



## Cultural Rejection and Racial Struggles: Amir Kapoor's Identity Crisis in *Disgraced*

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### ABSTRACT

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This essay examines how the crucial dinner in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* illustrates the concept of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and racial and cultural identity confrontations in a hierarchical society. This drama explores Amir Kapoor's inner turmoil as a Muslim South Asian American negotiating his identity in a large white workplace. The structural obstacles that racial minorities encounter are brought to light by Amir's rejection of his ethnicity and his career challenges and hidden prejudices. The scene highlights the continuation of racial hierarchy in progressive settings and criticizes liberal multiculturalism. This research shows Amir's identity dilemma by utilizing the notion of Bhabha's hybridity. This study adds to the conversation on race, identity, and modern theater by examining the psychological effects of cultural rejection and its structural injustice.



## Introduction

The complexity of nationality, identity, and social order is selected in modern theater. These topics are powerfully explored in Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Disgraced*, which centers on the protagonist Amir Kapoor's conflict with his Muslim origin and integration into a largely white professional society. The play depicts the socio-political conflicts that come with being a racial and cultural minority in a hierarchical society and is set in post-9/11 America. Amir's

attempt to repress his South Asian Muslim identity in favor of Western values, which he believes are essential to social and professional success, is the source of his internal strife.

The underlying dinner scene in the play exposes the racial and cultural forces that influence Amir's relationships and sense of self. Amir's and his fellow workers passive intellectual arguments turn into accusations during the scenario, revealing ingrained prejudices and the rifts in cross-cultural relationships. The critique of liberalism and the continuation of structural equality are two aspects of this. That are consistent with the denial of critical race theory (CRT). Bhaba (1994), in his book, the location of culture defined identity is fluid in multicultural settings, frequently characterized by conflict and negotiation. This hybridity is demonstrated by Amir's expedition, which also highlights the psychological cost of handling opposing social institutions and cultural norms.

### **Research Objective**

1. To examine how *Disgraced* portrays racial and cultural identity struggles using Critical Race Theory, focusing on Amir Kapoor's experiences of systemic racism and cultural rejection.

### **Literature Review**

In modern literature, especially in works that depict the experience of immigrants, the interplay of race, culture, and identity is crucial. In-depth research has been done on how postcolonial and critical theories expose identity conflicts and structural injustices in contemporary literature. The term hybridity is introduced by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) in *The Location of Culture*, wherein he describes identity as flexible and continuously negotiated insights of cultural crossing. In *Disgraced*, Amir Kapoor has an identity crisis that reflects Bhabha's concept of existing in the "in-between." Area, wear tension, and dissonance are caused by opposing cultural markers.

Western civilization frequently "otherizes" Eastern cultures, turning them into stereotypes (Said, 1978). Amir encounters personal and external prejudices based on these reductive beliefs in disgrace, demonstrating this paradigm (Said, 1978). Regardless of their effectiveness in the workplace, Akhtar criticizes how these social constructions marginalized people. Is for examining the structural obstacles portrayed in the play is provided by critical race theory (CRT). Racism is ingrained in social institutions and shows itself in ways that impede minorities' advancement in both their personal and professional lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Such systematic injustices are reflected in Amir's failure to obtain a promotion in spite of his qualifications, supporting the CRT tenant that racial inequalities are frequently concealed by meritocracy (Crenshaw, 1995).

Chawdhury (2019) also emphasizes how *disgraced* depicts Islamophobia, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, as Amir internalizes social biases against his ancestry. In a similar manner, Zahid (2020) examines the place treatment of identity politics, emphasizing how Amir's rejection of his Muslim identity is motivated by a desire to fit in with Western standards.

Amir's work highlights the superficiality of liberal multiculturalism in the play. Liberal policies frequently represent minority cultures without addressing the more profound structural injustices they encounter, as noted by Motherhood 2013. This is especially clear in the movement at the dinner table, as Amir's coworkers romanticize Islamic art while ignoring the structural obstacles he faces.

The cytological effects of cultural rejection have been studied by other academics. Postcolonial world immigrants frequently feel alienated as a result of social pressure to fit in, which causes a shattered sense of self (Gilroy, 2004). This split is reflected in Amir's rejection of his lineage, underscoring the emotional impact that cultural hybridity demands.

Finally, Foucault (1980) ideas of power and knowledge, particularly how prevailing ideologies mold people's identities and perceptions, aligned with the actor's investigation of power dynamics. This internal struggle is structural, mirroring larger societal control mechanisms (Foucault 1980).

This gaze is framed by this extensive corpus of work as a nuanced examination of race, identity, and structural injustice. Akhtar offers a complex criticism of modern society by combining personal experiences with more journal research.

## **Research Methodology**

Employing a close reading technique and qualitative methodology, this study examines Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*, concentrating on the dinner scene. The research intends to investigate the layers of cultural and racial identities as they are shown in the play, especially in light of a hierarchical social system. The research reveals how race and identity are portrayed by closely analyzing the interactions and conversations in the dinner scene, emphasizing the conflicts between individual goals and social norms. A thorough grasp of how ethnic and cultural factors influence the characters experiences and actions is offered by this in-depth textual examination.

Every aspect in the text is carefully examined for how it contributes to the play's overall themes according to the close reading process. In order to identify the subtle manifestations of racial and cultural tensions, the study examines the language, gesture, and interactions throughout the dinner scenario through the lens. The play is an important dinner scene, when underlying biases, prejudices, and power dynamics come to light, providing a wealth of information about the intricacies of identity in a racially divided society.

In order to understand the events of the dinner scene, the study also applies critical race theory (CRT), exposing the ways in which CRT concepts like color blindness, racialization, and the relationship between race and power are interwoven within the story. The methodology is intended to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the racial and cultural tensions in the play by blending conventional close reading techniques with modern theoretical frameworks. By concentrating on the dinner scene, the study provides a thorough analysis of how these teams appear in the relationships between the characters, mirroring more general racial and identity concerns in society.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Scholars like Derek Bell, Kimberly Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado created critical race theory (CRT), which offers a framework for analyzing the ways in which systematic racism functions in society. According to CRT, racism is more than just personal prejudice; it has roots in laws, regulations, and social norms that influence opportunities and results according to race (Delgado and Stefan, 2017).

Derek Bell's contributions to CRT, especially his ideas, are still fundamental. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), color blindness is the liberal notion that equality can be achieved by disregarding race. CRT challenges this idea, contending that it ignores racism's systematic basis and, by doing so, perpetuates inequality. Second, the concept of interest convergence holds that racial advancement only takes place when it serves the interest of the dominant group.

Furthermore, CRT contends that rather than being based on biological distinctions, race is a social construct that is established and perpetuated by cultural standards. Also, the process by which civilization gives people or groups racial identities in response to social, political, and economic demands is known as racialization. Finally, because people of color's lived experiences offer distinct perspectives on the consequences of systematic racism, art highlights the need of elevating their voices.

We may more thoroughly analyze the complex relationships between race, identity, and power in *Disgraced* if we use the critical race theory (CRT) theoretical framework. The drama critic's color-blind views and the conditional nature of racial development while highlighting the societal construction and racialization of racial and religious identities.

The work reveals the conflict between personal goals and the structural factors that establish and restrict identity via Amir's experiences. Thus, our research goes beyond merely criticizing racial injustice; it instead examines the ways in which race and power are formed, maintained, and sustained in modern society (Delgado and Stefan, 2017).

## **Textual Analysis**

Significant challenges with racial and cultural identifications are reflected in Amir's experience in *Disgraced*, especially in the context of a hierarchical society where personal views and experiences are shaped by cultural norms and vices. Amir's struggles with his identity as a South Asian Muslim in America after 9/11 represent the conflict between his own sense of self and how society, highlighting the difficulties of mixing religion and race. The difficulties of being a colored person in a largely white society, the Western world, are illustrated by his internalized conflicts with cultural authenticity and social acceptability.

The conflict between Amir's cultural heritage and assimilation is one of the main aspects of his struggle. Even though Amir makes an effort to blend in with American culture, his Muslim is a legal part of who he is. In an attempt to fit in with his white friends and their secular viewpoints, Amir rejects conventional religious customs and makes an effort to remove himself from his faith and ancestry throughout the play. Amir considers his choice to reject Islam at a crucial point. Saying, "*I hate the religion that my mother raised me in*" (Akhtar 2015, p. 51). His mental struggle to balance his cultural identity with his desire for inclusion in a hierarchical society that marginalizes people who don't fit its mold is highlighted by this self-pity.

Amir's denial of his Muslim identity, however, does not protect him from racialization. Even though he claims to be colorblind, his co-workers nevertheless have a racially biased opinion of him. I have always loved Islamic art; there is a spirituality to it that is so much more refined than Western art is one of the sex remarks on Islamic art in the dinner scene, which exposes the subtle periodicities that hide behind the surface of polite discourse (Akhtar 2012 P. 55). Despite their seeming flattery, sex remarks reveal a racist othering of Amir and underlying about Islam. The fact

that Ahmed is still viewed through the prism of his racial and religious identity in spite of his efforts to disassociate himself from it emphasizes how enduring racial hierarchies are in society.

The unpleasant efforts of negotiating racial and cultural identity in a hierarchical society that values assimilation and treats diversity with mistrust are ultimately made clear by Amir's experience in *Disgraced*. In the last scene, he lashes out violently at his coworkers as a result of half his issues with his Muslim identity and the preconceptions and biases of people around him. The hearing for inclusion and the reality of being alienated due to tone, ethnicity, and religion in the sect in the dinner scene, which is a reflection of the larger racial dynamics at work. The recurring conflicts in the society where racial and cultural hierarchy still influence people's lives and perceptions of themselves are brought to light by Amir's journey.

## **The Dinner Scene and Critical Race Theory**

### **Color blindness and the perpetuation of systematic racism**

Critical race theory (CRT) criticizes the notion of color blindness, which advocates ignoring race in order to promote equality. The idea suggests that if individuals disregard race, they can achieve an adjusted and equal society. However, the court argues that this perspective overlooks the systematic and structural nature of racism, thereby perpetuating inequalities. By failing to acknowledge race and the historical context of racial oppression, color blindness perpetuates the status quo and ignores the lived realities of people of color. In *Disgraced*, Amir's colleagues attempt to adopt colorblind attitudes, insisting that they don't judge him based on his race or religion. Yet, their behavior during the dinner scene reveals the inherent biases they hold. For example, Isaac's praise for Islamic art, while well-intentioned, reduces Amir's cultural background to a simplistic and exotic narrative. Demonstrating the color blindness ignores the complexities of Amir's lived experiences as a South Asian Muslim in America (Akhtar's, 2012, p. 55). This moment reveals how color blindness fails to address the deeper issues of racial inequality that are integral to Amir's identity and experience.

### **Interest convergence and the conditional nature of racial progress**

CRT's concept of interest convergence suggests that racial progress is often only achieved when it aligns with the interests of the dominant group. This idea is vividly illustrated in Amir's professional life. Although he is initially accepted in his frame due to the farm's desire to project diversity, his Muslim identity becomes a liability once it threatens the comfort and image of the dominant group. Amir's acceptance is conditional upon his ability to confirm you are broader in the white-dominated agenda, demonstrating how racial progress is not an inherent societal shift but a conditional concession made when it benefits those in power. A scene in the dinner scene, when Amir's background becomes uncomfortable for his colleagues, particularly during the tense conversation about religion and race, his previously accepted identity is swiftly rejected (Akhtar's, 2012, P.59). This illustrates how racial progress is only genuine when it serves the interest of the dominant group, a dynamic that reflects the limit of diversity and inclusion in a racially hierarchical society.

### **Race is a social construct**

CRD emphasized that race is not a biological fact but a social construct, created and maintained by societal norms and institutions. This perspective challenges the idea that racial differences are inherent or natural. Instead, race is constructed through historical, social, and political forces that define and assign meaning to racial categories. In *disgraced* Amir's identity as a South Asian Muslim is constructed and reconstructed by societal norms that force him into predefined racial categories. Although Amir perceives himself as a secular and American individual, society continually forces him to confront his racial identity, often reducing him to a stereotypical "Muslim or other." This is evident when his colleagues, especially Emily, reference his background in ways that ignore his complex personal narrative, forcing him into a radicalized box. As Emily remarks about Amir's "exotic" cultural heritage, she reinforces the notion that Amir's identity is not determined by his personal experiences but by the socially constructed categories imposed on him by others (Akhtar's, 2012, P. 56). This demonstrates how race, as a social construct, shapes individuals interactions and their perception of themselves within a hierarchical society.

### **Racialization and the imposition of racial identity**

Racialization refers to the process by which societies assign racial identities to individuals based on social, political, and economic needs, often disregarding personal or cultural distinctions. This process reduces complex identities to oversimplified categories that serve the interests of those in power. Amir's experience in disgrace highlights how racialization works in practice. Despite Amir's rejection of his Muslim identity, society continually racializes him through interactions that ascribe him to a specific ethnic and religious category. In the dinner scene, his colleagues repeatedly emphasized his Muslim background, even when he distanced himself from the faith. Isaac's comment that Amir's cultural heritage is more refined than western art highlights how racial and cultural identities are imposed based on stereotypes and perceptions of what is considered exotic or other (Akhtar, 2012, p. 55). This demonstrates how racialization operates not as a deflection of personal identity but as a process that is shaped by external societal forces that classify individuals according to predefined racial categories.

### **Amplifying the unique voice of people of color**

CRT places significant emphasis on the importance of amplifying the voices of people of color, as their lived experiences offer unique insights into the effects of systematic racism. *in disgraced*, Amir's monologue about his internalized disdain for Islam and his feelings of alienation Exemplifies the unique voice of color in the narrative. His experience provides a rare opportunity to hear directly from a corrector navigating the intersections of race, religion, and identity within a hierarchical society. Amir's articulation of his frustration and alienation challenges the dominant narrative of assimilation and success in America. His analysis of his rejection and exclusion from both the Muslim and white groups offers a potent remark on the difficulties of forming an identity in a society divided along racial lines. Akhtar emphasizes the significance of recognizing and validating the experiences of oppressed people by giving voice to Amir's internal conflict, offering a more thorough comprehension of the consequences of systematic racism (Akhtar, 2012, P. 51).

## **Discussion**

Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* offers a profound exploration of racial and cultural identity struggles through Amir, who navigates the psychological burden of systemic racism, cultural rejection, and internalized biases. Amir's internal conflict and his desire to assimilate into mainstream American culture versus societal pressures that racialize and stereotype him reflect the broader themes of the play. The dinner scene serves as a microcosm for examining critical race theory principles like color blindness, interest convergence, racialization, and the social construction of race. While a middle school league claims to adopt a color-blind approach, their latent biases reduce his identity to stereotypes, highlighting the failure of color blindness to address systemic racism.

Amir's racialization, where society imposes a Muslim identity on him despite his rejection of the faith, underscores. As a social construct dictated by societal norms. The principle of interest convergence is evident in Amir's professional success, which is conditional on his firm's need to project diversity, and his identity becomes a source of discomfort; he is swiftly discarded, revealing how racial acceptance is contingent on benefiting the dominant group.

Future research could explore disgraced resonance with broader immigrant experiences, analyzing identity struggles across various diasporas. Themes of systemic racism, cultural alienation, and identity negotiation transcend Amir's story, reflecting universal immigrant challenges. A comparative approach could illuminate how race, religion, and cultural assimilation operate across global contexts, contributing to a deeper understanding of systemic racism and identity struggles in diverse societies. *Disgraced* thus opens a critical discourse on identity in a hierarchically structured world.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, *Disgraced* offers a powerful exploration of fresh air and cultural identity struggles within a hierarchical society, with Amir's journey serving as a poignant representation of the psychological toll of systemic racism, cultural rejection, and internalized biases. The dinner scene encapsulates critical race theory's principles, such as color blindness, interest convergence, and racialization, revealing how even progressive environments perpetuate deep-seated inequalities. Through Amir's interactions with his colleagues, Akhtar underscores how racial and cultural identities are socially constructed and imposed, highlighting the persistent, often subtle, nature of racism in everyday life.

Future research could expand on the themes of *disgrace* by exploring the experiences of other immigrant communities and comparing their struggles with racial and cultural identity across different global contexts. A broader comparative analysis of Diasporas experiences would illuminate the universal challenges faced by marginalized groups in navigating complex identities within hierarchical societal structures. This could deepen our understanding of how systemic racism operates across cultural contexts and offer new insights into the interaction of race, religion, and cultural assimilation in a globalized world.

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