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Un/Desirable Subjects: South Asian Racialization in the Age of Terror

Santhosh Chandrashekar

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**UN/DESIRABLE SUBJECTS:
SOUTH ASIAN RACIALIZATION IN THE AGE OF TERROR**

by

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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

To (un)Occupy Albuquerque and all the women of color from whom I have learned my life lessons and to whom I remain eternally indebted.

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Like all works, this dissertation has accumulated many debts, only some of which are named here. First and foremost, I wrote it on unceded indigenous lands on which the University of New Mexico sits. Although I am documented, so to speak, I am still an intruder/outsider on these lands. My gratitude to the land and its original inhabitants for the many favors I have received, and apologies for my unauthorized presence. I hope to center indigenous decolonization in all my work and struggles.

I am also indebted to my parents without whom this day would not be upon me. My mother, R. Rangamma, encouraged me to pursue my dreams in a foreign country knowing fully well that letting go of me would never be easy (it still isn't). She will always be at the center of my world. My father, S. Chandrashekar, is one of the kindest person I know. His life and his compassion reinforces my faith in all that is good about humanity. Finally, this work would not have been possible without the two of them. My brother, Prashanth, has also tremendously supported this work, although he may never realize it.

When I first came to this country, my identity was that of the oppressed. As a postcolonial migrant, I very unproblematically saw myself as a victim of racial inequality rather than as an active participant in a colonial and racial system that was well honed to use oppressed against oppressed by giving benefits and accolades to some and depriving them to others. If not for women of color feminism, queer of color critique, and critical race theory, I would not have been able to see how I was both oppressor and oppressed. I hold these bodies of work very close to my heart. They are not only the foundation upon

which to build my academic work but also a moral compass that will continue to guide me for the rest of my life.

No classroom has brought these dynamics to sharp relief as much as (un)Occupy Albuquerque (UOA). It is there that I heard the strongest call to be accountable to the communities that I live in, especially indigenous communities, that are the source of all knowledges. I am and will always be indebted to UOA for giving me the opportunity to see my own privilege and work in real ways towards indigenous decolonization. It is also there that I really saw intersectionality in action as UOA showed me that there is no decolonization without putting an end to sexism and heteropatriarchy, a lesson I hope to always live by. Thank you Amalia and Maria, my elders, friends and one of the best couple I know. Thank you for your guidance and for making UOA and me what we are today. More personally, thank you for the last-minute rides and the endless nachos and the decolonial thanksgiving and the overall warmth. Getting to know the two of you has perhaps been the best gift that I have received during my stay in Albuquerque. This is a relationship of the heart and I hope you two will continue to guide and look over me, wherever we are. Thanks also to the other amazing souls I met at UOA, including Darcy, Sayrah, “Wendy” Hershe, Sean, Nitish, Melissa, Henry, Sarah, Summer, and several others who I will always count as friends.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines South Asian racialization in the United States after the 9/11 attacks. Using a comparative racialization framework, it proposes South Asian racialization as entangled with neo-orientalism, anti-Blackness, and settler colonialism—which Andrea Smith (2006, 2012) has called the three pillars of white supremacy—and undergirded by heteropatriarchy. An examination of the Oak Creek shooting and the discourses surrounding it demonstrated that neo-orientalism rendered Sikh Americans as interchangeable with Muslims by constituting them as ‘Muslim-looking’ (Ahmad, 2004), even as it coerced the former to instantiate their difference from Muslims through an aggressive performance of heterosexual patriotism and by reducing who is a Sikh along ethnic and gendered lines. Anti-Blackness as a central logic of policing produced Sureshbhai Patel, an Indian immigrant visiting his son in Alabama, as a ‘skinny Black guy,’ which exposed him to police violence. However, the response from the Indian American community avoided situating the attack as part of a concerted pattern of violence targeting Black people but instead sought refuge in discourses of respectability.

Finally, the public and private personas of U.S. Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard illuminated how Hindu Americans were constituted as exemplary subjects as her Hindutva-inspired Islamophobia articulated with the War on Terror to intensify the militarization of Hawai'i while her "Hawai'ian style Hindu wedding" reinforced the association of the islands with exoticism. Together, these three sites demonstrate how South Asians become un/desirable whereby enduring forms of racism expose them to violence even as they become ventriloquists and exemplar subjects for the normative discourses. This project concludes by arguing for a coalition politics that reorients South Asian Americans towards other groups of color through a candid engagement with not only the shared history of oppression but also a grappling with how South Asians are implicated in the racialization of these other groups.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On December 27, 2012—over a decade after the 9/11 attacks—Sunando Sen, a Hindu Indian American was pushed in front of an oncoming train in Queens, NY. Erika Menendez, who was arrested for the attack, told authorities that the killing was a retaliation for the 9/11 attack: “I pushed a Muslim off the train tracks because I hate Hindus and Muslims ever since 2001 when they put down the twin towers I’ve been beating them up [sic]” (Santora, 2012, para. 4). Media reports hinted that she not only had a history of assaulting Hindus and Muslims, but that she was also homeless, mentally disturbed, and may have been off her medication when the attack occurred (McCormack, 2015). Menendez was charged with second-degree murder as a hate crime and was sentenced to 24 years in prison.

This incident is emblematic of some of the core issues that this project grapples with. First, note the backlash that seems to not have diminished even after a decade after the 9/11 attacks. *Un/desirable subjects* locates the 9/11 attack as a significant turning point that intensified the racialization of South Asian communities in the United States. Second, Menendez’s utterance alludes to the slippage between Hindus and Muslims. Despite the association of the 9/11 attacks with radical Islam in the American imagination, Menendez saw both Hindus and Muslims as enemies because of the common denominator of brownness that these bodies shared. In this, her reaction had a lot in common with the state. As Muneer Ahmad (2004) argues, vigilante violence targeting Muslim, Arab, and South Asians after the 9/11 attacks was accompanied by a legal and political violence from the state that re-racialized these communities as “Muslim-looking” (p. 1262). Michael Omi also terms this phenomenon as the emergence

of the “ArabMuslimSouthAsian” body after 9/11 (Zarrugh & Wheatley, 2013). Hence, Menendez’s fatal attack on Sen is not an anomaly but shares much with the state. However, despite their shared brownness, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh South Asians did not experience the post-9/11 violence in the same manner. This phenomenon needs to be demystified, which this project attempts.

The figures of both Menendez and Sen demand further scrutiny in order to grasp the full spectrum of racial violence and to understand the specific dynamics of South Asian racialization. Menendez had endured homelessness, poverty, mental illness, and had frequent run-ins with the mental health and law enforcement establishments in New York City (Santora & Hartocollis, 2012). Sen, on the other hand, was pursuing a Ph.D. in economics at New York University and had recently opened a print shop after saving up enough money (Stepansky, Parascandola, & Tracy, 2012). His roommates described him as soft spoken, philosophical, and gentle (Santora, 2012) while his lawyer called him an “Indian Gregory Peck” who was helping Hindu Bangladeshis settle in the United States (Stepansky et al., 2012). What emerges then are two contradictory profiles: one of a (racialized) woman who became a stark example of the worst form of Islamophobia that became pervasive and normal after the 9/11 attacks, and the other of an ideal immigrant subject who was hardworking and entrepreneurial and whose dreams were cut short by (misplaced) racial hatred. In other words, this incident provides us with an opportunity to map South Asian racialization as bound up with the racial violence faced by other groups.

Un/desirable subjects explores these and other dynamics towards generating a complex understanding of South Asian racialization in the post-9/11 United States. I deploy racialization intersectionally as Jasbir Puar does, “as a figure for specific social

formations and processes that are not necessarily or only tied to what has been historically theorized as ‘race’” (Puar, 2007, p. xii). My project tries to understand how race, ethnicity, national origins, gender, sexuality, class, and religion, among others, intersect to script certain bodies as worthy of sympathy and state protections while excluding others. Put differently, this project grapples with the contradictory position that South Asians occupy in the United States: both as bodies that are exposed to racial violence but also as ventriloquists and exemplars for normative discourses that implicate them in the racialization of other groups.

I use South Asian as a category that captures a range of subjectivities, specifically Sikh Americans, Indian Americans, and Hindu Americans that are the focus of this dissertation. These subjectivities descended from South Asia are often overlapping, and an individual or a group may be a member of more than one of them (for instance, a Hindu American is often an Indian American). They are exposed to uneven violence in the context of the United States based on their national origins, religion, gender, and sexuality, among others. But, at the same time, they are also implicated in the racialization of other groups, including Black and Native people. As such, my project draws attention to not only how South Asian racialization is mediated by gender, sexuality, class, and religious and national differences, among others, but also outlines the role that the selective inclusion of South Asian bodies play in the devaluation of other disenfranchised communities in the United States.

It is indeed a perplexing experience to be counted as South Asian in the United States. Indian Americans, especially Hindu Americans, have become the very emblem of the model minority myth as they have the highest median household income among all

ethno-racial groups in the United States at \$88,000 compared to \$66,000 for all Asian Americans, and \$49,800 for all U.S. households (Desilver, 2014). As a result, only 9 percent of Indian Americans lived in poverty compared to 12 percent of Asian Americans, and 13 percent of the U.S. population. If Indian American politicians such as Bobby Jindal and Nikki Haley have ascended to prominent political positions, media personalities such as Kal Penn, Mindy Kaling and Aziz Ansari have broken new grounds in television. Indian Americans are also well represented in the STEM fields as 28 percent of them work in science and engineering, and two-thirds of Indian Americans 16 years or older were in management, business, or other lucrative occupations (Desilver, 2014).

Bangladeshi Americans and Pakistani Americans, on the other hand, started arriving in the United States in the 90s through the visa lottery program (Maira, 2009). They mostly hold blue-collar jobs. Furthermore, their religious identity as Muslims has exposed them to intense policing and surveillance in the post 9/11 era—a vulnerability to which Indian Americans are not completely immune due to their shared brownness, as Sen’s example demonstrates. These dynamics need to be unpacked urgently. Although my focus in this project will be on Sikh, Indian, and Hindu Americans, respectively—which are neither exhaustive of South Asia nor mutually exclusive categories—I do so to map the central role that religion and national origins play in the post-9/11 era. I am interested in how these subjectivities, while exposed to different forms of violence, are also constituted as exemplars for normative discourses such as liberal multiculturalism and neoliberal productivity that intensify the devaluation of other groups. As such, my project demonstrates the salient yet liminal positions that these South Asian subjectivities

occupy in the post-9/11 United States.

Theoretical Framework

This project builds upon the comparative turn within ethnic studies and other fields. It posits South Asian racialization as entangled with, and therefore indivisible from, the racialization of other groups of color, especially Muslim, Black, and Native communities in the United States. It explores the particular modalities that produce Sikh, Indian, and Hindu Americans as un/desirable subjects by mapping those discourses hinged to sexual and gender normativities that turn these subjects into more than sites of injuries: as coerced into reproducing normative discourses that participate in the disenfranchisement of other groups.

In this regard, I follow Hong and Ferguson's (2011) call for evolving comparative models that can go beyond empirical juxtapositions and offer a comprehensive view of racialization. As they note:

... the stakes for identifying new comparative models are immensely high, for the changing configurations of power in the era after the decolonizing movements and new social movements of the mid-twentieth century demand that we understand how particular populations are rendered vulnerable to processes of death and devaluation over and against other populations, in ways that palimpsestically register older modalities of racialized death but also exceed them.
(p. 1-2)

Hong and Ferguson (2011) critique both the hegemonic western model as well as the minority nationalisms model. If the former sets the west as the "ideal" against which other societies were evaluated as deviant, the minority nationalisms model emerged in the

1950s and the 60s to draw attention to the role of racial and colonial violence in producing non-western societies as deviant. But it replaced nation-state with races. In the place of these two models, the authors call for a comparative model that is based in women of color and queer of color critique that tracks the production of difference not only between but within groups.

The comparative method of women of color feminism and queer of color critique is heterotopic insofar as it refuses to maintain that objects of comparison are static, unchanging, and empirically observable, and refuses to render illegible the shifting configurations of power that define such objects in the first place. (p. 9)

I understand Hong and Ferguson as calling for an exploration of how differences between groups always manifest as differences within groups. They suggest that gender and sexual normativities in particular play a heightened role in and between groups as they are mobilized to mark certain bodies as respectable and others as deviant. As such, comparative models are rarely productive if they do not account for how gender and sexual politics are integrally tied in with the racialization of communities.

This dissertation employs comparative racialization as its theoretical framework to map how South Asian racialization, specifically the racialization of Sikh, Indian, and Hindu American subjectivities, is interwoven with the devaluation of Muslim, Black, and Native communities, respectively. Pairing of these cases is intentional as it allows me to explore the historical forces of neo-orientalism, anti-Blackness, and settler-colonialism in the United States—which Andrea Smith (2006, 2012) terms the three pillars of white supremacy and which, following Audre Lorde (1984), we may call the master's tools—as implicated in South Asian racialization with heteropatriarchy providing the foundation

that undergirds all of them. I contend that South Asian racialization in the post-9/11 period cannot be understood outside of how it is entangled with these three structures.

In her remarkably influential article published in 2006 and revised in 2012, Smith contends that people of color organizing in the United States is often premised on the idea that those victimized by white supremacy should come together based on their shared oppression. Such a model not only flattens the different ways in which communities are affected by white supremacy but also occludes how people of color may be complicit in each other's oppressions. In its place, she offers the "three pillars of white supremacy" as a model that can help organizers grapple with how people of color can be oppressors even as they are oppressed at the same time. As she notes:

This framework does not assume that racism and white supremacy is enacted in a singular fashion; rather, white supremacy is constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated, logics. Envision three pillars, one labeled Slavery/Capitalism, another labeled Genocide/Capitalism, and the last one labeled Orientalism/War, as well as arrows connecting each of the pillars together. (2006, p. 67)

The first among them is slavery/capitalism, which I designate as anti-Blackness in my project. I expand each of them in detail in the following chapters. But suffice it to say here that if the logic of slavery renders Black people as slaveable—i.e., nothing more than property (Smith, 2006)—anti-Blackness in an era of post-slavery (Sharpe, 2009) secures the disposability of Black people by constituting Blackness as not only undesirable but as an object of fear. It accomplishes this feat through the discourse of criminality to produce Blackness as an aberration and mobilizes the security apparatus to

carry out modern-day lynchings. Furthermore, anti-Blackness in my work gestures to not only its constitution by white supremacy but also how it is practiced by other communities of color, which Jared Sexton (2010) has called people-of-color racism.

The second pillar, genocide/capitalism, is articulated as settler colonialism within my analysis. The logic of genocide holds that indigenous people must always be disappearing so non-indigenous people can take their place (Smith, 2006, 2012). Their forcible removal is both symbolic as well as material as various strategies from wars, forced relocation, and sexual violence to biopolitical assimilation and cultural appropriation are deployed to disappear the Indian (Wolfe, 2006). A concomitant process is set off at the same time as settlers claim monopoly over not only Native land but also their spirituality, cultural practices, beliefs, customs, and even costumes! I name this pillar settler colonialism as it allows me to analyze the role of non-whites—specifically Hindu Americans—in the dispossession of Native people. Furthermore, settler colonialism gestures to how the mere fact of settlement by immigrants on occupied lands can intensify the dispossession of Native people.

Orientalism/War is the third pillar of white supremacy. Orientalism, according to Edward Said (Said, 1978), was a self-referential technique through which the west saw itself as superior and the orient as decadent and inferior. Smith (2006, 2012) notes that this pillar constructs certain groups, especially Arabs and others from the Middle East, as not only inferior but as posing a constant threat to the United States that needs to be neutralized. It provides the main reason for the constant wars launched in the name of freedom. I rearticulate orientalism as neo-orientalism in my project to mark the intensification and weaponization of orientalist logics in the post-9/11 United States,

specifically the racialization of religious differences, the polarization of the world into a us v them binary, and the reliance on gender and sexual normativities to prosecute the War on Terror, which have had an internal impact on communities that have borne the brunt of neo-orientalism.

All of these processes have historically shaped South Asian racialization in the United States, but they have taken new forms and intensities after the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing consolidation of security processes in the United States. Undergirding these pillars is heteropatriarchy, which Smith calls the “building block of US empire” (2006, p. 71). Heteropatriarchy is the fundamental mode of producing ab/normalities and assigning differential values to bodies. Furthermore, it is also the primary means through which groups are socialized into hierarchical structures. Heteropatriarchy is an unequal model that enforces the subservience of women to men and children to parents by rationalizing these behaviors as part of natural law. These unequal relationships, then, become the basis for structuring all of society and enforcing compliance: “Just as the patriarchs rule the family, the elites of the nation-state rule their citizens” (Smith, 2006, p. 72). As such, heteropatriarchy provides the foundation or the very ground that sustains an unequal system. Each of my chapters is dedicated to exploring one of these pillars and how South Asians are implicated in them.

At a very basic level, Smith’s “Heteropatriarchy and the three pillars of white supremacy” is a comparative racialization model that allows us to see how groups of color are complicit in each other’s oppressions. Native people, for instance, continue to be dispossessed by settler colonialism even as they participate in orientalism as they are enlisted in record numbers in the military (LaDuke & Cruz, 2013). Arab Americans may

be targeted by new and deadly regimes of surveillance, but they are also beneficiaries of settler colonialism when they profit from indigenous dispossession. This model allows a better grasp of the position of people of color in the United States beyond the category of the oppressed.

In sum, my project brings together the work of Hong and Ferguson (2011) and Smith (2006, 2012) to analyze South Asian racialization in the post-9/11 United States. I take the call for critical comparative racialization models seriously by situating South Asian American racialization as entangled with the historical structures of neo-orientalism, anti-Blackness, and settler colonialism in a manner that implicates South Asians in the racialization of these groups. My decision to focus on South Asian racialization in the United States is informed by what postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak has termed “accident of birth” (Spivak, 2010). In other words, by focusing on South Asian Americans, I am putting to good use my familiarity with the South Asian diaspora in the United States. By delimiting my project this way, I am not making an identitarian argument but drawing on my familiarity with a sociopolitical racial formation to explore the complexity of racialization. I do so by exploring South Asian racialization as hinged to the deployment of gender and sexual normativities to render some bodies as desirable while, concomitantly, contributing to the scripting of Muslim, Black, and Native groups as aberrant.

Methodology

The methodological choices for this project are informed by a women of color feminist critique. By this, I am simultaneously invoking a reading practice (Hong, 2006) and an oppositional politics (Sandoval, 2000) that is theoretically and politically

committed to demystifying the processes that produce raced, gendered, and sexualized subjectivities (among others) with unequal access to power. As such, I intentionally select texts and excerpts that allow me to demonstrate how inequality and violence become acceptable conditions of existence. Additionally, a women of color feminist critique demands a rejection of liberal strategies of inclusion and assimilation in favor of a politics of solidarity and coalition building grounded in anti-oppression and liberation, which is a core focus of this project.

I adopt critical rhetoric, as elaborated by Raymie McKerrow (1989, 1991), and racialized critical rhetorical theorizing as enunciated by Hasian and Delgado (1998) as my analytical frameworks. McKerrow argues that a critical rhetorical perspective not only allows for a “critique of domination” but also mandates a “critique of freedom,” particularly when freedom presents itself as a desirable goal. Although I agree with Ono and Sloop (1992) that McKerrow’s articulation of critical rhetoric can inadvertently slip into skepticism and that domination and freedom are “two perspectives of the same phenomenon,” I find it necessary to maintain an analytical distinction between the two. Given the South Asian investment in procuring legal and cultural recognition by reproducing normative discourses, I am interested in a critique of freedom (from violence) as a particular modality of power that reinforces the state and its violent structures. I find critical rhetoric especially helpful to analyze South Asian politics grounded in heteronormativity and to critique the struggle for legal and other forms of recognition that continues to organize liberal South Asian anti-racist and civil rights activism in the United States.

Additionally, Hasian and Delgado offer racialized critical rhetorical theorizing as

a productive framework to analyze the constitutive role of race in rhetorical cultures. Racialized critical rhetorical theorizing, which is an amalgamation of critical race theory, critical rhetoric, and vernacular criticism, illuminates the ways in which race is constructed through historical, legal, political, and cultural discourses and, in turn, shapes them. I deploy racialized critical rhetorical theorizing to understand how South Asians are produced as un/desirable through their interpellation in neo-orientalism, anti-Blackness, and settler-colonialism.

I also draw upon Foucauldian discourse analysis and Derridean deconstruction as specific strategies for analysis. Foucauldian discourse analysis entails three processes: historical inquiry, an analysis of the mechanisms of the power, and a description of the process of subjectification—the signifying practices that produces subjects (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Derridean deconstruction illuminates the fundamental instability or internal contradictions (Chuh, 2003) that structure discourses by tracking them from the most elementary form of human communication—language—to their embeddedness in our thought processes. Deconstruction is not a method in the conventional sense of the term but rather a strategy for analysis. As Richard Beardsworth (1996) notes:

Derrida is careful to avoid this term [method] because it carries connotations of a procedural form of judgment. A thinker with a method has already decided *how* to proceed, is unable to give him or herself up to the matter of thought in hand, is a functionary of the criteria which structure his or her conceptual gestures. For Derrida ... this is irresponsibility itself. (p. 4)

Both Foucauldian discourse analysis as well as deconstruction call for an anti-

method wherein the analyst does not presume a certain way of reading a text or discourse before encountering it. Deconstruction in particular examines what has been “set off” or excluded to enunciate a proposition in a manner that it appears as truth. It tracks the rhetorical maneuvers that conceal the track of the constitutive originary that has been excluded, which Derrida termed *différance*, and its continuous deferment within the enunciation called *trace* (Spivak, 1999). Together, these strategies help me uncover how the discourses that South Asians articulate to produce themselves as desirable positions them as active agents in the racialization of other groups.

If critical rhetoric and racialized critical rhetorical theorizing allow me to firmly maintain the focus on racialization, Foucauldian discourse analysis and deconstruction provide textual strategies to analyze a variety of primary and secondary sources in my project. In the first chapter on Sikh racialization, I draw upon popular media reproductions of the Oak Creek shooting to map racial violence against Sikhs as well as analyze self-representational material produced by organizations such as the Sikh Coalition and the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund to understand how they rendered Sikhs as desirable. My second chapter analyzes media accounts of the police takedown of Sureshbhai Patel as well as the legal documents and court proceedings connected with the case. The last chapter, which scrutinizes the public and private personas of Tulsi Gabbard, draws upon a diverse archive of media reports, congressional hearings, and self-representational material to illuminate how Hindu Americans are entangled in the dispossession of Native Hawaiians.

Purpose of Study

My project has two purposes. My research elucidates the discursive constitution

of South Asians as a racialized category in the United States through their interpellation in the racialization of other groups. I am interested in exploring South Asian racialization as a comparative project that is influenced by historical factors that have no doubt intensified after the 9/11 attacks. I reject the model of inter-racial prejudice in favor of understanding how South Asian Americans are compelled into producing discourses that make them active agents in the dispossession of other groups. I am particularly interested in the politics of neoliberal multiculturalism and inclusion that are hinged to gender and sexual normativities.

Second, I am interested in not only theorizing the conditions that mediate the racialization of South Asians but also in the political implications of such conditions for projects that seek to challenge South Asian racialization. South Asian civil rights activism has been dominated by liberal assimilationist strategies that seek inclusion into the U.S. cultural and political imaginary that, paradoxically, reinforce the violence facing South Asian subjects, as I demonstrate in this project. Assimilationist strategies are invariably tied in with the production of difference as certain groups become admissible only at the cost of excluding others. Moreover, the U.S. nation-state is a formation of racial power that has been historically organized around the protection of white property rights, which implicates it directly in the exploitation and subjugation of racialized groups. Hence, a key purpose of my project is to understand the discursive processes that produce South Asians as un/desirable to interrupt strategies for redress that make appeals to the U.S. nation-state. I hope that this research can offer lessons in terms of imagining futures that reject normative demands for inclusion into a violent system in favor of a challenge to race itself as a constitutive premise of modern state power.

Relevance of Study

This study makes important contributions to two fields: communications studies and South Asian American Studies. Racialization has emerged as a major area of focus within the field of communication studies. Primarily imported through the work of Stuart Hall (1992), cultural communication studies (Jackson, 1998) generated tremendous interest in racialization that moved it from the margins to the center of the discipline. Of particular interest to communication scholars is how mediated and other forms of discourses produce race as a normative category that erases the operation of power and rationalizes inequalities. Critical/cultural communication studies and media studies are not the only fields pursuing racialization, as it has emerged as a major focus of intercultural (Roy & Shaw, 2016) and interpersonal communication studies (Soliz, 2016) as well as other emerging fields such as environmental communication (Godfrey & Torres, 2016). My project builds upon this interest by offering South Asian racialization as a prime site to map the changing dynamics of racialization in the United States.

By South Asian American Studies (SAAS), I am naming a disciplinary formation that can be seen as coalescing primarily in the U.S. academy at the intersections of Asian American Studies and South Asian Studies. Its emergence is partly a response to the ways in which Asian American Studies is structured by notions of Asian America as predominantly referencing migrations from the Pacific Rim, which leaves under-theorized the emergence of “South Asian America” as a racialized category of governance in the U.S. (for example, see Dave et al., 2001; Shankar & Srikanth, 1998). Additionally, South Asia’s contradictory position as a vital geopolitical entity (Grewal, 2005; Radhakrishnan, 2011) even as it remains one of the two frontlines of the global

War on Terror, continues to produce unequal effects for those racialized as South Asian Americans. SAAS tries to account for this phenomenon through an analysis that puts into conversation the biopolitical and geopolitical dimensions of racialization as it unfolds in the United States. My project is directly aligned with this field as it examines South Asian American racialization in the post-9/11 United States as a complicated phenomenon entangled with the production of other racialized subjectivities that are deemed disposable. My project pays attention to how such violences are normalized.

Chapter Outlines

Each of the chapters in this dissertation concentrates on a particular pillar of white supremacy to unpack South Asian racialization as entangled with the production of racialized others. Although these three pillars are simultaneously at work—for instance, neo-orientalism is always already wrapped up in an assumed distinction between brownness and Blackness—I have organized this project in a manner that each individual chapter examines a specific pillar. While this suppresses certain analytical possibilities, it also allows for a more in-depth examination of each of the pillars as they racialize South Asians in specific ways.

Chapter 1, “Replaceable Subjects: Neo-orientalism, Anti-Muslim Violence and Sikh Vulnerability,” explores the relationship between anti-Muslim racism and Sikh racialization through neo-orientalist logics that are embedded in the discourses of securitization. The World Trade Center collapse unleashed a wave of attacks against especially turbaned and bearded Sikh Americans in the United States “mistaken” for Muslims with the Oak Creek massacre reflecting a stark culmination of this violence. However, Sikh civil rights activism following the attack has coalesced around the

demand that attacks against Sikhs be recorded as a separate hate crime category. My project tries to illuminate how neo-orientalist logics constitute Sikhs as enemy others while coercing Sikhs to produce themselves as respectable subjects through embracing American multiculturalism and inclusion.

Chapter 2, “Fungible Subjects: Anti-Black Police Violence and South Asian Disposability,” reads the case of Sureshbhai Patel, an Indian immigrant, who was partially paralyzed by a cop responding to a call describing a “skinny Black guy” peering into garages. Patel had come to the United States to help his son and daughter-in-law care for their 17-month-old baby when the incident occurred. *Fungible subjects* explores how the centrality of anti-Blackness for racialized policing, especially the assemblage of phenotype, language, and other markers, constituted South Asians as proxies for Black people. Yet, the reaction of the Patel family and the Indian American community demonstrated a heightened investment in normative conceptions of the immigrant family to produce themselves as subjects worthy of rights and protections. I use this incident to map how Indian Americans become ventriloquists for anti-Black discourses through their embrace of sexual and gendered normativities.

Chapter 3, “Exemplary Subjects: Hindu Americans and Hawai‘ian Settler Colonialism,” foregrounds the intersections between Hindu Americans and settler colonialism. It tracks the public and private personas of United States Representative Tulsi Gabbard, widely narrated as the first Hindu congresswoman, to understand how Hindu Americans are implicated in the ongoing colonization of Hawai‘i and the continuing dispossession of the indigenous people of the islands. Tulsi is not a South Asian or Indian by descent, yet she has received widespread support within the Hindu

American community because of her religious identity. Furthermore, she is a conduit for the Islamophobia that goes hand-in-hand with the rise of Hindu nationalism as she articulates it into policies because of her access to institutional power. I examine how Tulsī's Hindu identity connects with the post-9/11 Islamophobia, liberal multiculturalism, and military and commercial interests to further entrench settler colonialism in Hawai'i .

The conclusion, "Insurgent Subjects: Beyond Normative Inclusion," recaps the main arguments made in the earlier chapters. I outline how anti-Blackness, neo-orientalism, and settler colonialism are all process in which South Asians are centrally implicated and outside of which South Asian racialization cannot be understood. More importantly, this chapter takes up the difficult task of coalition-building. While all the three chapters suggest how South Asians can work towards not becoming instruments of neo-orientalist, anti-Black, and settler colonialism, the conclusion dwells deeper into the question of building ethical coalitions that do not trade in each other for nominal inclusion into a violent system. I draw upon women of color theorizing to illuminate how to approach difference without allowing it to erect walls while also not losing its ethical purchase. My hope is that my work can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of South Asian racialization as a relational process, which can help us build stronger coalitions.

Like the Sikh faith, America is very young.

– Amy Chua

Chapter 2

Mistaken Subjects: Neo-Orientalism, Anti-Muslim Violence and Sikh Vulnerability

On June 5, 2013, the Advisory Policy Board of the FBI voted to expand standard hate crime reporting to include crimes motivated by bias against Sikhs, Hindus, and Arabs (Kaleem, 2013). This decision came in the wake of demands by numerous Sikh civil rights organizations that the FBI track hate crimes against Sikhs as it had done for “Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Atheists [sic]” (“Victory!,” 2014, para. 3). The organizations charged that under current reporting procedures, violence against Sikhs was “often misreported as anti-Muslim” (Kaleem, 2013, para. 3), which prevented Sikh victims from seeking legal redress. Other civil rights organizations such as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee also supported the reporting changes on the grounds that they would allow Arabs and Arab-Americans to report instances of violence and crimes that were also motivated by hatred and discrimination (Mitchell, 2013).

In a notable amendment to this decision, the FBI decided to track hate crimes against all self-identified religions as listed in the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and Statistical Abstract approved by the U.S. Census Bureau. These include “Catholic, Protestant, Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, Orthodox, Other Christian, Jewish, Islamic (Muslim), Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Other Religions, Multiple Religions-Group, and Atheism/Agnosticism” (Kaleem, 2013, para. 13). Hastily added as an afterthought, this amendment indexes the anxiety that has generally greeted the gains of the Civil Rights movement, which are seen as affording special protections to disenfranchised populations

at the expense of the majority. In this context, neutral hate crime reporting that is not geared towards any particular religious group promise equal protection to the followers of all religions, including majoritarian Christian denominations, thereby allaying fears of minorities being afforded special treatment.¹

But how do we make sense of the demand by Sikh civil rights organizations for a separate reporting category that would track hate crimes against Sikh males “mistaken for Muslims”? Such a demand rests on the premise that “Sikh” and “Muslim” exist *a priori* as coherent religious categories and racial violence is seen as wrongfully targeting Sikhs by “mistaking” them for Muslims. In other words, such an understanding presumes that there is a coherent Sikh subject—complete with specific religious accouterments and bodily practices— before the operation of racial violence who has become the victim of misdirected anti-Muslim rage.

But what if these categories are made to coagulate through racial violence (Thobani, 2012)? In asking this question, I am not suggesting that “Sikh” and “Muslim” are entirely reducible to effects of racialization. Rather, I am drawing attention to the ways in which anti-Muslim and anti-Arab violence articulated through neo-orientalist

¹ Here, one may recall the critical race theorist Derrick Bell’s suggestion that racial progress will not be conceded to by Whites unless it is conclusively demonstrated that it is in their best interests to do so. Hence, Bell maintained that the law was a complicated register in which to make a case for racial equality (2009). In this context, the decision to track hate crimes against all self-identified religious groups allays White fears about the state making too many concessions to the minorities.

logics after the 9/11 attacks has played a central role in coercing Sikhs to produce themselves in a certain image: through their distancing from Muslims and Islam (i.e., Sikhs are not Muslims) but also through instantiations of Sikh normativity (i.e., the Sikh as a quintessentially turbaned [male] subject) and an aggressive performance of heterosexual patriotism, participation in American imperialism, and a presentation of Sikhs as a key component of the United States' multicultural composition. Hence, the role of racialized violence cannot be underestimated in regulating the meaning of what it means to be "Sikh" and "Muslim," particularly when one of them becomes intelligible by performing its difference from the other.

This chapter maps how the intensification of anti-Muslim violence following the 9/11 attacks through neo-orientalist logics collapses Sikhs (as well as other South Asians and Arabs) into the racial typology of "Muslim-looking people,"² even as it accelerates efforts to isolate "Muslims" by coercing Sikhs to produce themselves as a distinct (i.e.,

² I borrow "Muslim-looking peoples" from Muneer Ahmad (2004), who argues that following the 9/11 attacks, physical violence targeted at Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians was accompanied by institutionalized legal and political violence which re-racialized these communities as "Muslim looking." Apart from launching wars against predominantly Muslim countries, the U.S. state apparatus reconfigured immigration laws to keep out those it understood as "Muslim looking" while targeting such people already present in its territory for surveillance and deportation. Immigration sweeps and indefinite detentions complemented vigilante violence that inflicted serious bodily harm and egregious violations against those appearing to be Muslim.

non-Muslim) religious-cultural group. It addresses the relationship between anti-Muslim racism and Sikh racialization in post-9/11 U.S. to explore, more specifically: What are the ways in which fear of the Muslim (looking) produces discourses that signify the Sikh subject as distinct from the Muslim, even as both groups continue to be collapsed into the racialized category of “Muslim-looking” peoples? How are national origins, phenotypes, gender, and religious identities, including religious markers, invoked in institutional discourses? How do hate crime advocacy and self-representational practices reproduce these distinction? What connections are foregrounded or disavowed by institutional discourses to produce the Sikh as a distinct—i.e., non-Muslim—religious-racial subject and what are the pitfalls in making such claims? Finally, if the fate of the racialized Sikh subject is indelibly linked with that of the Muslim in post-9/11 U.S., then how do we forge a response that does not secure protections to Sikhs at the cost of in/advertently abandoning Muslims as a legitimate target of state and vigilante violence? These are the questions I seek to explore in this chapter by drawing upon a variety of primary and secondary sources, including media commentary, Sikh civil rights activism, FBI reporting guidelines, Army policies, and other documents.

But why not investigate the production of the Muslim subject as a figure of terror rather than turn to Sikh racialization to understand post-9/11 racial formations? After all, if the goal of this chapter is to map the conditions under which racial violence renders certain bodies as disposable, then what better way to accomplish this than examining the production of Muslims as terrorist others? I want to clarify at the onset that I remain acutely mindful that not all South Asians have faced post-9/11 violence in the same manner. In positing post-9/11 Sikh racialization as intimately bound up with anti-Muslim

violence, I do not mean to suggest that anti-Muslim racism is a diffuse mechanism that affects non-Muslims *as much as* Muslims. My position is quite the contrary, as Muslims continue to figure disproportionately as targets of the War on Terror and its egregious manifestations internally in the U.S. and externally.³ My interest, rather, is in the ways in which the figure of the Muslim can be mobilized as a sign of terror by state and non-state actors to operationalize a wide range of repressive projects. In this context, I agree with

³ I return to this point in more detail later, but suffice it to say for now that the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks was characterized by immigration sweeps targeting Muslim males over 16 years (Bayoumi, 2006), passage of draconian laws such as the Patriot Act that gave free rein to the security apparatus to indefinitely detain suspects (an overwhelming number of whom were Muslim) (Sekhon, 2003), and extensive racial profiling (Chon & Arzt, 2005). These efforts by the state bureaucracy were complimented by vicious media campaigns that demonized Muslims, resulting in widespread vigilante violence against those “looking Muslim” (Ahmad, 2004). Additionally, the War on Terror has predominantly targeted Muslim-majority countries with Afghanistan and Iraq being the most egregious examples of a phenomenon that has opened many fronts in the Islamic world (Bacevich, 2014). A 2015 report by Physicians for Social Responsibility titled *Body Count* notes that 1.3 million to 2 million people have died as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the resulting insurgency in Pakistan, all coveted fronts in the War on Terror (Physicians, 2015), although other accounts put the total death toll since 1990s close to 4 million people, almost all of whom are Muslims (Ahmed, 2015).

Junaid Rana (2011) that the figure of the “Muslim”— signified through a beard and turban—has been invoked in such a manner that it is specific enough to target Muslims while being flexible enough to designate a range of (non-white, non-Muslim, mostly turbaned but also un-turbaned) bodies for containment and disciplining.

In addition, I am fascinated by the ways in which the circulation of neo-orientalist ideology in the post-9/11 period generated attacks against turbaned Sikhs while, at the same time, coercing them to produce themselves as a distinct—i.e. non-Muslim—religious-cultural group. This interrupted the possibility of cross-religious alliances among South Asians. As such, instead of presuming that a normative Muslim and Sikh subject exists prior to racial violence, I am interested in mapping how anti-Muslim racism following the 9/11 attacks produced Muslims and Sikhs as mutually exclusive religious-racial categories—their ethnic ties and common exposure to racial violence notwithstanding—even as it rendered them interchangeable by collapsing them into the racial formation of Muslim-looking people.

Sikh males were overwhelmingly targeted in post-9/11 attacks as state racial profiling practices, such as asking Sikhs to remove their turbans at airports for additional security screening, complemented vigilante violence that targeted Sikh males for purportedly looking “Muslim” (Sidhu, 2013; Sidhu & Gohil, 2009). Gradually, the Sikh civil society started to respond to these attacks by claiming that Sikh males had become victims of post-9/11 profiling as a result of their corporeal resemblance to Muslims because of the pagh or the dastar, the turban worn by baptized Sikh men (as well as some women—a point that is largely ignored in Sikh civil society discourses around the turban and its role in inciting racist attacks). Most efforts from Sikh civil society were directed

towards clarifying the religious and cultural differences between Sikhs and Muslims, in which resignifying the pagh assumed key importance (Puar, 2007, 2008). This move was paralleled by well-coordinated campaigns to situate Sikhs as an important element of the United States' multicultural composition. In sum, what emerged was an articulation of the turbaned Sikh as a distinct, i.e. non-Muslim, religious-cultural victim-subject who, by producing "himself" as such, came to represent an important element of the United States' multicultural diversity.

In emphasizing religious and cultural distinctions between Sikhs and Muslims, such responses not only left unaddressed the role of anti-Muslim violence in intensifying religious-racial differences but also reinforced whiteness (Koshy, 2001) and multiculturalism (Goldberg, 1994; Melamed, 2011) as important registers that calibrate U.S. national belonging. Additionally, Sikh civil society responses gesture to the intensified reorganization of diasporic and migrant South Asians along religious lines (Mishra, 2013). This not only exacerbates historical communal tensions in South Asian communities by inflecting them with new meaning, but also severely limits the possibility of forging a pan-ethnic, pan-religious South Asian (American) response to post-9/11 racial profiling and attacks. If Sikhs (as well as South Asian Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians) are being targeted for purportedly "looking Muslim," then clarifying religious and cultural distinctions through recourse to multiculturalism only aggravates the situation by in/advertently offering the Muslim as a legitimate object for retribution.

I start this chapter by providing a historical account of Sikh racialization in the United States. I pay special attention to the racial and religious significance of the turban

because of its historical role in Sikh racialization. What I hope to demonstrate in this section is how Sikh racialization in North America has often involved the collapsing of Sikh bodies into proximal categories. Put differently, Sikhs in the United States and Canada have been racialized precisely through their unintelligibility as Sikhs: historically as “Hindoos” and now as Muslim (looking). I emphasize this point to mark the ways in which racial violence tried to fix the meaning of what it means to be Sikh by collapsing Sikhs into proximal racial-religious categories.

I then propose neo-orientalism as a theoretical and analytical framework that allows us to map post-9/11 racialization of Sikhs outside of discourses of “mistaken identity” that dominate accounts of anti-Sikh violence. Neo-orientalism names the contemporary mode of racial violence against turbaned non-white bodies. It works by reorganizing the boundaries between Sikhs and Muslims, sometimes by completely rendering them invisible and, at other times, heightening the distinctions between them by coercing Sikhs to produce themselves as distinct religious subjects, i.e. not Muslim. My argument is that it is impossible to understand contemporary Sikh racialization without accounting for how neo-orientalist logics project racial anxieties onto articles of clothing such as the turban and the hijab by turning them into overloaded signs of oriental Islam.

I then look at two interconnected events, both of which illuminate the ability of neo-orientalism to render the boundaries between Sikhs and Muslims invisible and hyper-visible. I first examine the Oak Creek Gurudwara shooting in which Wade Michael Page, a self-avowed white supremacist, killed six Sikh worshippers at a Gurudwara. The mainstream media widely represented the killings as one of mistaken rage in which the

“wrong” community was targeted. Missing from these accounts are how militarized neo-orientalist discourses that became pervasive after the 9/11 attacks rendered the boundaries between Sikhs and Muslims porous. I then turn to how Sikh civil society self-representational practices and advocacy mobilized around the hate crimes initiative soon after the shooting worked to exaggerate the distinctions between Sikhs and Muslims. But the “Sikh” that such re-significations offer produces its own exclusions by not only implicitly gendering the Sikh as a turbaned male, but also flattening the racial and ethnic diversity that constitutes the Sikh populations in North America.⁴ Additionally, such conceptions actively disavow the ethno-cultural links and common histories of racist violence that bind non-white turbaned bodies. A major goal of this chapter is to pursue such links so as to imagine solidarities that do not secure protections for the Sikh by disowning the Muslim. I end the chapter by recapping my arguments and suggesting that it is important to keep open the question of what “Sikh” means instead of calcifying the Sikh subjectivity along certain lines to prevent its collapsing into proximal categories.

⁴ The 3HO community, which considers itself a Sikh *sangat*, largely comprises white converts to Sikhism who follow Sikh religious tenets, including donning white paghs as part of their attire. Literature on racial attacks and state repression facing Sikhs in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks has been largely silent on the experiences of the 3HO community. While there are differences over whether 3HO community members are Sikhs, the fact that there is little to no commentary on the experiences of the 3HO community in relation to the racialization of the turban speaks to the absence of works that take up the question of racial diversity in the Sikh community.

The Tide of Turbans

On January 26, 2013, Jagjeet Singh, a turbaned Sikh who worked as a commercial driver, was passing through Mississippi when he was pulled over for a flat tire. The officers who detained him called him a “terrorist” and mocked him for carrying the kirpan, a ceremonial dagger worn by baptized Sikhs (Hing, 2014). This humiliating experience repeated again when Singh came to the Pike County Justice Court on March 26. He was promptly removed by officers from the courtroom on the orders of Judge Aubrey Rimes for wearing the turban. When his attorney went to the judge’s chamber to inquire about the matter, Judge Rimes confirmed that Singh would not be allowed to enter the courtroom until he removed “the rag from his head” (Atwood, 2013). The judge also threatened to call him last on the docket if he refused to comply with his orders.

Sadly, there is little that is surprising about this incident. As with most racialized immigrants to North America, the story of Sikhs reveals a tumultuous history marked by vigilante and institutionalized racism often codified in law. But violence against Sikhs is also distinct in that it has overwhelmingly coalesced around the turban, which has historically symbolized the racial and religious difference of Sikhs, sometimes as members of a unique religious-cultural group but also as non-Christian, non-White “oriental” others conflated with “Hindoos” and currently with Muslims. As a result, accounts of the turban as an object of racial and religious difference saturate scholarly and popular accounts of Sikh racialization in ways that have yielded critical insights but also decentered other readings of Sikh racialization.

European imperialism, extractive colonization, and improvements in travel and communication converged in the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to

unleash a grand wave of migration that saw 50 million Chinese, an equal number of Europeans, and an estimated 30 million South Asians leave their homes for new lands (Lake & Reynolds, 2008, p. 6). The journey of Sikhs away from the Indian subcontinent was part of this outward migration. It was instigated by a combination of factors, including Britain's imperial expansion in what was then British India (Ramnath, 2011); first-wave migration of South Asians to different parts of the empire, including North America, which established tried routes that other migrants could follow (Shah, 2011); the limited opportunities open to British subjects in Britain's overseas holdings such as Canada, which were undercut by racial citizenship requirements institutionalized in law (Lake & Reynolds, 2008; Mawani, 2012); and the growing demand for cheap labor unleashed by the expansion of U.S. capitalism that offered highly uneven possibilities for Asian migrants (Hong, 2006; Luibhéid, 2002; Ngai, 2004). In their own ways, all of these factors propelled Sikh migration to North America.

Early Sikh migrants arrived in the U.S. often through Canada and settled on the West coast where they found employment in the railroads or on the farms worked almost exclusively by immigrants (Takaki, 1989). Migration from what was then colonial India to Canada and then to the U.S. remained negligible with an average of 30 migrants per year from 1898 to 1903 and then 250 annually from 1904 to 1906 (Hess, 1969). As Canada began to tighten its immigration policy against South Asians, mostly because of pressure from Britain (Mawani, 2012), Sikhs and other South Asian immigrants started to move to the U.S. and their numbers gradually increased from 1072 in 1907 to 1710 in 1908. They did so to escape the growing political repression in Canada while rallying other diasporic South Asians to support the anticolonial struggles in South Asia.

Diasporic Sikhs had established the Ghadar Party to work for independence in the Indian subcontinent while organizing South Asians in the U.S. and Canada against racial oppression (Gill, 2014; Sohi, 2014). It became a leading voice of dissent against the colonial violence inflicted on South Asians, which it saw as integrally tied to the racial violence faced by diasporic Sikhs and other South Asians.

Nevertheless—and despite the turban—Sikhs do not appear as a distinct category in the United States’ historical or legal archive. Rather, a recurring feature of their racialization is precisely their unintelligibility as Sikhs. In the 1900s, Sikhs were enumerated as “Hindoos”—a generic racial designation that did not refer to the followers of Hinduism but to those from what was then known as “Hindustan,” including Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and Sikhs, among others (Hess, 1969; Takaki, 1989). Sikhs were seen as part of the “Asiatic hordes” trying to emigrate to the U.S. This marked them for “anti-oriental” violence by organizations such as the Asiatic Exclusion League, whose members not only attacked Asian migrants⁵ but also worked closely with the political establishment to pass anti-Asian immigration laws that denied legal and economic rights to those already present in the U.S. Although citizenship was limited to

⁵ Shah (2011) argues that violence against “Asiatics” was often indispensable to the practice of white male privilege and homosociality: “White male homosocial solidarity consolidated around the ridicule of the turbaned South Asian man. This racial subordination through ridicule and humiliation confined South Asian men to a tightly circumscribed world and heightened their wariness of interactions with the white public” (p. 39). Also, see Ngai (2004) and Lake and Reynolds (2008).

“free white persons” under the Naturalization Act of 1790,⁶ South Asians, including Sikhs, found some respite in courts that were prone to grant them citizenship on the grounds that they had descended from Caucasians. Such cases often relied upon the Aryan invasion theory, which was widely accepted at that time (Hess, 1969; Joshi, 2006). To borrow the title of Ian Haney Lopez’s (1996) famous book, they became “White by law,” if not in practice.

The 1923 Bhagat Singh Thind case was to change this phenomenon. To rehearse an oft-told story in South Asian and Asian American Studies, Thind, a turbaned Sikh, applied for citizenship after his discharge from the U.S. army after World War I. He was offered citizenship twice—first by the state of Washington and then Oregon—to be revoked both times on the grounds that he was not a “free white person” (Snow, 2004). His case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which adjudicated that Thind was ineligible for naturalization. In writing the majority decision, Judge George Sutherland (himself a naturalized citizen of British extraction) noted that while Thind’s genealogical claim that he was a high-caste Hindu who had descended from a Caucasian ancestor was consonant with anthropological and scientific definitions of the term “Caucasian,” it was contrary to commonsensical understanding of “free white persons.” Sutherland reasoned that Thind’s dark skin made him ineligible for citizenship (“United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind,” 1923). He argued that Section 2169 of the Naturalization Act of 1790, which limited

⁶ An amendment to this Act in 1870 opened citizenship to “aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent” while the 1940 Nationality Act added language to include indigenous people. See Ngai (2004, p. 38).

citizenship to “free white persons,” was enacted to bar “Asiatics” from naturalization. As such, Thind could not be considered eligible for citizenship.

Thind’s quest for citizenship through the claim of white racial ancestry can be understood as an effect of how whiteness was indispensable for naturalization (Koshy, 2001). In this context, his legal representation as a high-caste “Hindoo” (rather than as a Sikh) was an attempt to work with already intelligible academic and legal categories to gain entry into whiteness and thereby citizenship. One could then argue that Sikh racialization has depended on the prevailing configurations of biopolitics and geopolitics structured by whiteness as the constitutive category of national belonging (Koshy, 2001). But what about Thind’s racial-sartorial difference emblemized by his turban? If the turban emblemizes the Sikh subject’s racial/religious difference from other groups, as argued by Sikh rights activists, what role did it play in the court’s decision that Thind was not a “free white person”?

Despite its widespread citational history, this aspect of the Thind case has not received adequate attention, as Puar (2007, 2008) points out. The court and most of the ensuing commentary refuse to remark on Thind’s turban as a mark of his racial/religious difference, resting instead on his presumed phenotypical difference from the white man—a phenotypical difference vividly marked by Thind’s brown skin and perhaps heightened by the visual appendage of the turban. As such, I believe there is truth to Puar’s argument that racialization worked as an interaction between the organic and the inorganic as bodies were sorted into different visual, tactile, sensorial, and racial economies based on their appearance—with “appearance” not just limited to epidermal or phenotype differences but to its signification through accouterments and bodily difference such as

unshorn hair, turbans, clothing, beards, etc.

While it is undeniable that the turban stands as an important sign of the Sikh's racial/religious difference, it takes on different meanings depending upon the prevailing racial configurations of the time and the issues at stake in each instance when the turban is invoked to mark racial/religious difference. I underscore this point to suggest a slightly different role for the turban in the post-9/11 period. My argument is that if the pagh that sat on Bhagat Singh Thind primarily marked his non-white status in law, it plays an additional role today. As a sign overloaded with racial meanings—thanks in no small measure to the ubiquitous representation of Osama bin Laden in a turban (Griffin, 2004; Poynting, 2002)—it collapses the Sikh into the figure of the oriental Muslim. Hence, it becomes imperative to track this signification of the turban, whose importance is paramount for the contemporary racial formation of “Muslim looking peoples” premised on anti-Muslim racism articulated through neo-orientalist logics.

Few other theorists have engaged the role of the turban in contemporary racialization as much as Jasbir Puar. I turn to her work to sketch the contemporary role of the turban while addressing what I see as a critical limitation in her otherwise brilliant theorization. Puar's research has pursued the intersections between South Asian queer diasporic and Sikh American organizing in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. She argues that the turban became a key object around which state and vigilante violence coalesced as it imbued the body on which it sat with patriarchal and racial meanings. As such, the turbaned body became evocative of a patriarchal-terrorist masculinity.

Its (the turban's) historical attachments to hypermasculinity, perverse heterosexuality (and at times pedophilia and homosexuality), and warrior

militancy rendered these turbaned bodies neither within the bounds of respectable queer subjecthood, nor worthy of a queer intervention that would stage a reclamation of sexual-racial perversity, suggesting that it is a body almost *too perverse to be read as queer*. (original emphasis, 2008, p. 50)

Central to Puar's argument is the idea that a perverse, pathological sexuality is invented and imputed to the turbaned body—a sexuality that is to be disowned by both normative South Asian queerness and Sikh heteronormativity. Here, Puar maintains that renderings of non-normative sexuality are central to contemporary instantiations of racialization, as also argued by several other scholars.⁷ South Asian diasporic queer communities were forced to disown turbaned bodies as vestiges of traditional patriarchy, longing instead for a liberated, secular queerness to be actualized through investments in American nationalism or what Puar terms “homonationalism.”⁸ She notes that reading certain bodies this way depended on visual representations of corporeal difference in which the turban played a key role and appeared as a sign of patriarchal and racial difference. Instead:

⁷ For example, see Ferguson (2004).

⁸ According to Puar (2007), homonationalism names the contemporary arrangement whereby certain queer subjects are afforded the privileges of citizenship primarily based on their allegiance to the U.S. nation-state and its empire but also premised on other markers such as their participation in racial capitalism as productive economic subjects and their willingness to practice monogamy and embrace the nuclear family structure. Also see (Duggan, 2003).

As a figure that deeply troubles the nation's security, the turbaned body can be most fruitfully rearticulated, not solely as a body encased in tradition and backwardness, attempting to endow itself with modernity, nor as a dissident queer body, but rather as an assemblage... My interest here is to rethink turbaned terrorist bodies and terrorist populations in relation to and beyond the ocular: that is, as an affective and affected entity that creates fear but also feels the fear it creates, an assemblage of contagions (again, this is distinct from the perverse body as contagious), cohered not through identity or identification, but the concatenation of disloyal and irreverent lines of flight – partial, transient, momentary, and magical. (Puar, 2008, p. 53)

But what about the turban's religious significations, which seem to have gained renewed valence after the 9/11 attacks? While I agree with Puar's argument that the turban became coded as a sign of repressive patriarchy and racial difference, I wonder about the extent to which her reading disregards the turban's contemporary religious significations as representing oriental Islam, which has been widely depicted in popular discourse as being in fundamental opposition to Western civilization (Smith, 2012). As Mandair (2009) points out, the turbaned man is not just a patriarchal figure who embodies a perverse sexuality:

While Puar rightly brings attention to the heteronormative frame of white middle-class America, which endowed the turban-wearing man with a terrorist masculinity, what seems to be underplayed in her analysis is the religious grounding of this frame, a grounding that equally motivates liberal and conservative sentiments. Within this religio-heteronormativity, the turbaned man

is not just a patriarchal figure who presents “a resistant anti-assimilationist stance” but a deviant figure of monstrosity, a barbaric evil that refuses to become civilized. (p. 306)

If the turbaned Sikh becomes an object of violence because of *his* reception as “Muslim” (looking), it becomes important to account for the contemporary significations of the turban—significations that emerge in a social habitus structured by Protestant secularism as the norm and oriental Islam as its nemesis. In other words, neo-orientalism. My argument is that instead of understanding the Sikh as a distinct religious-racial subject who has been “wrongly” victimized as Muslim, we need to turn our attention to how anti-Muslim violence articulated through neo-orientalist logics and its attendant discourse of the “Clash of Civilizations” (Huntington, 1996) places the figure of the Muslim at the very epicenter of racial violence into which the Sikh slides. To reiterate, instead of presuming that a coherent Sikh subject already exists, we need to turn our attention to how neo-orientalist logics produce Sikhs as proximal, even proxy, Muslim (looking) subjects while, at the same time, coercing them to perform their difference from Muslims.

From Orientalism to Neo-Orientalism

Historically, the occident discursively produced the orient as a mysterious and promiscuous site inhabited by primitive people and, by contrast, understood itself as rational, sexually disciplined, and civilized. Edward Said (1978) names this self-referential process orientalism: “a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts” (p. 12). Orientalism posited an ontological distinction between the east and the west by producing the former

as inferior and the latter as superior. Such depictions heavily relied upon the racialization of religious distinctions, specifically the purported antagonism between Old World Christianity and Islam, which were rearticulated as civilizational differences. In Said's oeuvre, orientalism represents the Middle East, particularly the Holy Land and its adjoining regions, as the oriental site *par excellence* and Muslim-Arabs as embodying the starkest racial, religious, and civilizational differences from the European self (also see Edward W. Said, 1997). The racialization of religious differences was central to this process as it imbued phenotype and other differences with new meanings that were eventually deployed to posit an unbridgeable civilizational split between the occident and the orient.

Melanie McAlister (2001), however, has argued that while orientalism provided a fruitful grid to understand the operations of European colonial and postcolonial power, it cannot be easily transposed in the context of the U.S.'s engagement with the Middle-East. If European orientalism depended on the presumption of a homogenous *us* of the west differentiated against *them*, the people of the east, the United States has imagined itself as a multicultural nation that remains obsessed with domestic and international diversity. This challenges the "unified *us* v indistinguishable *them*" dichotomy. A second problem is posed by orientalism's neat mapping of the orient as feminine and the west as masculine. McAlister contends that while there is some truth to Said's reading of how orientalism gendered the world, it ignores how the feminine articulated through the logics of heteronormativity is increasingly becoming central to (re)producing the United States through representations of nationality, sentimentalism, and citizenship (as also argued by Berlant, 1997). Summarizing that the binaristic and gendering premise of orientalism are

ill suited in the context of the United States, McAlister posits “post-orientalism” instead as an apt model to theorize how the United States has dealt with questions of racial and religious differences both internally and in the Middle East.⁹

While I concur with McAlister’s assessment that the United States remains obsessed with (racial) diversity and relies heavily on the “feminine” to articulate national identity, I remain unconvinced that this limits the formulation of a normative identity—the *us*—against which the *them* can be elucidated. On the contrary, I posit neo-orientalism as a framework that allows us to map the contemporary production of the *us/them* binary through the racialization of religious differences. To clarify, I am not suggesting that this mode of racial difference has displaced other historically salient modes of racialization (for example, the production of Blackness as abjection, which continues to calibrate racial belonging for all groups in the U.S.). Rather, my argument is that neo-orientalism has become a salient racial technology whose importance cannot be underestimated in understanding South Asian, specifically Sikh and Muslim, racialization after the 9/11 attacks.

By neo-orientalism, I am marking the ways in which three salient features of orientalism—the racialization of religious differences, particularly the production of

⁹ It is important to note here that McAlister’s path-breaking work was released a few months before the 9/11 attacks. One can only wonder how her interpretation of orientalism would have changed if she were to account for the impact of the 9/11 attacks on questions of racial difference in the U.S., which were reorganized around religious identities, specifically Islam and Muslims.

oriental Islam as the Other; the positing of a us v. them binary; and the centrality of gendering and sexualization practices to the racialization of religious differences—have come to be intensified after the 9/11 attacks in a manner that produce Sikhs and Muslims as sympatric, even synonymous, categories in particular instances while rendering them mutually exclusive at other times. Let me elaborate.

First, neo-orientalism refers to the historical anxieties around religious differences, specifically oriental Islam, that became exacerbated in the post-9/11 U.S. By this, I am marking how the racialization of religious differences and national origins following the 9/11 attacks generated the turbaned Muslim as a figure of terror through tropes of religious fundamentalism, oppressive patriarchy, and ontological civilizational differences. All of these were posited as inalienable traits of Islam. The emergence of “Muslim looking” as a post-9/11 racial typology—into which the Sikh slowly slides—is a direct outcome of this ideological production of Islam.

The racialization of religious differences has a long-standing history in the U.S., as several scholars of American puritanism and orientalism have elaborated. Elver (2012) and Bayoumi (2006) argue that immigration and naturalization is the best register to understand how Muslims are rendered disposable in the United States. One of the earliest cases that illustrate this phenomenon is that of Ahmed Hassan, a Yemeni immigrant, who applied for naturalization in 1942. Just like Bhagat Singh Thind, Ahmed relied on the argument that Arabs were descendants of Caucasians and shared a common Semitic heritage with them, which made him eligible for citizenship. However, just as in the Thind case, the court thought otherwise and ruled that Arabs were not white persons within the meaning of the Nationality Act. As Judge Arthur J. Tuttle noted:

Apart from the dark skin of the Arabs, it is well known that they are a part of the Mohammedan world and that a wide gulf separates their culture from that of the predominately Christian peoples of Europe. It cannot be expected that as a class they would readily intermarry with our population and be assimilated into our civilization. (quoted in Bayoumi, 2006, p. 269)

A key difference here is that unlike in the Thind case where religious differences does not warrant commentary from the court, Hassan's racial difference is specifically marked by drawing attention to his religious identity. While nothing in the archive suggests that Hassan wore a turban or any article of clothing that marked him as a Muslim, his name's religious significations seemed to have played a major role in the court's decision.¹⁰ In highlighting this point, I am not arguing that religion was one of the primary axes of differentiation that assigned differential value to groups, "just like race." Rather, racialization as a technology of producing otherness relied on religious

¹⁰ A similar phenomenon is at work with regard to the president, Barack 'Hussein' Obama. A major allegation that Obama has had to contend with is that he is a Muslim. His detractors invoke his middle name as proof of his religious affiliation. Despite providing several public rejoinders that he is a practicing Christian, Obama has never been able to dispel this charge completely. In fact, the president had to cancel his visit to the Golden Temple—the holiest shrine of Sikhism—during his 2010 visit to India as he would have had to cover his head to visit the shrine. This decision was made after his team expressed apprehensions over how his photographs with a head cover could be used to fan rumors about his religious beliefs. See Little (2004).

differences to police access to citizenship and belonging.

Even a cursory survey of literature demonstrates a similar but intensified phenomenon at work in the post-9/11 U.S. I again draw upon immigration as a register through which to map these logics. Soon after the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration instituted the National Security Entry Exit Registration System (NSEERS), which mandated that all non-citizen males over the age of 16 who were citizens or nationals from 25 countries be interviewed, fingerprinted, and photographed by a Department of Justice official (Love, 2009; Tehranian, 2007). It also applied to all nonimmigrant visitors already present in the United States. All of the 25 countries were Muslim-majority with the exception of North Korea. Although NSEERS was superseded by US-VISIT which, in turn, morphed into the Office of Biometric Identity Management, the program accomplished several goals, including the calcification of Muslims as a distinct racial typology through the bureaucratic collectivization of all followers of Islam, their ethno-cultural and racial differences notwithstanding (Bayoumi, 2006). Needless to say, such logics inversely helped define “us,” the “universal” subject understood as white, straight, Protestant-Christian (and secular), and property-owning (Razack, 2008).

However, just as in most instances of racialization that rely on racial optics to render bodies transparent, the creation of “Muslim looking” peoples as a racial typology heavily drew upon the turban and the hijab as well as physiological markers such as beards to identify the Muslim body. In particular, and mostly because of its ubiquity in media and other popular cultural representations of Osama Bin Laden, the turban gained a supericonic status (Berlant, 1997) as it came to signify the Muslim’s fundamental difference from Western modernity: a form of alienation that was inalienable. As such,

the turban (its different permutations notwithstanding) and the hijab¹¹ became the starkest sign of this racial difference, endowing the bodies donning them with a stubborn resistance to western modernity. Hence, turbaned bodies—both Muslim and Sikh—became proxies for Laden: Not him, but just like him. This genealogy is important to understand how Sikh racialization has unfolded after the 9/11 attacks.

Second, neo-orientalism functions very much in a binaristic manner by polarizing the United States into us v them, albeit with some nuances. If the (malleable) figure of the turbaned Muslim fundamentalist still inherits the “them” of this binaristic formulation, the us does not refer solely to practicing (white) protestants but to all un-turbaned and some turbaned bodies aligned with (Protestant) secularism and its attendant values of “freedom,” “responsibility,” and “democracy” that undergird free market racial capitalism.¹² Here, I am drawing upon Saba Mahmood’s (2013) definition of secularism

¹¹ The hijab plays a different role in contemporary racialization because of its heightened gendered inflections. Coded in equal parts as a threat (the hijab conceals the bomb) and the starkest sign of repression of women under Islamic patriarchy, it calls forth both the security and rescue instincts that are constitutive traits of Euro-American imperialism. Thus, while the turban is seen as a sign of a subject’s voluntary fealty to fundamentalist Islam, which sanctions the use of preemptive force against the subject, the hijab invokes complicated feelings of both rescue and neutralization. See Bouchard (2012).

¹² Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the *us* includes India, largely seen as a Hindu-majority nation-state and a coveted partner in the fight against Islamic terrorism. This has been achieved in no small measure due to lobbying by Hindu-Americans, who have

“not simply as the doctrinal separation of church from state but also as the rearticulation of religion in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance” (p. 65). Broadly understood, secularism is indispensable for liberal democracies to achieve two goals that are integral to the practice of modern statecraft. First, secularism becomes an implied political consensus that can transcend “particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion” (Asad, 2003). This renders it into an important register that signifies a point of unity around which the nation-state can coalesce, despite bodily and other differences embodied by its subjects. Second, and closely tied to the first goal, secularism becomes a mode of diffusing the “protestant ethic” (i.e., the mastery of economic productivity as the key drive organizing public life; Weber, 1976) into the public sphere as it pushes back the practice of ritualized religion into the private sphere.

In this context, the figure of the turbaned Muslim (and its proximate cousins, the turbaned Sikh and the hijabi Muslim woman) can be seen as posing a challenge in that it brings back religion into the public sphere, thereby unsettling the supposed secular consensus of western modernity. As such, neo-orientalism associates un-turbaned and turbaned bodies with freedom and repression, respectively. Additionally, this boundary also manifest among turbaned bodies as it coerces some to produce themselves as

sought to distance themselves from Muslims through public disavowals and aligning themselves with the West in the global War on Terror (See Mathew & Prashad, 2000; Prashad, 2009).

affiliated with “us” by voluntarily separating themselves from “them,”¹³ a position that Sikhs civil rights activism has aspired for. This, in my view, explains the power of neo-orientalism in exacerbating the divisions between Sikhs and Muslims even as both are forced to inhabit the them category.

I am emphasizing this point because while scholarship acknowledges that turbaned subjects trouble the Christonormativity (Ferber, 2012) of western civilization, rarely is their impact explored in relation to the purported secular moorings of western modernity. Hence, I believe that Mandair (2009) is right in pointing out that the turban provokes hostility from both liberals and conservatives, who see it as a threat to western civilization. In sum, the turban (and the hijab) sometimes becomes a sign of non-Christianity and sometimes a challenge to secularism, but always a threat to western modernity. One can therefore argue that it has worked as a glaring sign of oriental Islam, marking the subjects who don it for retribution.

Lastly, neo-orientalism relies on an intensification of gendering and sexualization practices to produce turbaned bodies as perverse and degenerate (Puar & Rai, 2002). In this, it heavily draws upon orientalist tropes that produced the orient as sexually

¹³ One can see this manifested internally in such formulations as “Good Muslims, Bad Muslims.” If “good Muslims” are those who have become partners in the U.S.’s globe-girdling War on Terror, bad Muslims simply stand in the way of “freedom” and “democracy” through their resistance to the West’s imperial interventions. See Mohamed Mamdani (2004). However, the primary fault line continues to be between *us* (broadly understood as non-Muslims organized around whiteness) and *them* (oriental Muslim).

degenerate. However, unlike orientalism, which produced the West as heteronormative and the orient as exotic and decadent, neo-orientalism articulates sexual freedom and gender equality as foundational to western modernity. In other words, Euro-America (and, through pinkwashing, Israel) is produced as not only heteronormative but also homonormative (the internal repression of homosexuality notwithstanding) against which turbaned masculinities are coded as patriarchal, pathological, and sexually repressed and repressive.

Neo-orientalism relies on the deployment of sexual tropes to pathologize racial and religious others even as normative queerness and liberal feminisms are rewarded with the privileges of citizenship and belonging. Puar and Rai (2002) are perhaps most useful here. As they note, the construction of the (turbaned Islamic) “terrorist” in the post-9/11 period relied heavily on orientalist knowledge of sexual perversity (failed heterosexuality, notions of the psyche, and monstrosity), which in turn evoked an aggressive heterosexual patriotism in Sikh and South Asian organizing. They argue that Western norms of the subject and its abnormal others, which were worked out in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (the highpoint of European colonial contact) are central to the contemporary production of the “terrorist”:

The monsters that haunt the prose of contemporary counterterrorism emerge out of figures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that have always been racialized, classed, and sexualized. The undesirable, the vagrant, the Gypsy, the savage, the Hottentot Venus, or the sexual depravity of the Oriental torrid zone shares a basic kinship with the terrorist-monster. (p. 124)

However, this sexual perversity attributed to the terrorist is no simple misnaming

of homosexuality. Rather, inclusion of normative forms of queerness under western modernity is central to neo-orientalism, which produces Islam as degenerate by coding it as being inherently destructive of queerness. To be clear, western modernity is inclusive of normative forms of queerness only in so far as they do not pose any challenges to the centrality of reproductive heteronormativity and in so far as non-heterosexual forms of desire and gender non-conformity can be contained into a secondary position legally and socially. Nevertheless, and despite these important qualifications, queerness and gender equality have become key sites of contestation under neo-orientalism as Euro-America appropriates them to enunciate itself as superior and renders Islam as degenerate.

Together, these three dimensions of neo-orientalism are heavily implicated in Sikh racialization in that they produce Sikhs as proximal, even proxy, Muslim (looking) subjects while concomitantly coercing Sikhs to produce themselves as distinct from Muslims. My point is that instead of understanding Sikhs as a group “mistaken” for Muslims, as if the two existed as discrete categories before the operation of violence, we need to account for how neo-orientalism actively produces Sikhs as proxies for Muslims even as Sikhs are coaxed into producing themselves as distinct religious-racial subjects in accordance with conceptions of diversity as articulated under U.S. multiculturalism.

The implications of such a shift cannot be overstated. It strikes at the very roots of the “mistaken identity paradigm,” which has become the regnant explanation in both popular and scholarly inquiries of anti-Sikh racial profiling after the 9/11 attacks. Neo-orientalism as a theoretical framework helps explain how Sikhs are not “mistaken” for Muslims. In post-9/11, racism is articulated through neo-orientalist logics and rearticulates the boundaries between different religio-racial categories, specifically

Sikhism and Islam, in such a manner that the distinctions between them are exaggerated, even as Sikhs and Muslims are collapsed into the racial typology of “Muslim looking.” Inversely, such a framework explains how the meaning of what it means to be a Sikh has come to be constrained into a narrow religious-racial category, which not only invisibilizes un-turbaned and non-cismale Sikh bodies but also interrupts inter-religious, pan-ethnic alliances among South Asians. I now turn to the coverage of the Oak Creek shootings and the subsequent efforts of the Sikh civil society around the hate crimes initiative to demonstrate how neo-orientalism produces Sikhs as proxies for Muslims while coercing Sikhs to perform their differences from Muslims at the same time.

Oak Creek Massacre: Mistaken Identity or Cultivated Terror?

On August 5, 2012, white supremacist Wade Michael Page shot dead six Sikh worshippers—Paramjit Kaur, Suveg Singh, Satwant Singh, Ranjit Singh, Sita Singh, and Prakash Singh—at a Gurudwara in Oak Creek, WI. Page also injured a police officer before killing himself after a responding team grievously wounded him. Although the reasons for his fatal rampage are unclear, media reports indicated that he harbored a deep hatred for non-whites, whom he referred to as “dirt people” (Leitsinger, 2012; Romell, 2015). The shooting left the American Sikh community in general and the Oak Creek Sikh community in particular shaken as it had all the telltale signs of an incident that was in the making for some time.

The Oak Creek massacre had all the markers of mass shootings that have become the staple of American national life: a disgruntled white male with easy access to firearms who focused his rage on racially marked subjects with whom he had no personal ties. Page’s history of involvement with the organized white supremacist movement had been

well documented (Goodwin, 2015; Heim, 2012; McGreal, 2015). The Southern Poverty Law Center had tracked Page's activities for over a decade (Beirich & Potok, 2015). As a result, and contrary to most mass shootings where the racial dimensions are deliberately underplayed (for example, see Brandzel & Desai, 2008; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003), the Oak Creek massacre starkly highlighted the primary role played by Page's white supremacist leanings in the shooting spree. Yet, while most media reports recognized this dimension, including Page's membership in hate groups such as the Hammerskin Nation (a white supremacist group), the framing of the shooting worked in two ways to underemphasize the post-9/11 climate of racial-religious acrimony that intensified Page's hatred for non-whites.

First, the media coverage rendered Page as largely an isolated extremist who had gotten radicalized through his association with the white supremacist movement in his role as the leader of a white-power band, "End Apathy," and another band called "Definite Hate" (Beirich & Potok, 2015). In their detailed profile of Page in *The New York Times* tellingly titled "*Wisconsin Killer Fed and was Fueled by Hate-Driven Music*," Goode and Kovalski (2012) focus on the role that white-power music or "hate rock" played in radicalizing Page. The article quotes SPLC fellow Mark Potok to emphasize that white power bands were key in radicalizing Page: "The music that comes from these bands is incredibly violent, and it talks about murdering Jews, black people, gay people and a whole host of other enemies." Another story in the *Washington Post* titled "Wade Michael Page was Steeped in neo-Nazi 'Hate Music' Movement" similarly emphasizes the role of music in extenuating racial hatred.

Whatever caused Wade Michael Page to massacre worshippers at a Wisconsin Sikh

temple on Sunday may never be known. But this much is clear: For at least a decade, he had been steeped in a neo-Nazi “hate music” scene that espouses white power and racial superiority and occasionally promotes violent acts against people of other races and religions. (Heim, 2012)

Just as in other cases of media coverage of school shootings that link gun violence to the perpetrators’ tendency to play violent video games and/or exposure to other forms of mediatized violence (for example, see Anderson, 2004), the framing of the Oak Creek shooting overemphasized Page’s role in the white music scene in inciting racial animosity while eliding the structural conditions behind the eruption of violence, particularly the pervasiveness of neo-orientalist discourse in the post-9/11 period that marked turbaned bodies as “enemies.” Hate music worked remarkably similarly to anxieties around different forms of mediatized violence in that it was seen as the primary reason that incited the fatal attack rather than the post-9/11 climate that normalized violence against those perceived as Muslims.

But the links between the white power music scene and the capacity to indulge in racial violence is arguably more complex. As Futrell, Simi, and Gottschalk (2006), who studied the white power music scene in Southern California of which Page was a part, pointed out, “White power music culture matters to activists, but it is not clear precisely how it matters” (p. 282). They argue that music is an important component of the white power movement in that it allows for intergenerational contact, which creates a cohesive community of shared interests. But there is no reason to believe, according to the authors, that music is what brings white activists together or that it incites violence on its own. Nevertheless, this purported link between music and violence was so strong in the

mainstream media's framing of the Oak Creek shooting that soon after Page was identified as the killer, the FBI was looking into what music he was listening to in the hours before the killing to understand "whether it shaped his state of mind..." (McGreal, 2015).

Second, and as is the case with most mass shootings, the media rendered what is essentially a case of nationally-condoned racial rage into an effect of Page's troubled upbringing. Almost all of the media profiles framed Page as having had a difficult childhood that manifest in a severe drinking problem and the inability to hold a job. *The New York Times* quotes his stepmother, Laura Page, humanizing Page as "a precious little boy" who would go camping and fishing with his father and her in Colorado.

For most of his childhood, Ms. Page said, Mr. Page lived in the Denver area with his mother, a dog groomer, but she died when he was 13 or 14, and "he took it very hard." He was not close to his father, she said, and moved in with a grandmother and an aunt who were also in Colorado. (Goode & Kovaleski, 2012)

In sum, what slowly emerged was the profile of a "lunatic" with a troubled past, as *The New York Post* report summed it up (Fenton, 2012). "Lunatic" as a framing device not only signifies individual pathology rooted but also renders racial violence as an exceptional act, thereby misrepresenting the pervasiveness and frequency of what has been a recurring feature of Sikh life. In sum, by attributing racial violence to "hate music" and a "troubled past," mediatized discourses invisibilized the neo-orientalist racial climate that condoned violence against turbaned bodies. While I am not denying that several factors could have contributed to Page's eventual outburst, I am perturbed by the ways in which the media astutely avoided broaching the post-9/11 climate in which anti-

Muslim racism not only became normalized but reached endemic proportions. Moreover, if Page's troubled upbringing and hate music were indeed the central factors behind the shooting, why were his targets members of a group whom he understood as racially different at best or as Muslims/Arabs/Middle-Easterners at worst? And is it a coincidence that Page's victims are also the ones that have experienced the brunt of post-9/11 racial violence in the form of vigilante attacks and state-sanctioned racism?

Something else was also at work that the media was reluctant to explore as a causative factor: Page's radicalization in the U.S. military. Page served six years in the U.S. military, first in the psychological operations unit at Fort Bliss, Texas, and then as a E4 psychological operations specialist at Fort Bragg, N.C., before receiving a general discharge for being AWOL and for being drunk on duty (Shane III & McCloskey, 2015). Although he was never deployed, Page was awarded the Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Army Good Conduct award, the National Defense Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal and Parachutist Badge (Foxnews, 2012). Page's ties with organized white supremacist groups started during his time with the military, which not only initiated him into a "thriving neo-Nazi underworld" (Elias, 2012) but might have also introduced him to neo-orientalist discourses that situated Muslims and Arabs as the primary threat facing the United States. This might have played a role in his eventual retaliation.

The U.S. military has served as key recruiting grounds for white supremacist movements such as the National Alliance and National Socialist Movement, which often look for soldiers with tactical training to join their ranks (Hudson, 1999; Kennard, 2015). In fact, a disproportionate number of those convicted on domestic terrorism charges in

the United States have had documented military experience (Simi, Bubolz, & Hardman, 2013). However, I am interested here not only in the tactical and weapons training that the military offers to recruits but also in how it is integrally tied to the production of knowledges such as neo-orientalist counterinsurgency discourses that normalize the alterity of those racialized as Muslims. Put differently, the military not only offers tactical skills that are highly sought after within white supremacist organizations but also produces knowledges and experiences that deeply draw upon and reinforce neo-orientalist racialized logics, thereby reinforcing the fear of those coded as Muslim.

My argument is that Page's radicalization is integrally tied to the role of the military both as a state apparatus that trains individuals in technologies of violence and as an entity that is centrally complicit with the production of neo-orientalist knowledges that reinforce the alterity of racial-religious groups. While the former role—the military as a producer of tactical knowledges—has been relatively well documented in various congressional hearings, independent studies, and academic scholarship, not much has been said about how the defense establishment relies on neo-orientalist logics to prosecute its War on Terror. I posit that Page's radicalization should be located at the intersection of these two roles of the U.S. military.

Officially, the U.S. Army maintains a zero-tolerance policy with regard to discrimination based on racial and religious differences. It also proscribes extremist activities within the military on the basis of race, color, gender, or national origin. The latest Army Command Policy issued in 2014 notes:

Participation in extremist organizations and activities by Army personnel is inconsistent with the responsibilities of military Service. It is the policy of the

United States Army to provide EO [equal opportunity] and treatment for all Soldiers [sic] without regard to race, color, religion, gender, or national origin. Enforcement of this policy is a responsibility of command, is vitally important to unit cohesion and morale, and is essential to the Army's ability to accomplish its mission. It is the commander's responsibility to maintain good order and discipline in the unit. Every commander has the inherent authority to take appropriate actions to accomplish this goal. (Department of the Army, 2015)

However, it is important to note that the military uses "extremism" as a catchall phrase, which occludes the specificity of racial violence targeted at non-white groups. In addition, its response to extremism was developed to primarily clamp down on left-wing activities (Hudson, 1999). As a result, white supremacist networks on bases have rarely attracted serious disciplinary action, making the military home to a thriving white supremacist movement. An investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigations spanning Oct. 2001 to May 2008 reported 203 individuals with ties to white extremist organizations who had confirmed or claimed military service (FBI Counterterrorism Division, 2008). Of these, 19 veterans had verified or unverified service in the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, another report on gang members and gang-related activities in the U.S. military notes that white supremacist groups along with other ethnically-organized gangs are active in U.S. military installations both internationally and domestically and often recruit children from military families into a range of activities, including drug peddling (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2007).

Fort Bragg, where Page was stationed for some time, was a hotbed of white supremacist activity. A billboard in the mid-1990s near the military base, the time when

Page was serving there, read “Enough! Lets start taking back America.” It was paid for by an active-duty soldier on the base who was also a recruiter for the National Alliance (Barton, 2012). Page transferred to Fort Bragg in 1995, the same year that three paratroopers—James N. Burmeister 2nd, Malcolm Wright Jr., and Randy Lee Meadows Jr.— attached to the 82nd Airborne Division were involved in the killing of a Black woman and a man in Fayetteville to earn spider web tattoos, which signify that the bearer had killed non-whites (Elias, 2012). Burmeister’s documented history of white supremacist activity was ignored by the authorities (Hudson, 1999). The three soldiers received prison sentences for life and 19 soldiers from the base were discharged for participating in neo-Nazi activities (Elias, 2012). The shootings also prompted an internal investigation by the Army into white supremacist activity in its ranks. It revealed that only 100 of the 7,600 soldiers interviewed belonged to known white supremacist groups but that 3.5 percent of the interviewees had been contacted to join an extremist group since joining the military (“Ex-G.I. at Fort Bragg,” 1997).

Page recognized Burmeister from his days at Fort Bragg, although it seems they knew each other only in passing (Goodman, 2012). Nevertheless, he confessed to Pete Simi, a sociologist who met Page as part of his fieldwork on the organized white supremacist movement, that he had become radicalized in the Army: “If you don’t go into the military as a racist, you definitely leave as one” (Goodman, 2012). Page maintained that it was not the military’s indifference or even tacit support that encouraged white supremacist activities but the feeling that white recruits were treated badly compared to recruits of color, which turned the former towards rightwing extremist groups.

Here, a central trait of the injured white male subjectivity presents itself: the feeling of being a victim of political correctness when denied the privilege that one feels historically entitled to. As Lauren Berlant (1997) noted, the cultural wars of the Reagan-Thatcher era were a direct result of the growing acrimony among whites who felt that the Civil Rights era had short-shrifted them while helping accrue undue benefits for people of color. As a result, the period after 1980s marked the emergence of the wounded white male subjectivity which was forced to speak its own name and make claims on behalf of what was widely perceived as a racial slight against the white male subject (Robinson, 2000).

While Page's radicalization can be seen as part of this broader response to the loss of white male privilege, the military weaponized it with knowledges and training and redirected it towards turbaned bodies. Page worked as an E4 psychological operations (PSYOPS) specialist at Fort Bragg and before that in Fort Bliss. PSYOPS is defined as "the planned use of communications to influence human attitudes and behavior. It consists of political, military, and ideological actions conducted to induce in target groups behavior, emotions, and attitudes that support the attainment of national objectives" (Paddock 1989; quoted in Post, 2005). The army's description of the job duties on its webpage includes "Research and analyze methods of influencing foreign population from a variety of information sources" (U.S. Army, 2015). Furthermore, it adds "Interest in foreign countries, cultures and languages" and "Skilled at building rapport in unfamiliar surroundings" as helpful skills for applicants to possess.

The defeat of the United States in the Vietnam War and the conclusion of the Cold War spawned two developments that made PSYOPS a critical unit in the U.S.

military. First, Islamic fundamentalism replaced the U.S.S.R. as the primary threat to the United States (Collier, 1994). This intensified an already existing interest in Islam, Muslims, Arabs, and the Middle-East, all of which were often used interchangeably. Second, it catalyzed efforts to reinvent the U.S. military in a new mold. Beginning in the 1980s, military strategists started calling for a change in the “mindset” of the defense establishment that would allow for the harnessing of information technology and other technological advances to create a leaner, effective war machine unencumbered by its own weight (Boot, 2003; Kennard, 2012). This new military was to be highly effective, mobile, decentralized but well-coordinated, and would be able to inflict crushing defeat on its enemies. The renewed interest in PSYOPS, particularly after the first Gulf War, should be placed at the intersection of these two broad developments.

Page began working as a PSYOPS specialist at a time when the military had just concluded the First Gulf War. Hutchinson (2006) notes that “information warfare,” which had only existed as a concept since the 1980s, came to life in the Gulf War of 1990-91 when the production and circulation of selective information became a critical component of battlefield operations. The military controlled not only what information would be conveyed and by whom but also took an active role in crafting and disseminating messages aimed at the Iraqi people. In addition, there was a growing understanding that the enemy facing the United States was an irregular one, which made the role of information and its use in subverting the enemy highly salient in contemporary military operations (Department of Defense, 2007). Information became a mainstay of military operations to such an extent that “information operations” replaced “information warfare” with the latter referring to that subset of operations that were to be resorted to during war

(Hutchinson, 2006). Around the same time, social psychology theory was integrated with psychological warfare as a key tool of war, particularly to study those populations seen as posing a threat to the United States.

William C. Bradford, a controversial professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, posits the War on Terror as unfolding between two factions: the West and Islamists (Bradford, 2015). The latter, according to Bradford, is a loosely defined formation encompassing everyone from Al-Qaida to secular Muslims opposing dictatorial regimes supported by the United States and European powers and they do not shy away from using anything and every means at their disposal. Terming the current modality of this conflict as 4GW (Fourth Generation War; the first three being premised on manpower, firepower, and maneuvers, respectively), Bradford (see also Lind, 2004) chalks out a heightened role for the PYSOPS, so much so that “Military operations are combat support efforts that frame, magnify, and potentiate the effects of PSYOPs on adversarial political will” (p. 4)

One can imagine the formative role that obsession with Arab Muslim societies and the fundamentalist Muslim subjectivity played in organizing PSYOPS work. Porter (2009) notes that war became the primary site through which to apprehend the oriental enemy. And key to waging a war is the Chinese war strategist Sun Tzu’s instruction, “Know your enemy, know yourself,” which is perhaps overemphasized within the U.S. military and made evident through the numerous area studies programs funded by the defense establishment. This marked the cultural turn within contemporary anthropological approaches to war that, according to Porter, resurrected metacultural forms that suggested an undifferentiated “orient” stretching from Japan to Turkey against

which the West had to be vigilant.

A key text that encapsulates this phenomenon and became popular following the First Gulf War was written by the cultural anthropologist-cum-orientalist Raphael Patai and is telling titled *The Arab Mind* (1973). The popularity of the book in military academics is perhaps best captured in the foreword to the 2007 reprint of the book by Col. Norvell B. De Atkine, who taught at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg. De Atkine noted that *The Arab Mind* formed the basis of his instruction at the military school where he taught. He adds:

Over the past twelve years, I have also briefed hundreds of military teams being deployed to the Middle East. When returning from the Middle East, my students, as well as the members of these teams, invariably comment on the paramount usefulness of the cultural instruction in their assignments. In doing so they validate the analysis and descriptions offered by Raphael Patai. (p. XV)

Rather adventurous in its ambition to offer a preview into the “Arab mind,” Patai’s work traffics in the most egregious orientalist stereotypes by reducing socio-political complexities and colonial histories of the Middle East to psycho-cultural peculiarities of the “Arab mind” (also see Hersh, 2004). Patai argues that Arabs are ruled by primal instincts and, as such, it is only through the use of force that they can be reigned in and made to fall in line with Western interests. Patai renders “Arabs” and “Muslims” as synonymous categories by collapsing racial and religious distinctions. I am highlighting this point because the collapsing of Sikhs into the racial formation of “Muslim-looking” peoples can be traced back to this phenomenon.

The Arab Mind is a (neo)orientalist text that is emblematic of the cultural

instructions that the military relied on to prosecute its wars in the Middle East. While it is unclear if Page ever read the book, it sketches a general psychobiography of the “Arab” that was trafficked heavily in military academies. As such, it is emblematic of the training material that Page might have been exposed to in his work as a PSYOPS specialist. Patai argues that while “Arabs” and “Muslims” can be apprehended as analytically different, the crossover between them in the real world is so immense that any effort to distinguish them is unrealistic. As he notes in his characteristic hyperbolic delivery, “Middle East is as Muslim as Europe and America are Christian” (p. 12). *The Arab Mind* implicitly compares the Arab society to the West and, in the process, posits one as Islamic while the other—the “us,” the location where this scholarship is produced and intended to be read—is rendered Christian (and secular). Patai adds, “Arabs identify Arabism with Islam and vice-versa” (p. 14). This collapses Arabs with Muslims, rendering both these categories interchangeable.¹⁴

It is in this context that Page’s training as a PSYOPS operative is key to comprehend the Oak Creek massacre. There is no reason to believe that Page held

¹⁴ The extent to which neo-orientalist logics held sway on the military’s imagination is also made apparent from the fact that the leading video games in the genre of the military shooter, *Kumu/War*, *Close Combat*, *America’s Army*, and *Full Spectrum Warrior*, were developed in close coordination with the military with the latter two wholly or partly funded by the military. All of these games depict the Middle East as the quintessential battleground with “Arabs” in turbans representing the terrorist-enemy. See Höglund (2008).

animosity against Sikhs. In fact, he never seemed to have mentioned Sikhs as his primary targets seem to have been Blacks and Jews (Goodman, 2012). His last girlfriend, Misty Cook, worked as a cook at a restaurant near the Oak Creek Gurudwara (Elias, 2012), and Page might have frequently seen turbaned Sikhs pass by the restaurant, the only time he came into contact with Sikhs. Nevertheless, he was enraged after the 9/11 attacks, remarking that “America should just plaster all of the Middle East” (Walker, 2012). His military training may have intersected with the 9/11 attacks to add “Arabs” and “Muslims” to his list of racial enemies and perhaps may have even moved them to the top of the list (Elias, 2012).

But why attack Sikhs? Neo-orientalism as an explanatory mechanism can throw some light on how Page’s rage was redirected against a population he saw as “Arab and Muslim.” After the Gulf War, “Arab/Muslims” emerged as the central objects of the U.S. military’s attention. This was nowhere more true than in the world of PSYOPS, which was tasked with “understanding” the enemy. “Arab/Muslim” was a racial formation that was primary defined as an index of otherness. Its primary coordinates were knowledge of Arabic (or any language not recognizably European¹⁵), fealty to Islam, and was best

¹⁵ While Arabic continues to be one of the primary “signs,” it works with a constellation of other signs that are understood to make the enemy apparent. A case in point is that of a Northwest Airlines flight bound to India that was escorted by two Dutch fighter jets to Amsterdam airport after the captain radioed in asking for help. The aircrew said their suspicion was aroused when they saw 12 men with “a large number of cell phones, lap tops and hard drives, and (they) refused to follow the crew's instructions” (Sterling,

emblemized by the turbaned Muslim who refused to assimilate into Western ways. When seen through this racialized optics, Sikhs fit the profile.

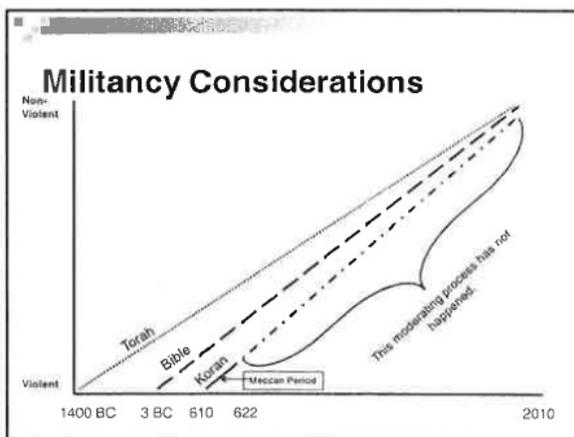
Page declared that “America should just plaster all of the Middle East.” I argue that “all of” in this iteration stands for a key characteristic of the contemporary War on Terror: it encapsulates not only the entirety of the Middle East, including all Arabs (coded as Muslims), but also captures the inherent interchangeability of non-white, non-Christian, turbaned bodies that lose their specificity when whiteness perceives a threat. Recall that neo-orientalism is not only premised on the racialization of religious differences but also on the production of the us/them binary that reduces socio-cultural and other differences into binaristic metacultural categories that are mapped onto bodies to render the other/enemy apparent. In the post-9/11 period, visual and other sensory cues became key signs of reading racial-religious difference. The turban (and the hijab), which was rendered as a supericonic sign of oriental Islam, also sat on Sikh heads, making them *equally* expugnable. The vulnerability of Sikhs then is not an accident but is directly related to the ways in which neo-orientalism imputes disposability onto non-white, non-Christian bodies by rendering them interchangeable.

John Liebert, a psychiatrist who conducted fitness exams for the military, noted soon after the shooting that Page should not have been recruited as a PSYOPS specialist

2006). U.S. air marshals on the flight were also suspicious of them. The men spoke Urdu, “the language commonly spoken in Pakistan and by many of India's Muslims.” All the men were later released as there was no reason to believe they were planning to commit an act of violence.

as he had a history of mental illness (Kissinger, 2012). However, locating individual pathology as the main reason for racial violence does little to address the ways in which neo-orientalism and the broad categorizations that it spawned formed the basis of much of the military's operations and continues to guide state apparatuses whose function is to be prepared against terrorism. To give but one example, the slide below is part of the FBI's instructional material titled "Militancy Considerations" used in counterinsurgency trainings (Ackerman, 2011).

Figure 1



It compares the influence of the Torah, the Bible, and the Koran (sic) over Jews, Christians, and Muslims. While those who adhere to the teachings of the Torah and the Bible are depicted as generally moving from violence to non-violence by embracing liberal hermeneutical practices, the reception of the Koran is depicted as being immune to this process. The implication here is that any reading other than strict doctrinal interpretations are frowned upon in Islam. This is signaled as the basis for militancy.

While the FBI has arguably different responsibilities than PSYOPS, the training material nevertheless gesture towards how neo-orientalist logics suffuse state security apparatuses whose task it is to neutralize internal and external threats to the United

States. Needless to say, not all PSYOPS personnel have turned to violence and neither do all shooters who go on a rampage have PSYOPS experience. And not all victims of shooting sprees are Sikhs. Rather, my point is that Page's exposure to neo-orientalist logics in the military weaponized his racial rage and redirected it onto turbaned bodies that were coded as a threat to the U.S. In other words, neo-orientalism and its attendant ideas of racial threat that coalesced around discreet objects such as turbans and the hijab rendered Sikhs as proxies for Muslims, making them disposable.

“The Dignity of Being a Statistic”

On Sept. 19, 2012, Harpreet Singh Saini appeared before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights Committee on the Judiciary convened by Sen. Dick Durbin to offer testimony on the need to include attacks against Sikhs as a separate hate crime category. His mother, Paramjit Kaur, was one of the Sikh worshippers shot dead by Page. Saini's testimony starts with a description of the shooting that claimed his mother and five other Sikhs' lives. All of the victims are presented as devout familial subjects who came to the U.S. looking for better opportunities: “He (Page) killed my mother, Paramjit Kaur, while she was sitting for morning prayers. He shot and killed five more men – all of them were fathers, all had turbans like me” (United States Senate, 2015). The shooting is presented as an interruption of the American dream, which is a key trope that organizes Saini's testimony. As he rehearses the names of those killed, Saini prefaces it with “This was not the American dream of ...” to humanize the victims who lost their life that day. Then, Saini puts forth his main demand to the committee: to give his mother “the dignity of being a statistic” by recognizing the attacks against Sikhs as a separate hate crime

category.

Senators, I came here today to ask the government *to* give my mother the dignity of being a statistic. The FBI does not track hate crimes against Sikhs. My mother and those shot that day will not even count on a federal form. We cannot solve a problem we refuse to recognize. (United States Senate, 2015, emphasis mine)

I situate Saini's testimony as a text that represents Sikh pain, fears, and aspirations in the post-9/11 period. In addition, it forcefully articulates the central demand of post-9/11 Sikh civil rights activism: to recognize the specificity of anti-Sikh attacks by enumerating them as a separate hate crime category. Saini humanizes this demand by calling the federal government to give his mother "the dignity of being a statistic" so that violence against Sikhs can be prosecuted effectively. Given the general apathy of the state towards the plight of Sikhs and Sikh Americans despite a decade of attacks against turbaned bodies, Saini's plea evinces a desire to make Paramjit's death count by gaining her recognition as a prelude to state acknowledgement of attacks against Sikhs as hate crimes.

But one cannot help but ask: what other options are foreclosed when the demand to be recognized as victims of hate crimes becomes the central focus of Sikh civil rights activism? In posing this question, I want to clarify that I do not mean to underestimate Saini's demand. Quite the contrary, as I remain aware that one of the important ways in which marginalized populations facing racial violence have historically dealt with it is by calling for such attacks to be recognized as hate crimes in the hope that it would have a deterring effect on the perpetrators. Additionally, the post-9/11 period has been marked by an intensification of the security state, particularly its legal and police apparatuses

(Khalili, 2013).¹⁶ Hence, grievances coded as legal demands become easily intelligible to the state and, consequently, elicit liberal promises of protection. For these reasons, hate crimes have become one of the few avenues through which marginalized populations can demand an end to racial violence perpetrated by vigilantes.

However, two concerns inform my question. First, the state draws upon the same logics of racial profiling such as singling out turbaned bodies at airports for additional security checks that drive vigilante attacks. In this light, Saini's demand raises important questions about the effectiveness of depending on the state to prevent attacks against Sikhs. Second, if we are to set aside skepticism momentarily and accept hate-crime recognition as an important way to address anti-Sikh violence, what are the terms on which this recognition is sought and what are its implications?

Sikh efforts to force the federal government to recognize attacks against Sikhs as hate crimes began soon after vigilantes started targeting turbaned Sikhs after the 9/11

¹⁶ Khalili argues that "lawfare" or the deliberate use of law as a weapon of war has been a key feature of the contemporary War on Terror, which led to a proliferation of the legal apparatus. The use of law in the War on Terror has taken several forms from the passage of such draconian legislation as the Patriot Act, which severely limited civil liberties, to a suspension of law through legal procedures in places such as the Guantánamo Bay detention center, where the rule of law was substituted by administrative measures. As such, legal demands have better traction with the state, although one is never sure if the state shares the same intentions as marginalized groups in recognizing legal demands. See Khalili (2013).

attacks.¹⁷ However, as Navdeep Singh, policy director of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) noted, the Oak Creek attack became the turning point in galvanizing public and governmental attention to this issue as it forced the state to expedite efforts to at least collect data on attacks against Sikhs (Navdeep Singh, personal communication, April 2, 2015). As such, I examine the activism around hate crimes to understand how the effects of neo-orientalism coerced Sikhs to instantiate their distinction from Muslims.

Neo-orientalism not only rendered Sikhs as proxies to Muslims; it also instigated efforts from Sikh organizations to (re)present Sikhs as a distinct religious-cultural group by emphasizing their difference from Muslims. Resounding through media as well as academic discourses, neo-orientalism forced a closer collaboration between Sikhs and the state by channeling Sikh rage against post-9/11 violence into seeking recognition for such attacks as Anti-Sikh hate crimes. In these efforts, resignifying the pagh assumed significance followed by well-coordinated attempts to place Sikhs within a multicultural national imaginary that would secure them their rights and protections as “Americans.”

¹⁷ The earliest document I could access in this regard is a 2003 communiqué from Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) encouraging Gurudwaras in the U.S. to write letters endorsing an initiative led by inter-faith religious leaders in support of S.966, the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act (LLEEA), and its House companion bill, the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which would expand the federal hate crimes legislation to include a broad set of categories. The communiqué also includes a sample letter that the Gurudwaras are instructed to use ("SMART," 2015).

Despite being conscientious not to mark Muslims as the “real targets,” such representations not only betray a deep investment in multiculturalism but also a belief in the supposed insularity of religious-cultural categories. As such, the implications of these moves are not solely limited to Sikhs.

Figure 2



Two days after the Oak Creek massacre, the Chicago-based *Red Eye*, a daily publication aimed at young readers, published a “Turban Primer” that narrated to its readers the difference between different turbans and their wearers (“Turban primer,” 2012). The primer features “Sikh men,” “Iranian leaders,” “Taliban members,” “Indian men,” and “Muslim religious elders”—all coded as men—horizontally arranged from left to right and wearing different turbans. The text accompanying the illustration explains that although they are common in many societies, including Muslim ones, “turbans are not required by Islamic faith” (“Turban primer,” 2012). The following text appears under the figure titled “Sikh men”:

(Sikh men) commonly wear a peaked turban that serves partly to cover their long hair, which is never cut out of respect for God’s creation. Devout Sikhs also tuck their uncut beards up into their turbans. Sikhism originated in northern India and Pakistan in the 15th century and is one of the youngest of the world’s

monotheistic religions. (“Turban primer,” 2012)

The illustration gives special attention to the nuances of the turbans as they are depicted in different colors and variations. In the process, the primer renders the turban into the central sign that can help distinguish the different ethno-cultural-religious subjects on which the different turbans sit—particularly Sikhs from others. Eerily reminiscent of an illustrated story that appeared in a 1941 issue of the *Life* magazine titled “How To Tell Japs (sic) From The Chinese” to help Americans distinguish Japanese from Chinese immigrants in the U.S. (“WTF: ‘Turban Primer,’” 2012), the onus of the primer is on capturing the different variations of turbans with as much detail as possible, as if to provide a visual guide to the uneducated American eye to tell Sikhs apart from members of other groups who also wear headgears.

In the textual commentary, only “Sikh men” and “Indian men” (a highly amorphous category) appear with no qualifications other than their religious and national identities. Iranians and Muslim elders are represented as “leaders” and “religious elders,” respectively, with an illustration of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei standing in for the archetypal Iranian. At the center of the infographic is a “Taliban member” who along with the preceding two subjects emblemizes the ethno-national diversity of the “Muslim world.” The turban again is the key sign of difference that helps the reader-viewer tell them apart. Despite the effort to depict the variety of turbans, including the differences in turbans worn by Muslims, the primer not only sets up the primary contrast as being between the turbaned Sikh and Muslim subjects—thereby reinforcing the idea that Sikhs have been “mistaken” for Muslims—but also renders political positions as incumbent on religious authority in Muslim societies. This move buttresses the dominant

view of a lack of separation between religious and secular authority seen as a scourge in Islam (Asad, 2003). As such, I believe that while Hatty Lee's (2012) argument that the primer serves no purpose other than helping to "distinguish your friends from potential shooters" is only partially true as a closer reading also suggests the continued politicization of Islam. The primer is an example of how neo-orientalist racial meanings are coded into texts through a combination of visual illustration and text. It also offers a glimpse into how elaborations of Sikh distinctiveness invariably situate Islam as an object of contrast.

The primer was not alone in catering to the sudden need to tell Sikhs apart from Muslims. Rather, it was part of a voluminous media production that sought to teach American audiences unschooled in the nuances of orientalist multiculturalism, how to match turbans with bodies. A story that appeared on the CNN website two days after the attack and titled "The Sikh turban: at once personal and extremely public" situates the turban as the central object that has heightened Sikh vulnerability (Basu, 2012). It profiles two brothers—one who decided to retain the turban and another who decided to shed "the most visible sign of his faith" after the 9/11 attacks—to map the general crisis faced by Sikhs. While the author does not dwell into the nuances of the Sikh turban in as much detail as the primer, the message of the story is nevertheless that the central dilemma of Sikh life after the 9/11 attacks has been about how to retain one's religious identity as Sikh—rendered synonymous here with the ability to keep the pagh—while presenting oneself as "American" at the same time. The answer, according to the author, is in the re-presentation of Sikhs as "not Muslim."

In the years following [the 9/11 attacks], the Sikh Coalition, a New York-

based advocacy group, reported more than 700 attacks or bias-related incidents against Sikhs.

That was certainly cause for concern in the Soin family.

They displayed an American flag and bumper stickers on the family car that said: "Proud to be American" and "Sikh American."

"It was to show people that we are with you," Harkirat Soin says. "We are not who you think we are."

"We are not radical Muslims." (Basu, 2012).

This was a recurring theme in media discourses, as if the inability to distinguish between Sikhs and Muslims was the primary reason driving the attacks against Sikhs. Another story also starts with a similar suggestion: "Ten years ago, Balbir Singh Sodhi was gunned down, apparently because he looked Muslim or Arab. He was neither. Sodhi was a Sikh (Santos, 2012). The message repeated by such stories is that Sikhs are not "Muslim or Arab" but that they have been mistaken for Muslims. This is presented as the main reason behind the attacks against Sikhs. Additionally, such stories situate men as the primary victims: "Sikh women are less identifiable than men, [who are] identifiable by their beards and turbans. Many American Sikh women dress like other Westerners or wear the salwar kameez, a traditional north Indian garment of a long shirt and loose-fitting pants" (Santos, 2012). While it may be true that those coded as men figure primarily among the victims, such coverage takes attention away from the fact that vigilante attacks are often the most visible of a variety of repressive projects that target communities, including women and children, who are often the most vulnerable.

Even voices that tried to chart a different course could not help but reinforce the

primary contrast as being between Sikhs and Muslims. Raushenbush (2012) noted a day after the Oak Creek shooting that the media's need to clarify the differences between Sikhs and Muslims, however thoughtfully done, left the impression that there was something wrong with Muslims with whom Sikhs did not want to be identified. "Sikhs are not interested in being identified as 'not Muslim.' American Sikhs would rather their tradition be understood for what it is, rather than what it is not" (Raushenbush, 2012). Despite their intention to challenge the stigmatization of Muslims by carving an autonomous representational space for Sikhs, such utterances left unaddressed the racial grammar of neo-orientalism that produced the turbaned body as a threat, irrespective of the religious identity of that body. While I am aware that the association between Sikhs and Muslims—or Sikhs as Muslims—was difficult to escape as the semantic field was overwhelmingly forged by this binary, I am perturbed by the media's evasion of how securitization discourses produced turbaned bodies as a threat.

This heightened attention to the vulnerability faced by Sikhs spawned two broad but intertwined responses. First, it pushed Sikhs into an intensified embrace with the state apparatus. At the heart of this emerging alliance was the demand that the federal government recognize attacks against Sikhs as Anti-Sikh hate crimes. Second, it spawned a parallel drive to create awareness among the "American public," especially white Americans, about Sikhs through campaigns that would resituate them as distinct religious-cultural ethnic subjects who complemented the United States' multicultural diversity. Cumulatively, both efforts set out to produce Sikhs as distinct ethnic subjects by calling attention to their difference from Muslims.

Paradigmatic of the effort to seek a collaborative relationship with the state

apparatus is UNM law professor Dawinder S. Sidhu (2013), who not only argued against retiring the mistaken identity paradigm, but insisted that the Oak Creek massacre be treated as an act of domestic terrorism. Sidhu observed that federal statutes as they existed did not allow for dealing with violent reprisal against racial others as terrorist attacks as current definitions of terrorism rested on objective criteria such as whether a shooting was premeditated and politically or ideologically motivated. This was arguably difficult to prove in the Oak Creek massacre:

Uncertainty hinders, if not precludes, that final determination from being made. There are many possible reasons why Page did what he did. For instance, Page may have sought to kill people whom he thought were Muslims; shot the Sikhs because they were a non-white “other” or because they were Sikhs; or sought simply to kill someone—anyone—regardless of their background or characteristics. (p. 79)

Sidhu argues that not only objective criteria but also subjective ideology and motivation should also be considered when determining whether an incident qualified as a terrorist act. Such an approach would produce a reevaluation of the definition of terrorism as “the premeditated, random murder of innocent people that causes physical and psychological harm on a community, without regard to whether the perpetrator attempted to further a possible message” (Sidhu, 2013, p. 82). Prosecuting the Oak Creek incident as an act of terrorism would provoke strong social disapproval and might act as a deterrent against future attacks targeting Sikhs.

This call to treat the shooting as an act of domestic terrorism is very much aligned with the demand that the federal government recognize attacks against Sikhs as a separate

hate crimes category. As Attorney General Eric Holder noted soon after the attack, the Oak Creek massacre constituted both a hate crime and a terrorist act: “Now, the victims of Oak Creek must never be reduced to mere crime statistics. But, in order to honor their untimely losses by ensuring that justice can be done – they do need to be counted” (Holder, 2013). The call to prosecute the Oak Creek attack as an act of domestic terrorism was part of the growing demand for hate crime recognition for attacks against Sikhs.

The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act was passed in 2009. It is the most comprehensive piece of hate crimes legislation that allows for the prosecution of attacks motivated by prejudice. Before its passage, the federal government could bring charges in bias-related crimes only if the victim had been attacked because they had engaged in a federally-protected activity such as serving on a jury (“Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr.,” 2015). The passage of the act expanded federal jurisdiction significantly by not only allowing for the prosecution of hate crimes but also added more categories to the existing list of race, color, religion, and national origin.

The law makes it unlawful to willfully cause bodily injury—or attempting to do so with fire, firearm, or other dangerous weapon—when 1) the crime was committed because of the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin of any person, or 2) the crime was committed because of the actual or perceived religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of any person and the crime affected interstate or foreign commerce or occurred within federal special maritime and territorial jurisdiction. (Federal Bureau of

Investigation, 2015b)

However, note here that the victim should have faced serious bodily harm on the basis of “race, color, religion, (or) national origin” for hate crime charges to be invoked. But discrimination based on “gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability” can be prosecuted only when the crime committed on their basis intervenes with interstate or foreign commerce within federal maritime and territorial jurisdiction.

For Sikhs, the legislation did little as it did not revise the reporting categories under anti-religious attacks. The bipartisan Hate Crimes Statistics Act 1990 only allowed for hate crimes motivated by religious attacks against “Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and atheists/agnostics” to be tracked as specific categories (Kaleem, 2013). All other anti-religious attacks were treated as crimes against “other religions.” In 2013, for instance, the FBI data indicated that 60.3 percent of the “anti-religious crimes” were committed against Jews while 13.7 percent targeted Muslims. Anti-Catholic, anti-Protestant, anti-atheist, and anti-agnostic attacks and those against multiple religious groups accounted for 14.8 percent of the attacks while 11.2 percent were characterized as crimes against “other religions” or “anti-other religions” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015a). Sikhs belonged to this latter category.

The advocacy for identifying attacks against Sikhs as a distinct hate crime category rests on the premise that state recognition is often the first step in evolving a more comprehensive and just response to the violence facing Sikhs. However, three problems are immediately evident in this approach. As I have been arguing throughout this chapter, such a demand obscures the role of the state in normalizing neo-orientalist racial logics that render Sikh lives fungible. Put slightly differently, Sikh investment in

procuring hate-crime recognition (re)situates the state as the arbitrator of racial justice by ignoring how state-sponsored securitization and counter-insurgency discourses reinforce the alterity of turbaned bodies. Second, it helps the state to consolidate its monopoly over violence through a re-intensification of its security-making apparatus, which has emerged as the primary arena to elaborate racial distinctions (Kundnani & Kumar, 2015; Richter-Montpetit, 2014). Lastly, hate-crime recognition relies on the ability of Sikhs to resituate themselves as distinct religious-cultural ethnic subjects through their disavowal of the threat faced by all turbaned non-white bodies and by instead underscoring their difference—implicitly from whiteness and explicitly from other ethnic(ized) subjects, particularly Muslims. This is arguably a high-risk approach. While it offers the best chance of procuring immediate redress for turbaned Sikhs, it can do so only by reducing Sikh essence to orientalist conceptions of religious differences by heightening the role of visible ethnic and religious markers. In the process, the ethical oppositional core of Sikhism that poses a challenge to the secular-religious consensus of modernity is overpowered (Grewal, 2012). In addition, Sikh vulnerability is depoliticized and made to seem as a result of “bad” reading practices from “misguided” individuals rather than as a cumulative effect of state-condoned neo-orientalist racial logics.

All of these dimensions converged in the demand for recognizing attacks against Sikhs as Anti-Sikh hate crimes. In June 2013, almost a year after the Oak Creek shooting, the Advisory Policy Board to the FBI recommended adding two new categories—Anti-Sikh and Anti-Hindu—under anti-religious attacks, which was quickly revised to include all religious categories. This became possible in no small measure because of lobbying by Sikh civil rights organizations. Needless to say, this new-found recognition became

possible at a cost, albeit one that may not be readily evident.

In conveying his strong support along with over 100 other members of Congress to add an Anti-Sikh category to the Hate Crime Statistics Act, U.S. Rep. John Garamendi situates the United States not as the source of the threat facing turbaned bodies but one where they may find resolution:

We Americans will never forget the 2,977 victims of the September 11th terrorist attacks. If I have any say in the matter, we also won't forget the 2,978th victim, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a loving Sikh father shot and killed in Mesa, Arizona on September 15th because his hateful ignorant killer was out for revenge and thought he was a Muslim (Garamendi, 2013).

By integrating Sodhi as a casualty of the 9/11 attacks rather than as a victim of state-endorsed racialized prejudices, Garamendi obscures the role of neo-orientalist logics in generating attacks against Sikhs. Furthermore, he notes that excluding Sikhs from data-collection efforts not only diminishes their safety but also weakens the quality of hate crime data overall. Herein surfaces an important reason behind asking for a separate hate crime category for Sikhs: to enable the security apparatus to collate better data so as to ensure better law enforcement. Recall here that for Foucault, what separates the modern biopolitical state from its predecessors is its reliance on statistics and other modern techniques to “make live and let die”: a process that helps identify populations that need to be protected from those that are coded as a threat (Foucault, 1978). It is not a stretch to argue that access to better data on hate crimes—while beneficial to turbaned Sikhs in the short-term—enables the state to perform better threat assessments to neutralize any perceived threats that are associated racial others.

Yet, along with these problematics that explicitly shore up state power, hate crimes recognition is fundamentally incumbent on situating Sikhs as distinct religious-cultural ethnic subjects by essentializing Sikhi into the visible religious dimensions of Sikh life. Put differently, it is not enough to mark Sikh difference in abstract and philosophical or even ideological and political terms. Rather, Sikhs have to constantly perform their difference in visible/racialized terms at two levels: from whiteness, on the one hand, and from other South Asian and non-white un/turbaned subjects, on the other. And with regard to the former, they have to do so in ways that do not elaborate a fundamental difference with whiteness but rather instantiates a degree of separation that can be made to work harmoniously with depoliticized multiculturalism.

Furthermore, the Sikh demand for hate-crime recognition was honored in a manner that acknowledges the request in letter but not its intention. The annual 2015 *Hate Crime Data Collection Guidelines and Training Manual* of the FBI, which is issued to all local and federal law enforcement authorities to collect and report hate crimes data to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program, instructs law enforcement agencies to collect data against all self-identified religious categories as listed by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and Statistical Abstract approved by the U.S. Census Bureau. In this manual, Sikhs finally emerged as a distinct category, but did so in a manner that recognized their distinctiveness while reducing them to one of the many religious groups in the United States, which are catalogued in alphabetical order. For instance, the following definition of "Protestant" and "Sikh" appear one after another:

Protestant—A person who follows the monotheistic religion of Christianity that is not part of Catholic or Eastern Orthodox faith. Members of this faith affirm the

Reformation principles of justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the primacy of the Bible as the only source of revealed truth. Moreover, believers deny the universal authority of the Pope and some churches are governed by federated councils on the local, national, and international levels. (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary [Eleventh Edition, 2003]; the Encyclopedia Britannica Micropedia Ready Reference [15th Edition, 2010]).

Sikh—A person who follows the monotheistic religion founded by Guru Nanak in the Punjab region of South Asia. Sikhs follow the teachings of 10 gurus; study from the religion's primary sacred text (i.e., the Guru Granth Sahib), and worship in Gurdwaras. Some members of the Sikh faith may be distinguished by the *dastarr* (Sikh turban) and five religious articles: *kesh* (unshorn hair, including a beard), *kanga* (wooden comb), *kara* (steel bracelet), *kachera* (short trousers), and *kirpan* (religious sword). (Criminal Justice Information Services, 2015)

Note here how “Protestant” and “Sikh” emerge as separate but somewhat equivalent categories because of the decontextualized nature in which they are presented. More importantly, Sikh suffering and the endangered position that they occupied in America's post-9/11 racialized neo-orientalist landscape is obfuscated as they are reduced to another religious category whose heightened vulnerability does not warrant any mention, in the same way that the historical privileges that attach to identifying as a protestant in the United States is made invisible by reducing Protestantism to just another religious category. This way, Sikh precarious position is denied, even as Sikhs emerge as a distinct category. Additionally, by embodying these racial-religious characteristics, the Sikh emerges as a subject distinct from whiteness—particularly as that against which

white normativity can distinguish itself.

Apart from pushing Sikhs back into the orientalist trappings that they were trying to dislodge, this definition of “Sikh” denies the Sikh subject’s ties to other South Asian and non-white subjects emerging in common histories of racial violence. In doing so, the document delimits the “Sikh”—a complex formation whose signification is in equal parts social and religious and includes immense variations in theological as well as embodied terms—into a practicing baptized Sikh who is male-bodied and displays the five articles of Sikh faith. This, constitutes the basic profile of the religious-ethnic Sikh subject, according to the document, and any departure from thusly scripted ethnicity renders one’s claims to Sikhism spurious at best and untenable at worst.

Yet, such arbitrary delimiting of complex identities comes undone in more than one way. First, the resignification of the pagh, which has emerged as a vital component of Sikh activism, cannot proceed without drawing attention to the place of the turban in other religions before rendering it an essential part of the Sikh religious identity. To give an example, in outlining the significance of the pagh in Sikhism, the Sikh Coalition relies on the importance of the turban in both Islam and Christianity. It uses excerpts from the Old Testament to render turbans as embodying cross-religious significance that represents faith and devotion to god. Then, it goes on to outline the role of the turban in Islam:

Prophet Mohammed in one of his hadiths states that the turban is a frontier between faith and unbelief. This aptly describes the significance of the turban for a Sikh as well. It is a true mark of sovereignty and a crown. (“Sikh Theology,” 2012)

In *Freud and the Non-European* (2003), Said turns to Freud's work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) to argue against the mutual constitution of identities. Freud argued in his book that Moses, the patriarchy of Judaism, was an Egyptian who was only belatedly assimilated as a European. Said reads this work as brushing against the historical constraints of its time as it recognizes the most important figure in Judaism as a non-European Egyptian, thereby opening the possibility to examine the inherent limitations of identity, which cannot work outside of the originary break which constitutes it. I suspect that something similar is happening in the Sikh Coalition's presentation of the turban as it demonstrates how religions cannot exist as isolated entities that are hermeneutically sealed from each other. In calling attention to the status of turbans in Christianity and especially in Islam, the Sikh Coalition invariably renders Sikhism as something that cannot be made sense of on its own.

This is not the only place where the effort to render Sikhism as distinct and isolated from other religious formations comes apart. The FBI training manual also repeatedly fails in sustaining this distinction on its own terms:

Classifying a hate crime can be confusing when a perpetrator commits a bias-motivated act based upon a victim's religious clothing, object, or identity marker, but uses epithets commonly directed at members of the Arab, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and South Asian communities, such as "raghead," "towelhead," and "terrorist." In such cases, officers should classify the crime based on the religion that investigation determines was the targeted group. If the investigation determines an attack was motivated by and directed at a victim's article of faith such as a Dastar (Sikh turban) or the kesh (unshorn hair, including a beard), and

the offender knew the victim was a Sikh, the incident should be classified as Anti-Sikh. If the investigation shows the victim's turban was targeted because the offender believed the victim to be a Muslim, the crime should be classified as Anti-Islamic (Muslim). (Criminal Justice Information Services, 2015)

If one were to follow this set of instructions, it is not entirely clear that our hypothetical assailant attacked the Sikh pedestrian because he was aware of the former's religious identity. In fact, the last sentence above states that if a person is attacked because the attacker believed the victim to be Muslim, the crime is to be classified as Anti-Islamic, irrespective of the religious self-identification of the victim. As such, if a Sikh is victimized using an anti-Muslim epithet, then the incident can only be recorded as an Anti-Muslim and not as an Anti-Sikh hate crime. In effect, then, an Anti-Sikh hate crime can be added only if the assailant made an explicit anti-Sikh reference or had a documented history of dealings with the Sikh community. But the instructions allow for an attack to be categorized as Anti-Sikh if a person was attacked because of their turban. In doing so, the hate crimes manual ends up firmly coding the turban as "Sikh," missing any other references.

What I am marking here is how the essence of Sikhism is made to conform to orientalist conceptualizations of religious identities that are paradoxically also used to mark the religious-ethnic difference of certain subjects. In other words, the recognition sought by Sikhs is conceded, but only after further entrenching them into religious-ethnic difference. At the same time, it is important to note that despite these contradictions, the recognition of attacks against Sikhs as Anti-Sikh hate crimes worked to cleave Sikhism not only from other religious and spiritual formations but also from intimacies that bind

the Sikh to the non-Sikh (non-white) other. As a result, the Sikh emerges as a distinct category, but with a heavy price.

Along with the hate crime initiative emerged concomitant efforts to educate Americans (i.e., non-Sikh whites) about Sikhs through campaigns that would “rebrand” the turban as well as resituate Sikhs as (ethnic) American citizens. In summer 2013, almost a year after the Oak Creek massacre, the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) commissioned the Stanford Peace Innovation Lab to conduct a study on American perceptions of Sikhs and to offer recommendations for an advocacy and engagement program. The multimodal study integrated two consumer surveys; an overview of social sciences literature on stereotypes, bias, shooter bias, and hate crimes, among others; interviews with Sikh leaders; a review of media coverage of hate crimes against Sikhs; and a study of internet conversation regarding Sikh Americans.

The study noted that Americans overwhelmingly associated the turban with Osama Bin Laden than any named Sikh or Muslim alternative (Stanford University Peace Innovation Lab, 2013). In addition, almost half of the respondents thought that Sikhism was a sect of Islam and 70 percent could not identify a (turbaned) Sikh man in a picture. Lastly, the study noted that anti-turban bias was common even among those with a greater knowledge of Sikhs, including populations considered “sophisticated.” One in five respondents said they would be angry or apprehensive if they came face-to-face with someone wearing a turban. As a result, the study proposes the turban as a prime candidate for a campaign:

Because of its strong visual identity, and because of the strong emotion it invokes among so many Americans, the turban can be analyzed in the context of a

behavioral loop. Thus the turban can be seen as a viable candidate for a campaign that is as much about behavioral change as it is about advocacy. In fact, the [sic] change the dynamics between Sikhs and non-Sikhs in America, a campaign that does not incorporate behavior design might be insufficient. (Stanford University Peace Innovation Lab, 2013, p. 18)

While many of the findings of this study, particularly the conflation of the turban with Islam, confirm what I have been arguing throughout this chapter, my interest here is in the recommendations that are offered to redress Sikh precarity. The study postulates that Sikhs should first “engage and align themselves internally” before they can engage the larger public. It argues that “the Sikh community’s relative lack of engagement with general influencers on hate crime, human rights, peacebuilding, etc.” needs to change, and it calls for better integration (with the American public), influence (within and outside the Sikh community), and institutional capacity (building) (p. 25). Specifically, with regard to the turban, the report asks the Sikh community to leverage the power that the turban has acquired so as to alter its signification “from negative to positive” (p. 26).

By doing so, the study—perhaps more explicitly than the hate crimes initiative—enunciates a neoliberal model of personal responsibility whereby the burden of racial rapprochement is transferred onto Sikhs. Note how Sikhs are held responsible—if not outright blamed—for not engaging the larger American public to dispel negative perceptions of the turban. By suggesting that such negative perceptions arise from a lack of Sikh outreach to the U.S. American public, the study comes close to “victim blaming” as Sikhs are held liable for what has happened to them. Inversely, by doing so, the structural conditions that produce such “negative perceptions” are given a pass even as it

becomes the responsibility of Sikhs to remedy their conditions.

Furthermore, culture has become the lynchpin of racial relations under neoliberal multiculturalism as it comes to be coded as both a counterweight and metonym for race (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991). One can see this in the ways in which the title of the study represents the turban as a “cultural symbol of post-9/11 America.” Additionally, through recourse to social sciences such as psychology and criminology, the study translates what is essentially a case of nationally-condoned racial animosity and violence into individually inhabited psychological traits. The language of “bias” and “stereotype” overemphasizes the emotional dimensions of racial violence while decontextualizing the political and social milieu that produces and sustains them.

Another report commissioned by the National Sikh Campaign and titled *Sikhism in the United States: What Americans Know and Need to Know* (2015) reports similar findings as the earlier study. What is quite revealing about this project is that it started “with three focus group among white Americans with mixed levels of education (one group in Iselin, NJ, and two in Chicago, IL) to allow Americans to describe in their own words their knowledge, perceptions, and reactions to Sikh Americans” (p. 4). Although it slowly expanded to reach out to non-Asian Americans, we are still forced to ask: Why does “white America” become the starting point for such a study? Is the public that is to be reached and whose approval is sought solely imagined as white?

What is evident here is how “white America” comes to stand in for the “mainstream” to which Sikhs should endear themselves. Notice how Sikhs are called upon to tailor their presentation to this mainstream so as to write themselves as “Americans” worthy of protection. In doing so, they are forced into a metonymic

identification with whiteness. In other words, one can argue that to be American is to disappear into whiteness. What the report perhaps inadvertently captures is not just the place of whiteness as occupying the farthest distance from the Sikh subjectivity but also its power in determining the protections that Sikhs are to receive. In other words, whiteness emerges as an alibi for America to whom Sikhs have to endear themselves. As such, the report encourages Sikhs to reach out to (white) “Americans” but in an idiom that they understand: “In particular, messages and information that emphasize the commonalities Sikhs share with other Americans and Sikhism’s strong focus on equality are effective in communicating the Sikh American story to the broader American public” (p. 3). The study notes that (white) Americans are more likely to be receptive to Sikh outreach campaigns if they incorporate elements of the “American story” and “Patriotism” in narrating the Sikh experience in the United States. While patriotism emphasizes Sikh participation in U.S. armed forces, including in World War I and II, and active servicemen in Iraq and Afghanistan, the American story, which elicited the most positive reaction, is defined as:

Sikhs embody the quintessential American story. Like the Irish, Italians, and Chinese before them, Sikhs immigrated to this country seeking a chance to build a better life for their families through hard work. Today, Sikhs serve on their local PTAs and in Boy Scout troops, run small businesses and local charities, and sing our national anthem with pride. They are part of the fabric of their communities in every corner of this nation. They know that the United States is the greatest country on earth, and they are proud to call themselves Americans (p. 14).

In summary, what the two studies try to accomplish is a de-historicization of Sikh

suffering and its routing into modalities that shore up state power by denying the structural nature of anti-Sikh racial violence. In doing so, both studies not only reiterate the need to distinguish Sikhs from other ethnic subjects, particularly Muslims, as the solution of the post-9/11 backlash but also map the responsibility of racial violence onto Sikhs by blaming them for not integrating completely into the “American mainstream.” As a result, structural neo-orientalism is made invisible, the centrality of (unmarked) white norms is reiterated, and Sikh suffering is attributed to Sikh reluctance not to lose their ethical distinctiveness by merging into the American mainstream.

The Turban as an Opportunity

Both popular and academic discourses have relied on the idea that the attacks against Sikhs are a result of bad reading practices. Yet, I have attempted to show here that it is not mistaken identity but the intensification of neo-orientalist racial logics after the 9/11 attacks—including the racialization of religious differences, especially around Islam; the positing of a us v. them binary; and the centrality of gendering and sexualization practices to the racialization of religious differences—that produced Sikhs as proxies for Muslims, i.e., Muslim looking, even as Sikhs were coerced into instantiating their difference from Muslims at the same time by rearticulating themselves as distinct religious-cultural subjects who were an indispensable part of the United States’ multicultural diversity. Neo-orientalism works by rearranging the distinctions between Sikhs and Muslims, sometimes by rendering them non-existent and, at other times, by heightening them.

I situated the Oak Creek shooting, in which a white supremacist gunned down six Sikh worshippers, and the subsequent organizing that emerged around the hate crimes

initiative as dense sites that demonstrate these paradoxical tendencies of neo-orientalism. If Page targeted Sikhs believing they were Muslims because of how religious markers such as turbans and beards and non-whiteness became firmly linked with radical Islam, such an association is rooted in an orientalist history in which phenotype, national origins, gender, and religious differences were marshalled to produce otherness and one which the military has weaponized to prosecute the War on Terror. The Oak Creek massacre, then, should be seen at the intersection of these developments.

In sum, my argument throughout has been that Sikh vulnerability in the post-9/11 United States is not a result of “mistaken identity,” as has been generally projected in popular discourse, but that it is structurally produced because of how neo-orientalism has become indispensable for the maintenance of the U.S. empire. If this is indeed the case, it stands to reason that Sikh vulnerability cannot be redressed through a recognition of the attacks against Sikhs as a separate hate crimes category or by producing Sikhs as distinct religious-cultural subjects in the American imagination. Such maneuvers depend upon calcifying the Sikh as an exclusive religious-cultural subject, which not only denies the historical ties that bind the Sikh body to other non-white bodies, but also reinforces the reliance on religious markers to produce the normative Sikh subject.

What then needs to be done to address Sikh precarity? If law can only offer short-term relief (Volpp, 2002) and that, too, only by circumscribing the meaning of what it means to be Sikh, then what other options are available to secure Sikh life against state and vigilante violence? Here, I want to suggest that Sikh wellbeing is, first and foremost, incumbent upon a grappling with the condition of fungibility that plague all non-white, non-Christian bodies in the United States. This is a historical crisis that has arguably

intensified after the 9/11 attacks. The violence facing Sikhs can then be read not as exceptional but as resulting from this condition of disposability. This would reorient Sikh aspirations away from the state and modalities of liberal redress towards a reckoning of the role of racialization in rendering non-white bodies fungible.

Often, groups facing egregious violence have little in the way of choices, so working in partnership with the state is unavoidable. Yet, as David Goldberg reminds us in his book aptly titled *The Racial State* (2002), the state (apparatus) should be understood not as neutral with regard to the question of race but rather as an instantiation of racial power. As such, it works in the final instance to protect the interests of whiteness even as it dabbles with liberal modalities, particularly in the legal avenue, to arbitrate on racial grievances while making least amendments to the status quo.

Yet, there is an ontological problem that emerges in relying on the state for recognition. As I have been arguing throughout this chapter, such a move mandates a reification of “Sikh” through a delimitation of that category onto overt religious markers which, in turn, reduces the variety of subjectivities hailed by the term, “Sikh.” Put differently, there is the danger that “Sikh” will become reified along racial-religious lines that will work to increasingly exclude those who do not display the overt markers of Sikhism, particularly the five articles of faith as mandated by orthodox Sikhism.

In *The Subject of Sikh Studies* (2005), Alhuwalia and Mandair note that despite the shifts within the field—from the traditional domination of the theological approach making way to an anthropological methodology grounded in a secular approach to the current emphasis on how race and gender intersect with Sikhism—the ontological grounds of what it means to be Sikh continues to be foreclosed. In other words, 1960s

Sikh Studies presumed a coherent Sikh subject “by simply accepting the native informant’s self-representation as a legitimate enunciation” (p. 5) of what it means to be Sikh. This led to the calcification of what it means to be Sikh through a re-turn to normative Sikh theology.

A way out of this impasse, it will be suggested, is to retrieve the question concerning the ontological status of “Sikh” in Sikh Studies. It would mean to shift from the sole preoccupation with epistemological... towards the more uncertain ontological terrain of the question “what is Sikh Studies?” which, in turn, depends on the existential question “what does it mean to be a Sikh?” If the temporal element in the latter question is always kept open, attested to by the temporal etymology of the words Sikh (“learner” or “student”) or Sikhi (“the constant process of learning and becoming”), it can become a very different starting point for Sikh Studies because what can never be definitively installed with a once-and-for-all meaning... is the category “Sikh.” (p. 9)

The authors argue that such an undertaking is essential if the Sikh subject is not to be trapped eternally in a museum culture. In its place, they call for a rigorous analysis that illuminates the processes that produce the Sikh as a religious-cultural-ethnic-racial subject, which this project has tried to pursue. Foregoing ontological certainty mandates that we keep the question of what constitutes a “Sikh” eternally open. Specifically, in the context of this project, it would mean that we shift the focus from who a Sikh is to how Sikhs are produced as distinct religious-cultural ethnic subjects through their disarticulation from Muslims. It would also mean that alternative solidarities be forged that does not allow for any easy differentiation between the Sikh and the Muslim but

rather grapple with the centrality of whiteness to the United States' self-imagination that produces the Sikh as a proxy for the Muslim.

Whoever, under color of any law, . . . willfully subjects any person in any State, Territory, Commonwealth, Possession, or District to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured or protected by the Constitution or laws of the United States, or to different punishments, pains, or penalties, on account of such person being an alien, or by reason of his color, or race, than are prescribed for the punishment of citizens, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than one year, or both; and if bodily injury results from the acts committed in violation of this section or if such acts include the use, attempted use, or threatened use of a dangerous weapon, explosives, or fire, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both, or may be sentenced to death.

--United States Code, Section 242 of Title 18.

Chapter 3

“Skinny Black guy”: Anti-Black Police Violence and South Asian Fungibility

In January 2015, Sureshbhai Patel left India for Madison, Alabama, to help his son Chirag Patel and his daughter-in-law care for their 17-month-old baby (Sheets, 2015). On February 6, 2015, about a week into his visit, the 57-year-old was taking a stroll in the neighborhood when the police received a call from a neighbor about a “skinny Black guy” peering into garages. The caller said that he had lived in the same neighborhood for four years and had never seen Patel before. He also expressed concerns about leaving his wife alone at home with a stranger in the vicinity. Apart from sketching Patel in racial terms—skinny Black guy—the caller gave extensive details about the clothes Patel was wearing and the direction in which he was headed (Challen, 2016).

Two officers showed up soon after and intercepted Patel on the sidewalk. They asked him for some identification. Patel, who only speaks Gujarati and a little Hindi, told the responding officers “no English” and repeated the number of his son’s house. The officers ignored his plea and attempted to frisk him. At this point, Patel may not have fully cooperated with the officers because of communication barriers (Challen, 2015b).

Later, he told the court through translators that he was attempting to walk the officers towards his son's home. Eric Parker, one of the responding officers, who tried to restrain Patel and had asked him not to "jerk away" (Challen, 2015a), used a controversial leg sweep and slammed him to the ground. Patel was hospitalized for spinal swelling and was declared paralyzed. He underwent surgery for cervical fusion. As of writing this chapter, he has not fully recovered the ability to use all of his limbs.

The case did not initially attract much attention but following growing public outrage over the incident after the video of the takedown was widely circulated on social media, Parker was charged with third-degree assault, a misdemeanor that carries a fine and a maximum sentence of one year. The incident was widely discussed in mainstream media outlets, on social media, and within the South Asian diaspora, and eventually escalated into a diplomatic row between India and the United States (Holpuch, 2015). The Federal Bureau of Investigation charged Parker with civil rights violation for "deprivation of rights under color of law" after the video of the takedown was shared widely on the social media (Challen, 2015a). The Governor of Alabama, Robert Bentley, had to tender an apology to the Indian Consul General over the incident (Elliott, 2015), and Madison police chief Larry Muncy recommended that Parker be fired. In a letter dated Feb. 17, 2015, Bentley called for a parallel investigation by the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency to examine the charge of excessive use of force.¹⁸ However, two juries failed to indict Parker on the federal civil rights violation charges and the court

¹⁸ Accessed from

http://media.al.com/news_impact/other/Read%20Gov.%20Bentley's%20letter.pdf

finally acquitted him. The state also dropped the misdemeanor charge (Stephens, 2016b). The Patel family filed a civil lawsuit against Parker and the city of Madison (Bonvillian, 2015). Meanwhile, Officer Parker vowed to fight to get his job back (Stephens, 2016b).

This chapter explores how racialized policing implicates South Asians in anti-Black discourses. Policing has emerged as a primary institution in the regulation of populations that are deemed “social surpluses.”¹⁹ Although it plays a vital role in the racialization of all groups, its impact is acute on non-white bodies in general and Native and Black bodies in particular. Furthermore, the burgeoning state security apparatus²⁰ not

¹⁹ While Karl Marx (1934) and those in the Marxist tradition (for example, see Li, 2010) are widely credited with developing the concept of surplus populations, my use of this category is in line with scholars in the Black oppositional and critical race theory traditions (for example, see Gilmore, 1999; Gilmore, 2007), who argued that the impact of capitalist accumulation of surpluses is particularly acute on bodies of color, which are produced as disposable through the prison industrial complex and other technologies of racialized violence. I see policing as a primary technology of racial violence that works in concert with systems such as the prison industrial complex to manage surplus populations.

²⁰ I borrow this terminology from Louis Althusser (1972) who argues that states deploy a wide array of ideological and repressive apparatuses to enforce compliance with authority. While the repressive apparatuses comprise primarily the police and the military, the ideological apparatuses include schools, churches, etc. that work at the superstructural level or at the level of ideology to normalize repressive ideologies. While

only plays an important role in drawing the line between “make live” and “let die” (Foucault, 2003) but also determines the extent to which populations racialized as non-white are exposed to various levels of rightlessness. As such, it is very important to map the role of racialized policing in rendering racialized populations as disposable.

Specifically, this chapter explores the relationship between anti-Black policing and South Asian racialization. How does the constitutive role of race in policing implicate South Asians in anti-Black discourses? How do racial logics combine phenotype, language, and other markers to produce South Asians as proxies for Black people? Consequently, what rhetorical maneuvers are resorted to by South Asians to produce themselves as distinct, i.e., respectable subjects worthy of state protections? How do such attempts reinforce the devaluation of Black people? Finally, if South Asians become disposable through their collapsing into Blackness, then how may we address the problem of police violence without embracing sexual and gender normativities? These are the main questions I explore in this chapter. A combination of primary and secondary sources, including media reports, court proceedings, and witness testimonies, comprise the archives that I draw upon to answer these questions.

I propose that the impunity with which policing operates against Black (looking) bodies—in other words, as a race-making technology—constitutes some South Asians—in this case, an Indian immigrant—as proxies for Blacks, which coerces the latter to

this distinction has produced several critiques, I find repressive state apparatus useful to mark those apparatuses such as the police who rely on the use of deadly force to regulate populations marked as non-white.

perform their difference from Blackness. Put differently, the racialized logics of contemporary policing create slippages at particular moments when some South Asians become proxies for Black bodies, which then intensifies efforts among them to perform their difference from the Black community by distinguishing themselves as a distinct ethnic and racial community. Representations of the heteronormative, cohesive, economically committed family play a central role in representing South Asians ideal immigrant or citizen subjects who, despite their racial difference, are in compliance with “American” ideals. What remains unsaid but forceful in such articulations is the continued scripting of Black bodies and communities as economically unproductive, sexually unrestrained, un-normed by nuclear family ideals, and therefore unworthy of legal protections and recognition that accrue to familial American subjects, both white and non-white (C. P. Cohen, 1997). In summary, I argue that it is the need to organize populations into hierarchical relationships that produces South Asians and Blacks as discrete, ahistorical categories at certain times while rendering them interchangeable at others.

I would like to clarify, nonetheless, that in suggesting that contemporary policing produces some South Asians as proxies for Black people, I do not mean to imply that South Asians are exposed to the same intensity of genocidal violence facing Black bodies and communities. Here, I take my cue from Lisa Maria Cacho (2012), who aptly notes that while criminalization has generally been used to signify both being stereotyped as a criminal as well as being criminalized, it is important to differentiate between the two. As she argues:

Unlike stereotyping (as a criminal), which refers to the multiple ways (in which)

law-abiding people of color are misrecognized as criminal and treated by others as such, criminalization refers to the various ideological and material processes that turn some people into criminals by making it all but impossible for them to be law-abiding. (Cacho, 2012, p. 29; parenthesis mine)

In other words, to be branded as a felon, a gang-banger, an “illegal” immigrant, or a terrorist is to be prevented from being law-abiding through the full force of the repressive state apparatuses. Hence I remain aware that being misrecognized as Black is not the same as living in a Black body (Coates, 2015), which is to be made unlivable except as the object of law. This paper is not an effort to draw false equivalences between the Black and South Asian communities by collapsing historical differences and the dissimilar effects of structural racisms on these groups.

I hope to accomplish three tasks by exploring how anti-Black policing constitutes some South Asians as proxies for Black bodies. First, my project demonstrates the socially constructed nature of race, particularly the role played by policing and security discourses, in elaborating Blackness and, by extension, South Asians, as discrete racialized categories that become interchangeable at times. Here, I am following the argument made by Kundnani and Kumar (2015) that race, specifically Blackness (Browne, 2015), has been historically produced and reproduced in the United States through systems of surveillance—a phenomenon which I argue has intensified after the 9/11 attacks. Second, this chapter draws attention to how the regulation of Blackness continues to be at the center of law enforcement work. In other words, anti-Black policing continues to centrally organize domestic security processes in the United States. This phenomenon should be unpacked if South Asian interpellation into Blackness is to

be understood, which this chapter attempts. Third, my project examines how anti-Black policing coerces South Asians to participate in anti-Blackness through a reinvestment in gender and sexual normativities. My hope in doing so is to interrupt efforts among South Asians to signify themselves as respectable subjects through a recourse to the trope of the South Asian heterosexual family, but instead build strong coalitions with Black and Native communities around the issue of police violence.

The next section reviews theories of policing in an attempt to outline the racial implications of the security apparatuses. A recent spurt of scholarship in this area, influenced by Foucault's work on policing and prisons, situates the institution of police as the strong arm of the state whose target is the management of poverty and the disciplining of stubborn bodies into economically productive subjects. In this scholarship, the emergence of policing in medieval Europe continues to provide the dominant model, and the question of race or specifically anti-Blackness is a glaring blind spot. In its place, I build on the work of Black theorists to situate policing as the central instrument of racial terror in the United States. It then naturally follows that policing is constitutively anti-Black and cannot be apprehended through a strictly poverty-based lens.

I then turn to the case of Sureshbhai Patel to demonstrate how policing implicates South Asians in anti-Black discourses. I develop the concept of the phobic stranger by combining the work of Frantz Fanon and Sarah Ahmed to illuminate the anti-Black logics that constituted Patel as an object of fear. Then, I look at how the Patel family represented themselves as respectable familial subjects, which contrast against the history of representing Black communities as sexually promiscuous. A core goal of this project is to interrupt such logics and to imagine solidarities grounded in an anti-violence approach.

Guarding Racial Boundaries

Policing in the United States has received some critical attention with the widespread circulation of videos in the social media of egregious violence against Black bodies. The murders of Sandra Bland, Ersula Ore, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and others have opened up a conversation about the normalized nature of police terror against Black and Native bodies and not too infrequently against other bodies of color. In the first half of 2016 alone, police had killed over 500 people (“The Counted,” 2015). As if this were not enough, officers involved in fatal shootings have been overwhelmingly acquitted by courts, as juries tend to be deadlocked over cases involving officers.²¹

Thanks to regular police executions, Albuquerque, the city where I lived during the completion of this dissertation, also made it to national news. According to The Guardian’s “The Counted” (2015), a database tracking people killed state-wise by the police in the United States, New Mexico topped the country per-capita with 21 people killed in police encounters in 2015. Albuquerque Police Department’s extrajudicial policing methods prompted a U.S. Department of Justice investigation, which

²¹ To address the problem of juries acquitting cops, California governor Jerry Brown signed SB 227 in August 2015 that banned the use of grand juries in deciding whether police officers charged with excessive use of force would face criminal charges (Gutierrez, 2015). The bill was authored by Sen. Holly Mitchell following widespread distrust in juries for failing to indict police officers charged with excessive and fatal use of force.

documented several instances of unconstitutional lethal and non-lethal policing and lack of accountability, such as repeated use of “electronic control weapons” (Tasers) on incapacitated victims, using “excessive force” against those with mental illnesses, and supervisors endorsing officers’ version of events uncritically (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014).

Yet, we live in a confounding moment. Despite the irrefutable nature of racialized police violence, critiques of law enforcement in the United States, including those from scholars in the critical Left tradition, continue to turn to Foucault to theorize police violence.²² While Foucault’s work has revealed important ways in which police function in modern society, its Euro-centric nature as emblemized in the woeful lack of attention to racialized policing, calls for alternative theories. I turn to scholars in the critical race theory tradition and Black feminists as they can provide an important corrective that can

²² Scholars in what I term the liberal tradition continue to resort to police reforms as a way to regulate police violence. Emblematic of such work is Radley Balko’s *Rise of the warrior cop: The militarization of America’s police forces* (2013), in which he argues that the militarization of the police forces is a recent phenomenon directly emerging from the ill-advised policies of politicians. In doing so, Balko not only ignores the racial histories of policing but also posits that the problem is not policing *per se* but the unconstitutional abuse of power by law enforcement. My chapter bypasses ahistorical work such as these as they do nothing more than reinforce the normalcy of policing. Rather, I center my critique around such works that call into question the role of policing itself and supplement a class-based analysis with a race-based one.

capture the structural nature of racialized policing in the United States.

For Foucault, policing emblemizes an intensified form of state disciplinary power deployed towards managing poverty (1977). His work situates the institution of policing as emerging with the rise of the bourgeois society and the collapse of the old order, which released poor surplus populations onto cities. Historically, it was not the prevention of crime but the maintenance of communal order that was the core function of the police (Neocleous, 2000). As a result, certain populations—the vagabonds, the infirm, prostitutes, and the homeless, among others—were seen as needing surveillance to unmoor them from their habitual ways and socialize them into the wage economy so they could be turned into economically productive subjects. Although fears of moral corruption, particularly around sexuality, and the spread of diseases organized police work, it was the management of poverty that provided the *raison d'être* for intensified policing. As Foucault notes:

Police is the totality of measures which make work possible and necessary for all those who could not live without it; the question Voltaire would soon formulate, Colbert's contemporaries had already asked: "Since you have established yourselves as a people, have you not yet discovered the secret of forcing all the rich to make all the poor work? Are you still ignorant of the first principles of the police?" (Foucault, 1965, p. 43)

Foucault's work is interested in policing as a core logic of state governmentality itself rather than the police as a distinct, repressive institution. Perhaps owing to this reason, he does not specify the differences between the police and the prison system. But despite race entering the priorities of European state management through colonization

and through the presence of bodies of color who arrived on the shores of Europe as slaves, traders, soldiers, etc., Foucault does not account for it (Weheliye, 2014).

According to him, the police were called upon to perform a variety of functions such as monitoring intellectuals, registration and classification, book-keeping, monitoring food-grain production, and the like. At the same time, policing as a primary state function is diffused through different apparatuses such as schools and clinics. As he noted in an oft-cited quote: “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” (Foucault, 1977).

In his assessment of the work of Foucault, Andrew Johnson (2014) argues that there is a core contradiction while using Foucault’s work to theorize policing. He notes that while the functions of the other apparatuses of the state have arguably expanded following the neoliberalization of the state, the role of the police has narrowed down along repressive lines. In other words, if other state institutions have progressively subsumed disciplinary powers under biopower, the police seem to have migrated in the other direction by embracing their role as the iron-fist of the state. According to Johnson, this misunderstanding persists because the police use different strategies, only some of which are visible. These include everything “from biopower, to disciplinary techniques, to security and insurance analysis, and even the instantiation of an ideological thought-police” (p. 22). Johnson argues for a nominalist reading of Foucault that will help account for the supposed inconsistencies in his theorizing. He notes that sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower are not so much historical epochs but rather different technologies of power. Finally, he adds: “The best path forward for critical theories of modern police power is a ruthless criticism of neoliberalism, its functional mechanics and

its organising principle” (p. 24).

I argue that Foucault’s lack of attention to how race have historically shaped police work both in Europe and elsewhere limits the applicability of his work to explain the role of law enforcement in the United States. Foucault’s ethnocentricity has been well-documented.²³ This is a limitation that carries into his theorizing of policing. While I agree with Johnson’s reading of Foucault to a certain degree, my main contention is that it is not because the police use a variety of techniques that their role in modern society remains invisible. Rather, we should understand these techniques as specific strategies that are reserved for particular populations. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to policing as fundamentally racialized in the United States where it can function as highly repressive but also as invisible at the same time, particularly to those who are not the direct objects of law. Second, my project hopes to demonstrate how anti-Black logics suffuse the security apparatus, including the police and the judiciary. My intention in doing so is not only to demonstrate that policing is anti-Black but also that anti-Blackness circulates at the highest levels of the judiciary and other parts of the security apparatus. Owing to these reasons, I would proffer that “The best path forward for critical theories of modern police power” is *not* “a ruthless criticism of neoliberalism,” as Johnson argues, but rather a critique of the anti-Black and other racial logics that suffuses policing.

I have presented Johnson’s work as symptomatic of the mainstream Left’s colorblind approach to the problem of police violence. Against it, I want to chalk a

²³ See Achille Mbembe (2001), Jasbir Puar (2015), and Alex Weheliye (2014) for more on the Eurocentric nature of Foucault’s work.

different position from which to apprehend the role of law enforcement as an institution of racial terror in the United States that is organized around the regulation of Blackness and other bodies of color. There now exists an extensive body of literature that maps the anti-Black roots of modern policing. Rodriguez (2011) argues that slave patrols formed to apprehend escaped slaves were the forebears of modern-day police (Rodriguez, 2011, 2012). Often, free white men were deputized by the town sheriff into such patrols. They freely used their power to hunt down Black bodies. This legacy has carried into modern policing.

Simone Browne (2015) notes that modern policing techniques, including surveillance practices such as the use of biometric data and the common procedure of asking people to produce IDs to prove their identity, have their roots in slavery as Black bodies were branded with hot iron to mark their status as the property of specific white masters, and Black people were forced to carry manumission papers to prove their identity as freed slaves. She terms such practices racialized surveillance: “Racializing surveillance is a technology of social control where surveillance practices, policies, and performances concern the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a ‘power to define what is in or out of place’” (p. 16). In other words, racialized surveillance are those practices that reify the “boundaries, borders, and bodies along racial lines” in a manner that race starts to emerge as a natural, ahistorical, and essentialist category (p. 16).

My theorizing of policing is also informed by the path-breaking work, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978), which tracks the ways in which notions of crime are themselves

racialized. *Policing the crisis* maps how the rise of policing mediated the United Kingdom's racial crisis by morphing it into a social crisis. Situated at the intersection of cultural studies and legal theory, this work demonstrates the ways in which racial anxieties around crime invented "mugging" as a new form of street crime in Britain that became a handy tool to criminalize predominantly youth of color. The fiction of mugging helped the British society forge new links between "race," "youth," and "crime" to normalize the discourse that the British society was in the midst of a collapse, which revived calls for intensified policing.

In summary, Hall *et al.*'s work is organized around crime as a racialized phenomenon that brings social contradictions to the fore. More importantly, it demonstrates how social forces re-narrate an illegal act as an "exemplary crime" (also see Cacho, 2012) that becomes the *raison d'être* for intensified policing. Hall *et al.* accurately point out that, in the end, mugging alibies society's need to "police the (social) crisis" by determining who needs to be rendered as the object of law's disciplinary regime for society to function smoothly. In doing so, their work opens up ways to not only map the important role played by ideas of crime in racializing populations of color but also allows one to see how social contradictions are woven into the logics of crime itself. It sets the precedent for my work to investigate how racialized logics that are endemic to policing produce South Asians as "Black looking," which intensifies South Asian efforts to distance themselves from Blackness through strategies that are hinged to the reproduction of sexual and gender normativities. Hall *et al.*'s work, along with the upending of the causality between race and racism by Karen Field and Barbara Field (2012) and the centrality of anti-Black logics to racialized surveillance as outlined by Simone Browne

(2015), provides the theoretical and methodological foundations for this chapter.

Anti-Blackness as a constitutive pillar of white supremacy (Smith, 2012) and a historical force in the United States deeply structures policing. For Browne, racialized surveillance is derived from the larger ontological phenomenon of Blackness historically constituted through the white gaze, specifically through surveillance. While Blackness is not reducible to its constitution through the white gaze, this historical phenomenon cannot be ignored, either. W.E.B. Du Bois (1913) also captures the work of the white gaze in constructing Blackness through the idea of double consciousness: “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” (p. 2-3). Note here that the particular modalities of this gaze are contempt and pity, the former of which, I argue, organizes the relationship of policing to Blackness. I borrow Browne’s excellent outlining of racialized surveillance as a model to develop the concept of anti-Black policing.

Anti-Black policing names the operation of anti-Black racial logics in the domain of policing, which associates Blackness (and everything that resembles it) with criminality that is in need of negative management through disciplinary tactics ranging from hyper surveillance to bodily neutralization. It also marks the weaponization of the anti-Black propensities of policing with different technologies and knowledges that are marshalled with the specific aim of regulating and neutralizing Blackness. Another key component of anti-Black policing is what Mimi Thi Nguyen (2015) calls the “liberal disavowal of racism” (p. 793) whereby the anti-Black mooring of policing is consistently denied through the colorblind language of crime and punishment, even when there exists

overwhelming evidence to the contrary.²⁴ This chapter illuminates how these logics are operationalized.

In identifying anti-Black policing this way, I deliberately avoid the theory of racially biased policing, which maintains that policing as an institution suffers because of the racial prejudices of its officers (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Rather, my argument is that policing in the United States is constitutively anti-Black as it is designed to regulate Blackness. This is not only borne out by the disproportionate number of Black people killed by police officers but also by how anti-Blackness structures ideas of crime and punishment. In 2015, over 100 unarmed Black individuals were shot and killed by the police and only in nine cases were officers charged with a crime (“Police killed more than 100 unarmed Black men,” 2016). Additionally, one in three Black people killed by the police was identified as unarmed, although the number is likely to be higher. Another example that demonstrates how anti-Blackness structures ideas of crime is the vast dissimilarity in crack cocaine and powder cocaine sentencing. As David Sklansky (1995) argues, mandatory federal sentences for traffickers in crack cocaine are demonstrably harsher than penalties for powder cocaine, partly because the former is imposed almost

²⁴ Here, one only has to consider the work of prison abolitionists such as Joy James (James, 2000), who argues that Black men are much more prone to be in the prison system than white men, a point also made by Michelle Alexander (2010). Additionally, despite the availability of bystander and police bodycam recordings of police shooting unarmed Black people (for example, the beating of Rodney King), officers have been overwhelmingly acquitted by courts, as I mentioned earlier.

exclusively on Black defendants. Despite federal reforms to crack cocaine sentencing, this is a phenomenon that has continued, which gestures to how laws constitute Blackness as a devalued category. In citing this example, I am not trying to collapse judiciary into the institution of policing but rather suggesting that these institutions work in tandem to reify anti-Blackness.

I now turn to the case of Sureshbhai Patel to illuminate how anti-Blackness constitutes a foundational pillar of policing. I first elucidate how contemporary policing constitutes Black bodies as objects of fear. I then turn to the anti-Black strategies that are mobilized in South Asian representations that depend on the production of sexual and gender normativities to distance South Asians from Blackness. Lastly, I look at how migrant imaginaries also contain the seeds of resistance to American assimilation. My archive here comprises of court proceedings as well as media representations of South Asians that produce them as respectable subjects.

The Phobic Stranger

How may we understand the violent treatment meted out to Sureshbhai Patel at the hands of Officer Parker,²⁵ which opened this chapter? In posing this question, I evade the more-common framing of this issue as one of police brutality, which abhors excessive violence against peaceful protestors but turns away when the same violence is directed at racialized bodies (Rodriguez, 2012). In its place, I turn to the racial dimensions of

²⁵ I will include the prefix “officer” whenever I mention Parker as it is important to mark him as an agent of the state to draw attention to the structural nature of anti-Black policing.

policing, especially anti-Blackness, as a foundation for modern policing. I do so to mark the irrefutable importance of race for contemporary policing even as it continues to be denied at the highest levels. If violence against Patel was the direct result of racialized policing, then it is important to highlight how the right to live is unevenly distributed and enforced through contemporary policing and how this process is rationalized through the judiciary.

Most attempts to make sense of the violence against Patel drew attention to Officer Parker's violent streak that manifested frequently in his interactions with civilians. A year before his run-in with Patel, Parker was off duty with some friends when an armed man tried to rob him. He fired two shots at him but missed (Grass, 2014). Eventually, Officer Parker was declared the victim and cleared of all charges. Soon after Patel's take-down, several members of the Madison Gujarati community told a local news outlet about Officer Parker's repeated aggressive behavior with them. There seem to be a consensus that he was far from cordial with Madison's minority populations (Grass, 2015). These accounts demonstrate that his excessive methods were not an anomaly but racially-specific strategies to discipline non-white populations. Andrew Slaughter, the other trainee officer who accompanied Officer Parker to the scene, told investigators that he did not sense that Patel was a threat to them. Some media reports even suggested that Officer Parker might have been trying to demonstrate the leg sweep to Slaughter when things quickly went out of hand.²⁶

²⁶ Because Slaughter pleaded the Fifth, he has been exempt from testifying in the grand jury trials.

But courts are generally reluctant to consider such behaviors as part of an established pattern. In her analysis of the case of Vincent Chin whose murder in 1982 by Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz in Detroit was a major factor in the emergence of the Asian American civil rights movement in the United States, Sheila Bedi (2003) notes that Ebens had a confirmed history of racist behavior. In 1974, he had screamed racial slurs at Willie Davis, an African American, in a bar and the latter was asked to leave to diffuse the situation. When the defense introduced this as evidence of Ebens' racially biased mindset and proof of intent to violate Chin's civil rights, the court not only held that the prior incident was too remote to have any bearing on the current case but also maintained that proof of racial hatred against an African American was not an indication that Ebens was biased against Chinese Americans. Hence, it is highly unlikely that Officer Parker's racially prejudiced policing practices would be registered by the courts because of the colorblindness that pervades the security apparatus.

The treatment meted out to Patel lays bare not only the importance of race for policing but also how judiciary acts as a cover for this process. Law enforcement authorities in the United States have been deeply implicated in anti-Black racism, as I have been arguing throughout. For example, investigative journalists have documented the widespread use of racial slurs by police officers to refer to people of color, particularly Black people, in email communications and in everyday conversations (Williams, 2016; Yimam, 2015). However, I am interested here not only in the casual racism of police departments but also in how racial categories and racialized knowledges are woven into the very texture of policing.

I contend that the descriptor "skinny Black guy" was not an innocent profile but a

racialized portrait of Patel that was elicited by the law enforcement's dependency on racial taxonomies. Here, I use Frantz Fanon's enunciation of a phobogenic object (1967) in combination with Sara Ahmed's theorization of the "stranger" as a racialized figure of danger (2000), to argue that the profiling of Patel as a "skinny Black guy" constructed him as a phobic stranger who had to be contained. Any other descriptors such as "old person in the neighborhood" or "unfamiliar person walking in the street" would have sufficed. But the caller racially profiled Patel as a "skinny Black guy," which testifies to the integral nature of racial categories—particularly Blackness—for policing.

According to Fanon, the phobogenic or the phobic object produces the twin feelings of fear and revulsion in the seeing self. The phobic object's constitutive trait is that it is racially coded in a manner that the perceiving self apprehends its absolute difference from the phobic object immediately. This evokes a powerful irrational reaction aimed at neutralizing the phobic object (Hook, 2004). As Fanon (1967) puts it, "In the phobic, affect has a priority that defies all rational thinking" (p. 155). Moreover, it is not the phobic object's actions but the phobic object itself which evokes such an affect. Its mere sighting can induce a deep sense of abhorrence and insecurity in the seeing self. Additionally, it is attributed with superhuman powers, which necessitates its immediate containment. As Fanon further notes (1967), the phobic object is endowed with "the attributes of a malefic power" (p.155). It turns into something monstrous: an entity that should be preempted because of the enormous powers it possesses and is likely to unleash upon the seeing subject. Under such circumstances, any act is permissible in the interest of self-preservation.

While a range of subjectivities such as queer and disabled bodies often appear as

phobic objects, the over-determining nature of the colonial-racial relationship—imported into our times primarily through security discourses—makes racial difference and particularly Blackness a constitutive mode of producing the other (Wynter, 2004). And given racism’s fundamental reliance on skin color, or what Spivak (1990) terms chromatism, to reify racial difference, Blackness has been interpellated as the other of whiteness. So fundamental is racial difference to the European self that Fanon argues that the European collective unconscious itself becomes coalesced through an intense revulsion towards Blackness. As he asks (1967), “Why is it the case that, concretely or symbolically, the black man stands for the bad side character?” (p. 198). For Fanon, this (white) unconsciousness is sustained through the symbolic and material reproduction of what he calls the “Negro myth,” a collection of popular and scientific knowledges, stereotypes, discourses, and practices that produced Blackness as the abject(ed) other of whiteness.

However, Patel’s status as a phobic object is not only derivative of his dark skin tone but also his cultural otherness marked through his inability to speak English, to comply with officer instructions, etc. Here, I use Ahmed’s (2000) definition of a stranger to capture the fears that Patel evoked. Let us revisit the anonymous caller’s description of Patel as not only a “skinny Black guy” but also as someone he had not seen in the neighborhood before. In describing the stranger as a figure who evokes racial anxieties, Sara Ahmed (2000) forcefully argues that the stranger is not someone “whom we do not know” but whom we have already recognized as a stranger (p. 19). Hence, to identify someone as a stranger is to racialize her or him as not-belonging. She further adds that identification of “some body” as a stranger—as a body that does not belong in a

particular place—is critical to how a locality becomes transformed into a living community where the stranger appears as an unwanted presence. Terming this phenomenon “stranger danger” (p. 20), Ahmed notes that racial knowledges are liberally deployed to mark certain bodies as “strangers” against whom [racially homogenous] neighborhoods should unite. As she notes, “I am suggesting that it is the recognition of others that is central to the constitution of the (self) subject” (p. 22).

Ahmed’s work also draws attention to how neighborhood watch schemes—a growing collaboration between neighborhood associations and police departments beginning in the United States in the 1970s and in the United Kingdom in the 1980s—led to the normalization of such logics. Ahmed argues that police departments recruited neighborhood watch associations as “eyes and ears of the police” (p. 25) to report “strangers” or “suspicious activities” so police could preempt crime. The emphasis was not only on creating safe neighborhoods as the opportunity to conduct surveillance on bodies that did not belong was presented as a way to bring communities together. As she explains, “There is a constant shift between an emphasis on a caring community and a safe one: a safe community moreover is one in which you feel safe as your property is being ‘watched’ by your neighbours” (p. 25). Moreover, members of neighborhood watch associations were instructed not to hesitate to call the police if they saw “something out of the ordinary,” even if their “suspicions” turned out to be false. Ahmed notes that the term “suspicious” functions as an empty signifier; the very fact that it is not defined stands as a technique of knowledge as it allows one to mark all bodies that are perceived as not racially belonging as strangers and thereby a threat.

Over the past three decades, policing in the United States has turned towards what

is termed as “broken windows” or “order maintenance” policing, which disproportionately affects poor people of color. This trend was inaugurated by a remarkably influential article titled “Broken Windows” appearing in *The Atlantic* in which social scientists James Wilson and George Kelling (1982) suggested that police work had to be reoriented away from preventing crime towards maintaining order as disorder was what gave the impression that “no one cared” and invited further lawlessness. In what would popularly come to be known as the “broken window thesis,” they argued that the primary function of the police should be to reverse the urban decay that vandals—itsself a racialized term—had caused. The authors argued that “one broken window becomes many” unless the police sent out a strong message to those aspiring to move up the criminal ladder that their transgressions would not be tolerated. Coinciding with the rise of the Reaganite era, the broken window theory reinforced the idea of tougher policing by marshalling racialized fears of inner-city decay, which spawned the white-flight of the 70s (also see Lauren Berlant, 1997). By seeking to refocus policing towards property crime or “vandalism,” the broken window theory reinforced the anti-Black foundations of policing. As Hartcourt (2009) argues, this newly emerging insistence on order maintenance only served to criminalize poor people of color as mundane activities such as strolling or cruising through neighborhoods came to be heavily monitored by the police.

This context should help us in grasping the motivation of the anonymous caller in reporting Patel. Policing both draws upon as well as reproduces the devaluation of Blackness by situating it as the phobic object against which whiteness has to be on guard. It also provides the background to understand why the caller read Patel as both “Black”

and as a stranger. Even though Patel did not pose any immediate threat to the caller or to his family, the latter thought it his civic duty to report him because of how fears of the figure of the Black criminal/stranger produced Patel as a threat. Put differently, Sureshbhai Patel's dark phenotype, which signaled his proximity to Blackness, combined with his status as a stranger or someone unrecognizable (except as not-belonging here), to constitute him as the phobic stranger: the object of white fears. Excerpts from Officer Parker's testimony at his trial, as outlined in journalistic recapitulation of the hearing as well as the judgment delivered by United States District Judge Madeline Hughes Haikala throwing out the case, illuminate the ways in which Patel became the phobic stranger against whom Officer Parker was forced to act.

A constant theme in Officer Parker's testimony is the exaggeration of Patel's physical traits, which made the latter appear as a threat. Officer Parker argued that Patel gave several indications from his behavior that he posed a threat to him and fellow officer Slaughter. As Gattis (2015), who was covering the trial for a local news outlet, reported: "That included Patel repeatedly walking away from the officers when they approached to investigate possible trespassing as well as putting his hands in his pocket. Other signs were a distant stare by Patel and a tensing of his body." Throughout the trial, Parker stressed that all actions he took were for officer safety. "I have no idea he lived (in the area)... Or he was a grandfather or he was 57 years old. I was called to investigate" (Gattis, 2015).

In this excerpt, note how Patel loses his personhood in Officer Parker's eyes and becomes rendered into an object or a threat that needs to be neutralized. The police officer's statement that he did not know that Patel "was a grandfather or he was 57 years

old” captures the erasure of personhood that can be the basis for empathy. As Saidiya Hartman argues, Western modernity cannot see the other’s personhood unless it has been rendered in the image of the self: “Only if I can see myself in that position can I understand the crisis of that position” (quoted in Wang, 2015). Officer Parker maintained in his testimony that factors such as older age that would have normally evoked a sympathetic response (one can only hope), did not register in his interaction with Patel. I argue that the profiling of Patel as a “skinny Black guy” abbreviated him in a manner that chromatic Blackness overwhelmed all other details that could have led to a different outcome.

Put differently, Patel became a threat even before Officer Parker arrived on the scene, and all subsequent interactions should be seen as “colored” by this profile. What Patel did or did not do would have no impact on the outcome of that day. This is further borne out by how routine actions such as the twitching of an eye or the pulling away of hands are narrated as threats of danger by Officer Parker. He told the court that Patel pulled his left hand away four times when he was attempting to restrain him, which forced him to escalate his actions to restrain Patel. Note here how a reflex action, one that the body unwittingly performs, is presented as a definitive sign of danger. Recall Fanon’s argument that the phobic object is invested with a monstrosity that endows it with almost superhuman powers. Patel stands in as that phobic object, which had to be neutralized through an extreme response.

Furthermore, despite Patel’s limited fluency in English, his noncompliance is narrated as a justification for the body slam that Officer Parker used to subdue him. Officer Parker initially denied that he had used a leg sweep while confessing that he had

resorted to a “similar maneuver” on other suspects without injuring them (“Madison officer denies,” 2015). The hearing then slowly turned to discussing the “reasonableness” of his technique with some police officers calling it a leg sweep while others refraining from using the term. Ten officers called in by the defense to testify on behalf of Officer Parker termed it an “adapt and overcome” approach that helped him deal with the situation (Challen, 2015c), while three other police officers testifying on behalf of the prosecution disagreed with Officer Parker’s tactics because it was not a technique taught in police academies.

John Lee Smith, a karate expert who created the martial art program used by police academies in Alabama and was called in to testify by the defense, maintained that Officer Parker’s maneuver should be seen in the context of his interception of Patel, as it was impossible to say in hindsight whether it was not reasonable to use this technique or not. When prosecutor Saaed Mody argued that Officer Parker was aware of four things: that Patel was an older-looking man, on a sidewalk, did not speak English, and had no weapons, Smith interrupted him to suggest that it was not obvious from the video if Patel had been completely patted down. He noted that Patel moved his left foot forward and dipped his head. “I think it’s plausible he was trying to pull his left hand away,” Smith said. He maintained that this suggested “passive borderline defense” to add a moment later that Patel was, in fact, actively pulling away (Challen, 2015c).

It is important to note here that barring a karate expert (someone with deep ties to the police and who testified for the defense), both the prosecution and the defense depended on police officer testimonials to decide whether Officer Parker’s actions were reasonable. In his reading of the grand jury transcripts in the Michael Brown case,

Nicholas Mirzoeff (2016) argues that the testimony of Officer Darren Wilson, the police officer who killed Brown, became the standard against which physical evidence was judged. Mirzoeff added that the prosecutor framed the case in such a manner that an indictment was unlikely and a conviction would have been impossible in that case. Similarly, in this case, it is police officers who were called upon to decide whether Officer Parker had used reasonable force. The gold standard here is whether another reasonable police officer in a similar situation would have resorted to the same response. By effectively removing this matter from the public domain and making it the exclusive preserve of expert police knowledge, law works to render this as an internal and specialized matter that only other police officers can arbitrate on. Give the fraternal order of police, this is clearly a tall order.

The phobic object is not just any generic threat but a danger to whiteness. It becomes a threat to the (white) officer because he stands in as an agent of whiteness. More specifically, *he* protects the borders of white propertied interests, looks for its opponents, and is tasked with neutralizing them. Although he speaks the language of law and uses the preemption of crime as his main excuses, his chief enemies are those of whiteness. This is made evident by the numerous ways in which security discourses render non-whiteness, particularly Blackness, into a threat that needs constant surveillance, monitoring, and, increasingly, elimination through execution. It is because of this reason that racialized logics render even routine actions such as the twitching of an eye or the resting of hands by Black (looking) people as provocations that the officers are “forced” to respond to.

Furthermore, when the prosecution questioned him about whether it was clear that

Patel understood English and could comply with his orders, Officer Parker responded: “People constantly try to deceive us. Officers get assaulted and killed taking that for granted” (Gattis, 2015). Here again, Patel’s ability to speak English becomes irrelevant. This chilling statement gives the lie to the claim that one is presumed innocent until guilty. Rather, racialized policing constitutes the phobic stranger as guilty, and self-preservation licenses the use of maximum violence. Parker is not a “lone bad apple” here, as some would be inclined to think; during the trial, the defense attorney Robert Tuten noted that “When you come to the US we expect you to follow our laws and speak our language. Mr. Patel bears as much responsibility for this as anyone” (Sureshbhai Patel speaks out, 2015). Such an argument maintains that it is not Officer Parker who is at fault but Patel for not being able to speak the assumed language of the land. At one point, the trial broached the possibility of charging Patel with a misdemeanor for not carrying his identification papers while he went out on a stroll (Challen, 2016).

If Parker’s testimony gestures to anti-Blackness masquerading as colorblindness as it operates through policing (Mirzoeff, 2016), the judgment acquitting Parker penned by Haikala allows us to see how this same ideology permeate the highest levels of the judiciary, if only more insidiously. A close reading of the judgment acquitting Parker makes it abundantly clear that despite being a body formally distinct from policing, the judiciary is suffused with the same colorblindness that refuse to see the vulnerability facing Black bodies. Thus, my argument is that the judiciary is not so much a mechanism that can act as a check on policing but is strung together with it. Particularly, I am interested in how the juridical embrace of colorblindness enables anti-Blackness to operate even as it continues to be denied.

Here, it is important to point out that right from the commencement of the first trial, Haikala was hostile towards even weak attempts by the prosecution to highlight the racial dimensions of this case. The first jury had deadlocked after the 10 white men on it declared Parker innocent while two African-American women voted guilty. Following subsequent media coverage of the racial composition of the jury, Haikala had instructed the prosecution to desist from bringing up the racial dimensions of the case (Stephens, 2016a). In a meeting that occurred in the judge's chamber when the second jury was deliberating, Haikala noted that the Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Posey had used the phrase "all lives matter" in his closing arguments even though she had asked him not to bring up race. Despite Posey's clarification that he had mentioned "all lives matter" to indicate that it is not the lives of cops but all lives that mattered, Haikala noted that the phrase still had racial overtones. Reproaching Posey for going too far, the judge observed: "I said to you at the first trial, and I don't think I said it explicitly at this one, but I did say that I did not want there to be racial issues in this trial" (Stephens, 2016a).

I want to draw attention to two issues here. First is the judge's strong reluctance to consider race as an important factor in this case. Lest we read this as her personal choice, I want to suggest that the widespread embrace of postracism after the election of Barack Obama as the first Black president of the United States may have been a factor forcing the rejection of race as a crucial factor that could determine the outcome of this case. Postracism, defined by Cho (2009) as a revamping of the colorblind ideology for the new millennium, maintains that Obama's presidency is proof that racism is now passé (Ono, 2010). As such, postracism call for a material retreat from the category of race. In particular, the state is forced to abandon the use of race both as a basis for its policies and

as a consideration when arbitrating matters such as police violence that have historically allowed for the perpetuation of racial injustice. In its place, postracial ideology calls for a race-neutral or colorblind approach that deliberately ignores the relevance of race. Judge Haikala's firm stipulation that the racial dimension of this case not be mentioned is then as much a result of structural postracism than her own decision to ignore it.

But even though Haikala may appear to disavow race, what she is, in fact, attempting is a racial project that benefits the *status quo*. Omi and Winant (Omi & Winant, 1994) define a racial project as:

... simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning (p. 56; emphasis in original).

Following this theorization, it can be argued that by censoring race, Haikala gives it new meaning: one where race cannot count as being of import to the legal process. Her stipulation not only draws upon colorblindness but also normalizes it through a strict embargo on any mention of race. This specification went a long way in strengthening Parker's case.

Second is the decontextualized use of "All Lives Matter" by the prosecution. "All Lives Matter" appropriates the rallying cry of #BlackLivesMatter to deny the racial vulnerability facing Black bodies. In doing so, it masks the significance of anti-Black logics to policing practices. In her exhaustive account of Black Lives Matter, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016) argues that the movement emerged as a response to egregious

cases of systematic police violence against Black people. It was triggered by the murder of Michael Brown by Darren Wilson and his subsequent acquittal, which sparked off an uprising in Ferguson. She notes that Black Lives Matter brought to national attention with tremendous urgency the continued hemorrhaging of Black lives in the hands of the police, thereby exposing the lie that the presidency of Obama had resolved the question of race.

Black Lives Matter spawned two rhetorical responses. First was the racist “White Lives Matter” (WLM) used by white supremacist groups such as the Aryan Renaissance Society (Viets, 2016) “to promote the white race” and to amplify the false message of Black-on-white crime as a grave threat to white people. But far more sinister is “All Lives Matter,” a rhetorical strategy devised by liberals to deny the anti-Black nature of police violence. This call subverts “Black Lives Matter” to implicitly claim that no life should be privileged over another, which reinforces colorblindness and obfuscates the fact that all lives are not exposed to the same intensity or frequency of state violence as Black bodies are. As Judith Butler argues

It is true that all lives matter, but it is equally true that not all lives are understood to matter which is precisely why it is most important to name the lives that have not mattered, and are struggling to matter in the way they deserve. (Yancy & Butler, 2015)

Although Posey might appear to use “All Lives Matter” to uphold the sanctity of non-white life and not just the lives of cops, it cannot be stressed enough that this strategy ultimately works to shore up a colorblind approach through law by denying the vulnerability facing Black lives. Yet, even this weak reference—which, as I have

demonstrated, is an articulation of colorblindness—was disallowed by the judge because of its implicit association with the “Black Lives Matter” movement. I have highlighted this fact to show how the judicial system remains inimical to addressing race, despite the fact that it provides the basic grid of intelligibility for police work. This is a racial project with far reaching consequences beyond the purview of this case. Although there is no evidence that the judge explicitly favored Officer Parker, I contend that the censoring of the racial dimensions in the hearings created the optimal conditions that would enable the disgraced cop to walk free.

Haikala’s judgment opens by stipulating that a jury may find Officer Parker guilty of a violation of § 242 if the government can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Parker acted under the color of law; that he deprived Patel of the right to be free from the unreasonable use of physical force by law enforcement officers; that Officer Parker acted willfully; and that his actions resulted in grave bodily injury to Patel. Since Officer Parker was indeed acting under the color of law and since his actions did result in Patel suffering a spinal injury, the only two issues left for the jury to resolve were whether his use of force was unreasonable and whether he acted willfully. The judge notes: “The first—reasonable use of force—is measured by an objective standard while the second—willfulness—involves a subjective test” (p. 5). “Willfully” here gestures to the racial bias that may have prompted the officer to detain Patel, but refuses to name it as such. The first is presented as an objective matter to be resolved using legal standards and the second as a subjective matter where Parker’s “intent” is of primary importance. Nonetheless, the outcome with regard to the first issue—of whether Parker used excessive force under the color of law and violated Patel’s Fourth Amendment right—

necessarily influences the decision with regard to intention.

Here, I want to briefly focus on the judicial cleaving of the first issue from the second one (intent). Note here that the objective issue is ranked as “first” while intent occupies the “second” position. I contend that this is a strategy that works to exclude charges of racial bias from receiving any consideration in the hearing process. Leipold (1997) suggests that the move to “objectify” certain claims and defenses during the pretrial hearing is guided by the need to streamline the judicial process and to limit the number of issues that courts can arbitrate. Nevertheless, such efforts invariably close off attempts to draw attention to the “mindset” or racial biases of state officials, thereby affecting the chances of those who might have a legitimate claim of racial prejudice: “Simply put, by moving the inquiry of certain issues away from the actor’s mindset (towards objective issues), courts have undermined the ability to root out vestiges of race-based behavior” (Leipold, 1997, p. 560). He further argues that the judicial process is largely based on discretion, which privileges state actors who often make judgments based on race while not admitting to it. Consequently, defendants can rarely prove that a state actor’s actions were motivated by race. Hence, the cleaving of the current case into objective and subjective issues and the privileging of one over the other suppresses the claims of racial bias made by Patel while limiting the scope of the hearing to primarily resolving whether Parker’s use of force was unreasonable.

Haikala states that to resolve the first issue (use of force), the jury would have to consider two issues: whether Officer Parker used a leg sweep, widely seen as an undesirable technique and against Madison Police Department (MPD) policy, and whether Patel understood English so as to determine if he was intentionally not

complying with officer instructions. Yet, even this limited opportunity around deciding whether the use of force was unreasonable is seriously compromised as the judge maintains that the only criterion that can be applied to determine the use of force is whether another officer in a similar position would have used a similar response: “The ‘reasonableness’ of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight” (United States District Court, 2016). In lining the issue this way, the court interprets the un/reasonable use of force as an issue that only police officers can determine, and something that is effectively outside of the domain of public opinion. The judgment further notes that police are often called to make split-second decisions in circumstances that are tense; therefore, it is only other police officers who can decide whether the use of force was reasonable or not. Furthermore, cops who use force must “be able to articulate that their decisions and actions were reasonable at the time of a response to resistance incident based on the totality of the circumstances and information available to them at the time” (p. 8).

In effect, the judgment firmly articulates that the un/reasonable use of force as something that only fellow officers can determine. This might also explain why a majority of the witnesses lined up by both the prosecution as well as the defense in this case were police officers. Given the strong homo-social bonds among police personnel and the strict codes of secrecy that bind officers (Westley, 1955)—what Nolan (2009) terms the “blue wall of silence” (Nolan, 2009)—it is difficult to imagine that cops would implicate their own. One study, for instance, found that police officers committed perjury 20 percent to 50 percent of the times they were called to testify on Fourth Amendment

issues (Orfield Jr, 1992). Furthermore, many police departments have unspoken conventions prohibiting officers from testifying against each other (Westley, 1970). Given such strong structural conditions that discourage cops from testifying against other officers, it is not a surprise that not many of Officer Parker's colleagues would come forward against him. Hence, it is hard to deny that he had an advantage from the start.

Even those police witnesses who testified that there may be a case against unreasonable use of force remain tellingly ambivalent about Officer Parker's actions. As the judgment records, while Lieutenant Harrell attested that Officer Parker had admitted to him about using a leg sweep when they reviewed the video together, he also allegedly told Officer Parker that "everything was okay" (p. 80). Furthermore, Lieutenant Harrell instructed the officer to pad up his report with information about other burglaries in the area so he could claim probable cause. Note here how Lieutenant Harrell's contradictory responses where he both claimed to have witnessed Officer Parker admit that he had used a leg sweep and yet went on to give him advice on how to cover up his tracks, created an opening for the defense to exploit. Although other officers, Capt. Stringer and Capt. Sanders, testifying for the government submitted that the use of force was inconsistent with MPD policy and that Officer Parker appears to have used a leg sweep, Lieutenant Harrell's position created chinks in the prosecution's arguments. Hence, the court was inclined to believe Sergeant Marc Bray when he testified for the defense that Officer Parker's use of force was consistent with the MPD policy because he had used "objectively reasonable force" (p. 35) and that he had lost balance while trying to restrain Patel. The judgment does not dismiss the fact that Officer Parker may have used disproportionate force; in fact, it admits that Officer Parker's technique is not something

that is taught at the police academy. But it maintains that given the inconsistencies in prosecution testimonies, there is incomplete evidence to suggest that he used the leg sweep.

Second is the question of Patel's fluency in English. Specifically, I am interested in how the judgment interprets Patel's lack of proficiency in English as both a mark of his foreignness while also refusing to see it as an alleviating factor. Lisa Lowe (1996) argues that Asians in the United States have been integrated into its markets as workers and managers, yet rendered foreign through exclusionary laws and restrictions on citizenship. She calls the Asian subject in the United States the "perpetual immigrant" or the "foreigner-within" who is figured as being at odds with the cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the nation-state, irrespective of legal citizenship status. The uneven distribution of English proficiency among Asian subjects has undoubtedly played a role in reinforcing the stereotyping of Asians as culturally unintelligible. Such fears also suffuse the court's attempt to understand and interpret Patel's lack of proficiency in English.

Even before broaching this issue, Haikala notes that "an officer is not excused from the obligation to investigate, and a subject is not excused from complying with a preliminary investigation, simply because the subject reports to an officer that he does not speak English" (p. 43). Furthermore, she adds that the issue for jurors is not so much whether Patel understood English or not but "whether a reasonable officer evaluating the totality of the circumstances concerning use of force would question whether Mr. Patel legitimately could not understand English or whether Mr. Patel made an excuse in an attempt to avoid an investigation" (p. 45). Note here how the judiciary again interpellates itself into the shoes of the police and refuses to allow alternative readings of the

interaction between Officer Parker and Patel. By framing the issue this way, the judgment renders Patel's knowledge of English as both insignificant but highly salient to the case.

Haikala reads Patel's ability to follow simple commands in English as, in fact, undercutting his claims that he did not understand English, which is presented as grounds that would reasonably rouse the suspicions of a police officer. As this excerpt from the judgement reveals, Patel's limited ability to follow commands becomes the very grounds through which his claims are dismissed:

The enhanced dashcam video demonstrates that when Officer Slaughter called to the unidentified subject to "come here," the subject turned, waved, and walked a few steps toward Officer Slaughter... Mr. Patel testified that he did not understand what Officer Slaughter said when he called out, but he stopped and stated in English, "I am walking, walking." Mr. Patel added that Officer Slaughter "asked me about my house and I said, 148, 148." Neither the phrase "I am walking, walking," nor the statement "148, 148" can be heard on the audio track of the dashcam video recording, but some of Mr. Patel's statements are unintelligible or inaudible on the recording. (United States District Court, 2016)

The judge notes that a police officer is not at liberty to walk away from a suspect because of communication barriers. She even adds that "an officer cannot walk away from the subject to go to his patrol car to call an interpreter if the officer is concerned that the subject may flee" (p. 20), overlooking the fact that there were two police officers on the scene that day and that Officer Parker could have easily called for an interpreter while Officer Slaughter stayed with Patel. Although Haikala admits that Officer Parker's statements are inconsistent about whether he thought Patel knew English or not, she

relegates this observation to a footnote. Rather, the entire incident is seen as exacerbating the situation as it heightened the suspicions of Parker and led to what the court admits was an unfortunate incident.

The judge's inclination to see Patel's limited knowledge of English not as an alleviating but an aggravating factor repeats the defense's strategy to mark Patel as undeserving of legal protections. For instance, during the trial the defense attorney Robert Tuten said, "When you come to the U.S. we expect you to follow our laws and speak our language... Mr. Patel bears as much responsibility for this as anyone" (Stephens, 2015, para. 5). English continues to be a prime vector of cultural and national belonging, and a lack of fluency in the language marks the cultural alien. Conservative political scientist and commentator Samuel Huntington says as much when he noted: "There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican-Americans (and other non-whites) will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English" (Huntington, 2004, p. 256). The judge here ventriloquizes this argument to give a clean chit to Parker.

The court reduces willfulness to a subjective issue that is difficult to arbitrate by tying the outcome to the objective issue of the unreasonable use of force. Haikala refuses to consider if Parker may have been motivated by racial animus. Rather, willfulness here is tied to two factors: judicial precedence with regard to whether non-citizens are entitled to constitutional protections and whether Parker lied or tried to cover up his actions that day. Since this question has already been addressed in the first part of the judgment—which concludes "that the evidence concerning use of force in this case is not adequate to support a unanimous verdict of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt" (p.52)—Parker is again

given the benefit of doubt and acquitted of all charges.

With regard to legal precedent, Haikala maintains that although as a green card holder, Patel is justified in having a reasonable expectation to be free from unauthorized searches by the police, the court does not find that this right has been made “specific and definite” in the Eleventh Circuit to non-citizens with regard to Section 242. The judge then goes on to add that her final decision, however, is not based on the question of law but rather upon the evidentiary record that points to inconclusive proof against Officer Parker. Note here how Fourth Amendment protections are rendered as unavailable to non-citizens, irrespective of a person having been legally present in the United States. Even if the evidentiary record was stacked up against Officer Parker, one can safely guess that the lack of constitutional protections could be cited to dismiss the case. I address this question in detail in the conclusion.

As for whether Officer Parker lied, the court pegs this question on circumstantial evidence and rehearses the testimonies from both sides to argue that there is little indication to suggest that Officer Parker lied that day. Since the question of the use of unreasonable force has already been resolved in Officer Parker’s favor, it would indeed be contradictory to suggest that he lied that day. The judge notes that the prosecution relied on video evidence to argue that Officer Parker took Patel to the ground while restraining his hands, which prevented the latter from breaking his fall. While the technique that he used is one that is not taught in the police academy, the judge concluded that it was more inclined to believe Officer Parker that he had lost his balance while trying to restrain Patel. When the prosecution argued that the tone of Officer Parker’s voice is proof of his intent to violate Patel’s rights, the judge countered it by

claiming that police officers have to give clear, loud commands to enforce compliance with their orders. Furthermore, Haikala notes that Patel's ambiguous response to whether he knew English could have forced Parker to give loud comments and, as such, they cannot be seen as proof of intent.

As a result, and despite a fellow responding officer's testimony that he saw no threat from Patel, two juries failed to indict Officer Parker. The availability of visual evidence documenting Patel's takedown is not going to alter this phenomenon. Officer Parker remained silent throughout the trial and the resulting controversy about the question of race. Neither his racial identity as a white officer, nor that of Patel as a South Asian, is the object of legal inquiry. Yet, my argument is that the description of Patel as a "skinny Black guy" activated the modern day version of the Negro myth (Hook, 2004), which holds that any person described as a "Black guy" is a potential offender and using full force in such conditions is not a choice but a necessity. This is a position that was articulated by Officer Parker and upheld by the courts, which share in the racialized logics of police work.

Of Racialized Normativities

If the anti-Black logics of policing rendered a South Asian immigrant into a proxy Black criminal, barring a few exceptions the South Asian diasporic responses avoided a critique of racialized anti-Black policing. Rather, they emphasized the sexual- and gender-normative nuclear family to signify a strong adherence to "American ideals." Additionally, such representations also amplified claims of innocence through an affective rendering of disability that worked to implicitly normalize the criminality attributed to other bodies. Mediatized representations of the police assault and the

subsequent ordeal faced by the Patels depicted them as hardworking immigrant subjects whose social and emotional lives centered on the heterosexual family. They were narrated as leveraging the family not only emotionally and socially but also economically as a resource to accumulate capital. Such a strategy resonates with the historical framing of Asian Americans in general as family-oriented subjects (Pyke & Johnson, 2003) who depend on their family as an emotional as well as economic resource.

Lauren Berlant (1997) argues that the cultural wars of the 1980s and the rise of the conservative Right propped up an ideal citizen-subject marked by deep ties to his family. Such a subject refrained from making claims on the state but rather reinvested his energy in his family and in producing ideal future citizen-subjects who were untainted by questions of racial and other forms of injustice. For Berlant, this inward focus and heightened reinvestment in the family gesture to the depoliticization of social grievances that is a key mark of neoliberalism's ascendancy under Ronald Reagan. To this, Paul Gilroy adds, "The family remains a key motif, but the multiracial family of nations has been displaced by the racially homogenous nation of families. The nation is composed of even, symmetrical family units..." (Gilroy, quoted in Desai, 2004, p.74). Here, the family is not only the basic unit or the building block that together constitute the nation-state but also becomes a microcosm of the state.

But such an investment in the heterosexual nuclear family as constituting the highest American ideal was consolidated not because of any natural utilitarian value that the family possesses. Rather, it has its roots in decades of demonizing the Black community for its non-adherence to the heteronormative family norm. *The Negro Family: The case for national action*, a report issued by Daniel P. Moynihan (1965) which best

encapsulates this claim, criticizes the Black community for not adhering to the norm of the heteronormative nuclear family and for the excessive number of single-mother households, which were seen as socially deforming the Black child and emasculating the Black man (for example, see Spillers, 1987). As Moynihan categorically states: “At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family” (p. 5). In the place of the non-heteronormative familial arrangements in the Black communities, Moynihan firmly advocates for national action “to strengthen the Negro family so as to enable it to raise and support its members as do other families” (p. 47).

I contend that the South Asian investment in projecting themselves as family-oriented subjects has deep implications when read against this anti-Black history of the heteronormative family as the core American building block. Discourses of conformity to the heteronormative family ideal not only offer minimal access to the wages of whiteness that is otherwise withheld from groups of color, but also readily transforms into an optic to differentiate South Asians from Blacks seen as non-heteronormative. As a result, South Asians are implicated in anti-Blackness when they become ventriloquists for heteronormative family discourses, whether they do it willingly or not.

Such South Asian representations draw upon a strategy of self-making by (over)emphasizing the centrality of the heteronormative family to South Asian communities. It liberally draws upon the stereotyping of Asian Americans as family-oriented subjects while reinforcing it in new ways to present them as deserving of recognition and legal protections. Additionally, South Asians are figured as economically productive subjects who are working hard to live the American dream. Such claims not only deny the vast variety of same-sex and non-normative hetero forms of sexual desire

in the South Asian diaspora but also exploit notions of hard work and entrepreneurship that are fundamental to neoliberalism to rewrite South Asians as respectable.

But any analysis of the representations of the Patels would be incomplete without an understanding of the caste and class privileges that have traveled with them from South Asia to the United States. One of the most economically and politically powerful castes today in the state of Gujarat, India, the Patels are “an overdetermined entity, enabled by historically and geographically contingent articulations of class, gender, political, and religious elements” (Gidwani, 2008, p. 38). They emerged as a distinct caste under British colonialism because of how colonial revenue policies favored certain groups who were seen as skilled agriculturists and adept at collecting revenues from other sharecroppers and other tenants. They quickly consolidated their hegemony in pre- and post-independence India by migrating overseas to places such as East Africa and repatriating earnings while also taking advantage of emerging economic policies that favored large-scale agriculturalists and entrepreneurs. Today, they form one of the most prominent and perhaps the wealthiest South Asian diaspora as members of the caste have settled in several locations in the West (Parvin & Rutten, 1999). As most savarna caste groups, the Patels practice endogamy. The other ways in which they differentiate themselves from other castes is through practicing vegetarianism and through the high value placed on ideas of thrift, entrepreneurial spirit, risk-taking, and highly gendered forms of self-sufficiency that limit women to mostly household chores (Gidwani, 2008).

I have given this brief synopsis of the Patels because some of the traits associated with them—particularly the high value placed on the entrepreneurial spirit and the gendered understandings of the role of women—shaped how the attack against

Sureshbhai Patel and the subsequent plight of the Patels were narrated through the media. Furthermore, it is important to account for the privileges that accrue on account of class and caste while making sense of the tragedy visited upon this immigrant family. I do not deny the racial violence the Patels were subjected to but to present a more complex picture of how various privileges and violence intersect in this case.

My analysis also uncovered an overreliance on representations of disability in media discourses that evoked pity, which obfuscated how structural conditions—in this case, anti-Black police violence—produce disability. I follow Sherene Razack’s (1998) in using this term: “Pity is the emotional response to vulnerability, a response that does not necessarily lead to respect—that is, to a willingness to change the condition that hurt people with disabilities” (Razack, 1998, p. 138). Representations of Patel’s spinal injury rendered him as a truncated subject, a framing that was critical in evoking “pity.”

“Post assault, Gujarati grandfather on recovery path,” “Alabama Police Department Brutality? Cops Accused of Paralyzing an Indian Grandfather After Tackling Him for Looking ‘Suspicious’,” “Grandpa left paralyzed after encounter with cops,” and “Meng Disturbed Over Injury of Grandfather Visiting from India” are just a few of the headlines that narrate Sureshbhai Patel not as an immigrant or as an old person but specifically as a “grandfather.” Strictly speaking, this is an accurate description as Patel was visiting the United States to care for his developmentally challenged grandchild so his daughter-in-law could return to her job (Post assault, Gujarati grandfather, 2015). However, calling Patel a “grandfather” is not an innocent choice. Eric Garner was rarely described as a caring father who was only trying to provide for his family. Tamir Rice was never called an innocent child playing with a toy gun. Why then is Patel referred to

as a grandfather in the media?

A story appearing on *The Guardian* opens with a picture of a disabled Patel being led by his son, Chirag Patel, to the courthouse (Figure 1). The picture features the caption: “Sureshbhai Patel arrives with his son Chirag at the federal courthouse during the first trial in September” (Alabama officer accused of, 2015). Sureshbhai Patel is seen using a four-legged walker as his son dressed in a blazer stands to his right ready to help his father. Another news story in the local broadcast News 19 opens with a similar picture of the Patels where the younger Patel is seen assisting his father, who is in a neck brace and is struggling to walk. Chirag’s eyes are focused on his father and his left hand slowly rests on his father’s back as the latter learns to use the walker. The story opens with a somber lead: “He moves slowly, painfully... Using a walker and aided by his son, Sureshbhai Patel moves from the bedroom to the living room of the home they now share in Madison” (Riopka, 2015). A similar framing is deployed by another story as Sureshbhai sits silently next to Chirag on a couch as the latter fields questions from the media: “He is motivated and working really hard to get better,” Chirag says of his father (Stephens, 2015).

Chirag is consistently framed by mediatized discourses as not only someone who offers moral and emotional support but also as a caregiver who physically assists his father as he learns to cope with his limited mobility. Sureshbhai’s daughter-in-law is acknowledged in the media coverage, but I could not find a single news report that named her, let alone included a direct quotation from her. Irrespective of this lack of direct representation, she is presented as an economically productive subject who has now been forced to put her career on hold and care for her father-in-law because of the assault. For

example, this excerpt from the news story below barely gives us a glimpse of the absentee daughter-in-law. Yet it succeeds in presenting her as an economic subject: “‘He came here to help with the baby so my wife can go back to work,’ said Chirag Patel. Instead his wife now stays home to care for both the baby and help care for her 57-year-old father-in-law” (Stephens, 2015). This framing implicitly presents South Asians as patriarchal while coding the family as an economic resource that individuals can call on during trying times.

What we see in these reports are glimpses of how notions of heteronormative family mix with affective renderings of disability and the ideal of the “hardworking immigrant” to render the Patels as recognizable subjects. My argument is that such representational strategies firmly place Sureshbhai Patel within a heteronormative extended family structure from where he becomes intelligible to “American” audiences as a subject of pity. Although the extended family may appear different from the heteronormative nuclear family that constitutes the core American ideal, it should be read as a variation of the nuclear family rather than marking a departure from it. Furthermore, the extended family marks racial difference as it is understood as representing the Asian American family arrangement. Hence, it conveys a non-threatening variation that articulates well with white America’s stereotype of Asian American difference while not compromising the presumed universal need for family structures (Arendt, 1968).

I want to pay some attention here to the persona of the daughter-in-law that emerges in the media reports. She is presented as aspiring to enter the workforce, perhaps to both build a career for herself and to improve her family’s financial position. However, she is narrated as having had to put her plans in abeyance because of the attack against

Patel. This presents her as the ideal gendered neoliberal subject. In tracking the emergence of *homo oeconomicus* as a neoliberal subjectivity, Dilts (2010) notes that neoliberal theorists such as Gary Becker sought to liberate labor from classical as well as Marxist conceptions by theorizing it not as labor but as human capital. Put differently, they held that laborers were not an object of economic analysis but active economic subjects:

What an individual does, in deciding to engage in labor, is forgo some other “substitutable choice” to produce an income stream in the future, and in this way, the neo-liberals argue, they can think of themselves, in the language of capital, as bundles of abilities, attributes, and qualities. While these qualities can be either innate or acquired, they are necessarily connected to a particular body, a distinction that separates human capital from other forms. (p.136)

In sum, neoliberal theory of human capital holds that “entrepreneurial activities and investments are the most important practices of the neo-liberal self” (p. 137). This reading is particularly important to understand the role of Patel’s daughter-in-law. By aspiring to go back to work and in seeking her father-in-law’s help to make this happen, the daughter-in-law models a neoliberal self that tries to make the best of economic opportunities while not completely abandoning family obligations. As such, she can be seen as accepting the double-burden of production and reproduction that falls upon women with a little help from her extended family.

But the extended family is no more Asian American than the nuclear family is white. Sunaina Maira (2009) points out that the first major wave of migration from South Asia in 1965 has been followed by another wave of immigrants entering the United States

in the 1980s on family reunification visas. The Family Reunification Program was framed as presenting the benevolent face of U.S. immigration since citizens and permanent residents were permitted to sponsor their immediate family members for citizenship. However, what distinguished those who entered the United States under this program was that they were predominantly working- and lower-middle class, which changed the model-minority profile associated with the South Asian community. Most of them took up jobs as cab drivers or worked in gas stations and restaurants.

The Family Reunification Program consolidated the idea of the United States as organized around the primacy of the family while in actuality it worked in concert with the rolling back of the welfare state as the federal government gradually divested itself from funding essential services such as housing and welfare assistance. This positioned the family as the shock absorber that helped marginalized populations cope with depleting services while, at the same time, providing a readily exploitable pool of workers who could be employed at minimum or below-minimum wages (Reddy, 2011). The valorization of the family in general and the extended family as an Asian American peculiarity in particular should be seen as an ideological maneuver that obfuscates the demise of the welfare state and the outsourcing of its services to the family. Given this context, mediatized representation of the Patels resounds with white American audiences as they appear as responsible subjects who are not burdening the state but dealing with their own crisis by leveraging the family as an economic resource. Inadvertently, such representations help South Asians amplify their differences from Black people through a performance of gender and sexual normativities that is typically disassociated from African Americans. An additional effect of such representational choices is that they

alienate queer South Asians from their community. However, time prevents me from discussing this dimension here.

Although the heteronormative extended family and the gender and sexual normative roles that constitute it were at the heart of reinforcing the idea of South Asians as the model minority, it was not the only way in which mediatized representations presented them as worthy of protection. Representations of disability were mobilized in a manner that framed the “ultimate” impact of Patel’s spinal injury as personal and economic rather than as produced because of a broader pattern of concerted violence against bodies of color. In fact, the iconic image that has come to represent this story captures the senior Patel lying on a hospital bed in a neck brace with wires crisscrossing his body. However, such images were often framed in a decontextualized manner as they sought to bring attention to the senior immigrant’s plight without calling attention to the police violence that produced it in the first place.

But how may we make sense of the injury inflicted on Patel? It is a sign of our times that Patel’s injury at the hands of Eric Parker evoked mixed reactions. Given the frequency at which police kill Black and other people of color, Patel’s injury might have seemed as a “preferable” if still an undesirable outcome compared to the outright execution in the hands of cops. Yet, as Puar (2015) reminds us in the context of Israel’s violent repression of Palestinians, the “right to main” framed by Israel as a “humanitarian response” still exercises biopolitical control over Palestinian bodies and environments. It is not a “let live” (in Foucauldian terms) but a “will not let die,” which leaves life suspended somewhere between life and slow death. Furthermore, it traffics in the logic that disability is preferable to dying.

While Puar's reading of the right to maim might not be completely transposable to Patel's situation, there are nevertheless important lessons to be gained through a comparative reading. Puar is right in pointing out that maiming works as a form of biopolitical regulation that codes disability as an accidental outcome (in her case, collateral damage), which precludes an analysis of the full arsenals and techniques police deploy against different bodies. Furthermore, I find this reading relevant as policing in the United States often draws upon military tactics and arsenals developed in battlefields across the world, especially Israel.²⁷ In this sense, we can see how disability is not an accident but is directly related to the violence that police inflict.

Nevertheless, the representations of Patel eschewed such an analysis by resorting to sentimental renderings of disability. In these accounts, disability becomes an unfortunate occurrence that is depoliticized through its personalization. First, most headlines presented Patel as "partially paralyzed" While this may be technically true, "partial" works to minimize the extent of injury that Patel suffered. Given his age, it is unlikely that Patel will ever recover fully. But the media reports inadvertently glossed over this dimension through the use of "partially paralyzed" (Fuchs, 2016). Additionally, renderings of the injury inflicted on Patel were mostly narrated in the U.S. media as an unfortunate occurrence, a side-effect of zealous policing rather than integrally related to how police deal with bodies of color. This is articulated through the drawing of attention

²⁷ As #BlackLivesMatter activists noted, some of the tactics used against protestors in Ferguson and elsewhere might have been acquired by police who frequently travel to Israel on training programs. See (O'Connell, 2015).

to the bodily debility facing Patel rather than to the police violence that produced it. By concentrating on how Patel was coping with his condition, the media again rendered the structural basis for disability obsolete by narrating it as an incident that brought the family together. For example, the family's attorney Hank Sherrod told MSNBC "I talked to his son, Chirag, only less than an hour ago and the reports from the doctors are very good — that he is improving faster than expected" (Diaz-Balart, 2015). Notice here how "home" is a significant trope that is indispensable to narrate Patel as worthy of empathy. Furthermore, the narration of Patel as healing from his condition not only works to take attention away from injury towards recovery but also articulates well with the "positive and upward" looking attitude that is a key mark of neoliberalism.²⁸

Claims of innocence were also highly significant in situating Sureshbhai Patel and, by extension, South Asians as having been wrongly targeted by the authorities because of an "accidental" likeliness to the racialized criminal profile that is at the heart

²⁸ The affective life of neoliberalism promotes such feel-good values as positivity as individuals are constantly instructed not to look for structural causes for their condition but rather to turn internally and cultivate an attitude of positivity to overcome the dire situations that they face. Furthermore, such a positivity also has an economic dimension. As Emma Luck (2016) demonstrates, under neoliberalism some advertisers have deftly capitalized on body positivity to promote their products by branding them as "feminism." Likewise, my argument is that in a social milieu conditioned by neoliberal sensibility, Patel's recovery, which gestures to his intention to overcome the odds facing him, presents him as an ideal subject.

of police work. Such a framing rests on the presumption that there is indeed a criminal subject who can be rightfully apprehended as breaking the law without recognizing that it is the repressive state apparatus and its laws that produce crime as a punishable activity through racialized logics. To paraphrase Cacho (2012) again, criminalization is not only about being stereotyped as a criminal; rather, it actively prevents certain bodies from being able to comply with the law.

As I have been arguing throughout, Sureshbhai Patel was repeatedly presented as an innocent immigrant who had come to the United States to care for his family. Not only he but also his son Chirag is represented as unacquainted with a life of crime. In other words, innocent. When questioned in an interview about the attack on his father, Chirag emphasizes his absolute unfamiliarity with crime as well as with the legal system in general: “I am just an engineer. And I would let the law work” (Stephens, 2015). The first part of his response tacitly conveys Chirag’s conformity with the model minority myth through his self-identification as an engineer. Given the transition of the United States into a service economy that innovates cutting-edge technology and provides technical support to the rest of the world, Chirag gets coded as an integral part of the high-technology workforce that has helped the United States maintain its global supremacy. Additionally, it comports well with the myth of Asian Americans as scientifically inclined and technologically advanced and therefore forming a bulk of the tech workforce. Just as his wife, Chirag gets rendered as a productive economic subject.

But I am more interested here in the second part of his statement: “And I would let the law work.” By saying so, Chirag reposes his faith in law and its supposed indifference to the question of race. Further along in the interview, Chirag notes that he

“does not welcome the fame” that the incident has brought him and his family. “The reason is pretty bad,” he adds (Stephens, 2015). I contend that his readiness to “let the law work” and his shying away from a more overt stand on racialized police violence appeals to a white liberal sensibility that abhors the politicization of racial injustice and firmly believes that any question of discrimination be solely the domain of the legal apparatus. This has also been a flashpoint of conflict within Leftist struggles that agree on the fact of policing as an instrument of racial terror but insists that protests only exacerbate the situation. While I am generally sympathetic to the pressure of assimilation that coerces immigrant families into articulating discourses that present the United States as a fair and egalitarian society, I am troubled by how the South Asian response as ventriloquized by Chirag foreclosed the opportunity for making connections with the Black-led anti-police violence movement while inadvertently benefiting from it. South Asian representation of Sureshbhai Patel and his family as aggrieved familial subjects who were wrongly targeted by the authorities leaves untroubled ideas such as “crime,” “innocence,” and “guilt” as foundational concepts that guide policing, despite the fact that they are racially structured. This helps frame the attack against Patel as an unfortunate accident at best or the work of an individual racist at worst, and it also obfuscates anti-Blackness as a constitutive logic of contemporary policing.

Yet, Shakuntala Patel, the wife of the senior Patel, articulated an alternative reading of this incident that refused to minimize the attack against Patel. “I am shocked,” she told *The Indian Express* in a mixture of Gujarati and Hindi. “The way they threw him to the ground was unkind. He is an old man. I am worried about him. My son told me that although movement has returned to one hand, other parts of his body are still paralysed

(sic). He committed no crime” (Raja, 2015). Unlike the earlier excerpt that presented Patel as recovering, notice here how Shakuntala Patel refuses to minimize the attack against her husband. She went on to add:

I am scared to live in a country where they attack you for no reason. I want to go there now because my husband and my son need me, but once Suresh recovers, I will bring him back to India. I wish my visa is granted on humanitarian grounds so that I can be there to take care of my husband. It is the US government that is responsible for his condition. (Raja, 2015)

Here, Shakuntala Patel, steers clear of the depoliticized responses that dominated the mainstream media as well as the South Asian reaction to the attack. Neither does she participate in the American dream. In its place, she offers a trenchant critique of the police violence that left her husband disabled. By noting that “It is the US government that is responsible for his condition,” Shakuntala Patel refuses to see the attack against Patel as an unfortunate occurrence but rather promptly lays it at the footsteps of the racial state. While her family is very important for her, it is precisely this importance that informs her political position: to bring her husband back home. If Chirag and others present themselves as “wedded” to the American dream, Shakuntala Patel articulates a position that is much more attuned to the racial realities on the ground.

I contend that herein lies an alternative imaginary – one that is attentive to the violence that comes with being an immigrant. And it is no surprise that it is articulated by a woman from a village in Gujarat waiting to get a humanitarian visa so she can join her husband in the United States. My aim here is not to valorize Shakuntala Patel but to point out the structural nature of her critique. While migrants are expected to live with

violence, as if it is a normal part of being a migrant, Shakuntala Patel refuses to accept this status quo as she stands up against police violence. She clearly pronounces not the police officer but the United States as guilty for what has happened to her husband. In doing so, she refuses to see the take down of Patel as an egregious act by an individual officer but rather positions it as a structural issue that the entire state apparatus is responsible for. While she may be motivated by personal interest—in this case the wellbeing of her family—her critique is clearly structural and refuses to be seduced by the myth that is the American dream.

Conclusion, or New Beginnings

Policing in the United States has historically functioned as an important register of race-making. The following excerpt from Barbara Fields and Karen Field's *Racecraft* (2012) captures an incident in which the colorline and its ensuing loyalties are in a flux:

So, BAM, a wreck; and out of this wreck comes a white man. Good Lord! Now, out of the other wreck comes a Negro woman in her houseshoes (sic). And I was a sight, trying to hold up my gown with my hands through the coat pockets and standing there in my worn-out slippers. In fact, my car wasn't really a "wreck," I only had a small dent, but the other one looked bad. As my witness, Mr. Crawford sent a boy for a cop and waited with me, all of us more or less 'on display' out in the middle of the avenue. "Miz Fields, now don't you worry," Mr. Crawford said. But to tell you the truth, neither one of us knew what mightn't happen. The only thing I knew about the other driver was that he came from Vermont, which I read off his plates. He didn't talk to me, and I didn't talk to him. When the cop got there, he walked around the two Model Ts, not saying much either—at first. But

then, all of a sudden, Praise the Lord, the cop began to shout and carry on, “You damn Yankees so-and-so. You damn Yankees such-and-such.” From the time I heard that, I kept on not saying a word, I kept quiet sure enough. I was not the “damn Yankee.” (Fields & Fields, 2012, pp. 128-129)

Ms. Fields, a Black woman in Charleston, got into a wreck involving another driver from Vermont. Given the racial dynamics of the South, Ms. Fields believed it her fate that the cops would hold her responsible for the accident. But the officer who arrived on the scene let a different loyalty get the better of him. As soon as he realized that the driver was a “Yankee,” he turned on him.

Fields and Fields use this incident to give us a glimpse into the lived reality that was the Jim Crow, which does not align in any simplistic way with the racial orthodoxies that many of us are fond of reproducing. Even though the responding officer seemed to have sided with a Black woman, a rarity for Black women like Sandra Bland, whose encounter with patrol officers turned fatal), what is of interest to me here is the primary role of policing in deciding who is rendered the object of law’s disciplinary regimes and who becomes the subject of its empathy.

I started this chapter by asking how racialized policing implicates South Asians in anti-Black discourses. I offered the figure of the phobic stranger by combining the insights of Frantz Fanon and Sara Ahmed to suggest that such a scripting of his body elicited the brutal response that is emblematic of law enforcement’s treatment of Black and Native bodies. Yet, the resulting South Asian response refracted through the media and other modes of self-representation avoided an engagement with anti-Black policing. Rather, it embraced heteronormativity and the nuclear family as central South Asian

tenets, relied on a sentimental rendering of Patel's disability that obfuscated the structural conditions that produced it and made claims to innocence that not only reposed faith in the law but also reinforced the devaluation of Blackness. My objective was to show how racialized policing, at certain moments, produces South Asians as proxy Black (dark) subjects, which coerces South Asians to produce themselves as a distinct group, i.e. not-Black. The quest for legal redress and the pressure to assimilate into the white nation-state come together to elicit particular rhetorical maneuvers that underwrite the production of South Asians as a distinct racial-ethnic group. Given the United States' racial history, such efforts readily translate into anti-Blackness as they contribute to the devaluation of Blackness and its continued scripting as "criminal" and "disposable."

This is also borne out by my own experience and in my interactions with other South Asians. Most South Asian responses that I have witnessed over the social media and elsewhere expressed deep anguish over the fate of Sureshbhai Patel. Yet, barring a few voices, rarely did the systematic nature of anti-Black policing become a focus of debate in the South Asian diasporic community. Most attempts to make sense of this case left constitutive ideas such as the fairness of the law, colorblindness, innocence, and the devaluation of Blackness intact. Even those voices that called for justice for Patel relied on inclusion and justness as frameworks to make their claim.

What might a response look like that does not in/advertently participate in the disposability of Blackness but works to foreground the systematic nature of state-endorsed racial violence against bodies of color as the techniques of repression come to be honed on the bodies of Black and Native people? What would it look like for South Asians to challenge anti-Black policing without just capitalizing on all the work that

Black activists have done against the epidemic of police violence? Surely, if Patel's case has gained any visibility, it is thanks to primarily Black-led movements such as #BlackLivesMatter that have taken on the issue of police violence with utmost attention. What I want to suggest below is not an answer but some possibilities that can potentially take us in this direction.

The first step in this direction would be coming to grips with the systematic nature of anti-Black policing that is poised to gradually draw other bodies of color into its orbit. Given the constitutive role of anti-Black logics, any critique of the so-called excesses of policing is likely to remain expedient and self-serving if it does not consider how policing is designed to instinctively react violently against Black and Native bodies. As such, my argument is that it is necessary to stop interpreting the violence against Patel as the work of an overzealous officer or as an unfortunate incident but grapple with policing as constitutively anti-Black. Such a reading opens several coalitional possibilities between South Asian Americans and Black activists who are leading the fight against the menace of police violence.

Additionally, it is also incumbent upon South Asians to rethink the embrace of heteronormativity as a tactic that helps them align with whiteness. In her work aptly titled *Deviance as resistance* (2004), Cathy Cohen addresses the need for queering African American Studies by centering the “experiences of those who stand on the outside of state sanctioned, normalized White, middle- and upperclass, male heterosexuality” (p. 29) and who are often also marginalized within their own communities. Cohen notes that instead of pathologizing Black deviance, Black scholars would be better served from closely studying the lives of those heavily dispossessed, not because such behaviors and

identities hold a great secret, but they can delineate the conditions under which transgressive behavior can be mobilized into transformative political resistance. In addition, studying them would also expose the normative rules that undergrid society that even movements for social liberation often underwrite.

I want to suggest in a similar vein that decentering heteronormativity would demand an end to South Asian investment in gender and sexual normativities that is often a resort to gain what is denied on account of racial difference. A queer of color perspective would caution us that heterosexuality is not always unilaterally privileged over queerness as the state often punishes hetero desires that do not comport to normative expectations of marriage and family.²⁹ Yet, in the case of the Patels, it is not just the acceptance of heterosexuality but the way in which the family is normatively gendered and rendered as an economic and social asset that gesture to the reign of heteronormativity. Inadvertently, such representations reinforce the anti-Black history of the family as the foundational unit of American national culture that South Asians seek to enter.

In highlighting these possibilities, I do not mean to privilege a lofty politics over the mundane pressures of everyday life that affects immigrants. But being folded into power on a conditional basis is bound to unravel, as Patel's injury at the hands of Eric Parker demonstrates. Rather, my point here is that our desires for inclusion and recognition have become the very tools that the state wields to fracture a broad-based coalition against its various violence inflicted upon bodies of color and other

²⁹ For the most comprehensive discussion of this phenomenon, please see Cathy Cohen (1997).

marginalized groups. Ultimately, a just and ethical struggle demands nothing more than a severance from the racial state (Goldberg, 2002) and its liberal promise of equality and redress that has become the horizon of politics. It also asks for a divestment from whiteness as it structures the politics of inclusion and whose pressure is particularly acute on immigrants who have been excluded from the rewards of citizenship.

Chapter 4

Exemplary Subjects: Hindu Americans and Hawai'ian Settler Colonialism

In 2012, at the age of 32, Tulsi Gabbard was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Hawai'i's 2nd District. A two-time Iraq veteran who also had experience in politics at the city- and state-levels in Hawai'i, her victory while surprising was not improbable as Hawai'i has overwhelmingly voted Democrat ever since a coalition led by Asian Americans took over the reins of the party soon after WWII (Trask, 2008). But while the results might not have registered as nothing more than the mundane outcome of an electoral battle both inside and outside Hawai'i, this was not the case.

Tulsi's³⁰ electoral success set off celebrations 8,000 miles away in India as there was much excitement over the election of the "first Hindu" to the U.S. Congress. In 2007, an attempt to open the Senate with a Hindu prayer evoked hostility from fundamental Christians, which was widely publicized in India as an insult to Hinduism (Rajghatta, 2007). In addition, noted Indian American politicians such as former Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal and South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley have converted to Christianity without which their rise to power would have been impossible (Choudhury, 2012). Given

³⁰ I will refer to Tulsi Gabbard by her first name, as it plays a key role in her identification as a Hindu woman. Tulsi, which is the Sanskrit name of holy basil, is very important in Hindu ceremonies, especially in the Vaishnava traditions to which Tulsi adheres. Her name also plays a key role in her identification as Hindu in American politics.

this history of perceived slight against Hinduism, the Indian news media waxed eloquent about how Tulsi had breached the religious glass ceiling by not abandoning her faith. They were also joined by the Hindu American constituency mostly comprising Indian Americans who also took immense pride in Tulsi's victory (Haniffa, 2012). In her, they saw a figure who could work to bring India and the United States together by leveraging her political power while also serving as a role model for young Hindu Americans who may not often feel comfortable about their religious identity.

But the celebration of Tulsi's victory belies two issues. First, it occludes the ongoing colonization of Hawai'i and the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli, the indigenous people of Hawai'i, on their ancestral homelands. Her election is but a recent episode of a long history in which non-Hawaiians, especially Asian Americans, rise through the ranks politically and economically while the islands continue to slide into acute forms of settler control (Trask, 2008). Second, Tulsi represents the conjoining of Hindu nationalism and its virulent Islamophobia with U.S. imperial interests (Jilani, 2015), which has immense consequences for not only for those rendered as enemies by the global War on Terror about also for the anticolonial struggle in Hawai'i .

This chapter explores how South Asian Americans, especially Hindu Americans, are implicated in settler colonialism—the third pillar of white supremacy. Simply put, settler colonialism marks the elimination of the Native through a host of technologies ranging from genocide to assimilation that concomitantly tries to write the settlers as natives (Wolfe, 2006). I analyze the public and private personas of Congresswoman Tulsi to understand how Hindu Americans are implicated in settler colonialism through their participation in projects that invest them with power while further eroding the

sovereignty claims of the Kanaka Maoli or the indigenous peoples of the islands of Hawai'i. I am especially interested in how Tulsi's Hindu identity and access to institutional power overlap against the backdrop of post-9/11 Islamophobia, liberal multiculturalism, and growing American military and commercial interests in the archipelago to further entrench settler colonialism in Hawai'i.

More specifically, this chapter seeks to answer the following questions: What are the links between Hindu nationalism and the struggles for sovereignty in Hawai'i? How does the discursive production of Tulsi's political positions as U.S. Congresswoman and of her private persona as an ideal multicultural subject implicate particular Hindu subjectivities in settler colonialism? How do these processes reproduce settler colonial logics of dispossession that affect Kanaka Maoli claims to their ancestral lands? Finally, how may Hindu Americans articulate an anticolonial politics that refuses to partake in the destruction of Hawai'i?

This chapter's title borrows from Sunera Thobani's monograph, *Exalted subjects: Studies in the making of race and nation in Canada* (Thobani, 2007). Thobani explores the processes that constitute certain bodies as foreign and alien, bodies against whom national subjects become legible. She notes that race becomes central to national formation in countries like Canada, where the European Christian white subject is imagined as law-abiding (juridical), committed to diversity, and progressive—in sum, “exalted”—while others, especially Native people, are rendered as heathen and primal. These distinctions are sustained not only by state practices but also by the power relations that emerge in everyday interactions. This corpus of practices shapes an exalted subjectivity that comes to structure the nation itself by providing the basic grid of

intelligibility about whose lives count and whose does not.

I develop Thobani's elucidation of "exalted subjects" to map another subjectivity that has become increasingly critical to the operation of power under multicultural settler colonialism. "Exemplary subjects" names those non-white immigrants who have overcome significant odds to make "home" in this hemisphere through their individual efforts and hard work rather than by seeking redress for racial injury from the state. In doing so, they help gloss over the violence of settler colonialism by diverting attention away from the structural nature of dispossession towards the efficacy of individual attempts in overcoming historical hurdles. A central argument in my research is that the role of exemplary subjects needs to be demystified for any anticolonial coalition between indigenous and non-indigenous people to become possible.

Exemplary subjects are not exalted subjects in that they are not the constitutive subjectivity around which the nation coalesces. Put differently, while exalted subjects are those whose values become those of the nation, exemplary subjects try their best to embody these values to establish their credentials as rights-bearing subjects. As such, performance plays a key role in the political and social lives of exemplary subjects. I am using performance here not in the poststructuralist sense (Barad, 2003), but as a neoliberal regulatory technology that coerces individuals and groups to reproduce specific behaviors, such as flying the U.S. flag, by rewarding such behaviors through an incentive-based system (Ball, 2003). In sum, I am using exemplary subjects as a variation of the model minority myth to map the operation of power within multicultural settler-colonial societies whereby non-indigenous, non-white immigrant populations become the very tools through which the dispossession of indigenous people becomes intensified. As

a concept, exemplary subjects undergirds my project as it helps me map how South Asian Americans participate in settler-colonialism.

The next section of this chapter opens with a brief account of indigeneity and settler colonialism. Here, I draw upon scholarship that focuses on North America to understand the dynamics of settler colonialism and its relationship to indigeneity and to non-indigenous, non-white others to outline some of the ways in which it is normalized as an inevitable force of history. Then, I turn to Hawai‘i, whose occupation both draws upon and yet diverges from the settler colonialism of continental United States. Hawai‘i is a key site in the United States’ imperial network as the United States Pacific Command is headquartered there. Additionally, it is the only “state” that has an Asian American majority. Hence, I am interested in the role that Asian Americans play in rationalizing the occupation of Hawai‘i.

I use “militourism” as articulated by Teresia Teaiwa (1999) to map the role of Tulsi in the dispossession of the native people of Hawai‘i. Militourism refers to how the massive presence of the military in Polynesia in general and Hawai‘i in particular supports the tourist economy, while the pervasiveness of the tourist industry makes the military invisible. My argument is that Tulsi’s public and private persona emblemizes the ways in which the military and tourism play important roles in the occupation of Hawai‘i.

I start by outlining the emergence of Tulsi as an important figure in American politics by mapping the larger circuits of power that she is enmeshed in. Tulsi is a conduit for Hindu nationalism, which has severe implications for Hawai‘i. The next section reads her political career closely to understand how Hindu-inspired Islamophobia is brought to

bear upon Hawai'i before I turn to understand how her private persona also contributes to the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli. Finally, I conclude the chapter by trying to demystify Hindu American settler-colonialism in Hawai'i .

Occupation by Another Name

This section of the chapter takes J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's (2016) caution seriously that it is disingenuous to dwell on settler colonialism without acknowledging the foundational role of indigeneity as the condition of possibility for the former. Indigeneity not only endures against the genocidal impulse of settler colonialism—which is to eliminate the Native—but “settler colonialism is a structure that endures indigeneity, as it holds out against it” (Kauanui, 2016). In other words, Kauanui calls for an acknowledgement that settler colonialism as an organizing concept may also work to elide the question of indigeneity³¹ if the latter is not deployed as a core analytic. Jodi Byrd (2011) adds that indigeneity can “provide possible entry points into critical theories that do not sacrifice Indigenous worlds and futures in the pursuit of the now of the everyday” (p. xxxix). Hence, this section focuses on the dialectical relationship between indigeneity and settler colonialism before I map the role of non-indigenous, non-white others in this process with an eye on Hawai'i . Although my focus here is on North America, I draw upon a broader literature that maps the transnational dimensions of indigeneity and settler colonialism.

³¹ To proffer an analogy that may illuminate this problem better, one can think here of how generic discussions of “racism” may conceal the question of anti-Blackness, thereby reducing racism to discrimination.

I want to start by acknowledging that peoples native to this hemisphere have inhabited this land since pre-contact times, a history that settler colonialism tries to erase through the manufactured fiction of *terranullism*. Cree scholar Loraine Le Camp explains *terranullism* as “the habit on the part of academics of all backgrounds to adopt a post-conquest set of assumptions, that the Americas are originally empty lands, devoid of any valid Indigenous presence” (quoted in Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Hence, I find it important to acknowledge how indigeneity continues to persist despite the genocidal violence that targets it. For the purposes of this chapter, I posit indigeneity in the North American context as a genealogy of belonging that is primarily based in a spiritual and material non-exploitative relationship to land that informs the cosmologies and day-to-day living of groups of people who can trace back their existence to pre-contact Americas or Turtle Island.³² Indigeneity, in its simplest form, then distinguishes those who are “native” to a land base from those who are not (Merlan, 2009). This non-exploitative genealogical relationship to land is what pits indigeneity against settler colonialism.

Settler-colonialism tries to erase the Native so it can claim sole ownership over land. As Patrick Wolfe (2006) argues, if franchise colonialism is based on the extraction of resources where colonizers come as sojourners to make profits and eventually return

³²“Turtle Island” is a term used by indigenous peoples to refer to the Americas. It is an important part of the cosmologies of the Delaware Indians, and is also widely shared by other tribes, notably the Iroquois (Miller, 1974). Although not all tribes have the same origin story, it has been widely taken up within the contemporary Indian movement as an alternative epistemology to articulate a non-Eurocentric idea of the Americas.

back to the metropole, it is ownership of land that matters for settler colonialism:

“Whatever settlers may say—and they generally have a lot to say—the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (p. 388). To this, Lorenzo Veracini (2011) adds “... if I come and say: ‘you, work for me’, it’s not the same as saying ‘you, go away’. This is why colonialism is not settler colonialism” (p.1). It is because of this reason that settler colonialism is wrapped up in what Wolfe (2006) calls the “logic of elimination” (p. 387), which posits that the Native has to continuously disappear for the settler to take the former’s place on unceded lands. This continuous process of disappearing the Indian makes invasion “a structure not an event” (p.388) as symbolic and material tactics are deployed to eliminate the Native.

The positive outcomes of the logic of elimination can include officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations. All these strategies, including frontier homicide, are characteristic of settler colonialism. (p. 388)

Note here that it is not only killings and other forms of transgressive bodily violence against Natives, but assimilation through a variety of biopolitical strategies that are characteristic of settler colonialism. Wolfe calls this totality “elimination,” which includes genocide but is not limited only to this mode. What then are the ways in which settler colonialism “destroys to replace” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388)?

First I want to start by recounting the genocidal strategies that render Natives

invisible and disposable. These include state-sponsored killings and removals carried on through armies, frontiersmen, and vigilantes who are best understood as actors of the same settler-colonial formation (Blackhawk, 2006; Churchill, 1997). Genocide also manifests centrally as sexual violence since Native women are especially targeted to stop them from reproducing. As Andrea Smith (Smith, 2015) notes, sexual violence is a tool of colonialism and genocide as it defines certain people as inherently “rapable.” Sexual violence not only takes the form of state-sanctioned sexual violence, including rape and other forms of violations, but also includes calculated policies such as sterilization abuse and medical experimentation in Native communities.

Lest we see genocide as an event of the past, Native people are disproportionately targeted by the police and prison systems on and off the reservations. Although Native Americans comprise 0.8 percent of the total population, they account for 1.9 percent of police killings (Males, 2014), making them the most-targeted group by law enforcement. In particular, Native Americans between 24-35 years old are one of the most vulnerable groups facing state violence (Loevy, 2015). According to the Lakota People’s Law Project’s report *Native lives matter* (2015), Native youth comprise only 1 percent of the national youth population, but account for 70 percent of the youths committed as delinquents and 31 percent of the youth committed as adults with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. On any given day, 1 in 25 American Indians age 18 or older is under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system.

Sexual violence also suffuses contemporary Native communities. Native American and Alaska Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be raped or face sexual assault than non-Indigenous women. Additionally, 50 percent of the rapes of Native

women is accompanied by additional physical violence as compared to the national average of 30 percent for non-Native women (Amnesty International, 2007). It is significant that in 86 percent of the cases of rape involving Native women in 2004, the perpetrators were non-Native men. In contrast, 65.1 percent of white victims and 89.9 percent of Black victims of rape reported that the perpetrator was from their own race (Amnesty International, 2007). Several conditions, like the fact that tribal courts are not authorized to prosecute non-Native men, allow the latter to target Native women (Minno, 2012). This reveals how settler colonialism lives on as a structure and not just as an event. Such conditions of bodily and sexual violence combine with high rates of alcoholism, substance abuse, poverty, and lack of access to mental and physical health services (Beals et al., 2005) to create ecologies of extreme violence in Indian communities.

These genocidal conditions work in concert with tactics of elimination that are both symbolic and biopolitical. Hegemonic renderings of indigeneity often present it as primitive, backward, and simple (if it is presented as anything other than extinct) while settlers are imagined as modern, progressive, and fully-formed subjects (Byrd, 2011). This works as a tactic of elimination by devaluing indigeneity. Moreover, settler colonialism inculcates a deep libidinal desire in the settler to interpellate himself as the Native, even as he works to eliminate indigeneity. Labor—specifically turning the wild west frontier into habitable spaces that produce capitalist value—becomes a primary mode of self-indigenizing for white settlers (Phung, 2011). Philip J. Deloria (1998) has astutely called this phenomenon “playing Indian.”

Perhaps the most trenchant form of biopolitical elimination is evident in the

state's attempt to water down Indian blood. If the United States practiced a policy of hypodescent with regard to its Black population whereby the presence of Black blood secured a child's status as Black (Spillers, 1987), its Indian policy has been structured by hyperdescent aimed at de-Indianizing Native populations. With blood quantum determining indigeneity, the policy of hyperdescent works biopolitically to shrink the pool of those who can qualify as Indian (Garrouette, 2003). This is done with the explicit aim of freeing up Indian land for settler expansion.

But the effects do not end here. As Joanne Barker astutely argues, there is an internal mirroring in Native communities of the logics of exclusion—particularly racism, sexism, homophobia and exclusions based in blood quantum—which have historically determined the relationship between indigenous nations and the United States. The United States has also made the enforcement of these logics integral to its administration of Indian communities through such legislative maneuvers as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Barker contends that owing to these reasons, demands of authenticity are mounted through the very tropes of exclusions practiced by the United States.

Finally, there are other forms of elimination of the Native that draw in non-indigenous, non-white others to participate in Native dispossession. This phenomenon is the focus of this chapter. Such tactics centrally deploy settler liberal multiculturalism and frameworks of inclusion that organize social movements in a manner that anticolonial struggles of indigenous people are consistently sidelined or subsumed under other struggles, especially anti-racist ones (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Put differently, non-indigenous, non-white others have been coerced into participating in

settler colonialism and Native dispossession not only through their acceptance of notions of hard work and entrepreneurship that compels them to produce capitalistic value on Native land, but even their modes of resistance such as Civil Rights-inspired antiracist activism may contribute to Native dispossession.³³ If land, money, and credit all emerge in relation to the colonization of Indian lands (Vimalassery, 2013), then their accumulation, however small, contributes to Native dispossession. I explore these dynamics in detail in the context of Hawai'i .

Hawai'i and (Asian) Settler Colonialism

“To acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the January 17, 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i , and to offer an apology to Native Hawai'ians on behalf of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i ”: thus begins the text of the United States Public Law 103-150, a joint resolution of the U.S. Congress passed on Nov. 23, 1993, and signed into law the same day by then U.S. President Bill Clinton. ³⁴ It came

³³ Postcolonial theory has also participated in the erasure of Native peoples as it has failed to pay attention to the persistence of settler colonialism as the constitutive condition for postcolonial theory. If postcolonial theory emerged from the work of third-world migrants in the metropole (Loomba, 2015), it is important to acknowledge that the metropole is stolen land. As Indigenous scholar Qwo-Li Driskill asks: “If you are reading this in the United States or Canada, whose land are you on, dear reader?” quoted in (M. Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013).

³⁴ Joint Resolution to Acknowledge the 100th Anniversary of the January 17, 1893 Overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i , Pub. L. No. 103-150, 107 Stat. 1510 (1993).

a century after the undemocratic overthrow of the Hawai'ian kingdom headed by Queen Lili'uokalani by the U.S. marines in a coup engineered by white sugar planters.

Settler encroachment started soon after the disastrous expedition of British explorer James Cook to the islands in 1779 when he was killed by Native Hawai'ians for trying to abduct and hold their king for ransom (Cook & Price, 1971). A steady trickle of foreigners, or *haole* in Hawai'ian, brought with them a host of diseases to which Native Hawai'ians had no immunity. As a result, the number of Native Hawai'ians dropped from an estimated 800,000 to one million Native Hawai'ians in 1778 to 40,000 in 1893 when the U.S. military disposed the Hawai'ian government by force (Fujikane, 2008). The *haole* had started to gain a foothold in the affairs of the kingdom with the establishment of constitutional monarchy in 1840. They were a major force in the passage of reforms known as *mahele* in 1848, which led to the fragmentation of Hawai'ian lands into private holdings. *Mahele* was a reformation of the land system that divided the land interests of King Kamehameha II and other high-ranking officials and led to the end of common holdings among Hawai'ians (Chinen, 1958).

American investors had started to build large-scale sugar plantations on the islands of Hawai'i by 1850 and looked to the political unrest in Asia to recruit laborers. The first group of Asian migrants to arrive in Hawai'i were the Chinese, who by 1882 comprised a quarter of the population of the Kingdom of Hawai'i (Fujikane, 2008). But the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 made the islands an unwitting destination for Chinese laborers as they were refused entry into continental United States.

This led to growing anti-Chinese sentiments in Hawai'i, which culminated in restrictions on Chinese immigration. It also led to recruitment of laborers from Japan, and the Issei (first generation of Japanese laborers) started arriving in the islands in 1885 (Kimura, 1992). By 1900, they had become the biggest settler group in Hawai'i. American sugar planters also recruited laborers from Korea and the Philippines, all countries destabilized by U.S. interventions. Steadily, Asians became a major presence on the island and outnumbered Native Hawai'ians.

Haole elites had formed their own militias known as the Honolulu Rifles with support from the U.S. military to exert more pressure on the Hawai'ian monarchy (Kauanui, 2008). In 1887, the militias forced King Kalākaua to sign what would be known as the Bayonet constitution, which stripped him of executive authority and gave wide-ranging powers to white planters in Hawai'ian affairs. It also severely restricted the rights of Native Hawai'ians and excluded Asians altogether. Queen Lili'uokalani, who assumed power after the death of her brother, attempted to promulgate a new constitution in 1893, which led to the illegal overthrow. United States Minister of Foreign Affairs John L. Stevens, in coordination with a handful of white planters, used the U.S. marines to depose the queen by force (Silva, 2004). Hawai'i remained an independent republic until 1898 when the United States annexed it as a territory. But it was not admitted into the union as it was considered "Asiatic" territory (Saranillio, 2013). Following a deceptive campaign that refused to list independence as an option, Hawai'i was formally included as a state in 1959.

Asian Settler Colonialism

It is important to locate the role of Asians in this history, not just as an oppressed

group but as having a more complicated role in the colonization of Hawai'i. As Fujikane (2008) argues, Asian Americans are frequently cited in the rhetoric of Hawai'i as a multicultural paradise, which is ideologically at odds with the claims of sovereignty and self-determination espoused by the indigenous Kanaka Maoli. Furthermore, Asian-American power is not just symbolic as Asian Americans have ascended to important positions of power in government as well as in tourism and other sectors. As such, the often-cited racial oppression of Asian Americans should be read as part of a larger history in which they emerge as more complex actors whose desires and actions reinforce settler colonialism in Hawai'i.

If the white oligarchy consolidated its power through the Republican Party and exercised domination over the islands, Asian Americans beginning in the 1950s found in the Democratic Party a vehicle for their political ascendancy and to bolster their socioeconomic position. Nisei (second-generation Japanese) soldiers who were returning after serving in WWII established themselves as patriotic United States citizens and took over the Democratic Party to end the domination of the Republican Party over the islands (Kyle Kajihiro, 2008). Although this victory, popularly called the "Democratic Revolution," was based on promises of land reforms that would benefit the working class, Asian Americans slowly became major actors in the emerging real estate and tourism sectors in ways that intensified the dispossession of Native Hawai'ians (G. Cooper & Daws, 1990). Furthermore, their takeover of the Democratic Party did little to address Hawai'ian land claims. In fact, it may have worked to exclude Kanaka Maoli from political power altogether. It is no surprise, then, that Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and whites continue to be the dominant groups on the island in terms of

socio-economic status and occupational mobility while Kanaka Maoli and Filipinos consistently rank the lowest (Okamura, 2008). And given the Asian American clout in the Democratic party, it is also not surprising that United States Public Law 103-150, with which I opened this section, was sponsored by two Asian American politicians: Daniel Akaka³⁵ and Daniel Inouye, both Democratic senators from the islands.

And lest one argues that Asian American ascendancy has little to do with the dispossession of Kanaka Maoli, one only needs to look at how Asian Americans have colluded with whites and benefitted from legal challenges that have contributed to the further erosion of entitlements set aside for Native Hawaiians after the overthrow of the monarchy. In the 2000 Rice v. Cayetano case, the Supreme Court ruled that voting for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) should be opened to non-Hawaiians as restricting voting along the lines of race was a violation of the Fifteenth Amendment (Kauanui, 2002). Soon after, the courts in the Arakaki et al v State of Hawai'i declared that same year that non-Hawaiians could run for OHA positions. This culminated in the election of Japanese American veteran Charles Ota to office (Fujikane, 2008).

It should go without saying that not all Asian Americans in Hawai'i share the same access to power and privilege. Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans comprise the well-heeled classes of Hawai'i while Filipino and Vietnamese Americans trail behind them (Fujikane, 2008). Even within each group, members may have varying access to resources. Furthermore, South Asian Americans in general and Indian

³⁵ Daniel Akaka has Chinese and Kanaka Maoli lineage, but has consistently aligned himself with Asian-American interests.

Americans in particular do not have the same presence in Hawai'i as they do in continental United States. But as Fujikane (2008) again reminds us:

The status of Asians as settlers, however, is not a question about whether they were the initial colonizers or about their relationship with white settlers. The identification of Asians as settlers focuses on their obligations to the indigenous peoples of Hawai'i and the responsibilities that Asian settlers have in supporting Native peoples in their struggles for self-determination. (p. 7)

In other words, any project committed to indigenous decolonization should center indigenous people and land in its analysis (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This obligation does not replace the white/non-white binary with an indigenous/settler binary nor rationalize nationalism by packaging it under indigenous sovereignty—as Nanditha Sharma and Cynthia Wright (2008) erroneously argue—but provides a better analytics of power that can help us move beyond the position of Asian Americans as oppressed by apprehending their complex role in the colonization of Hawai'i.

In line with these arguments, I deploy a settler of color critique (Saranillio, 2013) to analyze how Asian Americans, despite being racialized in relation to whiteness, also participate in the colonization of Hawai'i. I am inspired here by Fujikane and Okamura's anthology, *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*

Hawai'i (2008), from which I draw upon extensively. Their work collates contributions from several Asian-identified scholars who reflect upon Asian complicity in the ongoing dispossession of Hawai'i (Fujikane, 2008). As Fujikane (2008) notes in her introduction:

Asian Settler Colonialism calls for a methodological and epistemological shift

away from predominant accounts of Hawai'i as a democratic, multicultural or multiracial state by showing us instead the historical and political conditions of a white- and Asian-dominated U.S. settler colony. (p. 3-4)

In sum, I ground my work within the analytics of Asian settler colonialism as I use a settler of color critique to read the public and private persona of Tulsi Gabbard metonymically. I do so to understand the ideological and material labors she performs in normalizing the status of Hawai'i as a settler colony. I begin the next section with a dense description of the figure of Tulsi. I then organize my findings under two sections to outline how Hindu nationalism, Islamophobia, and settler liberal multiculturalism come together in a toxic cocktail to bear on the ongoing dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli in the archipelago. I use both primary sources, primarily media reports and self-representations via public sites, as well as secondary sources to construct the persona of Tulsi.

The Exemplary Subject: Tulsi Gabbard

Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, on whom this chapter is centered, is not a South Asian or Indian through descent. She is of mixed heritage: her father is of Samoan and Caucasian descent and a deacon in the Catholic church while her mother is Caucasian and a practicing Hindu (Haniffa, 2012). Her only link with the Indian American constituency in the United States is her religion: she is a practicing Hindu. As such, my methodological choice needs some clarification. By analyzing the persona of Tulsi, I am attempting to map a complex articulation of race that might gesture to a new and emerging paradigm of what "South Asian (American)" and "Indian American" mean in North America, not only to those that are hailed by those terminologies but also as

designations of identities and geocultural markers.³⁶

A key argument that I have made throughout my dissertation is that religion has assumed prime significance for North American racial formations in the post-9/11 era. My second chapter argued that an intensification of neo-orientalist logics after 2001 produced Islam as dangerous, which coerced Sikhs to instantiate their difference from Muslims. While my overall project has arguably focused on the place of religion, particularly Islam, in security configurations, I am very interested in how religious identities also reinforce ideas of normativity by scripting certain bodies as acceptable and others as deviant. In this context, I discussed how Christonormativity (Ferber, 2012) worked in conjunction with whiteness and European descent to ascribe value to some while rendering this process opaque. In the same vein, I am interested in tracking how the election of Tulsi as the first Hindu congresswoman aligns her with India and South Asia in ways that not only underscore the undeniable importance of a Hindu identity to contemporary conceptualizations of India—which itself has come to stand in for South Asia (Desai, 2004)—but also to the overall importance of religious identities to racial configurations.

Tulsi's foregrounding of her faith as a Hindu aligns her with Hinduism, Hindutva³⁷ and India, all concepts that have been deployed interchangeably by the Hindu

³⁶ I am grateful to my friend and noted desi blogger Yasmin Nair for this phrasing and for helping me think through this issue.

³⁷ A key trend in contemporary scholarship and in popular media narratives is to posit an analytical separation between Hinduism, the religion, and its appropriation by the Hindu

Right to redefine the modern Indian nation-state narrowly as “Hindu” against the numerous historical ethnic and cultural ties that bind the subcontinent. In other words, while my focus here is on the Hindu Indian American community, I do so not to default to the dominant Indian nation-state framework that still dominates South Asian and South Asian American scholarship but to demonstrate how a Hindu identity becomes isomorphic with India. This has implications in understanding the colonization of Hawai‘i as well as the specter of Hindu nationalism that is becoming prominent in South Asia and South Asian American communities.

As religious minorities, and especially as people not from the Abrahamic tradition, Hindus have been discriminated in the United States, a country which formally professes a separation of the church and the state but is thoroughly structured by Judeo-Christian ideas (Silk, 1984). As I argued in Chapter 2, the term “Hindoo” was historically used to refer to South Asian immigrants in the United States irrespective of their religious identities (Puar, 2007; Shah, 2011), which gestures to the significance of religion in

Right to “Hinduize” India. The latter is commonly known as Hindutva or the politicization of Hinduism to secure political power (A. Sharma, 2002). Such a separation is hinged to the idea that it is the appropriation of Hinduism—and not Hinduism itself—which is at the root of the problem. My argument is that there are deep contradictory tendencies within Hinduism—especially the hierarchical caste system—which creates the constitutive conditions for the appropriation of Hinduism into a conservative political ideology. As such, I contend that this division between Hinduism and Hindutva is untenable.

working as an alibi for race. Hindus in the United States, an overwhelming majority of whom are from modern-day India, have faced instances of violence ranging from the infamous dot-buster gang of New Jersey who terrorized the South Asian American community (Anand, 2006) to the vandalism of Hindu temples (Masunaga, 2015). Kyati Joshi (2006) argues that these instances of violence are connected to the racialization of religion: “a phenomenon wherein the fact of an individual’s race creates a presumption as to her religious identity” (p. 212). Yet, discrimination and violence are only one part of the complex story of Hindu immigrants in the United States.

A politicized Hindu identity has been the nucleus around which an ascending Indian American constituency has coalesced in the United States. Owing to complex factors both here and in the South Asian subcontinent—including the rise of Hindutva or rightwing Hindu political mobilization in India which catapulted the BJP to power in 2014, and the globalization of Islamophobia after the 9/11 attacks—Hindu nationalism has emerged as a major conduit that conjoins the South Asian Hindu diaspora here in North America with the hegemonic political class in India while aligning both with global configurations of white supremacy that are seen as locked in a war with Islam. As a result, Hindu identity in the North American context has slowly come to be seen as a cognate of India itself. Neo-orientalism’s collapsing of brown bodies as Muslim-looking has also contributed to this phenomenon as it has intensified the drive within South Asian communities to differentiate themselves along religious lines.

Mathew and Prashad (2000) argue that the rise of Hindu identification among the Indian diaspora in the United States is as much a response to the racism and alienation faced by Indian Americans as it is an outgrowth of the rise of Hindu nationalism in India.

Religious gatherings often double up as social and cultural events and are of great significance to members of the diaspora as they help reconnect with others. But the Hindu Right's ingenuity, the authors note, lies in capitalizing on this alienation to recode Indian Americans as Hindu Americans:

To reach the several elements of the Indian-American community in this complexity of diasporic life, the Hindu Right fashions protean forms. These forms allow Yankee Hindutva to occlude the mainspring of its agenda – to constitute a 'Hindu American' community that is a faraway supporter of the Hindu Right in India. (p.518)

Similarly, Arvind Rajagopal (2000) contends that Hindu nationalism and the strong Hindu-identification it fosters function as an ideology of cultural rejuvenation in the United States as they give diasporic subjects something very ancient to identify with in an age of extreme uncertainty while also advancing other conservative causes. In addition, a Hindu identity can easily accommodate itself to a minority status and to ideas of liberal multiculturalism and religious pluralism in the United States by amplifying the "inclusivity" and "peaceful" nature widely associated with Hinduism. At the same time, it allows the Hindu community to leverage its affluence to sponsor projects that seek to Hinduize India.³⁸

³⁸ Indian Americans have the highest median household income among all ethnoracial groups in the United States. In 2013, the median income for a household headed by an Indian immigrant was \$103,000 compared to \$48,000 for immigrants and \$53,000 for "native"-born households. Concomitantly, only 6 percent of Indians lived in poverty

While I agree with Prashad and Mathew and Rajagopal's analysis that the Hindu Right feeds on the alienation of the Indian diaspora and rearticulates it along religious lines, my argument is that cultural and social alienation are not the only reasons why Indians choose to identify as "Hindus." The subcontinent and what is modern-day India have a longstanding history of antagonisms which, despite their complicated origins, have been repeatedly presented as Hindu-Muslim conflicts (Brass, 2011), which makes religion a prime mode of identification in South Asian communities. And given that a majority of the Indians in the United States are Hindu and come from higher castes³⁹ that have a vested interest in this conflict,⁴⁰ it is not a surprise that the Hindu identity has been

compared to 19 percent immigrants and 15 percent "native"-born populations. See Zong and Batalova (2015).

³⁹ Kurien (2001) notes that upper castes form only 25 percent of the Indian population but they dominate the diaspora in the United States. While caste has its theological origins in Hinduism, it is not limited to that religion alone but also found among the adherents of Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism in the South Asian region. Muslims in the subcontinent, for instance, stratify themselves in terms of *quom* (Ahmad, 1978) while *Dalits* who converted to Christianity to escape caste oppression have continued to experience the effects of caste in myriad forms (Micheal, 2007).

⁴⁰ Space and time prevent me from unpacking this phenomenon in more detail. But to give a brief context, caste is clearly linked to recurring communal conflicts in India. The Ram Janmabhoomi mobilization, which set the stage for the rise of the Hindu Right in electoral politics and intensified India's communal polarization, was organized soon after

an important identification for many immigrants.

Additionally, two other factors buttress the growing preference to assert a Hindu identity among expatriate Indian Americans who follow Hinduism. The first is the War on Terror and its constitutive ideological structure, Islamophobia, which align Hindu identity and India with Western neo-imperialism while coding Muslims and Muslim South Asian nations such as Pakistan and Bangladesh as the other. For instance, soon after the 9/11 attacks, rumors started circulating that the Indian embassy in Washington had asked Indian nationals to wear a *bindi* (the red dot on the forehead which is seen on Hindu women) to distinguish themselves from Muslims (Prashad, 2005). As Sangay Mishra (2013) notes, the post-9/11 period initiated a re-intensification of identifying across religious lines, which made it difficult to build a pan-ethnic South Asian response to racist attacks facing them. The Indian lobby in the United States astutely used Islamophobia as a political strategy to distance India from Muslim Pakistan (a key front of the War on Terror) by recoding the former as “Hindu” (Therwath, 2007). What I am suggesting here is that the propensity to identify as Hindu for various conservative reasons also articulated well with the emerging geopolitical climate of the post-9/11 era.

former prime minister V.P. Singh tried to implement the Mandal Commission’s recommendations, which increased the government jobs and university positions reserved for Dalits and members of other backward castes (OBCs) from 27 percent to 50 percent. BJP President L.K. Advani, who decried the commission as an attempt to divide the Hindus, projected the idea that the common enemy facing Hindus was Islam, not the caste structure.

Second, and closely tied to the first one, is the growing discourse of India as a superpower, which has added another incentive for Indian Americans to identify along religious lines. The post-9/11 era coincided with the rise of neoliberal India as structural adjustments of the 1990s started bearing fruit. Steadily, India renounced its Cold War neutrality and moved closer to the United States. The first decade of the 21st century also witnessed the BJP consolidate its electoral base. In fact, the party's 2004 electoral campaign was titled "India Shining," which trafficked in the idea that the country was an emerging economic and military power that the Hindu rightwing party would restore to its rightful place ("From 'India Shining,'" 2009). It also implicitly signaled to the United States that India was open to business ("White Indians," 2013). These developments made it very important to differentiate this emerging "super power" from the other poorer nations of the subcontinent, especially Muslim ones. As such, a Hindu identification was invoked to do the ideological work of differentiating India from Muslim South Asian nation-states. The idea of an ascendant India has decisively driven the country into the Western camp with a Hindu identification forming the cultural basis for such a shift.

I have belabored this history to demonstrate how "Hindu" has become the central mode of identification for Indian Americans. My argument is that Tulsi's extensive portrayal in both the United States and Indian media as the "first Hindu congresswoman" has aligned her with the Hindu Indian American constituency in ways that make her a strong conduit for Hindutva politics. This has immense ramifications to understand the ongoing settler colonialism in Hawai'i.

The Indian American community in general and the Hindu American community in particular has embraced Tulsi enthusiastically the point that such a warm reception was

not accorded to other Indian American politicians such as Bobby Jindal and Nicki Haley, both of whom have converted to Christianity (Haniffa, 2012).. Hence, despite her non-South Asian or “Indian” descent, Tulsi is a sound methodological choice for this project to understand the Hindu American entanglement in settler colonialism in Hawai‘i . To reiterate, I am not claiming that Tulsi’s Hindu identity makes her Indian American. Rather, her wide reception as the “first Hindu Congresswoman” articulates well with the centrality of a Hindu identity to contemporary Indian Americans. As a result, a close reading of her political and private persona provides a productive opportunity to not only understand the changing racial configurations of the post-9/11 era that rearticulate Indian Americans as Hindu Americans, but also allows me to map how Hindu nationalism—and by extension, Hindu Indian Americans—are interpellated in the occupation of Hawai‘i.

Hindu Congresswoman: The Exemplary Politician

A female combat veteran who served two tours in the Middle East, U.S. congresswoman representing Hawai‘i ’s 2nd district, avid surfer, lifelong vegetarian, political maverick, first Samoan American to be elected to the U.S. Congress and, more recently, a “Bernie” supporter who broke ranks with the Democratic Party elite to support the socialist senator from Vermont—thus go some of the descriptions of Tulsi. Yet, as I argued in the beginning pages, they all pale in comparison to her repeated depiction in the popular media as the first Hindu congresswoman. Such a representation narrates America’s multicultural democracy as finally opening itself to multi-religiosity, thereby proffering a progressive teleology of American advancement towards inclusivity. But this is not the only lesson to be learned here.

There is a long history in Hawai‘i of non-Hawaiians, especially Asian

Americans, using their stint in the military to build political careers. As Kyle Kajihira (2008) notes, anti-Japanese racism following the bombing of the Pearl Harbor drove the Nisei to redeem their honor on the battlefield. Ironically, this became the very grounds upon which Japanese Americans such as U.S. senator Daniel Inouye, former U.S. Representative Spark Matsunaga, former Governor George Ariyoshi, and former Bishop Estate trustee Matsuo Takabuki built their political careers after Hawai'i was accepted as a state in 1959. If, "Politically, the vehicle for Asian ascendancy is statehood," as Haunani-Kay Trask states (2008, p. 97), then Asian Americans used their military careers as a stepping stone to consolidate political power within this "new" state.

Tulsi's story rehearses this historical injustice. Her father, Gerald Michael "Mike" Gabbard, is of Samoan and Caucasian descent and is a Democratic member of the Hawai'ian Senate where he represents District 20. A social conservative, he is best known as founder of Alliance for Traditional Marriage and Values, which ran an expensive campaign against the legalization of same-sex marriage in Hawai'i (Bolante, 2004). Gabbard chairs the Water, Land, and Agriculture Committee (Gabbard, 2016). Tulsi's mother, Carol Gabbard, is of Caucasian descent and is a practicing Hindu. Tulsi holds a degree in international business from the Hawai'ian Pacific University ("The unique, historic, and inspiring," 2016). She has served two tours in the Middle East.

It is important to mention here that although her Samoan ancestry places Tulsi as a close cousin of the Kanaka Maoli, located as both are in the Polynesia (M. R. Arvin, 2013), she is still not indigenous to the islands. For instance, speaking as a Tokelauan woman now residing in Hawai'i, Sania Fa'amaile Betty P. Ickes (2014) narrates how she is still a settler on Hawai'ian lands, even though she is part of the same Polynesian

culture that includes Hawai'i.

It is customary for Tokelauan guests to honor their hosts with gifts of goods and/or services; this nurtures reciprocity and fosters respect by adding value to the relationship instead of draining the host's resources. Thus, an important issue for us to consider is the well-being of Native Hawai'ians, whose lands and resources became our *pu'uhonua* (p. 247).

Note here the use of the word "host" to refer to Hawai'ians, which identifies Ickes as an outsider—a settler—in Hawai'i. Ickes argues that irrespective of the duration that one has lived in Hawai'i and regardless of the common cultural bonds of Polynesians, the ongoing occupation of Hawai'i makes non-Hawai'ians settlers. Hence my argument that Tulsi's Samoan ancestry does not necessarily make her indigenous to the islands.

Tulsi rose through the ranks, which is part of her appeal as a strong Democratic candidate. In 2002, at 21, she was elected to the Hawai'i House of Representatives from the 42nd House District, becoming the youngest legislator to be elected in the history of Hawai'i. She enlisted in the Hawai'i Army Guard in 2003 and left for a tour of the Middle East in 2004. Upon her return, Tulsi served as the legislative aid for Senator Daniel Akaka from 2006-2009 when she left for a second tour of Middle East with her unit. She ran for the Honolulu City Council elections and won upon her return. Mazie Hirono, who represented the 2nd District in the House of Representatives, announced that she would run for the Senate. Tulsi announced her candidacy for the seat and has since won two times ("The unique, historic, and inspiring," 2016).

Tulsi's record of receptivity to Kanaka Maoli issues is uneven. During her stint with the Honolulu City Council, she supported Native Hawaiians in their fight to protect

96 acres of agricultural land at Ka'olae in 'Ulehawa, also considered the birthplace of the demi-god Māui. Yet, at the same time, she introduced Bill 54 that allowed city workers to confiscate personal items left on private property, despite protests from members of Occupy Hawai'i movement and others (Wimpenny, 2011). This especially affected Kanaka Maoli, given the rampant homelessness among indigenous Hawaiians who are often forced to live in public spaces (LaDuke, 2004).

In addition, and despite widespread opposition from Hawai'ian sovereignty activists, Tuli has been a supporter of the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act, popularly known as the Akaka Bill after Sen. Daniel Akaka who introduced it. The bill seeks to win federal recognition for Native Hawaiians akin to Native American tribes, which would allow a special relationship with the United States and a right to self-determination under federal law by bringing the Kanaka Maoli under the Department of the Interior. Yet, as J Kēhaulani Kauanui (2014) points out, the Akaka bill is a strategy by the state to contain the Hawai'ian sovereignty movement, as it offers vague promises of self-determination under federal law only if the Kanaka Maoli agree to forgo their right to self-determination under international law and accept U.S. suzerainty. But Tuli has forged ahead with her support for the bill by maintaining that passing the legislation to recognize Native Hawaiians as an indigenous people is one of her top priorities ("Native Hawaiian Issues," 2016).

More recently, Tuli took the country by surprise when she broke ranks with the

Democratic Party to support the candidature of Bernie Sanders.⁴¹ She resigned as vice chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee in February of this year in order to endorse Sanders' bid for the party nomination (Alcindor, 2016). Her action was widely received as a bold move against the party elites, which also secured her status as a rising iconoclast politician who did not refrain from taking an unpopular stance. This image had been in the making for some time with Tulsi disagreeing openly with President Obama over his stand to work with rebels opposed to Syrian President Basheer al-Assad (Kopan, 2015), which earned her several conservative admirers. Her support of Sanders worked to reinforce her public reception as a bold politician who would not shy away from taking an unpopular stand.

But nothing makes transparent how Hindutva-inspired Islamophobia comes to bear upon the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli than Tulsi's support of military initiatives. Tulsi's deep ties to the armed forces is at odds with the sovereignty struggles of the Kanaka Maoli. Furthermore, her political career is directly connected to her service

⁴¹ Although a comprehensive analysis of her political position is beyond the purview of this chapter, it is nevertheless important to note that Tulsi's support for Sanders might have been influenced by her opposition to Hillary Clinton's stand on Syria. In a document unclassified by the U.S. Department of State following an uproar over her private email server, Clinton claimed that the best way to help Israel is to assist the people of Syria in overthrowing the regime of Bashar al-Assad (Prashad, 2016). This is contrary to Tulsi's position that the U.S. should cooperate with Assad to root out ISIS, a position that I discuss later.

in the military, which, along with her pro-Hindutva stance, informs her belligerent position towards what she terms “radical Islamic extremism.” This has severe implications for Hawai‘i as her antagonism towards Islam recodes her support for the military as rationale and expedient in a post-9/11 climate. This reinforces the security apparatus in Hawai‘i at a time when it is widely represented as downsizing there (Kyle Kajihiro, 2009). In addition, it situates the islands as an important symbolic and material site in the global war against the Muslim world. In sum, my argument is that Tulsi’s powerful position in institutional politics as a Congresswoman transforms Hindutva-inspired Islamophobia into policies that focus the military’s aggression against the Muslim world. This entangles Hawai‘i symbolically and materially in the global war against Islam while justifying this process and the consequent dispossession of Kanaka lands as not only necessary but inevitable. If the militarization of Hawai‘i poses unique challenges to the self-determination of the Kanaka Maoli, then Tulsi’s entanglement with Hindu nationalism and her endorsement of belligerent militaristic solutions to the problem of “radical Islam” reinforce the militarization of Hawai‘i. This process needs to be unpacked.

Ever since U.S. President John Tyler extended the “Manifest Destiny” into the Pacific in 1842 by claiming Hawai‘i as part of the U.S. sphere of influence, the archipelago has become transformed into a central site for the United States’ military interests. From Brigadier General Montgomery M. Macomb’s 1919 statement that “Oahu is to be encircled with a ring of steel” (Kyle Kajihiro, 2009) to Governor Wallace Rider Farrington’s declaration in 1924 that “Every day is national defense day in Hawai‘i ” (quoted in Lind & Farrington, 1984), and from the infamous Pearl Harbor attacks that

spawned a deep sense of insecurity in Americans and pushed the United States to strengthen its military, to the 9/11 attacks that have renewed calls for the militarization of the Pacific, American militarism has played a central role in the islands. This has prompted some analysts to describe Hawai'i as the most densely militarized state in the union (Ferguson & Turnbull, 1999).

After tourism, defense is the second largest industry as the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), the biggest of the combatant command of the U.S. Armed Forces, is headquartered in Hawai'i . PACOM's Area of Responsibility (AOR) spans over half of the planet or 100 million square miles and over half of the world's population spread across 36 countries, including two of the largest economies, China and India (U.S. Pacific Command, 2016). Approximately 360,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel are assigned to the USPACOM's AOR. Furthermore, every branch of the military has a presence on the island. For instance, the U.S. Army has 22 different installations with close to a 100,000 employees ("The Side Of Hawai'i You Probably Won't See From Your Resort (INFOGRAPHIC)," 2013). A study by RAND Corporation estimated that during financial years 2007-2009, the Department of Defense spending in Hawai'i averaged \$6.527 billion a year, including \$4.074 billion in personnel expenditures and \$2.453 billion in procurement expenditures (Hosek, Litovitz, & Resnick, 2011). In 2009, military personnel, civilians employed by the Department of Defense, and dependents comprised 10 percent of the Hawai'ian population (Hosek et al., 2011), not accounting for the veterans who live in Hawai'i . One gets a sense of the military's demographic impact on the archipelago if one considers that Native Hawaiians accounted for 21 percent of the islands' total population in the 2010 census.

The military also controls 20.6 percent of the land base of Hawai'i ("Military occupied areas in Hawai'i," 2009). In some places, like Oahu, 25 percent of the island is under the direct control of the military (LaDuke & Cruz, 2013). The magnitude of the problem becomes even more stark if one considers the rampant homelessness among the Native Hawai'ian population on their own lands (LaDuke, 2004). Furthermore, the military has also inflicted extensive environmental and spiritual damages to the land. The most egregious example is that of the 28,800-acre island of Kaho'olawe, which was taken over by the Navy in 1941 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and a heavy amount of ordnance was used for training on the island. Despite the presence of a number of cultural and spiritual sites, the Navy bombed Kaho'olawe for over 50 years before finally returning it back to the State of Hawai'i in 1994 (Kajihiro, 2009). Although over \$460 million has been spent in clean-up efforts, the island is still not clear of unexploded ordnance ("Military occupied areas in Hawai'i," 2009).

I have outlined the ways in which the military is a major presence in Hawai'i as it provides the context to understand how Tulsi's deep ties to the armed forces affects Kanaka Maoli claims to their land. Tulsi's political ascendancy is entangled with her military career, especially her service in the Middle East. She joined the Hawai'i Army National Guard in 2003 to avenge the attack of 9/11 as she wanted to fight those who had declared a war on "America" (Reininga, 2015). In 2004, she volunteered for a 12-month tour of Iraq with the 29 Support Battalion medical company, receiving the Meritorious Service Medal at the end of the tour (Hoe, 2012). She returned in 2006 to serve as a legislative aide for U.S. Senator Daniel Akaka in Washington, where she built a strong political network. Tulsi graduated from the Accelerated Officer Candidate School in 2007

but continued to work with Akaka until 2009 when she again voluntarily deployed to the Middle East with her battalion. One of her missions during her second tour was to serve as a primary trainer for the Kuwait Army National Guard, an assignment for which she received an award (Geiger, 2012).

Tulsi's antagonism towards what she terms "radical Islam" has roots not only in her post-9/11 service in the armed forces, which became a major conduit for neo-orientalism as I argued in Chapter 2, but also in her pro-Hindu nationalist position that places Muslims as the historic enemies facing a "Hindu India." Tulsi's alignment with Hindu nationalism is more than just symbolic or accidental. She has enthusiastically embraced Hindutva politics and closely works with the Hindu rightwing BJP as well as with other Hindu social and political organizations by representing their interests in the United States. In 2005 the George Bush administration decided not to issue a visa to Narendra Modi, current Prime Minister of India who was then the chief minister of the state of Gujarat, for his controversial role in the Godhra riots in which Hindu mobs killed about 2500 Muslims (Jaffrelot, 2003). At the time, Tulsi vocally opposed the decision to deny Modi visa, calling it a "great blunder" ("PM Modi to meet," 2014). In 2013, a year before Modi was elected prime minister of India, Tulsi opposed House Resolution 417 that called upon India to protect its religious minorities, claiming that such a move would affect the friendship between the United States and India ("PM Modi's trip," 2014). In August 2014, Tulsi was the star speaker at a gathering of Indian American supporters of the BJP organized by the Overseas Friends of BJP (Jilani, 2015). In her address, Tulsi condemned the religious persecution experienced not by Muslims but by Hindus and Christians in the Middle East (Ponangi, 2014). That same year, the United States granted

visa to Modi after he led the BJP in a landslide victory in India's general elections and was elected prime minister. Modi insisted on meeting Tulsi following his address to Indian Americans at New York's Madison Square Garden. Tulsi gifted Modi with her personal copy of the Bhagavad Gita on which she had taken oath to office (Balachandran, 2016).

Tulsi's access to institutional power allows her to translate Hindutva-inspired Islamophobia into policies that not only intensify the global war against Muslims but also have severe implications for the Kanaka Maoli. Once elected to the House of Representatives, Tulsi was keen on serving on the House Armed Services Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee (M. Cooper, 2016). Soon after her appointment to the former, she announced:

Hawai'i plays a significant role in advancing our defense and foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region, and this appointment ensures Hawai'i will continue to have a voice on this critical committee. I am honored to join the committee and look forward to working with all of its members as we set priorities and funding levels for the Department of Defense, provide for our men and women in uniform, and support a robust national security strategy that focuses on emerging threats around the globe. ("Rep. Tulsi Gabbard appointed," 2014)

Tulsi seamlessly renders Hawai'i into a strategic asset for the U.S.'s security interests from which to control over half of the planet, including Muslim nations. Absent from this articulation is the conception of Hawai'i as anything other than a key component of the United States' security calculus. Such a view is contrary to the Kanaka Maoli understanding of land as a living entity from which they emerge and which needs

to be cared for and protected from all abuses, including those from the military. As Kyle Kajihiro (2008) notes:

At its root, the conflict between Kanaka Maoli and the military over land involves a fundamental clash between the Kanaka Maoli relationship to a living *‘āina*, (literally ‘that which feeds’) and the Euro-American concept of land as flat and lifeless real estate. (p. 176)

Furthermore, Tulsi has challenged even nominal efforts by the Obama administration to reach out to Muslims by arguing that it is not material deprivation but theological motivation that prompts Muslims into embracing extremism (“Rep. Gabbard: We must,” 2015). She openly mocked Secretary of State John Kerry by stating that he was naïve to think that “if we give them [Islamic extremists] \$10,000 and give them a nice place to live that somehow they’re not going to be engaged in this fighting” (Jilani, 2015). Tulsi’s insistence on a military offensive as the only solution to “radical Islamic extremism” is not only deeply orientalist but weds U.S. militarism with Hindutva ideology to further entrench the military in Hawai‘i and elsewhere. She has also called for the United States to ally with any country that would help in the eradication of Islamic extremists (Bamforth, 2015).

Consistent with her position, Tulsi voted against the House-Senate compromise for the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 citing concerns over the introduction of a provision in HR 3979 to train and provide arms to moderate Syrian rebels fighting the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. As she noted, “I could not in good conscience vote to support so-called moderate forces who often work hand-in-hand with al-Daida and ISIS, and whose personnel and weapons often end up in the hands of those

terrorists” (“VIDEO: Rep. Tulsi Gabbard,” 2014). After the Act passed, she teamed up with Rep. Austin Scott of the Republican Party to introduced House Bill 4108, a bipartisan effort that sought an end to the arming of Syrian rebels (“Reps. Tulsi Gabbard, Austin,” 2015). Tulsi astutely mobilizes anti-war and anti-interventionist rhetoric to prevent the arming of Syrian rebels while, at the same time, calling for an all-out war against ISIS under the guise of fighting radical Islamic extremists:

The U.S. is waging two wars in Syria. The first is the war against ISIS and other Islamic extremists, which Congress authorized after the terrorist attack on 9/11. The second war is the illegal war to overthrow the Syrian government of Assad. The war to overthrow Assad is counter-productive because it actually helps ISIS and other Islamic extremists achieve their goal of overthrowing the Syrian government of Assad and taking control of all of Syria—which will simply increase human suffering in the region, exacerbate the refugee crisis, and pose a greater threat to the world. Also, the war to overthrow Assad is illegal because Congress never authorized it. (“Reps. Tulsi Gabbard, Austin,” 2015)

This strategy repeats the trope of good war v. bad war logic (Chinkin, 1999) by underwriting the overthrow of Assad as undesirable while, at the same time, rearticulating the destruction of ISIS as not only desirable but necessary. But its rhetorical prowess inheres in how it is presented as an argument informed by strategic, practical, and “ethical” concerns even as the Hindutva roots of this militarized Islamophobia and its role as a catalyst in the militarization of Hawai’i remain hidden. Furthermore, it articulates well with the anti-war liberal constituency in the United States that abhors regimes changes by the United States but continues to view Islam as a threat. Lastly,

Tulsi's framing of the arming of Syrian rebels as illegal but calling for the destruction of ISIS draws on the rhetorical precedent set by the argument that the Iraq invasion was a bad war but the invasion of Afghanistan was a just one (Orend, 2006).

Tulsi voted in favor of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2016, which would apportion \$604 billion for national defense and overseas operations. She cosponsored a provision that would allow Washington to reallocate 25 percent of the \$715 million set aside for the Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF), to directly train and arm Sunni and Kurdish forces fighting the ISIS ("Rep. Tulsi Gabbard includes," 2015). As she noted, such a move was important to "fight against the terror of Islamic extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda" while supporting a provision that required the Secretary of Defense to submit a comprehensive strategy to the Congress on what steps the United States is taking in fighting "Islamic extremism worldwide" ("Rep. Tulsi Gabbard includes," 2015). The contradictory stance of Tulsi to arm paramilitaries fighting ISIS while denouncing military assistance to rebels fighting the al-Assad government should not be lost here. In highlighting this inconsistency, I am not claiming that arming rebels fighting al-Assad is morally preferable over supplying weapons to Sunni and Kurdish forces fighting the ISIS. Rather, I use it to illuminate how Tulsi's ideological animosity towards "radical Islam" drive such politically-expedient decisions.

In addition to including special provisions focused on containing "radical Islam," Tulsi secured \$500 million in military investments for Hawai'i . This includes over \$30 million for power grid updates at the Pacific Missile Range Facility, nearly \$61 million for enhancements at the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH), over \$22 million for waterfront improvements at JDPHH for the Navy's Seal Delivery Vehicle Team, and

over \$100 million for various projects at Schofields Barracks, including the construction of a behavioral health and dental clinic facility (“Rep. Tulsi Gabbard includes,” 2015). Apart from this allocation, Tulsi also negotiated an amendment that keeps U.S. Navy forces assigned to the Pacific Fleet under the control of USPACOM, thereby reinforcing its operational capabilities, and two other amendments that secure Hawai‘i’s ballistic missile capabilities against a presumed threat from North Korea by requiring the Department of Defense to come up with a plan for enhanced radar capacity. All of this points to the ways in which the political establishment collides with the security apparatus to further militarize Hawai‘i under the guise of providing economic opportunities while using the discourse of U.S. national security and job creation to underwrite these moves.

What I have tried to demonstrate here is how Tulsi’s Hindutva-inspired Islamophobia intensifies her ties to the security apparatus, which in no small measure contributes to the ongoing dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli by further entrenching the military on the islands. If the Cold War and its attendant military spending underwrote the rise of Asian American politicians in Hawai‘i who often benefitted from military contracts, Tulsi’s support for Islamophobic military expansion not only continues the phenomenon of non-Hawaiians determining what is good for Hawai‘i and its place in the United States’ security calculus, but also situates the archipelago as a central site in the Global War on Terror. America’s interests, it seems, again trump the concern of the Kanaka Maoli for the *‘āina*.

In sum, Tulsi represents the exemplary politician. Hers is a rags-to-riches story as she went from being elected to the Hawai‘i House of Representatives to the U.S. House

of Representatives. Furthermore, she is presented as a progressive Democrat who is not afraid to take an unpopular stand. Yet, a closer reading suggests that Tulsi represents settler interests. Additionally, she is a strong votary of the Hindutva ideology as she often works as an intermediary between the pro-Hindu BJP led by Modi and the United States. It is at the intersections of these two roles that her contribution to the ongoing repression of Native Hawaiians becomes illuminated. Her belligerent Islamophobia calls for more militarization, which can only hasten the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli as it siphons vital resources, particularly land, to build war apparatuses even as indigenous concerns are sidelined.

Playing “Indian”: The Exemplary Multicultural Subject

Embracing pro-Hindutva political position is not the only way in which Tulsi becomes interpellated into the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli. If her public persona is a conduit for Islamophobia, her private persona exemplifies liberal settler multiculturalism by signifying Hawai'i as a tropical paradise open for settler pleasure. By private persona, I mean representations of the domestic aspects of Tulsi's life that draw upon specific strategies that intensify the depoliticization of Kanaka Maoli struggles. Here, I use a feminist critique of the distinctions between the private and the public to build my analysis (Pateman, 1983). While I am using “private” normatively, i.e. to mark how certain representational strategies produce Tulsi as an ideal American multicultural subject by invoking her domestic life, I do so only to demonstrate the political work it does in shoring up the image of Hawai'i as a multicultural paradise and consequently of Kanaka Maoli as culturally regressive and not in sync with the times. Ultimately, my project is interested in undoing the private/public distinction by demonstrating the

“public” resonance of the “private” life.

There are several ways in which representations of Tulsi’s private persona contributes to the underwriting of Hawai’i as a land without claims. For instance, her self-representation as a Hawai’ian “local” repeats the Asian American strategy of staking claims over the islands through the logic of domicile rather than descent (Trask, 2008). But given the focus of this chapter—which is to chart how a Hindu identification articulates through the persona of Tulsi to intensify the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli—I want to concentrate on the spectacle of Tulsi’s “traditional Hindu wedding” and how it mobilized Hindu cultural practices in a manner that delegitimization of Kanaka Maoli claims over their lands. While the wedding itself may appear as a mundane fact of life, an ethnic curiosity at the most, there are important ways in which it has implications for Kanaka Maoli land claims, which I try to chart in this section.

Tulsi’s wedding is anything but mundane, and Hinduism is more than incidental here. What transforms the event from a conventional nuptial into an occasion of significance is its extensive dissemination through the media as a “dream wedding” and public spectacle. A media spectacle, according to Douglas Kellner (Kellner, 2010), “includes those media events and rituals of consumption, entertainment, and competition like political campaigns that embody contemporary society’s basic values and serve to enculturate individuals into its way of life” (p. 4). Such events write the exceptional as normal and vice-versa, thereby shaping what counts as normative values in society. I read Tulsi’s wedding as a media spectacle that normalizes Hawai’i as a “land without claims” that is open to settler multicultural appropriation. In doing so, I am following Bacchilega’s (2007) lead who argues that the production of Hawai’i as a “legendary

place” was accomplished through the widespread appearance of narratives about Hawai‘i’s *wahi pana* or “storied places” in English-language publications. If this is indeed the case, then the representation of Tulsi’s Hindu wedding in the media becomes a vehicle to produce Hawai‘i in particular ways that have implications for Kanaka Maoli claims over their lands.

Tulsi divorced her first husband, childhood sweetheart Eduardo Tamayo, citing the heavy toll the Iraq war took on her. “It was sad and difficult, but unfortunately, not an uncommon story for people who go through being separated for nearly two years,” she said (Powers, 2013). Her current husband, Abraham Gaurachandra Williams, is a cinematographer and a practitioner in the Vaishnava tradition with ties to the Hare Krishna movement (Kaneya, 2015). Although Tulsi was acquainted with him, she says they did not know each other well until 2012 when he volunteered on her campaign. Williams asked her out a year-and-a-half later and their relationship slowly developed (“Rep. Tulsi Gabbard opens,” 2015).

Their developing courtship transforms Hawai‘i into an unspecific locale and even appropriates its spiritual practices for romantic play while rendering this process invisible. Tulsi narrates how Williams proposed to her over a surfing session:

I was home from D.C., and the day before Thanksgiving, he mentioned he wanted to go for a sunset surf on the South Shore that night. I was in meetings all day, and by the time we left, the sun was starting to set. We got stuck in traffic at a really long red light, and he was getting so frustrated. I couldn’t understand what the big deal was.

By the time we got there and were paddling out, the sun was just about to dip

under the horizon. He paddled quickly out to the lineup, way ahead of me, and waited as I slowly made my way out. Then he paddled over, pulled out a double-tethered contraption attached to a gold duct-tape-covered flotation device, with a beautiful ring attached, and said, ‘I have a question for you: Will you marry me?’” (Woletz, 2015)

This excerpt may seem innocuous as it appears to capture nothing more than an unconventional marriage proposal. Yet, it is in the mundane that violence inheres. Surfing, or *he‘e nalu* in Hawai‘ian, is a sacred practice for the Kanaka Maoli that has also been a source of great cultural pride (Gilio-Whitaker 2014; Nendel, 2009). Surfing the seas using long boards made after elaborate ceremonies required tremendous prowess (Nendel, 2009). It also brought together the spiritual, ceremonial, material, and social dimensions of Hawai‘ian life. However, surfing underwent a profound change in the early part of twentieth century. While Christian missionaries, on the one hand, proscribed surfing for Native Hawaiians, *haole* leaders, on the other hand, appropriated it as a new marketing tool to peddle the islands as a tourist destination for mainland Americans. Williams’ “surfing proposal” and its subsequent narration by Tulsi is part of this history that decontextualizes Hawai‘ian spiritual and cultural practices for the benefit of non-Hawaiians, both white and non-white. It reduces surfing into an activity open to anyone as long as they are ready to take the plunge, thereby robbing the cultural and spiritual specificity of Hawai‘ian practices. Furthermore, it bolsters the image of the islands as comprising beaches, waves, and surfing while displacing the contentions over these very spaces that are alive in Hawai‘i.

The proposal is only a trailer for the spectacle of the wedding, which represents

Hawai'i as a land without claims or, more specifically, as open to multiple entitlements. Weddings purportedly celebrate the heterosexual romance constitutive of American domesticity. But, as Chrys Ingraham (Ingraham, 2009) argues, they have transformed from events that formalize alliances to spectacles that set normative rules about heterosexual and, increasingly, homosexual relationships in a consumer-driven culture. While Ingraham's focus is on white weddings—with "white" referring to both race as well as the ostensibly expensive nature of modern weddings—I am interested in how Tulsi's multiracial, multicultural wedding in Hawai'i renders certain claims as illegible while amplifying others. I submit that Hawai'i's selection as the perfect venue for the wedding, while appearing natural because of the domicile of the couple, works well with the historical construction of the islands as a multicultural paradise where different cultures can thrive even as the Kanaka Maoli are being pushed out symbolically and materially. In this context, Hinduism plays an important role as it helps in reconsolidating the image of Hawai'i as exotic while pushing out Kanaka Maoli culture and claims. This move continues the strategy of cultural evisceration that has been central to the colonization of Hawai'i.

"Inside U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard's 'Perfect' Hawaiian Hindu Wedding" reads a headline in *People* magazine as it gushes over the big day (Dowd, 2015). The story opens with a photograph of Tulsi wearing an intricately embroidered blue lacha-style dress or Indian bridal wear. Her bridal makeup, complete with a red dot on her forehead and wedding jewelry, is evocative of the elaborate costumes of Bollywood movies. She is hugged from behind by Williams who is dressed in a white *sherwani* and is draped in a *lei* made of leaves. They both stare into the camera as the sun sets behind them. The

wedding occurred by the Kahalu'u Fishpond on Kāneohe Bay in windward Oahu, we learn from another story ("Rep. Tulsi Gabbard gets," 2015).

Oahu, as I argued earlier, is a particularly intense site of Hawai'ian dispossession as the military occupies over 25 percent of the land there (LaDuke & Cruz, 2013). Furthermore, a massive presence of both active military personnel and veterans has priced out "local" residents out of the housing market. According to the Economic Research Organization at the University of Hawai'i published in 2013, a single family home is unaffordable without an annual income of \$96,000 while a townhouse would require an income of around \$48,000, which are above the median income in Oahu ("UHERO 101.3," 2013). This statistic does not account for Kanaka Maoli homelessness on Oahu, which is one of the highest (Yamane, Oeser, & Omori, 2010). But the wedding elides such inconvenient details as it figures the island as a settler paradise.

Adjectives such as "perfect" vie with "magical" (Andrews-Dyer, 2015) and "colorful" (Lesley, 2015) to frame the wedding for the audience. But what are the elements that make the wedding "perfect," "magical," or "colorful"? My contention is that Tulsi's wedding reinforces the white settler association of Hawai'i with exoticness, which is accomplished through a Bollywoodized version of Hindu cultural practices that became the defining aspect of the wedding. It works in concert with Hawai'i as an ideal setting as it absorbs the lands into the narrative of the wedding, thereby making all competing claims illegible. "It really was a Hawaiian-style Hindu wedding, from the palm trees to birds of paradise flowers, to the birds chirping in the background" (Dowd, 2015). This has immense consequences as cultural exoticness is deployed in a manner that works to suppress claims over land even as the image of Hawai'i as a tropical

paradise is shored up by such representations.

Media accounts consistently framed the ceremony as a traditional Hindu Vedic wedding performed by a Brahmin priest, Vinod Dave, who was flown in from California (“Rep. Tulsi Gabbard gets,” 2015). The details of this event are lavishly shared with the audience: “...the priest built a fire and asked God to be present... The couple then put grains and bananas into the fire as an offering, and at another point they walked around the fire seven times while reciting prayers” (Dowd, 2015). Tulsi and Williams appear in a photograph sitting next to each other on a slightly elevated seating as they hold small utensils with offerings while the priest is by their side, ostensibly chanting mantras in front of the fire. Media accounts went on to add that much of the ceremony was in Sanskrit and concluded with a yoga kirtan with the guests encircling the newly-wed couple. Even the meal was meat-free with the guests feasting on “paneer tikka masala, samosas, mango and tomato chutney and saffron rice” complete with a cake adorned with henna-like decorations (Dowd, 2015).

How may we understand the representation of Hindu cultural practices in the wedding? After all, how different would it be with a regular white Christian wedding? My argument is that Tulsi’s “Hindu” wedding produces overlays the stereotypical exoticness of Hawai‘i with another form of exoticness. This reinforces the association of Hawai‘i with settler pleasure while also bolstering settler claims to the islands as open for all under the guise of multiculturalism. What is significant here is the ability to conduct a Hindu wedding on a land that is occupied. By doing so, I argue, Hindu settlers, just like Christian settlers, write themselves into the land by turning Hawai‘i into a “perfect setting” for their events without any concomitant recognition of Kanaka Maoli struggles

for their ancestral homelands. If Christianity has evoked resistance because of its historic association with the subjugation of the Kanaka Maoli (Kauanui, 2008), a Hindu wedding may not attract the same scrutiny under the guise of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism, even though it participates in the dispossession of Hawaiians.

Second, the wedding scripts Hawai'i as a multicultural paradise, which reduces any resistance to settler desires to a sign of regression and the inability to move with the times. Note that Tulsi describes the event as a "Hawaiian-style Hindu wedding." By doing so, she is trying to harmonize her Hindu identity with Hawai'i, as if there were no animosity between the two. But this can be accomplished only if the settler colonialism of Hawai'i is seen as a thing of the past that need not concern us anymore, and if the role of Hindu Americans can be seen as derivative rather than primary in the colonization of Hawai'i. In other words, non-white settlers can derive benefits just like white settlers while seeing their role as secondary. Gabbard, in fact, confirmed that Hawai'i would continue to be the couple's primary home ("Rep. Tulsi Gabbard opens," 2015).

The description "Hawaiian-style Hindu wedding" also frames it as a hybrid event that brings the best of two worlds together. But this privileging of the hybrid needs to be critically analyzed. In her critique of Gloria Anzaldúa's articulation of *mestizaje* as a form of higher consciousness, Saldaña-Portillo (2003) argues that in its privileging of the mixed, *mestizaje* traffics in the idea that the Indian is primitive and will be eventually replaced by the mestizo. Put differently, this strategy reifies a social Darwinist approach where hybridity represents the gradual phasing out of the unmixed or the primitive. In the same manner, Tulsi's "Hawaiian-style Hindu wedding" appropriates Hawai'i as an adjective that embellishes her Hindu wedding and eventually becomes subsumed into it

to create a “more-evolved” hybrid subjectivity and cultural practice that will reign over the islands of Hawai‘i . It also becomes an instantiation of liberal settler multiculturalism, or the idea that all cultural practices have an equal standing and are welcome on colonized lands when indigenous culture itself survives as a mere curiosity in the settler’s eyes (Povinelli, 2002). In sum, the wedding figures Hawai‘i as a place where settler desires can play free of interruption under the guise of social advancement.

It is precisely this sort of representations that entrench tourism in Hawai‘i. As Trask (1999) has argued, tourism has been a major factor in the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli both through its ideological work of encoding Hawai‘i as a tropical touristic destination and also through the material consequences that have steadily made the Kanaka Maoli homeless on their own lands:

My use of the word *tourism* in the Hawai‘i context refers to a mass-based, corporately controlled industry that is both vertically and horizontally integrated such that one multinational corporation owns an airline and the tour buses that transport tourists to the corporation-owned hotel where they eat in a corporation-owned restaurant, play golf, and ‘experience’ Hawai‘i on corporation-owned recreation areas and eventually consider buying a second home built on corporation land. Profits, in this case, are mostly repatriated back to the home country. In Hawai‘i, these ‘home’ countries are Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia, and the United States. In this sense, Hawai‘i is very much like a Third World colony where the local elite—the Democratic Party in our state—collaborate in the rape of Native land and people. (p. 139)

This excerpt outlines how tourism works as a material force in the lives of the Kanaka

Maoli. But, more importantly, it also demonstrates how the Democratic Party has been an active agent in this process. If Kay-Trask's critique is organized around the Democratic Party's role in acting as an agent of transnational business interests that have capitalized on the stereotype of Hawai'i as a vacation destination, Tulsī's "Hawaiian-style Hindu wedding" highlights the ways in which her domestic persona articulated through institutional power extends this phenomenon by continuing the dispossession of Hawai'i by settlers. It not only renders Hawai'i as a dreamy destination but renders as illegible the sovereignty claims of Kanaka Maoli.

Finally, I end this section with the following excerpt that illustrates the work that marriage accomplishes in representing Tulsī not just as an ideal multicultural subject whose ethnic difference helps gloss over the colonization of Hawai'i, but also as someone who is hardworking and industrious. A story appearing in *The Washington Post* tells the audience that soon after her "magical" wedding, Tulsī was on her way to Washington to get back to work: "Not every newlywed has to maneuver around the House calendar, but Gabbard hardly skipped a beat... Gabbard will travel back whenever her schedule allows, and her husband will make the trip to D.C. when the congresswoman can't return home" (Andrews-Dyer, 2015). Tulsī represents herself as a "karma yogi" or someone dedicated to the service of others (Balachandran, 2016). Such instantiations not only reinforce the representation of Tulsī as a hard worker but consolidates the idea of Asian-American commitment to personal uplift through hard work, as I have argued throughout this project. But Tulsī is also framed as the ideal familial subject whose home life does not come in the way of her work. More importantly, Hawai'i is signified here as the sphere of the domestic to which Tulsī will

return to take a break from work. This resounds with the feminization of Hawai'i (Ferguson & Turnbull, 1999) while the United States retains its masculine identity as the locale of work.

In sum, what I have tried to demonstrate in this section is how a mundane event—a wedding—becomes the vehicle to normalize the colonial dynamics of Hawai'i with Hindu cultural practices providing the cover for the ongoing dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli. More importantly, the Hawaiian-style Hindu wedding renders Tulsi as the exemplary multicultural subject who adds to the exoticness that is Hawai'i by bringing her own set of cultural practices while harmonizing her domestic life with her public duties. And lest my critics accuse me of politicizing a private event by over-reading a marriage, I want to remind them that one of the ways in which colonization writes itself as a completed project is through mundane and quotidian events. When settlers live on colonized indigenous lands, all private and personal acts have implications as they invariably intersect with the ongoing colonization of Native peoples. This is certainly true for a celebrity politician whose wedding was far from a mundane affair as it reinforced the stereotypical Hawai'i rather than the contested place that are the islands.

Conclusion, or Towards Unmaking Exemplary Subjects

I started this chapter by asking how Hindu nationalism and its cousin, belligerent Islamophobia, intensify the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli. For this purpose, I traced the figure of Tulsi as a conduit for Islamophobia and settler liberal multiculturalism that have implications for the ongoing colonization for Hawai'i. I identified some of the settler colonial logics of dispossession that are illuminated in the political and private persona of Tulsi, including the reinforcing of the image of Hawai'i as both a strategic site

for U.S. security interests and as a tropical paradise, embrace of values of hard-work and industriousness, and performing the ideal ethnic subject who fortifies the association of Hawai'i with exoticness. If non-indigenous, non-white others have become one of the primary instruments of settler colonialism, then how may we interrupt this process to begin building stronger coalitions between indigenous people and non-indigenous non-white others?

Despite not being a Native Hawai'ian, Tulsi presents herself as embodying the "Aloha" spirit ("The unique, historic, and inspiring," 2016). Yet, nothing could be farther from the truth. Tulsi has steadily acted on behalf of Hindutva and white settler colonial interests in a manner that sidelines or diffuses Kanaka Maoli activism for their land. First, her institutional position as a Congresswoman affords her access to tremendous power, which allows Tulsi to translate Hindutva-inspired Islamophobia into policies that strengthen the military. This has ramifications for the sovereignty struggles in Hawai'i as it further entrenches the U.S. war machine on the islands. If militarization is the face of settler colonialism in Hawai'i, Tulsi's call for an all-out offensive on ISIS calls for a beefing up of the military at a time when it is widely seen as downsizing in Hawai'i (Dame, 2015). In this, Tulsi is primarily an agent of the institutional interests of mainland United States that, despite incorporating Hawai'i as a state, continues to see it as a colonial outpost. As such, her political power is leveraged to subordinate Hawai'i to the United States' security and other interests.

Furthermore, it is not only Tulsi's institutional position that has ramifications for the anticolonial struggles of the Kanaka Maoli. Tulsi circulates in media discourses as the ideal ethnic multicultural subject who recodes Hawai'i as a settler paradise without

claims. Tropes of heterosexual monogamy, hard work, and settler liberal multiculturalism come together in the figure of Tulsi to reinforce the dispossession of Hawai'i. Her perfect "Hawaiian-styled Hindu wedding" reduces Hawai'i to an exotic locale, reinforcing the association of the islands with tropical beaches, *leis*, and vacations, while effectively recruiting a certain performance of Hindu cultural practices to bolster this association. Her projected image as a "local" Hawai'ian also adds to this signification.

What then needs to be done? The first step, I suspect, is to untangle the links between the rise of Hindu nationalism in the United States, American settler colonial military and tourist interests, and the dispossession of Hawai'i, as I have attempted to do in this project. While Hindu nationalism and the sovereignty struggles in Hawai'i seem unconnected, this is not the case as the former has conjoined itself with U.S. military interests to reign in "radical Islam." This makes it imperative that South Asian Americans in general and Hindu Americans in particular challenge the rise of Hindu nationalism and Islamophobia within their communities as well as interrupt its incorporation into the United States' security calculus.

Furthermore, such a position demands that the Hindu American community deeply introspects what it means to be included in the corridors of power. Tulsi's election as the first Hindu Congresswoman has been a great source of pride for the community as other Indian Americans such as Bobby Jindal and Nikki Haley's rose to power only after their conversion to Christianity. Nevertheless, an uncritical celebration of this fact ignores the deepening ties between Hindutva politics and U.S. institutional power that codes Muslims as enemies and normalizes the colonization of Hawai'i. As members who have immigrated from a post-colony, nothing is more ethically binding on Hindu

Americans than interrupting such logics and building solidarity with the Native people of Hawai'i. This also means that we evaluate our own position of power within the settler colony that racializes us but also actively recruits us in the service of its own interests. As minorities in the United States, it is important that Hindu Americans be weary of the logics of liberal settler multiculturalism and the lure of inclusion into what is a violent settler structure.

Hawai'i is more than a tropical paradise and a settler outpost for U.S.'s security interests. It is a contested territory whose colonization is far from complete. And Hindu nationalism has unfortunately come to play a role in the ongoing disenfranchisement experienced by Hawai'i's indigenous peoples. It is no accident then that the first Hindu Congresswoman was elected from Hawai'i's 2nd district to the U.S. House of Representatives. It is only by breaking the nexus between Hindu nationalism, Islamophobia, and the ongoing dispossession of Native Hawaiians that settler colonialism and Islamophobia can be challenged.

Chapter 5

Insurgent Subjects: Beyond Normative Inclusion

Un/desirable subjects is an attempt to grapple with South Asian racialization as part of larger socioeconomic and geopolitical dynamics. The project sought to outline a comprehensive theory of South Asian racialization as a relational process that is entangled with neo-orientalism, anti-Blackness, and settler-colonialism, or what Andrea Smith (2006, 2012) has called the three pillars of white supremacy. These pillars, as I argue, draw in South Asians in a manner that renders some of them as desirable while others are marked as disposable. Furthermore, lines are drawn both internally within the South Asian community and externally between South Asians and others to produce devaluation. To wit, if the pervasiveness of neo-orientalist logics after 9/11 and the extreme importance placed on religious identities and national origins took a toll on South Asian communities by intensifying identification on religious lines, such an ideology worked hand-in-hand with anti-Blackness and settler colonialism to heighten Indian American and Hindu American investment in normative ideologies that aligned them with whiteness rather than racial others.

In Chapter 1, “Expendable subjects,” I examined Sikh racialization in the post-9/11 United States. In that chapter, I argued that Sikh racialization was integrally tied with anti-Muslim racism. If (turbaned) Sikhs continue to be targets of racial violence because they are “Muslim looking” (Ahmad, 2007), my contention is that such a likeliness is assiduously produced by the circulation of neo-orientalist knowledges that racialize religious and other differences and, concomitantly, intensify an investment in gender and sexual normativities to constitute certain bodies as threats. I suggested that

Sikh civil rights activism based in gaining recognition for attacks against Sikhs as a separate hate crime category as well as an embrace of liberal multicultural values to present Sikhs as respectable subjects trafficked in the same neo-orientalist logics. In its place, I asked that the question of who is Sikh and what constitutes *Sikhi* (the essence of Sikhism) not be foreclosed along racial and ethnic lines but be kept open to answer the true ethical call of Sikhism.

The second chapter, “Fungible subjects,” explored how anti-Black policing produced Sureshbhai Patel, a 57-year-old Indian immigrant visiting his son in the United States, as a proxy Black subject while erasing this process through discourses of criminality and threat. I read this incident against a history of police violence against Black bodies that has been largely condoned by the court systems. I used the concept of the “phobic object” as enunciated by Frantz Fanon (1967) with the figure of the “stranger” explored by Sara Ahmed (2000) to suggest that anti-Black policing rendered Patel as a “phobic stranger,” which evoked an extreme response from officer Parker. Instead of contextualizing this attack as part of the concerted use of police as a tool of white supremacy against bodies of color, the South Asian American response barring a few exceptions relied upon rendering the Patels as family-oriented hardworking immigrant subjects whose dreams had been destroyed by the attack. Given the constitution of Black people as sexually promiscuous and dependent on state handouts, such discourses emanating from South Asian Americans readily translate into anti-Blackness as they contribute to the devaluation of Blackness and its continued scripting as “irresponsible,” “criminal,” and “disposable.” In this context, it is important for South

Asians to rethink heteronormativity and build long-standing coalition with racial others who have been at the forefront of the struggle for racial justice.

In “Exemplary subjects,” the third chapter, I analyzed the role of Hindu Americans in reinforcing settler colonialism in Hawai‘i by pursuing the public and private persona of the Tulsi Gabbard. Her electoral victory as the first Hindu elected to the U.S. Congress brought Hindu nationalist politics, especially Islamophobia, to bear on the archipelago by beefing up the military in Hawai‘i while erasing this process from public scrutiny. At the same time, the congresswoman’s “Hawaiian-styled Hindu marriage” on Oahu reinforced the stereotype of the islands as an exotic location where settler pleasure could be pursued, even as Native Hawaiians are being displaced from their own lands. If “militourism” is the particular modality of the occupation of Hawai‘i , as Teresia Teaiwa (1999) argues, then it is important to demystify how Tulsi’s public persona (her political career) and her private persona (her wedding as spectacle) come together to normalize the continuing settler colonization of Hawai‘i through her support of the military and stereotyping of Hawai‘i as an exotic location for settler pleasure. I argued that it is important to untangle the links between the rise of Hindu nationalism in the United States and American settler colonial military and tourist interests to understand how Hindu Americans are implicated in the dispossession of Hawai‘i. I questioned the uncritical celebration of Tulsi’s election by the Hindu American community, which raises important questions about the ethical costs of being folded into power. In its place, I suggested that as postcolonial migrants ourselves, Hindu Americans realign their loyalties with the Native people of Hawai‘i. This is a tall order, given the

growing embrace between Hindutva-inspired Islamophobia and the U.S. War on Terror, but not impossible.

Together, these sites explored how South Asians are implicated in neo-oriental, anti-Black, and settler colonial structures which, at times, produced them as undesirable while coercing them to become ventriloquists for discourses that undergirded the devaluation of racial others. Whenever South Asians have become targets of violence, as the first two chapters demonstrated, the dominant response has been to default to notions of racial injury that seek restitution by amplifying discourses that not only bolster the role of the state as an arbitrator of racial justice but also buttress violent structures such as multiculturalism and meritocracy that reinforce the violence against other racialized groups. The master's tools may never dismantle the master's house, as Audre Lorde (1984) prophetically pointed out, but they certainly help in strengthening the structures that the master erected. Together, these structures constitute what I term post-brownness, a phenomenon in which South Asians recognize brownness as inseparable from the South Asian identity in the United States. Yet, it is predominantly seen as a burden that is to be overcome or embraced only when expedient (for example, to elaborate racial injury) instead of seeing it as a valuable resource to build relationships with other disenfranchised communities in the United States.

If what distinguishes a women of color critique from other Left analyses is its insistence on building ethical coalitions that do not sacrifice difference, then I want to explore the possibilities that may exist to build coalitions between South Asians and racial others in the United States. Such alliances would involve not only identifying the common violence that targets all bodies of color, including South Asians, but also a firm

grappling with the privileges that South Asians, especially Indian Hindu Americans, have come to accumulate in the United States, often at the cost of other racialized groups. Without such a dialectical analysis, South Asians will continue to believe that the racial violence facing them is an exceptional phenomenon or that they have been mistakenly targeted (Sidhu, 2013) instead of understanding their victimization as part of a larger structural phenomenon that targets all bodies of color (and many white bodies), if only differentially.

Building a coalition would involve a firm rejection of all normativities, especially sexual and gender ones. Often, non-white bodies are targeted because of their assumed inferiority, which may be articulated along gender and sexual lines. Paradoxically, this may reinforce a belief in, and an attempt to, perform gender and sexual normativities that may exclude those within groups who are unable to meet such criterion. Furthermore, as women of color have historically argued, the notion of deviance is always already racialized in a manner that it refracts the violence of racialization internally upon bodies unable to meet the criterion of normativity as articulated by the colonizers. In its place, they argue for an embrace of deviance as a valuable asset in the fight against white supremacy.

In sum, what I am suggesting is a return to building coalition between South Asians and other marginalized groups that is both intentional as well as embodied. By intentional, I mean the forging of political coalitions that are based in shared goals of undoing white supremacy and its many iterations. Embodied, on the other hand, gestures to how sexual and gender variations are not to be despised but might be precious grounds upon which to build these alliances. If the former is aligned with contemporary modes of

transacting politics, the latter allows for turning the most intimate practices of life, i.e. ones gender and sexuality, as grounds for a new form of politics. In addition, embodied politics also rejects notions of normativity in favor a politics that does not abandon those who are worst victims of state and vigilante violence.

Together, these two modes of politics constitute what I term insurgent politics. Insurgent politics refers to an active struggle against the logics that produce some bodies as valuable and others as disposable. According to postcolonial scholar Ranajit Guha (1994), from whom I borrow the term, insurgency is “a motivated and conscious undertaking on the part of the rural masses” (p. 337). Although its use to explain oppositional politics in the North American context seems ahistorical, it is a term that allows for a translation of deep consciousness into political mobilization. Here, I am influenced by Chela Sandoval’s (2000) argument that disenfranchised groups develop a variety of sign-reading techniques to deal with the day-to-day oppression that they face. Yet, what remains unaddressed in her work is how these sign-reading techniques may allow for building coalitions across racial and ethnic lines. I submit that reorienting South Asians in the United States towards their implication in neo-orientalism, anti-Blackness, and settler colonialism can produce an insurgent politics that accounts for the mutual constitution of privilege and dispossession. Furthermore, such an approach can also bring together the intentional and the embodied to envision new forms of politics that go beyond the regulatory techniques of the ordinary. I am not suggesting here that such a coalition preempts or extends over the antagonisms that shape these groups’ relationships. Rather, my hope is that it allows for an understanding of how white supremacy shapes these groups’ experiences of racialization. In other words, I am not

asking for an ahistorical coalition but one that is attentive to how South Asian American privilege is tied in with its constitution as desirable under whiteness but might also exceed it on its own.

As an example, let me illuminate insurgent politics by applying it to the case of Sureshbhai Patel. An insurgent political position would help Patel see the attack against him by Officer Parker not as an anomaly but as part of an established pattern of racialized violence against bodies of color. Instead of depoliticizing the attack, i.e. seeing it as distinct, Patel and his family would use the publicity generated by the attack to call attention to the problem of police violence against bodies of color and other disenfranchised groups, especially Black and indigenous bodies. Second, instead of defaulting to representations of the normative hardworking immigrant South Asian family, the Patels could, argue in public forums that the daughter-in-law has had to rely upon the senior Patel for childcare because of the withdrawal of welfare services by the state. This would call attention to how the attrition of welfare services such as childcare has an overall negative impact on disenfranchised communities, which is then used by the state to render some groups as respectable and others as not. An insurgent politics would also deliberately interrupt the image of the South Asian heteronormative nuclear family by calling attention to the multigenerational composition of the Patel household. Lastly, Shankuntala Patel's vocal opposition to the United States' treatment of an old man would be prominently highlighted rather than sidelined. It would also mean building stronger relationships with Black groups on the ground challenging police violence.

In sum, what I am envisioning is an alternative politics that could help South Asians in the United States not only build stronger coalitions with other groups but, in

doing so, evolve a more ethical response to the problem of racial violence. Furthermore, such a response would produce an intersectional approach as it would amplify the voices of women of color and others who do not fit normative stereotypes (such as bearded women who wear turbans) and are often sidelined because of the power that gender and sexual normativities exercise over all communities. My hope in embarking on this project is that South Asians such as Indian Hindu Americans can come to terms with their privileges and thereby help build stronger coalitions of the oppressed.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study used a comparative racialization framework to understand how South Asians are implicated in neo-orientalism, anti-Blackness, and settler colonialism. While this approach offered several opportunities to understand racialization as a relational process, it also stymied others. Differences among South Asians—for example between Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans—are often as acute as those between South Asians and others. This has been left untheorized in this project. Furthermore, by focusing on Sikhs, Indian Americans, and Hindu Americans, this project has repeated the trend of recentering India, which stands in for South Asia itself. I hope that future work can examine both the internal differences that constitute South Asian formations and also challenge the hegemony of India.

Second, the prevalence of caste has also been left undertheorized by this project. If caste functions as a cognate of race in India, as Ghurye (1969) argues, then it can be safely extrapolated that race functions in coordination with caste dynamics in the United States, as an emerging generations of Dalit Americans have pointed out (Swapnil, 2015). This project, then, should be enhanced by a caste-inclusive analysis of how racial

formations occur in South Asian groups. This would address the growing demands that the South Asian diaspora, especially Hindu groups, hold themselves accountable to an anti-caste politics. This is arguably a task that will grow in urgency.

Lastly, *Un/desirable subjects*' focus on neo-orientalism, anti-Blackness, and settler colonialism leaves other *others* who may not be hailed by these logics. For instance, undocumented immigrants are often racialized as illegal others (Cacho, 2012) against whom documented South Asians may present themselves as deserving of state recognitions. However, they are not accounted for by this project. In addition, the war on drugs is transferring criminalization to brown bodies while continuing to entrap Black bodies in new regimes of policing and surveillance. Furthermore, as Christopher Rivera (2014) points out, the post-9/11 era has been marked by the emergence of the brown threat that conflates Latinos and Middle Easterners as a threat in the American imagination. As such, future work on South Asian racialization has to examine how discourses of il/legality and security configurations interpellate South Asians in Latino racialization.

South Asian racialization is neither exceptional, nor can it be reduced as an epiphenomenon of other forms of racialization. But it is only through an honest engagement with how races are relationally constituted that the many layers of this phenomenon can be accounted. This project is but a small attempt in this direction, and I hope that future projects can take on these missing dimensions to arrive at a multifaceted understanding of South Asian racialization.

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