing to the garden of Kabul;
Even Paradise is jealous of their greenery.

(*Homebody/Kabul*, 29- 30).

On the realistic level, Kushner also presents Afghanistan as a land with diverse cultures and severe violence. True, the history of Afghanistan is obscured by secrets and legends that continue to baffle historians, researchers or politicians. In their recent study about Afghanistan, Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby elucidate this same precept:

Travelers, empire builders, archaeologists, spies, researchers, traders, diplomats, teachers, and seekers of spiritual or drug - induced fulfillment have flocked to Afghanistan whenever conditions have allowed. Many of these visitors jotted down memoirs and wrote books, in many languages, from the earliest historical period of the Greeks and Romans to the Chinese, Arabs, British, Russian, and French... (1).

Many writers attempt to abridge the gap between this remote area of land and their own real world. In their detailed study, *Afghanistan*, Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby scrutinize Afghanistan's political importance, its physical geography, its

social context and its multiethnic relations within Central Asia. Politically speaking, Afghanistan continues to represent a land of agitation in times of danger or great difficulty. It has long been a frequent battlefield and a significant military path throughout history. Yet, it has always proved to be a fortified country on which conquests laid temporary or partial control during the preceding centuries. Geographically-wise, the land's mountainous topography could afford a safe shelter from political or religious pursuits. Again, this same critically geographical position could constitute a haven for those who long to maintain their rich, cultural heritage or to save it from decay. Hence, these varied and ancient cultures could entice archeologists to undertake further excavation and analysis of the land's physical remains. These same physical features of the area make its natural resources totally inaccessible to invaders. In Kushner's play, the woman reads from the guidebook about the peculiarly significant position of the land. She successively surveys important stages in the historical development of the city, namely, Darjus the Great (520 B.C.), Alexander the Great (329 B.C) and his successor, Seleucus Nicato (322 B.C.) the Mauryas (the third century B.C.), Greco-Bactrian (second century B.C.), Hephthalites (around 400 B.C.), Genghis Khan (1023), the Moghuls, the Russians, the British and U.S. The Homeboy's survey depicts Kabul as the coveted object of colonizers since the birth of Man. She reads : "Our story begins at the very dawn of history, circa 3,000 B.C., ..." (9).

It has been shown that, unlike many dramatists, both Kushner and Gilman depict factual reality about the issue of racial differences. Thus, the audience is lifted morally and intellectually from purely fanciful realms to more factual ones. Since the communal implication of the word 'race' is restricted to what writers mean by it, the two dramatists present two different representations of 'racism'. The exegesis of the term 'race', then, varies from one social context to another. In common usage, a nation is racist when its people elicit illogical presumptions or

preconceptions from the outside appearances or external attributes of their fellow human beings. In his recent study, George M. Fredrickson presents a short history of the issue of 'racism'. Fredrickson also attempts to define the term in the following account:

The term 'racism' is often used in a loose and unreflective way to describe the hostile or negative feelings of one ethnic group or 'people' toward another and the actions resulting from such attitudes. But sometimes the antipathy of one group toward another is expressed and acted upon with a single-mindedness and brutality that go far beyond the group-centered prejudice and snobbery that seem to constitute an almost universal human feelings....(1).

On the other hand, Robert Miles looks at the issue of 'racism' from another angle: "..., **the concept of racism refers to any argument which suggests that the human species is composed of discrete groups in order to legitimate inequality between those groups of people.**"(49). Miles goes further to distinguish between "overt and individual racism" and "covert and institutional racism" (51). Gilman's and Kushner's plays depict these two diverse representations of racism: 'institutional' and 'ethnocentric'.

In Gilman's play, 'black' students are to be found amongst the underprivileged groups in the American society. That being the case, some institutions could be carrying out clandestine racial practices which are causing detrimental effects to the blacks. Gilman's inquiry into these racial relations between individuals and their social system symbolizes a form of institutional racism. John Rex asserts this view:

Thus it was argued that even if government was

not in the hands of racists and deliberate racial discrimination was outlawed, the very institutions which were normal to the functioning of American society were producing consequences which were disadvantageous to Blacks and represented a kind of 'institutional racism' (109).

Although humanitarian efforts are seriously undertaken to guarantee social equality between the blacks and the whites, black people are still deprived of their basic institutional rights. Par excellence, in 2001, a world conference on *Racism, Racial discrimination, xenophobia, and Related Intolerance* was held under the auspices of the United Nations. Unfortunately, Fredrickson observes: "...But human beings continue to mistreat other human beings on the basis of their ethnic identities..."(144-145). Hence, various institutions may not be controlled by a set of racist laws; they may be led by an instinctive, prejudiced impulse or an "unconscious racism" as Rex declares (109). As a whole, institutional racism could stand for such unfair practices that increase the marginality of minority groups in any society. Robert Miles elucidates this same precept:

Hence, the concept of institutional racism does not refer to exclusionary practices per se but to the fact that a once present discourse is now absent and that it justified or set in motion exclusionary practices which therefore institutionalize that discourse. An ideology of racism is thereby embodied in a set of practices....(85).

According to Kushner, the real cause behind such racial responses is 'ethnocentrism' or the "ethnocentric we-group" as Robert Ezra Park mentions (15). Park makes his own critical remarks on ethnocentrism:

In these groups there is order and discipline and the institutions become fixed and hardened. The solidarity in the we - group depends upon the animosity with the our - group. The we-group has a cult, a religion and a moral order of its own...(15).

Hence, ethnocentrism could be described as an overt antagonism between individuals or nations. Contrastingly, other thinkers differentiate between 'ethnic' and 'racial' groups. To John Rex, ethnic groups are typified of their clearly distinct bodily shape. However, this assumption might not be totally applicable to Kushner's characters. Generally speaking, it is agreed upon that ethnocentrism applies to ethnic groups that have different cultural characteristics.

In Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*, racial discrimination comes from differences of languages, beliefs, behaviors or ideals. Inevitably, this kind of thinking breeds intolerance and violence. On the one hand, Kushner presents the colonist's vision of the Afghans as an inferior or underprivileged group. In the play, Milton speaks to Quango, the unofficial liaison for the British government in Kabul: **"We live near Pakistanis in London, Ghulupa or Palavi, when they are out for a walk it's husband first, wife next, then the Kiddies, like a little train of crocodiles."**(94). On the other hand, Afghan ethnocentrism is created from an enclosed community with its own internal social, religious or political dogma. The wide differences between Afghan and European or American contexts in a set of beliefs, manners, and particular systems of worship lead to the Afghans' repugnance of foreigners. Mullah After Ali Durranni, a Taliban minister, speaks to Milton:

**England betray us. United States betray us,
bomb us, starve us to ... U.S. and Russia**

destroy us as destroy Vietnam, Palestine, Chechnya, Bosnia As U.N. deny Taliban to be recognize... (133).

The minister belongs to the Taliban movement that grew increasingly throughout the southwestern parts of Afghanistan in the mid 1990s.

The term 'Taliban' means a learner or an undergraduate student in a religious Madrasa (school). These schools started as unorganized practices and later came to be acknowledged as the most popular movement of the Mujahidin (the Islamic Revolutionary Movement). At its outset, the Taliban movement promised to grant people peace and stability and to help any administration that might work for the interest of individuals. Conversely, Magnus and Naby declare: **"...Eventually they closed the frontier madrasas to studies and declared that all taliban should join the new Jihad in Afghanistan"**(182).

Nonetheless, George M.Fredrickson asks disapprovingly about the nature of this present struggle in the 21st Century: **"...Will conflicts more often take the form of Jihad or Crusades than movements for human rights or social justice? Many signs point in that direction..."** (148). This inconsistency or incompatibility of ideas causes a state of intolerance or even rejection of any form of foreign interference. Consequently, the Afghans are becoming more and more vulnerably susceptible to colonialists. Furthermore, the shared belief in a Sunni, Islamic community and the democratic system of tribal life have led to the emergence of Afghan opposition to foreign external threats. Magnus and Naby attribute this susceptibility to long years of foreign domination of the land: **"...A century of imperialism has changed attitudes towards westerners in many corners of Afghanistan."**(51). As a result, Kushner's characters constantly experience a feeling of estrangement or alienation and, consequently, they become

distant from or, sometimes, antagonistic towards others. Mahala's words underline clearly the Afghan feelings of enmity towards foreigners: "**English, America, no difference, one big and one small, same country, America say, Britain do, women die, dark-skin babies die, land mine, Stringer projectile, British American so what?....**"(83,84). The lines foreshadow the civilization clash that exists between the eastern and western sides. Yet, the character of The Homebody functions as a reconciliatory element between these two widely different cultures. The woman tries to be contentedly submissive to this disagreeable idea of estrangement.

It remained true, however, that the racial historical line of development goes back to ancient times. Racism first appeared in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and, then, it was gradually assimilated into religious thinking. Medieval Europe was reluctant to grant non-Europeans equal freedom of expression in religious, political or professional matters. Besides, in creative and fictional works, black men were occasionally represented as evil spirits. The rise of "**a religious racism or a racialized religiosity**" (Fredrickson, 42) extended into the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth Centuries. Even newly Christian converts were made more miserable by legal legislations that were designed in a manner to limit their freedom. By the Eighteenth Century, the theory of '*polygenesis*' flourished immediately after the deterioration of the biblical influence. According to the theory of '*polygenesis*', the origin of humanity goes back to diverse and distinct sources. Seen in this way, the theory contradicted firmly held religious tenets of equality and fraternity. In 1859, Darwin's theory of evolution, based on natural selection, had a deep impact on the scientific and theological beliefs of his time. In his famous study, *Origin Of Species*, Darwin brought into focus the concept that species evolve from more primitive sources through the process of natural selection. He also believed that not all individuals of species are typical but, rather, that they have variations. Some of these variations make some human beings

better customized to particular environmental circumstances. Darwin's theory brought about a reevaluation of the position of humans in relation to all other living forms; it also aroused great controversy all over England, Europe and the United States. Concurrently Fredrickson remarks: "...White supremacy attained its fullest ideological and institutional development in the southern United States between the 1890s and the 1950s..." (99). However, the two World Wars and the Cold War that followed had a profound effect on racial relations. The Holocaust together with the early manifestations of decolonization in the third world were among the most notable consequences of these two wars.

Nevertheless, the influence of racism on world events has been increasing again since the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st Centuries. Generally, the predominant social, biological or scientific interpretations of racism currently opposes the precept that large numbers of human beings act and respond differently due to their external characteristics. Today's scientists even shun the use of the word 'racism' in human interactions. Fredrickson asserts:

...the possibility that there were innate differences between races, and that crossing them might have deleterious consequences, were still a respectable hypothesis. But in 1950 most prominent geneticists and physical anthropologists endorsed all or part of the UNESCO statement declaring that science gave no support to the notion that human beings differed in their innate capacity for intellectual and emotional development...(128,129).

However, an assumed bodily or mental excellence of one group over another still exists. Seen in this light, racism has led to the practice of favoritism, bigotry or intolerance among different nations of the world. In reality, after September 11, the world is

becoming polarized into two opposing extremes that bring about two opposite attitudes to the world. Hence, this world's image turns to be the direct product of distortion. Jr. Reston puts emphasis on this view:

..., this was a struggle of believers versus infidels, East versus West, Christianity versus Islam, Godless secularism versus spiritualism, the United States versus al Qaeda. In his megalomania and narcissism, bin Laden had succeeded in personalizing the struggle. And President Bush had helped the villain mightily on Sept. 16 by declaring that America's struggle was a 'crusade' against terrorism. Bush would use the word only once, but once was enough. It was a gift to bin Laden. Now it was Bin Laden versus Bush(2).

It follows that Kushner, who is a Jewish, American dramatist, is not inclined to favor one culture more than another; he is not even markedly fond of the western side. The transition of events from London to Kabul is skillfully balanced. This counterbalance between the two settings brings the play into favorable harmony. Kushner's views are likely to show considerate as well as disinterested observations of public affairs as well as private rights. So, he is disposed to look after Man's civic needs and interests objectively. This objectivity entitles Kushner to handle his topics honestly. His opposition against racial segregation is openly expressed in his "*Last Word*".

Racism still exists, but the African-American civil rights movement changed the world forever....It's what Gorbachev said about perestroika: A movement succeeds not when everything is perfect but when so much has changed that there's no going back. This is inarguably where we're at. Skirmishes will be won and lost, greater changes are to be anticipated, and

the fight still needs everyone's best... (2).

According to Kushner, the absence of arbitrary class-distinction could best be achieved by democrats' efforts to practice social equality. Democracy is associated in our modern times with policies of social reform and internationalism. Though Kushner regards democracy as "**a bloody business, demanding bloody sacrifice**" (*Matthew's Passion*, 1), he is quite certain that it appeals to broader masses of people. So, worldwide and collective efforts are likely to achieve the required change in ethnic relations. Moreover, the causes of racism are multiple and cannot be attributed to a single factor. For example, the rise of American racism in Afghanistan is interconnected with clashes of interest and struggle for rare natural resources. Thus, racism is becoming generally associated with slavery, colonialism, manipulation, total injustice and other kinds of utilization. In consequence, relatively defenseless communities have been imperiled by local and financial insecurity. Kushner wonders:

...: **What sorts of indifference to the lives of what sons of people produces thirty-story buildings that have no adequate routes of escape, and why is it almost always black kids or Latino or Chicano kids, and children of the poor, falling down elevator shafts out of unprotected windows getting hit by stray bullets? Do stories such as these speak about the cruelty of life or about the cruelty of poverty and racism?** (Notes, 3).

In *Spinning Into Butter*, Gilman's bureaucratic administration does not gratify students with a fair resolution to their racial discord; it just prepares an impressive scheduled plan to end their crisis. The administration uses mere insincere language rather than a really liberal conversation. Dean Catherine Kenney gives official instructions to Sarah:

Well, you better come up with something, because that's why we hired you. So here's what I want. I want a ten-point plan with specific, concrete suggestions that don't involve a lot of funding but will have a great impact, and I want you to type it up so that any idiot can understand it. Type it up in a bulleted list (*Homebody/Kabul*, 65).

As we have seen, powerful and leading groups can easily take over or even eradicate other inferior and dependent groups. This struggle could best be interpreted in cultural and political terms rather than religious or racial terms. The powerful side sometimes resorts to 'faith' in order to have power over those who do not respond to its interests. Fredricksonk declares:

...it is not dogmatic religion itself that creates ethno-religious conflict or theocratic regimes. It is the politicization of faith and the effort to make others conform to beliefs they do not share that threaten the peace of the world and of many countries within it. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan in ways that much of the rest of the world found unacceptable... (149).

Correlatively, such racial, or rather, colonial manifestations can also incite religious fervor and a craving for self-realization. The estranged and frustrated group seeks refuge in 'race' in order to fulfill its identity.

At the end, Kushner's play seems to be carried out with great care though it is marked by complexity, fullness of detail and ornateness. Kushner develops his piece by building up a complex organic whole from mere simple details. He uses every means at his disposal to enhance an array of themes. Don Shewey makes the following praising remark on Kushner's talent: **"...The writing is some of Kushner's best ever, luxurious and intense and hilarious, extravagant in a way that might be**

maddening...”(1,2). After *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner enjoys a status of special privilege because of his distinctive taste for the art of theater. Also, Gilman’s artistic career continues to progress as she goes beyond her controversial play, *Spinning Into Butter*, into a wider range. Chris Jones evaluates Gilman’s position in theater: “...few playwrights find success as suddenly or as prolifically as Gilman has—and few either care or can afford to be as loyal as She is to the theater that gave her a start”(1). It has been shown that, both Kushner’s and Gilman’s explorations of such weighty social and political views on racism could lead to amazing results as well as deep insights. Both propose a wholly new social awareness of already conventional assumptions which could enthrall and captivate their readers.

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Representation of Racism in Gilman's *Spinning Into Butter* and
Kushner's Homebody/Kabul

A Summary

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It seems that Rebecca Gilman (1965-) and Tony Kushner (1956-) will occupy a recognized place in future research for their open exposure of contemporary social and political events. Gilman presents a portrayal of social issues as represented by liberal intellectuals in an educational institution. On the other hand, Kushner's plays are intended to be part of a wider political movement. Accordingly, the aim of the present research is to present an analytical as well as a critical depiction of two different representations of racism as portrayed by Gilman's *Spinning Into Butter* and *Kushner's Homebody/Kabul*.

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تحت عنوان:

تصوير العنصرية في "النوران في الزيد" لجيلمان و"هوم بودي/كابول" لكوشنر

تقدم الباحثة دراسة مقارنة بين مسرحية ربيكا جيلمان "النوران في الزيد" (٢٠٠٠) ومسرحية توني كوشنر "هوم بودي/كابول" (٢٠٠٢) وذلك بالتعرض لمفهوم قضية "العنصرية" وتاريخها و أنواعها. فجيلمان تتناول في مسرحيتها عنصرية المؤسسات و يتعرض كوشنر للعنصرية العرقية. و ينتقد كل من جيلمان و كوشنر الممارسات التي تتبع من فكر متعصب تجاه الآخر. كما يتبع البحث منهج تحليلي و نقدي لمعالجة مثل هذه القضايا