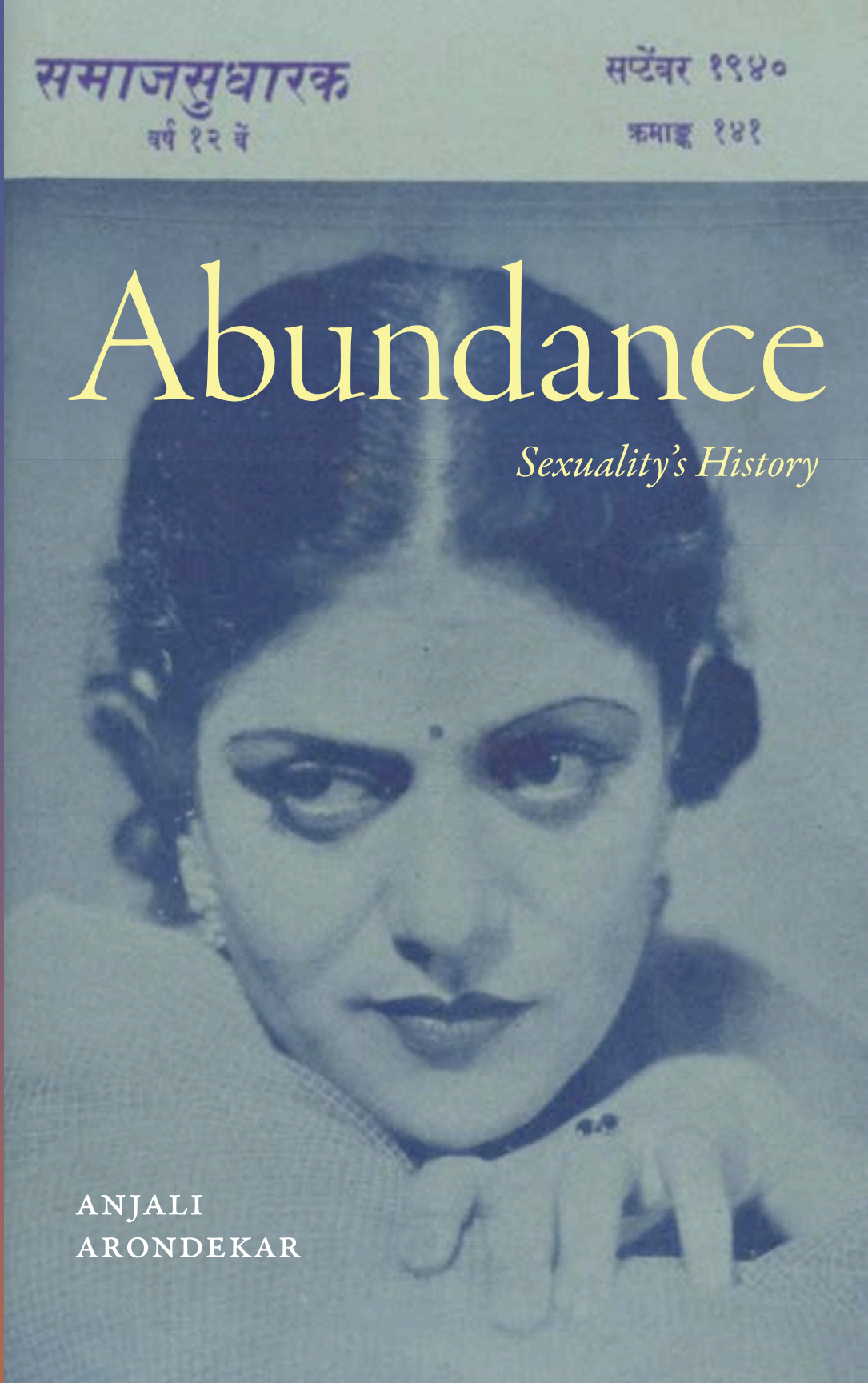

Abundance

Sexuality's History

ANJALI
ARONDEKAR

Abundance

THEORY Q

A series edited by
Lee Edelman, Benjamin Kahan,
and Christina Sharpe

ANJALI ARONDEKAR

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Cover art: Cover page of the *Samaj Sudharak*, September 1940.
Gomantak Maratha Samaj Archives, Mumbai, India.

For Aai, Baba, and all
the kalavantins . . .

CONTENTS

Make. Believe. Sexuality's Subjects

To "write" a history of sexuality, or so the story goes, is to embrace the chimeric prose of paucity and plentitude. If the present is marked by an inescapable surfeit of evidence, the past is haunted by an unremitting loss of materials.[1] Marginality and loss, paucity and disenfranchisement: these are the hermeneutical forms that have become the common currency of histories of sexuality. The missing amphora of sexuality is recovered from the archival detritus of hegemonic histories of slavery, colonialism, and nationalism to showcase more liberatory narratives of emancipation, liberation, and rights.[2] Even scholars of precolonial histories of sexuality in South Asia, for example, who rightfully bemoan the temporal focus on nineteenth-century European colonialism, call on a similar language of loss as they lament the postcolonial erasure of a historical archive resplendent with evidence of sexuality's past.[3] This orientation to loss, mutatis mutandis, surfaces most vividly within sexuality studies in the Euro/American academy, where the current invocation of negativity, failure, even utopia, still tethers histories of sexuality to forms of loss, lack, and failure in the face of, or rather because of, our embattled political horizons.[4] The appeal to psychoanalysis as the privileged language of critique further solidifies an attachment to sexuality as loss, phantasmatic, protean, or otherwise.[5] Tropes of loss especially abound in historiographical work where sexuality's (putatively) pathologized pasts and archives are recuperated as reparative sources of sanctuary/*jouissance* rather than despair.[6] Sexuality thus endures as an object of historical recovery, it follows, through a recursive

and iterative poetics of melancholia, an irresolvable longing for loss that eschews all forms of consolations.[7]

To note the orthodoxy of such theorizations about histories of sexuality is not to dismiss the considerable productivity of such thinking, or to re-create yet again the (false) divide between historicist and psychoanalytical thinking; if anything, it is more gestural of a larger and robust critical ecology, as evidence and evocation of the collective pull of loss across geo/political landscapes. Indeed, any effort to chart or critique such a broad swath of intellectual currents is, as one well knows, ipso facto reductionist. After all, narrative economies of loss are always already at work in the worlds we seek to enter, as an excruciating double bind that indentures us to the very historical holdings we seek to release.[8] We redeem the deficit of our minoritized histories through concerted acquisitions of lost pasts. Queer/trans subjects (especially in elusive subaltern pasts) remain in the stranglehold of such constant loss even as they stumble toward pragmatic, entrepreneurial (often legal) structures of survival.[9] In the face of the casual brutality of dispersed global suffering, there is, as Elizabeth Povinelli writes, "nothing spectacular to report" about loss anymore. Indeed, any epistemological privileging of loss (past or present) assumes an "eventfulness" that flounders in the face of the "ordinary, chronic and cruddy" syncopations of everyday subaltern life.[10] As Geeta Patel reminds us, the alluring double bind, that "ethical habit we refuse to release," is also "the ultimate place where recursivity resides,"[11] where our attachments to loss return and reset in an endless spiral of recuperative historiographies (from savage to salvage).[12]

My book challenges such an epistemological preoccupation with loss as the structuring mode of narration for histories of sexuality. Instead, I call for a historiography of sexuality that pushes against the binding energies of such "melancholic historicism," of an origin-mythos, as Stephen Best notes, that anchors us to scripted itineraries of loss and recovery.[13] To fix sexuality within such vernaculars of loss (while politically exigent) is to refuse alternative historiographical models, to bypass imaginative histories of sexuality, full of intrepid archives and acts of invention. I wish to set the two terms—*history* and *sexuality*—both alongside and athwart one another to stage a different story, one that seeks to discover what each of these terms might do to the other, without assuming a position of negation from the outset. At its most ambitious, my book invites two sets of ruminations: (1) What if we shift our attention from the recuperation of sexuality as loss to understanding it as a site of abundance? (2) What archival forms and

effects emerge from such a coupling of sexuality and abundance? To enter histories of sexuality through an imaginary of abundance is not to invest in and stabilize a new knowledge economy of plenitude, or to slide into plodding literalization (ah, there is more, more, more), mislaying in the process the messy misalignments the concept of abundance lugs along. Bypassing salvific modes, underwritten by loss as value, abundance serves more as a theoretical than descriptive supplement, as a concept-metaphor that moves us away from the incessant shuttling between the sated fulfillment and avid impoverishment of historiographical ambitions. Simply stated, the concept of abundance I am proposing does not replace paucity with overflow but, rather, unravels a set of archives that are fertile ground for producing and contesting attachments to history-writing.[14] Rather than resolve abundance into a concept that will be portable to other geopolitical contexts, I propose a messier experiment, an open-ended inquiry that travels between a difficult present and an unfinished past, a reeling spiral of flight and return, approaching histories of sexualities aslant. To speak of a history of sexuality from the *Ansatzpunkt* of abundance is to emphasize both the efflorescence of the past and to attend to its strategic and active mobilization within the politics of the present. One way to parse the concept of abundance I am proposing here is to see it as inextricably linked to the histories of subordinated collectivities, as a historiographical orientation that challenges the narratives of their constant devaluation. What historical forms does abundance take when we turn to subaltern peoples and pasts? How do such forms of abundance fall outside historical interest and preservation? How might a turn to abundance work against the imperative to fix sexuality within wider historical structures of vulnerability, damage, and loss?

In my previous work, I have grappled with these thorny concerns by writing about a pressing impasse in our recuperation of the historical archive, about the hermeneutical demands placed on histories of sexuality such as those in South Asia, which are entangled with questions of colonialism and race, and about the multiple double binds and possibilities that emerge from it. I have argued that the promise of archival presence as future knowledge is always circulated in relation to historical desire, a desire for lost bodies, subjects, and texts, and for the evidentiary models they enable.[15] My efforts here, however, are drawn especially to how such recuperative historiographical methods assume their more salutary forms of loss precisely in the service of collectivities tallying up what they do not yet have in relation to other constituencies. Far from repudiating such

salvific historical forms (instantiated as they routinely are in the language of lost rights and representation), I would like to ask (1) how minoritized conclaves wrestle with the evidentiary genres that such models of devaluation demand, and, in doing so, (2) how they assemble historical archives that self-consciously activate the compensatory mechanisms that such losses should or will produce. More broadly, I am interested in thinking through how the absence and/or presence of archives secures historical futurity, and what proceeds from an unsettling of that attachment, from a movement away from the recursive historical dialectic of fulfillment and impoverishment. The challenge here is to engage a historiography of sexuality that paradoxically adds value to a sedimented historical form (lost archives must be resurrected, found, produced for future gains) precisely by staging interest in its modes of reproduction (found archives must be disseminated, digitalized, and memorialized).

Such challenges are especially heightened, as I have suggested above, when geopolitics enters the diversified holdings of such historical work through languages of capitalization that shift the value of loss into the content of incommensurability. Thinking sex with geopolitics makes it a concept ineluctably linked to asymmetry, whereby a geographical location garners (lost) historical value through its (untranslatable) relationship to the West—in other words, through the labor of incommensurability.[16] Even as histories of sexuality appear provisional, open to transformation and to the velocities and inscriptions of *other* worlds, geopolitical sites (particularly in the global South) continue to be hailed as obdurately and enticingly incommensurate—literally ungraspable, undecipherable forms. Incommensurability generates a positive value here by promising to carry meanings beyond the failures of the present, to transport histories of sexuality into the future.[17] Indeed, the seductions of such incommensurability (often cast in the broad languages of divergent spatialities and temporalities) accrue a further political value where you cede to geopolitical difference precisely to lay aside the epistemic work such difference does.[18] Thus, as scholars repeatedly gesture toward the vastness of geopolitical landscapes (the required self-reflexive move that marks a reading as limited to the West while more knowledge awaits us in the "Rest"), or to the persistence of geopolitical asymmetries, little effort is made to translate those gestures to the *content* of episteme. References to knowledge elsewhere may abound in the requisite listings and bibliographies that accompany most studies of/on sexuality, but they remain largely a noninterventionist counterpoint to Euro-American epistemologies.[19] As

Neferti Tadiar reminds us, "In this endeavor, anti-European, anti-colonial critiques have not lost their pointed relevance"; rather, they have become suitably bracketed, akin to "third-string guests in a crowded party, nodded to in passing," while academic shareholders make their way to topics with "the highest profit margin."[20] In so doing, we recast, as it were, over and over again, the early debates inaugurated by Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as histories of elsewheres perform necessary scenes of nonrepresentability and reprieve (recall her opening invocation of the conversation between first-world intellectuals, Deleuze and Foucault). What is often elided in readings of Spivak's essay is her emphasis on forms of learning from below that must flourish precisely because of such incommensurability.[21]

Given such a conceptual quagmire, then, how do we harness the tremendous generative potential of incommensurability, and think sex with geopolitics, without ceding meaning *and* value?[22] How do we mark the incommensurability of geopolitics with the simultaneous plaint that such opacity is irrevocably compromised, interrupted, even staged? How do we generate geo/histories of sexuality through different economies of presence, through sight lines of abundance?[23] Given this book's indebtedness to knowledge formations in South Asia, how does one then translate the richness of a region's myriad politics, theoretical nuances, and multilingual aesthetics without falling prey to historical habits of legibility? To answer these questions and more, I want to step away from the acrimony of current debates, or from narrative conventions that impute "radical" critique. I want to bypass (or at least attempt to) settler-colonial habits of analysis that emphasize "new" discovery and capture, even as we tread shared, inherited modes of reading. Indeed, if the rich efflorescence of scholarship in transgender studies can be our guide, we are now more than ever in need of an ethos of theoretical and political generosity. For example, translation, decolonization, and trans/historicity are just some of the themes that animate recent special issues of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, all foci that call for theoretical vernaculars bold enough to galvanize and evoke situated knowledges.[24]

Setting aside privileged citations and methods, as well as critical priorities that have accrued to historical practices founded on the recuperation, reproduction, and reparation of a lost and/or erased past, let us commit instead to thinking sex and geopolitics not just as abstract concepts but as the substance and condition of our engagements.[25] To do so, I draw here from intellectual traditions within two entangled and often

segregated historiographies, one in South Asian/area studies and the other in sexuality studies, to ask: What would histories of sexuality look like if interrogated as histories of regions and/or "areas"?[26] As Keguro Macharia trenchantly asks, How does thinking in place, thinking with a geo/history, produce knowledge?[27] Such an invocation would, *eo ipso*, attempt to perform at the level of text the myriad epistemological forms such engagement can take. To that end, I have also deliberately turned to the term *sexuality* in lieu of *queer* to gather epistemologies and interlocutors across geopolitical sites that are not always poised to offer political salvation, or even configure as "queer." "Sexuality" here is not staged as a counternarrative or corrective to "queer"; rather, it serves more as an itinerant heuristics that gathers a density of narrative genres across divergent histories and spatialities.[28]

To flesh out these compacted observations and more, let me turn to some possible pathways to such abundance.

RIP: RETURN(S) IF POSSIBLE

July 14, 2009.[29] "Tumhi kai karta, madam?" (What are you doing, madam?) This was the question that the caretaker of the Gomantak Maratha Samaj archives in Panaji, Goa, quizzically asked me as I painstakingly placed a fragile document into one of many ziplock bags. The Gomantak Maratha Samaj (henceforth the Samaj) is a prominent lower-caste devadasi collectivity hailing from colonial Portuguese and British India. *Devadasi* is a Sanskrit term literally meaning "slave" (*dasi*) of a god/master, often falsely read as interchangeable with terms such as *courtesan*, *sex worker*, and *prostitute*. *Gomantak* speaks to geographical roots in Goa, *Maratha* is both a caste and regional term, and *Samaj* translates to "collectivity," "society," and/or "community." Bemused by my attempts to preserve rare archival materials that I perceived as being damaged or open to loss, the caretaker's question signaled an unforeseen twist in my orientation to archival research. For her, the preservation of these rare archival materials was of little consequence; after all, as she sternly reminded me, this was an oversaturated archive, so full at its seams that it struggled to manage the constant production of new and diverse materials. Here the return to a history of sexuality was not through a call to loss (of object and/or materials) but, rather, through ordinary surplus. When asked about the potential loss of valuable historical materials, the response from the archival custodian was one full of mirth and consternation. For her, the risk of loss is more *ek*

hasaichi gosht (a laughable matter), where the preservation of rare archival materials is of little consequence. We have more materials than we need (*zaroori peksha jasht*), she added, shaking her head in amused exasperation at my continued insistence on the looming dangers of archival loss. To this day, she reminded me proudly, new materials continue to enter the Samaj archives, with little effort being expended to either digitalize or republish older, more fragile materials.

July 20, 2014. On a rainy monsoon afternoon, a woman rushes into the Mumbai branch of the same Gomantak Maratha Samaj, where I am again busy wading through boxes of archival materials. A sheaf of papers in hand, the woman frenetically approaches the general factotum on call and demands to see the institution's *chitnis* (secretary). She is in urgent need of a written affidavit from the Samaj, an evidentiary marker, she states, that can then be used to procure an OBC (Other Backward Caste) certificate for her son to attend university on a seat reserved for lower-caste communities. The secretary arrives, listens patiently to her request, and gently reminds her that a letter from the Samaj no longer carries much legal weight, due to stricter regulations on caste verification materials. The rise in cases of false caste certificates, he tells her, has made collectivities such as the Samaj suspicious recordkeepers of caste histories, open to charges of caste fabrications. After all, he tells her with some amusement, we have trouble proving who we are.[30] Yet the woman insists that a letter authenticating her son's lower-caste status will help, so the secretary pulls out the requisite form and begins to fill out the necessary information. But surely, the woman asks, you must want to see my son's birth certificate. Surely, she asks, you must want some evidence of my claims. Ah, says the secretary, we don't need to see any evidence, nor your papers. All we ask, he adds, is your permission to list your name in our annual published record of members. "Aamche karya, tumcha vishwas" (We make, you believe), he notes, with a wry smile. The woman listens to the secretary's request, pauses, gathers her papers, and quietly walks out the door. No caste certificate is exchanged.[31]

TRANSLATION AS TRANSACTION

The two archival encounters described above animate, in many ways, the historiographical ambitions of this book: What are the evidentiary mandates that provoke histories of sexuality into presence? And what happens when such mandates go awry, flouted by the radical pragmatism of

subaltern evidentiary practices? Bear in mind that in both scenes, there is no renunciation or refusal of the evidentiary value of archives, or of the historiographical demands placed on minoritized communities. After all, the caretaker of the Goa branch acknowledges the Samaj's commitment to archival production (we keep producing, she states), just as the secretary of the Mumbai branch cannily speaks to the necessary visibility that such evidentiary forms can produce (the published list of Samaj members in exchange for the caste certificate). Together the archival events foreground (1) the compensatory economies of archival formations (archives as guarantors of presence, rights, representation), (2) the conventions of evidentiary genres (the caste certificate that we need to garner contractual rights and freedoms, a caste certificate that we have already noted is constantly under siege as a verifiable marker), and (3) the imaginative yet transactive refusal of such prescriptions (the epistemological liveness of the two scenes that speaks to riskier sorts of historical engagement).

In the first scene, we have the story of a collectivity that stubbornly refuses to move on from the ordinary plenitude of sexuality. Shorn of the aura of loss, we are confronted with a historiography that refuses to give up the paradoxes instantiated in its self-archiving: presence without preservation, production without reproduction. The very abundance of the archives directly kindles the nonrecuperation of its materials. As the caretaker of the Samaj archives reminded me, there is no dearth of materials and, as such, no inheritance of loss. Rather than safeguard against the (inevitable) destruction of fragile archival materials, the caretaker's obiter dicta folds archival surplus into an unexceptional consistency: more materials, we are told, keep coming in. Archival abundance here does not merely signify a surfeit of materials; it points more toward a deliberately embraced historical and pragmatic project. In all its ostensible substance (we have so much), the Samaj archive displays an errant materiality that remarkably eschews the exigency of preservation.

The caretaker's disinterest in the reproduction of the Samaj archives through digitalization equally stanches cherished archival routes of aspirational value. The digitalization of minoritized archives, we are endlessly reminded (and, for the most part, rightly so), safeguards against the risk of lost value, especially within the treacherous landscapes of post/colonial worlds.[32] As such, the Samaj's lack of investment in digitalized pasts and futures speaks further to an almost counterintuitive embrace of archival abundance: a refused relation to the valued reproductive imperative. In contrast to the imperative to immure and preserve materials through

digitalization, the Samaj archives appear instead to be focused on the sustenance of a history of sexuality whose abundant productions negotiated an unexpected pathway to futurity. What remains instead is the promise and failure of archival recuperation, the looking for, and a queer historiography about, found archival objects that are so plentiful that one must look askance.

In the second archival encounter, conventions of verification are cast/e aside, the uncertainty of the "original" evidentiary value-form writ large, even as claims to the future are sought (by the secretary) and refused (by the woman). As Lawrence Cohen and Amrit Rai, have variously argued, the logic of the *jugaad* (flexible form) and the "duplicate" founds the very evidentiary models of the colonial/postcolonial state in South Asia. Even as colonial/postcolonial subjects recognize themselves through the evidentiary regimes of the bureaucratic "stamp-state," they equally understand those regimes to be flexible and inherently provisional. For Cohen, the copy/duplicate of the original evidentiary marker (instantiated in the sign of the birth certificate, the ration card, etc.) crucially becomes the bearer of value such that the distinction between the proper and the spurious is always held in abeyance. The original opens itself to the threat of destruction, whereas the copy, the duplicate, the *jugaad*, continues to accrue in value through its constant reproduction.[33]

In the second archival event, the secretary's caution around the inherent "falseness" of the caste certificate (we have trouble proving who we are, as the secretary notes) does not summon unreliability as a salvational resolution; rather, his provocation (we make, you believe) captures the transactive value immanent in the evidentiary form. As such, the call to make.believe seeks less to free the caste certificate from its evidentiary referent (caste) than to corrupt the referent with a mimicry that can then, when the Samaj asserts itself as lower caste, be revealed as a ruse. Caste emerges as an open-ended fiction, not of bounded life but of an ongoing oppressive present, full of imperfection and fantasy. It is solely through such an understanding that the desired caste certificate can perform its proper transactive function, which is to signify not just alliance but the deeper and more contradictory attachments to the institutions exemplified in that alliance: family and reproduction. When the secretary invites the woman into an imagined collectivity brokered through sexuality (we make, you believe), he scripts presence outside the bureaucratic forms of judicially sanctioned life. No proof needed—we make it up as we go. These observations take hold of caste in a new way: caste is achieved now by dissolution, by the very annulment of

its form. The caste certificate becomes a radical invention of solidarity, an attachment to community, and an experimental vernacular of self-making.

The two archival events also speak directly to the ways that minoritized collectivities assemble archival technologies of presence and absence (what I am calling make.believe) to bypass our attempts to make coherent the heady confluence of uneven imaginings and longings that comprise the lives of caste and sexuality. After all, we live in a moment (especially in South Asia) where the 2018 repeal of Section 377 (the so-called antisodomy statute) and the 2014 NALSA (*National Legal Services of India v. Union of India*) judgment highlights the complex journey of gay, lesbian, and trans emergence.[34] That is, the success of these legal judgments foregrounds once more the maligned yet desired access-for-progress model (to have these rights we must cede to made-up judicial verities of identity (gay, lesbian, trans) that are rarely commensurate with lived experiences.[35] Juxtapose these efforts with the rising ranks of lower-caste/OBC communities (from the Bhandaris in Goa to the Marathas in Maharashtra and the Jats in Haryana, mockingly marked as the "haves who want more" or the "creamy layer") who clamor for rights that are currently reserved for ESBC classes (i.e., economic and socially backward classes) who in turn may or may not also be classified as OBC.[36] At the heart of these struggles is an uncertainty, a foundational unreliability in how evidentiary regimes guarantee forms of legal, economic, and social freedom. If we cannot prove (without legal doubt) the exchange value of caste and sex, how can we then transact a liberatory project? But before I delve any further, I need to first bring you closer to the historical stage on which my questions unfold. What and where is this subaltern archive of sexuality that promises abundance and courts the freedom of make.believe?

COME. AGAIN.

Even the most thorough historical study fears getting into trouble, less with the histories it is displacing or decentering than through what might be perceived as an overall lack of "proper" evidence. Nothing expresses this convention better within a history of a minoritized collectivity than an inherently paradoxical archival economy, at once empty and therefore full. An essential characteristic of such conventions is that the history far exceeds the official archives within which it is circumscribed. That is, the "absence" within official archives attests to the collectivity's enduring

historical "presence" and necessitates the concomitant search for missing and lost archives. In what follows, I hope to recalibrate such habits of historical writing, to shift the emphases away from what is missing toward a recognition of what is. The history of the Samaj, I will offer here, satisfies a double exigency: how to produce abundance entirely outside any official and/or state archive and, at the same time, how to preserve the effects of that archive within its own productions.

Members of the Gomantak Maratha Samaj, also referred to as *kalavants* (literally, carriers of *kala* [art]), are a devadasi diaspora that shuttled between Portuguese and British colonial India for over two hundred years, challenging European epistemologies of race and rule through their inhabitation in two discrepant empires. For scholars such as Rosa Maria Pérez, there is much confusion around what constitutes a devadasi under Portuguese rule, especially given the variegated and often competing references to "*bailadeiras*" (dancing girls) and "devadasis" within largely Catholic Goan sources including ecclesiastical and administrative documents, travel accounts, essays, literature, and poetry.[37] Central to such formulations is the force of Portuguese conversion campaigns that often collapsed all Hindu ritual practices into a larger arena of excess and eroticism. However, in her rush to rescue devadasis from the detritus of Portuguese colonialism and to return them to their former (Hindu) histories and cultural formations, Pérez conveniently glosses over similar atrocities committed against devadasis by Hindu and other local elites.

Interestingly, one of the few substantial accounts of the Goan bailadeiras appears not in a Portuguese source but in an 1851 travelogue by the infamous British spy/ethnopornographer Sir Richard Burton. Burton's interest in the "beautiful *Bayaderes*" situates them in the famed town of "Seroda" (now Shiroda), within a climate of Portuguese imperial decline and moral excess.[38] These "Bayaderes" are lapsed "high caste maidens," who interestingly have no ostensible ties to deity or creed. As Burton writes: "Having been compelled to eat beef by the 'tyrannical Portuguese in the olden time,' [they] had forfeited the blessings of Hindooism, without acquiring those of Christianity."[39] Yet "Seroda" then (as today) is described as a "Hindoo town," containing "about twenty establishments, and a total number of fifty or sixty dancing girls," some of whom read and write "Sanscrit shlokas" and speak a "corrupt form of Maharatta called Concanee."[40] Throughout his descriptions of the "Bayaderes," Burton routinely uses the terms *bayadere*, *"nautch" girl*, and *dancing girl* interchangeably, thus effacing the distinctions between the different terms in Goa. *Bayadere* is a term

exclusively used to describe Goan "dancing girls," whereas the terms *nautch* and *dancing girl* function more as pan–British Indian categories, covering a range of regions and linguistic cultures.[41]

On the one hand, Burton's account of the Goan "bayaderes" can be written off as yet another instance of his prurient interest in all things carnal and exotic. On the other hand, Burton's description of these "bayaderes" could also provide us with a complex prehistory to the emergence of the devadasi Gomantak Maratha Samaj in Goa. "Seroda"—or Shiroda, as the city is now known—was and continues to be one of the central locations for devadasi congregation in colonial and postcolonial India. At the center of this "Hindoo town" lies the temple of Kamakshi or Shanta Durga, the goddess of peace, which housed on its premises many generations of devadasis.[42] Unlike the noted "bayaderes," the devadasis in Shiroda were not known for their dancing skills but were instead lauded for their prowess as musical kalavants (artists) and were never lapsed "high caste maidens." Whether the devadasis of Shiroda were distinct from the "bayaderes" of Burton's Seroda is of less consequence than their historical entanglement within a diverse range of colonial texts and sources.[43]

Postcolonial histories of Goan devadasis rarely engage with the nominal replacement of *devadasi* with more fraught terms such as *nautch girl* and/or *dancing girl*. Instead, the focus is more on constructing genealogies of caste and labor that fix devadasis within a longer history of Brahminic despotism. As the story goes, the Goan Saraswats (a Brahmin subgrouping) were historically the primary patrons of the devadasis and devised a structure that demarcated kalavants who were either *ghanis* (singers) or *nachnis* (dancers) or both, *bhavnis* (women who attended to temple rituals), or *fulkars* (flower collectors). Of significance here is that *both* men and women did menial and physical labor on the farmlands of the Saraswat Brahmins and the Mahajans (elders associated with religious institutions) and were named *chede* or *bande*, literally bodies tied to the land. Included within the Goan devadasi structure were also *Chadde farjand* or *frejent*, a Persian term that literally means "boy" but is principally applied to sons of single mothers who had sex with their employers. These latter groups of boys were referred to as *deuli* (male members of the Bhavin class) and were situated lower than the kalavants within the devadasi substructures.[44]

According to one theory, Goan devadasis were no different from their counterparts in the Deccan region in function and history. Another account provides a different history of enslavement and labor by suggesting

that the devadasis were brought to Goa by the migration of Saraswat Brahmins who came in search of fertile lands and sustenance. The term *Gomantak*, for instance, is the Sankritized toponomic of the state of Goa and denotes the prosperity of its cattle herds. The irony, however, is that the region of Goa is geographically and topographically not suited for cattle rearing, and the term clearly references the nomadic Brahmins who came to its shores in search of lands and resources. Within the latter theory of enslavement and labor, devadasis were primarily "chattel," enslaved workers, whose services shifted into regimes of sex and art after their migration into foreign lands. The earliest official mention of the existence of devadasis as a social group appears in the Goa census of 1904. Of note is the careful demarcation of subgroups within the larger community; the first figure lists the number of males recorded under the category, and the second lists the number of females:

> Males: Females
> Kalavants 305: 420
> Devlis 4615: 4051
> Bhandis [Slaves] 3752: 4099
> Adbaktis [half slaves] 900: 1881[45]

The Gomantak Maratha Samaj, the focus of our study here, draws its members from such complex groupings of Goan devadasis. If the restoration of the devadasi archive has relied on a lost or maligned avatar of sexuality, the archive of the Gomantak Maratha Samaj, by contrast, denaturalizes any such presumptive understanding of the devadasi's customary forms, particularly under colonialism. In many ways, the Samaj turns to its own archives to articulate the question of sexuality, not by displacing it but by folding sexuality into the lineages through which it travels. Tracing its roots back to early eighteenth-century Goa, the Gomantak Maratha Samaj is an OBC (Other Backward Castes) community and was established as a formal organization in 1927 and 1929 in the western states of Goa and Maharashtra, respectively. It officially became a charitable institution in 1936. The Samaj continues its activities to this day and has from its inception maintained a community of ten thousand to fifty thousand registered members. Unlike oft-circulated histories of devadasis in South Asia that lament the disappearance or erasure of devadasis, the history of the Samaj offers no telos of loss and recovery. Instead, the Samaj, from its inception,

has maintained a continuous, copious, and accessible archive of its own emergence, embracing rather than disavowing its past and present attachments to sexuality.

Counter to well-documented histories of reform, particularly in southern India, this community's story in Portuguese Goa underwent very little transformation and exposure until the early part of the twentieth century. Members of the Samaj, unlike the devadasi figurations in southern India, rarely wed deities and were not "prostitutes" in any conventional sense of the word. Rather, these devadasis were mostly female singers, classically trained, placed through ceremonies like *hath-lavne* (touching hands) into companionate structures with both men and women. Only occasionally do we find references to dedications to deities through rituals such as the *shens* ceremony. And even then, the ceremony appears more as a proxy wedding in which a girl who is to be dedicated to a god or goddess is wed to a (surrogate) groom, always represented by another girl dressed as a man and holding a coconut and a knife.

Portuguese colonial officials also granted Samaj members exemption from antiprostitution laws, primarily because they remained in structures of serial monogamy, supported by *yajemans*, both male and female, who functioned as patrons and partners through the life of the Samaj subject. The Samaj members were also crucially sworn to remain in the spatial proximity of temples, whether or not they performed ritual temple roles. One curious feature of such arrangements was that children born to Goan devadasis were often given gender-neutral names that made accession of inheritance (particularly land) less judicially contentious, especially after the death of a particular yajeman, or patron. With the passage of the antidevadasi acts, many members gradually made their way to urban spaces like Bombay in search of work in the newly emergent Hindi film industry. The success of the Samaj was not restricted to the arts; it extended to fields of science, literature, and philosophy.[46]

Often referred to as Bharatatil ek Aggressor Samaj (an aggressive community in India), this devadasi diaspora is now routinely lauded (by the left *and* the right in India) for its self-reform and progress. From the immortal Mangeshkar sisters (Lata and Asha) to the first chief minister of independent Goa, Dayanand Bandodkar, there are few sectors of Indian society where the presence of Samaj members cannot be felt.[47] In obvious ways, the presence of this vibrant devadasi diaspora in western India (spliced as it is between the borders of two competing colonial projects) disrupts established histories of sexuality through its survival and geography and holds

great potential for a differentiated model of historiography. Devadasis are studied more in southern India, and rarely in western India. We have here the regional twist:[48] studies of sexuality and colonialism have overwhelmingly focused on the affective and temporal weight of British India, with Portuguese India lurking as the accidental presence in the landscape of colonialism (despite the startling fact that the Portuguese occupied Goa for nearly 451 years), so we have here a South-South colonial comparison.[49] And last but not least, Goan historiography itself, long written off as an underdeveloped and undertheorized kin of Indian historiography, could find new flesh within the lineaments of the radical history of the Samaj. As one scholar writes, it is time for Goan history to move beyond a "kind of absence," to brush aside the "shadows that obstruct our attempt to access, retrieve and understand" our past.[50] Yet even as such comparative modes (regional, South-South) enrich our understanding of sexuality's pasts, they could equally function in ways that are perilously additive, minoritizing the very histories they seek to make visible. That is, the story of the Samaj must not function as a singular parable of cathartic potentiality, nor of an abjured geopolitics, resolving historical ambivalence or loss through its success and emergence. Rather, I will argue, the archives of the Samaj must be read as examples of catachresis, as incitements to analytical reflection that produce more robust idioms of the historical.

It is important to note first that there are multiple registers of archival representation at work within the history of the Samaj. On the one hand, there are public archives of vocal performances (many Samaj members have been classical singers, and the group continues to constitute an impressive who's who of classical singers in South Asia) that are available and widely disseminated.[51] Yet such archives are largely generated by non-Samaj members and rarely include information or references on the membership of these singers to the Samaj, and they routinely elide any attachment to histories of sexuality. Mostly hagiographical in nature, these archives of voice and sound have been routinely utilized to address the centrality of the kalavants within traditions of Hindustani classical music. Indeed, the energetic circulation of these archives by scholars of South Asian classical music and music aficionados in general has guaranteed that the presence of the Samaj endures in public view.[52]

Alternatively, the Samaj's own archives are massively messy, and contain multiple genres of archival records in Marathi, Konkani, and Portuguese, ranging from minutes of meetings to journals, private correspondence, flyers, and programs, replete with the minutiae of everyday life in the Samaj.

Such efflorescence appears startling, almost jarring, pushing against archival expectations of absence and erasure. The Samaj archives are housed in open collections in brick-and-mortar buildings in Bombay and Panaji and have always been available for public viewing since their formation in 1929. I have spent the last fifteen years or so reading and sitting with the materials in the Samaj archives and have as yet read, at most, about 50 to 60 percent of the available materials.[53] In fact, the Samaj's incitement to archive, as previously mentioned, is surpassed only by its startling disinterest in the preservation and circulation of the very materials it continuously produces. A researcher's or even a curious visitor's request for rare materials is met with relative ease (a feat for anyone working in archives in India!), as one is directed to the archives without fanfare, and often with a cup of hot chai to accompany one's reading.[54]

A second key feature of the Samaj archives is the relative paucity of "veracity" genres such as memoirs, testimonials, and biographies. Indeed, the only available biography, to this day, remains Rajaram Rangoji Paigankar's *Mee kon* (*Who Am I?*) (1969), whose storyline (as we shall see in a later chapter) is itself mired in the production of a foundational fiction.[55] The privileged archival genre is fiction, written by Samaj members, in the form of short stories, serialized novels, and novellas that take center stage in the Samaj's self-fashioning project. Fiction provides the vitalizing properties of the archive, deliberately rerouting the demand for archival presence, from conventional evidentiary forms to more imaginative modes of representation. Here the "truth" of the Samaj is not what is at stake; rather, what matters are the genres of self-fashioning. These writings (mostly anonymous) appear in the monthly journal *Samaj Sudharak* (1929 to this day) and are heavily didactic in content, encompassing issues such as education, marriage, devadasi reform, the perils of prostitution, caste shame, travel, contraception, sports, and even the evils of gossip.[56]

More confounding still is the Samaj's relationship to principles of archival provenance and circulation. That is, how does the Samaj's archive become visible and gather value, mediating the imaginative leap, as David Squires points out in a different context, from "historical record to historical truth"? For Squires, even as histories of sexuality embrace the munificent returns of the archival turn, less attention is paid to the material organization of archives, their evidentiary genres, and the multiple problems of access and circulation.[57] As I noted earlier, the archives of the Samaj have not been read, circulated, or memorialized beyond a repeated reference to the glories of the Samaj's success as an aggressive, self-reforming

collectivity. Such a historical elision is particularly telling because there is no mystery surrounding access to the archives, no governmental bureaucracies to accommodate. In the story of the Samaj, archival surplus repeats itself in a historical calculus so minor, so unspectacular, that it does not appear to excite historical recuperation. As a historian colleague once asked me with great exasperation, Why is this not just a failed archive? If it has not been read and is so evidently available, surely there must be nothing there. The Samaj's provenance thus marks both archival abundance and historical minoritization: it is both removed from the archival mandates that govern minoritized histories and, at the same time, intimately acquainted with them and their most subtle efforts on history-writing.

KEEPING COMPANY

My efforts amplify recent scholarship within caste, slavery, and Indigenous studies that has also chosen to refuse the mandate of a "show and tell" and/or "lost and found" historical script. That these trenchant challenges to our consumption of times past have overwhelmingly come from scholars working on histories of minoritization that are attentive to archival economies of loss, paucity, and/or devaluation is hardly surprising. Echoing early postcolonial and anti-imperial critique, much of this scholarship has pushed back against the repeated demands of a Manichean perspective by drawing attention to the dangerous consolations of a rhetoric of blame, or of a salvific nativism and/or identitarianism. The sterility of established formulations is jettisoned for an intellectual renewal that aspires to supplant a politics tied to structures of paucity and recovery. A runaway poetics is needed, Fred Moten writes, that challenges ascriptions of impoverishment, crafts "a resistance to constraint and instrumentalization," and refuses the constant demand to "perform how mad you are."[58]

At this point, I must underscore that my effort in bringing these divergent strains of scholarship together is openly directed at pushing us to examine our own critical genealogies, along with those we leave aside or dis/engage even in seemingly shared political projects. My assemblage of thinkers and field-formations is thus not meant to suggest compatibility between the works I cite; more than anything, one must mark the convergences and divergences within such an amalgam. For instance, histories of sexuality and slavery in North America engage unevenly with histories of sexuality and slavery in South Asia, despite the obvious convergence of

historical and political antecedents. By this I mean not that there has been no acknowledgment of Indian Ocean histories of slavery and sexuality but more that such acknowledgment participates more in a structural economy of affiliation than in a robustly epistemological one. In other words, we understand that slavery existed across spatialities and temporalities, even as we elide what differences in form and content those variegated histories make to the very idea of who and what constitutes a slave. As Indrani Chatterjee reminds us, historians of slavery and sexuality need to liberate themselves from a Eurocentric racial imagination and cultivate "a vision larger than that which takes the plantation as its starting point for imaging slave lives."[59] To not do so is to surrender to the imperialist rhetoric of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whose Orientalism literally colors our narratives of the non-West.[60] Such an elision is equally seen within South Asia itself, whereby the Atlantic Ocean model of slavery still holds sway within much contemporary mobilizations of slave histories, complex local histories of slave emergence notwithstanding.[61] All this to say, let us not forge false equivalences between minoritized citational practices and ignore the asymmetries at work within and without.

Within South Asia, such pushback against the demand to proffer evidence of one's historical self is most notably seen within the vibrant field of Dalit studies. Dalit historiography, whether of Dalit actors or their archives, remains scripted, Milind Wakankar writes, as a heroic transition from silence (the horror of caste discrimination) to speech (empowerment as caste communities in electoral stakes). What happens, asks Wakankar, if we think instead on or/of "the cusp," of historiographical traditions? To think on the cusp is to catch a "a form of political will on the make," alluding to the retrospective movement that captures a moment of rupture "that was as yet open to transformation and change."[62] On the one hand, Wakankar argues, the recuperation of the Dalit radical medieval poet—Kabir, for example—installs him as a god, as an original prehistory that grants Dalit pasts a mighty presence, well before the emergence of colonial and/or nationalist caste formations. On the other hand, even as claims to Kabir restore Dalit histories, what falls away are Kabir's attachments to the now-defunct sect, the mythical Kapalikas, who, as silent figures of mourning, violence, and death, provide a more textured prelude to historical genealogies of caste. For Wakankar, to do Dalit historiography on the cusp is to suture speech and silence, to ask for divergence at the very moment of historical rupture and recuperation.

For more polemical scholars such as Kancha Ilaiah, the ascription of loss to Dalit histories derives more stridently from an upper-caste, hegemonic historiographical model that fosters elitist vernaculars of research and legibility, bypassing Dalit modes of historical writing. Illiah refuses such mandates of elitist nationalist historiography in most direct terms: "The methodology and epistemology that I use," Illiah writes in one of his oft-cited essays, "being what they are, the discussion might appear 'unbelievable,' 'unacceptable,' or 'untruthful' to those 'scholars and thinkers' who are born and brought up in Hindu families. Further, I deliberately do not want to take precautions, qualify my statements, footnote my material, nuance my claims, for the simple reason that my statements are not meant to be nuanced in the first place."[63] That Illiah's essay appeared in volume 9 of the heralded Subaltern Studies Series is hardly a coincidence, as its mocking foregrounds the disciplining and disciplinary proclivities of even that politically progressive intellectual project. To that point, Dipesh Chakrabarty (a founding member of the Subaltern Studies Collective and coeditor of that volume) acknowledges the difficulties the collective had in taking Illiah's work seriously: "I still remember the debate among the editorial members of Subaltern Studies that preceded our decision to publish this essay that deliberately—and as a political gesture—flouted all the disciplinary protocols of history and yet claimed to represent the past in a series that was, after all, an academic enterprise."[64]

A second key feature of Illiah's critique (which may in some ways pose even more of a disciplinary threat to Indian historiography) is his indictment of nationalism as the aspirational antidote to the evils of colonialism. Nationalism becomes the desired historical script that promises to restore and redeem the losses incurred (especially by subaltern subjects) through the brutalities of colonialism. Such a binary, Rawat and Satyanarayana remind us in their recent introduction to *Dalit Studies*, discourages any historical study of the vibrant Dalit social and religious reform movements that mobilized the promise of colonial modernity. From "anti-untouchability agitations to temple entry movements, to struggles for access to public space and representations,"[65] Dalit collective action (particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), they note, foregrounds anticaste discrimination, often utilizing the colonial state and its frameworks to fashion its demands. Archives of such Dalit mobilizations and more exist across multiple registers, yet they remain unreadable within the annals of nationalist history. Thus, if Dalit histories are now produced

as untold or lost in modern Indian history, it is more because they cannot be easily assimilated into the folds of a dominant anticolonial nationalist narrative. Instead, their abundance complicates our narration of the movement of a colonial to postcolonial history, provoking a different and difficult shift in our historiographical orientations to the past.[66]

In a similar vein, scholars of Adivasi and/or tribal historiography in South Asia, such as Prathama Banerjee, signal the paradox of even claiming such a lost history within current nationalist historiographical practices. Here the Adivasi appears as the missing link within narratives of counterinsurgency and policy, or to disappear within the folds of a flawed ethnographic imaginary. While such a historical calculus may well account for the "disappearance" of most subaltern subjects, Banerjee notes that the figure of the Adivasi and/or the tribal (distinct from the Dalit) poses an even more foundational agon. That is, if Adivasis or tribals are "an archaic embodiment of authenticity and radicality, outside of the realm of the modern, who is the subject around which a field such as adivasi studies might coalesce in the first place?"[67] What is there to recover or recuperate if the very historical category of the Adivasi was cultivated to fuel missionary and nationalist discourses of improvement and education? For the colonial and postcolonial state projects to flourish, the Adivasi must remain lost in time and space, enabling the reproduction of the modern as the tribe's necessary other. Yet Banerjee is quick to point out that it is no longer sufficient to simply invoke such a genealogy of construction. After all, construction or not, Adivasis or tribals have been disciplined and governed for over two centuries and have mobilized within the terms of the very category that erased them in the first place.

Similar imperatives surface within Indigenous histories (specifically in North America and Asia Pacific) where the recuperation of "Native" loss is seen as merely reproducing and replicating the homogenizing forces of settler colonialism. As Joanne Barker writes, it is time to suspend deluded forms of historical reading, to rail "against the idea of an indigeneity that was authentic in the past but is culturally and legally vacated in the present." Such ideas of indigeneity, Barker warns, hypostatize a modernist temporality whereby the celebration of a glorious past permits the dismissal and disavowal of a vivid and vast living present. As she says, "It is a past that even Indigenous peoples in headdresses are perceived to honor as something dead and gone."[68] Expanding on such pernicious historical fictions, James Clifford further cautions against the seductions of returns that incite claims of ownership to a past via a "logic of priority." To narrate Indigenous

history, within such a logic of priority, is ironically to decenter Indigenous historical practices that "give shape to time that question and expand conventional assumptions."[69]

While Clifford's study roams over broader networks of what he calls a global "*présence indigène*," he foregrounds the urgent need for a different mode of historical "realism" (of ritual, memory, and affect) that engages the living present, provincializing, as it were, the dead language of lost records and archives.[70] Further to this project, scholars such as Audra Simpson have advocated for more foundational shifts in the very ethnographic and historical forms through which we articulate and recover allegedly lost Indigenous knowledge and lands. "To fetishize and entrap and distill indigenous discourses into memorizable, repeatable rituals for preservation against a social and political death that was foretold but did not happen," she writes, is to tread the territories of the (dangerously) familiar. Instead, Simpson invokes a different order of knowing, or what "no one seems to know," where the demands for recognition, political life, and identity were all instantiated in refusals.[71]

Nowhere has the recuperation for a lost past seemed more palpable than within histories of Atlantic slavery. As the editors of a recent *Social Text* special issue on the question of recovery and slavery note, the limits of recovery in "the field of Atlantic slavery and freedom" have reshaped the very parameters of historical methods and debate.[72] Indeed, nearly every theoretical account of Atlantic slavery stages the historiography of slavery as the place where absence and archive meet.[73] A similar reading of archival loss, paucity, and erasure even animates scholarship that challenges the foundationalism of Atlantic slavery as the "origin story" for the African diaspora.[74] For scholars such as Jennifer Morgan, the enduring seductions of statistical empiricism concatenate such attachments to loss. Even as Morgan lauds efforts to develop crucial research databases such as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) that have led to new research on the contours and dimensions of the slave trade, she also remains "troubled by this kind of archival construction."[75] After all, data accumulation and modes of quantification in general, Morgan cautions us, remain enmeshed within the logic of the very "technology by which Africans are rendered as outside the scope of Man." That historians still remain continually struck by the difficulty of accessing counterfactual "evidence" of the slave past puzzles Morgan, especially as the records we do have were created primarily to shore up the commercial aspects of the slave trade. Morgan reminds us that histories of gender and slavery are further erased in databases such as

TSTD because ship captains rarely kept records according to sex ratio. As such, the multitude of experiences women had on these slave ships remains unmapped, undocumented, and thus transacted as archival loss.[76]

The historical inheritance of loss, as is now obvious, is formidably recursive and iterative. Loss and paucity provide the warp and woof of a better future, all the more so when they carry the promise that if such deficits are erased, we, who are subjected to both, can somehow be redeemed. And in every plangent iteration of this promise, the burdens of minoritization paradoxically demand archives and histories that must equally proffer arguments for their own survival. Under these conditions, when minoritized subjects have so effectively absorbed *and* struggled with the lineaments of loss, it becomes even more urgent to ask: What kind of historiography do we want? A historiography, I would respond, that breaks with such moribund conventions and summons more abundant and joyful lineages of possibility and freedom.

MADE TO ORDER

My book refuses the conventional reading of South Asia as a region that provides local historical avatars for Euro-American histories of sexuality. Instead, I ask, what would histories of sexuality look like if interrogated as histories of regions and/or "areas"? As such, the book equally offers a broader meditation on the politics and poetics of sexuality, geopolitics, and historiography. Even as South Asia, a fabular geography, provisions the possibility of archival abundance, it remains convened through epistemology rather than exemplarity. Individual chapters thus are composed through the ambit of the archives of the Gomantak Maratha Samaj, its torsioned histories, summoning us into worlds of make.believe, than to readings of geopolitical certitude. Each chapter speaks to the places where historiographical conventions and genres get stuck, go awry, or simply fold back into recursive habits of search and rescue. The structure of the book is organized around three concepts that have increasingly become the foci of debates within histories of sexuality: archives (what constitutes historical evidence), exemplarity (how we read evidence), and geopolitics (where we read from).

My first chapter, "In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts," serves both as a summation of the issues outlined thus far and as a lead-in to the broader trajectories of the book. For anyone who works within historical archives,

it would come as no surprise that any hegemonic text making confident claims to historical truth will be destabilized and exceeded by the operations of counter-archives, counter-stories that disrupt any and all ideological projects being advanced. Such a critical understanding, however, does not as easily extend to minoritized archives, where the "subversion/resistance hypothesis" (despite or perhaps because of the contaminations of Foucault and Subaltern studies) continues to function as difference's most consequential and enticing effect. The aura and/or seduction of resistance stubbornly lingers, suturing subaltern archives to an oppositional imperative. Even the most rigorous intentions to the contrary have not prevented the demand for a veracity archive that promises such desired radicality for histories of minoritized collectivities. What happens, I ask, if we are confronted instead with an archive of sexuality that eschews the consolations of veracity genres (such as memoirs, testimonials, and biographies), for the promise of more imaginative genres of representation? The orchestrated refusal of the Samaj to conform to representational archival forms, even as it continues to produce an efflorescence of materials, embraces the very paradox it engenders: the archive remains a central value-form, even as its radical transformation is continually demanded. The revelatory veracity of the archive gives way to a revelatory labor that eschews transparency and celebrates its own continuous (non)production.

My second chapter, "A History I Am Not Writing," explores what exemplifying readings of the Samaj records mean for the way we encounter archives, particularly archives of sexuality. What makes something an archival exemplar, adequate to the challenge of representation and study? Why does the writing of a history of sexuality take a particular narrative form (specifically in British and Portuguese India), and what creates obstacles to its seamless storytelling? I focus on one such narrative ritual that continues to inaugurate most historiographical projects of sexuality: the problem event, the detail, the legal case—in other words, an archival trace that compresses or even obfuscates historical content, legible only through reconstructive hermeneutics. For scholars working at the interstices of sexuality and subalternity, such as myself, the problem event could offer glimpses of a lost history, the scarcity of historical evidence countered by the hermeneutical performance of plenitude as you mine the archival trace for the promise of historical precedence and futurity. The incitement of my chapter title, "A History I Am Not Writing," calls for a more paradoxical labor: to read the archival exemplar precisely for what it cannot hold. What is on offer here is not a stabilizing recuperation of historical detail

but more an exhortation to think the archival exemplar as an absorbing and abundant discursive presence, reassembled through our every reading. Bypassing the seductive heroics of recuperative historiography, this chapter proffers a different pathway to historical presence.

My third chapter, "Itinerant Sex," interrogates how histories of region constitute robust histories of sexuality and what critical lessons are to be learned from such a shift in historical orientation. How do histories of sexuality trouble the heightened divide between the de/colonial and the post/colonial turn? Eschewing the conventional segregation of spatialities (Latin American studies versus South Asian studies) that often undergirds the force of the decolonial turn, this chapter engages the emergence of the Samaj in the fraught contexts of colonial Portuguese India. In so doing, I pose one central historiographical question: How do the vernaculars, temporalities, and spatialities that make "sex" intelligible as object and archive summon itinerant geopolitical forms (Portuguese in South Asia) that are often left behind? Itinerant sex calls for historiographical forms that muddle the theoretical pathways that suture geopolitics to forms (refused or otherwise) of region, area, nation.

Spatially split between British India and Portuguese India, the available archival records of the Samaj outline the peculiar geopolitical challenges its members face as sex workers who travel between regions. Samaj members express concern with the demands for national belonging and wrestle more with their place within and outside such regional formations. Even as Samaj records (minutes, editorials, judicial and property records) demonstrate a resistance to upper-caste/Brahmin hegemony, there is no evidence of any involvement in the burgeoning liberation movements in British or Portuguese India (India gains independence in 1947, and Goa is liberated in 1961). Indeed, the early absence of any collective involvement by the Samaj in the resistance movements outside of their local interests speaks to yet another twist in the tale of the Samaj. In fact, one of the recursive and fascinating features of this Samaj's history of sexuality is its refusal or rather sidelining of any regional attachment, outside of its own formation. Instead of laying claim to geography as established historical value, the Samaj, as I will demonstrate, strategically mobilizes the politics, desires, and identities made possible by the reach of geopolitics.

The book ends with a short coda, "I Am Not Your Data: Caste, Sexuality, Protest," an experimental fragment that excerpts three scenes of abundant reading in postcolonial India: from recent protests by trans/queer activists in India against the 2019 discriminatory Citizens Amendment

Act, to the radical attenuation of caste amid the dogged brutality of the current pandemic. Each scene translates histories of caste and sexuality as remaindered evidentiary forms, ongoing refutations of clarity and easy categorization.

IMPERATIVE

My meditations do not focus, as is clear by now, on archives that can be considered explicitly homosexual or transgender. Neither am I invested in extracting queer value from lost histories of sexuality within the sprawling landscape of an ever-changing South Asia. Rather, my turn to abundance as heuristic speaks to a nonrecuperative history of sexuality that embraces presence without return or the fear of loss. To theorize a history of abundance is not to be restored to value but, rather, to be set adrift upon more intrepid economies of meaning—sometimes harmonious, sometimes dissonant—that come together to upend genealogies of historical recuperation and representation.

And finally, this book, more than anything I have previously written, is the thick subjective effect of a history as it has been lived. The past is not only usable here but always somewhere close at hand. I grew up within the bawdy, colorful, and expansive lower-caste politics of the Gomantak Maratha Samaj, and it is those familial genealogies that first opened me up to the urgencies of archives and politics. My questions thus emanate from those intimacies; they are of them, but not about them. Contravening the protocols of reproduction (whether of collectivity, family, caste) was not just a familiar feature of my Samaj life but also a profoundly political matter. One's history was not a place of capture; it was a compositional lexicon of self-making, to be continuously taught, modulated, inhabited, and shed. I can do no better than to tell that story.

NOTES

1 I borrow the phrase "inescapable surfeit" from Teju Cole's focus on the constant incitement to photograph, to document the surfaces of the worlds we inhabit. "Take lots of photographs," he writes, is the mantra of a good account. See Cole, "Finders Keepers," 176–80.

2 Some sample texts include Arunima, *There Comes Papa*; Kapur, *Erotic Justice*; and Dave, *Queer Activism in India*.

3 See Chatterjee, "When 'Sexualities' Floated Free of Histories in South Asia."

4 I am imputing a certain relationality to the thinkers named, even though they may not always conceive themselves as constituting a cohort. I do not mean to suggest here that Edelman, Love, and Halberstam are uncritically recuperating languages of loss, lack, and failure, or that they are to be read as simply fungible within my conceptual formulation. Edelman, for instance, continually emphasizes a nonredemptive understanding of sex through his theorizations of negativity and the antisocial. My point here is each of their projects speaks (with varied degrees of success) to new imaginaries within queer theorizations of temporality and affect. I mean to draw attention more to the persistence of dominant forms of queer reading circulating around structuring tropes of loss, lack, and failure. See Edelman, *No Future*; Edelman, "Ever After"; and Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*. José Muñoz's landmark *Cruising Utopia*, for example, draws on queer of color critique to fashion imaginaries of reparation and renewal, distinct from a teleology of redemption, that would allay the injuries of the past through a "utopian" memorialization. See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

5 There is a literal cottage industry of texts on the potentiality of melancholia as a productive conceptual structure for thinking gender, sexuality, and difference. For example, see Eng and Kazanjian, *Loss*.

6 See Goldberg and Menon, "Queering History"; Love, *Feeling Backward*; Freeman, *Time Binds* and "Still After."

7 Fuss, *Dying Modern*, 4.

8 When I first began to give public talks on this project, I was often reminded by well-meaning and often concerned colleagues in the US academy that I was speaking from a privileged position—that as a tenured professor in a research institution, I had no idea of how people suffered in those distant elsewheres. To dismiss loss was to dismiss the very persistence of economic inequities, I was told. The irony of such presumptions about myself notwithstanding, I was struck by how the very insistence of such reminders was precisely the point I was trying to make. But more on that later . . .

9 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*. Berlant's opus, among many other weighty questions, speaks to the ethical conditions of nonpossibility under which minoritized subjects carve their relationship to the world. For a careful genealogy of the proliferation of the concept of precarity, see also Nyong'o, "Situating Precarity between the Body and the Commons."

10 See Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*, 3–4, and "The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall." See also Deer, "Beyond Recovery."

11 Patel, *Risky Bodies and Techno-Intimacy*, 18, 48. Patel writes that "double binds . . . show up with such assiduous, diligent, banal consistency, like

the old uncle who always arrives at every wedding with the same parcel of ageing hoary jokes."

12 I am of course drawing from James Clifford's important argument around modes of "salvage ethnography" in his essay "On Ethnographic Allegory."

13 Stephen Best makes an exemplary case for pushing against the melancholic attachments to the history of slavery. See Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present." See also Crawford, "The Twenty-First-Century Black Studies Turn to Melancholy."

14 Hannu Salmi calls for a "principle of plenitude" within historiographical writing, inspired through scientific models of "black-hole research." Drawing from such a model, a historian must speculate about the infinite traces surrounding a (lost but present) object that cannot be seen, but which must in many ways be "invented." See Salmi, "Cultural History, the Possible, and the Principle of Plenitude."

15 For an excursus on the relationship between sexuality and archival hermeneutics, see A. Arondekar, *For the Record*.

16 For more on the work of race, sexuality, and incommensurability within the United States, see Muñoz, "Race, Sex, and the Incommensurate."

17 For Subaltern studies scholars, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, the subaltern's incommensurability emerged from their unreadability, from their "archaic" and "religious/mythical" attachments to nonelitist modes of historical survival. To attribute value to subaltern historiography was to make way for multiple modes of historical writing that would take such attachments seriously. See Chakrabarty, "Subaltern Studies in Retrospect and Reminiscence."

18 See A. Arondekar, "Thinking Sex *with* Geopolitics." The piece is a response to Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*.

19 Hayot, *On Literary Worlds*.

20 Tadiar, "Ground Zero," 174.

21 Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

22 Arondekar and Patel, "Area Impossible."

23 Povinelli, "Radical Worlds."

24 See Gramling and Dutta, "Translating Transgender," special issue, *TSQ*, 3. See also DeVun and Tortorici, "Trans, Time, and History"; and Rizki, "Trans-, Translation, Transnational."

25 Reiter, *Constructing the Pluriverse*. See also Chen, *Asia as Method*.

26 See Chiang and Wong, "Asia Is Burning."

27 Macharia, "Queer African Studies."

28 I am thinking here of early feminist work in South Asia, which provided many of the theoretical vernaculars that have become the mainstay of histories of gender and sexuality for contemporary scholars. See, among others, Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*; Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*; Tharu, "The Impossible Subject-Caste and the Gendered

Body"; Oldenburg, "Lifestyle as Resistance"; John and Nair, *A Question of Silence?*; Sangari and Vaid, *Recasting Women*; and Mani, *Contentious Traditions*.

29 There is a (bracketed) prehistory to my lifelong tussle with the logic of returns. As a child I often visited a Catholic cemetery near my grandmother's house in Girgaum in South Mumbai. Given the paucity of open spaces for children to play freely in that area, my cousins and I often wandered over to the cemetery, which provided us with the rare luxury of space and exploration. We were surrounded by headstones, marked by scattered details of the lives of strangers, always framed with the invocation "RIP." As lower-caste Hindus (lapsed or otherwise) and staunch converts to the doctrine of reincarnation, RIP always read to us as an active "Return If Possible," not the sanctuary of a place of rest!

30 Saksena, Seth, and Biswas, "Study on Issue of False Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe Certificates," 102.

31 Gatade, "Phenomenon of False Caste Certificates."

32 There is of course much more to be said about debates around the push toward digitalization. On the one hand, as Brian Connolly asks (particularly in research on nineteenth-century North American history), does the digital availability of multiple archival genres of evidence produce a new and more problematic empiricism? Does the access to archives overdetermine the value ceded to written materials and more? On the other hand, literary scholars of early modern Europe, such as Elizabeth Williamson, speak to the limits of digitalization within early modern histories of accumulation and access: How does it cover over the gaps, or erase the abundance of multiple reading practices? While both Connolly and Williamson make sound cases for the limits of digitalization, I do have to note with some irony here that for most archives in the global South, digitalization is not even an option open for consideration. See Connolly, "Against Accumulation"; Williamson, "Abundance and Access"; and Balachandran, "Documents, Digitisation and History." For a discussion of the challenges of digitalization and access in South Asia, see "State of the Archive," *Archive and Access* (blog), https://publicarchives.wordpress.com/state-of-the-archive-2/.

33 Navaro-Yashin, "Make-Believe Papers, Legal Forms and the Counterfeit."

34 The 2014 NALSA case judgment led to the recognition of transgender people as the "third gender" by the Supreme Court of India, affirming that the fundamental rights granted under the Constitution of India would equally extend to them. However, the terms of such judicial recognition have yet to translate materially for most transgender subjects who continue to survive in conditions of economic and social precarity. See https://thewire.in/gender/over-two-years-after-landmark-judgment-transgender-people-are-still-struggling.

35 For excellent analyses, see Bhan, "For All That We May Become"; and Dutta, "Contradictory Tendencies."

36 To understand the complications of caste verifiability and discrimination in postcolonial India, see, for example, Daniyal, "As BJP MP Mounts 'Creamy Layer' Revolt against His Party, What Is Modi Government Thinking?"

37 Pérez, "The Rhetoric of Empire."

38 R. F. Burton, *Goa and the Blue Mountains*, 118–35.

39 R. F. Burton, *Goa and the Blue Mountains*, 119.

40 R. F. Burton, *Goa and the Blue Mountains*, 125.

41 See entries for "bayadere," "nautch girl," and "dancing girl" in Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*.

42 Amita Kanekar provides a detailed demystification of the so-called pillage and rescue of Goan temples during Portuguese colonial rule and beyond. See Kanekar, "Architecture, Nationalism, and the Fleeting Heyday of the Goan Temple."

43 Sarkar, "Dedication to the Altar," 145–51.

44 Kakodkar, "The Portuguese and Kalavants." I am grateful to Dr. Kakodkar, senior librarian (retired) at Goa University, for her invaluable help in locating crucial sources on Kalavants in the Historical Archives of Goa. She is the only scholar who has yet worked extensively on cataloguing the history of the Gomantak Maratha Samaj.

45 Sa, "Here Lived Batabai."

46 Kakodkar, "Devadasis of Goa." While female singers such as Moghubai Kurdikar, Kesarbai Kerkar, Lata Mangeshkar, and Kishori Amonkar remain the best-known Gomantak Maratha Samaj members, others of note include the first composer of Marathi musical drama, Hirabai Pednekar; a former chief minister of Goa, Shashikala Kakodkar; and Sulochana Katkar, retired president of the Goa Congress.

47 For more historical detail on the emergence of the Samaj, see A. Arondekar, "Subject to Sex." Other texts that gloss briefly on the history of the Samaj include Bhobe, *Kalavant Gomantak*; Khedekar, *Gomantak Lok Kala*; and Satoskar, *Gomantak Prakriti ani Sanskriti*. For the most recent hagiographical study of the Samaj, see Verenkar, *Prerarna Rukh*.

48 There is a small and well-cited set of writings on the cultural history of devadasis in southern India. Some key texts include Srinivasan, "Temple 'Prostitution' and Community Reform"; Kersenboom-Story, *Nityasumaṅgalī-Devadasi Tradition in South India*; Kamble, *Devadasi ani Nagnapuja*; Shankar, *Devadasi Cult*; Marglin, *Wives of the God-King*; Chakraborthy, *Women as Devadasis*; Ramberg, *Given to the Goddess*; and Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*.

49 Goa's official liberation came on December 19, 1961, when the Indian army moved in against the Portuguese garrisons as part of Operation

Vijay. Yet this late "liberation" by and into the Indian state did not come without a fair share of controversy and resentment. For many Goan historians and nationalists, Prime Minister Nehru's "soft policy" against the dictatorship of Portuguese rule provided late relief and relegated Goa to an extended state of historical stasis and neglect. See Shirodkar, *Goa's Struggle for Freedom*; Deora, *Liberation of Goa, Daman, and Diu*; and Rubinoff, *India's Use of Force in Goa*.

50 Trichur, "Politics of Goan Historiography," 268. For a further sense of the peculiarity of Portuguese colonialism and its afterlife within Goan historiography, see de Sousa Santos, "Between Prospero and Caliban."

51 A small sampling of notable singers from the Samaj between 1930 and 1959 (all women) would include Saroj Welingkar, Tarabai Shirodkar, Saraswati Rane, Kumodini Pednekar, Kesarbai Kerkar, and Mogubai Kurdikar.

52 An excellent example of such elisions is Bakhle's *Two Men and Music*.

53 My first serious research forays into the Samaj archives began in early 2008. I was eager to collect all necessary permissions and authorizations to quote from and/or reprint archival materials as needed. When I brought this question up to the Samaj's board of trustees, the response was again one of consternation. The question of ownership and copyright was not one they had considered, and as such, they were pushed to think of some process that would satisfy academic protocols. After some deliberation, I was asked to submit a letter of request to the Samaj collectivity at large, which would then be published in the monthly Samaj newsletter. The letter (written in Marathi) sought permission to work on the Samaj archives and clearly stated that if any member had objections to my research efforts, he/she/they should notify the board of trustees immediately. After three months had passed and no letter or call of objection was filed, the board of trustees drafted an official note of authorization on their letterhead, granting me permission to read, cite, and reprint any and all part of their archives. My letter of request and the Samaj's letter of permission acceding to my request are now both part of the extant Samaj archives.

54 Historians routinely and understandably expend much energy speaking to the torturous difficulties of accessing materials as they negotiate innumerable bureaucratic political and communal challenges to archival research, specifically in sites such as postcolonial South Asia. See, for instance, A. Burton, *Archive Stories*; and Blouin and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*. In an effort to combat such difficulties, there has been an increasing push among scholars based in South Asia to encourage more open-access and digitalized archives. Such efforts purport to not just remedy questions of access but also endeavor to create an entire alternative imaginary for archival composition. The website *Archives and Access*, launched by scholars such

as Rochelle Pinto et al., is a wonderful example of such efforts: https://publicarchives.wordpress.com/.

55 Henry Scholberg's exhaustive and much-cited work *Bibliography of Goa and the Portuguese in India* lists Paigankar's text as the only available published biography on the social lives of devadasis in Goa (121, listing D148). However, even such an appearance in an erstwhile authoritative bibliography of Goan texts seems staged to garner attention (the entry occupies ten lines—more than any other entry), given the name of the Scholberg's research collaborator in Goa: Mrs. Archana Kakodkar. Kakodkar has spent many years as a senior librarian at the University of Goa and is herself a member of the Gomantak Maratha Samaj.

56 The bulk of the archives are housed at the Gomantak Maratha Samaj Society building in Mumbai, India. In 2004, the Samaj offices were moved from Gomantak Maratha Samaj Sadan, 345 V.P. Road, Bombay 400004 to Sitladevi Co-op. Housing Society Ltd., 7–16/B Wing, D. N. Nagar, New Link Road, Andheri (W), Mumbai 400053. A partial archive can be found at the Gomantak Maratha Samaj, Dayanand Smriti, Swami Vivekanand Marg, Panaji 403001, Goa.

57 Squires, "Roger Casement's Queer Archive," 596.

58 Moten, "Black Optimism / Black Operation." This talk contains many of the observations that were published later in the oft-cited essay "Black Operations."

59 Indrani Chatterjee, "Decolonizing the History of Slavery," work in progress.

60 Chatterjee has made this point repeatedly and poignantly in all her writings. Yet her challenges have not been sufficiently taken up. The sentence cited here is excerpted from a work in progress that provides an overview of slavery and its histories of difference in South Asia.

61 There are, of course, groups like the Dalit Panthers to highlight histories of the Black Panthers and histories of black resistance that draw from the struggles of "untouchables" in India. But as of now, there is no extant scholarship on the longer historical intersection of the two fields. See A. Arondekar, "What More Remains."

62 Wakankar, "The Question of a Prehistory." Kabir, the feisty progenitor of Dalit politics and protest, gifts a much-desired individuality to the non/human, untouchable Dalit subject through his singular achievements as bard and mystic.

63 For a defining account of the challenges posed by Dalit historiography, see Ilaiah, "Productive Labour, Consciousness, and History," 127–64.

64 Quoted in Chakrabarty, "The Public Life of History," 158.

65 Rawat and Satyanarayana, "Dalat Studies," 10.

66 For a broader review of the shifts in Dalit historiography, see also Jangam, "Dalit Paradigm"; Rege, "'Real Feminism' and Dalit Women"; Paik, "Am-

chya jalmachi chittarkatha (The Bioscope of Our Lives)"; and Pawar and Moon, *We Also Made History*.

67 Banerjee, "Writing the Adivasi," 132. See also Pandey, *Unarchived Histories*.

68 Barker, *Critically Sovereign*, 3.

69 Clifford, *Returns*, 15.

70 Clifford, *Returns*, 13.

71 Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 99. See also Rifkin's excellent study, *When Did Indians Become Straight*; and Byrd, "'In the City of Blinding Lights.'"

72 Helton et al., "The Question of Recovery," 1.

73 Saidiya Hartman and Tavia Nyong'o, for example, have brilliantly argued (albeit in different registers of fiction and performance) for the sustaining narrative of critical/Afro fabulation. For both, fabulation, in its multiple avatars, emulates, fashions, and enlivens lost "wayward" gendered and performing subjects. For both scholars, the historical inheritance of loss and absence remains the structural force behind any kind of rewriting. See Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner"; and Nyong'o, *Afro Fabulations*.

74 Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present."

75 Morgan, "Accounting for the 'Most Excruciating Torment,'" 188.

76 Morgan, "Accounting for the 'Most Excruciating Torment,'" 188–91. For further reading on the entanglements of archival hermeneutics, gender, and histories of slavery, see Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*.