"Model Minority" or Potential Terrorist? Affective Economies, Rhetorics of Silence & the Murder of Sunando Sen

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There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things. . . . There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.

–Michel Foucault[1]

Introduction

On December 27, 2012, a Hindu Indian-American named Sunando Sen was pushed to his death from the 40th Street/Lowery 7-train station in Queens, New York, by Erika Menendez, who said she killed him in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks. This attack is part of a 12-year history of retaliatory violence; in the week following 9/11 alone, there were 645 "bias incidents and crimes specifically aimed at people of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent,"[2] and by early

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[1] Quoted in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Axiomatic," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michelle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 246.

[2] Palash Ghosh, "South Asians in America: Ten Years After 9-11," *International Business Times*, June 15, 2011, accessed October 1, 2013, http://www.ibtimes.com/south-asians-america-ten-years-after-9-11-290945#

2002, over one thousand incidents of violence were documented.[3] The FBI reported in 2010 that hate crimes motivated by 9/11 had risen 50% that year, and in 2012, assaults continued, the most public of which was the Oak Creek, Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting, where six people were killed and four were wounded.[4]

Figure 1: Sunando Sen's passport photo[5]

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[3] Leti Volpp, "The Citizen and the Terrorist," *Immigration & Nationality Law Review* 23.561 (2002): 1580, accessed October 1, 2013, http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/facpubs/515. This violence targeted "homes, businesses, mosques, temples, and gurdwaras," and individuals were attacked with "guns, knives, fists, and words" (pp. 1580-81).

[4] Deepa Iyer, "Safe Communities Start with Each of Us," *The Huffington Post*, January 7, 2013, accessed September 15, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deepa-iyer/safe-communities-start-wi_1_b_2426370.html

[5] Annie Robbins, "After Islamophobic Hate Crime in New York City, Mayor wants Public to 'Keep Death in Perspective,'" *Mondoweiss: The War of Ideas in the Middle East*, December 29, 2012, accessed October 15, 2013, http://mondoweiss.net/2012/12/after-islamophobic-perspective.html (attributed to Christie M. Farriella, *New York Daily News*).

As the statistics indicate, Sen's murder is far from an isolated event. Though this study focuses on only one out of thousands of similar attacks, it models a type of analysis that is exigent in the post-9/11 U.S. In light of the continued vigilante violence, there is a need to understand the mechanisms by which Sen was constructed as a target of fear, anger, and hatred. Furthermore, Sen's attack must be considered in light of the history of Indian-American deracialization, which is linked to the "model minority" trope—an "intermediary" racial location "between black and white"[6] that conceals a long history of racialization of Asian ethnicities and nationalities in the United States, most recently following 9/11. There is a need to examine representations of Indian-Americans to reveal traces of their historical deracialization. In the post-9/11 context, how is the "deracialized Indian-American" discursively constructed, and what ideologies are perpetuated in this silence about race?[7]

To attend to this question, I examine popular media reportage surrounding Sen's murder through the lens of critical emotion studies theorist Sara Ahmed's "affective economies," a mode of rhetorical analysis that centers on a discussion of constructions of emotion and their circulation through discourse. This theory offers a new way of understanding how the brown body

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[6] Koshy, quoted in Sunil Bhatia, *American Karma: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Indian Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 19.

[7] Educators working in rhetoric and composition, cultural studies, or media studies may find an analysis of affective economies in media a useful technique for building critical medial literacy in the post-9/11 era. Media critique using this type of rhetorical analysis reveals discourses (and with them, affective economies) that are naturalized in popular media. By questioning these discourses and denaturalizing these affective economies, we can attempt to trace their production and reveal the histories hidden in the silences.

has been constructed in post-9/11 popular media—specifically, the implications of popular media silence around the structural causes of racially-motivated violent crime, the racialized discourses embedded in this silence, and the ideologies perpetuated by the circulation of these discourses. It also provides a method for "denaturalizing" the deracialized representation of Sen set forth by popular media.

Post-9/11 Violence in the Context of Indian-American Deracialization

To contextualize this analysis, we can begin by considering historical conceptions and representations of Indian-Americans; this will allow us to identify and denaturalize traces of these histories in contemporary popular media. Indian-Americans do not fit neatly on either side of the color line, and have historically inhabited a liminal, often deracialized position. Rather than explore the historical differences in the racial formation of Muslim and Hindu diasporas in the U.S., I want to historicize the deracialization of Indian-Americans and trace how this has been complicated in the wake of 9/11—and, as Bill Ong Hing notes in "Vigilante Racism: The De-Americanization of Immigrant America," trace how institutional and interpersonal violence targeting Indian-Americans has endured: "the similarities between blatantly racist acts from one hundred years ago and today are troubling."[8]

Institutional discrimination against Indian-Americans in the continental United States can be traced to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, in which Asian-Americans were integrated into the U.S. racial system as a "non-indigenous, non-white, non-black group" that was denied the right to citizenship and property.[9] From the late 1800s

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[8] Bill Ong Hing, "Vigilante Racism: The De-Americanization of Immigrant America," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 7 (2002). Accessed October 1, 2013. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139 /ssrn.312879

[9] Bob Wing, "Race and Nationality: The Racial Formation of Asian Americans, 1852-1965," *Monthly Review* 57.7. (2005). Accessed April 15, 2013.

into the early 1900s, over six thousand Indians who had moved to California and the Pacific Northwest to work agricultural and timber laboring jobs faced discrimination from the Asiatic Exclusion League, Samuel Gompers's American Federation of Labor, and the towns in which they lived.[10] U.S. immigration officials responded to pressure from these exclusionists by turning away more than 3,400 Indians who sought entry to the U.S. between 1908 and 1920.[11] The passage of the Alien Land Laws in 1913 cut short attempts by Indian immigrants to open small farms, and the Supreme Court Case *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* ensured that Indian-Americans would not enjoy the privileges afforded to whites.[12] This case—in which a "high caste Hindu of full Indian blood" sought naturalization on the grounds that "high-class Hindus belong to the Aryan race"[13]—

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http://monthlyreview.org/2005/12/01/race-and-nationality-the-racial-formation-of-asian-americans-1852-1965

[10] Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 72.

[11] Ronald Takaki, *India in the West: South Asians in America* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), 39.

[12] Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk,* 72.

[13] This particular case set a troubling racial logic for why Indians should be granted American citizenship: "[i]nstead of challenging racism, the South Asian struggle became an individualized and personalized mission to prove that they were of pure Aryan stock" (Mazumdar, quoted in Bhatia 2007, p. 199). In *The Karma of Brown Folk* and its follow-up, *Uncle Swami*, Vijay Prashad investigates Indian-American complicity in post-9/11 oppression, situating it within a long history of Indian-American complicity in U.S. racial divides. In *American Karma*, Bhatia, too, describes the proliferation of racist model minority rhetoric within the Indian diaspora. These phenomena have transnational implications, particularly when considered in light of global politics and the Indian-American lobby's policy influence (see, for example, Ingrid Therwath's "Working for India or Against Islam? Islamophobia in Indian

foreshadowed post-9/11 politics by racializing religion: The Court ruled that "the physical group characteristics of the Hindus *render them readily distinguishable from the various groups of persons in this country commonly recognized as [W]hite.*"[14] Subsequent to this ruling, all South Asians who had previously been granted citizenship lost it, and in 1924, the National Origins Act halted immigration to the U.S. from India.[15] Immigration policies kept Indian immigration rates low for the next forty years, largely because low-wage agricultural workers from Mexico and the Caribbean rendered Indian manual labor unnecessary.[16] Marked by a racialized ethnicity, Indian-Americans were thus "othered" without being neatly categorized as black or white.[17]

This non-white, non-black designation was further complicated by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which

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American Lobbies"). Here, I have chosen to focus on the relationship between the model minority trope and deracialization post-9/11, rather than take up Bhatia's indictment of the Indian diaspora in the U.S. for its complicity in deracialization, or Prashad's indictment of the Indian diaspora's complicity in post-9/11 oppression.

[14] Hing, "Vigilante Racism: The De-Americanization of Immigrant America," 11-12, emphasis in original.

[15] Bhatia, *American Karma: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Indian Diaspora*, 199.

[16] Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk,* 72.

[17] In "Race and Nationality: The Racial Formation of Asian Americans, 1852-1965," Wing (2005) describes this type of institutional racism against Asian-Americans as "precedent-setting in the racialization of nationality and the incorporation of nationality into U.S. race relations"; today, these laws affect many different U.S. diaspora communities in similar ways: "The racialization of nationality was a critical event in U.S. history that has shaped today's social formation and even impacted its foreign policy. It was extended, with different particularities, to millions of Latino and Caribbean immigrants, and now Arabs, South Asians, and Africans, in addition to East Asians."

recruited a pool of university-educated, English-language-fluent Indian immigrants to fill the labor needs of the U.S. science and technology sector. As Vijay Prashad explains in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, this is when the "myth of the model minority" took hold, largely as a tactic for distinguishing Indian-Americans from Black Americans in the context of the Civil Rights movement: "[t]he struggles of blacks [were] met with the derisive remark that Asians don't complain; they work hard . . . [t]hat some people of color achieve appreciable levels of success, for whatever reason, is used as evidence that racism poses no barrier to success" (7-8). Used to support color-blind, meritocratic ideologies, this group of soon-to-be-assimilated Indian-Americans was transformed into a deracialized "model minority."

Immigration policy—and with it, immigration waves—have shifted since 1965, but the myth of the model minority endures. In *Unruly Immigrants,* Monisha das Gupta writes that the demographic and class differences arising from post-1965 immigration policy have "led to the emergence of distinct, often conflicting, needs and interests on the part of immigrants from South Asia" (2006, p. 56). These varying socioeconomic needs are obscured by the model minority trope, which has constructed the false sense that the Indian diaspora is an "evenly successful, self-reliant, and almost-white immigrant group."[18] The historical construction of this trope sits in direct contrast to the history of institutional and interpersonal violence targeting Indian-Americans, beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act and continuing today.[19] The National Security Entry-

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[18] Monisha das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 58. Even the term "Indian diaspora" is misleading for that reason---it obscures the multitude of experiences and class locations within the diaspora.

[19] In New Jersey during the 1980s, for instance, "a number of Indians, whose material success rendered them visibly open to attack, were murdered by young white men who came to be known as 'dot busters,' a reference to the *bindi* or

Exit Registration System (NSEERS), for example, led to the fingerprinting and interrogation of 83,000 South Asian males over the age of 16 immediately following 9/11; out of these men, 13,000 were placed in deportation proceedings.[20] The Patriot Act and "voluntary interview program" similarly profiled people based on nationality.[21] Ahmad argues that there is a "mutually reinforcing relationship" between this type of governmental racial profiling and individual hate crimes (2004, 1262). Wing draws a similar conclusion, linking profiling to nationality as well as race: "Today's war on terrorism is, among other things, also a war on racialized immigrants as the Patriot Act and other new laws treat them as suspected enemy combatants simply because of their race and nationality" (2005). Other institutional influences on the post-9/11 racial climate include police spying on Muslim student associations and mosques, FBI entrapment, and drone attacks, all of which have "established Islam as 'the enemy,'" leading to "more everyday forms of Islamo-phobia"—stereotypes, racist comments, and other "overt and covert abuse that have been a regular feature of life" post-9/11.[22]

colored dot placed by some Hindu women on their forehead between the eyebrows" (Lal, p. 45). In this case, the object of anger took the form of racialized cultural signifiers (like the *bindi*); post-9/11, as Lee (2008) explains in "Hate Crimes and the War on Terror," Arab-Americans, Muslim Americans, and those perceived to be Arab or Muslim have been "raced" by association to the terrorist attacks (p. 8).

[20] Ghosh, "South Asians in America: Ten Years After 9-11."

[21] Christina Lee, "Hate Crimes and the War on Terror," in *Hate Crimes: Perspectives and Approaches,* edited by Barbara Perry (2008), 9-10. Accessed October 5, 2013. http://scholarship.law.gwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi? article =1801&context=faculty_publications

[22] Ben Silverman, "Murder by Bigotry in NYC," *Socialist Worker,* January 10, 2013, accessed October 15, 2013. http://socialistworker.org/2013/01/10/murder-by-bigotry-in-nyc

This combination of structural and interpersonal violence has constructed a racialized ethnic category that has been referred to as the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body.[23] Post-9/11 stereotyping of the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body has become a transnational phenomenon, where "[f]ew *desis* (a person of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Afghani, Sri Lankan, or Nepalese descent) are able to deny the existence of a heightened fear of our bodies."[24] Indeed, the first three people killed as part of 9/11 backlash were of South Asian descent.[25] According to a report by National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC), 96% of the victims of post-9/11 vigilante violence in the three months immediately following the attacks were South Asian.[26] Attacks have disproportionately affected Sikh-American men, who are profiled because they wear turbans and grow long facial hair, leading to what Volpp describes a "conflate[ion] with Osama Bin Laden" (2002, 1590). In one of the earliest such attacks, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh-American, was murdered outside his gas station in Mesa, Arizona by a man who "said he wanted to 'kill a Muslim' in retaliation for the terrorist attacks."[27] Twelve years later, these attacks continue—around the

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[23] "The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Situating Asian Americans." An Evening with Michael Omi. *The University of Texas at Austin Department of Sociology*, February 11, 2013. Accessed October 1, 2013.
http://sites.la.utexas.edu/utaustinsoc/2013/02/11/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-being-situating-asian-americans-an-evening-with-michael-omi/

[24] Vijay Prashad, *Uncle Swami* (New York: New Press, 2012), ix.

[25] Lee, "Hate Crimes and the War on Terror," 7.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ghosh, "South Asians in America: Ten Years after 9-11."

time of the Oak Creek Sikh temple shooting,[28] there were also 10 separate anti-Muslim attacks.[29] In September 2013, Dr. Prabhjot Singh, a Columbia University professor, was attacked in Manhattan by a group of 20 young men shouting "get Osama" and "terrorist."[30] In New York, within a month of Sunando Sen's murder, police arrested a man accused of murdering Middle-Eastern Brooklyn shopkeepers;[31] a 72-year-old man named Ali Akmal was "nearly beaten to death while going on his early morning walk"; and a 57-year-old man named Bashir Ahmad was "beaten and stabbed repeatedly as he entered a mosque in Flushing, Queens."[32]

Considering vigilante violence in this context, it is hard to deny the racial motivations for the attacks. The "Arab-MuslimSouthAsian" body, a transnational figure that "constitutes a major shift in American racial conceptualization," is both produced by and enacted via institutional and vigilante violence.[33] It marks a

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[28] Matt Sledge, "Muslim Advocates Rally After Subway Pushing Death to Fight 'Climate of Hostility,'" *The Huffington Post*, January 8, 2013, accessed October 15, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/08/muslim-groups-rally-subway-pushing-death_n_2435611.html

[29] Sonny Singh, "Muslims in Queens Attacked by Bigots and the Media," *The Huffington Post,* December 5, 2012, accessed January 15, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sonny-singh/ali-akmal-beating_b_2233695.html

[30] Rebecca Leber, "Sikh Columbia University Professor Brutally Attacked by Crowd Shouting 'Get Osama.'" *Think Progress*, September 23, 2013, accessed October 1, 2013. http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2013/09/23/2662971/columbia-university-professor-attacked-sikh-hate-crime/

[31] Sledge, "Muslim Advocates Rally After Subway Pushing Death to Fight 'Climate of Hostility.'"

[32] S. Singh, "Muslims in Queens Attacked by Bigots and the Media."

[33] Muneer Ahmad, "A Rage Shared by Law: Post-September 11 Racial Violence as Crimes of Passion," *California Law Review* 92.5 (2004): 1259-1330. Volpp (2002)

major shift in Indian-American history by folding South Asian and Middle Eastern diasporas into the orientalist category of "Muslim-looking" or "potential terrorist,"[34] obscuring the "social and political salience" of the various identity groups consolidated under it.[35] The concept of the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body, understood within the context of Indian-American deracialization, serves as a framework within which we can consider popular media covering Sen's murder. We will see in the analysis that follows that the articles are marked by the absence of acknowledgment of the racially-motivated nature of the attack—an "absent presence"[36] or "rhetoric of silence" that is both meaningful and invisible.[37] Although scholarship in the fields of rhetoric and composition and discourse analysis offer both taxonomies of silence and methodologies for locating ideological silences in popular media (see, for example, Huckin 2002, Ratcliffe 2005, and Sweeney 2012), this work has not been applied to the model minority trope post-9/11. Though I do not argue for a causal relationship between the Indian-American

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makes a similar claim in "The Citizen and the Terrorist," arguing that we should understand "private" acts of vigilante violence in the context of "public" origins (p. 1583).

[34] Volpp (2002) draws from Said to connect the formation of this racial trope to a "redeployment of old Orientalist tropes" that polarize the East and West, situating the East as "primitive, barbaric, and despotic" (p. 1586).

[35] Ahmad, "A Rage Shared by Law: Post-September 11 Racial Violence as Crimes of Passion," 1261.

[36] Catherine Prendergast, "Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Studies," *College Composition and Communication* 50.1 (1998): 36.

[37] Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 4.

racial history set forth here and media treatment of Sen's murder, I do argue that the deracialized "model minority" trope is at play in the rhetorics of silence surrounding Sen's skin color, and that through this silence, deracialized discourses are produced that obscure the context of post-9/11 violence and racial profiling.

Affective Economies and the Metonymic Linking of Brown Skin with Terrorism

Reading the murder of Sunando Sen in this historical context, we can narrow the scope and focus by employing a rhetorical descriptor for why Erika Menendez singled out Sunando Sen: metonymy, specifically the metonymic relationship between the "Arab-MuslimSouthAsian" body and terrorism. Victor Villanueva (2006) identifies metonymy as signifying a "reduction," where—in the case of post-9/11 vigilante racism—the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body comes to stand in for the 9/11 attacks. Metonymy works to "stick words like *terrorist* and *Islam* together . . . [t]he sliding between signs also involves 'sticking' signs to bodies: the bodies who 'could be terrorists' are the ones who might 'look Muslim.'"[38] In many cases, this relationship has fatal consequences.

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[38] Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 79.22.2 (2004a): 132.

Figure 2: Islamophobia. Concept and photography by Ridwan Adhami.[39]

This "sticky," metonymic link between Islam and terrorism (captured so well in Ridwan Adhami's photograph above) came to a head in the racial profiling, vigilante violence, and media that followed the April 15, 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. In the wake of the attack, two men were removed from an airplane for speaking Arabic; a student (referred to in various media as a "Saudi National") was accused of the attacks; a Bangladeshi man in New York City was beaten up; a Palestinian doctor in Boston was assaulted as she walked her child in a stroller; and Ann Coulter called for "women who wear

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[39] www.ridzdesign.com © 2008. Reprinted with permission.

hijabs to be arrested."[40] Furthermore, the cover of *The Week* revealed that physical signifiers of terrorism could "slide" onto the white body as well. In the image, the Tsarnaev brothers are rendered "explicitly 'darker' and 'Arabized'" in their appearance:[41]

Figure 3: Racialized depiction of the Tsarnaev brothers.[42]

      The headline accompanying the image reads: "A radical change: What turned the Tsarnaev brothers into Islamic terrorists?" Here, this "transformation" is signified by darkened skin and aligned with a "global plot" of Islamic terrorism. This characterization is in stark contrast to typical media portrayals of white, non-Muslim

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[40] Hari S. Kumar, "White Privilege Radically Changes the Appearance of Tsarnaev Bros," *Brofiling,* April 29, 2013, accessed April 30, 2013.
http://www.brofiling.com/post/ 49029017043/white-privilege-radically-changes-the-appearance.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

perpetrators of mass violence as "individual deviants,"[43] "troubled loners" or people suffering from alcoholism, addiction, or mental illness.[44] Bayoumi writes that "[f]ear of terrorism, commonly (and regrettably) associated with Islam, is being usurped by a very popular fear of Muslims in general"[45]; the image of the Tsarnaev brothers reveals the pervasiveness of this fear as it "slides" onto the white body. Read against the accompanying text, brown skin comes to metonymically stand in for "Islamic radicalization."

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Sara Ahmed argues that these metonymic relationships are part of "affective economies," in which emotions circulate through discourse, constructing certain bodies as acceptable objects of particular emotions. This theory is useful for investigating post-9/11 vigilante attacks because it suggests that affective economies associated with "terror"—produced through

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[43] Volpp, "The Citizen and the Terrorist," 1585.

[44] Juan Cole, "Top Ten Differences between White Terrorists and Others," *Juan Cole*, August 9, 2012, accessed October 1, 2013.
http://www.juancole.com/2012/08/top-ten-differences-between-white-terrorists-and-others.html Cole uses the example of the "white terrorist" to indict post-9/11 Homeland Security policies: "There is nothing you can do about white terrorists. Gun control won't stop them. No policy you could make, no government program, could possibly have an impact on them. But hundreds of billions of dollars must be spent on police and on the Department of Defense, and on TSA, which must virtually strip search 60 million people a year, to deal with other terrorists." Volpp (2002), too, observes that "[u]nder the logic of profiling all people who look like terrorists under the 'Middle Eastern' stereotype, all whites should have been subject to stops, detentions, and searches after the Oklahoma City bombing and the identification of [Timothy] McVeigh as the prime suspect" (p. 1584). This logic can be extended from the Oklahoma City bombing to the Sikh temple shooting in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, as well.

[45] Moustafa Bayoumi, "Between Acceptance and Rejection: Muslim Americans and the Legacies of September 11," *OAH Magazine of History* 25.3 (2011): 18.

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institutional regimes—construct "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" bodies as acceptable objects of fear, anger, and hatred; it also suggests that these economies both predate acts of violence and are reinforced through them. Ahmed writes that "…figures of hate circulate, and indeed accumulate their affective value, precisely insofar as they do not have a fixed referent";[46] in the context of post-9/11 New York, where Sen was murdered, there is no "fixed referent" for terrorism beyond the constructions of fear of the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body that circulate in public discourse. Thus, anyone fitting this profile is vulnerable to becoming the object of the public fear, anger, and hatred that resulted from 9/11. This anxiety surrounding the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body allowed economies of fear, anger, and hatred surrounding signifiers of terrorism—specifically skin color—to "slide" onto Sen, a brown Hindu Indian immigrant.

This metonymic slide, and the affective economies at play, can be understood as a precipitating factor in why Erika Menendez associated Sen's body with 9/11. When she was arrested, Menendez was quoted as saying: "'I pushed a Muslim off the train tracks because I hate Hindus and Muslims ever since 2001 when they put down the twin towers, I've been beating them up."[47] Her conflation of the Muslim and Hindu faiths (quoted here and in her further comments to the police)[48] reflects the metonymic "slide" of signifiers of terrorism onto the "ArabMuslimsSouthAsian" body. By linking both Hindus and Muslims to 9/11 in her comments to police, Menendez indicates that both religions have been racialized post-9/11, and that the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body is capable of triggering thoughts of the burning, collapsed World Trade Center—

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[46] Ibid, p. 47.

[47] Marc Santora, "Religion Said to be Motive Behind N.Y. Subway Death," *The International Herald Tribune*, December 31, 2012. LexisNexis.

[48] Ibid.

Sen's mere presence on a subway platform comes to stand in metonymically for "terror" itself.

This metonymic link has been widely reinforced through media portrayals of the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body. Lee (2008) notes that "[w]hile the image of the Arab-as-Terrorist is not a new stereotype, it has become increasingly entrenched in the public imagination since 9/11" (p. 4). Sonny Singh writes that American media has "long portrayed Arabs and Muslims as barbaric, blood-thirsty caricatures," citing the need for a movement "to uproot Islamophobia from the mass media" (2012). Silverman echoes Singh's sentiments, noting that the movie *Zero Dark Thirty* and popular television show *Homeland* "provide ideological justification for the 'global war on terror,' torture and anti-Muslim stereotypes" (2013). Islamophobic media circulates even in the subway—the site of Sen's murder—in the form of anti-Muslim billboards and advertisements;[49] for example, in 2012, the American Freedom Defense Initiative installed advertisements featuring images of the burning World Trade Center superimposed with a Qu'ran verse.[50]

The complicity of these media—as well as the NYPD—in reinforcing Islamophobic sentiment was laid bare at a January 8, 2013 rally just over a week following Sen's murder. Political leaders and advocacy groups at the rally linked Sen's murder "to a broader anti-Muslim environment in New York City—inflamed, they said, by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the New York City Police Department."[51] Fahd Ahmed, legal and policy director for

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[49] Silverman, "Murder by Bigotry in NYC."

[50] Robbins, "After Islamophobic Hate Crime in New York City, Mayor wants Public to 'Keep Death in Perspective.'"

[51] Sledge, "Muslim Advocates Rally After Subway Pushing Death to Fight 'Climate of Hostility.'"

Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), a South Asian advocacy group, situated the murder within "racial profiling" and "painting communities as suspect" by government, police, institutions, and media.[52] Deepa Iyer, Executive Director of South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), wrote afterward that many people of South Asian, Arab American, Muslim, or Sikh descent said "be safe" following Sen's murder because the attack was understood to be racially-motivated (2013). Muneer Awad, executive director of the New York Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, cited a "climate of hostility" against Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians, and denounced both the Islamophobic subway ads and the NYPD's surveillance of Muslim communities in the New York City metropolitan area.[53] In this "climate of hatred and bigotry," wrote Silverman following the rally, "[t]he murder of Sunando Sen is a tragedy made possible"[54] (2013).

While the complicity of institutional profiling regimes in post-9/11 vigilante violence was clearly articulated at this demonstration (and in editorials like Silverman's), it is absent from the articles examined next. As we will see, media that remains silent about this context effectively denies it, and in failing to lay bare the affective economy of fear, anger, and hatred surrounding the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body, quietly reproduces it.

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Silverman made this observation in an editorial following Sen's murder. Editorial were omitted from the analysis that follows, as they are not presumed to be "objective."

Reading the Murder of Sunando Sen through the Lens of Affective Economies and Rhetorics of Silence

Within the framework of a case study examining popular media surrounding Sen's murder, I narrow the lens of analysis to focus specifically on the affective economies surrounding Sen that are produced and circulated through discourses following his death.[55] This case was chosen for analysis because the only visible signifier of "terrorism" on Sen's body was his skin color; following his death, "[t]he spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office, Meris Campbell, said she did not believe the victim was wearing any clothing that would have led someone to identify him as being a Muslim."[56] Additionally, the perpetrator was charged with murder as a hate crime,[57] which draws a sharp distinction between the legally-recognized racial motivations of the crime and the deracialized representations of Sen that appear in media reportage.

As tools for analysis, I attend to simple, yet provocative, questions drawn from methods of critical discourse analysis: "How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways? What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact? How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or

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[55] By "reducing" this man's life to the status of "case study," I worry about moving too far from the tragedy of this case. The intent of this analysis, however, is to try to give voice to the structural causes of his death, which are obscured in the media analyzed here.

[56] Reuters, "Woman Charged with "Murder as a Hate Crime" in Fatal Subway Pushing," *The Chicago Tribune,* December 29, 2012, accessed September 15, 2013. http://articles. chicagotribune.com/2012-12-29/news/sns-rt-us-usa-newyork-subwaybre8bs0bf-20121229_1_fatal-subway-new-york-subway-subway-track

[57] Ibid.

irrelevant to another?"[58] These questions were applied to a series of full-length articles drawn from major print and online sources that followed Sen's death (n=17).[59] These articles were chosen because, as primary reporting rather than editorials, they are presented as "objective" reporting.

Examining Sen's murder singularly allows for an in-depth analysis of the case's complexities and historical grounding.[60] The goal of the analysis that follows is, thus, not to generalize about post-9/11 violent attacks targeting Indian-Americans, but rather to reveal the affective economies and rhetorics of silence that circulate through reporting on one case, with the goal of opening up questions about the larger ideologies and social constructs that perpetuate these economies and rhetorics. While there is limited external generalizability to the analysis of discourses surrounding Sen's murder, this method of analysis is applicable to other, similar cases,

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[58] James P. Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 17-19.

[59] This was the extent of the 500+-word articles on Sunando Sen found via LexisNexis, Academic Search Premier, and Google search. Articles were drawn from *Associated Press, CNN, CBS, NBC, Reuters, The New York Times*, *The New York Daily News, The New York Post, International Business Times, The Indian Express*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *USA Today,* and *The Huffington Post.* Articles under 500 words were omitted because of the limited room to explore reasons for Sen's attack and the context of post-9/11 Islamophobia (the majority of the articles omitted had under 100 words). Editorials were also omitted, as were reprinted articles and articles that referenced Sen but were written to advocate for larger-scale changes such as slower subway speeds or large-scale mental health treatment overhauls in New York City. While these articles indicate a tendency to contextualize Sen's death within debates that do not concern racial profiling or post-9/11 hate crimes, they were not included in this analysis because the articles were not specifically focused on Sen.

[60] John W. Creswell, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 101.

and serves as an example of how we might analyze and denaturalize discourses surrounding post-9/11 hate crimes.

An analysis of these articles revealed that the main way Sen is deracialized is by recontextualizing his murder within two interlinked frames: mental illness and subway murders. Additionally, Sen is deracialized by being portrayed as a victim who "could have been anyone"—a framework that works to "produce" discourses of citizenship which hearken back to the model minority trope, and simultaneously obscures the context of post-9/11 racial dynamics. These recontextualizations of Sen's murder—and the concurrent rhetoric of silence around his race—work to conceal the affective economies that led to his death.

Recontextualizing Sen's Death: Mental Illness, Subway Murders & the Model Minority Trope

While the New York social welfare system's lack of resources for treating mental illness is a problem worth taking seriously in this case,[61] Erika Menendez's psychological state was only part of the reason why she murdered Sen, as evidenced by her comment linking her actions to 9/11. However, newspaper articles covering the murder overwhelmingly focus on Menendez's mental state as the cause of her violent crime—and, as an extension of this cause, draw connections to mental health care policy in New York City. Covering Sen's murder for the *Associated Press*, Hays (2012) quotes Mayor Michael Bloomberg as he makes this link: "Bloomberg pointed Friday to legal and policy changes that led to the release of many mentally ill people from psychiatric institutions from the 1960s through 1990s." This contextualization of the case within the framework of mental illness and mental health care policy constructs a rhetoric of silence around Sen's race and post-9/11 affective

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[61] Silverman, "Murder by Bigotry in NYC."

economies of fear, anger, and hatred that are "stuck" to the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body.

Because Menendez stated outright that her attack was in retaliation for 9/11 and that she had previously acted violently towards "Hindus and Muslims," it is impossible to avoid race entirely in reporting on Sen's murder. However, the reportage examined is marked by an acknowledgment of the religious (and by extension, racial) motivations for Menendez's act, with quick movement into a discussion of mental illness, as in the case of Bain (2012), writing for the *New York Post*:

> [Menendez] professed her hatred for Muslims and Hindus and said the murder was revenge for 9/11. Sen was Hindu. . . . "I just wanted to hurt Muslims and Hindus ever since [9/11]." For much of the interview, she was emotionless. But her eyes lit up and she became very animated when describing other violent run-ins with people she believed were Muslim or Hindu. "I've been beating up Muslims and Hindus for a long time. I just want to hurt them. I would punch them," she said. In her first interview since being arrested, she told *The Post* that Sen had stood out from the other riders because of his religion. The tragedy might have been averted if she had taken the medicine she is prescribed.

Here we see discourses of mental illness set in direct contrast to Menendez's racist orientation towards Sen, but mental illness—rather than Sen's skin color—is established as the determining factor in Sen's murder. This pattern was prevalent throughout the articles examined. For example, Ghosh (2012), writing for *International Business Times*, makes a similar rhetorical move: "It was reported on Saturday night that the suspect's motive was racial and religious enmity–she said she "hated Muslims and Hindus. But what actually links the Queens tragedy to those others is that the perpetrators were (or are) mentally ill." Ghosh goes on to

situate the crime within recent large-scale violent crimes like the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting and the Sandy Hook, Connecticut elementary school shooting—both of which were marked by mentally-ill perpetrators—rather than consider hate crimes like the Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting, which connect to post-9/11 racism and retaliatory violence.

Another theme that emerged within the framework of mental illness is the individualization of the crime via emphasis on Menendez's mental state. Santora and Hartocollis (2012), writing for the *New York Times,* describe the murder as the product of "years of [Menendez's] inner and outer turmoil" and other violent acts and arrests that "culminated in the deadly assault." In locating the impulse to murder Sen in Menendez's individual mental state, a link is constructed between Menendez's racist comments and her psychiatric condition, suggesting that the racist comments are "crazy," rather than the product of affective economies constructing "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" bodies as acceptable objects of hatred, fear, and anger post-9/11. Weichselbaum, Paddock, and Hutchinson (2012), writing for the *New York Daily News*, describe her use of 9/11 as a justification to kill Sen as "senseless." In another *Daily News* article, Parascandola et al. (2012) similarly link this justification to Menendez's mental illness, describing her as "deranged" and linking this derangement to the fact that she "told cops she detests Muslims" and "broke into a maniacal fit of laughter as she was charged with a hate crime." Here, too, mental illness crowds out her conflation of Islam and Hinduism and her specific targeting of Sen's "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body. While her mental illness is relevant, it cannot erase her *own* justification for the murder—that it was in retaliation for 9/11. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's comments following the attack similarly work to decontextualize it from post-9/11 affective economies: "'I don't know that there is a way to prevent things,' Bloomberg said. 'There is always going to be

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somebody, a deranged person.""[62] Quoted widely throughout the reportage on Sen's death, Bloomberg's comments—set alongside larger discourses concerning mental illness—medicalize Menendez's actions and in doing so, fail to critique their larger structural causes.

The second major mechanism by which Sen's murder was contextualized in popular media reportage is within the history of subway murders in New York. While this context is relevant, it also works to erase the racial dynamics at play in Menendez's act. Within the articles examined, this context was achieved consistently through references to 58-year-old Ki-Suck Han, who was pushed onto the subway tracks at Times Square and killed just weeks before Sen.[63] While Han's murder is deeply troubling, invoking it in articles about Sen works to distance Sen's murder from the rash of post-9/11 hate crimes perpetrated in the weeks and months prior to his murder—as in the case of an *International Herald Tribune* article titled "Religion said to be motive behind N.Y. subway death." Given the title of the article, we could expect that Santora would go on to discuss other violent crimes motivated by religion (particularly in light of the post-9/11 racialization of Islam)—by failing to acknowledge this context and focusing instead on Han's murder, the article deracializes Sen's murder.

In addition to Han, references to Kendra Webdale were found in nearly every article. As Long (2012) explains in *The Huffington Post*, "other high-profile [subway deaths] include the 1999 fatal shoving of aspiring screenwriter Kendra Webdale by a former psychiatric patient. That case led to a state law ["Kendra's law"] allowing for more supervision of mentally ill people living outside

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[62] Yoshita Singh, "NY Subway Victim Sunando Sen was 'Very Educated,' A Heart Patient," *The Indian Express,* December 29, 2012, accessed October 1, 2013. http://www.indian express.com/news/ny-subway-victim-sunando-sen-was-very-educated-a-heart-patient/1051906/

[63] Ibid.

institutions." Santora and Nir (2012), writing for *The New York Times*, cite this case as well, adding that Webdale was murdered by "Andrew Goldstein, who had stopped taking medication he had been prescribed for schizophrenia." By linking Sen's murder to a case in which the perpetrator's actions can be medicalized (like Menendez's), the murder is distanced from post-9/11 affective economies, discourses, and hate crimes, and situated firmly within the context of both mental health and subway murders.

Invoking subway crimes also works to construct the sense that any New Yorker could have been the target of Menendez's attack. This works in much the same way as the invocations of mental illness. For example, Long (2012) reports that "[t]he district attorney said such hateful remarks about Muslims and Hindus could not be tolerated. 'The defendant is accused of committing what is every subway commuter's worst nightmare,' he said." Here, subway crimes take precedent over Menendez's racist remarks; even though the district attorney draws attention to Menendez's religious animosity, he moves on to contextualize the murder within other subway murders, rather than within other racially-motivated hate crimes. Other articles quite clearly situate Sen as just one of millions of commuters, all of whom are presumed to be equally at risk of attack: "[b]eing pushed onto the train tracks is a silent fear for many of the commuters who ride the city's subway a total of more than 5.2 million times on an average weekday, but deaths are rare" (CBS/Associated Press, 2012).

Subway crimes also function to ask readers to keep Sen's murder "in perspective"—something Mayor Bloomberg calls for on several occasions, "tout[ing] new historic lows in the city's annual homicide and shooting totals. 'It's a very tragic case, but what we want to focus on today is the overall safety in New York,' Bloomberg

told reporters."[64] As part of this "perspective," readers are asked to consider the fact that "[t]here are no barriers separating the trains from the people on New York City's subway platforms, and many people fall or jump to their deaths in front of rushing trains each year."[65] Because attention is drawn to the structural and safety problems with the New York subway system, readers are not invited to consider it within the larger context of post-9/11 Islamophobia. The focus on the subway works together with the focus on mental illness to construct a rhetoric of silence around race, and maintain the affective economy of fear, anger, and hatred that "stuck" to Sen's "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body.

Mental illness and subway murders, two contexts that construct a rhetoric of silence around Sen's race, work to repress the true structural causes of Sen's murder. Here, it is useful to return to Ahmed's critical emotion studies theory, in which she draws from Freudian psychoanalysis to "consider the role of repression in what makes objects 'sticky.'"[66] Applying this insight to the reportage on Sen's murder, we can argue that in repressing the context of post-9/11 vigilante violence, these newspaper articles work to "re-stick" the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body with characteristics embedded in the affective economy of anger, fear, and hatred. Out of this repression, something interesting happens—new discourses are

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[64] Colleen Long, "NYC Subway Shoving Death: One Woman in Custody," *The Huffington Post*, December 29, 2012, accessed September 15, 2013.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ 2012/12/29/nyc-subway-shoving-death-_n_2381540.html

[65] Tom Hays, "NYC Subway Push Victim Was From India," *Associated Press*, December 29, 2013, accessed October 1, 2013.
http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012 /12/27/man-pushed-nyc-subway/1795415/

[66] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004b), 11.

produced. In the reportage on Sen, these discourses construct him as a hardworking "model minority." This is largely achieved through references to Sen's work life, as described by Sen's roommate, Ar Suman: "Suman said Sen had toiled hard to save money to open his printing business and hardly took a day off from work."[67] In "Immigrant's Dream now 'Unbearable' Nightmare," printed in *New York Daily News,* Lysiak et al. (2012) set these characteristics ("industriousness," "American Dream"-chasing, small-business-owner) alongside Sen's American cultural tastes:

> For 20 years, industrious immigrant Sunando Sen worked relentlessly for his piece of the American Dream—only to lose everything in mere seconds . . . Sen, 46, died gruesomely beneath a Queens-bound subway just six months after proudly opening his own printing business in Manhattan, his devastated roommates said Friday. 'Seven days a week he worked,' said friend Ar Suman, 33, a cab driver. 'He wanted to be his own boss. . . . He was very excited to have his own business.' . . . The unmarried Sen, a college-educated graphic designer, enjoyed American movies and music on his iPod - but spent most of his time focused on launching a self-run printing company.

This "Americanization" is further achieved through descriptions of the area in Queens where Sen lived; Ghosh (2012), for example, writes that "Sunnyside has become a kind of 'way station' for immigrants climbing the ladder of the 'American Dream.' For one Sunando Sen, that dream was shattered permanently." Presumably, had Sen lived, he would have followed suit and found upward mobility. By reproducing the dominant narrative of the "industrious

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[67] Y. Singh, "NY Subway Victim Sunando Sen was 'Very Educated,' A Heart Patient."

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immigrant"—i.e., the model minority—these articles are set in troubling juxtaposition to other, similar attacks, which do not receive nearly as much airplay as Sen's.[68] By constructing Sen as an industrious, hardworking, assimilated immigrant, these articles further remove Sen's murder from the post-9/11 affective economies that led to his attack, working alongside the rhetorics around mental illness and subway murders to make readers feel like Sen could have been anyone. As Ahmed writes, "[imagining] that the person who was lost 'could have been me'" leads to a repression of stories that are designated less-grievable—this is particularly salient given that Sen's murder was not linked to other, similar crimes.[69]

By framing Sen's murder as the product of the perpetrator's mental illness and situating it in a history of subway-related deaths, this reportage denies the context of post-9/11 racism, and conceals the production of emotion that made the attack possible. This is not meant to suggest that concealment is *intentional* on the part of journalists, but rather that rhetorics of silence surrounding race are embedded in dominant discourse and reproduced in popular media. The reportage does not recognize—let alone challenge or critique— the structural and discursive metonymic linking of brown skin with terrorism. This effectively works to reinforce the metonymic link, maintaining "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" bodies as objects at risk of attack.

The Repercussions of Deracialization Post-9/11

By reporting on Sen's murder in the context of mental health services and subway-related deaths, the media analyzed here perpetuate deracialized representations of Indian-Americans, and in doing so, construct a rhetoric of silence around post-9/11 vigilante violence

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[68] See S. Singh (2012) for a compelling critique of media depictions of Muslim victims of post-9/11 vigilante violence.

[69] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 130.

and maintain an affective economy of anger, fear, and hatred directed at the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body. These silences are further reinforced through the individualization of Sen's attack, and the fact that he is characterized with "model minority" virtues of hard work and entrepreneurship.

Here, we see race relegated to the margins, and as Ahmed writes, "what is relegated to the margins is often, as we know from deconstruction, right at the centre of thought itself."[70] Considering this attack in light of Indian-American deracialization and the "model minority" stereotype, it seems that post-9/11, this stereotype is doing harm in a new way: by constructing silences around the racially-motivated nature of vigilante violence and with it, reinforcing violent affective economies. We need to be critical of discourses surrounding post-9/11 vigilante violence to make sure they do not unwittingly erase the histories and reinforce the affective economies that made the attacks possible. Iyer makes a call to contextualize Sen's murder within a history, "past and present, of racism and xenophobia in our country" (2013). This work of historicizing post-9/11 racism is difficult, but also transformative; as Ahmed writes, "I cannot learn this history—which means unlearning the forgetting of this history—and remain the same.[71] To "unlearn the forgetting" of this history, we must work to denaturalize and re-contextualize narratives that do not take racial histories into account.

Menendez's attack suggests that the Indian-American body has been re-formed in the public eye post-9/11, "stuck" with a new set of characteristics, and rhetorically constructed as an appropriate target for fear, anger, and hatred. The articles examined, however, indicate that the deracialization of the Indian diaspora (and its

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[70] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 4.

[71] Ibid, p. 34.

historical association with the "model minority" trope) lingers in public discourse—at odds with the lived reality of many South Asian Americans post-9/11. By failing to acknowledge the post-9/11 racial climate, these articles suggest that Sen's murder was a senseless, tragic accident—it is thus dehistoricized and attributed to one "deranged" woman, rather than the post-9/11 culture of fear and hatred of potentially-Muslim brown skin. The individualization of the attack works to conceal this context from readers—and in concealing this context, the reportage engages in reproduction of post-9/11 affective economies that "stick" signifiers of terrorism to the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body. In doing so, these articles individualize and decontextualize post-9/11 racial dynamics and institutional violence, engaging in a covert Islamophobia that resides in the rhetorics of silence that surround Sen's race.

These silences demand further questions: Why is post-9/11 Islamophobia concealed in this reporting, even as it is laid bare in Menendez's confession? What other narratives are reproduced in the repression of this context? After being used as the "model minority" to attempt to quell civil rights activism, is it possible that the deracialization of Indian-Americans works to deracialize vigilante violence and the larger War on Terror? Would the act of acknowledging popular fear of the "ArabMuslimSouthAsian" body be too affectively or rhetorically proximate to condemning the institutional regimes that reinforce this fear, or the U.S. government's continued attacks on Muslim people abroad? By focusing attention on mental illness and subway murders, and constructing Sen in line with American notions of success, these articles suggest that any of us could have been subject to a mentally ill person's irrational, violent act—a troubling diversion from the fact that not all of us could be subject to a post-9/11 retaliatory attack, because not all of us could be profiled as "potential terrorists," because not all of us are easily mistaken for Muslim, because not all of us are brown.

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