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changed in a simple linear way but have fluctuated over time, depending on social and political conditions, and second, that in the postwar era fathers in comic strips and on television—two media channels she explicitly refers to as important in this regard (9)—varied in the degree to which they were lampooned, with the negative stereotyping more likely in the early 1950s than in the late 1950s and more likely to be directed at lower-class and working-class fathers than middle-class fathers. In short, the politics of fatherhood is more complex than Devlin sometimes suggests.

This limitation aside, *Relative Intimacy* is a fine book that raises interesting questions and would be an appropriate text for a family or gender course or a seminar on psychoanalysis and the postwar era.

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*Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures.* By GAYATRI GOPINATH. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003. Pp. 264. \$79.95 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper).

In her book *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* Gayatri Gopinath offers us tantalizing opportunities to forge a queer feminist diasporic critique that considers multiple forms of difference that compete, align, and are suspended in tension within South Asian diasporic cultures. Her book is ambitious in that it promises to engage postcolonial, feminist, queer, Asian American, and diasporic critiques not as disinterested parties but as possibly parallel theories and epistemologies that should make visible the tensions, contradictions, and complexities between the projects of racism, colonialism, nationalism, sexism, and heteronormativity. In doing so Gopinath seeks to find and mark the space of the “impossible,” the queer diasporic female subject who is not complicit in these projects.

Initiating the book with a reading of a scene from *My Beautiful Launderette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1985), Gopinath suggests that “the scene eloquently speaks to how the queer racialized body becomes a historical archive for both individuals and communities, one that is excavated through the very act of desiring the racial Other” (1). While the film features queer *men* as the historical archive from which racism and colonialism may be read, Gopinath argues that, by focusing on queer *female* diasporic subjectivity, we are able to see not only the ways in which “discourses of sexuality are inextricable from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism and migration” (3) but also the ways in which a queer female diasporic framework can critique the sexualized and gendered modalities of diaspora, globalization, and modernity. Offering interventions into the particularly Euro-American normativities of queer studies and the heteronormativities of South Asian and

diasporic studies, Gopinath offers to bring queer female diasporic subjectivity into the center of both projects through queer reading practices of diasporic cultural productions within film, music, literature, and art. It is through a recentering of the queer female diasporic subject that Gopinath works to disrupt the ways in which queer female diasporic subjectivity is made “impossible” through the normativities of nationalist and diasporic logics.

The book progresses neatly through juxtaposing diverse types of texts, such as reading South Asian diasporic music cultures in the United States and United Kingdom against Monica Ali’s novel *Brick Lane*; the domesticity of masculinities within films such as Ian Iqbal Rashid’s *Surviving Sabu* and Damien O’Donnell and Ayub Khan Din’s *East Is East* against V. S. Naipaul’s novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*; the work of heteronormativities and space for queer female desire within South Asian feminist films such as Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding*, Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend It Like Beckham*, and Deepa Mehta’s *Bollywood/Hollywood* against Bollywood hit Sooraj Barjatya’s *Hum Aapke Hain Koun!*; an analysis of Deepa Mehta’s *Fire* against Ismat Chughtai’s short story “The Quilt”; and, finally, a reading of Shyam Selvadurai’s novel *Funny Boy* against Shani Mootoo’s novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*. In fact, one of the central strengths of *Impossible Desires* is the successful deployment of the “scavenger methodology” (suggested by queer theorists such as Judith/Jack Halberstam) in the choice of diverse texts for analysis as well as the use of “queer reading practices” that work to expose appeals to domesticity, nation, and heteronormative familial structures. Gopinath’s readings of these multiple texts are mostly well informed; however, at times a lack of specificity about how to “read” a particular form (whether it be film, literature, or music) mars a deeper engagement with the notion of producing a public culture.

As the initial claim of the queer racialized body as “historical archive” suggests, many historians will be interested in Gopinath’s arguments despite the fact that the book is not a conventional history text. While the work itself might not continue to elucidate how and in what ways the queer racialized body as an archive calls up the memories and historical residues of colonialism, racism, and nationalism, one would be apt to point out that Gopinath’s queer reading strategies could serve historical work. To be more specific, Gopinath’s reading practices serve as a useful example of how we might read for queer subjects that do not rest within the standard telos of gay and lesbian political subjectivities, how we might endeavor to read for the silences and absences as much as the presences of queer female subjects, and, most importantly, how we could use history to reveal the erotics and intimacies of power that are latent within racialized, sexualized, gendered, and nationalized histories.

While Gopinath’s work has already been taken up within queer studies, it is critical to note the ways in which she attempts to disrupt what has been named as the “homonormativities” of queer studies within both the academy

and LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and intersexed) political organizing. *Impossible Desires* joins a larger body of work, most recently marked as queer of color critique and/or transnational sexuality studies, that centralizes race, ethnicity, and nation within queer studies. Gopinath successfully critiques, for example, the deployments of “coming out narratives” and “the closet” as universalizing strategies within queer and LGBT studies that use white middle-class subjects as models that obscure and, in fact, *erase* other forms of same-sex desire. For example, in her reading of the film *Utsav* (The Festival, dir. Girish Karnad, 1984), Gopinath eloquently observes that while the female erotic bonding between the wife and mistress has been read by feminists as a heterosexual male fantasy, “a queer reading might also allow for the possibility of triangulated desire that does not solidify into ‘lesbian’ or ‘heterosexual,’ but rather opens up a third space where both hetero- and homoerotic relations coexist simultaneously” (105). And, in another example, Gopinath argues that perhaps the “real queer” within the film *East Is East* is not the explicitly gay son who escapes the home on his wedding day in order to be placed within the familiar realm of queer exile but perhaps the rambunctious daughter who reappropriates Disney and Bollywood dance sequences in such a way as to provide “a mode of resistant feminist cultural practice that prevents the reconstitution of patriarchal, immigrant masculinity and that disturbs the space of the heterosexual home from within” (84).

Gopinath is clearly invested in intervening in diasporic and South Asian studies, particularly via the queer female diasporic subject, with the hope of “envison[ing] the diaspora in ways that do not invariably replicate heteronormative and patriarchal structures of kinship and community” (6). Her readings of heteronormativities within nationalisms are productive and nuanced. However, one might want to ask what it means to read certain texts via the lens of diaspora within Gopinath’s text. For example, to read Ismat Chughtai’s “The Quilt” through the concept of diaspora space as Gopinath does (144) might situate Partition and Pakistan within diasporic studies in compelling but perhaps troubling ways. The framing of Partition and Pakistan as diaspora space seems to be overwritten by and read through the other diasporas that Gopinath considers. In fact, much of the unnamed aspect of Gopinath’s work is its specificity to diasporas located in the economic North, particularly ones that are located in English-speaking nation-states where North American Eurocentrism is often dominant if not hegemonic. This is significant, as Gopinath often deploys a North American and/or Indian epistemological framework for her readings. To equate diasporas of the economic North with those resulting from Partition seems to erase the different ways in which migration occurs, nations consolidate themselves and their borders, and epistemes form in relation to these processes. One wonders, then, about the ways in which Pakistan is diasporic space while Sri Lanka is merely a challenge to Indian hegemony, as figured in her reading of *Funny Boy*.

While we are concerned with the lack of specificity in Gopinath's loose deployment of diaspora, we are most interested in the tension that emerges in the book around her use of and investment in marking subjects as "possible" and "impossible." At times, Gopinath offers us a recovery project, one in which she will, by "suturing 'queer' to 'diaspora[,] . . . recuperat[e] those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries" (11). In fact, the title of her book suggests such a gesture, whereby she will work to "make possible" that which has been, supposedly, deemed "impossible." In this way Gopinath offers an earnest attempt to find and locate (that is, identify and recover) the queer female diasporic subject, perhaps out of a sense of loss or mourning for the lack of intelligibility of diasporic female same-sex desires within hegemonic formations. And at the end of the text, in the epilogue, Gopinath describes queerness as a "mode of reading, of rendering intelligible that which is unintelligible and indeed impossible within dominant diasporic and nationalist logic" (187). One senses that in these moments Gopinath sees impossibility as the inability to exist, an inability that can only be addressed by recognition, identification, and naming.

However, there are enough reflections within the text when Gopinath argues she is *not* offering such a project and is, in fact, critical of the ways in which LGBT and queer studies has cohered to the project of visibility. As she states, "My foregrounding of queer female diasporic subjectivity throughout the book is not simply an attempt to merely bring into visibility or recognition a heretofore invisible subject. Indeed, as I have suggested, many of the texts I consider run counter to the standard 'lesbian' and 'gay' narratives of the closet and coming out that are organized exclusively around a logic of recognition and visibility" (15–16). In fact, Gopinath is at her best when she troubles the need for and recovery of the intelligible female queer diasporic subject, such as in her readings of Bollywood dance sequences and the short story "The Quilt." In these moments in particular Gopinath is especially vigilant to call for the recognition of queer possibilities within the *uncontainable* and *excessive* rather than within the project of recognition and recovery.

For example, throughout her reading of Ismat Chughtai's 1941 short story "The Quilt" Gopinath is apt to point out the various ways in which the text resists paradigms of "lesbian" identities and desire as well as the privileging of "the closet" as the location of such desire. While the narrator witnesses various moments in which the *begum*, or lady of the house, engages in what are described as gluttonous activities beneath a quilt with the female servant Rabbo, Gopinath effectively demonstrates how the narrator experiences ambivalence in response to these moments. Moreover, Gopinath suggests that, through the consistent references to gluttony heard by the narrator as "smack, gush, slobber—someone was enjoying a feast. . . . They were polishing off some goodies under the quilt for sure,"

Chughtai “evokes female homoerotic desire not only through images of satiation but through those of insatiability, greed, and excess as well” (quoted on 147). In the final scene the narrator’s quick glimpse of what lies beneath the quilt “causes the abrupt shutting down of the narrative”: “What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if they give me a *lakh* of rupees” (quoted on 150). It is here that Gopinath works effectively against narratives of location, visibility, and recovery, arguing persuasively that the final scene should not be read as “an apparent consignment to unspeakability of female homoerotic sex and desire” but, rather, speaks “to the impossibility of containing the erotic configurations within the text through a strategy of ‘naming,’ or making ‘sayable’ that which must first be produced as visible” (151). In deploying a “strategy of disarticulation” Ismat Chughtai’s “The Quilt” produces an analysis of queer female subjectivities that are uncontainable and excessive and that escape legibility. Here, then, a queer reading practice does not mark the project of containment or the project of forcing/making subjects intelligible but, rather, the recognition of the uncontainability and unintelligibility that accompanies an interrogation of heteronormativity.

We might, therefore, offer the suggestion that Gopinath’s work here is not so much about locating the “impossible” but is, in fact, a desire to locate and name processes of hegemonic formations that work (desperately at times) to *forget* or *abolish* the queer in the name of consolidating heteronormativity. Our suggestion, then, is that hegemonic nationalisms, for example, strive to make visible and, therefore, to denaturalize and make queer those nonnormative practices and affiliations that are troubling to the nation-state and its reliance upon the naturalized and dehistoricized heterosexual family unit. Deploying the analyses of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler or following the lead of Licia Fiol-Matta (in her work on Latin American icon Gabriel Mistral in *A Queer Mother for the Nation* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002]), we might insist here that hegemonic productions of heterosexuality and gender norms *require the presence* of that which must be made absent and/or denied. In this way queer female subjects are necessary to the production of heterosexual nationalisms and diasporas.

While many have waxed nostalgically and prolifically on the “future” of queer studies, most often through the declaration of its supposed decline, we offer our own suggestion that queer critique offers the most “possibility” through queer reading practices that work not only against the desire for containment and recognition of nonnormative sexual subjects but through attempts to denaturalize and *queer*—that is, make strange—processes and modalities that rely upon the presumption of their naturalness. Like Gopinath we are interested in projects that unsettle the racial, gender, and sexual ideologies of nationalism, empire, and globalization (10) and, in particular, the exposure of the reliance upon

heteronormative genealogies in the process. Queer critique, then, might be best served by an unmooring of the subject from the production of the sexual with the hope that we can work less toward recognition and containment and more toward disarticulation.

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*Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantatas*. By ELLEN HARRIS. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001. Pp. 448. \$49.95 (cloth); \$20.95 (paper).

*Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantatas* declares itself “the first comprehensive study of all the cantatas . . . set within the parameters of private aristocratic patronage and the eighteenth-century context of same-sex love” (2). Professor Harris reads these early vocal works of Handel, written for private patrons in Italy and England between 1706 and 1723, as bespeaking “a persistent homoerotic subtext” (1) that she proposes is key to understanding their aesthetic strategies and meanings. Analyzing both music and texts of these works, the book addresses itself to scholarly readers interested in Handel, in eighteenth-century music and its context, and in the history of sexuality. Harris says her purpose is not “to ‘out’ Handel but rather to broaden the interpretation of the cantata texts and music by placing them in the social context of the period” (22). This interdisciplinary project holds promise as a welcome substantiation of the homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual aesthetics and contexts for Handel’s work, especially in his formative early years.

Harris usefully identifies pertinent social and political milieus, poses questions related to homoerotic meanings and motivations, and marshals a wide range of contemporary reference and Handelian scholarship. Unfortunately, for all its promise this book is disappointing and at times conceptually and theoretically troubling. Premised primarily on a reading of libretti, its approach lacks necessary theoretical grounding with regard to historical analysis of gender and sexuality, on the one hand, and the methodological tools of literary interpretation, on the other. The terms of Harris’s discussion convey sympathy with, simultaneously, *both* the existence *and* the suppression of homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual realities that she delineates as pertinent to Handel’s life and sensibility. Her general discussion and specific interpretations stumble in turns of phrase and modes of argument that seem (unwittingly) to evince discomfort at the homosocial