

# Chapter 6

## Double Consciousness: How Pakistani Graduate Students Navigate Their Contested Identities in American Universities

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**Abstract** This chapter uses the case of Pakistani graduate students to understand how international students in the U.S. comprehend and deal with discrimination in the host society, which can illuminate larger processes of othering, identity development, and contestation. Using qualitative interviews of 28 Pakistani graduate students (13 female and 15 male) studying in the U.S., I conceptualize the analytical strategies adopted by international students to deal with discrimination in the host culture. I use the DuBoisian notion of double consciousness to theorize how Pakistani graduate students see their religious and national identity from the host culture's perspective. The students not only see their Muslim and Pakistani identity through their own eyes but also see these identities challenged within the context of the War on Terror, hence embodying a sense of double consciousness in the host society, and struggle constantly as they challenge and negotiate the negative constructs surrounding them. Pakistani graduate students navigate within the constructs of terrorism when their religiosity and nationality are revealed to the dominant group. They negotiate these identities by having a deeper understanding of worldviews on the War on Terror, enabling them to overcome and deal with the conflicting circumstances challenging their nationality and religiosity in the host culture.

The U.S. is the top destination for tertiary-level education for international students from around the world (UNESCO 2014). However, after 9/11, from 2002 to 2006, for the first time in three decades, the U.S. saw a consistent decline in the number of international students coming from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Bollag 2004; IIE 2004). Stringent immigration policies, cumbersome visa processes, national security issues (Campbell 2005; Urias and Yeakey 2005), heightened hostility, and prejudice toward international students all contributed to the plummeting

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numbers in the U.S. (Council of Graduate Schools 2004; Lee and Rice 2007; MacWilliams 2004). In particular, Muslims from South Asia and the Middle East residing in the U.S. gained visibility in the host society after the terror attacks. Several hundred Muslim international students left the U.S. without finishing their degrees due to threats to their safety from the dominant group (McMrtrie 2001; Swiney 2006). Despite their negative experiences, few studies empirically explore the discriminatory experiences of international students during the “War on Terror” (McDermott-Levy 2011; Tummala-Narra and Claudius 2013).

This chapter uses the case of Pakistani graduate students to understand how international students in the U.S. comprehend and deal with discrimination in the host society. The significance of studying the Pakistani student experience is three-fold. First, though Pakistan is geographically part of Asia, specifically South Asia, since the War on Terror commenced, the role of Pakistan has been significant in sheltering Iraqi Taliban and religious extremists (Al-Qaeda members, often Arab) in the country, while simultaneously being a strong ally of the U.S. against the War on Terror. Such factors have enabled the international media to politically portray the country as part of the Middle East. Thus, Pakistani international students embody both a South Asian and Middle Eastern experience in the U.S. Second, from 2009 to 2011, Pakistan was among the top 25 countries of origin of international students studying in the U.S. (IIE 2009, 2011a). The U.S. also has the largest Fulbright Program for Pakistani nationals (USEFP 2011, 2012). Despite being the third-largest Muslim-majority sending nation of international students studying in the U.S. from the Asiatic region (IIE 2010, 2011b, 2012, 2013, 2014a), Pakistani international students largely remain an understudied population. Third, since 9/11 there has been a rise in anti-Islamic sentiments against Muslims and Arabs in the U.S. (CAIR 2008). The majority of the Pakistani students coming to the U.S. are Muslim<sup>1</sup> and on arrival to the host culture are aware of the Islamophobic sentiments surrounding their religious identity. This chapter focuses on the complexity of the Pakistani graduate student experience in the U.S., which can illuminate larger processes of othering, discrimination, identity development, and contestation. I use the term discrimination to demonstrate the hostility, prejudice, and social exclusion experienced by Pakistani international students from the dominant group, based on their religious and national identity.

Using qualitative interviews of 28 Pakistani graduate students studying in the U.S., I conceptualize the analytical strategies adopted by international students to deal with discrimination in the host culture. I use the DuBoisian notion of double consciousness to theorize how Pakistani graduate students see their religious and national identity from the host culture’s perspective. The students not only see their Muslim and Pakistani identity through their own eyes but also see these identities challenged within the context of the War on Terror, hence embodying a sense of double consciousness in the host society. They encounter discrimination as their national and religious identities are contested in the Islamophobic settings of the host society. They negotiate these identities by having a deeper understanding of

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<sup>1</sup>Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country, and 95% of the population adheres to the Islamic faith, while the remaining 5% minorities practice Christianity and Hinduism (CIA 2010).

worldviews on the War on Terror, enabling them to overcome and deal with the conflicting circumstances challenging their nationality and religiosity in the host culture. The findings show that Pakistani students feel the need to demonstrate their innocence to members of the host society in the context of War on Terror and are constantly battling the negative constructs of terrorists and terrorism surrounding their national and religious identities. In addition, students who were traveling or studying in the Southern parts of the U.S. faced threats because of their religious and national identity as compared to those living elsewhere. Before I delve into the theoretical framework, I discuss the literature on the acculturative challenges experienced by international students on arrival to the host culture.

## **Acculturation and Neo-racism**

International students studying in the U.S. represent a diverse group of individuals coming from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (IIE 2014b). On arrival to the host culture, these students experience a lack of social support due to the absence of family, friends, and unfamiliar social and cultural circumstances (Frey and Roysircar 2006; McClure 2007; Sawir et al. 2008; Zhao et al. 2008). However, welcoming institutional policies and the communal environment of the American university can assist in their acculturation experience (Sherry et al. 2009; Sümer et al. 2008). International students with a large number of friends have been linked with academic success and positive experiences in the host culture (Bochner et al. 1977; Furnham and Alibhai 1985; Sam 2001). They also have a significant impact on the U.S. economy, promote multiculturalism in their programs, and help groom American undergraduates for global careers (IIE 2014c).

Acculturation studies on international students often center on psychological adaptation, focusing on depression and stress, as the students experience the new culture (Berry 1990; Russel et al. 2008; Searle and Ward 1990; Ward and Kennedy 1999). Studies show that discriminatory experiences faced by international students are often linked to high acculturative stress. These experiences often cause feelings of anxiety, resulting in homesickness among the students (Atri et al. 2006; Jung et al. 2007; Poyrazli et al. 2004; Wang et al. 2012; Wei et al. 2012). Further studies show that cultural, religious, and linguistic differences can lead to isolation and depression, thus discouraging international students from making friends in the host culture (Chen 1999; Mori 2000; Smith and Khwaja 2011). Poor English language abilities and stereotypes around race, ethnicity, and cultural traditions in the host culture are often the root causes of discrimination experienced by international students from these regions (Bonazzo and Wong 2007; Poyrazli and Lopez 2007; Ruble and Zhang 2013; Sodowsky and Plake 1992; Wei et al. 2012; Wong et al. 2014). However, the spectrum of these experiences varies among this group based on their phenotype, gender, culture of origin, and language abilities. Research shows that white students from New Zealand, Canada, and Europe face fewer problems than dark-skinned students from the Middle East and Africa (Duru and Poyrazli 2011; Hanassab 2006; Kilinc and Granello 2003; Lee and Rice 2007).

According to Toussain and Crowson (2010), international students are perceived as a “*symbolic threat*” due to their cultural and religious differences and a “*realistic threat*” as they compete for economic and academic benefits with American students (415). Lee and Rice (2007) use the concept of neo-racism to operationalize the prejudices experienced by international students: “Discrimination becomes, seemingly, justified by cultural difference or national origin rather than by physical characteristics alone and can thus disarm the fight against racism by appealing to ‘natural’ tendencies to preserve group cultural identity—in this case the dominant group” (389). Their study shows that students from the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia experience both covert and overt forms of discrimination in the host culture (Lee and Rice 2007). The concept of neo-racism offers insight on the national and cultural differences that lead to social exclusion and discrimination against international students. Nonetheless, the concept doesn’t elaborate on how the religiosity of this group also inflects their experiences of prejudice in the host society. It also overlooks the complex experience of students from the Middle East and Asia, due to their contested religious and national identities in the realm of War on Terror.

Muslim international students from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia face rising challenges due to the rising fear of Islam in the U.S. (CAIR 2008; Tummala-Narra and Claudius 2013; McDermott-Levy 2011). The religious signifier of covering the head (i.e., hijab) for women and beards among Muslim men increases their visibility in the host culture. A study on Arab Muslim women showed that Omani women wearing hijab often experienced microaggressions and were frightened due to feelings of hostility as a result of their religiosity in the host culture (McDermott-Levy 2011). These signifiers can increase their chances of facing anti-Islamic sentiments inside and outside college campuses (Tummala-Narra and Claudius 2013; Swiney 2006; Kishawi 2012; William and Johnson 2011).

These studies make crucial contributions in the acculturation literature focusing on the international student experience. First, they clearly show that international students of non-European descent face more challenges and discrimination in the host culture than their European and Western counterparts. Second, such incidents lead to higher acculturative distress and social exclusion of international students from the host society. Third, these studies point to the importance of social support and social networks that mitigate these negative experiences. At the same time, the diverse ways that international students understand and respond to the discrimination they face remain undertheorized. I use the DuBoisian theory of double consciousness to conceptualize how Pakistani graduate students negotiate their religious and national identity in order to navigate prejudice in the host culture.

## **Double Consciousness of the Pakistani Graduate Students**

As previously stated, the perceptions of Islam and Muslims are linked to the current political ideology of terrorism. Cesari (2010) argues that the West has developed an essentialized approach in conflating Islam with terrorism. Disha et al. (2011), in their

analysis of hate crimes in the U.S., show that the 9/11 terror attacks have resulted in a larger wave of hate crimes against Arab/Muslims in the country, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Pakistani graduate students arriving to the U.S are aware of anti-Islamic sentiments surrounding their religious and national identity (CAIR 2008). The current geopolitical framework of the War on Terror, and the capture of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan, contributes to the negative perception of Muslims and Pakistanis and characterizes them as the “other” in the host society (Omi and Winant 1986, 3). Therefore, in order to survive, Pakistani students not only see their religious and national identity through their own eyes but also from the outside, i.e., the Western perspective. I demonstrate that in the host culture, these two identities of the Pakistani graduate student become more pronounced. They embody the DuBoisian notion of double consciousness of viewing their Pakistani and Muslim identity in the context of War on Terror in the host culture (Du Bois 1903).

Du Bois describes the experience of African American people as looking at oneself through the outsiders’ perspective (Falcon 2008). In *The Souls of the Black Folk*, he explains “It is a peculiar sensation, 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 twoness, 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 1903/1982, 45). Du Bois uses double consciousness to conceptualize the troubling experiences of African Americans in the hands of white supremacists, as they struggled with being both American and black and were subjected to inequalities and racist dehumanization of their “negro” selves (Anzaldúa 1999; Falcon 2008). I extend this concept of double consciousness to Pakistani graduate students as they negotiate their national and religious identity in the host culture. The Pakistani and Muslim identities are not perceived as threatening in their home society. But post 9/11 in the U.S. context, however, the Muslim identity is associated with terrorists and terrorism. The Pakistani students see this religious identity from the perspective of the host culture and struggle every day as they battle with the constructs of War on Terror surrounding their religiosity. This perspective from the outside marks their twoness and double consciousness in the host society, as they look at themselves from a Western perspective.

When the religiosity of the Pakistani graduate students is not made apparent in the absence of religious signifiers, i.e., hijab for women and beard for men, they are still perceived as dangerous by the dominant group. Attempted terror attacks in the U.S. conducted by assailants of Pakistani origin have received prominent media attention, such as the attempted car bombing of Time Square in December 2010 by Faisal Shahzad, a naturalized American citizen of Pakistani descent,<sup>2</sup> who had entered the country as an international student. In addition, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace (2014), Pakistan has been ranked third on the global ter-

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<sup>2</sup>NY Daily News May 2010 “Times Square bomb suspect Faisal Shahzad ‘was just a normal dude’ before making neighbors suspicious” <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/times-square-bomb-suspect-faisal-shahzad-normal-dude-making-neighbors-suspicious-article-1.444286>

rorism index, following Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, Pakistani graduate students are constantly aware that their nationality is often conflated with terrorists within the War on Terror framework in the host society. They see their nationality from the host culture's viewpoint and struggle as they challenge the stereotypes of terrorist and terrorism surrounding their country of origin. The students thus possess double consciousness as they negotiate their religious and national identities in the U.S. Their national and religious identity is viewed as synonymous to each other in the context of War on Terror from the host society. Pakistani graduate students studying in the U.S. thus experience othering as these identities come into conflict with the host culture. I explore how they use their sense of the selves from the host culture's perspective as they negotiate their religious and national identities and investigate how they make use of their worldviews to navigate these conflicting experiences.

## Data and Methods

My participants consist of 28 Pakistani graduate students and are spread across 8 states in the U.S. This demographic information is helpful in capturing the texture of Islamophobia in the U.S. However, as per IRB protocol and to ensure confidentiality of the participants' identities, I only reveal their regional location in the U.S. as Southeast, Southwest, Northeast, Midwest, and West.<sup>3</sup> I interviewed 13 women and 15 men studying in the U.S. over a period of 6 months from February to September 2012. The age of participants in the study ranges from 23 to 40 years old. This variation reflects the multiplicity of life experiences and life circumstances that can influence how students negotiate their national and religious identity in the host culture. Please refer to Table 6.1 for the demographic composition of the sample. Unlike undergraduate programs, the graduate programs in the U.S. provide a higher chance of funding, enabling young adults from varying professional and personal backgrounds to pursue their academic interests. The multiplicity of their experiences provides a complex picture of the Pakistani graduate student experience in the U.S. Using a life history approach, I document the social, cultural, and ideological transformations occurring /having occurred in the lives of these students on arrival to the U.S. (Thomas and Znaneiecki 1927; McCall and Wittner 1990). I developed a comprehensive interview guide that was divided into three major sections: (1) the life of the respondents before coming to the U.S., (2) their experiences upon arrival, and (3) their current experiences in the host culture. In this paper, I focus on the third section of my interview guide and pay attention to questions that investigate the negative experiences of students in the host society. I started off with the leading question: Have you experienced any discomfort in the host culture? The purpose of keeping the question broad was that students could highlight any personal negative

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<sup>3</sup>I use the *National Geographic* outline maps for the regional distribution of the U.S. <http://education.nationalgeographic.com/maps/united-states-regions/>

**Table 6.1** Participants' details

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Duration (year. month)	Regional location
1	Faiza	F	25	2.4	Northeast
2	Zohaib	M	35	0.8	Northeast
3	Junaid	M	38	3.7	Southeast
4	Ahmed	M	30	2.4	Northeast
5	Rubina	F	40	1.8	Southeast
6	Shaista	F	36	2.6	Midwest
7	Talha	M	25	0.8	Northeast
8	Ali	M	29	0.8	Northeast
9	Tanzeela	F	35	2.6	Midwest
10	Naveed	M	25	1.6	Midwest
11	Mahmood	M	27	0.8	Northeast
12	Areeba	F	23	0.8	Northeast
13	Omer	M	25	0.8	Midwest
14	Saad	M	25	0.8	Midwest
15	Humera	F	23	1.8	West
16	Mehwish	F	31	0.8	Northeast
17	Mohsin	M	24	1.8	Midwest
18	Rohail	M	27	0.8	Northeast
19	Hayyat	M	25	1.8	Northeast
20	Mona	F	25	0.8	Southwest
21	Zohaib	M	38	0.101	North East
22	Qasim	M	25	0.8	Southwest
23	Sara	F	25	1.6	West Coast
24	Seema	F	31	4.101	Northeast
25	Hina	F	35	2.101	Midwest
26	Amna	F	26	0.5	Southwest
27	Zobia	F	31	4.11	Northeast
28	Raza	M	27	5	Midwest

incidents experienced during their stay. The question resulted in a longer conversation, as the respondents shared their discriminatory experiences in the host culture within the context of the War on Terror. I also asked about the state and city where they were located in, when they experienced these incidents. Such information provided deeper understanding of contextualizing their discriminatory experiences within the geographical space of the U.S.

The intention was to keep the interview informal so the respondents could reflect on their life in the host culture. I use grounded theory methods and draw upon the narratives of the participants that inform the theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I located Pakistani graduate students by emailing international student organizations, South Asian groups, and Muslim student associations across the U.S. However, word of mouth was most effective in accessing the group and generated a snowball sample of Pakistani graduate students studying across different

U.S. institutions (Mile and Huberman 1994). I built upon the prevalent networks of these students to locate participants for my study. My positionality as an insider to the focus population increased my chances of connecting with the participants.

My knowledge of Urdu (the national language of Pakistan) helped them talk openly about their experiences in the host culture. The interviews lasted between 1 and 2 h, and following my participants' choice of language, the conversation was carried out in either of the languages, i.e., Urdu and English. I conducted interviews in person with respondents in the greater Boston area only and used Skype video calls for interviewing remaining participants. The audios of the interviews were recorded. I informed the participants when I began and stopped the recording. Only one male respondent did not allow me to record his interview. I did not record his interview and only took notes. Participants' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

## Coding and Analysis

I translated and transcribed the interviews in English and took notes on the interactions with the respondents. In particular, the notes kept track of the frustration and discomfort experienced by the participants while sharing their discriminatory experiences in the host society. I also noted at the time of the interview whether the respondents had visible religious signifiers—hijab for women and beard for men—that could contribute to their discrimination in the host society. I rely on Miles and Huberman's inductive approach to carry out data analysis that also informs my theoretical framework for the study (Miles and Huberman 1994). After coding, I collated similar and conflicting patterns as the respondents described uncomfortable and threatening circumstances in the host society.

## Findings

Pakistani graduate students battle every day with the social constructions of terrorism associated with their national and religious identity, which are in continuous conflict with the Islamophobic settings of the host culture. The male respondents in the sample experienced more discriminatory incidents compared to the women. This is not surprising because men have carried out more terrorist acts. Students visiting or living in the Southern parts of the U.S. experienced heightened hostility against their religious and national identity than their counterparts living in other areas of the country.

When students used religious signifiers (e.g., head scarf, beard), the practice increased their likelihood of experiencing threatening and/or discomforting situations in the host culture. Since Pakistani students vary by phenotype (brown to fair skin tones), they can often be misidentified as belonging to other parts of South Asia

and/or the Middle East. Their religious Islamic identity is not immediately recognizable in the absence of religious signifiers. Thus, I present the responses based on the presence and absence of the religious signifiers that further shape their discriminatory experiences. I show how these experiences embody the DuBoisian notion of double consciousness as the Pakistani graduate students navigate their contested religious and national identities in the host society.

### **Presence of Religious Signifiers: Conflicting Religious Identity in the Host Society**

Only two female respondents wore a headscarf, and one male respondent had a beard. Their responses show that the beard for men and headscarf for women act as religious markers in the host society and increase the visibility of their religiosity in the host culture.

Faiza is currently living in the Northeast and does not wear the headscarf. But she recalls a startling incident while she was studying at a college in the South that influenced her decision:

Well the people are nice in general. But when I came here, I used to wear a headscarf and that was my personal decision only. Shortly when I came to the south, that week, 3 American girls had embraced Islam, and I used to wear scarf, and one day when I was doing laundry and came back to pick up my clothes, somebody had thrown all my scarves on the floor and I was left a note saying 'don't ever wash your scarves here'

I told my mother about this incident and she told me that if this is creating complications for you so don't wear it. After that I decided to take off my scarf and it's my personal decision and I don't regret it.

Though Faiza is threatened for washing her headscarves in a laundromat, she did not complain to the school or the authorities. Rather, she attempts to rationalize the situation from the perspective of the host culture. She argues that her headscarf in combination with the recent conversion of American girls to Islamic faith made her a threat to the dominant group and a target for Islamophobia. She sees her religiosity as viewed from the outside and chooses not to cover her head to avoid any animosity in the future. Her scarf made her religiosity visible and placed her in a hostile situation. Her decision to not wear the headscarves shows how she sees her own religiosity from the host culture's perspective. She has double consciousness and is aware of how her religious identity is contested in the host society. She negotiates this identity by taking the scarf off to avoid any further conflict.

Faiza does not regret her decision to not wear a headscarf, and this choice is facilitated by her home culture. In Pakistan, women are not socially obligated to cover their heads, and the choice of wearing a headscarf is voluntary, especially in urban spaces. She uses her experience from the home culture to navigate the new cultural settings. The question remains whether she may have experienced more hostile conditions if she had continued to wear the scarf.

Contrary to Faiza's experience, Zobia, who lives in the Northeast, struggles in deciding whether or not to cover her head in the host culture. She has gone through episodes of wearing the headscarf, taking it off, and wearing it again. Her decision to cover or not to cover her head is influenced by how she is viewed by the host society. She struggles with how her religiosity is seen by the host society in the realm of War on Terror and is continuously conflicted by it. Her experience embodies double consciousness, as she is constantly aware of her representation in the host society, as she switches to wearing and not wearing the scarf. She is conflicted by the perception of the self and how she is viewed by the host culture. She was the only female participant who chose to cover her hair:

I was wearing a scarf, when I came here. I used to cover my head. I did it for one year. I rarely saw any Muslim women wearing headscarves, but I felt people would stare at me a lot. They didn't say anything but I am sure I looked different from them. Even though I wanted to blend in with the people so I don't get any extra attention. But people would look at me as if I am different. So I decided to take off my scarf, and took it off for two years. Not because I didn't like scarf anymore, but I didn't want to become prominent. But after years I felt I still looked different and maybe I am Asian and everyone around me is American. But I longed for it. When I would see someone wearing it, I would say oh I wish I had the guts to wear it like her and I liked their modesty. So one year ago I started becoming more religious and I have started wearing scarf again.

On arrival to the U.S., she wore the headscarf, but she experienced stares and discomfort. She notes, "They didn't say anything but I am sure I looked different from them." Zobia finds herself prominent in the host society, and though she didn't experience any negative comments on her appearance, she feels that people stared at her because she "looked different." Even though she wanted to "blend" in to the host culture, she felt that she stood out because of her headscarf. She eventually removed the scarf to integrate into the host society. However, Zobia notes that even after taking the scarf off, she was still othered in the host society because of her South Asian appearance. She has a light brown complexion, a common feature of Pakistani identity. Her religious identity and South Asian identity highlight her otherness in the host society. However, she longed for the headscarf and missed that part of her identity especially when she saw someone else wearing the hijab. But she lacked the "guts" to wear it herself. Over the past year, she has decided to cover her hair, and the choice of wearing her headscarf is a struggle of personal courage, as she negotiates her religiosity in the Islamophobic settings of the host society.

Zobias' experience shows a constant struggle within herself on how she chooses to express her religiosity in the host society. Unlike Faiza, she has never been threatened because of the hijab, but she constantly feels that she is being othered in the host society because of her appearance both with and without the hijab. She has had to find courage within herself to represent her religiosity in her appearance, while she is constantly aware that it is viewed in the context of the War on Terror.

Like their female counterparts, Pakistani men also struggle with similar dilemmas. Ahmed was the only male respondent who had a beard. He also had a light-skinned complexion. Studying at a college in the Northeast, he struggled constantly with the expression of religious identity, and, unlike Zobia, he maintained his reli-

gious identifier throughout his stay in the U.S. His experience embodies the DuBoisian notion of double consciousness in that he sees his own religiosity from the Western perspective, as he battles constantly to overcome these negative frames of terrorism.

He had been racially profiled on several occasions and experienced lengthy immigration processes. He recalls being stopped for questioning by the local authorities after attending the mosque, and his friends told him that surveillance officials had questioned the people at the mosque about him. Ahmed was a graduate student interning in his field and was frustrated that his appearance immediately categorized him as a threat in the host society. He felt that Americans at large were ignorant about his reality, and he had a hard time finding an internship because he visually fit the terrorist stereotype. While the majority of Americans treated him poorly, Ahmed acknowledged the support of his American professor who helped and supported him. It was through his professor's connections that he was able to find his internship. He actively participated in conversations that questioned his religiosity and explained that Americans were misinformed and the social media has harmed the image of Pakistan and Islam in the eyes of the dominant group.

Ahmeds' experiences show the process of double consciousness at work in the host culture. He is constantly aware of how the host culture looks at his religious identity as he battles the terrorist stereotypes surrounding him. He engages in dialogues with his friends and colleagues explaining how the terrorists are perpetuating their menacing agenda, which is contradictory to Islamic preaching. His family and friends had asked him to shave his beard so he wouldn't stand out in the host culture, but Ahmed maintained that by doing this, he would give into the pressure, and he needed to live by example and contradict the terrorist stereotype surrounding his religious identity. Ahmed battles constantly with how he is categorized as a threat to the host society because of his appearance. He has suffered setbacks both in his professional and social life, but he continues to challenge the negative constructs surrounding him.

### **Absence of Religious Signifiers: Conflicting National Identity in the Host Society**

Both men and women experienced conflicting situations that challenge their national identity in the host culture. Men experienced direct questions about the War on Terror, while women experienced microaggressions on revealing their national identity. The responses show a constant struggle of Pakistani graduate students, as they understand their own conflicting experiences in the host society, while simultaneously contradicting the stereotypes surrounding their identity in the host culture.

Ali (recalls an incident while visiting a friend in the South) feels *animosity* toward himself from Americans because of his national identity:

Somebody in my school asked if I had taken military training I was like, no but I thought what kind of a stupid question is that? I feel the animosity of the Americans towards Pakistan but this is because of lack of understanding. I was in [state x] visiting a friend and we were in a car driving when some guys started shouting slurs and someone threw something on the car so there is racist sentiment here.

Ali pauses while gathering his thoughts, as he sees his nationality from the host culture's perspective. He realizes that Americans don't have a clear understanding of his realities. He embodies double consciousness and feels conflicted by how his national identity is viewed in the host culture. He notes the prevalence of "racist sentiment" in the host culture and has experienced these conflicting experiences both inside and outside of the American university. His negative experiences are harsher outside of the academic institution. Ali feels that he is racialized in the host society because of his contested identities.

Naveed, a male graduate student, studying at a school in the Midwest, also feels that his national identity is viewed in the context of the War on Terror in the host culture:

People here think that we are very backward and the perception of Pakistan is as if a war is happening all the time, I don't feel offended but they are misinformed, and I tell them that I am also a product of Pakistan and at the same academic level as them. So there is a lot of good in the country also. When Osama was captured my colleagues thought it was very near the capital. I explained that no the demographics can't be compared to that of the U.S. and the war is on the border and not in Pakistan.

Naveed notes how Pakistan is viewed as "backward" and warlike in the host culture and takes it upon himself to challenge the negativity surrounding his identity. He is not "offended" by these remarks but considers the host society to be oblivious to his reality. Naveed was in the U.S. when Osama Bin Laden was captured in Pakistan, increasing his visibility in the host society. He expresses a double consciousness, as he is aware that in the host culture his nationality is viewed in the context of global terrorism, and takes it upon himself to contradict the stereotypes about war surrounding his nationality. He engages in an open conversation with his colleagues after the incident, clarifying the demographics of the country. He has developed a counter-narrative to the warlike image of Pakistan and uses himself as an example to show positivity about his nation.

Like Naveed, Saad's national identity is also challenged in the host society. He uses dichotomies of innocent vs. bad as he engages in conversations with his colleagues. He recalls an incident (located in the Midwest):

There was a discussion going on (about the) benefits of new research on developing this new technology that could help improve precision in target killing. My American professor said, 'this will kill terrorists in Pakistan.' My advisor (Korean professor) interrupted, 'we have a Pakistani student here' and then American professor rephrased the incident 'as oh I meant it will kill the bad people and I am sure you are not from the bad part of Pakistan.' I felt extremely uneasy and frustrated by this and said yes this software is very important because it will improve accuracy and then the drones can stop killing innocent children and people in Pakistan and kill terrorists only.

The American professor rephrases his statement on terrorism when he is reminded of Saad's presence. Though Saad is shocked by the incident, he immediately responds by segregating his nationality from the terrorist stereotype and carefully challenges the statement of the professor by segregating terrorism from Pakistan. He sees himself from the host culture's perspective and uses the term "innocent children and people in Pakistan," distancing his religiosity and nationality from the terrorist framework. His experience shows the process of double consciousness at work, as Saad sees his positionality from the dominant Western view and is conflicted by it. He engages in this debate by using the binaries of innocent vs. terrorists to challenge the constructs of the War on Terror surrounding his country of origin in the host society.

Like men, women also experience conflicting circumstances based on their national identity. However, these incidents are not directly in reference to the War on Terror debate, but appear in forms of microaggressions and/or threatening conversations surrounding their nationality. Seema (Northeast) recalls an incident that continues to unsettle her today. She was flying back to Pakistan that day and was dressed in the Pakistani attire, i.e., shalwar kameez. Like most Pakistani women, she does not wear a headscarf, and hence her religiosity is not immediately recognizable:

Americans have a huge misconception of Pakistanis, even bigger than the Pakistanis misconception of Americans. But not all Americans have these views. I remember once I was taking taxi to airport, and on the radio, there was talk on the possibility of the U.S. war with Iran. The American taxi driver could see I was wearing a shalwar kameez..... He said next will be Pakistan. I was shocked and kind of scared and was very silent throughout the ride and thanked God that he is not the one making decisions.

She sees her national identity from the host culture's perspective in relation to war and is stunned by the whole incident. She embodies double consciousness and is conflicted by the whole experience and is relieved that the future of her nation doesn't rest in the hands of the taxi driver. Though Seema is wearing a Pakistani dress, she is not sure whether the driver could discern her nationality. The experience leaves her feeling uneasy and scared for her future, and she is conflicted by how her national identity is viewed from the driver's view. She exclaims that not all Americans have derogatory thoughts about Pakistan. Though she is shaken by the remarks made by the driver, she justifies them based on the *misconception* of the host culture.

Amna another female respondent shares her troubling experience that questioned her national identity:

Well once I was in New York with my friend at a train station, and there were some American women sitting next to us. They started speaking to my friend, who is French, so they assumed I was French too, but while I was talking to one of the women, I told her that I am Pakistani and she was taken aback. I immediately felt a change in their behavior they all completely ignored me in the conversation and only spoke to my friend.

In the mean while a guy was running besides the track bare feet, he was well dressed and everyone was puzzled. So I just said that he may have gotten mugged. So one of the women was like, yeah you know everything right! and I felt really awkward... and when we were about to catch our train she muttered something bad about me. It was not a good experience.

Amna's experiences demonstrate a covert form of social isolation, and the whole incident has left her with discomfort. Her experience is twofold and changes as she reveals her national identity, which is not apparent from her appearance. She feels excluded from the conversation, as her Pakistani identity is made apparent. This is contradictory to her initial experience, when she was part of the interaction while she was being considered French. She notes that the American women were shocked that they had mistaken her as French. Amna has fair skin, common among Pakistani individuals, but her phenotype breaks the brown-colored skin tone associated with her South Asian identity.

While discussing the instance of a man running barefoot on the station platform, Amna again experiences conflicted interaction as the American woman exclaims "yeah you know everything right" and finds that condescending. At the end of the incident, she is not clear of what was said about her, but the social interaction gives her the impression that the American women slurred.

Amna's experience shows the processes of the double consciousness at work. First she feels immediately socially excluded on revealing her nationality. Second she is aware how the host culture views her country of origin and feels animosity toward herself from the American women. The interaction doesn't pose any threat or violence but subjects her to microaggressions as her identity is contested in the host society. She experiences discomfort from this whole experience, and she is aware that the host culture's perspective of her national identity shapes this negative interaction.

It is important to mention here that Pakistani graduate students are involved in social and cultural activities with their American and non-American friends. I argue that it is the double consciousness of the Pakistani graduate students that enables them to be aware of how they are being perceived in the host society. None of the students were discouraged to interact with the host culture based on their negative experiences contesting their religious and national identity.

Participants' experiences show that religious markers, i.e., beard for men and headscarf for women, increase the visibility of the Pakistani graduate students in the host society. These markers immediately distinguish them as Muslims and trigger the War on Terror debate surrounding their religious identity. Both men and women experienced othering on the basis of their visible religiosity in the host society. However, the absence of the religious markers doesn't absolve the Pakistani students from being othered. When their national identity is revealed, for example, in conversation, it again triggers the terrorism constructs surrounding their heritage, and they are othered in the host society based on their country of origin. However, in order to cope with these circumstances, students have developed a narrative of "misconception" among the dominant group, regarding Pakistan and the Islamic world. They process both violent and nonviolent forms of discrimination against their religiosity and national identity by adhering to idea of the "ignorance" of the host society. Being transnational citizens and geographically closer to the War on Terror, these students have a deeper understanding of this geopolitical crisis. This enables them to consider the dominant group as misinformed about their religion and nationality.

## Discussion and Implications

Previous research on international students has detailed the discriminatory experiences of the students due to their cultural and national differences from the host society (Lee and Rice 2007; Toussain & Crowson 2010). But such studies often overlook how the factors contributing to these negative experiences have become more complex within the realm of the War on Terror and also fail to note how students conceptualize these experiences in the new culture. In this paper, by using the case of Pakistani graduate students studying in the U.S., I show that on arrival to the host culture, their national and religious identities are constantly in conflict with the Islamophobic settings of the host society. This research adds a global and transnational frame to DuBoisian theories of double consciousness, as the Pakistani graduate students continuously perceive and challenge their contested identities in the context of the War on Terror. Pakistani graduate students navigate within the constructs of terrorism when their religiosity and nationality are revealed to the dominant group. They embody double consciousness, as they see their identities outlined by the War on Terror framework, and struggle constantly as they challenge and negotiate the negative constructs surrounding them. Their Muslim and Pakistani identity appears as a threat and leads to their otherness in the host society. They rationalize the prejudices and hostility toward them by considering the host society to be ignorant and misinformed about their realities. This narrative of misconceptions by the dominant group enables the respondents to deal with their conflicting experiences. They take the responsibility to negotiate their reality in the U.S. and contradict the negative narratives surrounding their religious and national identity. While the students experienced othering, prejudice, and social isolation across different regions of the host society, they especially experienced heightened hostility in the Southern parts of the U.S. This may be because historically the Southern states have enforced the black/white racial divide more strongly than the rest of the U.S. (Elmendor and Spencer 2014). Further research needs to be done to thoroughly examine and compare the prevalence of Islamophobia across Southern and the Northern states of the U.S. The issue raises important questions about race and ethnicity and whether, after 9/11, Muslims are undergoing a racialization process in the American mainstream.

The findings show that political incidents surrounding the War on Terror interlinking Pakistan also increase the groups' visibility in the host society. However, future research should explore whether international students from Central Asia and the Middle East, specifically Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, experience similar discriminatory experiences within the constructs of terrorism and whether they have developed a similar double consciousness like their Pakistani counterparts to cope with the hostility they encounter in the host society.

In the context of War on Terror, Pakistani students are compelled to prove their innocence to the American society. The American university needs to share this burden and should establish programs educating community members to help understand the complex ethno-racial experience of students from South Asia and the

Middle East. Such programs should collaborate with international students and need to present the global complexity of the War on Terror and its impact on humanity. These initiatives will provide a wider and deeper understanding of the perplexity of the situation to the dominant group and help facilitate the experience of international students from Pakistan and the Middle East in the American university. These measures will also improve their social interaction with the host society.

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