

other way than the classic Enlightenment comprehension or disclosure or unmasking?  
What if not-knowing were most intimate?

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## Neel Ahuja

### UNMODELING MINORITIES: THE SIKH TEMPLE MASSACRE AND THE QUESTION OF SECURITY

Long subjected to racial profiling as potential terrorists, Sikhs have now become targets of a physical assault that the US Federal Bureau of Investigation has labeled ‘domestic terrorism’. On 5 August 2012, Wade Michael Page opened fire at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek, killing Satwant Singh Kaleka, Prakash Singh, Sita Singh, Ranjit Singh, Suveg Singh, and Paramjit Kaur. After a policeman called to the scene, Page shot him in the leg, and turned his semi-automatic handgun on himself. A Joint Terrorism Task Force, an interagency collaboration led by the FBI, investigated the mass murder and suicide, connecting the attack to ongoing investigations of white supremacist groups. Media reports quickly activated a discussion of security that traversed communities and borders. Attorney General Eric Holder condemned the attack while sliding between naming it ‘an act of terrorism’ and an ‘act of hate, a hate crime’ (CNN 2012). Meanwhile, Sikh political leader Giani Gurbachan Singh of the *Akal Takht* at Amritsar described the attack as ‘a security lapse on the part of the American government’ and called for US American Sikhs to install security cameras to monitor entrances to houses of worship (*The Hindu* 2012). A coalition of Sikh civil organizations has called for the FBI to distinguish anti-Sikh hate crimes in its statistics. What is at stake in the turn to security in these statements, in the conflicted call for self-protection and the protection of the state? In this short essay, I want to explore the emerging organizations of life and deployments of affect and technology in relation to the ideal of security. I want to provisionally suggest security’s broad role in governing the interpretation and response to the massacre as well as the uneven relation of security to racialized bodies that appears when Sikhs and other Asian diasporic, ‘Muslim-looking’ groups experience.

I write this essay in October of 2011, long after the media frenzy over the massacre has subsided. We have been left with an ambivalent governmental language and public response to the slaughter. A hate crime or terrorism? A failure of the US state to contain right-wing extremists, or the paranoid act of a troubled alcoholic who had lost his girlfriend and job? Vulnerability slides into hate. Hate into terror. Terror into security. Security, an apparent sign of love, of care for the community. There is an emotional and affective life to the massacre and its responses that crosses groups and borders,

intensifies through media, and relates to the embodied feeling of vulnerability and the responses that targeted groups organize.

It is necessary to explore these slippages as they influence the public responses of Asian diasporic communities to racial surveillance and violence. The first attempts to memorialize the dead were a series of highly visible, yet apparently nonpolitical, public forums, vigils, and *gurdwara* services that were advertised on television and the Internet and that worked to raise money for the Wisconsin victims. It is from these community memorial events where my thinking about security begins. At the Sikh *gurdwara* of North Carolina, I attended a service on 9 August 2012 where, amongst many valuable public homilies to interfaith dialogue, peace, and solidarity, there remained a persistent disavowal that related crimes of hate against Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, largely constituted by diasporic groups from South and West Asia, could happen here, indeed *were ongoing* here, in North Carolina, in the US South, and in suburban and rural areas where they are often underreported.<sup>1</sup> Just two hours from the Durham *gurdwara*, Wade Michael Page had served in the Army for 6 years at Fort Bragg, the site of the most sustained white supremacist organizing within the US military during the 1990s. The day after the *gurdwara* service, a major anti-immigration conference convened in Wilmington and featured politicians from around the state, including Ilario Pantanas, an Iraq War veteran who had been charged with premeditated slaughter of Iraqi civilians before capitalizing on anti-Muslim sentiments at home during a run for the US Congress.

There are of course differences between Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims being targeted by post-9/11 racial profiling, and it is American Muslims who have faced the brunt of surveillance even as racial surveillance and violence circulate across other racialized bodies. In 2009, the unequal prosecution of 'the Raleigh seven', suspected terrorists organized by the white Muslim Daniel Boyd, brought relations between the North Carolina FBI and the community of mainly Arab- and South Asian Muslims to a breaking point. The government struck plea deals with Boyd and his sons to target the immigrants he egged on; meanwhile, the enhanced secret surveillance of Muslims by the FBI, and persistent racial profiling by the highway patrol framed a tense meeting between law enforcement and Raleigh-area Muslims at a meeting at the Apex Mosque.

Even as Muslim leaders promised to continue cooperating with law enforcement, often sharing their suspicions about new immigrants and the poor who attend mosques, they engaged this aspirational class discourse in order to publicly align their communities with the projects of American bourgeois inclusion. It is in this sense, in the definition of the object of security as a peaceful, upwardly mobile immigrant domesticity, that Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim security discourses merge. At both the mosque and the *gurdwara* meetings I attended, the organizers spoke of the normative bourgeois aspirations of the communities, linking Sikh and Muslim life to love of labor, family, and a singular and abstract god. Sikhs and Muslims are doctors, they work hard, they just want to be left to their families. Reinforcing this attempt to project communal difference into a vision of multireligious American inclusion, a white anthropologist who was invited to speak at the *gurdwara* ceremony reflected, 'Sikhs are a model minority'.

Yet what happens to a 'model minority' when it needs its own hate crime statistics, when it must monitor the entrances to its temples, and when one of its civil rights' groups develops a cellphone application to speed reporting of improper airport searches to the Transportation and Security Administration? Diffusing the crises of racial profiling

and hate crimes into a technological policing of everyday life, security 'unmodels' minorities, unraveling the myths of access, equality, and upward mobility at the sites of the skin, the turban, the veil, the cellphone, the mosque, the *gurdwara*. It works on the assemblages of space, behavior, dress, domesticity, and technology through which the tactile and embodied dimensions community are established. In her studies of communal violence in Panjab, Veena Das connects violence to a 'descent into the ordinary' (Das 2006). Das is interested in how, for example, the massacre of Sikhs in Panjab in 1984 by the Indian state is parlayed into everyday social organizations that reproduce both violence itself and communal suspicion in everyday relations of home, kinship, and labor. India's genocidal suppression of the Khalistan movement included Operation Blue Star, which assaulted Sikh nationalists in the Golden Temple at Amritsar and destroyed the *Akal Takht*, or the divine seat of Sikh sovereignty. The violence in Panjab that followed was itself one of the forces mobilizing increased Sikh migration to the US and other countries. Technology mediates such everyday relations, as media technologies connect diasporic subjects across space, transmits money, and support back to the 'homeland', and is deployed by the state and by Sikhs in efforts to rebuild and respond to violence.

The state language of domestic terrorism undermines understanding of the deeply transnational force and techno-mediatizations of life that underline both the crime itself and the community response. Sikhs, of course, have particular histories of violent targeting within multiple states. The fact that the *Akal Takht* rendered the massacre as a problem of sovereignty, of a failure of Sikhs to be protected by an external state, articulates a particular, transnational form to Sikh activation of insecurity. Sikhs could be hailed in a subtle project of nationalism by virtue of a lack of security in the diaspora. This was different from the aspirational model inasmuch as Sikhs were not simply 'innocent' and neutral Americans, but were a displaced group that had been failed by a protector state. Despite the obvious question of whether cameras would have made any difference in this case, their invocation suggests a kind of internal policing that would work to solidify the *gurdwara* as the site of Sikh community and vulnerability.

At the same time, Wade Michael Page was part of a deeply transnational circuit of white supremacists, his ex-girlfriend being the only female member of the Volksfront, a neo-Nazi group. But the federal language of 'domestic terrorism' separates white supremacists from the privileged category of international Islamic terrorists. Like Terry Nichols and Tim McVeigh, the Oklahoma city bombers, these are the 'terrorists we know'. Sara Ahmed's important recognition of the slippery relation between love and hate is instructive here ('Affective Economics' Ahmed 2004). Even as the vigils and other attempts at memorialization kept the massacre story in the news for weeks, they persistently inquired into Page's psychological state, humanizing him as a troubled American man facing economic and intimate vulnerability, and suggesting his act could be understood as psychopathological instead of an outgrowth of organized violence disseminated through music and community institutions and nurtured by politicians who suppressed the FBI's investigations into white supremacist activity.

To understand security is not only to inquire into policing and forms of social inclusion aimed at preventing criminal activity. In this case, security must be understood as a set of practices, feelings, and ways of thinking that circulate publicly through events, institutions, bodies, and media. This means that security represents its own form of 'government'.<sup>2</sup> Government in this sense means that we learn to navigate the world

with expectations that are governed by the ways in which events, ideas, and bodies shape the world we find around and inside ourselves. Put differently, government is not only the imposition of power by a state upon us, or the control of public discourse by media and other national institutions; government also consists of the ways we establish of touching and interacting with one another in time and space, intimate and bodily elements of life that are also interpreted and structured by larger forces including technology. The Sikh Temple massacre is an extraordinary event, a moment of crisis that then unfolds, slowing into the grain of life in ways that modifies the political relations between Sikhs and other bodies. The massacre should cause us to think about how security, including the incipient forms of security that diasporic Sikhs may aspire to institute as minoritized Americans, thus takes shape around intimate domains of labor, worship, dress, domesticity, travel, and communication as Sikhs interface with other bodies and technologies.

### Notes

- 1 While there is no comprehensive report on hate crimes and hate speech since 9/11 in North Carolina, the report of the mainstream South Asian civil rights group SAALT lists 15 reported hate acts in the state in just the week following 9/11. See SAALT (2001).
- 2 I am thinking along with Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality (Foucault 2009a, 2009b), which suggests that specific rationalities of security modulate both the discipline of populations and the rationalities of state by infusing decision-making with concepts of balance, risk-aversion, and containment. See his two series of lectures, *Security, territory, population* and *The birth of biopolitics*, both published by Palgrave.

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## Harjeet Grewal

### SECULAR SIKHISM, RELIGION AND THE QUESTION OF AMERICAN VALUES: THE MORNING OF FORGIVENESS IN A QUEST TO MOVE FORWARD

We mourn the loss of life in Oak Creek ... AFSC has often witnessed the impact of hatred and ignorance around the world. But we also witness the transformative power of dialogue, love, and nonviolent action to bring people together.

– Shan Cretin, American Friends Service Committee's General Secretary

Almost three months after the killings at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin, one can observe from almost the very onset of media coverage, an effort both on the part of Sikh representatives, politicians, leaders from several faith groups, and the media outlets themselves, to emphasize and locate the tragedy away from the personal aspects of loss in order to privilege a discourse of the preservation of American values such as freedom, justice, and equality for all. This almost meticulously enacted, stalwartly secular and disturbingly 'public' act of depersonalizing the death of six members of this Sikh *sangat* is not without its own motives and continues unabated; it is one of the objectives of this paper to bring out the subtleties of this public reaction while not seeking to invade or privilege the privatization of tragedy. After the death of six Sikhs on 5 August 2012, it seemed as though the Sikh community rolled out a public relations campaign whose main arm was to be the numerous Non-profit Organizations and foundations that defend Sikh political interests, promote religious harmony, and – after 9/11, alongside the secular nation-state, purport to defend Sikhs against assault. A critical aspect of this campaign was to liaise with media outlets to coordinate an outpouring of calls for the respect of religious difference; the rhetorically perfected, ceryly Christian, messages against hate and for love were heard; as well as the push for vigils, solidarity, there were orchestrated Sikh public service campaigns seeking to increase the visibility of Sikh turbans and beards in a positive manner. As the instances of such initiatives seemed to have lost their immediate solvency and relevance, the