

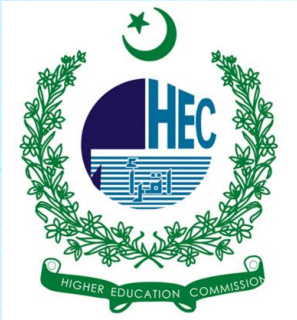
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**Analysing Racial Identity and Discrimination in Akhtar's  
*Disgraced: A Postmodern Study***



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**Abstract**

This study examines *Disgraced* (2012) by Ayad Akhtar with a focus on how racial identities are constructed and give rise to discrimination in postmodern society. The thesis deconstructs these constructed racial identities using the conceptual framework of Baudrillard's simulacra (1994), and Lyotard's notion of metanarratives (1979). The researcher examines *Disgraced* (2012) critique of post-9/11 American society, where boundaries are simultaneously blurred and reinforced by race, culture, and religion. Akhtar delineates the character's sense of exaggerated individuality to disparage societal stereotypes, portraying them as simulacra representations that embody and exaggerate societal stereotypes. In doing so, he reflects the fragmented and hyperreal nature of modern identity. Akhtar posits that the character's identities are shaped not by authenticity but by societal expectations, media depictions, and historical narratives. By employing Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, this analysis explores how *Disgraced* (2012) exposes the artificiality of racial and cultural categories. The protagonist's internal conflict with his Muslim heritage and American identity is analyzed as simulacra, a constructed identity that reflects the fragmented and hyperreal nature of modern identity. The play challenges the notion of a fixed, essential self, revealing how these simulated identities sustain discrimination, ultimately fostering alienation and self-loathing. Concurrently, this research employs Lyotard's metanarrative technique to explore how *Disgraced* (2012) exposes artificiality of racial and cultural categories. This research argues that *Disgraced* (2012) not only highlights the postmodern crisis of identity but also critiques the societal mechanisms that construct and deconstruct identity in a hyperreal world. By engaging with Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and Lyotard's critique of metanarratives, this study augments the discourse on racial dynamics in contemporary American literature, offering insights into the complex processes of identity formation in a globalized, media-driven society.

**Keywords:** Simulacra, Discrimination, Postmodernism, Cultural Politics, Post-9/11 Literature, Identity Disorder

## **1. Introduction**

After the terrible events of September 11, 2001, Muslims perceptions globally based on negative opinions in most western societies have shifted to more cultural and religious conflicts. As a consequence, Muslims came under increased scrutiny as well as the persecution and marginalisation for the first time (Akhtar, 2012). *Disgraced*, Ayad Akhtar's 2012 Pulitzer Prize winning play, examines problems of racial identity, racism, and cultural assimilation in contemporary American society. Amir, the protagonist and successful Pakistani–American lawyer, is a metaphor for the conflict written in many Muslims' souls about their identity in post 9/11 America in the face of the tension between their national, religious, and cultural loyalties. Racial and cultural tensions that pervade American society are revealed through his experiences.

This research regards the play, *Disgraced*, through Jean-François Lyotard's critique of metanarrative (1979) and Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra (1994). Baudrillard's idea of simulacra that we discussed, the notion that the artificial representation quite often replaces the reality, shows itself well in the play when it comes to identity formation. Instead, characters battle to create their reality with social driven representations of race and religion, so the characterization of their identities is based more on what they are expected to be and what they symbolize than their actual experience. These qualifications also strengthen Lyotard's skepticism towards fixed narratives and thus further portray the play as fragmented and contested in its portrayal of identity. It shows how today grand cultural stories have become obsolete in a postmodern world and that traditional terms such as identity and belonging are not fitting.

This research explores how the play *Disgraced* looks at identity in a post 9/11 world by utilizing these postmodern frameworks that problematize conventional definitions of race and the role of religion in society. It shows how media stereotypes, personal conflicts and social expectations lead to unstable fracturing of identity. By focusing on clashes between characters' inner desires and outer forces, the play provides sharp criticism of how race and religion create misinterpretations and narrow-minded attitudes toward one another today.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Since 9/11, however, Muslim identity in American literature has often been explored

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as part of cultural tension and the difficulties of self-definition. After 9/11, Muslims in America faced heightened societal pressure and Pakistani Americans and other Muslim communities sought to reframe their identities within a space of heightened cultural scrutiny (Benea, 2015), this study also examines how Muslims have been attempting to redefine themselves in a period of increased cultural tensions. Akhtar's work is generally read as a contemporary tragedy that calls to mind Shakespeare's Othello, exploring the range of national and religious identities. *Cry of the Vanishing Beasts* is part of the aftermath of 9/11 that generated, alongside Islamophobia and cultural animosity (Yuliano, 2018), a broader ideological shift which has influenced representations of the Muslim in American literature and the media.

*Disgraced*, besides dealing with the racial issues of the past, also rebuts the systematic hatred that oppressed different faiths and ethnic communities during the history of America (Peek, 2005). Using the play as a lens, the ill effects of anti-Muslim sentiment, incited by political rhetoric and media portrayals boxing complex identities into simplistic stereotypes are examined. Guttman (2021) makes similar observations about how media narratives on Muslims reinforce already existing biases. *Disgraced* explores identity through the postmodern reality whereby media and societal norms define a racial identity over actual experience. The concept of hyperreality put forth by Baudrillard is especially relevant, since characters often deal with identities and self-images quite different from one's true self. Among too many, Amir's inner struggle stands as testament to the isolation Muslims too often feel in a society that tends to see their identities as danger. This corresponds with Bhabha's (2012) notion of unhomeliness, that is, unhomeliness as the disconnection between personal and ancestral cultures.

The dinner party scene in *Disgrace* perfectly embodies underlying racial and religious tensions brought forth among the characters, as well as barring the faced biases and dynamics between the respective cultures. Amir's wife, Emily, an authority on Islamic art, provides an ideal representation of naive and well intentioned attempt to relate to Amir's heritage where there is a plethora of simultaneous mixing of giants, using stereotypical symbolism all devoted to generating color in the dull painting (Nayak, 2006). It's this moment that exemplifies how postmodernist comes first, appearance supersedes lived reality, meaning that be able to see the surface level

things, but not the things that are actually happening—the lives of people like Amir. More importantly, Amir's experiences in the work place show the continued existence of racial stereotypes that undermine the race to his professional identity, as described by Fanon in (2012). Overt and covert prejudices of his colleagues exemplify the prevailing discrimination that destroys our self-esteem and feeling of belonging.

The play shows the aptness of the play in portraying Amir's identity struggle apt in showing the fragmentation which seems to be part and parcel of the postmodern identity. Rather than being static, cultural identity is fluid and ever changing, in Hall's (2015) view. More broadly, Amir's victories, defeats and experiences reflect to me the challenges we all face when negotiating identity in the context of a society that preserves zero space for gray and inflexibility around hard, specific definitions. Amir's rejection of his Muslim identity can also be explored as an example of internalized oppression as a result of living in a culture that marginalizes and scrutinizes individuals like himself (Pyke, 2010). Furthermore, *Disgraced* displays characteristics of postmodern pastiche, in that it combines many cultural references to query how religion and race are intertwined. Hutcheon (2003) characterized postmodernism as a 'complicitous critique', its treatment of the intertextual problems converges with the multiple dilemmas faced by folks of varied backgrounds. The race, gender, and power dynamics of the professional interactions between Amir and his African-American colleague Jory further complicate the dynamic (Collins, 2022). The presence of being and unbeing at this intersectionality reflects how LGBTQ North Korean people simultaneously exist within and apart from multiple identity constructions in our contemporary society.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

1. To study how the concept of simulacra operates in the context of racial identity in the *Disgraced* (2012) narrative, with a focus on identity formation in a postmodern society.
2. To examine how the racial identity and experiences of the characters in *Disgraced* (2012) are influenced by cultural symbols, stereotypes, and media portrayals utilizing postmodern theories of representation.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

- How does the use of simulacra impact the characters understanding of race and

identity in *Disgraced* (2012)?

- In what ways do the characters' racial identities and experiences of discrimination in *Disgraced* (2012) interact with the media's and culture's hyperreal portrayals of race?

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The study examines the play *Disgraced* (2012) through hyperreality using a textual and content analysis technique based on postmodern theory. The qualitative research method is used for analysis. This approach allows the researcher to build a complex, holistic picture by analysing words, reporting detailed information, and conducting the study in a natural setting.

### **2.2 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection involves several steps. The method includes library research and comprehensive reading. The researcher has read *Disgraced* (2012) thoroughly to identify passages related to racial prejudice. Detailed notes have been taken, and the data have been categorised based on themes such as hyperreality, simulacra, and the politics of survival.

### **2.3 Data Analysis Technique and Theoretical Framework**

In qualitative research, data analysis involves several key steps: Procedures for organizing and preparing the data, a thorough review of the data, coding applicable text into relevant passages, describing the data, interrelating these descriptions and interpreting their meanings (Creswell, 2009). Coded passages are connected using Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and of simulacra, and Lyotard's idea of meta-narratives. It enabled me to synthesize a coherent narrative that combines the view of racial prejudice in the play with post-modern theory. Further, the researcher examines the broader relevance of these findings to race identity in a post-modern context and locates the research in terms of existing literature on hyperreality, simulacra, and racial prejudice. The data is cited properly so that the findings can be proven credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable (Given, 2008).

## **3. Data Analysis and Findings**

The research has employed two theories: Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, introduced in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), and Lyotard's concept of

metanarratives as given in his work *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979).

### **3.1 Subtle Symbolism**

The play begins with an oppressed atmosphere set up through props' placements and the protagonist, Amir Kapoor, and his wife, Emily interaction. The juxtaposition of the identities in the audience begins, even before any dialogue, when we see an Islamic garden painting in the apartment shared by all three parties with a statue of Shiva, a Hindu god, in the same room. Before even one word is exchanged this imagery illustrates the very same thing that is so lucidly portrayed in the remainder of the novel: Amir's broken sense of identity, his confused mind regarding his past and present relationships, and the larger theme of identity loss.

### **3.2 Postmodernist Simulacra, Hyper-reality and Collapse of Meta Narratives**

Amir Kapoor and Abe Jensen display intentional as well as unintended loss of true identity, which is what Baudrillard dubs the loss of the real and leads to hyper reality in the play. Muslim characters conceal their identities so they can fit into a society that is prejudice to them as they grapple with their backgrounds and these characters learning to exist in post 9/11 America. So they cannot define their true selves. Further, the play conveys Lyotard's post modernism philosophy of disintegration of metanarratives. Religion is treated as nothing more than tradition, and the characters, even Amir shows Islamophobia, the turn away from tradition in favor of rationality.

In this context small localized narratives can do this diversity of ideas and does not claim universal validity is *Petit Récits* which differ from metanarratives. The narratives here show how events can be interpreted as differently as they are interpreted in different contexts. A conversation between Amir and Emily parses their different views on the Quran, how it permits violence, where Amir claims he's not wrong, Emily counters that he is misreading it, and by extension, how context changes meaning.

1). Do you also know that-- according to the Quran-- it makes me punishable by death? That's technically not true Amir. That's technically not true, Amir. It's not clear from the text. Renouncing the faith is condemned. It's clear there will be punishment... But it isn't clear what that punishment is... The tradition has interpreted it as punishable by death. (Akhtar, 2012, p. 59)

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In particular, Amir's interpretation of a Quranic verse affords problematic generalization of narratives by overlooking the context of the text to mean either beating or leaving a wife. This misconception feeds his antagonism against Islam, and is something to do with the collapse of metanarratives (Lyotard) and the idea of loss of the real and identity crisis in hyperreality (Baudrillard). Ironically, Amir's interaction with Emily reveals just how far he has become the very thing he criticizes just by physically abusing her, is so out of touch with who he is, and what he represents in the eyes of another.

Amir changes his Muslim surname to a Hindu one in his struggle about fitting in to post 9/11 American society, symbolizing the giving up of the fact that he is Pakistani and a Muslim. He added, "I'm not Muslim. His rejection of faith is highlighted by 'I'm an apostate,' and functions as a shred of simulacra and hyperreality. This renunciation is an expression of religion's negative conception, a function that has corrupted grand narratives and Lived Lyotard's postmodern condition where the metanarratives failed to give an holistic account of identity and history. Due to Amir's confusion and rejection of true Islam his representation of Islam and his cultures is distorted.

Even though Amir is born in America, he cannot cut off his roots and throw them away. Although he tries his best and in place of his true reality, he creates a reality for himself which suits him best as per the circumstances of the prejudice-driven society, that is: to be a Hindu by religion and an Indian by nationality.

2). Asks me where I was born. I said India. That's what I put on the form when I got hired. He knew about my name change. Your birth name is not Kapoor, its Abdullah. Steven says, Why did you change it? (Akhtar, 2012, pp. 33-34).

Hence we see him create a reality for himself that was never there to begin with and could never be there, at least not in the sense that he wants it to be.

"They do it all the time. When people go through identity theft" (Akhtar, 2012, p. 34).

The same is the case with Amir's nephew, Hussain, who changes his name to Abe Jensen for reasons similar to why Amir did that.

"Its gotta be one thing or the other. I can't be all mixed up" (Akhtar, 2012, p.12). But more so not to face the discrimination that Muslims have to face, especially especially after the 9-11 incident. It is, however, ironic that Abe did stay "mixed up" no matter



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how much he tried to Americanize himself, either in accent or in dress and behaviour, until he finally decides to go back towards that which he recognises as his true identity, that is, a Muslim-Muslim and a Pakistani, by the end of the play. For the time being, nonetheless, things did smooth down a bit for him through this hyper-realistic representation of who he is.

“You know how much easier things are for me since I changed my name?” (Akhtar, 2012, p. 11). Moreover, in a conversation between Amir and Isaac about the 9/11 attack, Amir’s response is yet again evident of his torn sense of identity.

“That we were winning. Yeah, I guess I forgot...which we I was” (Akhtar, 2012, p. 60). The main conversation in dinner between Amir and Emily in Akhtar's *Disgraced* (2012) illustrates the identity crisis and mismatched perception of one another's reality each character possessed. This distortion arises from their desires: Amir is wanting to assimilate into American society, to which he makes judgements on religion, and Emily's desire to portray Islamic art represents cultural exploration. Abe’s integration struggle against prejudice as well as Jory’s goal with her career are some more illustrations to theme of the identity fragmentation.

Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra is applied through characters that choose to embody various identities instead of their true selves; that show the first order of simulacra, representation. Second order (or perversion) is manifested in Amir’s manipulation and distortion of reality and ultimately living a false version of Islam. The final order, the simulation, is characters trying to differentiate between who they are being and who they really are.

Amir’s performance as a whites surrogate to escape racial treatment in a post 9/11 America, reveals his own prejudice towards his own heritage and religion. At the end, he understands that trying to fit the societal mould has cost him his marriage, his career, and a devastating awareness that transforming the world to accept yourself is a catastrophe that, ultimately, leads to one continual loss of self. The second research question of this study is connected to this theme in that it encompasses the broader problems of racism and Islamophobia in Western societies.

### **3.3 Racial Identity and Discrimination**

Racial prejudice is the theme explored in the play from a complex, multi layered angle demonstrating racial identity and other postmodern concepts of representation.

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However, it focuses on the modern tools of racial bias, like Islamophobia, Orientalism, and Anti-Semitism, by describing how they are implicated in bias towards minorities in American society, especially Muslims in their post 9/11 context.

Racial discrimination, in the play, is tied up with Islamophobia. This also corresponds to Lyotard's concept of the corruption of metanarratives, which prevents the piece to hold together, when Amir does not hear his religion anymore. In the beginning of the play, Emily presents Amir as a "Muslim slave" depicted as a victim of negative stereotypes and prejudices on the basis of racial and religious identity. Emily and Amir may be seen talking about how a waiter stared at Amir the night before because he is Muslim. Emily acknowledges that the waiter's actions are discriminatory. Yet, she unconsciously treats Amir in the same way.

3). Not seeing you. Not seeing who you really are. Not until you started to deal with him. And the deftness with which you did that. You made him see that gap. Between what he was assuming about you and what you really are. (Akhtar, 2012, p. 5)

Here, we see Emily repeatedly emphasizing the fact that the waiter does not know who really Amir is. But when it comes to painting Amir, she chooses to take a slave for the portrayal all the while calling him Velazquez' "assistant" until Amir repeatedly points out that he was not his assistant working voluntarily for Velazquez but rather a slave.

4). But I started to think about the Velázquez painting and how people must have reacted when they first saw it. They think they were looking at a picture of a Moor, an assistant. (Akhtar, 2012, p. 5)

In doing so, Emily sees Amir as someone different, exotic, and an outsider. Exoticism, being another form of carrying out prejudice, thus builds on the theme of racial prejudice depicted in the play. But also, it could be evident of Emily being simply naïve or ignorant enough to not be able to see through Amir's build up reality, which is, simulacrum, in other words. For one reason or another, she is unable to see the performance that Amir is putting on in order to prove that he is his "Americanness" because no matter who one may be, if he is not White, he is not considered to be American enough. This would then lead these individuals to put on a performance, simulacra, in one that Emily is simply naïve or ignorant enough not to be able to see

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through Amir's build-up reality, which is an arm or another, to prove their loyalty to their host land.

"I think it's a little weird. That you want to paint me after seeing the painting of a slave." (Akhtar, 2012, p. 4)

Later in the play, describing the portrait to Isaac and Jory, we find Emily saying:

"I've been thinking about the Study After Velazquez's Moor. I'm using the same palette, same composition but its a portrait of Amir" (Akhtar, 2012, pp. 46-47). And Isaac comments on the painting in the following words, which strongly hint at him viewing Amir as an outsider, directly likening him to the said slave as well as reminding him of his "place", where does he stand in a foreign prejudiced society, by making use of euphemism so it seems rather normal and casual conversation on the part of Isaac.

5). So there you are in your six-hundred dollar Charvet shirt, like Velazquez's brilliant apprentice-slave in his lace collar, adorned in the splendors of the world you're now so clearly a part of...and yet... the question remains...of your place. (Akhtar, 2012, p. 48)

These words summarize the minority status – especially the status of Muslims – in post 9/11 American society. Amir becomes successful as a lawyer and tries to assimilate but it doesn't seem he ever loses the description of being a 'minority' as he suffers an identity crisis right through the play. He is his own death because he has such a schizophrenic sense of self and because he is a minority. Emily painted Amir as a slave, this shows her own naivety, and cannot picture him being anything else. This shows that a very Islamophobic that also pitted Amir with rigidly Islamophobic mind, even while Amir is struggling with his identity and becoming a paradox aware of his real identity. Ironically, although Amir was a Muslim he hates his own religion in his pursuit of acceptance within white society. His nephew, Hussain, also known as Abe Jensen, tells us his ideas about Islam earlier in his life, when he probably did not have to face this level of discrimination from this society:

6). That's what mom says grandma used to say about you. That you were working something out, that you were such a hood Muslim when you were a kid. And that you had to go the other way for a while. (Akhtar, 2012, p. 14)

In the work place, realizing how in a subtle, constant way, Islamophobia and any kind

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of different races, religions or ethnicity, we are reminded that we are 'the other'. "That firm will never be ours." says Amir. It's theirs. And minority employees have always known they were simply invited to the party." It sits with a broader set of realities where power amongst groups is inevitably the dominance and from where the rules are set.

Thus the aftermath of 9/11 exacerbated Islamophobia and allowed for changes in the law, for example the Patriot Act that allowed for increased surveillance and for Muslims to be arrested. Post 9/11 policies are outlined when Imam Fareed is wrongfully arrested, and the reader sees how post-9/11 policies directly and disproportionately affect a person on nothing but religion and social standing. Now Amir being a lawyer, is asked by his nephew Hussain to help Imam Fareed get out of this mess, for which he convinces him in the following words, which again depict Amir's Islamophobic notions:

"Uncle, don't think of him as a Muslim if you don't want to" (Akhtar, 2012, p. 18). Emily also tries to convince him to help Imam Fareed, and when she tells him he is one of Imam Fareed's own people, with regards to the religion, Amir responds with: "I'm not one of his own people" (Akhtar, 2012, p. 20). By saying this, Amir further tries to distance himself from what has been once his identity, that is, Islam. On further convincing Amir for Imam Fareed's help, Emily resorts to using such words that further tell of him being an Islamophobe.

In the play, Amir demonstrates his fear of judgment because of Islamophobia and that as a result of his attempt to help Imam Fareed, he loses that job. Amir goes to Jory with this job, and later finds out that his employers have Islamophobic views, which is why he couldn't trust him again after Amir's Islamic past. Amir's efforts, in presenting himself as Hindu, furthers the example of how far he goes to avoid racial prejudice.

Jory's promotion after concealing her role in removing Amir shows the distorted reality around the work place because of the racial biases. Ironically, Amir's views about Islam are Islamophobic; he doesn't believe the religion, but fears for all of the negative repercussions of being a Muslim. He abhors Islam and says it is a 'backward way of thinking' with no proof of it. This project reveals the complexities of identity acceptance by individuals who are living in a prejudiced society. Here we

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see a strong depiction of what Lyotard calls the “incredulity towards metanarratives” in the post-modern era.

7). The Quran is about tribal life in a seventh century desert. “It’s like one very long hate mail letter to humanity.” Islam comes from the desert. From a group of tough-minded, tough-living people. Who saw life as something hard and relentless? Something to be suffered. (Akhtar, 2012, pp. 53-57)

His Islamophobic ideals are so deeply embedded within his mindset that he can’t even stand a normal gesture, such as Emily taking inspiration for her art forms from traditional works of art that are part of Islamic culture and architecture and tells her she should go for painting landscapes instead.

“We both know why you like the landscapes. Because they have nothing to do with Islam” (Akhtar, 2012, p. 48). More so, Amir never wanted his brother-in-law to come to America for the sole reason that the family constitutes of practicing Muslims and attends such gatherings. And when the family, nonetheless, was finally able to come to America, these were Amir’s views:

“And lo and behold! He wants to come here. And what do they do? Spend their time at the Islamic Centre.” (Akhtar, 2012, p.19)

It is not clear whether these ideas root from his ignorance regarding Islam or he has harbored hatred for it over time or, for the most ironic reason, he became Islamophobic to avoid Islamophobia of the post-9/11 American society. And in an attempt to either fit in or to save himself of the said society’s critique, we see him admitting people who look like him are capable of horrendous events like 9/11.

“The next terrorist attack is probably gonna come from some guy who looks like me” (Akhtar, 2012, p. 52). Nevertheless, when Emily confronts him saying it can be any guy, anyone, even a white guy with a gun, Amir’s response further highlights what Islamophobia makes the Muslims living in such societies go through.

“And pointing it at a guy who looks like me. On top of people being more and more afraid of folks who look like me, we end up being resented too” (Akhtar, 2012, pp. 51-52). Now, here again, Amir is identifying with a different we, that is the Muslims and not the Americans this time. Amir’s nephew Hussain points out a rather sensible reason for Amir’s dilemma by the end of the play, somewhat confirming his desire to fit in:

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8). The one thing I can be sure with you? You'll always turn on your own people. You think it makes these people like you more when you do that? They don't. They just think you hate yourself" (Akhtar, 2012, p. 89).

The use of words such as "your own," and "these people," in the play makes Muslims seem so separate from how America is as a whole, creating an otherness, and indicating that no matter what you do, who you are, will always be who you are. Often, this struggle for acceptance leads to self-disgracing.

Discussions about increased airport security checks post 9/11 are also evoked to discuss Islamophobia, through targeting Muslims in post 9/11 airport security checks. Amir's comments capture the absurdity of the nightmare that is airport security, and characters Amir and Emily both acknowledge that for good reason — because such is life with a Muslim name. Isaac openly admits to there being racial profiling, so it seems like people are finally aware that this stuff happens.

The insidious nature of Islamophobia is also exposed as we see living hypocrite Hussain and his friend Tariq, interrogated by the FBI because he is a Muslim, and because of what he experienced in Afghanistan. This treatment of them mirrors how society operates prejudice off of religious identity to the detriment of the target victims, meaning that, by exploiting the negative implications of racial bias in their own lives, they reinforce its detrimental impacts in their own lives. The questions went something like this which goes on to show the stereotyping of Muslims, once again, as nothing less than terrorists:

9). Do we believe in Jihad? Do we want to blow stuff up? How often did I read the Koran? They're going into our community and looking for people whose immigration status is vulnerable. Then they push us to start doing stuff for them" (Akhtar, 2012, p. 86.)

Amir's response to this incident further highlights stereotyping of Muslims and their treatment based on racial prejudice, basically how this world does not remain a neutral place in the least when it comes to the Western world's treatment of Muslims and Islam.

10). You need to understand it's not neutral world out there. Not right now. Not for you. You have to be mindful about sending a different message...than the one that landed you into an interrogation with the FBI. (Akhtar, 2012, p.

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For Muslims, living in the post-9/11 American society in where they are constantly under the microscope and need to think twice before expressing their opinions and leading their lives, freedom of expression is the right that 'belong to other people, but not to Muslims.' But they're often too scared to send a 'different message' for fear of offending the 'mainstream' who may persecute them into death or incarceration just for being who they are. The constant pressure Muslims live under is exemplified by Amir's warning to Abe that there are consequences if he fails to appease The FBI.

That racial prejudice (especially Islamophobia) knows no ethnic boundaries, and that it targets not only Muslims but all races and religions, is what the play demonstrates. Akhtar both critiques Western perceptions of Islam and its tendency to distort its image, and fights against Islam's extremism on the other hand. It also considers anti-Semitism in an account of Amir's childhood encounter with a Jewish girl, Rivkah. The cycle of discrimination shown in the mothers warning and Amirs spitting in hers reflects that there is no end to the cycle and that racial prejudice can come from a variety of people from a variety of backgrounds. It reinforces Akhtar's point: prejudice isn't limited to one kind of marginalized community, but rather encompasses them all. Discrimination stays very much alive and well regardless of who is on the receiving end of it.

11). Rivkah, my mom says, that's a Jewish name. If I ever hear that name again in this house Amir, I'll break your bones. You will end up with a Jew over my dead body. Then she spat in my face. I look at her and say, you've got the name of a Jew. She smiles, Yes I'm Jewish, she says. Then I spit in her face. (Akhtar, 2012, p. 15)

The play shows that prejudicial behaviors, such as Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism, are often the product of an environment, childhood influences. Amir's mother's response to racial discrimination gives Amir a mirror and shows that this prejudice is learned. Amir repeatedly encounters Isaac, who tells prejudice to the Muslims and repeats stereotypes of Islamophobic, and Amir is conflicted with his Islamophobia and about his discrimination of Isaac's own behavior towards Amir's wife, Emily. These events, therefore, mirror an unclear identity of Amir as well as the racist prejudice he has had to deal with his entire life.

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Through those words “they” and “you people” in the dialogue of the play, and with the play itself, the theme of “otherness” is reinforced. Akhtar recognises there are valid cases of racial bias, but also states that some claims of Anti-semitism or Islamophobia may be made simply by someone wanting to play the role of the victim. The play also addresses Orientalism, or the stereotypical view of the Middle Eastern and Asian peoples, via Isaac’s warnings to Emily regarding her attraction for Islamic art and culture. Emily believes her perspective as a White woman married to a man of color gives her insight into that space while highlighting her concerns that her work honors Islamic traditions. In this dynamic are glimpses into the complexities of cultural appreciation and appropriation in a post 9/11 era in which identity, race, and religion are touchstones of tension that are only just developing, that her work is mere transparent embrace of a culture and art that she has immense respect for.

12). A young Western painter drawing on Islamic representation? Not ironically? But in service. You know what you are going to be accused of... Orientalism... I mean hell you’ve even got the brown husband. (Akhtar, 2012, p. 29)

On another occasion, again Isaac is about to begin the same topic but Emily does not even let him complete the sentence and quite clearly and strongly responds that its about time the Western consciousness swallows the fact that much of the civilization and way of living comes from none other than Islam itself. And that Islam also has its impact on the foundation of the Western art, culture and architecture.

13). About me being a White woman with no right to be using Islamic forums? I think you’re wrong about that. Its time we woke up. Time we stop paying lip service to Islam and Islamic art. We draw on the Greeks...the Romans but Islam is part of who we are, too. God forbid anybody remind us of it. (Akhtar, 2012, pp. 29- 31)

Amir’s vehement resistance to Emily’s interest in Islamic art and architecture emphasizes Amir’s own inner struggles and his Islamophobia, as an expression of the bigotry found in much post 9/11 American society. By criticizing their work as 'naïve' he shows a stunning difference from the Muslim upbringing he used to have. Although, the play mainly deals with Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism, it does



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mention small references of the Orientalism, and that bigotry cannot be lost even if people start to progress collectively. Ironically, with the progress of society, marginalization in new forms is coming up and continues to emerge as we see newer forms of discrimination resurfacing in modern forms such as Islamophobia, Anti—Semitism and Orientalism.

## **4. Discussion**

The current study examines two critical themes within the play: Loss of true identity and the performance that transpires its place, and pervasive prejudice that has permeated American society in the post 9/11 era. The play reflects the trauma and discontent caused by the 9/11 attacks changed for the better the American social space forever; future generations are bound to feel the long lasting effects of this. The investigator uses the theory of simulacra and hyperreality by Jean Baudrillard and the postmodernist theory of the collapse of meta-narratives by Jean Francois Lyotard to show how prejudice stops the people from leading normal lives. Character of Amir remarkably depicts the societal expectations along with weights of discrimination.

While it may seem obvious to some that the central conflicts in the play arise from the effects of the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, what it does is make clear how prejudice has rooted so deep that even if it's merely prejudice that fuels prejudice that it has distorted perception and interactions across class lines. Amir attempts to demonstrate the pains of people who belonged to middle class and have to choose, either to adapt themselves to the society norms or to preserve their cultural identities. He has to decide to either submit to the racist stereotypes, and marginalization that pervade his environment, or to fight to return to the image of being Muslim American. The tension marks the strangeness of moving through a society that sorts people by religion, race, and other categories much of the time.

The play presents the interracial couples it features, such, as Amir and Emily, to show how racism and discrimination are issues in society. Amir is brown and Emily is white and thus a juxtapose of the dynamics of Islamophobia and Orientalism. Indeed, the relationship between Jory, an African American woman, and Isaac, a Jewish man, exemplifies anti-semitism, and expands the general reflection on racial prejudice in the story. Primarily, the play does not offer answers as to how to end the cycle of discrimination that we see everywhere around us, but it does show us how

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entrenched chaos are in US society after 9/11, how there are double play standards for white Americans and those from the white minority group.

It is found that the theme of Islamophobia is pervasive, and figures as a foundation to the characters' experiences with discrimination and marginalization. Anti-Semitism reinforces the narrative of lost identity, simulacra and racial prejudice as all closely follow. Conversely, the theme of Orientalism is played down, mainly as a warning from being branded an orientalist because of an appreciation of Islamic art and architecture. Although this approach is nuanced enough to keep the message about America's racial prejudice, the message still gets across in a very effective way.

From beginning to end of the play, the anxiety between self and other not only depicts simulacra but is also about corrupted meta-narratives. On the one hand, characters become plagued with the social agony of's being 'other', the conflict between acceptance and alienation. This reflects Baudrillard's notion of hyper-reality, where identities are fluid, and lose meaning until they themselves become indistinguishable. Through the characters' problems we see that spirituality and religious beliefs are relegated to place reserved for the trivial, while instead one must adhere to rationality and the dictate of society.

By depicting several different kinds of Muslim American identities, the play complicates a difference between reality and mere representation. The fear that severe racial prejudice makes normal life impossible in the context of post 9/11 is an issue that characters struggle with. In an effort to be accepted, they create hyper-real representations of themselves that are designed to help them get through society which may be unaccepting of minorities to a great degree.

Abe Jensen (Hussain) is to represent resistance against societal prejudice of prejudice and resist his fragmented reality if it will lead to an authentic identity. Hussain embodies commitment to his true self rather than the internalization of struggle that we see in Amir, and together their complex relationship highlights the complexity of identity within a hyper real environment. It magnifies Baudrillard's simulacra and the disjointed and fragmented simulacra of the post-modern condition.

The East-West divide mirrors the divide between reality and representation; an East–West schism blown up by so much political rhetoric against Muslims since 9/11. Amir represents that marginalized brown identity chasing for validation by whites and

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Emily is that symbol of white privilege. The interplay among characters within this narrative shows the complex play of discrimination and acceptance, and paints a stark picture of the current American society.

In short, the study details the lightly hidden racism of 9 post-9/11 American society on those who are minoritized in order to ascend to try to escape the discrimination. Set in a maze of fractured realities and identities, the characters strain themselves between the past and present. Through the language of Baudrillard's simulacra and Lyotard's auto-destructive disruption of meta-narratives, the dilemma of identity is located in recognition of the impact prejudice has on the individual, on the collectivity, on individuality, and on the collective identity. Ultimately, it becomes a poignant commentary on the difficulties faced by marginalized communities in a society where there are deep racial and religious divides.

## 5. Conclusion

Using Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra (1994) and Lyotard's concept of metanarrative (1979), this study analyzes racial identity in Ayad Akhtar's play, *Disgraced* (2012) from a postmodern point of view. In doing so it shows the subtle critique of the play of the complications of racial identity in the current American society (especially for those with Muslim heritage) and in a post 9/11 cultural context. *Disgraced* portrays characters who have an atomized, hyperreal understanding of identity broken up into categories—these characters all experience the ways in which social and preconceived expectations, stereotypes and media impact their own and other people's perceptions of themselves. The analysis using Baudrillard's concept of simulacra argues that the characters' identities are both socially constructed and not really genuine. Moving in a reality of images and external expectations whose perceptions define who they should and shouldn't be causes that feel of alienation and internal conflict. This study goes beyond understanding *Disgraced*, and addresses the larger picture of the dynamics of identity and discrimination in a world that has become increasingly globalized and quite encumbered with the instant saturation of media. She contributes again to scholarship on postmodern identity formation in contemporary literature by demonstrating the critical function of works like *Disgraced* to illuminate the ways cultural, racial and religious constructs dictate and inform individual and collective identities. These insights may be applied to other

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contemporary literary works in order to better understand identity and representation in the postmodern era, suggest the study.

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