TRIPLE CONSCIOUSNESS: EXPLORING NATION, CULTURE, AND RELIGION IN LEILA ABOULELA, FADIA FAQIR, AND MONICA ALI

by

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(Under the Direction of Dr. Esra Mirze Santesso)

ABSTRACT

In 1897, W.E.B. Du Bois published an article in *The Atlantic* entitled "Strivings of the Negro People," in which he introduced the concept of double consciousness: an struggle that Du Bois identified as inherent to the African American experience. In considering the imagery within Du Bois's work, it could be argued that Du Bois was in truth arguing not for a double consciousness, but for a triple consciousness: of race, ethnicity, and nation. Drawing from the geographic locations and creative imagery used within Du Bois's work, I assert my own "triple consciousness" – that of nation, race, and religion – and argue for its application beyond solely African American literature to literature which contains any immigrant experience. I will focus primarily on modern Muslim Women's Literature, reading triple consciousness within the works of Leila Aboulela, Fadia Faqir, and Monica Ali.

INDEX WORDS: Double Consciousness, Du Bois, Other, Muslimwoman, Headscarf, Veil, Fadia Faqir, Monica Ali, Leila Aboulela

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my father, Richard Van De Velde; to my mother, Sharon Van De Velde; and to my sister, Meredith Van De Velde. Thank you for your unending support, your unfailing belief in my abilities, and your unfathomable love.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1897, African American civil rights activist, poet, and scholar W. E. B. Du Bois published an article in *The Atlantic* entitled “Strivings of the Negro People.” Later revised and reprinted in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the article explored a concept that Du Bois termed “double consciousness” – an internal struggle that Du Bois identified as inherent to the African American experience (Bruce 299). “It is a peculiar sensation,” wrote Du Bois:

> this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, --an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 80)

In “Strivings,” Du Bois identifies two seemingly disparate elements of the African American experience – that of being an “American” and a “Negro. “Du Bois posits that life as an African American necessitated a continual navigation between these “two warring ideals,” creating a provocative explanation for issues of race. This critical idea, which has received great scholarly attention, remains applied largely to African American literature and the African American experience.

Through consideration of the use of imagery and geographic references within Du Bois’s works, I will argue that Du Bois’s ideas of double consciousness merit an expansion of the idea from application solely the African American experience to that of “the Other” more broadly. Specifically, through examination of Du Bois’s images in “Strivings of the

Negro People," I will suggest particular applicability of Du Bois's ideas of double consciousness to the experience of the Muslim immigrant in modern literature. Through close reading of "Strivings of the Negro People" alongside Du Bois's other essays on race and ethnicity, I will argue that scholarly interpretations of Du Bois's divisions of double consciousness – that being nationality and race – deserve more complication. I argue that Du Bois himself creates unclear boundaries between his depiction of race and his depiction of ethnicity within "Strivings of the Negro People." While he sets up a binary between "American" and "Negro," Du Bois is truly arguing in triplicate; his double consciousness is in reality a triangulation, namely, of race, nation, and ethnicity. In recognizing Du Bois's triplicate, I will suggest as an alternate source of exploration a "triple consciousness" of my own, defined as nation, race, and religion, that is applicable to both the African American experience specifically and the immigrant experience more generally. Drawing upon images of "the veil" in Du Bois's work, I will explore the veil as a critical motif within Muslim women's literature, explore Du Bois's discussion of the veil to specific arguments concerning the veiling of the Muslim woman, and will then explore the presence of said "triple consciousness" in three works about Muslim women immigrants to Great Britain: *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela, *The Cry of the Dove* by Fadia Faqir, and *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali in order to create discourse between separate scholarly ideas within the field of postcolonial literary criticism.

Double Consciousness: Origins, Limitations, and Expansions

Du Bois's concept of double consciousness as a means of conceptualizing the African American experience has received widespread critical attention. Scholars such as Frank Kirkland, have seen double consciousness as a valid critical discourse that typifies "with a sense of understanding, black people as problematically responding to scenarios with racially contested expectations" (Kirkland 138). Others, such as Adolph Reed and Lawrence Bobo, have criticized double consciousness a critical concept more suited to the political and social unwindings of Du Bois's context; for example, Reed claims it is contingent upon the evolution of "neo-Lamarckian social science," while Bobo identifies it as a natural factor of the current political climate of "racial prejudice and racial attitudes in lockstep with the economic interests and ambitions of working-class whites" (190). In his argument, Bobo expands double consciousness from nation to race, by defining it in opposition to "working-class whites." The theory of double consciousness has also received criticism from scholars such as Kerry Rockquemore for Du Bois's use of imagining an act of division between nationality and culture in order to imagine and valorize cultural hybridity between the two of them – a "merg[ing]" into a "truer and better self" which is the "end of [the Negro's] striving" (80). While debates over the merits of double consciousness as a critical theory continue, the term has undoubtedly come to be widely known as one means of conceptualizing the African American experience and has been used as a viable theoretical frame from which to delve into other venues of Otherness.

It is possible to build upon the scholarship that has broadened the argument concerning the scope of double consciousness from the African American experience to an experience of "the Other" – categorical identities including race, class, gender, and culture.

Frank Kirkland pointed out that Du Bois's exploration of double consciousness was not "speaking strictly to African Americans" and could be applied more broadly to any marginalized racial group navigating the unfamiliar waters of a new nation (80). Kirkland argues that within *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois deliberately references: "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (80). With language dripping with allusion to other nations and cultures, Du Bois elevates his argument within the expanded *The Souls of Black Folk.* This expansion, Kirkland argues, indicates that Du Bois

> recognized one hundred years ago that these crucial social differentiations [that is, the struggle between race and ethnicity] were not national but global in scope. What is new in our new century is not that transnational reach of black experience but rather the degree to which the global and the national are imbricated in each other and the immense political and cultural implications of this dramatic shift. (80)

Kirkland pushes the bounds of current application of double consciousness from the African American experience to the experience of a cultural outsider within any nation in which their ethnicity is not the majority group. In accepting that Du Bois himself posited this broader application of the term, Kirkland suggests that such scholarly appropriation from the experience of one ethnic group to that of another would be acceptable.

While I accept Kirkland's suggestion that Du Bois welcomed and insinuated the expansion of double consciousness application in African American society to application to all cultural outsiders, I argue that Du Bois's language particularly suggests its theoretical application to not only the racial, but also the religious, Other. Du Bois's language within

The Souls of Black Folk drips not only with geographic references to distinct racial groups, but also speaks to an exotic group of individuals, who share an ethnicity and a religion often distinct from those of African Americans. Even within the original article of "Strivings of the Negro People," Du Bois included phrases such as "Ethiopia the shadowy" and "Egypt the Sphinx," which both alludes to African Americans' ethnic roots within Africa. Yet, Du Bois's references to these particular geographic locations do not seem accidental; they are invested with a deeper, richer sense of imagery than simply a point on a map. These nations are predominantly Muslim, and by making allusions to religion as an element that interacts with double consciousness, Du Bois sows the seeds of an argument which he invites, but does not explicitly bring to its conclusion: that there is a religious implication within double consciousness that has yet to be drawn out.

Yet very little scholarship pursues the reflection of double consciousness in the lives or literature of any group beyond that of African Americans. Perhaps part of the reason why is that Du Bois's original definition of double consciousness is limited to two relatively problematic categories that merit a further complication or distinction. Within "Strivings," Du Bois refers to double consciousness as consciousness of individual "two-ness" through being both "an American" and "a Negro" ("Strivings" 1). Many scholars, including Paul Gilroy and Kerry Rockquemore, have accepted the binary that Du Bois offers his readers: that the African American experience is defined by a cleaving between the navigation of one's nation ("American") and one's race ("a Negro"). Other scholars, such as Bruce Dickinson have argued that Du Bois created a binary between nation and ethnicity, with "the essence of a distinctive African consciousness" as its "spirituality, a spirituality based in Africa but revealed among African Americans in their folklore, their history of patient

suffering, and their faith" (301). The confusion between scholars about Du Bois's intentions is well merited. Du Bois explicitly writes about race in several publications, particularly in his essay "The Conservation of Races," and would have been familiar with the definition and development of the term; any confusion created around its use, then, should be assumed as an opportunity for scholarship to build upon.

Du Bois works with at least two conceptualizations of what it means to be "a Negro" within "Strivings." First, Du Bois works with the concept of the "American Negro" in terms of economic equality, education, political participation, and human rights. In his publication "The Negro Problem," Du Bois argues for access to justice for the "American Negro."

> In the struggle for his human rights the American Negro relies above all on the feeling of justice in the civilized world. We are no barbarians or heathen, we are educable and our education is increasing; our economic abilities have proven themselves. We too want to have our chance in life. ("Strivings" 2)

Within this work, Du Bois identifies "The American Negro" as part of a collective whole, which deserves equitable treatment and justice and shares a comparatively poor situation in social politics and policy. Du Bois also explicitly defines the group in terms of its race, connecting race, politics, and class: "[T]he fact that there is in America a proscribed race also makes it easier to proscribe classes, and class privileges are responsible for the fact that Negroes find deaf ears for their wishes" (284). Within "Strivings," this form of argumentation takes the form of attention to "the ballot box" and the "ideal of liberty" – forms of representation and equality denied to African Americans on the basis of their race, as well as an exploration of the discrimination by "'higher' against the 'lower' races" ("Strivings" 2).

Indeed, in "Strivings," Du Bois refers to qualities of "The American Negro" that extend beyond race. He references "the soul-beauty of a race," "black artisans" and "black artists" ("Strivings" 1). As the piece moves on, Du Bois moves away from a simple advocacy for political participation and social equality, but begins to describe more intangible qualities which he hopes to see the African American claim and pass on to others:

> Work, culture, and liberty—all these we need, not singly, but together; for to-day these ideals among the Negro people are gradually coalescing, and finding a higher meaning in the unifying ideal of race,—the ideal of fostering the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to, but in conformity with, the greater ideals of the American republic, in order that some day, on American soil, two world races may give each to each those characteristics which both so sadly lack. ("Strivings" 2)

It is here that Du Bois refers to something that is beyond the simple boundaries of skin color, reaching for an intangible connection between members of a particular social group. As Judith Stein remarks in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, "Du Bois acknowledged that Afro-Americans were Americans by citizenship, language, religion, and politics, but they were also members of a 'vast historic race' which was international" (82). It is here that Du Bois expands from a definition of the African American that describes race, and into a definition of African American that describes ethnicity, therefore moving from the national to the transnational conceptualization of race.

While Du Bois sets up a binary between "two unreconciled strivings" within "Strivings," he is truly discussing three unreconciled strivings. The "Negro people" do not navigate only between their nation and their race, but they navigate between their nation, their race, and their ethnicity. Du Bois, at some level, must be aware of the confusion that

he creates through using the term "double" while speaking in triplicate. However, in his excitement to imagine the future of the African American race, within his excitement to carve out an imagined space for them, combining their exotic ethnic heritage and imagined geographic locations, and within historical and scholarly pressures to create a binary distinction, he fails to draw a distinction between the characteristics of their race and the characteristics of their ethnicity. It is important to note that this distinction needs to be made, because while African Americans as a collective share a racial identity, their ethnicities are rich and various. An African practitioner of vodun in Puerto Rico and an African practitioner of Christianity in Chicago may share the same race, but have completely separate religious traditions; in other words, being African American does not constitute a stable position in one ethnic group. A shared history is not the same as a shared religion, and to assume so is to severely diminish a critical element of one's identity.

It is within this context that I suggest a complication of Du Bois's proposition of "double consciousness" to "triple consciousness." This preposition is made in an effort to remove the false binary which Du Bois sets up, and allow for his original theory to extend to the far reaches of identity which Du Bois had allowed it to explore, but had not named. This is not a suggestion without precedent. Petro Rivera suggested the use of triple consciousness in application to the experiences of Afro-Latino/as within the United States, identifying a "three-ness-a Latin@, a Negro, an American" (159). Debbie Lee, another pioneer of triple consciousness, suggested its use within a reading of Regino Pedroso's life and poetry through his triple experience of being "Black, Chinese, and a member of the Cuban working class" (226). Both of these suggestions of triple consciousness are posited for application to a member of the African American community with cultural associations

within another ethnic group. However, both suggestions still merit further complication, as their triplicate nature is asserted because the individuals in question who should navigate "triple consciousness" are of mixed race, so the authors are suggesting that their triple consciousness be between their two racial identities and their national identity. Furthermore, while both are helpful for expanding the application of Du Boisian theory beyond the African American community, they do not break from tradition and extend its application to another racial group. Nor do the binaries suggest a further complication of triple consciousness beyond the terms of nation and race, never inviting a different third factor for consideration.

However, the complications expressed within the exploration of "Ethiopia" and "Egypt" – Du Bois's deliberate inclusion of imagery which allude to separate religious groups – lead me to question the role that religion plays within the immigrant experience and his or her navigation of triple consciousness. The religious component, while not explicitly brought into play by Du Bois, does have a shadow of existence within his original argument. I believe that this shadow should be given a deeper consideration. Religion deserves to be recognized by Du Bois because of the deeply interior nature that it brings to play within triple consciousness; a nation is a geographic location, a race is an exterior expression, but religion is an interior experience that is extremely intimate – and can be absolutely empowering for individual self-worth and identity.

While borrowing their term of "triple consciousness," I will suggest two new aspects for theoretical application. First, I suggest the application of "triple consciousness" to Muslim immigrants to Great Britain, whom I argue both experience "double consciousness" firsthand as they navigate nationality and race within their diasporic experience. Second, I

suggest the recognition of additionally complicating factors through which "the Other" navigates within "triple consciousness" as nationality, race, and religion. As argued above, membership within each of these groups is separate and deserves to be recognized as such. I suggest the conflation of nation and ethnicity, introducing religion as a third, separate, and critically important factor for navigation in triple consciousness. In terms of why I am suggesting the application of this new configuration to the study of modern Muslim women's literature: I am particularly interested in the study of Islam because of its connection to the post-colonial experience, as well as its nod to Du Bois's reference to Islamic nations within his original articulation of "double consciousness."

Triple Consciousness in Application

Having argued above that Du Bois invites the application of double consciousness from African Americans to any "Other" in an unfamiliar nation, I will extend the idea of triple consciousness from the African American experience more broadly – to the Muslim immigrant community within Great Britain. My particular reasoning for extending the application of triple consciousness to the Muslim immigrant community, and even more particularly – to the women within that community – is through Du Bois's imagery in and choice of language within "Strivings." In relating the physical object of separation between African and American "warring ideals, Du Bois uses the following description:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, *born with a veil*, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. (80) [emphasis added]

Du Bois choses to define the barrier between nation and race as "a veil." Scholar Frank Kirkland expertly navigates this description and parses the meaning of "the veil" referenced above, as the source of a "broad-based cultural dilemma" – both an "impediment, on racially segregated groups…to the fulfillment and the belief in the fulfillment of African American ideals and objectives" and a "concealment from white people's comprehension the legacy and currency of African-American practices and forms of life" (137). Thus, the veil serves as both a barrier to racial belonging and a barrier to national belonging for the mediating other. For Du Bois, the metaphor of the veil is as a filter, through which an individual can construct a viable identity.

Because I am looking at the Muslim woman immigrant, I want to bring in the physical veil, creating a dialogue between Du Bois's conception of the veil and the physical act of veiling of the Muslim woman. What Du Bois articulates concerning the veil as a filter is also applicable to the Muslimwoman. The veil is an object of incredible symbolic importance in Muslim literature and Muslim culture as an object of religious clothing for women, with which Du Bois would surely be familiar. In her crucial essay "Deploying in Muslimwoman," Miriam Cooke explores the "singular identity" into which Muslim women are associated through employing the term "Muslimwoman" – a verbal reminder that many outsiders view a Muslim woman's religion, her gender, and her race as inextricably linked (Cooke 91). Cooke argues that it is the veil, real or imagined, that functions as race for a female Muslim; it is "a marker of essential difference that Muslim women today cannot escape" (91). Scholar Leila Ahmed artfully explores the extensive mythos surrounding the idea of "the veil" in association with Islam as typifying "Islam's degradation of women" and serving as a "fatal obstacle" to the "attainment of that elevation of thought and character

which should accompany the introduction of Western civilization'" (Ahmed 153). The Muslimwoman is defined by other Muslims, by Orientalists, by neo-Colonialists – by everyone, it seems, but herself. As an immigrant to Western society, the Muslimwoman is continually navigating a triple consciousness of nation, race, and religion, and her hijab stands as the most visible symbol of both religious conviction and societal Othering. Literature containing the Muslimwoman is full of navigation of triple consciousness. Applying the Du Boisian concepts of the African American experience into a more globalized experience allows me to transcend from race into religion, broadening scholarship and inviting a reading that is more inclusive and transnational in nature.

One novel in which the motif of the veil is particularly poignant is Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005). In the novel, Aboulela tells the story of Najwa, a Sudanese girl who grows up Khartoum's upper class. Najwa is accustomed to a lavish lifestyle, which is afforded to her and her family through her father's alleged embezzlement of government funds. When her father's illegal maneuvers are discovered, Najwa and her family are forced to flee to Great Britain as asylum-seekers, where Najwa is forced to determine and navigate her identity through the facets of her race, nation, an ethnicity.

What is striking about Najwa's narrative are the changes that she chooses to make to her faith in order to gain security, redemption, and even invisibility within both her race and her adopted nation. Najwa's childhood in Khartoum was not religious; while teaching principles of charity and familial obedience, her mother and father remained secular in their instruction. Many years later, in London, her brother recounts: "we weren't brought up in a religious way, neither of us. We weren't even friends in Khartoum with people who were religious" (95). The religious people with whom Najwa was acquainted in Khartoum

were of a lower socioeconomic status; they were "the servants" and members of the lower class, who would "be praying in the garden," physically separated from Najwa and her family by walls and economically separated from their family by their income, prospects, and education (95). Najwa encounters girls at school who are religious, choosing to wear tobes (modest Muslim women's clothing, covering the head) and active in prayers. She describes these girls as "provincial," citing their difference in class as "the reason we were not friends" (14). Like her parents, Najwa creates barriers between herself and active participants in religious groups, distancing herself from the religious beliefs of the members of the lower class. The enforcement of distance between her and her religious peers is reinforced through Najwa's friendships. In their childhood, Najwa's upper class friends view the religious inclination of their classmates, and particularly the women who choose to wear the veil, as a constraint to their economic and professional ambitions. Najwa's friend describes wearing the veil as:

> 'Totally retarded,' she said looking at the picture and handing me a spoon. 'We're supposed to go forward, not go back to the Middle Ages. How can a woman work dressed like that? How can she work in a lab or play tennis or anything?'
>
> 'I don't know.' I swallowed spoonfuls of crème caramel and stared at the magazine, reading bits of the article.
>
> 'They're crazy,' Randa said. 'Islam doesn't say you should do that.'
>
> 'What do we know? We don't even pray.' Sometimes I was struck with guilt. (29)

Even though Najwa expresses uncertainty in regards to her feelings about the veil and prayer, her fleeting guilt does not convince her to participate in Islam throughout her time

in Sudan. She maintains distance between classes and maintains both her cultural and her religious identity based in the acquisition of material wealth and emotional attachments.

When Najwa is forced to seek asylum to Great Britain, however, she is forced to navigate a new national culture, her existing race, and determine her feelings concerning her ethnicity. Her transition to England is difficult; lacking a college degree or relationships beyond her immediate family, she has few professional or interpersonal options available to her in London society. She remains, therefore, insulated, surrounded by the indulgent and wealthy culture of Khartoum high-society through limiting her companionship to her mother, brother, aunts, and uncles. She does not experience a new nation; she lives within her reconstruction of her old one. By the same token, her only companionship is with people who share her race and her culture. With the imprisonment of her brother for drug use and the death of her mother, however, Najwa finds herself financially unsupported and under strict instructions from her uncle to "just live off the interest, try not to touch the savings" in her bank account (155). Yet her family has taught her the value of appearances and material goods above all else; in fact, after their father's death and immediately after their migration to London, the "first thing we did was go to Oxford Street and buy clothes" (56). Najwa's inability to practice fiscal self-restraint is hardly surprising. Without family around her to reinforce the arbitrary boundaries of permissible behavior, Najwa indulges deeply, passively satiating her sexual and material desires. In meeting a childhood infatuation, Anwar – a Communist activist from Sudan who actively blasphemed her father in local newspapers and rallies – Najwa makes expensive purchases for him: "a word-processor," "a computer," the tuition for his Ph.D (155). Eventually, the two consummate their relationship. Najwa is consumed by guilt.

The sexual encounter has significant consequences for Najwa, consequences that Najwa is unable to erase with money or with help from her family. Anwar describes her as "Westernized" and "modern," and Najwa feels guilt from abandoning her class position and her moral upbringing. Reflecting on her situation, Najwa reflects that she wants "a wash, a purge, a restoration of innocence. I yearned to go back to being safe with God" (242).

Najwa's reflections are interesting, as there is no point indicated throughout the narrative at which she did feel "safe with God." Her safety has been contingent upon the presence of her family and the presence of funding, not a heavenly protection. She also reflects upon the girls who wore tobes in Khartoum, recalling not their difference in social class (which had consumed her as a child), but rather than difference in demeanor. Najwa reflects, "I envied them something I didn't have but I didn't know what I was. I didn't have a name for it" (134). Najwa is perhaps identifying retroactively a lack of guilt, symbolized through her frequent emphasis of the pure whiteness of the tobes, that the girls wore. In this moment, her decline in class position and her relative moral decline allow her to become attracted to their religion. It is their unblemished nature that she desires, and she believes that she can achieve that be becoming an active participant in their culture.

The problematic nature of Najwa's cultural appropriation becomes evident as her efforts to wear a hijab unfold. From the start, the motivations behind her decision to wear the hijab are questionable; Anwar has called women wearing hijab "'disgusting, what a depressing sight!'" (167), so her choice to wear a hijab will succeed in erasing his affection for her, ridding her of her attachment while requiring her to exert very little agency – and receive very little blame. Also problematic is Najwa's description of the hijab as "a uniform, the official outdoor version of us. Without it, our nature is exposed" (186). Najwa's

descriptions of the hijab, then, seem to package it as a means by which to rid herself of a problematic connection and a means by which to visually purify herself of her "nature," which she perceived to be blemished as a result of her sexual conduct, rather than an experience of liberation or a sign of agency, as scholars such as Cariello would argue.

In fact, throughout *Minaret*, Najwa seems more interested in outward than inward transformations. Particularly since her relocation to London, Najwa becomes obsessed with her appearance, noting that she is gaining weight and that it has "settled on my hips," purchasing clothes, and spending time examining her physical appearance and comparing it to that of others (130). As she tries on the hijab for the first time, her curls "resisted" and "escaped," as she attempts to restrain and reform her identity underneath a cloth her mother had once worn as she oil-treated hair to improve her own appearance (245). Najwa's first thoughts after her transformation are: "Untie the material; observe the transformation. Which made me look younger? Scarf or no scarf? Which made me look more attractive?" (245). As she walks outside in her scarf, she surveys herself in windows and notes the absence of heckling from the construction workers around her. The scarf performs an act of erasure; "I was invisible and they were quiet" (247). Wearing the headscarf gives Najwa a new perspective within triple consciousness; the veil acts a filter through which she can view her new nation, and a symbol by which she can construct her identity. The silence of the construction workers indicates the power of her clothing to impact the perceptions and behavior of others around her.

It should be argued that an act of erasure is exactly what Najwa is hoping to perform, because she continues to wear her hijab after realizing its powers to force her into shadows. Perhaps, this erasure is one of Najwa's means of coping with her aging; through

wrapping her aging features in a scarf, she is able to cleave her life into a period of opulent and attractive youth, and a period of adult invisibility, allowing her to passively cope with her physical changes in adulthood while satiating her vanity. There is no need to argue whether Najwa is, at least in part, wearing the scarf as an act of performance, because she articulates it herself.

> It was inevitable that Anwar would seek me out one last time. He came to my place and rang the bell. Instead of buzzing him in, I said, 'Wait, I'll come down instead.' I put on my new ankle-length skirt, my long-sleeved blouse. I put on my headscarf…There was still laughter in me, the desire to tease him one last time. I tied my headscarf with a pin. I slowly walked down the stairs to the shock on his face. (248)

Particularly compelling about this passage is Najwa's comparison of her wearing the hijab for Anwar to her "day in Selfridges when I had tried on that skimpy black dress and walked out of the changing room to twirl in front of him" (248). At Selfridges, Najwa had encouraged Anwar to participate in trying on the clothing and perfume that the store offered for pleasure, making this act of appropriation performative as they displayed the goods and clothing for each other's pleasure.

> "'Do you want to try anything on?' I asked him, 'You don't have to buy it.'
>
> 'So what's the point?' He seemed uneasy…
>
> I shrugged. 'Just for the fun of it.'"(167)

The idea of trying on a dress "just for the fun of it" and without "having to buy it" is acceptable, but the idea of donning a religious symbol and participating in a religious tradition for the same reasons seems abhorrent. With Najwa making the comparison of

wearing the headscarf to performative appropriation in Selfridges, she reveals the way in which she thinks about herself wearing the veil: as an act to provoke reaction from Anwar, and as a temporary commitment which does not require significant spiritual or emotional buy-in.

The assertion that Najwa's cultural transformation through the embrace of the veil is a shallow and self-serving artifice is an unpopular one. Many critics have seen Najwa's decision to don a headscarf and immerse herself into a conservative Muslim tradition as a positive movement. Marta Cariello is one such critic, calling Najwa's choice "a liberating gesture, in that she openly declares she is no longer going to be signified by the intruding, sexualizing gaze of male, Western hegemony – she will now take agency in her own personal corporal schema" (340). Yet, I argue that Najwa's experimentation with the hijab is thick with themes of outward appearance, rather than inward transformation. While the invisibility her scarf provides does divert the attention of the male gaze, Najwa's subsequent romantic attachment – to a conservative Muslim man – proves that even while attempting to be invisible, she cannot perfectly master that art. The male gaze is present regardless of culture and regardless of methods of subversion or invisibility that the female can practice. Najwa's decision to wear the hijab not only defines her relationship with the patriarchy, but also her relationship with other women. Just as she had defined the tobe-wearing girls in Khartoum purely in terms of their social class, her female employers and superiors define her as a member of a lower class because of her hijab. At work, she realizes her employer "will always see my hijab, my dependence on the salary she gives me, my skin colour, which is a shade darker than hers. She will see these things and these things only; she will never look beyond them" (116). By embracing the hijab, she is forced

to accept the powers and limitations that the veil offers – allowing her to be comparatively invisible, but also placing her in a position of permanent marginalization within society. In wearing a veil, Najwa becomes a symbol – a "Muslimwoman" – rather than functioning as an individual; outsiders assume her religious beliefs and her social class through a summary observation of her physical appearance. Najwa is deliberately sacrificing her individuality and agency through donning the headscarf. She wants to flatter her character in order to keep attention away from it; she does not wish to be a three-dimensional Muslim, but a caricature of a Muslim.

What is the effect of Najwa's navigation of triple consciousness within British society? At the conclusion of the novel, Najwa's decisions concerning the veil, her embrace of a conservative Muslim ideology, and her situation within a narrow circle of contacts leave readers with a sense of frustrated isolation. While Najwa crosses borders, she has no connections with any British nationals – but her interactions in British society enable her to take on British morality. Through taking on the veil, Najwa is able to mediate her experience within British society. Wearing the veil allows Najwa to function as a symbol of a religion and an ethnic tradition – a Muslimwoman – rather than as an individual with a sordid past. It does not give her invisibility, but it gives her anonymity. While Najwa is left with less freedom than she had at the beginning of the novel through the wearing of the veil, she is able to conceal the details of her and her family's impulsive sexual and financial decisions below it. She shapes and constructs her outward appearance, and thus others' conceptions of her, deliberately delving into their reductionist views in order to find a way to hide from her change in class status and moral conduct.

A reverse transformation take places in *The Cry of the Dove* (2007) by Fadia Faqir, a novel which likewise addresses issues of integration and assimilation. In *The Cry of the Dove,* the main character – a Bedouin woman named Salma – is forced to flee her homeland of the Levant after conceiving and delivering a child out of wedlock. In relocating to Great Britain with the help of Roman Catholic nuns, Salma is forced to navigate British culture and to regulate her Muslim beliefs, without a support system of a familiar social, racial, or religious group around her, as Najwa of Aboulela's *Minaret* benefitted from. Unable to hide from British society and without the support or physical presence of her family, Salma views her move to Great Britain as a mandate to leave her religion, at least in its most visible forms, in the past. For Salma, her Muslim identity is threatened in the Western secular nation. She narrates her struggle thus: "Now Salma the dark iris of Hima must try to turn into a Sally, an English rose, white, confident, with an elegant English accent, and a pony" (Faqir 4). Like Najwa, she experiences triple consciousness; however, her response is to choose a lifestyle of assimilation, rather than deliberate self-definition as an "Other."

Within Salma's childhood in a Bedouin tribe in the Levant, Islam guides every principle of her, her family, and her tribe's lives, from their social interactions to their business ventures. Every action in the village is seen as a financial transaction, and Islamic law is the arbitrator of what can be bought and sold. Islam also provides a strict moral code that is applied to the sexual economy, enforced by tribal tensions and patriarchal attitudes towards women that do not allow for female sexual liberties. Religion provides a means of enforcing modesty on the young Bedouin women as the reach puberty. Salma's father, for example, first asks Selma to don a headscarf, after commenting to Salma "'Your breasts are like melons, cover them up!'" (6). If the women in the tribe remove their

headscarves – or worse, their trousers – they are subjected to malicious gossip and avenging brothers. For one of Salma's friends, even the appearance of transgressions results in her death; "Some whispers in the dark turned into a rumour and then turned into a bullet in the head….An old woman in black squatting next to me and sucking on her long pipe whispered, "Good riddance! We've cleansed our shame with her blood!'" (88). When Salma pursues sexual relations with the Bedouin man she is attracted to, and becomes pregnant as a result of that encounter, her tribe's Muslim faith and patriarchal structure serve as the reason for her exclusion from it. Even within her birth nation, Salma's hijab – a symbol of her religious convictions and a requirement within her nation – serves as a mediating presence that constructs and communicates her identity to the friends and family around her.

Religion serves a double role; the reason for Salma's separation from her community and her imprisonment for her own safety, but also as a manifestation of her mother's love. The same sacred text that could compel her mother to exile her daughter gives Salma's mother solace as she parts from her. While on her journey to Great Britain, due to the intervention of Roman Catholic nuns, Salma considers the binary nature of her tribe's chosen faith.

> While Miss Asher was on her knees, praying to the dark wood cross on the bed, I opened the door to the balcony and stepped outside to do my own praying…'I command you to Allah's protection, our maker and breaker, daughter,' said my mother. 'I will never hold my head high as long as she is still breathing,' said my father.' (92)

Interestingly, this is the only passage in which Salma describes herself as performing the act of "praying," but her form of prayer seems to be an act of reflection upon the power dynamics present, not only within Islam, but also within other religions – including Christianity – that are able to guide and sometimes oppress those who are subject to them. When referring to the efforts of the nuns to evangelize to her, she says: "They stripped me of everything: my dignity, my heart, my flesh and blood" (78). Salma seems to conflate the efforts of the nuns, who might be stealing her heart by taking her away from her family, with the efforts of her tribe, who separate her from her newborn infant and her reputation. Even before she reaches Great Britain, therefore, she has witnessed religion as both destructive and protective – a force to be battled, rather than a relationship to be pursued.

Both Salma and Najwa's participation in, or lack of participation in, their Muslim faith while in Great Britain concerns a sense of invisibility and erasure. Salma has few professional opportunities available to her in London because she lacks both proficiency in English and academic training, but unlike Najwa, Salma does not relocate to Britain with a community and therefore cannot immerse herself in Bedouin culture. However, Salma and Najwa view participation in the Muslim community in fundamentally different ways; Najwa seeks out participation in a mosque in order to gain a sense of invisibility, and Salma avoids the Muslim community in order to maintain her sense of invisibility. Salma's isolation functions as a form of self-imprisonment and self-punishment, a form of penance for her sexual misconduct and her physical relocation from her daughter. Salma's integration thus imbues her narrative with greater perspective of the immigrant in opposition to the native Brit.

For Salma, the racial aspect of triple consciousness is critical. In her frequent interactions with British natives, Salma is continually defined in terms of either her religion, when she is wearing a headscarf, or her race, when she chooses to take it off. She even exoticizes and eroticizes herself, commodifying her body to enable it for a sexual exchange. When she interacts with immigration officers, she is described as an "alien;" when she interacts with her mailman, he calls her "girl," repeatedly forgetting her name despite daily reminders (28). At the White Head pub, men yell at her "Hey, alien! You, freak! Why don't you go back to the jungle? Go climb some coconut trees! Fuck off! Go home!" (28). Her landlady, Liz, lost in fantasies of her time in India, conflates Salma with memories of her Indian servants (145). Most offensive of the interactions is her attempt to be prescribed medication from an NHS doctor, who calls her Anglicized name, Sally Asher, "preposterous" and asks her "not to waste [his] time and government money" (95). It is only with the assistance of Parvin, a well-integrated second-generation Pakistani immigrant to Great Britain, that Salma receives the medical assistance she desperately needs. In her salwar kameez, Parvin attacks the doctor for his poor judgment:

> "You call yourself a doctor! … You also think that we waste the NHS, us Pakis. Well, I have some news for you. We are both British and soon we will be sitting in your very seat…. You want us to pay tax. We will pay you in shit because that is what we're getting at the moment..."
>
> I overheard the doctor shout, "You are most welcome to it…miracles…no money…recovering…heart attack…rather live in Pakistan."
>
> "You're fucking welcome to it," Parvin screamed. (141)

In each of these interactions, Salma is defined in terms of her race, treated as part of a group, rather than as a distinct individual. What differentiates Salma's interactions with British society from Najwa's, however, is that most of the interactions define Salma in terms of a different socioeconomic group, rather than purely as a Muslim "other." Rather than becoming transparent, as Najwa does, when she puts on a headscarf, Salma becomes an object for insults that define her as unintelligent ("go back to the jungle") and exotic ("desert rose"), as well as a fiscal drain on the system ('wasting government money"). She is essentialized on the basis of her race, rather than religion, with insults leveled at her that could as easily be applied to cultural outsiders from any racial or religious background. It is within this context that Salma transforms herself into an exotic commodity, making herself marketable for a job in order to bring in a larger income. Like Najwa, she transforms her exterior in order to gain the greatest benefit from the outsiders who summarily define her in terms of her appearance.

Perhaps, in part due to the British nationals' persistent definition of Salma in terms of her outward appearance, Salma pays increasing attention to her own physical appearance as the novel progresses. In fact, Salma does not have any access to her outward appearance until she lives with the nuns who take her from the Levant; it is with them that she first uses a mirror and surveys her physical reflection. She recognizes the English obsession with physical appearances, too, which manifests itself in the beauty counters at department stores:

> A cloud of perfume. The chemists promised that their dye would permanently cover grey hair, their body lotions would turn skin to smooth silk and their facial creams would iron out any wrinkles. Englishwomen were promised they would look 'ten

> years younger'. I always went to the most expensive counter and tried eyeshadows, eye-liners, creams and perfumes on my face and hands. (12)

Like Najwa, Salma attempts to "try on" the products displayed in British department stores by requesting a sample of perfume. Unlike Najwa, Salma is not permitted to try on the aspects of British material culture. The difference in their socioeconomic status, manifested in Salma's "scruffy shoes" as she visits the store, permits one access while keeping the other from it.

Also like Najwa, Salma finds herself obsessing over her perceived physical defects in the British material culture. While Najwa obsesses over her weight gain and aging and attempts to address the problem by donning a headscarf in order to fade away from society, Salma, who already wears a headscarf, obsesses over the relative whiteness and darkness on her body. Salma defines herself in terms of darkness:

> Whenever I looked at the ornate mirror, which Liz had brought all the way from India, I saw a face dripping like honey wax, a face no longer young. My hair was dark, my hands were dark and I was capable of committing dark deeds. (41)

Gazing into a mirror brought from India, Salma subjects herself to the colonizing male gaze and allows herself to be defined as an exoticized and Orientalized "Other." Her darkness, like her age, is considered to be a negative quality. Salma takes her self-loathing and erasure a step further when she attempts to undertake a medical procedure to alter the darkness and elongation of her nipples. Salma's obsession with her nipples comingles with her conflation of whiteness with purity, and her conflation of darkness with sin – as well as grief and confusion over the loss of her daughter and her punishment for exploring sexuality.

> While stitching hems, folding collars and ironing dark-blue suits in Lord's Tailors, under the watchful eyes of my boss, Max, I dreamt of whiteness. Sitting in a cloud of steam and starch, I dreamt of happiness. To sit in a department store coffee shop, buttering my scones, sipping my tepid tea and looking at the colourful dresses and shoes on display as if I belonged…. Sitting in a cloud of steam, I dreamt of weekends in country mansions, tea with the Queen and whiteness. What if I woke one morning a nippleless blonde bombshell, like the ones that splayed their legs in *The Sunday Sport*… What if I turned white like milk, like seagulls, like rushing clouds. Puff, my sinful past would disappear, a surgeon would slice away part of my mind and my ugly nipples… No more unwanted black hair; no more "What did you say your name is?" (90)

In this passage, Salma dreams of "whiteness," which she defines both as happiness and as serving as an active participant in British culture. She fetishizes whiteness, misappropriating British culture and seeking to normalize and naturalize her appearance: an "other" passing as a girl from Spain. Within the above passage, "black" is only used in reference to unwanted elements of herself: hair, nipples, and memories. Salma's obsession with the size and color of her nipples is intermingled with her grief over the loss of her daughter, Layla, who was taken from her directly after birth. When Salma attempts to take her fantasies of nipple reduction to a medical professional, her fantasies are recognized as delusional and self-harming. "'I want them reduced, cut out, doctor, please,' I said in a trembling voice…."You cannot see other women's nipples. Me always dark and out. Slice them. Better that way'" (134). The doctor immediately refers Salma for psychiatric treatment, and Salma is left to cover herself, asserting "me no mad" (134). Through the use

of the mirror and her viewing herself as an essentialized, sexualized, and exoticized Other, Salma allows herself to imagine how, without surgery, she could remove her blackness. She could meet a

> sensitive, generous, rich, white Englishman, who was dying to meet an exotic woman like me with dark eyes, skin, hair and deeds. I would rub my olive skin against him, and – puff – like magic, I would turn white. Just like that, without using a skin-bleaching cream for years I would become whiter and fairer. Just like that I would disappear. (41)

Unlike Najwa, Salma's act of erasure is neither one of covering, nor one that can be performed independently. Najwa participates in self-erasure through wearing a hijab and more actively participating in her Muslim religion; Salma participates in erasure through conducting sexual acts with or receiving surgical operations from white men. She functions, in essence, as an opposite to Najwa; rather than delving into a religious extreme to gain invisibility through essentialization, she seeks to delve into a racial extreme to gain her own form of invisibility through the act of blending in.

In navigating her Du Boisian triangulation of identity, not only does Salma mediate her racial background, but she also mediates her religious viewpoints – and both for largely fiscal reasons. When asked by the nuns why she wears her veil, Salma replied that "'My hair is 'aura. I must hide it. Just like my private parts…I cannot take off veil, Sister. My country, my language, my daughter. No piece of cloth. Feel naked, me'"(159). Salma's association of the veil, and her hair, with her family is understandable; her mother often dried, oiled, and braided her hair before telling her to "put on your madraqa" (70). For Salma, her veil, and therefore her Muslim faith, is intricately tied together with her sexuality, her race, and her family. Even though Salma calls herself "a sinner pretending to be a Muslim" and "an infidel,

who would never be allowed to enter the mosque" (114), she also asserts that she will "pray five time on your doorstep" to a neighbor in Britain who challenges her religious convictions (222). Her decision to wear her veil is complex, as is her relationship with her faith – but she does define herself as an adherent to Islam.

Despite her veil's connections to Salma's cultural heritage, she is convinced by Parvin's strict economic analysis that taking it off would be ultimately beneficial. Parvin tells Salma that she "must learn the rules of the game" (17). "'Lighten up! Groom yourself! Sell yourself!' Parvin said to me. 'You are now in a capitalist society that is not your own" (40). It is when Salma begins to look for employment in earnest that Parvin succeeds in helping her to take off her headscarf, saying "it will be much harder to find a job while you insist on wearing it" (102). Looking into the mirror, Salma chooses to untie the veil.

> I was so thin that my frizzy dark hair fell over my face almost covering it completely. I looked again at the veil, which my father had asked me to wear and my mother had bought for me, folded on the bed. I rubbed my forehead and walked out. It felt as if my head was covered with raw sores and I had taken off the bandages. I felt as dirty as a whore, with no name or family, a sinner who would never see paradise and drink from its rivers of milk and honey. When a man walked by and looked at my hair my scalp twitched. I sat down on the pavement, held my head and cried and cried for hours. (108)

Though Salma's act of unveiling makes her feel "dirty," it also offers her opportunities to connect with British society that had before been unavailable to her. After unveiling, the postman begins to remember her name and she finds a job as a seamstress, as she receives outward recognition by British society for changing her physical appearance. However, as

she continues to integrate into society, stripping into increasingly scanty layers of clothes for her second job as a barmaid, Salma recognizes the extent to which her decision to integrate can allow her to be objectified. Taking off her veil allows her to be perceived not in terms of her socioeconomic status, but in terms of her gender; taking off her clothes further objectifies her by completing erasing the traces of her race and religion. She notes, "I had stopped being an incomprehensible foreigner and had become a woman, a body neither white nor olive-skinned nor black. My colour had faded away and was replaced by curves, flesh, and promises" (150). Under the male gaze, she is transformed from individual to object.

In navigating British society, her Bedouin race, and her Muslim faith, Salma haphazardly weaves her own identity. She is unique in the tools that she employs to craft her own space: her sewing machine, through which she constructs dresses and dreams for her daughter and a living wage for herself; her reed pipe, which allows her to design music which blends East and West; and her mirror, which allows her to imagine other identities for herself and make choices about her own physical presentation to British society. Ultimately, she integrates into British society through marriage to her English professor, John – but ever fully feels at home without her daughter by her side. She is able to navigate her religion by accepting a nominal conversion on his part, while participating in a nominal faith on her own part. While identifying as Muslim, she drinks, removes her hijab, and is never seen praying, but these actions are often as a form of self-punishment, rather than an act of liberation.

However, her navigation of her race is more difficult. Having left her daughter, Layla, behind in the Levant, she ultimately feels compelled to return to her daughter. Salma's

brother murders both her and her daughter in order to avenge his honor. The narrative leaves the reader hoping for Salma's full integration into British society and successful reunion with her daughter – an expectation that is unfulfilled. The only individual who has the potential, at the close of the novel, to experience genuine integration into British society is Salma and John's son, who has a father who will speak to him in "pidgin Arabic" and in native English.

Exposure to the public space, and the dangers present within exposure, is one of the motifs that surfaces in another novel featuring a Muslim protagonist. The below passage details the first foray of Nazneen, the protagonist of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, beyond her street and out of her relatively homogenous neighborhood of Tower Hamlet, into greater London.

> Nazneen walked. She walked to the end of Brick Lane and turned right. Four blocks down she crossed the road (she waited next to a woman and stepped out with her, like a calf with its mother) and took a side street. She turned down the first night, and then went left…Every person who brushed past her on the pavement, every back she saw, was on a private, urgent mission to execute a precise and demanding plan: to get a promotion today, to be exactly on time for an appointment, to buy a newspaper with the right coins so that the exchange was swift and seamless, to walk without wasting a second and to reach the roadside just as the lights turned red. Nazneen, hobbling and halting, began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination. A leaf-shake of fear – or was it excitement?—passed through her legs. (Ali 40)

Nazneen, who moved from Bagladesh to London for an arranged marriage with her husband, Chanu, remains largely isolated within her new home. Surrounded by Bangladeshi families and Muslim neighbors, Nazneen's struggle is not an immediate, shock of integration, as if thrown into a body of cold water; rather, her story takes place over the course of twenty years, featuring incremental changes and small steps out of herself and her home to experience the world beyond both. The above quote, then, is critical as the first example of such steps. Moving beyond her isolation allows Nazneen to see herself "without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination," giving her the ability to reflect on her outward appearance to British society, as well as practice a moment of self-inspection. It seems that it is through the act of defining herself in terms of another religious and racial group that Nazneen begins to become "aware of herself" (40). It is her otherness that informs her identity; she becomes conscious of herself through the gaze of the other – an extremely Du Boisian concept. Her comparisons force her to define her own being, and that feeling makes her choose who she is, rather than passively accept her fate. For Nazneen, interaction with British society and the navigation of triple consciousness is active, involving emotion, self-reflection, and ultimately, mutation. At the conclusion of Nazneen's first exploration of British society, she reflects that she felt "a little pleased. She had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something" (43). It is through a series of such "somethings" that Nazneen is able to craft her own identity in British society through the lens of triple consciousness.

Like Najwa, Nazneen's move to London is not constituted by a separation from her racial group. Unlike Salma, Muslim and Balgladeshi friends and confidants in her

neighborhood of Tower Hamlets surround Nazneen, who, according to Chanu, "don't ever really leave home. Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there" (19). Much of her world is filtered through the lens of her husband's opinions, with whom she shares the large majority of her conversation and company over the span of the novel. Chanu, though calling himself "westernized" and "an educated man," actively discourages Nazneen from going out (16). He says that Nazneen's exploration outside of their home will make him "look like a fool" and incite gossip amongst their neighbors, so Nazneen remains inside and isolated in her apartment.

Since so much of Nazneen's information about race is filtered through the perspective of her husband, it is worth noting that Chanu is largely disparaging of the Bangladeshi immigrants that surround them. He calls them "dirty" and "uneducated," stating that the immigrants attempt to recreate a sense of home and a sense of community when they arrive in Tower Hamlets as though "they are back in the village," so that "in a sense they are home again" (16). Despite his membership in the same racial group, Chanu behaves in a insensitive manner towards the other Bangladeshi immigrants, saying: "I don't look down on them, but what can you do? If a man has only ever driven a rickshaw and never in his life held a book in his hand, then what can you expect from him?" (16). Chanu's intolerance, however, is not limited to Bangladeshi immigrants; he also makes racist comments about the British citizens and African migrants around them. He warns Nazneen about "making friends" with the British, because "*they shake your hand with the right, and with the left they stab you in the back,*" continually blaming his lack of career advancement on British racism rather than on a lack of commitment or follow-through on his own part (53). He also expresses racism towards their African bus driver, saying "they were bred for

it. Slavery… That's their ancestry… Only the strong ones were wanted; they fetched the highest price. Commerce and natural selection working hand in hand'" (76). All of Chanu's comments about other racial groups focus around differences in class status; the kernel of his insecurities seems to be their comparative economic advantage or disadvantage. Chanu's perspective, however, is alarming because he provides Naznneen her greatest – and often, her only – perspective into the world beyond the boundaries of her own walls. Chanu's comments, therefore, instruct her to both define individuals in terms of their race, but also to minimize the value in racial groups. He is an essentializer, at the same time that he complains about the racism that daily affects him. Nazneen's responses to Chanu's racism indicate that she either does not accept it, or does not care about it; for example, when Chanu rants about their African driver, Nazneen's only response is a mild, "if you say so, husband" (76). The small circle of Nazneen's acquaintances, too, view racial integration as largely threatening. Mrs. Islam, on whom Nazneen and her family are reliant for small loans, claims that fraternizing with members of other racial groups necessarily results in impurity. "If you mix with all these people, even if they are good people, you have to give up your culture to accept theirs. That's how it is" (16). Nazneen's closest friend, Razia, watches as her son becomes addicted to heroin within British culture. Nazneen's friends tend to frame integration as a dangerous pastime, despite Nazneen's own demonstrated enjoyment of exploration of British culture.

The moments that Nazneen is not surrounded by her racial group are rare, and they universally occur within *Brick Lane* when she is alone and has caught those moments out for herself. The moments are also extremely self-conscious. One such moment is her abovementioned walk beyond the limits of Tower Hamlets, but many more of them occur

within the boundaries of her apartment. Watching British television, for example, fills Nazneen with happiness and makes her feel renewed. "While she sat," watching the program, "she was no longer a collection of the hopes, random thoughts, petty anxieties, and selfish wants that made her, but was whole are pure. The old Nazneen was sublimated and the new Nazneen was filled with white light, glory" (27). Another unconventional means through which Nazneen interacts with British culture – and one which is consistent within *Minaret* and *The Cry of the Dove*, as well – is through interaction with the mirror, and a dialogue with her own mediated reflection. In each of these novels, clothing is critical both as a means of self-expression and as a means of communication to British society. With the ability to perceive herself as she would be perceived within the white male gaze, Nazneen gives herself the freedom to alter her appearance away from the norms dictated by her racial and religious group. At one point in from of the mirror, she tries on a pair of Chanu's trousers and pulls up her skirt to examine "her legs in the mirror," allowing herself to imagine herself "swinging a handbag like the white girls" (112). At another point, she tries on the sequined vests that she has been embroidering for her business as a seamstress (a profession that she shares with Salma). In that instance,

> She looked in the mirror but she did not see herself, only the flare of the sequins, and then she closed her eyes and the ice smelled of limes and she moved without weight and there was someone at her side, her hand in another, and they turned together, arms around waists, and through her half-closed lashes she saw him. The fine gold chain about his neck. And then she opened her eyes and took off the top. She held it out again and she saw that the sequins were cheap. She turned it over in her hands. The sequins looked like fish scales. (178)

Her moments of imaginative play with clothes and her moments of admiration give Nazneen pleasure; they allow her to feel like a “new Nazneen” in opposition to her present state. Yet Nazneen does not allow herself to maintain the pleasurable feelings that accompany her exploration of British culture and her disrobing from elements of Bangladeshi culture. She does, however, admit to the power of clothes to transform her outward appearance, and thus, in at least some regards, transform her life:

> She could see herself in the dressing-table mirror. Suddenly, she was gripped y the idea that if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well. If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels, then what else would she do but walk around the glass places on Bishopsgate and talk into a slim phone and eat lunch out of a paper bag? If she wore trousers and underwear, like the girl with the big camera on Brick Lane, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud. And if she had a tiny, tiny skirt with knockers to match and a tight bright top, then she would – how could she not? – skate through life with a sparkling smile and a handsome man who took her hand and made her spin, spin, spin. For a glorious moment it was clear that clothes, not fate, made her life. (228)

Nazneen admits to herself that she could magically transform into a Westerner by as simple an action as changing her wardrobe, but makes the conscious choice to deny herself of that action – though it has repeatedly brought her pleasure. It is only through meeting Tariq, a British citizen of Bangladeshi heritage, who provides Nazneen with information about other races through his pamphlets detailing the struggles in the *umma* that Nazneen accepts her desire to experience the world beyond herself, through secretive reading “in the night of occupiers and orphans, of Intifada and Hamas” (199). It is clear, too, that

Nazneen's imaginative play with other racial groups cannot extend into her day-to-day realities; she is reliant upon her friends and neighbors for their funding, their community, and their good opinion. To step beyond the bounds of Tower Hamlets or to transgress the moral boundaries enforced in Tower Hamlets would be to risk her husband's livelihood, her family's security, and her own reputation.

One of the primary means by which Nazneen represses her own desires to explore the fashions and traditions of other races is through utilizing her Muslim faith as an active suppressant of her needs. Nazneen keeps *purdah* in her household and prays actively. While her headscarf does not function as one of the primary motifs in the novel, she does wear one and adjust it when she is "conscious of being watched" (166). Her patterns of prayer, "five times each day," give her days order and force her to focus on elements beyond her own needs and desires. Once, while praying, she thinks she "could flush her body and mind with gratitude. There should be no room for other thoughts" (50). Nazneen's felt-inflicted repression of feelings, needs, and desires allows her to live life in a passive manner: "Life made its pattern around and beneath and through her" (27). For Nazneen, as for Najwa, religion offers a mode of invisibility, allowing her to define herself in terms of a collective rather than as an individual. It provides a coping mechanism, also, for the grief she experiences following the loss of her son; in the midst of mourning, she "swallowed hard and prayed hard, and she used prayer, in defiance of her vows, to dull her senses and dull her pain" (166).

In *Brick Lane* more so than any other novel, the experience of integrating into British culture, and navigating nation, race, and religion, is directly addressed. While at

dinner at the Azad house, another immigrant family whom Chanu knows from work, Chanu begins discussing the "immigrant tragedy":

> I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society were racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one's sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. (87)

Suddenly, Mrs. Azad, who is clothed in short skirts and eats her dinner from a T.V. tray, speaks up, calling Chanu's opinions "crap."

> Listen, when I'm in Bangladesh I put on a sari and cover my head and all that. But here I go out to work. I work with white girls and I'm just one of them. If I want to come home and eat curry, that's my business. Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two works of English… They go around covered from head to toe, in their little waking prisons, and when someone calls to them in the street they are upset. The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing. That … is the tragedy.(89)

Chanu and Mrs. Azad serve, within this scene, as diametric opposites who each promote an essentializing means of interaction with British culture. For Chanu, British society should change to accept his Bangladeshi culture; for Mrs. Azad, she should sacrifice all elements of her religion and her race in order to smoothly integrate with British culture or Bangladeshi culture: whichever she is in at the time. Neither viewpoint allows for any introspection, any

navigation of the individual within triple consciousness; rather, they each prescribe a set of behavior which all members of the immigrant community should carry out.

It is within this context, therefore, that I argue that Nazneen's ultimate decision, therefore – to "decide what to do," to "say what happens to me," to "be the one" – is an argument for an individual navigation of their nation, race, and religion, pinpointing the elements of each that they require to make them happy. For Nazneen, she opts to remain in British society rather than to return with her husband and children to Dhaka, which she recognizes to be "the right thing to do" (340). Instead, she chooses "sheer exhilaration" – a life of shaved legs, under her shalwar kameez, speaking in English with her daughters in the midst of Tower Hamlets, and ice-skating for herself: fully embracing, not in imagination, but in reality, the "new Nazneen" she had pushed away for twenty years. Her life is a celebration of hybridity, and an argument for its success.

<u>Triple Consciousness and Violent Conclusions</u>

But Nazneen's ending is truly unique. In celebrating her life as an integrated member of British society, she stands in opposition to the female protagonists from many other novels within this tradition who do not find their agency within their narratives. Salma finds her agency in the reality of death; Najwa sacrifices her agency beneath the barricade of the hijab; but Nazneen ignores economic and social pressures to pursue her own agency, gaining happiness as a result.

Why do so many works of modern Muslim women's literature end in either bloodshed or else the erasure of the female protagonist? In *Minaret*, Najwa is preparing to embark on the hajj – to remove herself, arguably, from British society, perhaps forever. At the end of *The Cry of the Dove*, Salma is murdered – a bullet sent through her brain by a

jealous and avenging brother, desperate to regain the honor Salma had ostensibly tarnished through the pursuit of her own pleasure. Other novels not included in this paper, but included within this tradition, end in the same fashion: *Maps for Lost Lovers*, by Nadeem Aslam, ends with a brutal honor killing of a happy couple by a band of avenging brothers; *Women on a Journey Between Baghdad and London*, by Haifa Zangana, ends with the murder of the best-integrated Muslim character in the book, who is attacked and murdered on the basis of her race. The act of veiling itself can be construed as an act of violence and of oppression. Of so many novels, *Brick Lane* emerges as unique in that it ends neither in violence, nor in erasure, of the main character; rather, Nazneen is shown to be capable of living a happy, hybrid life in Great Britain with the assistance of her daughters – and without the influence of religion.

Again, within the three novels upon which I focused in this paper (but also in those other novels referenced above), family emerges as both an element which can aid integration and an element which can break it. Isolation within a close racial or religious group is universally condemned within these novels; it allows Najwa to hide from her past, hides from Nazneen the freedom and opportunities waiting for her beyond her walls, and takes from Salma her health and her child. Yet, in each of these novels, the presence of children in the lives of the female protagonists is good. While some children are ultimately corrupted by British society, purchasing drugs or alcohol, an equal number seem to revert to the fundamentalism from which their parents fled. Children define themselves either as diametric opposites to their parents' religion, or in complete embrace of it. As Nazneen remarks in *Brick Lane*, the children "did not have [their] place in the world. That was why [they] defended it" (377). Again and again in these novels, the protagonists sacrifice or

erase themselves within British society. While they all too often die, nearly all of the children in these novels survive. Again, *Brick Lane* remains the exception – but it seems as though Nazneen's life is purchased by the death of her son. The grief she experiences from his death is what allows her to live, opening up her eyes to British society and opening up her mind to new experiences at the hands of her daughters, her lover, and herself.

These women, torn from their homelands, forced to integrate with the race that had once colonized their land, and defined in terms of their religion, would understand Du Bois's frustration in "The Strivings of the Negro People." They have triple aims; they strive to satisfy three unreconciled ideals. To them, colonization – and the economic slavery and the cultural appropriation which accompanied it – were "indeed, the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice," and like the African Americans, "emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites" ("Strivings" 2). But what differentiates Du Bois's idea of double consciousness and my application of triple consciousness is precisely this idea of emancipation. Du Bois was calling for political and legal equality under the state. The asylum-seekers of these novels, on the other hand, ostensibly have equal freedoms under the law. What they lack, however, is a social equality; and economic opportunity; and a freedom of, and from, religion that they require to genuinely participate in British society as equals.

Yet, if Najwa from Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* is any indication, what limits migrants from assuming equality is often themselves. Du Bois asserts in "Strivings" that "to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another" (2). The Muslim women, likewise, are faced with this dilemma – to be individuals, navigating their race, nationality, and

religion on their own terms, rather than by the expectations of British society, at the demands of overbearing husbands, or out of a sense of obligation to their religious group. Triple consciousness, in a sense, requires corrective lenses; no one can be three things, but everyone can herself. It is in the novels where protagonists are able to independently and honestly uncover their own identities and balance their nation, race, and religion to their own satisfaction, where they find happiness.

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