

Homely Housewives Run Amok: Lesbians in Marital Fixes

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WANTED—for Bombay Patel boy, widowed, early thirties, foreign-returned, Ph.D., with well-paying job in multi-national—wheat-complexioned Patel girl from Bombay or Ahmedabad family, thirties, foreign-educated, homely, preferably Ph.D. Caste no bar.¹

Notwithstanding my complexion, I would have been an almost perfect candidate for the position. Such an advertisement, accounting as it does for the (modern, faux-secular Hindu—caste no bar) Patel diaspora, could be one that my parents might have answered several years ago when I was within marriageable

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1. For slightly more truncated variations on this fictional, composite advertisement, which I wrote as one my parents might have answered for me, see, for example, the matrimonial pages of the *Times of India*, 27 February 1988. I have chosen this particular date to cite as an example because it is contiguous with the “lesbian” marriage story that I discuss in this essay. Web-based advertisements at www.timesclassifieds.com/tc/matrisearch/MatriSearchAd.jsp in the *Times of India* still use some of the same language and feature homeliness as an exemplary quality for women.

age. The boy's family would have to overlook a few minor glitches: I'm not a full-blooded Gujarati girl (my mother is non-Sanatani Punjabi), and I am prone to obstinacy and temper tantrums—products of my relatively advanced age and an upbringing that permitted me a little too much freedom. My problems as a late-twentieth-century ideal and idealized prospect for the marriage advertisement are located in *homely*, which is a word with different resonances in Indian English than in American.²

Homely. The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines *homely* as “of or belonging to a home or household, domestic; characteristic or suggestive of home: specially in its coziness, lack of formality, etc.”³ So my own nonhomely attributes, induced by a lack of perfect Gujarati home training, include my unfamiliarity with a Gujarati kitchen and my potential for behavior inappropriate to a good, more or less Hindu, housewife.

If my relative unhomeliness were overlooked, I might marry and fit the familiar secular contours of the large government-sponsored billboards scattered around the Bombay of my 1960s childhood. “*Do yaa tiin bas*”—“Two or three are enough.” The words, proclaiming the efficacy of a family organized around the state's family planning and population control initiatives, sit robustly below four or five stolidly straight idealized figures—a mother enclosed by a father and her children. The images on the billboard constitute homeliness. If I were a homely woman who could fulfill this self-proclaimed secular state's notions of a perfect family member, then I too could partake of the goodness bestowed on those who carry out the commandments issued to Third World countries: produce frugally in heterosexual units, and you might be able to eat well, borrow on debt, own goods, and join the fellowship of the less-fecund First World.⁴

The marriage advertisement displays registers of diasporic return and reversal that are immediately translatable into the family planning billboards. Its implicitly Hindu subjects need to leave India in order to return home to the Third World that was their first, venture capital in hand, where they create a simulacrum of imperatives implicated in the production of a potentially secular family. This cir-

2. Although the word does not appear in recent ads with the frequency with which it did in the 1960s, it is still an implicit requirement for the job.

3. In addition to “of a person, the features: plain or unattractive in appearance (Now North American [usage]).” The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is the dictionary that was in use in schools (from the equivalent of second grade on) in India. Students use several dictionaries now, but the *Shorter OED* is still one of them.

4. Meena Alexander (1997) discusses a similar mapping of morality, the social, and international capital onto symbols of docile and submissive (i.e., homely and asexual) womanhood.

cularity of movement, through which forms of venture capital invested in education, debt financing, global corporations, information, morality, resources, commodities, and modes of governmentality circulate, is belied by a point of stillness—the figure of the woman. This stillness, lack of movement, or lack of change is the charge carried by the term *homely*.

It is no accident that the singular, nuclear family (also folded into the marriage advertisement) is portrayed for consumption on billboards funded by the state. This idealized, commodified family, cleansed of and displaying none of the valences of regional (including “tribal”), economic (class), or religious (including communal) particularity, is implicated, with woman as its centerpiece, in the very ideas of statehood, sovereignty, citizenship, and nationality.⁵ This family is the necessary icon of the national imaginary and of the symbolic construction of nationhood. The family’s—and consequently women’s *en famille*—imbrication with the nation as state is addressed in cite after site.

Gender and Nation, Gender and States: An Exegetical Invocation

From the nineteenth century to the present, domesticity, intricately threaded into both public discussions about a future citizenry and its discontents, has preoccupied many male and female writers of fiction, memoir, religious polemics, political tracts, and legal documents.⁶ In the nineteenth century, patterns repeated in this writing were colored by the ways in which households appeared to be configured as sites in which practices had to be modernized and secularized or, conversely, returned to the constructed traditions from which they were ostensibly straying.⁷ Given the often fraught conditions under which they were produced, narratives that have featured domesticity have not been seamless: dissimulations and dissimulations around property, class, gender, and communalism are knitted into them as frays.⁸

5. See Bhattacharjee 1992 for a different perspective on obliterating traces of agency in the production of the bourgeois family by rooting the family in a timeless forever. I am concerned here with certain idealities—including those represented in advertisements and government-sponsored billboards—where the bourgeois, nuclear family predominates and overrides different, and specific, family formations. For readers unfamiliar with the term, *communal*, as it is used in all of South Asia, designates a community whose identity is based in religion.

6. These writers identified with or came from every South Asian community and were Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, or avowedly secular. See Minault 1998 and Kapur and Cossman 1996.

7. For provocative ruminations about colonial temporality and its imbrication with the domestic, see Chakrabarty 1994, 2000, and 2002.

8. For (legal) debates see Nair 1996 and Oldenburg 2002.

The domestic—either deliberately called forth or necessarily turned silent—figures in violations of national identifications. Fear and violence accompany what then comes to be obscene: violations of the home articulate as shifts around homeliness, which are marked as secular even as they resonate with explicitly communal practices. In the twentieth century, such preoccupations have haunted the discourse of nationalist writers (even if the hauntings are ghostly traces of discussions around gender) and have come to inhabit the daily intimacies and depredations of communities constructed in the diaspora.⁹

Three examples, from the work of Partha Chatterjee, Deniz Kandiyoti, and Anannya Bhattacharjee, interweave women across three different sites: colonial India, postcolonial states, and diasporic communities organized around national identity. Though there is no obvious geographic or temporal connection between the three sites, their discursive continuity points up the inevitability of transfers among them. These transfers—nationality as traditional family in public conduits; privatized nation mobilized as wife and as gendered family intimate; modernity, its proprieties, and its discontents—are registered simultaneously as secular and as not, because they are always already rendered through tradition and community.

Partha Chatterjee (1989: 247) discusses the New Woman, mother and housewife, who carried with her into the twentieth century nineteenth-century womanly virtues of “chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, [and] patience,” all hallmarks of homeliness (also see Chatterjee 1993, 1997). This woman was the repository of the “typically ‘bourgeois’ virtues characteristic of the new social forms of disciplining—of orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, and a personal sense of responsibility, the practical skills of literacy, accounting and hygiene, and the ability to run the household according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world” (Chatterjee 1989: 247).¹⁰ She epitomized simultaneously a reconstituted, perfected tradition and an idealized, homogenous modern secular national culture.

Deniz Kandiyoti (1994: 382), revisiting the contradictory effects of nationalism on women in post- and neocolonies, rewrites Benedict Anderson:

9. I use *intimacy* here to evoke Lauren Berlant’s *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997). The public production of intimacy and a lost private and gendered public is necessary to theorizing citizenship in a South Asian context. Also see the “Intimacy” special issue of *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998).

10. Chatterjee’s New Woman is not the New Woman one encounters in the Victorian novels of Sarah Grand; neither is she the New Woman in Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s (1989) seminal article. Chatterjee’s Indian New Woman epitomizes traditional Victorian femininity.

The very language of nationalism singles women out as the symbolic repository of group identity. As Anderson points out, nationalism describes its object using either the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, patria) or home (heimat) in order to denote something to which one is “naturally” tied. Nationness is thus equated with gender, parentage, skin color—all those things that are not chosen and by virtue of their inevitability, elicit selfless attachment and sacrifice. The association of women with the private domain reinforces the merging of nation/community with the selfless mother/devout wife.

Anannya Bhattacharjee (1992: 30–31), producing a genealogy of the literal marks of violence—battering—on the bodies of women in diasporic communities in the United States, speaks of the heterosexual home as the reservoir of Indianness. Women, arbiters and guardians of this space, conserve its safety by remaining uncomplainingly untainted by unacceptable desire or difference from their assigned positions. Violations are counted as multiple transgressions of family, community, and nation.

The pure, unsullied, heterosexual family is another space that the bourgeoisie in its construction of Indianness seeks to preserve. The responsibility for the preservation of this unsullied space lies with the woman, and the honor of an Indian woman is contingent upon her ability to suffer in silence and maintain this space. Her role assumes an unrivaled sanctity even as her life requires the utmost control. . . . Thus, any challenge to the family or the Indian community translates for the national bourgeoisie into a betrayal of national cultural values. For a woman (who is mother, wife, bride, daughter-in-law, or daughter-to-be-married) to disown her role(s) is to betray not just the (THE) family but also the nation. (Bhattacharjee 1992: 38–39)¹¹

In the postcolonial nation or in the diaspora, community identity as national identity becomes a site for returns to a nostalgic invocation of both the past and the future. At the heart of South Asian invocations is the domesticated, homely body of a woman, a body produced as a biological truism that enacts debates around tradition and modernity. As Bhattacharjee makes clear, violations by this body are understood as threats to nationalist integrity and are severely sanctioned.

11. On the fear of family violated by diseased bodies, and carrying that potential for its own difference within itself, see Watney 1993.

The discursive traffic over tradition and modernization, whether local, national, transnational, or global, keeps its nodal point intact. As discourses ebb and flow, commodified and reified into symbols of identity for nation or community, the woman is held steady—both commodified and reified into symbols of identity for nation or community. Whether authors describe this movement in Newtonian and Euclidean or in fractal and chaos metaphors, the woman steadfastly tethers movements that occur simultaneously around and through her.¹² The repetition of different enunciations of gender coalesce into women as a strange semiotic gravitational attractor, a node around which these enunciations circulate.

Like the point of observation in Werner Heisenberg's, or perhaps more properly Niels Bohr's, discussion of the paradox in the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory, holding the woman steady and in place (as the point from which observation takes place) allows these movements to be seen.¹³ But were women to be placed within the experiment, we could not measure their movement and positions simultaneously. We could measure with certainty either the movement or the location of a thing (Heisenberg 1989). Or we could measure both, but because *motion* and *location* are terms taken from classical physics, either measurements or descriptions are incomplete in precisely the way laid down by the uncertainty relation (also see Hayles 1984: 52; Popper 1982; and Loudon 2000).

I turn to science here because my project demands a decoupling of postcolonial discourses of gender and sexuality from the modalities in which they take shape—excavatory legal history, testimonial anthropology, restorative historiography. History, historiography, and testimonials have been the symptomatic, redemptive formations through which gender has been constituted as static. These formations have proved remarkably resilient to interruption. I turn to science, in a gesture that is neither valedictory nor utopian, because it is an analyti-

12. I thank Kath Weston for a particularly trenchant phrasing of this observation and Anindyo Roy and Anjali Arondekar for help with the rest of the section.

13. See Heisenberg 1989. Though Heisenberg's reading of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory fuses his position with Bohr's, it is really Bohr's that I refer to here. I start with Heisenberg because he popularized the uncertainty principle: the observer, the apparatus, and the conditions of observation necessarily produce interference and transform what is observed. One can predict only the probability of a particular result. This probability function does not describe any single event but over the course of observation offers an "ensemble of possible events" (Heisenberg 1989: 42). If one makes a decision to focus on any one thing, position, momentum, energy, or time in order to determine the probability of its occurrence, one has to give up simultaneous, certain determination of another (Gibbons 1992: 153–57).

cal mode that allows me to offer a metanarrative for and insertions into the circulations of postcoloniality that hold gender and sexuality at their center (including those that turn to colonial sites). Theories of capitalism, theories of the kinds of fetishization that occasionally nominalize women as commodities, are central to articulations of gender and sexuality in postcolonial discourses. These theorizations, whether they are explicit about their allegiances or not, naturalize the science-laden metaphors intrinsic to their arguments. I do not turn to the sciences through which gender is usually given substance, metaphoric or otherwise—biology, biochemistry, and biophysics. I look instead toward the physical sciences that grew out of the uncertainty of the political and economic conditions of the 1920s and 1930s. The physical sciences gave those uncertainties (including those inscribed through the vantage points of observation), and their concomitant resolutions of certainty, physical shape.

I turn to discussions of quantum phenomena using the uncertainty relation to explore gender that is rendered intimate, close, and small through homeliness or domesticity while shaped in the context of much larger forms of circulation than those enclosed within the household or family. These larger forms of circulation transfer a range of investments instantiated in capital across or through embodiments of nation and statehood. Women, shaped as gendered bodies or particles—perhaps measured through homeliness—can be articulated as quantum phenomena sited at the heart of these much larger forms of circulation. If one does not hold to the assumption that women must be naturalized as solid, measurable only by location, it is essential to consider the entailments of quantum mechanics: to consider the relations between particle and motion, appearance and disappearance, measurement and probability and the place of the apparatus of observation when thinking about gender in terms of the circulation of capital. Such a move allows for the possibility of reconstituting women as something other than merely positioned embodiments.

For Gayatri Spivak, the subaltern woman, trapped in debates (also forms of circulation, which entail capital) that are movements enacted through her body, disappears violently. “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (Spivak 1994: 162). This “violent shuttling” of discourses is also discussed by Chatterjee, Kandiyoti, and Bhattacharjee in their attempts to render the disappeared figure of the woman. The woman reappears as a stillness in the midst of the “shuttling.” Spivak turns the location of observation into a point that is no longer observable,

either within or outside post-Heisenbergian measurement that understands women and motion. Other theorists have been concerned with the production of gender within axes of visibility where the locatability of a body is mediated by visual economies of desire as opposed to measurement that privileges motion.¹⁴ Rather than holding the woman in place—as invisible or still, to allow for the production of fractal or Euclidean cultural forms—I would like to render women in motion or women as points of observation that are visible but not stable.¹⁵

In the quotes cited above, women subalterns are insistently produced as “woman,” an essentialized category pinned ineluctably into a narrative of marriage. Here, marriage is not merely a literal material practice but a series of characterizations (measurement fields), metonymized in homeliness, that accrue on the bodies of women. As Chatterjee (1989) makes clear, these characteristics—chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, and a vaunted capacity to organize and run a bourgeois household—clothe (literally, as appropriately demure dress, or symbolically, as attributes) women whether they confine themselves to a household or saunter out into the world. Marriage and domestication then become exemplary narratives for gendered behavior. The uniform domestication of women, versus the multiplicity of positions available to men, slides almost effortlessly into unreconstructed role theory, which haunts descriptions of Indian women in historical, anthropological, and legal discourse. Its predominance is displayed in the phrase occasionally used by “gender benders” to identify themselves: marriage resisters.¹⁶

What might the (parallel, circular, ovoid, spiral, linear, pendular . . .) motion of women entail? How would homeliness and domesticity, in the instances offered so far, be recapitulated through narratives of marriage resistance as stories of movement? How would circulations of capital, and with them assignments of value, invoke homeliness, domesticity, and resistance and thus inscribe or script motion and stillness?

14. As I write here I struggle, as Arjun Appadurai (1996) does, to write about globalization and movements of people, goods, and capital. This kind of theoretical engagement requires one to use images from nonclassical physics. My conundrum is that the conventions of the language available to me rely on metaphors that emerge from classical physics.

15. Appadurai (1996) proposes that fractals and chaos provide more productive “configurations” for cultural forms than do tropes from Euclidean geometry (and, I would add, Newtonian mechanics). Despite his apropos call for transforming the metaphors used to describe cultural configurations, Appadurai still maintains the figure of woman as effectively still—she bears the brunt of the friction of generational differences of the heritage politics of an intergenerational household. The woman’s honor becomes the “surrogate for the identity of embattled communities” (Appadurai 1996: 335–36).

16. For narrations of sexuality in relation to otherness over space and time, see Dinshaw 1999 and Halperin 2002.

In the penultimate section of this essay, I focus on two instances of marriage resistance—both located in relation to capital invested in nationhood—not as refusals to marry but as refusals to behave appropriately in the context of marriage. In both of these cases of women in motion, desire between women renders the narrative of marriage and gender problematic. In the first, a short story, “Lihāf,” by Ismat Chughtai, the complex erotic alignments between women are transgressions conducted within what appears to be a seamless (traditional Muslim) heterosexual marriage. The second story concerns a transgressive Hindu wedding, conducted under the auspices of a temple, between two policewomen working in a small rural town—a marriage for which the policewomen were fired. Both instances raise the specter of sexuality—sexualizing women who ought to remain consistently chaste and desexualized. Both denaturalize the apparently necessary movement that turns marriage into heterosexuality.

In these stories, the denaturalization of heterosexuality through transforming constructions of marriage opens up the possibility of excess and ambiguity in representations of women as “the woman.” Excess and ambiguity are not generated by turning to other representations that can be read as alternative in different sites, parceled off into the margins and thus controlled, patrolled, and disciplined. Rather, they are produced by complicating the representation of woman that anchors nation, family, and home on familiar variants of these sites, so that the excess that “makes multiple and resistant readings possible” (Phelan 1993: 4) is in ghostly evidence.

Both Ismat Chughtai’s and the policewomen’s cases engage, legally and otherwise, with secularist concerns. Chughtai’s case does so because she was charged with obscenity under secular criminal law.¹⁷ The policewomen’s case does so because the interpellation of their sexuality in court was in the context of a suit over employment that did not explicitly speak to religious or communal concerns.¹⁸ As such, the two cases are not at odds with most discussions of same-sex (lesbian and gay) sexuality, which incline toward secularist disquisitions on the

17. See *Times of India* 1997. In this evocation of the legal (Indian Penal Code 393, which defines the distribution of obscene materials as a criminal offense), the customs department in Calcutta seized a monthly consignment of gay rights magazines.

18. See *Indian Express* 1997 for a short discussion of this case in the context of civil statutes. The two policewomen, Leela Namdeo and Urmila Shrivastava, have become poster children for gay rights activists’ calls to change legal definitions of the family. Fernandez 2002 updates the situation on sexuality in India through a series of essays and restatements of statutes and cases that address sexuality in the context of contemporary global movements. For other recent texts and discussions on sexuality in South Asia, see Vanita 2002 and Vanita and Kidwai 2000.

rights of an implicitly secular civil subject who stands apart from religious affiliations. Most assertions of lesbian and gay subjectivity in South Asia erode, efface, or refuse the kinds of multiple or layered subjectivity available through legal discourses that invoke religion. This refusal is not unexpected because, as a great deal of South Asian feminist scholarship has shown, gendered differences that address desire through the juridical have, since the nineteenth century, traversed religion in ways that were antithetical to conventional twentieth-century rights discourses. At the same time, because the policewomen's and Chughtai's cases are about marriage (like the ad that opens this essay), they provoke intertextual resonances with personal, family, and thus communal (religious) legal codifications. The two cases invite a serious engagement with the relation between secularism and religion. They also suggest theoretical approaches that do not reduce a simple lapse into same-sex sexuality to generic, identity-politics notions of lesbian sexuality.

In the following section of this essay, I offer forms of mediation that still need to be displayed, despite the inconsistent but fairly continuous South Asian responses to same-sex sexuality since the movie *Fire* opened in India in late 1998.¹⁹ The forms of mediation I offer here are, first, readings of the two, now almost banal, precursors to *Fire*. Banal because both Chughtai and the two policewomen are invoked whenever a prehistory of *Fire* is laid out. But necessary because few analyses have brought all three together and because each iterates the circulations of value vested in nation, state, and tradition. I also demand that same-sex sexuality not be accorded a space other than that of heterosexuality. That heterosexuality and homosexuality are contiguous and necessary to each other is by now self-evident; yet recent scholarship on South Asia continues to hold the two apart, as though heterosexual desire remains the unspoken arbiter, the final culmination of the plots offered to women. And the work done on same-sex sexuality and its effects on gender is still parceled off to gay- and lesbian-identified scholars. I hope that, by raising the specter of rights as the ground for constituting multiple layers of difference, the questions I ask will fold themselves into the same terrain that feminists have so assiduously and thoroughly begun to investigate since the 1980s in South Asia: the differences, commonalities, and troubled reception of the gendered civil subject (as opposed to the gendered religious subject) in the various heterogeneities of the postcolonial nation-state. This is the terrain that assumes shape in recent discussions on communalism.

19. *Fire* is a film by Deepa Mehta, a Canadian Indian filmmaker, that portrays desire between two sisters-in-law living in a Hindu joint family in Delhi. It received a great deal of both negative and positive publicity for its portrayal of the women and traveled the international film festival circuit.

“A summons arrived: George the Sixth versus Ismat Chughtai,” says Chughtai (1983: 5) in an interview published in the feminist journal *Manushi*. “I had a good laugh at the idea that the king had read my story. So we went to Lahore to fight the case.” The story brought to trial was “Lihāf,” a narrative set in a seemingly traditional Muslim zenana, or harem, that reveals and revels in a complex web of pleasurable sexuality between a husband and his coterie of boys and between his wife, her masseuse, and the narrator as a young girl.²⁰ The story was written in 1941, and in 1944 Chughtai was charged with obscenity—“three months,” she points out, before her marriage.

“Lihāf” is narrated retrospectively by a girl whose absent mother sent her to the zenana. “Lihāf” opens with a foreshadowing, the shadow of a quilt on a wall that provokes the narrator to remember her past. The quilt transmutes into a *parda* (window curtain, stage curtain, cover, or dress) that lifts to play out a theater of desire, memory, and childhood. The reiteration of her childhood carries resonances of titillation and terror for the adult telling the story.

The zenana the girl visits is inhabited by her mother’s excruciatingly traditional friend, Begam Jān. The girl has been sent to the zenana to be reeducated for gender bending—running around like a boy, climbing trees, and beating up other children. The child is fascinated by Begam Jān, whose marriage to a nawab is dysfunctional: he is more interested in boys than in her. The cloistered wife, the *begam*, turns to various diversions—improvements suggested for a faithful, homely, companionate, modern-thought-traditional housewife: reading love novels and romantic poetry, caring assiduously for visiting relatives, sustaining and maintaining a groomed home, and finally the extraordinarily pleasurable attentions of her masseuse. The wife’s body and face engage the child’s budding sexual attention. The latter is evoked, created, and gendered in exquisitely textured detail as simultaneously male and female, “Sometimes her face became transformed under my adoring gaze, as if it were the face of a young boy” (Chughtai 1990: 10).

Though the wife’s body is accessible to the child during the day, at night access is frustrated by hidden movements of the quilt under which the two women—wife and masseuse—sleep. The quilt is a metaphor that resurfaces throughout the story and opens and closes it. The denouement of the tale is an extended descrip-

20. Two English translations of “Lihāf” are Dulai and Coppola’s (Chughtai 1972) and Naqvi and Hameed’s (Chughtai 1990) versions.

tion of the child's physical, though inadvertent, initiation into the pleasures and fears of massaging the wife's body while the masseuse is away. The story ends, finally, with the masseuse's return and the child's terrified peek at the contortions under the quilt. The reader, however, never learns what is under the quilt. And it was precisely this deferral on which the court case hinged.

"The obscenity law prohibited the use of four letter words," continued Chughtai in the *Manushi* interview. "Lihaf does not contain any such words. In those days the word 'lesbianism' was not in use. I did not know exactly what it was. The story is a child's description of something she cannot fully understand. It was based on my own experience as a child. I knew no more than the child knew. The lawyer argued that only those who already had some knowledge could understand the story. I won the case" (Chughtai 1983: 5).

I would like to lay aside a discussion of what look like epistemological disclaimers, trapped by Chughtai in assertions that she "did not know" and that lesbians are known only if they are named.²¹ Instead, I want to address the story's implications for state-sanctioned homeliness and the connections and resonances among homeliness, its lack, and a gay rights movement in India slowly emerging in the 1980s and 1990s.

Of all the stories Chughtai had written, why was "Lihāf" singled out for judicial scrutiny? As Chughtai makes clear in her interview, many of her stories incited the ire of male readers who wrote her "dozens of insulting, abusive letters." Along with two male writers, Sa'adat Hasan Manto and Miraji, she was charged with obscenity at meetings of the Urdu Progressive Writer's Association—the largest Urdu literary movement of the 1930s and 1940s. At this point in Indian literature, representations of marriage had been homogenized in ways that Chughtai's story unsettled. Like Manto, she was taken to court.

In "Lihāf," Chughtai's denaturalization of heterosexuality appeared to resist fixed representations of women as "the woman," home as uncanny, and the use of both woman and home to underpin the production of and rhetorical justification for the future nation-state. Genderings of the nation and national citizen seemed

21. Chughtai's response to the court's charges provides an interesting cross-cultural turn to theories of sexuality. Obviously Chughtai did not fuse desire to identity, nor did she nominalize sexuality. Her depictions of sexuality did not conform to performative theories of sexuality, so that the women in her story do not "become" lesbians even though they engage in physical activities with one another. This form of not-being-a-lesbian in a cross-cultural situation raises the question of where (i.e., in what national, cultural, and historical sites) performance needs to be located in order for it to produce identity (cf. Weston 2002, 1993; also see Povinelli and Chauncey 1999).

to rely on visible representations and visual metaphors of the traditional woman and traditional home. Visibility was ensconced in the pragmatics of Platonic mimesis, a literal one-to-one mirroring of reality. Tradition, produced through unmediated mimesis, was an unmarked representation of reality “as is.”

In “Lihāf,” Chughtai picked apart the motifs, tradition, realism, and visibility usually quilted into a feigned naturalistic realism. The nawab and Begam Jān, displaying the accoutrements of religious, disinterested, companionate marriage, produced the semblance of a pious formulation of Muslim tradition. The nawab, a hajji who had also enabled others to make the journey, lived in a house never graced by “prostitutes or dancing girls.” Begam Jān, bound to the zenana, was intent on seducing her husband into companionate marriage using all the wiles at her disposal. The seduction of narrative stability promised by this pious husband and his good wife failed when the narrator opened up the household to another kind of seeing, other registers of visualizing sexuality.²² The objects of desire in the household—the *begam* and the boys fed into plumpness by the nawab—navigate sexuality against a promise of mimed tradition. They are the foci of the two gazes of same-sex desire in the story, the gaze of the girl and the gaze of the nawab. Scripted into the language of another tradition that renders them in metaphors appropriate to the Urdu *ghazal* (a genre of lyric poetry), these renditions of the visual are already mediated by Urdu poetics. Both the *begam* and the boys as “typical” beloveds return to the convention of the *ghazal* as their bodies are sensually described: “fair, slim-waisted boys,” and the *begam* with “complexion fair . . . hair black . . . eyebrows like a couple of perfect bows” (Chughtai 1990: 8–10).

“Lihāf”’s promise of mimesis is undone in yet another way. As Gayatri Gopinath (n.d.: 3–11) has so aptly pointed out, visualizations in “Lihāf” are underwritten not by the specular but by food, desire, money, and labor. Both the *begam* and the boys live out their desirability by feeding and massaging their flesh into life—the boys “eating up syrupy rich puddings,” the *begam* soothed with special oils, “slobbering” under her quilt with the masseuse like a cat licking cream. Visibility mobilizes other movements that then undo its stabilities.

As a participant in a Marxist movement that relentlessly promoted social realism and an attendant belief in the “real” as a simple, visible given, Chughtai was in a constant negotiation with realism as a literary ideology. She faced the ques-

22. This particular movement of the visual (what you see is not what you think you see), and its imbrication with memory and tradition, opens two more recent narratives, the film *Fire* and Meena Alexander’s novel *Manhattan Music* (1997).

tion of the production of the “real”: the real Indian subcontinent and real people (subalterns—women, peasants, and workers) who were allocated the right to inhabit the future nation-land. For her the real was as much an ideologically coded production as any other and one that cycled back into colonial representation of what constituted the subcontinent, its real native inhabitants, and the projected nation-state. Every real was always already a re-presentation of a represented real. Re-presentation, new modes of historicization or education, called for a turn back toward representations of the past, whether through poetics or through literary enactments of practices that fell under the purview of the traditional. Memory (as in “Lihāf”), memorialization, remembered recreations, or the loss of memory became the sites for one such kind of return.²³

Chughtai, with her evocation of the real as representation, was trying to draw distinctions between the “real” and literary realism.²⁴ Through her fiction, she enacted resistance to Urdu conventions of literary realism and to local concordances and collusions with colonial representations of the subcontinent. For her, relationships between categories of the real, representation, literature, materiality, and politics were vexed ones, always in the process of being contested—sometimes over writers’ oeuvres and sometimes over readings of their work, biographies, and bodies. For Chughtai, as for Manto and Miraji, literary production—writing that looked like straight fiction or mystical poetry—was a politically charged activity that had the potential to disrupt the future formation of a nation-state and its subjects and which garnered them ostracism from the Urdu Progressive Writer’s Association.²⁵

Many of Chughtai’s stories were set in Muslim homes and opened them up for public viewing, displaying valences of sexuality intertwined with class and power in traditional, and therefore implicitly religious, settings. They spoke of sexual pressures placed on servants by both male and female employers in urban and “feudal” (Chughtai’s term) households and of the physical payments exacted from them—one servant is beaten, another poisoned—under these conditions. Like

23. Chughtai’s negotiations with literary realism were shared by Miraji and Manto.

24. See Hart 1998. Hart talks about the problematics of representation and the negotiations around the real and realism that haunt the U.S. feminist movement’s discussion of sadomasochism. Her work is particularly apropos here because it signals the violence attendant upon these negotiations.

25. See Patel 2002: chaps. 3 and 4. These three writers played with representation, refusing to fix representations visually. Their visual material moved into troubling colonial-complicit fixities. Chughtai, writing women as she did, had to “unfix” through embodiment, which paradoxically could slide into a fixed image of woman. One of her attempts to both body and slip away from bodying (by reading the anxieties coded into a child’s desire for a woman whose body she poeticizes as doubly gendered) is rendered in “Lihāf.” See Gözl 1998.

“Lihāf,” these stories are occasionally polysexual, the narrative dynamics playing out as sexual tensions between men, men and boys, men and girls, women and girls, and men, women, and their servants.

In narrative after narrative, Chughtai writes the material of home as slippery and uncanny. Because her stories do not permit any one home described to be easily mapped onto another, they do not allow for the production of a uniform, homogeneous representation (as tangible, visible, fungible) of the home. Sexuality and class, in their unevenness and violence, disturb, disrupt, and rent easy notions of the bourgeois home when they are interpolated into it. In “Lihāf,” Begam Jān comes into her sexuality through her servant Rabbo, the masseuse. Though Rabbo is paid for her services and clearly forms the underside of the zenana, she is permitted a narrative mobility in and out of the zenana not given to the *begam*, who must stay home.

So why was “Lihāf” chosen for censure? Was it because (as happens with stories that are eerily misread—or not read at all—when they are taken to court) of a slip that read in the name *lesbian* where the court thought it belonged? Was this simple slip, then, exposed in court, cleaned up, or clarified when Chughtai’s lawyer pointed it out and argued for the story and Chughtai’s release? Or was it something else? The story was taken to court both because it permitted the name *lesbian* to be slid into it, almost without notice or apparent violation, and because it opened up the potential for that slip within a heterosexual household. Unlike some of Chughtai’s other stories, this story mapped violation upon violation.

A story written by a Muslim woman, “Lihāf” depicted physical pleasure between women, as narrated by a girl. The nexus of desire in the story was a good wife seemingly ensconced behind the veil, someone who had no intentions of leaving her zenana but who attracted the sexual attention of the child she was supposed to inculcate into homeliness. The husband’s lust for his adolescent male protégés, which drove his wife toward other women, went unremarked by critics. So the terms of the violation were threefold: the story tells of two women—one clearly identified as a wife—exchanging pleasure for money; it is narrated by a child sent to the zenana to be socialized as a woman; and it was written by a Muslim woman who was to be married.

“Lihāf” then, queried and queered the domestic arena, implicitly interrogating both the domesticated, hopefully homely housewife who lived at the center of a particularly inflected home and the potential wife who wrote about it. This discussion offers a strange twist on Janet Halley’s essay (1993: 83), which discusses the modes through which “legal definitions of the class of homosexuals . . . persistently involve far less visible practices of constituting a class of heterosexuals”

(also see Halley 1995). According to Halley (1993: 83), “the difference between the categories homosexual and heterosexual is systematically related to differences within the category heterosexual. . . . These differences aren’t merely lexical . . . rather they structure the social conditions in which the status ‘heterosexual’ is given meaning and is attached to individual persons. Despite its representation as monolithic in its nonhomosexuality . . . heterosexuality . . . is a highly unstable, default characterization for people who have not marked themselves or been marked by others as homosexual.”

When Chughtai was asked by her interviewers at *Manushi* to expand on the reasons why “Lihāf” provoked the responses it did, she closed with the indictment, “it is not references to sex that these men object to but the exposure of their [i.e., the men’s] attitudes” (Chughtai 1983: 6). Although Chughtai says her refigurations of sexuality that “expose” moralizing attitudes to sex are the targets of male censure, the objections to her work reveal more about fears fixated on violations of the home than about sex per se. By the time Chughtai was writing and publishing her stories, “home” had been demarcated as a homogenous, heterosexualized space to be kept safe and inviolate from colonial incursions (Devji 1991: 153). As such, it embodied a politics of respectability suffused with fixed ideas of tradition. The protectress of traditional respectability was the wife, incarcerated within a home she was designated to save from modernity despite her bourgeois attributes. In the case of “Lihāf,” the homely Muslim housewife who anchors her traditional home and the girl sent there to be domesticated into womanly virtues, especially chastity, slip out of the positions assigned them. The complex registers of desire enacted in the story refigure both the home and the women settled firmly at the center of it by narrating the pleasure of physical desire between women and children in the context of a marriage. Yet because the wife does not ultimately leave the zenana, run away with her masseuse-lover, or repudiate her wifely assignments, the story provokes a retelling of the sanitized, secular heterosexual domestic space so necessary to nationalist narratives.²⁶

26. Written as it was, when nationalist movements in South Asia were embroiled in debates over the construction of nation and nationality, “Lihāf” directly confronted ideas of tradition. Tradition, cleansed of complexity, was necessary to the rhetoric of self-rule. This moralized refiguration of the past was a buffer against charges that Indians, with little access to modernity, did not have the prerequisites to form and sustain viable nation-states. The story also challenges communal constructions of both a separate Muslim past and a traditional Muslim family. See Devji 1991 for a discussion of how the home, as a privatized space, changed in response to colonialism.

In December 1987, Urmila Shrivastava and Leela Namdeo, two police constables who “belonged to the special armed forces,” were married in north India “with the consent of their families” (*Times of India* 1988).²⁷ They were subsequently discharged from the police force. Their story made the 24 February 1988 headlines of the *Times of India*, one of the country’s premier papers. Pictures of the two women accompany the story—in one, Urmila, “sporting” a T-shirt and jeans, hands firmly on her knees, appears arrogant and aloof, while Leela is dressed in a sari, her hands are cropped out of the photograph, and she gazes, wide-eyed, up and away from the camera.

The headline of the article, “‘Lesbian Cops’ in M.P. [Madhya Pradesh] to Challenge Dismissal,” sits boldly enlarged and darkened below a list of the contents of this section, the latter including Commodity Prices, Air Pollution, Appointments, and Crossword. Paralleling “Commodity Prices,” in the upper-right-hand corner, the right-lower frame of the story screams “Another Scare.” Although “Another Scare” apparently refers only to the story “Bhutto Offered Bases to US,” which follows “Lesbian Cops,” it also inadvertently provides a reading of the story that precedes it. “Another Scare” is the cornerstone that links the “other” nation, Pakistan (angled along the western edge of India and not too different but potentially threatening), with lesbians at home. Home here is multiply demarcated. The lesbians are in Madhya Pradesh, a rural state with both Hindu and Muslim histories, the heart, hearth, and home of the great central plain of the subcontinent.²⁸ Lesbian cops in the women’s barracks (a state-supported, sanctioned, and endorsed putative zenana) of the special forces gathered and arrayed to protect the nation turn into a threat, disturbing the heart of the rural epitome of home. An inch of newsprint draws lesbian military police officers to Benazir Bhutto’s militarized obeisance to a foreign superpower, the

27. Also reiterated in Fernandez 2002.

28. In the conventions of socialist-realist narrative, good literature should be reportage. In such literary productions, the “real” India is rural India. This representation continues and mimes orientalist depiction of the real (read: authentic) subcontinent. *Madhya* can be translated as “middle” or “central,” and *pradesh* can be translated as “region,” “territory,” or “district.” Though a geography of India that takes the south seriously into account would probably locate Madhya Pradesh in northern India, I am playing with its name here, as I am playing with *zenana* in the following sentence. The case of Leela and Urmila is particularly useful for my essay because, though it assumes a Hinduized secularism, Madhya Pradesh has had Muslim and Hindu histories I want to evoke simultaneously by laying them (as is rarely done in discussions of either) against my discussion of Ismat Chughtai.

United States.²⁹ That connection houses the foreign—Islamic co-option, corruption, and threat from the bordering country—squarely in the home. The threat is embodied in secular and Hindu lesbians recruited (as nonlesbians) to safeguard the nation and to patrol its borders and hearths.

The story was circulated transnationally as an article in a 1993 collection on South Asian gay and lesbian experience, *Lotus of Another Color*. The bare bones of the story seem fairly straightforward. The two policewomen, teased and harassed about their relationship by a male superintendent at a police training camp, took a photograph of themselves garlanding each other. In the *Times* rendition of their story, the dynamic duo outlined the response to the photograph, which to them was the equivalent of a marriage: “We were kept in isolation and not given food for 48 hours. They coerced us into signing papers that we had not read. We were given some cash and our company commander, Mr. R. L. Amravanshi, accompanied by three havildars, deposited us at the Bhopal railway station in the dead of night. They warned us against returning to the barracks.” The two women moved back to Urmila’s home village, in Vidisha district; her family subsequently “assumed responsibility” for her “partner,” Leela, “because she is poor”—even as they were quoted as saying that “the marriage is of no consequence.” The story apparently excited the attention of the national press when the two women contested their summary silencing, ejection, and dismissal in civil court, demanding either an explanation for their “no show of cause firing” or a reinstatement.

Urmila and Leela’s saga is more complex than the *Times*’s account of a lesbian marriage fiasco that incited the ire of the state in the guise of their commanding officer. The complications manifest themselves in corroborating statements attributed to them as well as in the retellings of their story in the paper and in the

29. See Faisal Fatehali Devji’s exquisitely theorized polemic (1992) for an articulation of the Muslim foreign other in relation to the Indian nation and home and a Muslim faux citizen’s relationship to Pakistan. Though I have alluded to the debates around secular and religious nationalism without citing them, I want to call attention to them here in a counterpoint to Devji’s essay. Calls for tradition are religiously inflected, and I do believe, as Devji does, that one must pay attention to the ways in which differences on the subcontinent get racialized and othered. For a cogent analysis of the differences between Hindu and secular nationalisms, see the essays in *Towards Secular India* 2, no. 2 (April–June 1996) and its more recent incarnation, *Indian Journal of Secularism* 1, no. 1 (April–June 1997). The Web site of *Communalism Combat* (www.sabrang.com/cc/archives) covers more recent instances. See Basu 1993 and David E. Ludden’s edited collection (1996) for a careful elaboration of Hindu (Hindutva) nationalism and its differences from secularized versions of nationalism. In brief, the distinctions lie in where and how difference is positioned in the discourse of nationalism—unity in diversity for secularism and *adhikāra bheda* (differential rights or claims) organized along an axis of hierarchies with a particular Hindutva position as the norm for Hindu nationalism.

article published in *Lotus of Another Color*. Both pieces expose rifts in conventional understandings of marriage and explore transgressions of marriage and its figurations of homeliness.

In “Inverting Tradition: The Marriage of Lila and Urmila,” Giti and Anu cast Urmila and Leela’s marriage as a viable lesbian “alternative to heterosexual marriage” and an “affirmative decision by two courageous women” (Ratti 1993: 81–84). The authors are clear about the kinds of challenges this marriage posits for the patriarchal status quo and the widely held opinion that there are no gay men or lesbians in India. As Giti and Anu (1993: 81–82) point out, the “women’s decision to marry and support each other questions the prevailing notion that only heterosexual marriage can provide women with security and pleasure”; by potentially rendering men redundant, it “poses a fundamental threat to masculinity.” The marriage also “graphically illustrates that society sanctions only certain representations of women’s sexuality. These women’s actions have implicitly called into question a heterosexual definition of marriage . . . and challenged heterosexuality’s exclusive occupation of the public sphere” (Ratti 1993: 84).

Giti and Anu’s critique of the *Times* article is apropos. To make the police-women’s marriage palatable, they argue, the newspaper rendition of it had to enclose the two women in a narrative of previous (Hindu) marriage. For the purpose of the *Times* piece, Urmila and Leela are implicitly lesbians who were once, originally and organically, married nonlesbians. As a child bride, Urmila refused to live with a “joint family,” which Giti and Anu gloss as “a refusal to live with her husband” (Ratti 1993: 82). Leela is a widow; given conventional attitudes toward remarriage, she has no possibility of a happy heterosexual re-union. The newspaper depicts the two as victims of ensuing loneliness, marginal women beyond the pale of heterosexual marriage who find solace and companionship in their careers and eventually with each other (Ratti 1993: 82).

Leela’s widowhood thus opens her up as both sexually available and sexually rambunctious.³⁰ As the feminized, demure half of the Urmila-Leela dyad, she

30. For some of the fears and anxieties of Indian male reformers that floated around in late-nineteenth-century discussions of the Widow Remarriage Act, see Radha Kumar 1993: 34–37. An *Amrita Bazar Patrika* report appearing in 1869 noted that 90 percent of the prostitutes in Calcutta were widows. A substantial number of these were from Kulin Brahmin families. Some of the discomfort around widows as eroticized women, whose rampant, rampaging potential for eroticism was no longer contained by being channeled toward their husbands (Kumar 1993: 47), stemmed from the fear that these widowed prostitutes came from the same class or financial communities as the reformers. For the production of the past, tradition, and gender differences (via textual and oral source material), see Sarkar 2001, Banerjee 1998, and Hasan 1994.

should not be allowed to continue in this state, so she is married off. Paradoxically enough, though, marriage qua marriage turns off her sexual potential by detouring it toward a new partner. However, because her partner is a woman, questions about her sexual availability and voraciousness cannot be closed off completely. The *Times* article and Giti and Anu's piece attempt to resolve this paradox in different ways. The *Times* sanctions the marriage with a closing call to Hindu scriptural tradition, so that the proclivities described in the article are contained and constrained. In contrast, Giti and Anu sanitize and secularize the depictions of same-sex sexuality, flattening Urmila and Leela's union into an asexual, shirtwaist Boston marriage.

Like the newspaper article, Giti and Anu's piece fails to represent the domestication of the two women as wedding the couple to secular respectability. Despite their necessary attempts to recuperate the value of narratives about the policewomen, the writers commit the same error they identify in press accounts of the policewomen's relationship. Their article does not account for or look at the policewomen's self-representation in the voices they assume for themselves in the *Times* story and so foreshortens a potentially fruitful investigation of sexuality that might or might not fall under the category "lesbian." In so doing, the authors have unwittingly conscripted and stabilized the two women into previously defined, prescribed representations of sexuality.³¹

When asked, the two policewomen "plead ignorance of the word lesbian." They are also "puzzled at the fuss over their so-called [*Times* phrasing] marriage." Their mystification is explained quite simply, without much ado: "You have no idea what the life is like inside our barracks. There are 90 women in our company and usually a woman will be more friendly with some than with others. We would say to them, 'Joda Bana liya' [*sic*] (they have become a couple). A good many of them have been paired off in this way. . . . According to Leela, two constables had even fought with each other for the favor of another, Miss Divya Dube." The complex configuration of sexuality in the police barracks is eloquently portrayed in another photograph captioned: "Urmila, arms around her two earlier wives, Leela touching her feet."

Although Giti and Anu are concerned about the ways in which the police-

31. "Political activists in India, including women's rights groups, have been slow in mobilizing around issues of sexuality. Notions of what constitutes 'respectable' Indian sexuality thus remain hegemonic" (Sinha 1994: 4; also see Sinha 1995, 1998). Since neither Urmila nor Leela was elite or Westernized, this case illustrates how a nationalist rhetoric of Indian sexuality has succeeded in closing off some public (and "feminist") discussions of same-sex behavior.

women's marriage has been desexualized in the popular press, they too fail to sexualize the marriage. The portrait of Urmila with her serial wives and the description of women fighting over other women in the barracks are at odds with the monogamous lesbian marriage (and the photograph of Urmila and Leela garlanding each other) at the forefront of the argument about misreading that Giti and Anu so painstakingly develop. Their representation of the two women focuses, instead, on the policewomen's "frank dignity," their "decency," and the ordinariness of the relationship in barracks where women "join" or pair up as a matter of course.

The *Times* piece on Urmila and Leela inadvertently displays anxieties about these two women who, while agents and embodiments of the nation-state, brought to public attention both the policing of sexual dynamics in the police barracks and the refiguration of tradition, home, homeliness, and marriage under the aegis of sexuality. For what are these police barracks if not secular-Hindu zenanas produced and sanctioned by the nation-state? Zenanas deployed for protecting a secular-Hindu state against Benazir Bhutto, the dangerous secular-Muslim woman who "controlled" the neighboring nation-state? A quote from a female neighbor, Sushila, in Urmila's village seemingly anchors the end of the article: "After all, what is a marriage? A wedding of two souls. Where in the scriptures is it said that it has to be between a man and a woman." But the quote, lacking any further discussion, becomes a floating anchor, providing the illusion of impassive stolidity without the substance of commentary from the writer.

Even more curious is Giti and Anu's omission of the neighbor's comment. Given the title of their crafted polemic, "Inverting Tradition," the quote could have provided them with a jumping-off point for a provocative discussion of tradition, communalism, and their imbrication with sexuality. Giti and Anu's silence points to sites where there might be problems articulating sexuality under the secular sign "lesbian" (Ratti 1993: 82). The project of calling forth or culling "lesbians from the annals of Indian history" for circulation within and without the borders of a nation demands the production of sexualized women, women in motion. At the same time, feminists uncomfortable with this lesbian challenge to respectable "Indian sexuality" (Sinha 1995: 4) desexualize and secularize lesbians into respectability. Giti and Anu are caught in the paradox of having to render sexuality visible while keeping the women who embody this sexuality clean and desexualized, so as not to tarnish public images of good and appropriate Indian womanhood. The neighbor's quote could have incited a provocative exploration of tradition as a construction—Hindu, mandated by men, and an effect of colonial discourse on India. Her series of questions could have been continued:

What is at stake in maintaining the stability of the ahistorical present in constructed tradition?³² For which gendered subjects and from what vantage points are these constructions of tradition, with their evocations of communalism, produced? What positions, readings, and material practices are elided in a series of epistemic fiats, even as a simplified, text-based, uncontextualized tradition is produced? Who is given authority to speak for, comment on, or challenge tradition? What discrepancies are made visible when oral comments by an unauthorized speaker confront tradition with the terms of its own construction and denaturalize its assumptions? Where does domesticity play into these movements?

Reiterations in the Form of Theory

Over the course of this essay, I have invoked forms of domesticity as they travel through gender. These forms have been instantiated under different historical circumstances and across a range of traversals and movements. Each form—the woman solicited for marriage by a 1980s advertisement, the mother displayed on a 1960s billboard, the women in diasporic households in the late twentieth century, the gendered shapes assumed by nations, the desiring child and women in Chughtai's *zenana*, the desiring policewomen in the *zenana*-barracks—takes shape and is constituted in some way as it circulates through homeliness and its transformation into domesticity. By *circulation* I mean not just exchange, but movement in which capital of various kinds travels over the border of the nation, through nation-to-be in relation to law, between nation and state both spectralized, and between national communities and those formed outside the nation in relation to what was and is and will be. Capital is invested in the national (through sentiment, attachment, protections, policing, and law), the global (through rights, International Monetary Fund loans, and law), the sexual (through narratives, rights, and law), and the familial; it returns through these circuits to some form of nationhood that is also statehood. I am not asserting a series of causal relationships between gendered bodies rendered static and circulations of capital; the two are webbed together in a kind of complementarity that is akin to Bohr's but not the same as that premised by him. Both the gendered bodies and their movements need one another to be seen, to be measured.

Homeliness renders the objects produced through it familiar, intimate, and close. Homeliness becomes a form of value through which objects—the women

32. See Mani 1998. Kaplan and Grewal 1999, which discusses Gayatri Spivak's career, is a case in point.

stabilized into objects of value, even when they are phantasmatic—accompany the transactions of capital. Homeliness does not necessarily render women into commodities. Women might become commodities whose value is given through homeliness, but in each instance described in this essay, the women themselves are not exactly nominalized into a commodity form. The possibility of their homely domesticity is held out as probability (as a portion of the contracts or promises I articulate in my examples) precisely because women are not merely reified into commodities. Through the intimacy invested in homeliness, women become intrinsic to circulations of capital that are also not reified.

So what of gender in movement? What my essay attempts to clarify is how gender in movement might be produced through an unhomely sexuality visible only through forms and points of observation that do not capitulate to circulations of capital. The ideologies of domesticity and homeliness as intimacy, whether heterosexual, homosexual, or something else, are complicit with capital, and when gendered renditions circulate, their circulation is as nodal moments—the homely housewife who cannot run amok.

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