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## Sikhs, Muslims, Drones, and Guilt By Association

By Deepa Kumar  
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The tragic death of six Sikhs in suburban Milwaukee sheds light on the ugly ways that bigotry works.

Since 9/11, Sikhs have often been the target of hate crimes.

Balbir Singh Sodhi, a gas station owner in Arizona, was the first such casualty. He was murdered just four days after 9/11 because, his murderer said, he was “dark-skinned, bearded and wore a turban.”

The hate crimes against Sikhs have continued over the last decade. Sikh temples have been vandalized, and according to Representative Joseph Crowley (D-NY), two Sikh men were murdered last year in hate crimes.

This is how cultural racism operates: anyone who bears the markers of the “enemy” must necessarily be guilty. For members of the Sikh community, this bizarre attitude is baffling. Some have gone out of their way to insist that Sikhs are not Muslim and should therefore not be targeted in these ways.

Yet, the horrific murders in Wisconsin should teach us that racism is about the dehumanization of an entire group of people: It is the worst kind of guilt by association.

If the Sikh community is not to blame for the events of 9/11, neither is the Muslim community.

It was not Islam that caused the 19 hijackers to carry out the attacks. It was the nihilistic political views of those particular assassins.

Similarly, it was not something intrinsic to white American males that precipitated this attack on the Sikhs in Wisconsin. It was the neo-Nazi attitudes of this particular white gunman.

Page was a white supremacist and the leader of a white-power band named End Apathy, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. He was even supposed to have had a tattoo of 9/11 on his upper right arm.

The context for this crime is the climate of prejudice in the United States that “the war on terror” has created.

Central to “the war on terror” is the ideology of Islamophobia. Rep. Peter King (R-NY) has held hearings hyping the risk of radical Islam here at home. Rightwing politicians such as Michele Bachmann and Newt Gingrich have also used reckless rhetoric targeting the entire Muslim American community.

In U.S. military policy, Islamophobia allows the United States to carry out drone strikes against Muslim men perceived to be terrorists in several countries around the world with impunity. Many victims of these “kill lists” are not terrorists, but innocent people.

Dehumanization and guilt by association enable the United States to kill innocent people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen.

Dehumanization and guilt by association enable a killer to gun down worshipers in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

As we mourn the latest killing, we need to denounce this dehumanization and guilt by association. They are the handmaidens of the murderer.