

**Interracial Communication at Dinner Parties in
Rebeck and Gersten-Vassilaros' *Omnium Gatherum*
and *Akhtar's Disgraced***

Asst. Prof. Ansam Ali Flefil Al-Hussainawy
University of Thi-Qar/ College of Education
for Humanities

ABSTRACT

This study deals with interracial debate that occurs at dinner parties in two post-9/11 American plays, namely, *Teresa Rebeck* and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros' *Omnium Gatherum* (2004) and Akhtar's *Disgraced* (2011) respectively. Interracial communication, here, means the controversy about different topics and issues that happens between/among individuals of different races and cultures; each one is trying to support his/her viewpoint whether it is right or wrong. The setting in which such argument occurs is dinner parties in a post-9/11 era. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to shed light on using dinner parties in literary works, drama in particular, to discuss various issues in a form of interracial altercations that end with aggressive attitudes among characters. The focus is on two sample plays: *Omnium Gatherum* and *Disgraced*. Structurally, the work starts with an introduction that illustrates the meaning of interracial communication, dinner parties in literature, and a hint on post-9/11 American drama. Then, the two chosen plays are analyzed in terms of the mentioned theme. The conclusion sums up the findings of this research. This includes that: (1) dinner parties are used as a device to present different attitudes and issues. (2) The characters of guests are depicted

from different races, cultures, and tendencies. (3) The debate turns around different subjects and each guest tries to display his/her viewpoint with a strong defense. (4) Parties of this type often end negatively with a quarrel. (5) The two selected plays are the epitome of this type of invitations.

Keywords: Interracial Communication, Dinner Parties, Post-9/11 drama, *Omnium Gatherum* and *Disgraced*.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الجدل العرقي الذي يحدث في حفلات العشاء في مسرحيتين أمريكيتين في فترة ما بعد الحادي عشر من سبتمبر ، وهما، *التجمع الغريب* (2004) لـ تريزا ريبك و الكساندرا جريستن-فاسيلاروس ومسرحية *العار* (2011) للكاتب أياذ اختار على التوالي. المقصود هنا بالحوار العرقي هو الجدل حول مواضيع وقضايا مختلفة تحدث بين أفراد من أعراق وثقافات مختلفة؛ يحاول كل فرد أن يساند رأيه فيما إذا كان هذا الرأي صحيحاً أم خاطئاً. الإطار الذي يحدث فيه مثل هكذا جدال هو حفلات عشاء في فترة تلت أحداث سبتمبر. وفقاً لذلك، فإن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تسليط الضوء على استعمال حفلات العشاء في الأعمال الأدبية ، المسرحية بشكل خاص، لمناقشة قضايا متنوعة في شكل مشاهدات عرقية والتي تنتهي بمواقف عدائية بين الشخصيات. يركز هذا البحث على مسرحيتين: *التجمع الغريب* و *العار*. نبأياً، يبدأ هذا العمل بمقدمة توضح معنى الحوار العرقي، حفلات العشاء في الأدب، ولمحة عن الدراما الأمريكية في فترة ما بعد أحداث سبتمبر. يعقب ذلك، تحليل المسرحيتين المختارتين في ضوء المضمون المذكور. أما الاستنتاج فيلخص نتائج البحث. يتضمن هذا التالي : (1) يتم استخدام حفلات العشاء كوسيلة لعرض المواقف والقضايا المختلفة. (2) يتم تصوير شخصيات الضيوف من مختلف الأعراق والثقافات والاتجاهات. (3) يدور النقاش حول مواضيع مختلفة ويحاول كل ضيف عرض وجهة نظره من خلال دفاع قوي. (4) غالباً ما تنتهي الحفلات من هذا النوع بشكل سلبي بمشاجرة. (5) المسرحيات المختارة هما مثال لهذا النوع من الدعوات.

الكلمات الدالة: الجدل العرقي، حفلات العشاء، الفن المسرحي بعد الحادي عشر من أيلول، مسرحية *التجمع الغريب*، مسرحية *العار*.

1. Introduction and Background

Race relations remain a prominent issue, particularly in multicultural societies, like the American society, due to the conflicts among their diverse communities in manners, customs, values, and beliefs.

1.1 Interracial Communication

Communication as a means among people is regarded as "the organizing principle of human social life ...[it] constructs the social world rather than ... describing that world" (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, p. lii). Since the attention of scholarly studies focuses on intercultural communication, most of these studies have a relation to interracial communication. In their book *Interracial Communication: Theory into Practice*, Orbe and Harris (2015, p. 6) tackle this concept intensively, focusing on the American society as a sample. The two authors indicate that during the early to the mid of 1970s, some books emerged on this field and formed a foundation or background for the study of the term.

Rich, as cited in Orbe and Harris (2015, p.6), refers to the concept as an interaction between whites and non-whites in particular, or among people of different races within the same nation in general. The concept also denotes the talk among representatives of nations. Such type, as Rich observes, is different from other forms of communication like interpersonal and intercultural. This view indicates the earlier definition of the term.

Then Orbe and Harris (2015. p.7) shift historically to point out that as the time has passed, the term has included types of communication that cover cultural differences such as interactions affected by age, race, ethnicity, abilities, sex, national origin and religion.

In a sequence, Orbe and Harris (2015, p.7) provide a general definition in which the term is regarded as "the transactional process of message exchange between

individuals in a situational context where racial difference is perceived as a salient factor by at least one person" (p.7). Once more, the two authors suggest that one of the main factors of the importance of studying interracial communication is that race is still to be one of the chief important issues, especially in the American society. In this respect, multiracial aspects have valued specific racial groups over others because of race and racism that based on colour, religion, ethnic diversity, nationality, and others.

Harding, as referred to in Orbe and Harris (2015, p. 14), sees the matter differently in which he presents advantages of such type of communication. In this context, Harding indicates that:

This concept helps people understand that a person's racial/ethnic identity influences how that person experiences, perceives, and comes to understand the world around him or her. Everyone has a racial location, defined primarily in terms of the racial and ethnic groups to which that person belongs.

Littlejohn and Foss (2009, p.562) opine that interracial communication is a type of study that includes the arguments between/among people of dissimilar historical races. The process refers to the encounters between/ among persons of various racial, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. It also covers the researching of the racial phenomenon, attempting to determine the problems and prospects of such issue. Furthermore, the writers demonstrate that the old perception of race depends mainly on superficial or physical criteria regardless such variations as language, culture and social groupings. In the United States, for example, ethnicity has a great role in constructing different corners of life, reflecting that "race remains socially and politically salient in some communities although its biological basis has been in doubt scientifically" (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, pp. 562-3).

In addition, Littlejohn and Foss (2009) keep on explaining that the practical application of 'interracial communication' began prior than the study of the concept. As a field of research, it has begun since the 1970s and 1980s. The processes that have been done before 1970s can be ranked as "rhetorical communication or cybernetics, and neither of these fields imagined interracial work" (p. 563). Edward Hall, Margaret Mead, and others have been regarded as the anthropologists of the early research on the interracial communication of African and Asian cultures. In 1970, Andrea Rich, Arthur L. Smith and Molefi Kete Asante wrote an article entitled "An Approach to Teaching Interracial Communication," which has become the first intellectual and modern treatment of the term in the academic field. In the same series, Arthur L. Smith's book *Transracial Communication* in 1973 and Andrea Rich's book *Interracial Communication* in 1974, have formed the foundation for the study of how individuals communicate within racial groupings (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, p. 563). Thus, interracial communication is as old as human beings can interact with each other; but as a formal field of study is initiated from 1970s up on.

1.2 Dinner Parties in literature

According to McGee (2001), the using of a dinner party in a literary text is a crucial process not only in defining the characters, their world and their relationship to the cosmos, but also "in structuring ... the story and ... in understanding the author's relationship to ... historical times" (p. 3). However, meals and customs of the food are significant material of any culture. In "The Most Disastrous Dinner Parties in Fiction," Somers (2015) observes that:

When an author assembles their characters for an evening, the reader begins to anticipate the lovely disasters to come, and is disappointed when it's just a lot of dull chat and decent grub—much like any party we might actually attend in real life. Boring!

Dinner parties are often symbolically related with the image of the Last Supper which is found in 'history' and 'theology'. This portrait depicts Jesus' meal with the Apostles with an implied reference to the betrayal. However, there are views focusing on matters such as the relationship of Christ with the Communion of the Apostles or how the prophet used food, particularly bread and wine. According to Wessel (1964, p. 6), the origin of the thread of the Last Supper has a relation to early "sepulchral art" and "catacomb paintings" that have revealed the traditional Christian arrangements of the food.

In his "introduction" to *Plato's Symposium*, Gill (1999, pp. xviii-xix) refers to this theme as a popular banquet, reinforcing that the event of the Last Supper has a reference in ancient Greek and Roman customs. Plato's *Symposium*, as Gill keeps on, includes sorts of communal dining that demonstrate their cultures and art.

Such connection is closely associated with Christian beliefs in a form of celebration through dining to gain salvation (McCormick, Jr., 1966, p.124). The dining ritual in ancient cultures continued in the same traditions of those of early Christian period to be as an important part and a celebratory custom of the church. Thus, the Last Supper can be regarded as a continuation of previous habits (Newbigin, 1991, pp.90-107).

Religiously, the plot of the Last Supper refers to the Prophet Christ's final meal with his Apostles before the betrayal that the Prophet faced by identifying him to the authorities and arresting him (The Last Supper, 2017). Holy Books have accounts of communal dining and sacrificial meals. In this context, Humphreys (2011, p. 4) explains that the Last Supper is "one of the most famous meals in history". On this occasion, a large number of the world Christians immortalize and celebrate it, calling it "the Lord's Supper," "the Mass," "the Eucharist," "the Breaking of Bread" or "Holy Communion". The Meal and the words of Christ are referred to in all four Gospels. Regarding this day, there is a controversy whether the last supper was a Passover meal or not.

Depending on this, most literary writers, figures or painters have exploited this occasion as a literary device to reveal various themes and topics.

1.3 Post-9/11 Drama

After the incident of the American World Trade Center (WTC) that happened on 11th of September/ 2001, the images of the attack have been reflected frequently in media in the form of "heroism, patriotism, innocence and trauma" (cited in Gerlach, 2015, p.1). The days after the attack have witnessed a concentration on War on Terror, Islam and Muslims in particular. However, the event has marked a new corner in the American history, politics and culture as well as it has become the major turning point in global politics. In this context, Colleran (2012, p. 87) observes that:

The 9/11 date has come to act as a dividing line in the American historical consciousness, separating a prolonged age of innocence from the new and dreadful knowledge of vulnerability used to produce a rhetoric that divided the globe into allies and enemies.

In post-9/11 literature, the art of drama is like the other literary genres that dramatize and portray the event and its consequences. As Gray (2011, p.147) illustrates, drama in the wake of September 11th has been used as a platform for debate, as in Theresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros' play *Omnium Gatherum* (2004), which is set at a post-9/11 dinner party. There are also a number of plays dealing with the attack. But this study tackles *Omnium Gatherum* and *Disgraced* for each has a dinner invitation which becomes a place of revealing different attitudes and subjects.

2. Interracial Communication in *Ominum Gatherum*

The play *Omnium Gatherum* (2004) by the two American female writers Theresa Rebeck (b.1958) and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros (b.1960) is a miniature of a dinner party in Manhattan in post-9/11 America. It reflects the voices of various cultural figures as they argue about topics including capitalism, terrorism, socialism, feminism, heroism, food, culture, wealth, morality, religion, imperialism, Eastern meditation, Star Trek, and justice.

Colleran (2012, p.22) indicates that the dinner party in the play parodies public icons such as the hostess Marth Stewart and the critic and writer of global issues Edward Said. The guests are drawn from real and common life. In their talk, there is a variance within each pair: the conservative writers and radical writers, the vegans and non-vegans, men and women, blacks and whites, etc. The setting metaphorically occurs at another world, somewhere between Heaven and Hell. Yet, the main line of the play is eating food "in the hope of understanding and fellowship" (Rebeck and Gersten-Vassilaros, 2004, p. 13)¹.

In the play, Suzie hosts the guests in her decorated dining room in the evening. She has invited seven persons including Terence (a British journalist, English Christopher Hitchens-like critic and analyst), Roger (an American writer; a conservative Tom Clancy-style novelist), Julia (an African-American, devoted to her vision of peace and equality), Lydia (a staunch feminist and vegan), Khalid (the party's Arab guest, who stands for Edward Said, highly critical of America's policies in the Middle East), Jeff (Joseph Lyle Taylor, a soft-spoken firefighter), and Mohammed, the last guest who represents the terrorist. The play, thus, takes twofold side: "the need to face ourselves and the need to face the enemy" (Colleran, 2012, p.28). Moreover, the talk among the guests is shifting from comedy to realism to satire and ends in chaos. It deals mainly with 9/11 attacks. Thus, as explained, in the words of Isherwood, the play is:

A dinner party from hell -- literally! -- disintegrates merrily onstage at "Omnium Gatherum," a new play that serves up a smorgasbord of emotional and intellectual responses to 9/11 in between courses of mouth-watering food (qtd. in Omnium Gatherum-Variety, 2005).

Karahashi (2014) illustrates that the words of the title Omnium Gatherum means a "miscellaneous collection" (p. 195). In this dinner party, the collection contains eight characters, the hostess Suzie and seven guests who all stand for, as Terence indicates, "Omnium Gatherum. A collection of peculiar souls" (p. 73). The eight

characters are from various aspects of life, each with strong opinions about the right way and the wrong way to look at any issue. Suzie works on serving perfect food at a perfect table around which perfect debate about all sorts of topics the order of the evening. Even the food in this dinner invitation is universal where the courses are pan-roasted Columbia River salmon, roasted Moroccan spiced lamb, Belgian endive and Anjou pear salad, and a non-stop volley of furious opinions offered up by a diverse group of guests who eat, drink and laugh.

In her luxurious Manhattan flat with a long table and chair, opposed characters are placed at opposite ends with different tones and opinions among the guests, who are constantly interrupted by new dishes. The characters reveal their shallowness and superficiality. The talk is initiated by Khalid who from time to time adds something universal about the digital divisions of the mankind:

Khalid: 100 people: 57 Asians 21 Europeans 14 from the Western Hemisphere, north and south, 8 Africans 52 would be female 48 would be male 70 would be non- white 70 would be non-Christian... . 30 would be Christian. 89 would be heterosexual, 11 would be homosexual 6 people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth and all 6 would be from the United States... . 80 would live in substandard housing... . 70 would be unable to read... . 50 would suffer from malnutrition (pp. 9- 11).

This reflects the diversity of the world population that varies according to race, ethnicity, sex, and the distribution of wealth. Khalid also speaks about 'poverty' and 'exploitation' in the world before starting eating. Such atmosphere is interrupted frequently by asking questions about the food or costumes by Suzie and others to avoid much intension:

Khalid: Unbridled capitalism has long been a concern to the global community-

Suzie: (To Julia.) I love your jaket, is that Donna's?

Khalid: Warnings have been made again and again and the resistance in America-

Julia: I got it at Lohman's. They cut the tag out.

Khalid:- to the simplest examination of this basic question has been rather absolute. We must reflect.

Lydia: Americans, reflect?

Roger: Hey. You don't get to criticize us after you blew up the World Trade Center. (They all protest at once.) (p.14).

This shift, as Robert Brusetin (2003) observes, reflects that *Omnium Gatherum* "strongly indicts the unthinking hedonism of a consumer society in which, as one character observes, 'our spiritual response to any catastrophe should be to go out and shop'" (p. 27).

Actually, the debate in the play demonstrates radical differences and diversions. It does not offer solutions without any claim of solving global crises. However, the visitants "represent a broad variety of political points of view" (Clack et al., eds., 2003, p. 28). In this regard, the British journalist, Terence, mixes his irony with regular drinking of red wine. His initial debate is the Palestinian question, over which he comes to quarrel with Roger. On the other hand, Roger expects the disaster of 9/11 by giving a response to the rising tide of Muslim terrorism, as he views: "We have got to get a little crazy on everybody" (p. 66). In reaction, Lydia, as a pacifist and vegan, accuses Roger of using "words like 'evil' to trick people into subscribing to your political agenda" (p.23). However, the hostess Suzy tries to reduce the high aggressive mood, saying: "Such a lovely debate. Wonderful, really, bravo to everyone. Now, for the salad. I, for one, have never been a fan of frisee" (p.42).

Toward the end of the evening, Suzie's special guest, Mohammad the terrorist, arrives. It initially seems that her intention is to add extra surprises to her party: "I did manage to tempt a rather interesting young man to stop by, for just a few minutes" (p. 58) in order to "answer some of the many questions we've all been discussing tonight in such a lively fashion" (p. 58). An argument between

Mohammed and Khalid, who represents the world of diplomacy and the Arab intellectual like the figure Edward Said, follows. Mohammed accuses Khalid of siding with "infidels" (p.60) by supporting the United States, "the first terrorist in the history of mankind" (p.60). Khalid then accuses Mohammed of being a "barbarian, a scourge, part of a group of rejects of the Noble Muslim civilization" (p.60). Rather than continuing this argument with Khalid, Mohammed attacks him with a fork, leading the male guests to grapple with Mohammed and then tie him to a chair.

Apparently, the arrival of Mohammed, who turns out to be one of the hijackers from a plane that struck the World Trade Center, serves as a dramatic device that displays the voice of the silent or the other side in the media of 9/11. His claim that "everything you do" is "to silence the Arab community," "You want to take our land, and steal our oil, to corrupt our women, demean our culture and degrade our god" (p.59) is not normally heard in media. Here, the playwrights question and criticize the media that regards the images of the entire Muslim world as terrorists. Mahammed's presence and his comments also offer a response to the fireman Jeff, revealing that the latter actually died during his mission of rescuing victims on September 11th. Eventually, the sound of helicopters becomes louder with a sudden sound of a loud explosion.

Accordingly, Rebeck and Gersten-Vassilaros' treatment of the play and their distribution of the arguments among the characters of different races, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, cultures, positions, customs, and genders reflect the two authors as white Americans. However, they try their best to present the attitudes faithfully; and that's why they give a space to the character of Mohammad to demonstrate the viewpoint of the other side, whether it is accepted universally by people or not.

3. Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*

Disgraced (2011) is a play by the Pakistani American writer Ayad Akhtar (b. 1973). It has received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2013 as an award for best

play. Vincentelli (2014) states that the play is about various issues including religion and tolerance. These affairs are put on the table of a dinner party that ended horribly wrong. *New York Times* praises the work by reporting that:

In dialogue that bristles with wit and intelligence, Akhtar puts contemporary attitudes toward religion under a microscope, revealing how tenuous self-image can be for people born into one way of being who have embraced another (qtd. in Akhtar, 2012).

On his website, Akhtar writes that *Disgraced* deals with the story of Amir Kapoor, "a Muslim-American lawyer who is ...distancing himself from his cultural roots. At the moment of achieving his life-long ambition, he falls victim to professional and personal betrayals, not least of all, his own betrayal of himself" (qtd in CFR Staff, 2013). The protagonist of the play Amir is a successful American who appears in an expensive New York flat, drinks wine, a man near forty of South Asian origin and speaking with a "perfect American accent" (Akhtar, 2011, p.4)². Structurally, the action occurs between 2011-2012 in a "spacious apartment on New York's Upper East Side"(p.3) that consists of living and dining rooms.

It is important to shed light on the events occurred before three months of the dinner invitation, as this gives a background of the nature of the interracial talk in the supper meal. In this context, Amir's wife Emily, a woman of thirty, who is an American painter and is strongly influenced by Islamic imagery, discusses the art with her husband. In addition, Abe Jensen, Amir's nephew, who is seen assimilationist in style as he changes his name from Hussein Malik to Abraham (nick name Abe), to detach his Islamic name, involves in the discussion. His justification of changing his name, as he utters to Amir, is: "You know how much easier things are for me since I changed my name? It's in the Quran. It says you can hide your religion if you have to. It's called taqiyya— " (i:10-11). Abe asks Amir to be a lawyer for the Muslim Imam Fareed who is running a mosque and has been in a jail for several months because he is suspected with terror. According to Emily, the Imam is imprisoned for suspicion in gathering money for "Hamas" (i:12). Amir shows that there is a team of amazing lawyers called Ken and Alex. Racially,

Abe said "They're not Muslim" (i: 12), to which Amir replies: "More comfortable if he wasn't being represented by a couple of Jews?" (i: 12).

The visit of Issac, a white Jewish who works as a curator at the Whitney, to Emily in her apartment initiates the seed of the secrete relationship between the two. The meeting sheds light on several issues that concern with religions and civilizations. For example, Emily refers to Oriental civilization, saying, "The mosaics in Andalusia are bending the picture plane four hundred years before Bonnard... . The Muslims gave us Aristotle. Without their translations? We wouldn't have him. I mean, without the Arabs? We wouldn't even have visual perspective" (ii: 29). But to Issac, it is not acceptable, accusing her with "earnestness" and saying "unusual" statements (ii: 29). To reinforce his disagreement, he reminds her of her being "a white woman" who uses "Islamic forms" (ii: 29); and this leads "to be accused of... Orientalism" especially she has got "the brown husband" (ii: 29), in a reference to Amir. Emily, on the other hand, reminds him of his changing of attitudes towards Islam. In her discussion, she shows that the "Islamic tradition's been doing it for a thousand years... . It's 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" (ii:30). With a strong objection, Issac says, "Repetition. Obliterating the ego. You sound like a post-war minimalist" (ii,30).

We have informed that Amir is of a Pakistani origin but he says he has an Indian ancestry: "I said India. That's what's I put on the form when I got hired" (iii:34), justifying the reason that once Pakistan was a part of India. Moreover, Amir's "birth name is not Kapoor It's Abdullah" (iii: 35). For him, it is a matter of social change.

It is the time of the dinner invitation that takes place in the same apartment after three months of the above events. The gathering consists of Amir, Emily, Issac and Jory, Issac's wife who is an African American Christian woman near forty and who

is described as "commanding," "forthright," "intelligent" and "masculine" (iii: 37). Through their having supper, the individuals discuss various issues and topic within interracial bond.

As the visitors, Issac and Jory, come before the punctual time, 7:30 pm, several topics take place including sports, court issues, jobs, Steven (Amir's boss), and a project to form a new firm under the names of " Kapoor, Brathwaite" (iii: 42) that refers to Amir and Jory respectively: " You and me. On our own. In business. Steven and Mort got ahead under pricing the competition. Back in the day, when they got started" (iii: 42).

The talk shifts to be on the book entitled *Denial of Death* which was suggested to Emily by Issac to read before. To the latter, the book is given on purpose:

The only reason people remember this anymore is because it's the book Woody Allen gives to Diane Keaton on their first date in *Annie Hall*. And tells her: 'This is everything you need to know about me' (iii: 45).

The Portrait by the Spanish artist Diego Velazquez takes a part in the current debate. It is the picture about the painter's slave/apprentice, the Moorish Juan de Pereda. It gives an inspiration of what Emily has done of Amir; both works have important visual echoes of one another and similar implications about race relations. It is also the name Emily has given to her portrait. In a sequence, an intense conflict throughout the play continues and the conversation on art turns to be boring and racial.

With speaking on flying, a new racial direction takes place. At this point, Issac mentions that he has "a...little bit of an issue when it comes to flying" (iii: 52), expressing it: "I hate flying. It's a primal thing. The thought of not being on the ground... opens up this door to like every fear I have –" (iii 52). Jory, in response, tells the real reason of such fear due to "[p]anic attacks" (iii:52), a matter that

opens a storm of words of both sides: Issac shows that: "I'm not at my best. And the hysteria around security only makes it worse" (iii: 52); to Amir: "It's a nightmare at the airports" (iii: 52). The matter of security at the airports is the most one that lets Issac feel upset but to Amir the case is different. The interracial communication reached its climax with Amir's comment:

EMILY: I totally disagree. The next attack is coming from some white guy who's got a gun he shouldn't have...

AMIR: And pointing it at a guy who more or less looks like me.

EMILY: Not necessarily.

ISAAC: (to Amir) If every person of Middle Eastern descent started doing what you're doing...

AMIR: So you do have suspicions?

ISAAC: I mean, not me, I'm just saying --

AMIR: Look. Hell. I don't blame you (iii: 54).

The speech about religion, especially Islam and some Islamic figures, turns to be the most argumentative one. Issac initiates the thread as he refers to the gap he has created between Emily and Amir: "When it comes to Islam? Monolithic pillar-like forms don't matter... And paintings don't matter. Only the Quran matters" (iii: 57). Amir points out several Islamic issues: "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" (iii: 58). The Jewish people also suffered, Issac reacts. Amir, on the other hand, explains:

Desert pain. ... Jews reacted to the situation differently... They turned it over, and over, and over. ... They're looking at things from a hundred different angles, trying to negotiate with it, make it easier, more livable. ... Whatever they do, it's not what Muslims do. Muslims don't think about it. They submit. That's what Islam means, by the way. Submission (iii: 58-59).

This interpretation lets Issac, the Jewish, conclude that "the problem isn't Islam. It's Islamo-fascism" (iii: 58). However, talking about Al-Quran is another intensive conversation. In this respect, Jory relates this Holy Book with "anger". "Thank you. It's like one very long hate mail letter to humanity" (iii: 60), Amir replies. Emily, on this occasion, looks at it as the one that "sees humanity as stubborn and self-interested" (iii: 60). Issac joins the debate, focusing on "Islamo-fascism... there's a difference between the religion, and the political use of it" (iii: 60). On the other hand, Amir indicates the equality between the church and the state in the views of Islam; a matter that is objected by Jory who breaks the intension by resuming eating within this dinner party.

Keeping contact, Amir reveals himself as an "*apostate*" (p. 62) who renounces his faith. He invites the others to "talk about something that is in the text...[w]ife beating" (p.63), depending on the verse that reads " *Men are in charge of women...* . If they don't obey... . *Talk to them . If that doesn't work.... Don't sleep with them. And if that doesn't work... Beat. Them*" (p. 64). This point surprises the others who are from different races and religions, for example, Emily's arguments show that "if your wife doesn't listen, leave her. Not beat her" (p. 64); but that was not "how it's been interpreted for hundreds of years" (p.64), Amir reacts. Further, the speech on veil and disagreement with Islam has a spot here. In this field, Amir continues explaining the meaning of Islam and the role of Al-Quran:

The Quran is about tribal life in a seventh- century desert. The point isn't just academic. There's a result to believing that a book written about life in a specific society fifteen hundred years ago is the word of God: You start wanting to recreate that society. After all, it's the only one in which the Quran makes any literal sense... . To be Muslim -- *truly*-- means not only that you believe all this. It means you *fight* for it, too (p.68).

The above speech raises the climax and conflict in the play. This is aroused when Isaac questions Amir about if he feels proud on September 11th and the latter's reply with "yes":

ISAAC: Did you feel pride on September 11th?

AMIR: (with hesitation) If I'm honest...yes

EMILY: You don't really mean that, Amir.

AMIR: I was horrified by it, okay? Absolutely horrified.

JORY: Pride about what? About the towers coming down? About people getting killed?

AMIR: That we were finally winning.

JORY: We?

AMIR: Yeah.... I forgot... which we I was.

JORY: You're an American...

AMIR: It's tribal, Jor. It is in the bones. You have no idea how I was brought up. You have to work real hard to root that shit out (iii: 69).

The talk is developed to be more aggressive, ending with Issac's accusing of Amir as absurd and the latter's accusing of the former as naïve. Highly, the intensive argument leads the two to be near fighting but instead Emily interrupts by food to remind that the atmosphere is in dinner party. Near the end of the invitation, Jory and Amir discuss the firing of the Pakistani from the firm outside. In addition, Emily and Isaac involve with a secret affair , reflecting Amir's wife as an adulterous woman. This is the personal disgraced on which Amir suffers and leads to their divorce. But the general disgrace is revealed upon the tongue of Abe at the end of the play:

For three hundred years they've been coming to our part of the world. Taking our land, drawing new borders, replacing our laws, making us want be like them. Look

like them. Marry their women. They disgraced us. They disgraced us. And then they pretend they don't understand the rage we've got? (iv:87).

Basu (2016, pp. 83-102) explains that *Disgraced* is a thoughtful meditation about what Muslims in the United States have faced in post-9/11 era. The play, as Basu observes, exploits two racial theories: the first regards race as biological, whereas the second as cultural. Therefore, it presents Muslims of Asian countries as powerless to cope with their cultural and religious identities after September 11th. In his review of the play, Jones, as cited in Higgins (2017, p. 108), shows that the text "articulates matters that are not articulated in polite discussion".

Accordingly, Akhtar's handling of the play and the various subjects and issues that have been discussed among the characters show the different attitudes and tendencies of people of different races, religions and cultures. However, one can feel that the dramatist is speaking in a voice of the 'Other' in spite of his trying to be honest in his treatment.

4. Conclusion

The reading of the topic of this study demonstrates the use of dinner parties as a device by the authors to present different attitudes and issues matching with the themes reflected. However, female characters are always the pioneers of this type of invitations. The guests are drawn from different races, religions, cultures, and tendencies. The parties usually happen at home. The arguments turn around different subjects; each guest is trying to present his attitude with a strong defense on his/her viewpoint whether it is positive or negative. Such parties usually end with a destruction and quarrel. This device, though it is an ancient in literature and attributed to the high class society, it has been used in modern and contemporary art especially in post-9/11 literature because it can help in offering different opinions by different types of people in one place and at one time. Thus, a wide space for the writer can be used economically to push a huge of subjects at one seat. In other words, the parties of this type support the writer in reflecting multi

subjects, affairs, stories, tendencies, figures, etc. By doing this, the two argumentative opposed sides (the original and the Other) can be heard in a form of interracial communication.

Accordingly, *Rebeck* and Gersten-Vassilaros' *Omnium Gatherum* and Akhtar's *Disgraced* can be the best examples to present interracial communication at dinner parties to discuss views among characters of different races and religions in post-9/11 period. In the two works, both invitations are spoiled by the hot debates of the guests in which each one never accepts the opinion of the rival or the addressee though they all are invited by a hostess. Thus, struggle and conflict become the prevalent milieu. The dramatists are seen to be influenced by their races and origins though they all try to be honest and neutral in distributing the arguments among the characters by presenting the viewpoints of the different sides.

Notes

¹All quotations concerning the text of Akhtar's *Disgraced* are taken from:

Ayad Akhtar, 2012, *Disgraced* (New York: Amanda Watkins).

²All quotations concerning the text of *Rebeck* and Gersten-Vassilaros' *Omnium Gatherum* are taken from:

Teresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros, 2004, Omnium Gatherum (New York: Samuel French, Inc).

References

- Akhtar, A. (2012). *Disgraced*. New York: Amanda Watkins.
- Akhtar, A. (2014). *The who and the what*. New York: Newsettlers.
- Basu, L. (2016). Between performativity and representation: post-9/11 Muslim masculinity in Ayad Akhtar's *disgraced*. In Aparajita De (ed), *South Asian Racialization and Belonging after 9/11: Masks of Threat*. London: Lexington Books, pp. 83-102.
- CFR Staff . (2013). "Ayad Akhtar wins Drama Pulitzer for 'disgraced'". Available at [http:// www.clydefitchreport.com](http://www.clydefitchreport.com) › Stage › Theater (Accessed 1 December 2018).
- Clack, G., et al. (eds.). (2003). *The arts in America: new directions*. New York: Diane Publishing.
- Colleran, J. (2012). *Theatre and war: theatrical responses since 1991*. New York: Macmillan.
- Gerlach, N. (2015). " Falling men in the Post-9/11 novel." Master Thesis [online]. Available at: <https://books.google.iq/books?isbn=3656903247> (Accessed 10 November 2018).
- Gill, C. (1999). "Introduction." In Plato's *symposium*. London: Penguin Books, pp. xviii-xix .
- Gray, R. (2011). *After the fall: American literature since 9/11*. New York: John Wiley& Sons, Ltd.
- Higgins, J. (2017). *Wisconsin literary luminaries: from Laura Ingalls Wilder to Ayad Akhtar*. New York: History Press.
- Humphreys. C. J. (2011). *The mystery of the last supper: reconstructing the final days of Jesus*. Cambridge: CUP.

- Karahashi, Y. (2014). "A comparative analysis of three plays on disasters: *omnium gatherum*, *carried away on the crest of a wave*, and *radio 311*." In Graley Herren (ed.), *The comparative drama conference series, 11: Text & Representation*. Jedderson: MCFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, pp. 192- 208.
- Last supper, the." (2017). *Khan Academy*. Available at: <https://www.khanacademy.org/.../ap-art.../leonardo-last-supper> (Accessed 3 December 2018).
- Levingston, S. (2014). "Ayad Akhtar: on Muslim identity, and life in America." Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/...akhtar...muslim-identity...america> (Accessed 5 November 2018).
- Littlejohn, S. W. and Foss, K. A. (eds). (2009). *Encyclopedia of communication theory*. London: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- McCormick, Jr., S. (1966). *The lord's supper: a Biblical interpretation*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- Mcgee, D. (2001). *Writing the meal: dinner in the fiction of twentieth-century women writers*. London: University of Toronto Press.
- Newbigin, N . (1991). "Cene and cenacoli in the ascension and pentecost companies of fifteenth-century florence." In Konrad Eisenbichler, ed, *Crossing the boundaries: Christian piety and the arts in Italian medieval and renaissance confraternities*. New York: Western Michigan University, pp. 90-107.
- Omnium Gatherum –variety". (2005). Available at: <https://variety.com/2003/legit/.../omnium-gatherum-2-1200538993> (Accessed 3 October 2018).
- Orbe, M. P. and Harris, T. M. (2015). *Interracial communication: theory into practice, 3rd edition*. New York: Sage.
- Phelan, P. (1993). *Unmarked*. New York: Routledge.

Rebeck, T. and Gersten-Vassilaros, A. (2004). *Omnium gatherum* . New York: Samuel French, Inc.

Somers, J. (2015). "The most disastrous dinner parties in fiction." Available at: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/.../the-most-disastrous-dinner-parties> (Accessed 2 October 2018).

Wessel, K. (1964). *The last supper*. New York : Taplinger Publishing Company.

White, A. F. and Chansky, D. (2016). "The dinner from hell/ the chef from Le Cordon Blue." In Dorothy Chansky and Ann Folino White, eds., *Food and the Theatre on the World Stage*. London: Routledge, pp. 137-151.