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'THE TURBAN IS NOT A HAT': QUEER DIASPORA AND PRACTICES OF PROFILING

This article examines two facets of post 9—11 South Asian organizing in the US — that of South Asian queer diasporas and of Sikh Americans. Ironically, South Asian queer diasporic subjects are under even greater duress to produce themselves as exceptional American subjects, not necessarily as heteronormative but as homonormative, even as the queernesses of these very bodies are simultaneously used to pathologize populations of terrorist look-a-like bodies. As contagions that trouble the exceptionalisms of queer South Asian diasporas, male turbaned Sikh bodies, often mistaken for Muslim terrorist bodies, are read as patriarchal by queer diasporic logics and placed within heteronormative victimology narratives by Sikh American advocacy groups focused on redressing the phenomenon of 'mistaken identity'. Both the queer diasporic and Sikh American logics are indebted to visual representations of corporeality. Hence, I re-read these bodies as affectively troubling — generating affective confusion and indeterminacy — in terms of ontology, tactility, and the combination of organic and non-organic matter. Reading turbans through affect challenges both the limits of queer diasporic identity that balks at the non-normativity of the turbaned body (even as it avows the pathologized racial-sexual renderings of terrorist bodies) while simultaneously infusing the 'mistaken identity' debates with different methods of comprehending the susceptibility of these bodies beyond heteronormative victimology narratives.

'The turban is not a hat' became the slogan for an educational Sikh crusade, a central organizing refrain for numerous national Sikh advocacy groups soon after September 11, 2001, who were reeling from a surge of reported assaults on turbaned men mistaken for Muslim terrorists.1 The first of the post-9-11 hate-crime murders was in fact a turbaned Sikh, 52-year-old Balbir Singh Sodhi, who was shot five times in the back at a gas station in Mesa, Arizona, on 15 September 2001.2 His killer, Francisco Silva Roque, proclaimed, 'I'm an American. Arrest me and let those terrorists run wild'.3 Sodhi subsequently became the movement poster child for a wronged Sikh American citizenry, the symbolic and material evidence of the fact that Sikhs were, indeed, most certainly not Muslims. At this time I was involved with efforts at the Garden State Sikh Association (GSSA) (a temple community in
New Jersey that I have been a member of throughout my childhood and some of my adult life) to protect its membership, especially turbaned men facing various turban clawing and grabbing incidents, many of them working at gas stations and in bodegas. Our gurdwara community, as with many not only across the USA but also in Britain and France, went to exacting pains to enact a performance of allegiance to the nation, one bolstered by the display of heteronormative model minority ideals.

Along with the typical assimilative but self-preservationist tactics — candlelight vigils, flags covering the temple, red, white and blue turbans, and patriotic statements aligning themselves with the American citizenry as victims — public relations firms were hired to manage the damage control and 'deal with this misunderstanding among the American public', while an endless stream of lawyers went to Washington, D.C. to meet with senators and other public officials to expound upon Sikh commitment to American civil life. The cry of 'mistaken identity' thus became central to Sikh lobbying efforts. Organizations such as the Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART, a Sikh American civil rights advocacy group) have released statements, 'talking points', and photos explaining the differences between 'those' turbans and Sikh turbans (see Sanders 2001; Pradhan 2002). (The attacks themselves were becoming increasingly bizarre in their execution; often the turban itself was the object of the assault, upon which the unraveling of hair signified a humiliating and intimate submission, hinting at homosocial undertones (see Mahabir and Vadarevu 2004).) Sikh communities were flooded with messages on how to navigate airport security and promote interfaith exchange, and also released many documents. One such document is 'The Turban Is Not a Hat', which instructed Sikhs dealing with airport security to insist that their turbans, if it was insisted that they be checked for weapons, were sent through X-ray machines or scanned with a sensor wand, rather than being forcibly unwrapped, the prevailing practice at the time. In hopes of avoiding inspection altogether, SMART directed Sikhs to claim the turban could not be removed without it unraveling: 'The turban is not a hat. It is a mandatory symbol of the Sikh religion. I cannot simply remove it; it must be unwrapped'. The widespread campaigns undertaken by liberal Sikh advocacy groups to educate 'ignorant Americans' about Sikhs also responded to a series of offensive video games (like Hitman 2), cartoon strips (Carol Lay's 'A Field Guide to Turbans' and 'Randy bin Laden'), as well as demands that the turban be removed for driver's license and work-related photos, and other administrative jobs and work-related procedures. Largely disregarding the fact that there is a wide variation of turban styles, colors, material, sizes, and even uses between Sikhs from varying diasporic locations, class backgrounds, and even genders — for Sikh women may also don turbans, however rare — these efforts were driven by desires to inhabit a proper Sikh American hetero-masculinity, one at significant remove from the perverse sexualities ascribed to terrorist bodies. Further, the hypothesis of mistaken identity as the main causal factor for post-9-11 hate crimes, along with the liberal push to educate unknowing citizenry, relies on multiple premises: that the viewer (assumed to be white despite the proliferation of these attacks by people of color) is open to and willing to discern the visual differences between Sikh turbans and Muslim turbans; that the ideals of multiculturalism as promulgated by liberal education acknowledges that differences within difference matter; that violent backlash towards Sikhs, claiming Sikhism as peaceful, is a displacement of hostility from
the rightful object, the 'real' Muslims. Thus these political tactics encouraged amnesia of the turban assaults that stretch back to the late 1800s when the 'tide of the turbans' came forth to the Northwest USA, and more recent spates such as that following the 1984 assassination of Indira Gandhi. At the limit here, then, is the acknowledgement of the perverse masculinities encrypted into Sikh bodies, specifically through the rescripting of these masculinities via an enactment of anti-Muslim sentiment. The disavowal of the perverse queernesses attached to Muslim terrorist bodies thus functions as a rite of initiation and assimilation into US heteronormative citizenship.

Concurrently, I was also part of a group of activists loosely working together, many of whom were part of the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) based in New York City. In the weeks and months following 9-11, SALGA members across the tri-state area reported numerous sexual, verbal, and physical assaults, with queer South Asians being mugged, beaten, and molested. We were struggling to articulate a relationship between queer bashing and what were narrowly defined as racist hate crimes, a connection that was being patently ignored by mainstream queer anti-violence organizations, such as the New York Anti-Violence Project (AVP), and only preliminarily approached by many Arab American, South Asian and Muslim groups, some of which were admirably attempting to tackle issues about sexuality for the very first time. It certainly appeared to be the case that our queer South Asian communities were doubly vulnerable to these attacks, especially those more conspicuously marked by visible traits associated with gender non-normativity, working-class and working poor backgrounds, and immigrant bodies and speech. Some of those assaulted encountered very specific reference to faggotry or other homophobic slurs. But by and large it was more obvious that the invocation of the word 'terrorist' in these crimes always already betrayed an implicitly installed prerequisite of perverse sexuality, queerness, and gender non-normativity, beyond the pale of proper citizenship sexuality, both heteronormative and homonormative. We labored to produce materials and resources for the queer South Asian community that specifically addressed racist-homophobic crimes, recognizing that the queer perversity of terrorist bodies was both being read from their bodies as well as endowed to their bodies; that is, queerness was both an identifiable modality producing individual bodies and a generalized rubric applied to populations. The interstices between the brown queer subject who is hailed as terrorist and the terrorist who is always already pathologically queer surfaced as a complex activist scotoma that challenged the bounds of our work (a limitation that has everything to do with an understanding of queerness that is unable to address its own subterranean proclivities towards sexualities that are adamantly secular). Ironically, South Asian queer diasporic subjects were and continue to be under even greater duress to produce themselves as exceptional American subjects, not necessarily as heteronormative but as homonormative, even as the queernesses of these very bodies are simultaneously used to pathologize populations configured as terrorist. In response there was and continues to be a double movement enabled: an invitation into queer and homonormative folds of American patriotism to participate in and reproduce narratives of US queer exceptionalism in contradistinction to perverse (orientalist) and repressed (neo-orientalist...
human rights discourse) sexualities of the East; or, an investment in foregrounding and reclaiming the sexual perversities of the brown terrorist implicit in the queering of terrorist populations. In this latter move, however, there seemed to be a figure, or should I say an object, at the limit of this strategy: the turban, and the body that it sits upon. Its 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 reclaimation of sexual-racial perversity, suggesting that it is a body almost too perverse to be read as queer. As contagions that trouble the exceptionalisms of queer South Asian diasporas, male turbaned Sikh bodies are read as patriarchal by queer diasporic logics because they challenge the limits of queer diasporic identity that balks at the non-normativity of turbaned bodies (even as it avows the pathological racial- sexual renderings of terrorist bodies). Many queer South Asians in New York during the fall of 2001 were working with South Asian community-based organizations (such as Desis Rising Up and Moving [DRUM], the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund [AALDEF], Manavi [a help line for South Asian women], and the New York Taxi Workers’ Alliance). However, despite the best efforts of South Asian queer organizers and gurdwara community leaders, the two activist initiatives I have just sketched — even in light of the obvious commonalities of circumstance and concerns about racial profiling, surveillance, and security — did not and dare not converge.

On one hand, a queer diasporic subject may contest the limits of the liberated subject of Lawrence, produced through privileges of class, whiteness, and gender-normativity; on the other, this subject may be unable to respond to the turbaned Sikh victim and the related figure of the Muslim terrorist, both of whom are seen as conservatively heteronormative and anti-queer, yet in the perverse sexualities ascribed to them, are almost too queer to rehabilitate. But where they converge is crucial: their subjects of resistance, to one degree or another, fail. Further, to a greater or lesser extent, both queer diasporic and GSSA’s responses rely on the specular as the conduit for the transfer of correct information, the former through recourse to a queer visibility that forecloses the turbaned body as an object worthy of a queer intervention, and the latter through the privileging of ‘seeing’ as an naturalized activity that can be easily disrupted in order to redress mis-recognition and rearrange configurations of gender, sexuality, and race.

Queer diasporas

Brian Keith Axel, in his ground-clearing essay ‘The Diasporic Imaginary’ (2002), poses two radical modifications to the study of diaspora as it has developed in anthropology, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary forums. Referencing his study of Sikh diasporas, he argues first that ‘rather than conceiving of the homeland as something that creates the diaspora, it may be more productive to consider the diaspora as something that creates the homeland’. Axel is gesturing beyond the material locational pragmatics of the myth of return, the economic and symbolic importance of
the NRI (non-resident Indian), Khalistan and Hindutuva nationalist movements funded by diasporic money, or the modalities of homeland that are recreated in the diaspora. The homeland, he proposes, ‘must be understood as an affective and temporal process rather than a place’. But if not the fact of place, what impels a diasporic sensibility or collectivity? The ‘temporalizing and affective aspect of subjectification’ involved in the creation of the homeland pulls ‘the homeland into relation with other kinds of images and processes . . . different bodies or corporeal images and historical formations of sexuality, gender and violence’ (Axel 2002, 426).

Axel’s formulation can be productively reworked to further query the habitus of nation and its geographic coordinates. The paradigm of queer diaspora retrofits the notion of diaspora to account for connectivity beyond or different from sharing a common ancestral homeland (Axel 2002). That is, to shift away from origin, for a moment allows other forms of diasporic affiliative and cathartic entities — for Axel, primarily that of bodies — to show their affiliative powers. This is especially critical given that for Sikhs, ‘the homeland’ (Khalistan) is a perpetual fantasy and not a current political fact; thus the experience of temporality is already commanded to futurity rather than organized through tradition, a common past, an origin. Furthermore, an unsettling of the site of origin (i.e. nation as one of the two binding terms of diaspora) de facto wrenches ancestral progression out of the automatic purview of diaspora, allowing for queer narratives of kinship, belonging, and home. While Axel is primarily interested in images of the tortured Sikh male body, I would argue that, a focus on affect reveals how actual bodies can be in multiple places and temporalities simultaneously, not (only) tethered through nostalgia or memory but folded and braided into intensifications. The sensation of place is thus one of manifold intensities cathected through distance. To extend Axel’s formulation, the homeland is not represented only as a demographic, a geographical place, nor primarily through history, memory, or even trauma. But it is cohered through sensation, vibrations, echoes, speed, feedback loops and recursive folds and feelings. Axel argues that the homeland is a spatial rather than locational or place-based phenomenon, coalescing through corporealities, affectivities, and, I would add, multiple and contingent temporalities, as much as it is memory of place, networks (of travel, communication, and informational exchange), the myth of the imminent return to origin, and the progressive telos of origin to diaspora.

Queer diasporic theorizing has emphasized self-crafted kinship, erotic and affectionate networks or lines of affiliation, rather than filiation. David Eng’s wonderfully generative writing on queer diaspora is instructive here:

...reconceptualizing diaspora not in conventional terms of ethnic dispersion, filiation, and biological traceability, but rather in terms of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency[,] ‘queer diaspora’ emerges as a concept providing new methods of contesting traditional family and kinship structures — of reorganizing national and transnational communities based not on origin, filiation, and genetics but on destination, affiliation, and the assumption of a common set of social practices or political commitments.13

Foregrounding queer diasporic affiliations — bound through conscious adoption of alternative networking — may cohere and centralize a pre-discursive agential
queer subject proactively creating non-assimilatable diasporic circuits, rather than elucidate the ontological presences that constitute and are constitutive of queer diasporas. Shifting focus to affect also unsettles a long-standing preoccupation with queer diasporic representational practices. We move from 'what does this body mean?' to 'what and who does this body affect?' — what does this body do? While the notion of contagion is slightly overdetermined in relation to unwanted and afflicted bodies, in this case I am suggesting not that specific bodies read as contagions, but that all bodies can be thought of as contagious or mired in contagions — contagious bodies infecting other bodies with sensation, vibration, irregularity, chaos. Lines of flight that betray the expectation of loyalty, linearity, the demarcation of who’s in and who’s not. Contagions are autonomous, unregulated, their vicissitudes only peripherally anchored by knowable entities. They invoke the language of infection and transmission, forcing us to ask, how does one 'catch' something whose trace is inchoate or barely discerned? Contagions conduct the effects of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight — the five primary senses (from the vantage point of western science) — into shivers, sweat, flushes, heat, pain, among many other sensations. Contagions thus complicate even the most complex articulations of affiliation; that is, they return the process of affiliation over to indeterminacy and contingency. These oppositions that subtend Eng’s proposition — origin/destination, filiation/affiliation, genetics/socio-political — are thus defied by the unpredictability of contagions, whose unregulated forces have no designated a priori affinities or opponents, coagulating instead through sympathies. Contagions add an important factor in this equation, for they bypass the question of what constitutes a viable affiliation — this question returning us to the opening activist scenario whereby Sikh gurdwara sectors and South Asian queer diasporics are seen as incommensurate affinities or affiliations.

It is this shift from origin to affectation, from South Asia as unifying homeland to contagions — the assemblage of the 'monster-terrorist-fag', for instance — that troubles queer diasporic exceptionalisms, but also impels their exponential fortification and proliferation. South Asian queer diasporic communities in the USA (as well as in Britain) are disproportionately impacted by the production of terrorist corporealities, navigating the figures of the Muslim terrorist, the turbaned Sikh man so often mistaken for him, and the woman in hijab who must be rescued from them. These generative figures, always already sexually pathological, speak to the prolific fertilization and crosshatching of terrorist corporealities amidst South Asian queer diasporas. As such, South Asian queer diasporas must contend not only with the stigmatization of their communities via these perverse terrorist bodies, but also with the forms of queerness-as-exceptionalism that are often offered in response to this stigmatization. As a regulatory construct, this queer exceptionalism may mimic forms of (US) model minority exceptionalism, positing queerness as an exemplary or libidinal site devoid of nationalist impulses, an exceptionalism that narrates queerness as emulating the highest transgressive potential of diaspora. But the tensions — and overlaps — between the now-fetishized desi drag queen or even the hijra (think of the British and Broadway stage performances of Bombay Dreams) and the turbaned or otherwise Sikh- or Muslim-identified terrorist invariably temper this exceptionalism.

Since September 11, 2001, for example, many activists and community members from SALGA in New York have voiced similar sentiments as this one expressed by a
Pakistani Muslim queer man: ‘My sexuality has taken a back seat to my ethnicity’. 15 This statement suggests some re-entrenchment of organizational relations away from mainstream queers, a recomposition of the categories of race and nation, a reshuffling of intersectionality as a viable identity framework, and the differential impact of surveillance optics. Furthermore, the war on terror demands a dual homo-nationalism, as allegiances to the nation-state of India are unwittingly or often deliberately rearticulated through the allegiances to the USA (this is reflective of the recent rise of an India—US power couple). 16 Forms of regulatory queerness that collude with and are rooted in the quest for queer diasporic representational purchase, operating in tandem with the historical narrative of South Asians as a model minority population in the USA, must contend with the contagions of differently queer terrorist bodies. We have again the attempted splitting off of the queer liberal subject — this time modeled as the exceptional queer diasporic model-minoritized subject, regulatory insofar as it must disavow neighboring contagions of populations, regulated insofar it is both domesticated by and domesticating of spatially and temporally constricted amenable national populations, in this case, Indian and American — from attachments and associations to terrorist bodies. 17 The shift we can mark, then, is that these queer diasporic subjects are under duress, perhaps more so than any other population at this historical juncture, to naturalize or normativize their exceptional US-ness or American-ness, not through a heteronormative mandate but rather through homonormativity, at the exact moment that queerness is a modality of nominalization that demarcates these very same bodies as terrorists.

As much queer diasporic theorizing seeks to enact in the elaboration of a transgressive agential queer diasporic subject, I would like to offer an interpretation of affectation that does not demand that the (agential) queer (diasporic?) subject be read in line with affective or emotional resonance nor that the queer subject be produced through these resonances. I am not interested in reading the turbaned body as a queer body or queering the turbaned body. As a figure that deeply troubles the nation’s security, the turbaned body can be most fruitfully rearticulated, not solely as a body ensconced in tradition and backwardness, attempting to endow itself with modernity, nor as a dissident queer body, but rather as an assemblage, a move I make to both expand the expectations and assumptions of queer reading practices (descriptive and prescriptive) and to unsettle the long-standing theorizations of heteronormative frames of reference for nation and the female body as the primary or sole bearer of cultural honor and respect. 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. This re-reading of turbaned bodies offers a critical counternarrative to both queer subjects that regulate the terms of queerness (in this case, hinting at the foreclosure of a queer diasporic turbaned Sikh, male or female — this subject is distinct from the queernesses that have often been attributed to Sikh masculinities) and the pathological queernesses endowed to terrorist populations that Sikh gurdwara communities seek to evade.

Crucially linked to this, the purported coherence and cohesion of the organic body is at stake here, as I suggest, first, that the intermixing of the organic with
the inorganic turban needs to be theorized across an organic/inorganic divide, a
machinic assemblage, and second, that informational and surveillance technologies
of control both produce the body-as-information but also impact the organic body
through an interface — again, organic and machinic technologies that interface to
points of mutual dissolution. My reading thus elaborates the biopolitics of population
that racializes and sexualizes bodies not entirely through their visual and affective
qualities (as they are acquired historically and discursively) but rather through the
data they assemble, what are otherwise known as ‘data bodies’ bodies materialized
through information and statistics. Here I proffer some speculations about the con-
nections and divergences — the dance — between the profile and the racial profile,
keeping in tension with each other the ocular, the affective, and the informational.
What is the concept of race in racial profiling if we are not to privilege the visible, the
knowable, the epistemological? Is the informational body, the data body that
precedes and follows us, is this type of profiling racial, or racist, and if so, what is
this race articulated within profiling? This is of particular growing concern to me in
part because the notion of ‘surveillance assemblages’ that is currently emerging
from the field of surveillance studies, while rightly deprivileging the visual field in
favor of affect and information, tends toward discounting and dismissing the visual
and its capacity to interpellate subjects. This discounting is simply not politically
viable given the shifts around formations of race and sex that are under way in response
to a new visual category, the ‘terrorist look-alike’ or those who ‘look like terrorists’.

Turbans becoming strange attractors

The turban is accruing the marks of a terrorist masculinity. The turbaned man — no
longer merely the figure of a durable and misguided tradition, a community and
familial patriarch, a resistant anti-assimilationist stance — now inhabits the space
and history of monstrosity, of that which can never become civilized. The turban
is not only imbued with the nationalist, religious and cultural symbolics of the
Other. The turban both reveals and hides the terrorist, a constant sliding between
that which can be disciplined and that which must be outlawed. Despite the taxo-
nomies of turbans, their specific regional and locational genealogies, their placement
in time and space, their singularity and their multiplicity, the turban-as-monolith
profoundly troubles and disturbs the American national imaginaries and their attend-
ant notions of security.

The turban has faded in and out of US historical consciousness. 18 In 1923, Bhagat
Singh Thind, a turbaned Sikh man, petitioned the US Supreme Court to grant Indians
citizenship status. Arguing that north Indians have a similar Caucasian Aryan ancestry
as white Americans, Thind forced the issue of racial exclusion in relation to citizen-
ship, despite ultimately losing his case. In the literatures of ethnic, South Asian,
migration, and Asian American studies, the Thind case is hailed as a landmark
ruling about the racial status of South Asians in the USA, but in the broad citational
span of the Thind case, little commentary has been offered on the specific markings of
the (Sikh) bodies that were represented in this claim. (Ronald Takaki’s chapter,
‘Tide of Turbans,’ in Strangers From A Different Shore, speaks generally of turbans:
‘Yards upon yards of cotton, calico, or silk were swathed about their heads,
forming turbans, cone-shaped or round like a mushroom button, with waves or points directly in the middle of their foreheads (Takaki 1989, 63). Writing that Indians represented the specter of the new Yellow Peril, Takaki quotes Herman Scheffauer, a writer for Forum magazine: “This time the chimera is not the saturnine, almond-eyed mask, the shaven head, the snaky pig-tail of the multitudinous Chinese, nor the close-cropped bullet-heads of the suave and smiling Japanese, but a face of finer features, rising, turbaned out of the Pacific and bringing a new and anxious question” (Takaki 1989, 296–7). And while scholarship on the Third case rarely discusses the ‘tide of turbans’, the presence of the turban confirms a priori the properly religious Sikh man within essentializing Sikh historical scholarship. The language of the ruling itself speaks of the importance of ‘resemblance’ between ‘cultivated citizens’; the majority decision states that what matters is not that ‘groups of persons who are supposed to be or really are descended from some remote, common ancestor, but who, whether they both resemble him to a greater or less extent, have, at any rate, ceased altogether to resemble one another. It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them today’ (emphasis mine). By invoking the everyday experience of race over the scientific and anthropological evidence presented by Thind, the decision confirms the anxiety regarding dominant imagery of brown turbaned ‘Hindoo’ laborers at that time. The ruling is thus symptomatic not only of the demand for phenotypical resemblance, but also for resonance of visceral properties of the body. It is not only that the blond Scandinavian cannot see himself in the brown Hindu, and vice versa. Rather, the bodies inhabit different tactile and affective economies, insofar as touch, texture, sensation, and turban-as-appendage render the impossibility of resonance, of appearing to feel the same. There is a refusal to allow the simultaneous inhabitation of tactile economies that cut through and across these representational divides.

Thus, the pressure to naturalize the aspirant citizen is reflected in the erasure of nomenclature and the psychic de-turbaning (as castration?) that promotes a representational but not ontological assessment of the historical impact of the Third case (though the ruling might suppress turbaned embodiments, it never completely forgets them). As a form of unveiling, de-turbaning functions to allow the true nature of the Hindoo to emerge and be recognized; bodily practices involving hair, beard, turban, and the cultural body are under duress to conform. Furthermore, the claim of Aryan ancestry links into a foundational belief system of Hindu nationalism, which centrally asserts the truth of this connection: that of Hindu racial, cultural, and civilizational purity and superiority vis-à-vis Muslims, as well as the Hindutava state of India, are also complicit with the production of Sikh and Muslim terrorist corporealities.

Mistaken as Hindu in the early twentieth century and now mistaken as Muslim, the hypothesis of mistaken identity as the main causal factor for post-9-11 hate crimes has been embraced by conservative factions – the Bush administration, for example – and progressive ones alike. Since September 11, 2001, Sikh men wearing turbans, mistaken for kin of Osama bin Laden, have been disproportionately affected by backlash racist hate crime. Let us ponder for a moment the span of violence: verbal harassment (being called ‘bin Laden’, ‘son
of bin Laden’, ‘Osama’), especially on the phone and while driving; tailgating; hate mail; defecating and urinating on Sikh gurdwaras, Islamic mosques, and Hindu temples, leading in some cases to vandalism and arson; blocking the entrance of a Sikh temple in Sacramento with a tractor and truck and jumping into the sacred holy water at the temple; throwing bricks, gasoline bombs, garbage, and other projectile objects into homes of Sikhs and Arabs along with slashing car tires; death threats and bomb threats; fatal shootings of taxi drivers, the majority of whom have been turbaned Sikhs; verbal and physical harassment of primary and secondary school children, as well as foreign students on college campuses; and attacks with baseball bats, paintball guns, burning cigarettes, and pigs’ blood (Human Rights Watch 2001). This enumeration is provided to detail the prolific creativity engendered within these attacks in order to situate the importance of the turban not as an entity that merely represents any given meanings in these instances, but rather as a vector of information, a point of contact, a transfer and conduit of turbulence.

The disrobing of turbans undertaken by massive numbers of Sikh men after September 11 was one manifestation of the demanded domestication of Americanness, where turban removal functions as a reorientation into masculine patriotic identity. More importantly, these removals, along with hate crime statistics, underscore the costs of an association with terrorist bodies. Assaults of turbaned men continue to escalate, attributed in part to a ‘resurgence of backlash’ since the beginning of the war in Iraq. The Sikh Coalition estimates that in 2003 there was a 90 percent increase in bias incidents in comparison to 2002, adding that a vast majority of crimes go unreported because of language barriers and unfamiliarity with hate-crime legislation. The nature of these assaults has also become more sophisticated and more complex. Recent attacks (in the USA but also globally) involve not only verbal commands to de-turban — ‘Hey you fucking terrorist, take that turban off!’ — but also the grabbing, unraveling, or knocking and pulling off of the head covering. It is not for nothing that in one hate-crime incident after another, turbans are clawed at viciously, and unshorn hair is pulled, occasionally even cut off. The intimacy of such violence, in this case conventionally defined in terms of liberal autonomy and privacy, cannot be overstated. Indeed it is often the actual turban itself, an embodiment of metaphysical substance, that is the desired object of violence, suggesting that it is understood as much more than an appendage. Within Sikh community contexts, de-throning one’s turban is the paramount insult to the wearer, the most humiliating form of disrespect, the sheer force of which is usually unknown to hate-crime perpetrators. The attack functions as a double emasculation: the disrobing is an insult to the (usually) male representative of the community, while the removal of hair entails submission by and to normative patriotic masculinities. Yet the colliding of discourses of normative patriotic enforcement — ‘take that turban off you fucking terrorist’ — and community shame is noteworthy, suggesting that even without any understanding of the turban’s contextual significance, its magnitude is somehow comprehended.

As substitute embodiments for an elusive Osama bin Laden, Sikhs are a sanctioned hate-crime target, a target for what Muneeb Ahmad has called ‘a socially appropriate emotion [expressed] in socially inappropriate ways’ (Ahmad 2002, 108). No longer remarkable, these hate crimes have not only become normalized
within a refashioned post-9/11 racial landscape, but more significantly, they have become immanent to the counterterrorism objectives of the state, operating as an extended arm of the nation, encouraging the surveillance and strike capacities of the patriotic populace. The duality at work here — the centrality of multiculturalism and diversity to the discourse of citizenship, coupled with the surveillance, domestication, quarantine, and containment of the corporealities that attempt to represent these democratic ideals — enables the emergence of liberal multiculturalism not only as a consumptive project nor as a process of inclusion, incorporation, normalization and assimilation, but more perniciously as a form of governmentalities. Writing in December 2003 during the peak of France’s debates on banning religious head coverings, Timur Yuskaev and Matt Weiner claim:

In the aftermath of Sept. 11 the American model of a secular state that is tolerant of religious difference has worked remarkably well, though not perfectly. The public’s anxiety over the Muslim ‘enemy within’ was higher than ever. Yet not a single official asked Muslims to become invisible and remove their headscarves. The official policy was to protect the freedom to be visibly Muslim. Had the government acted otherwise, it would have sided with the ignorant bullies who harassed and physically attacked so many Muslims, Arabs and Sikhs.

(Yuskaev and Weiner 2003) (Emphasis mine)

This exalting of the United States in contrast to France is sorely ironic, for the function of the state in retaining the visibility of religious difference is hardly benevolent. Rather, the state depends on that isolated difference, the oh-so-celebrated difference (of food, clothing, literature, art, tourism, film) that allows for the watching and the assaulting of these different bodies, of ‘those whose difference is hard to stomach’ (Yuskaev and Weiner 2003). No official request is necessitated: the dual imposition of discourses of citizenship for Sikhs — normalization and expulsion — is not merely realized in the form of cultural or discursive negotiations. The state works doubly to promulgate anti-Sikh rhetoric on the one hand, while welcoming Sikhs as a protected population under hate-crime legislation on the other.

Turban, in their symbolic weight, are the masculine counterparts to veils, and in their usage, irrevocably link Sikhs and Muslims, signifying honor, dignity, purity, virginity, chastity; a sardar removes his turban as an offering of his word, a commitment to a promise. My intent here is not to draw any simple analogy or equivalence between the practices, but rather to highlight the ways in which they converge and diverge in ‘western’ queer, feminist and national imaginaries. Similar to the way veils have generated orientalist fantasies of female submission, emerged as nodal fixation, a standard topic of discussion in Women’s Studies curriculum, and become an easy marker of an Other (Muslim/Arab/Islamic) femininity — one of the most potent self/othering mechanisms in the history of western feminisms — turbans are emerging as a signal of an ‘other masculinity’. Within these heteronormative frames, the turbaned man is the warrior leader of the community — the violent patriarch — and at the same time, the long-haired, feminized sissy — a figure of failed masculinity in contrast to (white) hegemonic masculinities. Like the burqa, the hijab, and the head-scarf, turbans mark gender (though women, usually converted white ‘American Sikhs’, do don turbans), religion, and region, as well as signal, to the untrained
eye, the most pernicious components of oppressive patriarchal backwards cultures and traditions, those that have failed at modernity. Turbans have become strange attractors, centripetal forces to which the eye is instantly drawn. As with veils, the turban is multiple. Sizes, shapes and colors designate gender, caste, religiosity, militancy, marital status, and age. Assembled through a taxonomy of regional and religious differences (Sikh, Muslim, Middle East, South Asia, northern India, Sunni, Shiite), turbans mark not only ‘difference’ within US discourses of banal multiculturality, but also racial and sexual differences among South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities. Indeed, they are vehemently used within communities to demarcate insider versus outsider, devout believer versus religious fake. Yet turbans acquire a bizarre singular momentum, the sheer might of multiplicity collapsed into one stagnant pool of meaning. Like veiling, turbaning generates anxiety in the observer, the sense of inaccessibility, of something being out of place and out of time, of incomprehensibility.

Unlike veiling, however, turbans have not preoccupied western feminist scholarship and organizations concerned with missionary liberationist practices; in this sense, turbans do reiterate a masculinist centrality of cultural and religious norms, and as such have not been the target of social protests seeking to liberate those deemed to be subjugated. This is a crucial distinction, one that informs contemporary debates about head coverings in several parts of the world (France and Britain, for instance). While veiling — not turbaning — in migrant communities has been the primary source of disquiet in France, where such practices are most visible, turbans have been central foci of debate in Britain. This is partially fallout from the history of incorporation of Sikhs into the British colonial military in India, a disciplining that established Sikhs as warriors but also as colluding with British imperial occupation and as figures of guilt and treason in relation to the anti-colonial movement. However, as a form of cultural continuity and the maintenance of tradition, the plight of male turban wearers problematizes decades of feminist inquiry that locates women as the bearers and transmitters of authentic culture. Thus, my concentration on turban-profiling, one that displaces the conversation about racist backlash against hijab-ed women, or violence against women generally, is nonetheless committed to an unearthing of the often-obscured issues of gender and sexuality in relation to masculinity and effeminization. The turban is a contested icon imbued with the possibilities of re-masculinization and nationalism. That is to say, attending to the vulnerability of male turbaned bodies also opens up the possibility of their very restoration, their re-phallicization and re-centering within patriarchal nationalisms, a restoration that this chapter courts (perhaps fed by its most major shortcoming, the absence of specific discussion on turbaned women).

Turbans are also loaded with the weight of victimology, an overdetermined discourse about the trauma and suffering of turbaned Sikh men, the fetish of injury. This victimology, which pre-dates September 11, is often entangled in discourses about racism and racist encounters, in part narrated through relations with the white gaze, thus reestablishing the ascendancy of whiteness. What Ahmed terms ‘injury as identity’ (Ahmed 2005, 49), this exceptional narrative of victimhood — the claim that Sikh men encounter more racism than Sikh women, for example, conveniently effacing gender inequities between Sikh men
and women — is complemented by a reclaiming of the turban as a form of religious and multicultural excellence. This example foregrounds once again the heterosexual mandates of national belonging, a circuitry implicating homo-national subjects, model-minority heterosexuality, and perversely queered populations. This circuit casts immigrant communities and communities of color as 'more homophobic' — solidifying them, ironically, as simplistically heterosexual (mindless, careless reproduction) or heteronormative in an un-cosmopolitan, regressive manner (unable or unwilling to participate in the nuclear familial-individuation of market capitalism that promotes child-raising and kinship as consumption projects) — thus opening up greater libratory possibilities for white queer liberal and homonormative subjects and foreclosing, in an enactment of 'interested denial' (Spivak 1990, 123), queer of color subjects. Further, regulatory queerness (liberal, homonormative, or even diasporic) denotes queer turbaned Sikhs (male or female) as improbable, if not impossible, subjects.

**Ocular and affective**

Judith Butler, in her examination of the Rodney King case, has noted that '[t]he visual field is not neutral to the question of race; it is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic and forceful' (Butler 1993, 17). The field of the visible is a racially contested terrain. 'Seeing' is not an act of direct perception, but 'the racial production of the visible, the workings of racial constraints on what it means to "see"'(ibid., 16). Therefore, the act of 'seeing' is simultaneously an act of reading, a specific interpretation of the visual. But this reading passes itself off as a 'seeing', a natural activity, hiding the 'contestable construal' of what is seen. This racist organization and disposition of the visible also works to define what qualifies as visual evidence; thus the ocular distinctions between various turbans — the visual evidence of their differences — can be rendered meaningless, in advance: 'For when the visual is fully schematized by racism, the "visual evidence" to which one refers will always and only refute the conclusions based upon it; for it is possible within this racist episteme that no black person can seek recourse to the visible as the sure ground of evidence' (ibid., 17). What Butler terms 'inverted projections of white paranoia' (16) — in this case extended to a nationalist paranoia — posits the recipient of the violence, the object of violence, as the subject of violence, the threat of impending violence that was justifiably curtailed (ibid.). In the way that the visual field situates the black male body as always already the site of violence and a source of danger to whites and model minorities, the turbaned Sikh is always already circumscribed as a dangerous terrorist look-alike or aspirant terrorist. The principal place of the anticipatory future tense secures the necessity of the pre-emptive strike: the infantilized attacker, in need of protection, locates the about-to-be-attacked body as the site and source of danger; and, convinced of the desire for the turbaned individual to become a terrorist, defends against the imminent conversion through the attack. This narrative coheres the attacker as a patriotic vigilante, and obscures the reading of the attacker's violence in favor of locating the attackee's probable, always about to occur violence. Butler claims that this completes the circuit of white paranoia, whereby the attacker initiates 'the projection of their own aggression, and the subsequent
regarding of that projection as an external threat' (ibid., 19). This can be thought of as ‘the reversal and displacement of dangerous intention’ (21) such that the attackee comes to represent ‘the origin, the intention, and the object of the selfsame brutality . . . he is the beginning and the end of violence’ (20).

Butler’s account, while attentive to the materialization of the violent black body, does not elucidate how the black body, beyond its discursive baggage, comes to be feared as such. There is as well a reliance on the very act of seeing that Butler problematizes – while she is critical of the relationship between ‘seeing’ and what then counts as visual evidence, she nonetheless centralizes the visible black body whose difference is seen rather than felt, whose episteme cannot escape the chain of signs of danger qualified as the beginning, the end, the origin, intention, and object. To augment Butler, I turn to Sara Ahmed’s exploration of hate and fear. Ahmed writes: ‘. . . hate does not reside in a given subject or object. Hate is economic; it circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement’ (S. Ahmed 2004, 119). In this challenge to the localization of fear in a body, the materialization of the feared body occurs through a visual racial regime as well the impossibility of the containment of feared bodies. The anxiety of this impossibility of containment subtends the relegation of fear to a distinct object, producing the falsity of a feared object (ibid., 124). Further, it is precisely the non-residence of emotions, their circulation between bodies, that binds subjects together, creating pools of suspicious bodies. Riffing on Fanon, as does Butler, Ahmed focuses not on the black body that will assault, but on the one that passes by:

The black man becomes even more threatening if he passes by . . . the economy of fear works to contain the bodies of others, a containment whose ‘success’ relies on its failure, as it must keep open the very grounds of fear. In this sense, fear works as an affective economy, despite how it seems directed toward an object . . . [It is] this lack of residence that allows fear to slide across signs, and between bodies. This sliding becomes stuck only temporarily, in the very attachment of a sign to a body, whereby a sign sticks to a body by constituting it as the object of fear, a constitution taken on by the body, encircling it with a fear that becomes its own.

(S. Ahmed 2004, 127)

This is a different claim to an anticipatory, pre-emptive temporality: the real danger, as it were, is not that he will attack, but that he will pass by, the imminent attack unknown in terms of when, where, how, or if. Passing, or passing by, raises the possibility that the difference is imperceptible – the injury is endlessly deferred to the future. The object that once appeared to contain the fear, and was thus containable, instead contaminates and multiplies into many bodies through a sliding which works metonymically to ooze and seep these bodies into one another, ‘construct[ing] a relation of resemblance between the figures: what makes them alike may be their “unlikeness” from “us’” (S. Ahmed 2004, 119). Stickiness implies that the temporary reprieve granted through passing by is muted by residual remnants and echoes of older bodies that rub off, leaving traces of nearly getting off clean: ‘the word terrorist sticks to some bodies as it reopens past histories of naming, just as it slides into other words . . .’ (ibid., 131). Both Butler and
Ahmed ground their analyses in signification; for Butler, the visible black body is a priori signified as threatening, while for Ahmed, emotions circulate between bodies and thus signs stick, however momentarily. Unmoored emotion such as fear slides amidst bodies getting stuck on them — is it the fear that is sticky or the bodies that are already somehow signified as sticky, or both? But there are two distinct temporalities of anticipation and pre-emption at work here. Butler foregrounds the dangerous subject in need of rehabilitation, a temporality of pre-emption where the black body, already known as scary, must be beaten before he is able to beat first. The subject is created, known, and confirmed as the body is beaten. In Ahmed’s frame, some subjects are known while others are anticipated — the circuit of passing by-sliding-sticking entails that sliding emotions must invariably stick to bodies, giving other bodies their (new or accentuated) sign. Subjects can be anticipated but never known for certain; the contagious body that passes by (if we are even sure of the danger of this body) infects other bodies. The pre-emptive force is not focalized towards one body — in this case the black man or the turbaned terrorist — but rather stickiness can draw into question almost anyone in this affective economy of fear: pools of bodies, populations. The difference between Butler and Ahmed can be also qualified as the difference between a defensive position (‘I am ready to attack to pre-empt your attack’) and a defended position (‘I am pre-empting altogether the possibility of your attack, much less the attack’). In other words, the defended position or posturing attempts to pre-empt the necessity of a defensive position. What is being pre-empted is not the danger of the known subject but the danger of not-knowing.

Ahmed’s move from residence to circulation can lead to a fruitful understanding of the forces of population construction, their control not necessarily by knowing who they are but by the impossibility of fully knowing, as this circulation ‘work[s] to differentiate some others from other others, a differentiation that is never “over” as it awaits for others who have not yet arrived’ (S. Ahmed 2004, 123). Sliding works to create likenesses — relations of feared objects to each other — among differences that, despite such variance, appear to be distinctly different from the ‘us’ at stake. The fact that fear does not reside in a body, but rather could be materialized in anybody within a particular profile range, both allows for the figure of the terrorist to retain its potent historical signification but also enables the fear to ‘stick’ to bodies that ‘could be’ terrorists (ibid., 135). Ahmed’s focus on resemblance allows emotions to slide to and between bodies, impelling stickiness of signs and creating the relations of resemblance of feared objects to each other. Thus, the affective economy of fear that Ahmed lays out is a democratization of sorts — it does not rely solely on internal and external positionings (black man, white cop); instead, it modulates differentials of fear of populations that are caught within, rounded up, sutured as well as defect from these resemblances: the scenario is never finalized.

In the context of mistaken identity, passing functions doubly as a modality where the distinctions between turbaned may be incomprehensible — the Sikh passes for terrorist or the terrorist passes for Sikh — and where the Sikh must pass for American, and in that sense, may pass by, as it were. The proof offered in any performative of loyalty is betrayed by the demand to articulate oneself as American, this demand acting precisely as the evidence that the subject is indeed not constituted nor understood as American. The turban is thus a ‘sticky’ signifier, operating as a fetish object
of fear, and the ontological becoming of the turbaned Sikh is intricately tied into the temporal logic of pre-empting his futurity, a deferred death, a becoming that is sutured through its failure, its decay. It is fear then, as it materializes the turban, rather than the turban itself, that creates the chasm between subject and objects and mediates the conviviality among objects — these boundaries do not exist that then produce fear, but rather that fear produces these boundaries (S. Ahmed 2004, 128). As Ahmed has argued, ‘the other is only read as fearsome through a mis-recognition’ (ibid., 126) (emphasis mine), not despite it. Visibility is an inadequate rubric because of an old liberal predicament — visibility invites surveillance — but also because regimes of affect and tactility conduct vital information beyond the visual. The move from visibility to affect moves us from a frame of mis-recognition, contingent upon the visual to discern the mistake (‘I thought you were one of them’), to the notion of resemblance, a broader affective frame where the reason for the likeness may be vague or repressed (‘You remind me of one of them’): from ‘looks like’ to ‘seems like’. As distinct from the ‘looks like’, relegated to the optical restrictions of visibility, the ‘seems like’ is mired in loaded tactile economies, an affective space that pushes the ‘seems like’ towards ‘feels like’ and even, to explain the conviction of radical difference, ‘feels like nothing I could ever feel like’ or ‘nothing I have ever felt before’. The ‘mistaken for’ itself is not a mistake, insofar as it is the very point. The claim to have made a mistake functions as an alibi, a foil, for the prominence of resemblance, indicating either that the Sikh is a fine replacement (one Other is as good as another Other), or a substitution (the Other is undifferentiated, and needs to remain so); both reflect the circulatory economy of fear proffered by Ahmed — feared bodies are contagious.

The widespread campaigns undertaken by liberal Sikh advocacy groups to educate ‘ignorant Americans’ about Sikhs, focusing both on who Sikhs are (not terrorists, peace-loving good Americans, model-minority immigrants, our turbans look like this) and who they are not (Muslims, terrorists, our turbans do not look like that), while important, do not address the affective economies that conflate resemblance into mis-recognition. Flooding the media and Internet with ‘positive images’ of Sikhs uses a representational fix for an ontological dilemma, where what one ‘knows’ about ‘the turban’ is still trapped in epistemological ocular economy, and where one assumes the differences within and among difference actually matter.

In Ahmed’s usage, ‘affect’, however usefully deployed, remains within the realm of signification. Signification, narrative, and epistemological coherence — known or unknown — is what subdents and mediates the stickiness, or slipperiness, of objects. For Ahmed and Butler, fear is still produced predominantly, if not exclusively, by signs. As Butler’s incisive commentary on the Rodney King trial lays bare, the visual is saturated by a racial schema that is built upon layers of racial knowings and displaced un-knowings of the fearsome and violent black male body. But there is little sense of how the black male body comes to be feared as such. Similarly, in Ahmed’s schema, we might query: How do bodies become sticky in the first place? ‘History,’ is Ahmed’s answer. Must bodies already be signified as something sticky in order to become even stickier? Is stickiness only a product of signification, of epistemic formation rather than ontological properties? The assumption that drives Ahmed’s analysis of affect is a form of narrativized discursive knowing that
ironically functions as a pre-discursive necessity for ‘stickiness’ to have any force at all. (That is, the body is already known discursively as a body to fear; its signification is a pre-discursive necessity for an argument that claims that the attachment of signs to bodies is the primary way in which they come to be feared.) How did stickiness come to be? It is not quite clear. Further, we only learn how it feels to feel fear, never how it feels to be feared. (Butler and Ahmed rely on acts of reading to contest epistemological truths—that is, the logic of visibility is challenged through the logic of visibility by pointing out the instability of visual evidence, rather than moving aside the visual, however momentarily, as the primary epistemological terrain of racial knowledge. Similarly, the logic of signification is contested through pointing out the instability of signs.)

Brian Massumi, whose work in *Parables for the Virtual* is critical fodder for this project, insists upon ties to affective processes that mediate cognitive and epistemic knowing. The body’s ‘visceral sensibility’ precedes sense perception: ‘It anticipates the translation of the sight or sound or touch perception into something recognizable associated with an identifiable object.’ So the lungs spasm even before the senses cognize the presence of a shadow in a ‘dark street at night in a dangerous part of town’. The ‘dangerous part of town’ and the shadow are then the identifiable objects for which epistemic force is confirmed only after, or more accurately, as affective response has taken place. What we have, then, between Butler, Ahmed, and Massumi, are differentials of bodily participation, Butler reading meaning on the epidermis of the black body, Ahmed locating chains of signs between bodies, in this case those already prone to stickiness around the figure of the terrorist, and Massumi foregrounding the body that knows ‘before’ it cognizes, an antedating body, distinct from the pre-emption of anticipatory temporality. However, despite his attentiveness to the matter of bodies, for Massumi, in his perhaps unintentional reproduction of the generic body of science, race seems also to be relegated to the cultural, the discursive. Foregrounding ‘phenotypical encounters in public spaces’ (Saldanha 2006, 13), Arun Saldanha offers a different notion of stickiness from Ahmed’s through the ‘figure of viscosity’:

Neither perfectly fluid nor solid, the viscous invokes surface tension and resistance to perturbation and mixing. Viscosity means that the physical characteristics of a substance explain its unique movements. There are local and temporary thickenings of interacting bodies, which then collectively become sticky, capable of capturing more bodies like them ... Under certain circumstances, the collectivity dissolves, the constituent bodies flowing freely again. The world is an immense mass of viscosities, becoming thicker here, and thinner there. (Saldanha 2006, 18)

Unlike Butler’s rendition of phenotype which exists within discursive signification and Ahmed’s stickiness which also only has force through signs, Saldanha is interested in the matter of phenotype and how phenotypes matters,“ arguing that ‘bodies gradually [become] sticky and [cluster] into aggregates’ (2006, 10) because of how ‘certain bodies stick to certain spaces, how they are chained by hunger, cold, darkness, mud, poverty, crimes, glances full of envy and anxiety’ (20). If one agrees that‘... race is devious in inventing new ways of chaining bodies’ (20), this chaining or linking
occurs not only through the force of historically blighted signifiers that metonymically link and bleed into each other, as Ahmed suggests. They also occur through the encounter of smell, sweat, flushes of heat, dilation of pupils, the impulses bodies pick up from each other, the contagions of which we know little, the sense of being touched without having been physically touched, of having seen without having physically seen, '... what immanent connections [bodies] forge with things and places, how they work, travel, fight, write, love ... become viscous, slow down, get into certain habits, into certain collectivities, like city, social stratum, or racial formation' (ibid., 19). Saldana privileges the encounter of phenotypical difference itself: not only bound to visual representation or historical significations of phenotypical difference, but phenotype experienced outside of or beyond the visual, or the haptic where the visual induces the sensation of touch. Presumably, the experiential of phenotypical difference is where the representational weight (of blackness, for instance) might actually rupture and defuse, rather than endlessly reify.

**Turban modernities**

It starts my identity and ends my identity. It kills a part of you to take it off.

(Brar forthcoming)

Is it not a strange thing to be so marked by an object which is limited in temporal terms, requires recreating on a daily basis and outside of the body of the wearer is simply three to five meters of cotton cloth, dyed in various shades?

(Kalra 2005, 75)

In the inaugural issue of *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, the first journal devoted to fostering a critical Sikh cultural studies that diverges from anthropological, sociological, theological and area studies approaches to the study of Sikhs and Sikhism, a mediation on turbans (known as paghs or paghdi) is proffered by British South Asian scholar Virinder Kalra. Arguing that the advent of Sikh modernity is contingent upon the turban being perceived as just another article of clothing, Kalra states that the turban is, after all, merely a piece of cloth, and an inability to grasp this simplicity renders Sikhs 'in some halfway house between tradition and modernity' because of the policing norm of a 'non-turbaned head' as well as the turban's enduring signification and fierce ties to tradition, eternally 'deferred from the time of the present' (Kalra 2005, 77), a tradition—modernity binary that is in effect produced as a religious—secular dichotomy. Asking if 'the pagh can become ... just an accepted dress of a modern person' through a 'rapprochement with the modern, a secular removal', or even become a 'fashion accessory' through redemptive consumer markets that now advocate a pliable modernity through the combination of jeans and turbans, such as in Turkey, Kalra avers, 'Something more is at stake than just the question of six yards of cloth. The question that is posed is ultimately whether a Sikh modernity is at all possible' (ibid., 82). Kalra rightly points to British colonial incorporation of turbaned Sikhs (a masculinity narrated against an effeminate Hindu masculinity) into military units, made possible through the oscillation of the turban as 'a mark of discipline and obedience' and
also as a trace of savagery and wildness, double significations delicately bound up in each other. British colonialism is therefore complicit with the fusing of the turban in the late nineteenth century with an emergent Sikh identity, one that is ironically mocked and vilified in contemporary Britain. 38

While the terms of this debate are of great importance, I want to turn from this predicament momentarily. Thinking turbans through assemblages allows us to exit this question of temporality that doggedly binds all cultural forms navigating the yesterday of tradition with the futurity of the modern, to instead inspire anew other temporal and spatial possibilities. For one, there is the fact of the daily ritual as it is repeated morning after morning, of selecting, tying, binding, pinning, folding, winding what might feel to be endless (certainly copious) amounts of cloth, altering on a rhythmic basis the color, form, and the context in which it is wrapped. The daily temporal frame therefore is actually operating differently in its relation to limits. Rather the repetition is key; it enables not only the repetition of the familiar and time-worn but also the becoming of something open to the future, the repetition with a difference. Each turban is unique; repetition is never the same. Each turban is tenuously held together, as the rigidity of coarse fabric fades through the day. Repetition is also open to huge variation over lifetimes as turbans are adopted, discarded, worn one day but not the next, used for special occasions, and further, used with unshorn as well as shorn hair. Thus the temporal life of turbans should not be defined primarily through longevity but rather through repetition, pacing, fluctuation, and lines of flight that always hold open the chance of a disruption of the exact terms of mimesis.

Reading turbans as appendages and prostheses postulates the turban as an extension of the body — usually considered a phallic extension or an extension of the phallus — or the body as an extension of the turban — taking for granted the body as whole, so that it corresponds exactly with the body-as-organism. This notion of this discrete organic body persists even in Massumi’s thinking. He presumes the discreteness of an organic body in relation to a ‘thing’:

What is a perceiving body apart from the sum of its perceivings, actual and possible? What is a perceived thing apart from the sum of its being-perceivings, actual and potential? Separately, each is no action, no analysis, no anticipation, no thing, no body. The thing is its being-perceivings. A body is its perceivings. ‘Body’ and ‘thing’ and, by extension, ‘body’ and ‘object’ exist only as implicated in each other... Body and thing are extensions of each other. They are mutual implications: co-thoughts of two-headed perception. That two-headed perception is the world. [next paragraph] Extensions. The thing, the object, can be considered prostheses of the body—provided that it is remembered that the body is equally a prosthesis of the thing.

(Massumi 2002, 95)

While there is a mutual relation here between body and thing, that mutual relation is contingent upon the clear and finite separation of the two entities. Further, the thing is assumed to be non-organic, without any force of its own, and only a thing of relevance insofar as it is a sum of its total being-perceivable: how the body perceives the thing is the thing itself. The body is apparently not a thing at all. The body perceives and the thing is perceived; the possibility of an inversion is not entertained. But what
if the thing perceives? Or if the body and thing perceive together, one-headed rather than two-headed perception? Or more pointedly, what if the enactment of this relation of perceiving to being-perceived then changes altogether this separation of perception? That is, what if perceiving and being perceived can no longer be separate processes, nor processes that act as extensions of each other? This would be one difference (among many) between appendage and assemblage — thinking of the turbaned man as a man with an appendage and thinking of the turbaned man as an assemblage that cuts through such easy delineations between body and thing, an assemblage that fuses, but also scrambles into chaotic combinations, turban into body, cloth into hair, skin, oil, pores, destabilizing the presumed organicity of the body. On assemblages, Deleuze and Guattari write:

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 88)

Even if the turban is indeed witnessed as an appendage that is the total of its being-perceived, it is often represented by the wearer as part of his or her body, and not as an appendage or thing that has properties and qualities separate from the body. The horizontal axis of ‘actions and passions’ between bodies reveals the ‘phenotypical encounters’ that Saldanha writes of, but also implodes bodies from within, shooting through and past bodily boundaries. Accomplice to this is the representation of the turban as ‘part of the body’.

The turban is thus always in the state of becoming, the becoming of a turbaned body, the turban becoming part of the body. In all its multiple singularities it has become a perverse fetish object — a point of fixation (one that is most certainly reproduced in this text) — a kind of centripetal force, a strange attractor through which the density of anxiety accrues and accumulates. For the wearer, the rituals and sensations attached to these parts of the body — the smells during the weekly starching of the linens, the stretching of yards of coarse fabric to induce some softening, the wrapping and pinning of the turban into place — these are experiences in the midst of becoming qualitatively different from before. Reworking Michael Taussig’s notion of ‘tactile knowing’ (Taussig 1993), May Joseph eloquently asserts, ‘For cultures whose forms of social knowledge have been fragmented and mutated by multiple experiences of conquest and cultural contact . . . tactile practices are difficult to read and contain multiple meanings. Such exchanges are frequently informal events intrinsic to everyday life through which cultural knowledge gets cited, transmitted or re-appropriated. The senses acquire texture’. As that which ‘immerses the senses beyond the structuring logic of vision and dislodges memory as the fascia of history’ (Joseph 2000, 46), tactile knowledges install normativizing traces of danger, fear, and melancholia into the bodies of racialized terrorist look-alikes. (Deleuze and Guattari warn against the use of the term ‘tactile’,
stating that it forces a divide between seeing and touching, preferring instead the term 'haptic' as one that 'invites the assumption that they eye itself may fulfill this nonoptical function of touching' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 492). However, I believe Joseph is using the term tactile congruently.) Tactile economies reassert ontological rather than epistemological knowing, and highlight touch, texture, sensation, smell, feeling and affect over what is assumed to be legible through the visible. Even within the study of 'human sensorium', as Rey Chow points out, seeing and hearing have been the privileged rubrics of analysis, 'dictating the representational issues being discussed' (Chow 1999, ii). (Thus any perceived dichotomy between affect and representation is manufactured, obscuring the question of which sensorial functions are centralized in representational practices and analyses.)

In the case of turbaned Sikh men, the notion of 'racist backlash' also invokes the temporal confinement of 'the return of the repressed', a scapegoating mechanism insinuating that previously submerged, and thus disciplined and conquered, racial hatred re-emerges during state and capitalist resource crises. Recall, however, that for Foucault, racism is not linked to scarcity theory nor is it an ideological project driven by notions of difference or contempt between races, a displacement of hostility, nor the production of the Other in order to consolidate the self, but rather is about the destruction of 'the enemy race'. Racism is thus endemic to the production of populations and the shifting and fuzzy demarcations between biopolitics and necropolitics, as well as multifarious ambiguous spaces we could call spaces of the deferral or deflection of death. As Foucault writes in 'Society Must be Defended', 'What in fact is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die' (Foucault 2003, 254). The separating out of groups into populations or those that exist within populations is, Foucault writes, 'the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum...'. (Foucault 2003, 255). Instead of body and event, a body that has suffered a traumatic event, we have instead Massumi's 'body-as-event', and the trauma of hate crime re-scripted as 'intensification': 'the best word for a complicating immediacy of self relation is intensity' (Massumi 2002, 14). Following Joseph again, memory (of trauma) is dislodged as the primary arbiter of remembering (and forgetting). This is a reading that can potentially be mobilized politically to address victim narratives of racism towards turbaned men that discount Sikh women's experiences of racism. The three domains of 'intensification' relevant for Sikhs—partition, Operation Bluestar and the pogroms following Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, and the terrorist acts of 2001—actually articulate 9-11 and subsequent bias attacks not as singular traumatic events or phenomena, but rather as an ongoing, non-linear process of collecting and discharging intensities.40

Furthermore, turban wearers, usually male, bear the burden of safeguarding and transmitting culture and of symbolizing the purity of nation typically ascribed to women. But this does not automatically or only feminize turbaned men — and here we are pressed to rethink race, sexuality, and gender as concatenations, unstable assemblages of revolving and devolving energies, rather than intersectional co-ordinates. Instead, the fusion of hair, oil, dirt, sweat, cloth, skin, the organic melding into the non-organic, renders a turban not as part of a queer body, nor as a queer part of the body, but as an otherwise foreign object acculturated into a
body’s intimacies between organic and non-organic matter, blurring the distinction between them, blurring insides and outsides, speaking to the fields of force — non-organic entities having force — in relation to and melded into the organic, the body and turban folding in on themselves, quite literally, as folds press against other folds, folds of cloth and skin. Massumi, on the body folding in on itself, writes: ‘A knitting of the brows or pursing of the lips is a self-referential action. Its sensation is a turning in on itself of the body’s activity, so that the action is not extended toward an object but knots at its point of emergence: rises and subsides into its own incipiency, in the same movement’ (Massumi 2002, 139).

It is this assemblage of visuality, affect, feminized position, and bodily disruption of organic-non-organic divides, the not-fully-organic not-fully-non-organic body, which accounts for the queer figuration of turban in the calculation of a hate crime. And this line of analysis does not even approach theological considerations of turbans, their significance, and affective realms of the divine, the spiritual, the ethereal, that inhabit turbans and that turbans inhabit. Additionally, according to religious tenets, practicing and baptized Sikhs do not cut, shave, or pluck their hair on any parts of their body, and body modification (piercings, tattoos) is also prohibited. The turban thus theologically signifies not a modification to an otherwise pure, intact body, but is rather part of a body that is left unmodified.

The curious undermining of the distinction between organic and non-organic entities that I am interested in affirming in turbaned bodies resonates with other bodies of our war times — the (female) suicide bomber, the burqua-ed figure (female? male passing for female?), the monstrous terrorist-fag, the activist crushed by a bulldozer in Palestine, the Iraqi civilians brutally tortured by American soldiers in Abu Ghaib, the oddly charismatic (sexy, even?) Osama bin Laden. The becomings of these bodies, many blurring the distinctions between machinic and organic, have disruptive and eruptive capacities.

Trapped by precisely these poles — tradition versus modernity — this frame enables a disavowal of turbaned sexualities by queer diasporic subjects seeking to approximate cosmopolitan status, as well as queer diasporic subjects seeking to embrace the illegitimate and perverse sexualities ascribed to terrorist bodies (again, the turban is almost too perverse). Further, it continues the preoccupation of Sikh communities with positive representation, even if in the USA the turbaned Sikh can perform, especially in middle-class communities, allegiance to modern American citizenship through religious faith and conviction, semblant of a commitment to Christian fundamentalism, rather than predominantly a secular identity that views the turban as simply a form of dress. The overdetermined reliance on narratives of visibility by all of these discourses — queer, Sikh respectability, and the state regulation of visible difference — both privileges an epistemological knowing over an ontological becoming, and foregrounds a process of panoptic racial profiling, disregarding other contemporary uses of profiling.

Racial and informational profiles

In a 2006 New Yorker article which contrasts the ‘profiling’ of pit bulls as dangerous, vicious and constitutionally violent dogs to the ‘profiling of terrorists, drug
smugglers, and other mobile, detectable criminals', Malcolm Gladwell describes the New York City Police Department policy against racial profiling as it was instituted by Raymond Kelly, New York City's police commissioner. A list of 42 suspicious traits was replaced with a list of six 'broad criteria': 'Is there something suspicious about their physical appearance? Are they nervous? Is there specific intelligence targeting this person? Does the drug-sniffing dog raise an alarm? Is there something amiss in their paperwork or explanations? Has contraband been found that implicates this person?' (Gladwell 2006, 42).

This is a shift from 'unstable generalizations' (race, ethnicity, gender, as well as what people do – arrived late at night, arrived early, arrived in the afternoon; first to deplane, last to deplane, deplaned in the middle) to 'stable generalizations' – how people seem. A patrolling of affect that changes the terms of 'what kind of person' would be a terrorist smuggling, recognizing that the terrorist (terrorist is brown versus terrorist is unrecognizable) could 'look' like anyone and 'do' just like everyone else, but might 'seem' something else. ('After Kelly's reforms, the number of searches conducted by the Customs Service dropped by about seventy-five percent, but the number of actual seizures improved by twenty-five percent' (Gladwell 2006, xx.).) But in the revised frame above, the ocular, affective, and informational are not separate power grids or spheres of control; rather, they work in concert – not synthetically, but as interfacing matrices.

On contemporary profiling practices and their historical antecedents, Horace Campbell states: 'The racial profiling and targeting of suspected terrorists in the United States brings the ideas and organization of yesterday's racial oppression in line with new technologies and the contemporary eugenics movement' (Campbell 2003, 31). Thus profiling is the extended modern, biotech version of eugenics (fugitive slave laws, sterilization laws and practices, Tuskegee experiments), while it also is extended by biotechnology, genetic engineering (cloning, stem cell research), viruses such as AIDS and Ebola (if not engineered in the lab as biological warfare experiments, the political responses to the AIDS pandemic certainly suggest genocide via neglect) (Campbell 2003). The profile, as a type of composite, also works, as Deleuze maintains, as a mechanism of information collection and analysis that tabulates marketing information, demographics, consumer habits, computer usage (cookies), public policy data, airplane passenger alerts, public intellectual and political activist blacklists. 41

And now to return to the turbaned body. So if the turban is not a hat, in the way skullcaps and hijabs are deemed to be religious hats, what is it? 'This ain't no rag, it's a flag,' begins a song by country musician Charlie Daniels, written in October 2001. 'And we don't wear it on our heads.' 42 Sikh advocacy groups received complaints that turbaned men were being asked to remove and unravel their turbans at airport security checkpoints to check for weapons; alternatives recommended by Sikh advocacy groups included using X-ray technology (sensor wand, X-ray machine) to scan the turbans. This scenario – how to monitor the turban and the body to which it is attached – reflects the joint operations of ocular, affective, and informational profiling. The turbaned body is not only available for disciplining, not only meant to enable internalization of the sense of being watched. On the effects of this internalization, Butler remarks, 'It's a kind of patrolling the phantasmatic Arab, on the streets and in the cities of the US. It strikes me as a way of defining
who is American, the ones who are on alert, watching, and the ones who are not, the ones who are watched, monitored. But this again is a singular model of discipline, one person watches and there are fixed locations, positions, distinctions between those who are watched and those who are not, those who watch. Of a biopolitical model of control, Deleuze writes: ‘Control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded, whereas discipline was long-term, infinite, and discontinuous’ (Deleuze 1997, 181). Insofar as racial profiling of the panopticon works to discipline the patriot, the informational profile works to accuse in advance of subject formation. The panopticon serves to isolate, centralize, and detain; the profile disperses control through circuits catching multiple interpenetrating sites of anxiety. As strategies of surveillance, the panopticon and the profile work simultaneously to produce the terrorist and the patriot in one body, the turbaned body. The panoptic and the profile work together, not synthetically (that is, I am not arguing here for a notion of synthesis of these differing technologies) but through interlocking layers of vulnerability that are produced and distributed in their wake.

The intimacy of the turban unwrapping and the intimacy of surveillance technology that X-rays the turban are bifurcated thus: the first produces the violated subject of regulation, the penetration of the sacred private, that hinges upon a liberal fantasy of bodily integrity, a projection of wholeness. We can say that part of the panoptic policing embedded in this submissive ritual of sorts is indebted to regimes of regulatory heteronormativity as well as regulatory homonormativity and even regulatory queerness; the turbaned body appears not amenable to any of these frames, yet rehabilitation is nevertheless attempted. The second, the turban departing on the conveyor belt, toppled slightly askew as it maneuvers entry into the X-ray apparatus, or the sensor wand that scans the fabric and folds, is part and parcel of affective population control that rewrites bodies and their intimacies as it surveilles them, the perception of intrusion diffuse rather than penetrative or focalized, multiple rather than singular. In either scenario, there remains through the duration of both the moment-to-moment shifting assemblages of turbaned, de-turbaned and re-turbaned as well as being de-turbaned and being re-turbaned bodies. We have multiple bodies here: the ‘body of excess’ that is constitutive of any reading that foregrounds the racial and sexual excesses of the visual, representational body (here, the gender of the turbaned body is given substance; the affective body (shifting from ‘turbaned man’ or ‘turbaned woman’ to ‘turbaned body’) whose transformations and transformative potentiality lies in its contagious, its energetic transmissions, that is, its affective capacity to affect (Rai 2006) the data or informational body cohered through digitalized bits. The body is both seen and seen through. The visual is expanded through a certain kind of transparency, not only by looking at the body, but by looking through it. The X-raying of the turban is a surveillance event that does not dismantle or disaggregate the coherent body bit by bit; rather, it is a rematerialization of the body, a splaying of the body across multiple registers that adumbrates the terms of intimacy, intensity, and interiority. Joining biometric procedures that capture the iris of the eye, the geometry of the hand, the gait of the walk, these digitizing informational and surveillance technologies of control both produce a data body or the body-as-information but also impact and transform the contours of the organic body through an interface of organic and non-organic mechanic technologies that tempt the mutual dissolution of their boundaries.
who is American, the ones who are on alert, watching, and the ones who are not, the ones who are watched, monitored’.43 But this again is a singular model of discipline, one person watches and there are fixed locations, positions, distinctions between those who are watched and those who are not, those who watch. Of a biopolitical model of control, Deleuze writes: ‘Control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded, whereas discipline was long-term, infinite, and discontinuous’ (Deleuze 1997, 181). Insofar as racial profiling of the panopticon works to discipline the patriot, the informational profile works to accuse in advance of subject formation. The panopticon serves to isolate, centralize, and detain; the profile disperses control through circuits catching multiple interpenetrating sites of anxiety. As strategies of surveillance, the panopticon and the profile work simultaneously to produce the terrorist and the patriot in one body, the turbaned body. The panoptic and the profile work together, not synthetically (that is, I am not arguing here for a notion of synthesis of these differing technologies) but through interlocking layers of vulnerability that are produced and distributed in their wake.

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In this economy of sight, to be able to ‘see’ the terrorist is not contingent upon the surveying of the entire body; rather the securitization that aims to make something visible to ensure its capture relies on an assemblage of subindividual capacities. These technologies of ‘attention that suspend certain assumptions in order to make others’, Massumi states, ‘perturb to make perceptible’ (Massumi 2006). Race and sex are re-read not only through the regulatory (i.e. resistant) queer subject, but through the regularizing of this rematerialization of the body. Pivotal here is the notion of capacity — in other words, the ability to thrive within and propagate the biopolitics of life by projecting potential as futurity, one indication of which is performed through the very submission to these technologies of surveillance that generate this data. Following Rey Chow, then, on her statement that biopolitics is implicitly about the ascendancy of whiteness, the terms of whiteness cannot remain solely in the realm of racial identification nor phenotype but extend out to the capacity of capacity: that is, the capacity to give life, sustain life, promote life — the registers of fertility, health, environmental sustainability, and the capacity to risk risk. Race and sex are thus not disposed of as analytic categories, but rather supplemented by their redefinition as the capacity to regenerate, identity categories working with the kinds of statistical racisms that see some populations as worthy of life and others as decaying, as destined for death. Optimizing the body entails oscillation between the subject of rehabilitation — an already cohered subject that can and must be represented — and populations of regeneration — forward looking, regenerative bodies that appear to have the capacity for capacity.

Thus it is not necessary to eliminate the turbaned man (as is implied in the French ban on head coverings), nor to sequester him — quite the contrary. Turbans function in multiple power sites of perpetual monitoring linked together to stimulate a continuous circuitry and regime of control, interconnected pathways of surveillance and discipline. The turban exists not as a closed site of differentiation, but rather among proliferating vectors of capture: at airport security, while driving or in a vehicle, in a detention cell, through driver’s license photos that disallow ‘hats,’ in a police force that bans wearing of turbans because of the official uniform hat, in a terrorist video game, through rapidly disseminated and repetitive Internet and media imagery. The mistake itself (making the mistake) of ‘mistaken identity’ must be available in multiple tactile economies, whether through the cut and paste of Photoshop, the simulacra of video games, the imprint of the replayed image of Sher Singh — not solely in terms of a representational space (positive versus negative images), but also in terms of speed, pace, repetition, and informational flows. What is at stake here is therefore is the repetition and relay of the ubiquitous images and less so their symbolic or representational meaning.

This is not to fixate or fetish the turbaned body (an enterprise pivotal to the coagulation of Sikh diasporas). In fact, my reading suggests the applicability of this analysis to all sorts of other bodies (the most obvious being the burka or veiled bodies, the hijab, but also all bodies engaged with technology, machinic assemblages) to destabilize the taken-for-granted assumption that the discursive body, however socially constructed it may be, is always already presumed to be a wholly discrete organic body. While this frame may still privilege bodies that are in some sense machined together, all bodies are to some extent machined: in this case the turban is not remarkable at all. We return, albeit obliquely, to the nexus of Sikh
modernity that Kalra proposes, one that calls for a neutralizing of the difference of turbans, ironically through the commodification of their purported alterity. But instead of being tagged as sporting just another fashion accessory, turbanned bodies join all other bodies in destabilizing the boundaries between organic and non-organic entities and forces. For LGBTIQ communities, it is this type of reading that can enable a rethinking of violence against queers and attendant strategies to combat hate crimes. It also encourages Sikh masculinities that transcend or refute a victim status, but without recourse to a muscular nationalism. Ultimately, queer and gurdwara organizing may open up creative political conjunctures that are not bound through identity politics but gel instead, in however transitory and contingent a way, through the politics of affect.

Acknowledgements


Notes

1 One of the most enduring images from the media jamboree of September 11, aside from the determined charging and ramming of planes and the perverse magnificence of the cascading towers, was that of a turbanned Sikh man being briskly hauled off of an Amtrak train at gunpoint by multitudes of police. Sher Singh was the first suspect arrested after 9-11, and the first casualty of a doctrine of civil liberties already compromised by racist and xenophobic logics. As Sher Singh describes it, on September 13 while on the train in Providence, Rhode Island, he was raided by policemen with ‘huge guns screaming profanity at me’ (as depicted in Brar forthcoming). His guilt was established by the mere coincidence of his travel itinerary and of course, because he looked like a terrorist. His turban, complemented by a profuse moustache and lengthy beard, played a pivotal role in validating his guilt. The media disseminated this image of Sher Singh compulsively and without regard to his Sikh identity, criminalizing the turbanned Sikh male body tout court and reactivating an older genealogical trail of the terrorist Sikh.

For a tracking of hate crimes against people presumed to be Muslim after the events of September 11, including a list of hate crimes that occurred during the week after state by state, see Janma.org 2001.

Sikhs also experience religious discrimination based on the wearing of kirpans, regardless of their gender. See Suan 1994; and Sikh Coalition n.d.b.

2 At the time, however, his death was not news; no photos of this turbanned Sikh man circulated on the television or in national print media; the New York Times reported his death on page A17 without comment. He remained largely faceless, and only due to the efforts of community-based organizations were the details of his death dispersed. His turban, of course, rendered him largely unimportant as a victim of post-9-11 racial backlash. Sodhi’s brother, Lakwinder, publicly stated, ‘My
brother was killed because of his turban and beard. When asked by reporters, 'What are you feeling about Americans?' Lakwinder Sodhi angrily responded by stating, 'Why are you asking me that? We are Americans also'. Sodhi's killing prompted a phone call from Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to G.W. Bush to 'ensure the safety of Sikhs living in the US'; CNN 2001. Investigative reporting details the movement of white supremacist groups into the Valley, the area where Sodhi was shot, a year prior to his death. Hate crimes in this region continue to escalate. Less than a year later, on 4 August 2002, Sukhpal Singh, another brother of Balbir Singh Sodhi, and a turbaned taxi driver in San Francisco, was also shot and killed while on the job; see Hanashiro 2002. Few know of the double deaths of these brothers. By the time of the second incident, hate crimes against turbaned Sikh men, the misrecognized/mistaken terrorist, had been neutralized and absorbed into the media sensationalism surrounding 9-11. For the responses of advocacy groups, see SMART 2003b; and Leonard et al. 2001.

Thomsen 2001. Roque also stated, 'I'm a patriot ... I'm a damn American all the way', according to Goodstein and Lewin 2001. In 2003, Roque was found guilty of murdering Sodhi and received the death penalty. He was also found guilty on charges of drive-by shooting, attempted first-degree murder and endangerment, and received an additional 36 years. In response to the judge asking if he had any comment, Roque stated: 'Just that I'm sorry that all this happened' (Associated Press State & Local Wire 2003).

The Garden State Sikh Association (GSSA) of Bridgewater, New Jersey, produced a series of public materials after the events of September 11, 2001. On September 14, 2001, they issued a press release that condemned the attacks and Osama Bin Laden. In response to media coverage of Bin Laden and the Taliban, they argued, 'What is unfortunate is that the images of the likely perpetrators have made suspects and victims of Sikh communities ... In the days following the attack, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, and anti-Sikh sentiments have steadily grown'. They call for 'the media, public advocates and politicians ... to be careful and accurate about the distinctions between various religious, national, and ethnic affiliations that are implicated in rhetoric about who is responsible for the bombings'.

The press release was followed by fliers which include one titled 'Our Fellow Americans and President Bush need our support to win the war against terrorism', an informational flier that includes 'SIKHs ARE FROM INDIA and have NO relation at all to OSAMA BIN LADEN or the TALIBAN', and a final flier that states 'Sikhs are not Muslims'. Despite the general opposition to hate crimes, GSSA materials clearly are invested in distancing Sikhs from Muslims and instead presenting them as deeply patriotic. The materials do not push for an analysis that acknowledges that one cannot assume a person's political allegiances based on characteristics such as religion, national and ethnic identities. (GSSA, 'Press Release,' September 14, 2001, on file with the author; GSSA, 'Our Fellow Americans and President Bush need our support to win the war against terrorism,' September 2001, on file with the author; GSSA, 'Post-September 11th Flier, n.d., on file with the author; GSSA, 'Flier; Sikhs are not Muslims,' n.d., on file with the author.)

The Sikh Media watch and Resource Task Force (SMART) responded with a press release, 'Sikh Americans Denounce the Terrorist Attack, Ask Americans to Unite' (SMART 2001a). Sikhs held vigils to mourn 9-11 in conjunction with the pogroms

Another tactic was the support of Sikh runners in the New York Marathon in 2003; see Newindpress 2003.

Initially the Indian government responded to violence against Sikhs using the phrase 'mistaken identity'; Parasuram 2001. While much of this 'damage control' colludes with Hindu nationalist agendas to discredit Muslims and Pakistani, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee was actually reprimanded by Sikh groups for both suggesting that women wear bindis in order to pass as Hindu and also for asking the US government to protect Sikhs against hate crimes while not mentioning the need to protect Muslim Americans. See Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART), Sikh-Sewa (NY), Sikh Youth Federation of North America, United Sikhs in Service of America, Sikh Heresy Regulation Board, Sikh Network, Sikh Sisterhood, and Columbia University Sikhs, 'Americans of Sikhs Extraction Caution Indian Prime Minister,' posting to Sikhupdates yahoo group, 19 September 2001, http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sikhupdates/message/773?viscount=100&l=1 (login required).


See SikhNet, Sikh America Association, Sikh Coalition, Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Taskforce (SMART), and the Sikh Communications Council, 'Sikhs Respond to Representative Saxby Chambliss Bigoted Comments', SikhNet, 22 December 2001, press release, Community, http://www.sikhnet.com/s/Chambliss; INTERNET. The organizations authoring the press release state: 'As Sikhs and as Americans, we are deeply distressed about the comments that Representative Saxby Chambliss made November 19th to a group of law enforcement officers in Valdosta, Georgia. He alluded to "turning the Sheriff loose to arrest every Muslim that crosses the state line". We in America look to our elected officials for responsible leadership and guidance.' SCORE describes itself in the following manner: 'Founded in 1998, the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), based in Washington, serves as a think tank and represents Sikhs in various forums and venues. Its leadership has been invited repeatedly to the White House, Congress and by various non-governmental organizations to present the Sikh perspective from its inception and most recently, since the September 11th tragedy. The Sikh Council fosters understanding through education and interfaith relations, promoting the concept of community and working to secure a just society for all'; Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), 'About Us', SikhCouncilUSA.org, n.d., http://www.sikhcouncilusa.org/page.aspx?tabname=About_Us.

See SikhNet 2001b. On December 11, three months to the day after the September 11 tragedy, Sikh leadership from across the United States and Canada gathered under the dome of US Capitol Building for the First Annual ‘One Nation United Memorial Program’ sponsored by the Washington-based Sikh Council on Religion and Education and included senators, members of Congress, government officials and top leadership from commerce, labor and the interfaith communities. This was the first event of its kind for the Sikh Community to host in Washington. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton stated: ‘We will always remember the sacrifices that were made by the Sikh Community in the wake of the terrible terrorist attacks of September 11. No community suffered greater loss as a reaction to the terrible losses’ of September 11. Leaders of Muslim, Arab, and Sikh communities met with Attorney General John Ashcroft on 16 October 2001 to voice their concerns about hate crimes; see Frieden 2001.

For a summary of the work of the Sikh American Alliance, a collaboration between SCORE, the Sikh Coalition, the Sikh Communications Council, and SMART, see Pradhan 2002, 79–94. Pradhan reports that the ‘Decreasing Hate by Increasing Awareness’ campaign had a three-pronged plan: improving community relations (participating in prayers, vigils, relief efforts, and interfaith dinners); producing public relations materials for the media (press releases, educational videos); and creating stronger liaisons with governmental officials (meeting with the Departments of Transportation and Justice, inviting politicians to commemorative events).

See SikhNet’s ‘Attack on America’, SikhNet 2001a; SMART, ‘SMART initiates airport educational campaign, requests community involvement’, SALDEF.org [or SikhMediaWatch.org], posted date url (access date; printout on file with author); SMART, ‘SMART encourages community members to educate local airport security personnel about Sikhs’, SALDEF.org [or SikhMediaWatch.org], posted date url (access date; printout on file with author). Stating that many cases of ‘turban-removal have occurred at small or mid-size airports’ like Raleigh-Durham, Albany, and Phoenix, but also at larger airports such as JFK, SMART urges Sikhs to initiate educational forums for security personnel and airline employees about turbans and Sikhism and has developed presentations and other resources for this purpose. See also http://www.Sikhnets.com, Monday, 19 November 2001: ‘Federal aviation administration to ensure new security procedures that preserve and respect the civil rights of all Americans’. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued a set of directives detailing methods for conducting airport security, based upon information presented to FAA by the Sikh Coalition and other Sikh organizations (SCORE, Sikh Communications, SMART and USSA) ‘about the racial profiling that has caused turban-wearing Sikh-Americans to be denied air transportation while being publicly humiliated and embarrassed’. 'This kind of treatment to loyal Americans makes many feel humiliated, naked in public, victimized and most important, unwelcome in the country that many of us were born in,’ said Harpreet Singh, Director of Community Relations of the Sikh Coalition. 'It is especially upsetting since terrorists take great pains to wear typical American clothing in order to not stand out. We are grateful that the FAA has taken such a firm stand against this type of racial profiling as it is against
everything America and Americans stand for.' See also: Sikh Coalition n.d.d, n.d.f, n.d.g; SMART 2001c; Shonon and Toner 2001; SikhWomen.com 2002.

Distancing mechanisms from Osama bin Laden and all else that threatens to tarnish the model-minority image involve recourse to middle-class professionalism, benign multicultural patriotism, and heteronormativity. In this regard, Gayatri Gopinath writes: 'The Bollywood boom ... incorporates South Asians into the US national imaginary as pure spectacle to be safely consumed while keeping intact their essential alieness and difference; such incorporation holds safely at bay those marginalized noncitizens who function under the sign of terrorist and "enemy within"' (Gopinath 2005, 162). It is worth mentioning the class and religious particulars of this stratification: the contemporary tensions between the Bollywood version of South Asian diaspora (the model minority gone global, as in the figure of the NRI [Non-Resident Indian]) and the Sikh/Muslim terrorist version (underpinned by representations of working-class populations – taxi drivers, gas station workers, Indo-Caribbean immigrants) are emblematic of a new articulation of an older dynamic: the increasing polarization of model-minority diasporic populations and discourses from those who may complicate or contaminate such discourses. Through this polarization we see increasing public and political paranoia regarding Sikhs, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Muslim Indians paralleled by amplified forms of US exceptionalism and escalating conservatism of the model minorities able to enact these exceptionalisms. Sikhs and Muslims, hyper-visible because of the hijab and the turban, test the ambivalence of model minority ideologies and signal their unflattering excess.

In the early 1990s, the term 'rag-heads' was already being used in the Northwest USA to refer to turbaned men, mainly Sikhs. In 1907, hundreds of white workers rioted in Bellingham, Washington, 'stormed makeshift Indian residences, stoned Indian workers, and successfully orchestrated the non-involvement of local police' (Shukla 2003, 33-4). Some Sikhs evicted from Bellingham settled in Everett, Washington, where they were subsequently driven out in another riot (Hess 1998, 109-10). On the violence in Everett and Bellingham, also see Takaki 1989, 297. The online exhibit *Echoes of Freedom* contains an image of a 28 January 1910 *New York Times* article, titled 'Hindus Driven Out: Citizens at Marysville, Cal. Attack Them – British Consul Informed', briefly describing an attack on 70 'Hindus', which drove them out of Marysville; The Library, University of California, Berkeley, *Echoes of Freedom*, http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/echoes/chapter4/chapter4.html. See also Street 2004, 481–9, for an account of tensions between Punjabi and Japanese laborers.

On tensions between Hindu and Sikh communities in Canada after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984 and the downing of Air-India flight 182 in 1985, see Martin 1985. On the reaction against Sikhs in the USA after the Air-India explosion, see Howe 1985, which quotes Jagjit Singh Mangat, President of the Sikh Cultural Society, as saying, 'we have been dubbed as terrorists'. On the backlash after the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979, see Chhibber n.d., which quotes Surinder Singh of Atlanta: 'I had cut my hair, but kept my beard after the Iran hostage situation when I was heckled everywhere'.

14 See Susan Koshy’s work on the history of South Asian American exceptionalism, such as ‘Morphing Race into Ethnicity’ (2001).
15 Atif Toor, interview by author, New York City, July 2004. Atif Toor has been a SALGA organizer since 1990.
16 As the ‘India Shining’ project launches the normative upper-cast Hindu northern Indian subject as an economic, cultural and cosmopolitan player on the global scene, national Indian queerness, a liability at home in relation to Hinduva politics, is a form of cultural capital, however tenuous, in the global consumer market and human rights and NGO arenas. That is, Hindu Indian queerness, as an identity paradigm indebted to modernity, works in the service of consolidating normative Indian modernity, both in the homeland and its diasporas. This is especially true, for example, with Indo-Caribbean populations who historically and contemporarily function as ‘disavowed modernity’ (see Niranjan 2006). If Indo-Caribbean populations in the USA (most predominantly New York and Miami) are already marginalized by dominant South Asian model minority prototypes, South Asian queer diasporic formations that leave their own Hindu-centric dynamics and representations uninterrogated may in fact enhance these dominant forms as opposed to being excluded from them as is usually assumed.
17 Interviews with current and former SALGA members reveal that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment is and has been alive in the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association’s (SALGA) membership. We now have right-wing Bharat Janata Party (BJP) supporters who refuse to march in the India day parade or the gay pride parade if there are signs condemning communal violence, specifically of the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, are present in the parades.
18 In the early 1900s, turbaned Punjabi Sikhs constituted the majority of the first immigrants from India to arrive in numbers in the USA, working primarily on railroads, lumber mills, and farms in California, Oregon, and Washington. While initial press on these newly arrived laborers described them as Sikhs, they were rapidly assimilated into the lexicon of US immigration racial categorization, despite a burgeoning separatist Sikh identity emerging in India at this time (this is documented in the documentary Roots In the Sand [prod. and dir. Jayarsi Mujamdar Hart]). Renamed ‘Hindoo’, a term meaning ‘from Hindustan’, Sikhs were simultaneously transfigured into the representative Indian majority, Hindus, as well as abnegated precisely through the difference from Hindus they sought to embody. Turbans, specifically Sikh turbans, proactively and intentionally mark a distinction from Hindus, who do not wear turbans (exceptions include events such as weddings). During partition, turbans were a primary factor in distinguishing Hindu from Sikh from Muslim.
20 The Third case must also be read within the context of a number of immigration rulings at the time, including the Asiatic Barred Zone (created by the Immigration Act of 1917), a number of other citizenship petitions by Asians (including Takao Ozawa v. United States, ruled in 1922 and brought by a Japanese man, In re Mohan Singh in 1919, In re Sadar Bhagwab Singh in 1917, In re Akhay Kumar Mazumdar in 1913, and United States v. Ali in 1925) and the decline of the revolutionary Gadhav movement that sought to overthrow British colonialism in India. Further, as Nayan Shah’s research on the policing and prosecution of sodomy indicates, there were growing anxieties attached to the masculinities and sexualities of Asian migrants, specifically ‘Hindu sodomites’ who were often seen to be
preying on white youth. Shah’s research on the court cases of Arjun Singh, Jamil Singh, Rola Singh, and Keshw Singh reviews the descriptions that police gave of the apparently sexual positions in which these men were discovered, without mention of turbans; it is unclear if that signals their absence or if they were so prominent as to be a given attribute; see Shah 2005, 703–25.

We can read the Third case, then, as an instance where the ocular-specular is hailed, but the recourse to ‘resemblance’ is really about ‘common sense’, ‘instinct’, or ‘something everybody knows’.

Finally, the slippage from Sikh to Hindu, while initially appearing semantic, is actually the foreshadowing of post-1965 model minority discourses and how and who those discourses exclude and include. That is to say, among South Asian populations, the normative Hindu has come to personify the idealization of the model-minority construct. While this can correctly be ascribed to structural factors such as economics, immigration patterns, and the consolidation of bourgeois immigrant family models, the undertheorized variable is simply that Sikhs and Muslims look and feel different. This point has been driven home during the Gulf War in 1991 but most recently and vigorously in a post-9-11 racial climate of scapegoating. An especial irony is the global celebration of ‘Desi-ness’, not only through the skyrocketing popularity of Bollywood film, but also through fashion, food, lifestyle, and the lauding of India’s technological-industrial presence (though increasing vexed by resistance to job outsourcing). These issues form the composite framing of India Shining. Complemented by the consolidation of the Hindu right in India and its burgeoning business and political relationships with the USA (and less overtly, Israel), the Bollywood film industry often represents Sikh characters as infantilized, idiotic comic relief or as pathologically violent and hypermasculine, despite the prominence of Punjabi Bhangra music. The erotic charge of the turban is also a focal point of Bollywood films such as Ghadhar, whereby the most sensual and sexually suggestive scene in the movie is during the slow languorous wrapping of the turban on the protagonist’s head by his wife. Mission Kashmir is one example of a Bollywood treatment of the emasculated Sikh: a lone Sikh soldier is trepidacious about jumping off a platform that rests atop planted explosives for fear of setting them off. Eventually, he urinates on himself while other non-Sikh Indian soldiers assist him in jumping. Amit Rai has argued that, in Mission Kashmir, the Islamic terrorist is ‘an infection moving through the body politic’ (Rai 2003). Adult Sikh characters frequently are depicted with the patka, a garment for underneath the turban, which is typically worn by boys until they reach adulthood. The movie The Legend of Bhagat Singh has also been criticized for ignoring Singh’s apparent re-embrace of Sikhism in the later years of his life.

Sikh turbans function as an ambivalent signifier of inclusion and expulsion, marking both the incorporation of Sikhs into the Indian nation and the violence inflicted upon them through this incorporation. There is of course a complex history that ties Sikh communities to the discourse of terrorism. As is well known, the Indian state throughout much of the 1980s was involved in a massive ideological labor as well as bloody police repression that sought to mark off Sikh groups in Punjab and in the diaspora as in fact terrorist, and to contain the movement for Khalistan (a separatist Punjab). This history positions Sikh identity in an ambivalent relationship to the current war on terrorism: on the one hand, Sikhs in India and in
the diaspora, especially gurdwara communities, face severe repercussions from the USA PATRIOT Act; on the other hand, their self-positioning as both victims of state-sponsored terrorism (for example, of the 1984 riots in New Delhi) and, as American patriots, victims of the 'Islamic' terrorism of 9-11 simultaneously invokes a double nationalism — Sikh and American nationalisms. OMB Watch claims: 'The “USA PATRIOT Act” (PL 107-56) could pose big problems for non-profits, especially those that advocate changes in US foreign policy or provide social services to individuals that become targets of government investigations. The central problem is a vague, overbroad definition of a new crime, “domestic terrorism”. In addition, greatly expanded search and surveillance powers can be invoked under a lowered threshold, requiring only that investigators assert that information sought is relevant to a foreign intelligence investigation' (OMB Watch 2001).

For praise of the Patriot Act by Sikh organizations, see Sikh Coalition n.d.c. (This press release was also posted to the discussion board of www.sikhnet.com by the site's creator, Gurumukh Singh Khalsa ["President and Congress sign into law support for Sikh Americans", posting to SikhNet: The Discussion Forum, 31 October 2001, http://www.sikhnet.com/Sikhnet/discussion.nsf/SearchView/3F004F23EA3FA7787256AF7001483731OpenDocument]. Khalsa augments the press release, writing, 'Congratulations! As a result of your efforts the House and Senate Resolutions were included in the Patriot Act, approved in the House and Senate, and signed into law by the President of the United States!') The press release reads, in part: 'S.Con.Res.74 and H.Res.255 condemn crimes against Sikh Americans in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks and state acts of violence against Sikh Americans are to be prevented and prosecuted . . . "This law represents a significant milestone for Sikh Americans as it addresses the unique nature of the issues faced by Sikhs in the aftermath of September 11th, and calls for protection of our civil liberties, along with those of all Americans," said Gurpreet Singh Dhillon, Advisory Board member of the Sikh American Association.' (About the Sikh Coalition: "The Sikh Coalition was started as an effort to educate the greater North American community on Sikhs and Sikhism, the coalition seeks to safeguard the rights of all citizens as well as to promote the Sikh identity and communicates the collective interests of Sikhs to the community at large. The coalition serves as a resource for all organisations and individuals as well as a point of contact to Sikh people."

24 An example of an exception was the Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (ASATA), which states, 'As South Asians, we stand in solidarity with communities of color, including Middle Eastern/West Asian communities (Afghans, Arabs, Arab-Americans, Iraqis, and Iranians), rather than trying to distance ourselves from them in order to secure safety. We also recognize that many South Asians are Muslim, and deserve to be free from prejudice and discrimination as Muslims' (ASATA 2001).

25 See KRAC.com 2001. The perpetrator, John Lucas, turned himself in, stating that he committed these acts out of 'senseless patriotism' after Sikhs did not lower the flag at the gurdwara. Lucas stated: 'I didn't understand it was a religious flag. I thought it was a village flag. I didn't understand why it couldn't be lowered for those who died'. The newsreport includes the following description of his activities: 'Investigators said that Lucas, in an act of defiance, also jumped into a pond of holy water at the temple — water transported all the way from India.'


Other early incidents included the fatal shooting of Adel Karas in San Gabriel (Associated Press State & Local Wire 2001; in St. Petersburg, Florida, a hijab-wearing woman driving home had her car beaten with baseball bats; a mosque in Ohio was rammed into by a car; a 66-year-old turbaned Sikh man was beaten by four youths with a baseball bat outside a Sikh gurdwara in Queens, NY (Bishnoi 2002); a Pakistani storeowner was shot dead in Dallas, Texas (IslamOnline & News Agencies 2001). Additional reporting includes: Bradford 2001; CNN.com 2001; Mangat 2001; Naim 2001 (includes 'IMPORTANT Message to All NetIP North American Officers and Members'); Nanda 2001; Purewal 2001.

For a collection of reported hate crimes that occurred in the first month after September 11, 2001, see Hamad 2001. Actions described include: throwing bags of blood at an immigration office and law office in San Francisco, California; attempting to run a Muslim woman off the road in St. Petersburg, Florida; attacking, robbing and cutting the penis of an Indian man in Fort Wayne, Indiana; leaving a mutilated squirrel and note in a mailbox, Minneapolis, Minnesota; beating a woman on her way to prayer in Memphis, Tennessee; and numerous fire bombings. The previous list is clearly not exhaustive, and activities range from various forms of verbal harassment and physical violence aimed at people and places assumed to be connected to Muslims and/or Arabs, to loss of employment and racial profiling.

As a logical amplification of the Terrorism Information and Prevention System (TIPS), for example, hate crimes work on behalf of the nation-state by sanctioning a policing mechanism that the liberal multicultural state itself cannot openly propagate. It thus works towards the benefit of the state to condemn racial hate crimes on one hand while instituting growing measures for racial profiling on the other. Pleading for tolerance, 'President' George W. Bush visited Arab American mosques and Muslim and Sikh community forums (in part to shore up US alliances with conservative Arab regimes) during the same week that he initiated passage of the Anti-Terrorism Act, now known as the USA PATRIOT Act; see Milbank and Wax 2001. His opponent in the 2004 presidential campaign, Senator John Kerry, publicly linked Sikhs to terrorism. Kerry apologized under pressure from US Sikh groups; see United News of India 2004.

Richard A. Gephart released a statement that stuck to a message against violence, and referenced the 'shameful mistake of putting Japanese-Americans in internment camps where they were stripped of their rights, their dignity, their possessions' during World War II; Gephart 2001.

The US National Visa Registry for the Green Card Lottery Scheme, for example, requires a photo of the applicant who must not be wearing a hat or head covering. British resident Harjit Singh had his application returned to him because in his picture he was, of course, wearing his turban. The National Visa Registry wrote: 'NO covering on/around the head is permitted (in the ones you sent, you were wearing a hat, which is NOT permitted)'. The new photo requirements, which also state that the applicant may not be wearing a 'religious covering on the
face', were purportedly authorized by the US State Department in August 2001, one month before the 9-11 attacks. Harjit Singh explains it thusly to the Registry: 'As is the crown to sovereign, so is a turban to a Sikh... For a Sikh the turban is the frontier of faith and unbelief. It is deemed to give the Sikh dignity, consecration, and majestic humility'. The Registry responded to Singh's explanation of the religious significance of the turban by again requesting a photo without the turban, stating that 'there are many here who do understand the difference, not only between the two faiths, but between those of any faith who advocate the use of violence, and those who do not... Please do not think the requirement is related to the incident of September 11th'. In Alabama, a post-9-11 policy which stated that no head coverings of any kind could be worn when taking a driver's license photo, thus prohibiting hijabs, turbans, and nun habits, was repealed in February 2004, after a campaign by the American Civil Liberties Union in Alabama in conjunction with local Sikhs; see Rawls 2004. A similar problem was faced by Chitratan Singh when he attempted to get a driver's license; see Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) 2002.

Struggles over whether or not turbans (and to some extent, at least in terms of reporting, head coverings) are appropriate workwear included those serving in the military and police. See Sikh Coalition n.d.a; Gardiner 2002; Donohue 2004; Jewett 2004; Purnick 2004.

For example, the US Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs released an educational video accompanied by curriculum materials, titled Terrorism: A War Without Borders; 15,000 copies were distributed to middle and high schools throughout the country. In this first effort by the State Department to disseminate information about terrorism to students, Sikhs are categorically called terrorists - Sikh terrorists (there is no naming of right-wing Christian or Muslim terrorism) - and the 1984 occupation of the Golden Temple (Darbar Sahib) in Amritsar, India, is portrayed as a siege by Sikh terrorists. As with the other terrorist acts highlighted - including the Oklahoma City bombing and 1997 Hamas suicide bombing - the complexities of the 1984 incident and the Khalistan movement are smoothed over, and Indian state terrorism unmentioned. However, the video highlights the delicate balance for diasporic Sikhs who must inhabit a split identity - terrorist in India, patriot in America. Sikh advocacy groups failed to convince the State Department to revise the video, but more significantly, in their responses they were unable to portray the conundrum of this liminal, straddled position. See US Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs 2002; Kaur and The Sikh Sentinel 2003; and Khalsa 2003.

A lingering query that underscores this difference: Why is the turban exempt, for now, from the French ban on religious head coverings, intended for Islamic head-scarves, Jewish yarmulkes, and large Christian crosses? While Sikhs have been arbitrarily asked to remove turbans - for example, when Jagmohan Singh was asked to take off his turban in order to enter a Paris government building in January 2004 - French Education Minister Luc Ferry stated that turbans would be allowed provided they are 'invisible'. This has been interpreted by French Sikhs to mean that Sikhs would be allowed to wear a hairnet as a substitute, thus effectively invisibilizing the turban (R.Z. Ahmed 2004). Shortly prior to this comment, Ferry stated that the veil is 'a militant sign that calls for militant counter-signs', while the turban, if allowed to remain 'discreet', would not be a problem (see Sciolino 2004).
From Frantz Fanon's 'Algeria Unveiled' (which names women as the lynchpin of the nation), to the 'Women's Question' foregrounded in Indian anti-colonial and decolonizing movements (Partha Chatterjee argues that women uphold the inner domestic space of spirituality, culture, tradition and home; men are the outward faces of modernity), women's bodies have been liminal demarcations of inside and outside, tradition and modernity, in terms of physicality (clothing, hair, veiling, modesty, rituals), behavior (chastity, heterosexual conformity, reproduction), and symbolism (myths, 'mother tongue', territory/land). Cultural nationalism in these feminist accounts is reliant on a heterosexual matrix of sex (biology)/gender (subjectivity)/desire (sexuality): male is masculine and desires female, female is feminine and desires male (Butler); all that deviates is pathological. In the case of Sikhs, although women are expected to keep their hair unshorn, men embody the most visible vehicles of cultural adherence or betrayal. See Fanon 1965; Chatterjee 1990.

Cross-faith and interfaith dialogues are part of this mission; see IndiaExpress Bureau 2002.

For example, a documentary, Mistaken Identity: Sikhs in America is billed as a film that shows 'a white American, the young student Amanda Gesine, trying to demystify the enigma of Sikh Americans while sharing the hopes and desires of Americans from all ethnic backgrounds who seek to close ranks against bigotry and hatred. Amanda plays the host and investigative journalist in a search to discover her Sikh American neighbours'. Here, Sikhs are made out to be exotic creatures devoid of any modernist traits; a sense of their 'enigma' speaking to orientalist fantasies. In short, the mistaken identity line of reasoning articulates a fantasy about cultural difference that behaves as if racism did not exist (see Asiana in Media 2004).

Massumi adds: 'Call that "something recognizable" a quality (or property) (Massumi 2002, 60–1).

Interestingly, all three authors - Butler, Ahmed, and Saldanha - read Fanon's work in order to make their divergent arguments. Perhaps pending then is some thought on the potential of a re-reading of Fanon through Massumi's work (or better yet, a re-reading of Massumi through Fanon's work).

On the history of British colonial fascination with Sikh turbans, see Axel 2001, especially 'The Maharaja's Glorious Body' (39–78) on the travels to Britain of Maharaja Duleep Singh, the 'last Sikh ruler of Punjab' (39). Axel traces the emergence of the Sikh subject, in the mid-to-late nineteenth century within the 'colonial scene of surrender'(41), marked predominantly by the visual identification of a Sikh male turbaned body (42). This visual recognition produces the Sikh turbaned male as a regulatory figure that posits the turbaned male Sikh as the Sikh subject par excellence yet simultaneously produces this subject as 'a figure of subjection to the [British] Crown' (49). As the 'image of the male Sikh body became increasingly translocal' (63), Axel's historical analysis demonstrates the cleaving and collapsing of various male Sikh bodies - sardars, Amritdharis, and the tortured body.

On racial melancholia, see Eng and Han 2003, 343–71.

Sikhs, in particular men, have become the fodder for renewed anti-Sikh sentiment even from purportedly progressive factions of South Asian communities. South Asian novelist Bharati Mukherjee, both noted for her deplorable generalizations about non-Hindus as well as acclaimed as for her portrayals of immigrant acculturation (as appears, for example, in Jasmine [1989]), claimed in an interview
on 2 May 2003 with Bill Moyers that Sikhs had established ‘sleeper terrorist cells’ across the United States and Canada; Mukherjee 2003. Her efforts to transpose the anxiety attached to the vocabulary of terror of the al-Qaeda network are bolstered by her accusation later in the interview that since 9-11, Sikhs have been conducting terrorist fund-raising efforts in mosques on a transnational scale. In this puzzling conflation of Sikh temples of worship with Muslim mosques, Mukherjee’s outrageous statements would be hilarious if she were not considered such an exemplar of model-minority discourses, her novels being immensely and widely popular among South Asian American and (white) liberal readers. Her conduct is consistent of course with her literary depictions of Punjabi Sikhs, Sikh men in particular, as militant religious fanatics, inherently violent, hyper-masculine, ‘lecherous, dirty, and uncultured, especially when they [drink] drank, and they [drink] drank all the time’ (see Wife, as one case in point); in contrast, the Hindu male subject masquerades as the secular subject, as the central, indeed paradigmatic Indian subject (Mukherjee 1975). The Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) responded to the interview by writing a letter to Moyers, stating: ‘In fact, the Sikh community harbors no enmity towards the United States or Canada, nor are Sikhs raising money for any terrorist campaigns. There are no Sikh “sleeper terrorist cells”; SMART 2003a. This example demonstrates the intricately bound natures of Hindu and American nationalisms: the most rigorous refutation of Hindu nationalism can best (and perhaps only) be achieved through an announcement of loyalty and allegiance to the USA. For the feminized turban-wearer, the convergence of vitriolic US heteronormative patriotism and the deepening entrenchment of Hindu nationalist politics both in India and the diaspora render Sikhs and Muslims doubly vulnerable. The online transcript of the interview is now preceded by a statement stating that an ‘editing error’ resulted in ‘misunderstanding and confusion’, and that Mukherjee did not wish to imply ‘that she believes that Sikhs were involved in fundraising activities in support of the terrorism activities of 9/11’. This change to the transcript, which inserts ‘[Muslim terrorists] into the interview before Mukherjee’s claims about terrorist fundraising, is the result of SMART’s activities; see SMART 2003c.

41 As such, the Third case foreshadows, through its disciplinary apparatus, the proliferation of detention technologies; indeed, the spaces of citizenship inclusion offered through liberal multicultural model minority discourses operate both as spaces of dissent and extensions of hyper-visible detention cells — that is to say, detention is no longer only a disciplinary apparatus of isolation but rather most insidiously distributed control within the public sphere. Thanks to Amit Rai for a synthesis of citizenship as a form of detention.

42 Turbaned individuals in multicultural America have often been referred to as ‘towelheads’ and ‘ragheads’; US Congressman James Cooksey (R-LA) called them ‘diapers’ (see McKinney 2001). See also SMART 2001b, where SMART initiates a national letter writing and telephone campaign protesting Cooksey’s remarks. ‘SMART was founded in 1996 to promote the fair and accurate portrayal of Sikh Americans and the Sikh religion in American media and society, the Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership based organization. Its mission is to combat bigotry and prejudice, protect the rights and religious freedoms of Sikh Americans, and provide resources that empower the Sikh American community.’
Butler, interview.

As an example: In Hitman 2: Silent Assassin, a video game released in 2002 by Eidos Interactive, Sikh and Dalit characters are teamed together to battle against a western hero. The orientalist video game takes the player to Punjab, India, where one site of bloodshed is a Sikh temple of worship, a gurdwara. (‘A magnificent, ancient gurdwara [Sikh temple] – complete with marble inlays, glazed tiles, filigree partitions, priceless old wall paintings and gold domes – is flanked by a qila [old fort] and protected by high walls as well as fanatical believers – in front, a maze of small shops and bangalas [small houses] gives evidence of riches and prosperity in this otherwise poverty stricken remote region of Punjab in Northern India. Relentless loos [hot dry winds that blow across the plains of North India during summer] keep this little oasis isolated from the outside world. A Sikh uprising in this region in the mid 80s was ruthlessly cracked down on by government issued troops, and many innocents were killed – ever since, no outsider has dared venture into this territory for fear of reprisals’ [quoted in SikhNet 2002].)

What the video game enables goes far beyond the representational dilemma addressed by Sikh advocacy groups, who argue that violence begets violence, and ‘negative’ media representation must be eradicated and supplanted with educational representation. The Sikh Coalition writes: ‘Hitman 2 sends messaging to youth engaged with the game plot that killing people who look different and killing in general is a celebrated value in today’s society. These dangerous notions perpetuate intolerance amongst people in a very multicultural global village’ (Sikh Coalition n.d.e). However, in effect the simulation of terrorist warfare allows for an extension of the counter-terrorism imaginary, a production of the docile patriot as indispensable to the war on terrorism not simply through the forces of disciplinary surveillance but through combat and attack itself, beyond postmodern time–space compression, through the collapsing of speed, time, place, virtual and material corporealities. As many critical theorists have argued, these images do not simply do the work of representation – reflection and reproduction – but they also function as weapons of war, as intrinsic to the very perpetuation, experience, and maintenance of war (see Butler 1992, 11; Mitchell 2001). It is through this activity of simulated death that the bias crime perpetrator’s alibi of ‘mistaken identity’ is revealed as fallacious. This experience of the game is supported through proliferating technologies of voyeuristic participation – where Hollywood, the Internet, blogs, CNN, airplane simulations, terrorist rap videos, Photoshopped cartoon strips all engage in verisimilitudes of absence and presence, pretenses and concealments, and have been developed in tandem with media technologies used in military combat: GIS, satellite surveillance photography, radar, sonar, electronic battlefield, military training simulations – for example, airplane simulators such as F-Stealth, Apache; videogames such as Battlefield 1942; see also the simulation by Gonzalo Frasca, September 12th: A Toy World, NewsGaming.com, www.newsgaming.com/games/index12.htm. In what Horace Campbell names the ‘armaments culture’, this co-joining of the entertainment industry and military establishments has deep roots: military consultants are used for the film and television industries to ‘simulate situations that emotionally tie citizens to the ideology and practices of militarism’; corporate alliances between the Pentagon, Hollywood, and Silicon Valley abound; Campbell 2003, 28. See also Parenti 1992; Der Derian 2001;
also see the Information Technology, War and Peace Project, InfoTechWarPeace, www.infopeace.org. Indeed, the language of video simulation, the target that is the ‘blip on the screen’, is part and parcel of the vernacular of the military.

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