

South Asia

Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*

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As a contribution within cultural studies, *Unruly Visions* provides unique insight into the ways in which aesthetics of queerness provide potentially alternative lenses through which to view the concepts of region and area. Gopinath's understanding of queerness is not necessarily to limit it to acts of sexuality or sexual orientation but to view it as a "way of seeing space, scale, and temporality" (20). In doing so, Gopinath builds on her previous book, *Impossible Desires*, in which queerness is a mode by which conceptions of region and diaspora can be troubled. *Impossible Desires* highlighted the ways that diasporas rooted in South Asia can, if seen through the lens of queerness, suggest alternative ways of conceptualizing community through multiple geographic locations. In this book, her focus moves beyond the connections made through a singular diasporic network into how multiple diasporas interconnect and generate fertile spaces of creative production that, in turn, disrupt notions of bounded region and space.

Centering primarily on aesthetics through visual art and film, Gopinath coins two phrases that she returns to throughout the text: the "queer regional imaginary" and the "aesthetic practices of queer diaspora." The first refers to the intersecting ways in which diasporas and regions collide with one another; by focusing on queer artists that reimagine region and space through connections that go beyond simple diasporic relationships, she highlights how the queer regional imaginary helps to disrupt our notion of singular regions connected through ethnicity or language. The second, the "aesthetic practices of queer diaspora," are the means by which this "restaging of the region" occurs (21). As Gopinath states, these aesthetic practices provide the "locus and point of departure from which to imagine alternative logics of gender and sexuality, time and space" (21). The book contains an introduction, four chapters (each covering a set of artists exploring these two themes through their work), and an epilogue.

Chapter 1, "Queer Regions," dives into the concept of the queer regional imaginary by exploring the work of three artists, each of whom has a connection to the "region" of Kerala. The first is the film *Sancharram* (The Journey), a 2004 Malayalam film by Ligy Pullapally about queer female desire (34). The second is the digital remaking of the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma by David Dasharath Kalal. Gopinath frames Kalal's remaking as a means to "dismantle Varma's region/nation equation" and thus challenging Varma's collusion in the Indian nationalist project (45). The last artist that Gopinath discusses in this chapter is Sheba Chhachhi's 2007 art installation *Winged Pilgrims*, in which Chhachhi plays with Orientalist notions of a connected and homogeneous "Asian culture" by displaying pop culture elements from the 1980s and 1990s that highlight globalization and histories of migration (55). Of these three artists, it is perhaps Chhachhi's work that best highlights Gopinath's conception of queer regional imaginary. Gopinath states: "*Winged Pilgrims* shows us how to read the map of 'Asia' differently, enacting a queer critique of area studies knowledge" (57).

Chapter 2, "Queer Disorientations, States of Suspension," underscores the ways queerness critiques the mainstream, particularly the liberalized notions of orienting

oneself toward the “social good” and public acceptance through “homonormativity” (64–65). Borrowing from Sara Ahmed and Jose Esteban Muñoz, Gopinath frames this chapter as a way to better understand how these “disorientations” occur in relation to the disruption of region and space (65). For instance, where traditional notions of diaspora ties emphasize roles of family and kinship across space, Gopinath highlights alternative “queer genealogies” that build connections through disjuncture and discontinuity (67). Again, she chooses three artists whose works bring these themes to life. First, she discusses the photography exhibit *13 Photos* by Chitra Ganesh, a New York City–based artist who collected photos of her immigrant family that did not make it into their “official” family album (66). The second is the poem “Mythic Terrain” by Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali, which Gopinath analyzes as indicative of the disjuncture between the “negative” of home and the “lived, messy reality of the place itself” (73). The last is the 2012 film *Mosquita y Mari*, a film by Aurora Guerrero. Set in East Los Angeles, the film is a coming-of-age story about two young queer women living in poverty in a Mexican-American neighborhood. Gopinath notes that the film focuses on a “sideways mobility” rather than upward or downward, a focus on a kind of stasis that complicates seeing class and poverty as the only potential for more or less material gain (81). In each of these examples, Gopinath emphasizes how the queer regional imaginary and its aesthetics “suggest different forms of relationality” that move beyond liberal narratives of queer despair and thus “reorient our vision toward more . . . hospitable futures” (85).

Chapter 3, “Diaspora, Indigeneity, Queer Critique,” provides a challenge of region and space through putting into conversation diaspora studies and indigenous studies. Noting that these two are often framed in opposition with one another, Gopinath uses indigenous and diaspora artists to propose a view of immigrant and indigenous solidarity against settler-colonial imposition (89). This chapter focuses on the works of diaspora artist Seher Shah, who moves between Pakistan and the United States, Australian indigenous photographer Tracey Moffatt, and British photographer Allan deSouza. Gopinath points to each work as being exemplary of this kind of connection between indigeneity and diaspora. Seher Shah’s photograph titled “Native Trailer,” for instance, provides a diasporic view of Native containment and displacement during World War II (110). In this sense, the diaspora views the indigenous and vice versa, creating connections beyond the settler-colonial imposition.

Chapter 4, “Archive, Affect, and the Everyday,” focuses on artists Allan deSouza, Chitra Ganesh, and Mariam Ghani, and visual artist Akram Zaatari, whose photograph graces the cover of the book. Here, Gopinath stresses the importance of the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora as a means to create alternate archives of past and history, and, therefore, belonging. Zaatari’s work is most salient here; he takes the original studio photography of Hashem El Madani and re-curates them as pieces of work that challenge traditional notions of gender. Gopinath notes Zaatari’s use of archival photography as the means to reimagine pasts and space; in this sense, Zaatari “queers” time as the other artists have queered space and region.

Though *Unruly Visions* provides insight through a cultural studies framework, focusing primarily on obscure artists and artwork, the themes and concepts that Gopinath provides are valuable for those focused on ethnographic methodologies as well. The notion of the queer regional imaginary, in particular, helps provide a critique of the division of regions as fixed throughout time and space. This book is, therefore,

a helpful tool in seeing region through the “disjunctured” lens of queerness, which provides an important foundation in connecting previously separated fields, such as indigenous studies and diaspora studies.

Hafsa Arain
Boston University