

preface

MARY ANN HUDSON TITLES THE POEM we publish in this issue: “I don’t know what your father told you, but you don’t have the whole story.” This idea of incompleteness and omission dominates the articles and essays in this issue. All our authors are concerned with setting the record straight, filling in the blanks, or listening for the voices of women who have not yet been heard or acknowledged. This work has, of course, always been one of the driving forces of feminism, but it never loses its urgency, and as some of our authors make clear here, in an increasingly globalized and “connected” world, the omissions are often particularly brutal and dangerous. Whether it is women in the past whose stories have been dismissed, misrepresented, or ignored, or women in the present whose lives have been distorted by social convention or sexual inequity, the consequences of forgetting or misacknowledging are grave. As Shahnaz Khan points out, feminism will live up to its own promise only when women around the world understand that all our lives are intertwined, perhaps most of all when we are least aware of it. Some of the writers in this issue, like Mariana Valverde (“A Postcolonial Women’s Law? Domestic Violence and the Ontario Liquor Board’s ‘Indian List,’ 1950-1990”), Ruby Lal (“Historicizing the Harem: The Challenge of a Princess’s Memoir”), and Shahnaz Khan (“Locating the Feminist Voice: The Debate on the Zina Ordinance”), reveal neglected stories of women’s defiance and resistance that have been buried in official archives. As well, Helen Langa’s review essay in this volume, “Recent Feminist Art History: An American Sampler,” examines the expansion of traditional histories that came with the contributions of feminist writers; Priti Ramamurthy (“Why Is Buying a ‘Madras’ Cotton Shirt a Political Act? A Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis”) looks at the global inequalities that are suppressed by the rhetoric of advertising in the West; Norma Fowler and her colleagues (“Graphic Stories: Representing the Status of Female Faculty”) experi-

ment with different ways of analyzing statistics on academic women's salaries; and Shirin Neshat, in conversation with Scott MacDonald ("Between Two Worlds: An Interview with Shirin Neshat"), talks about her work as an artist and filmmaker dedicated to representing the lives and experiences of women in Iran.

In the first cluster of essays on new feminist historiographies, Mariana Valverde examines the files of the Ontario Liquor Board from the 1930s through to 1990, arguing that an alternative history of women's resistance to domestic violence is revealed in letters sent to the board requesting that family members be banned from local bars and from the possession of alcohol. She argues that from the end of the temperance era in the 1920s, until 1990, when the board ceased keeping an "Interdiction List," "wives and other relatives used this state tool to try to govern domestic violence and abuse not by denouncing domestic violence as a crime but rather by cutting off the violent man's drink supply." The list was informally known as the "Indian List," partly because of prejudicial associations between drinking and Native Canadians and partly because some of the more draconian aspects of government liquor control mirrored interdiction laws that had been used exclusively against Indians until the institution of the Liquor Board's Interdiction List in the late 1920s. Although local police authorities were clearly involved in many cases, in 80 out of 154 files the request came directly from a woman who felt physically threatened by a husband or son who abused her when he was drunk. In many cases the intervention seems to have proved effective, especially when the family lived in a small community where the banned individual would have been recognized wherever he went. Despite the list's name, only 18 files involve Indians living on reserves, perhaps because state authorities despaired of ever compelling an Indian to stop drinking, or because, by the 1970s, problem behavior by Indians was seen as the responsibility of aboriginal authorities rather than the state.

Like Valverde, Ruby Lal explores the limitations of traditional historiographical methods, arguing that a careful reading of a memoir written in the 1580s by Gulbadan Banu Begum, aunt of the great Mughal emperor Akbar, reveals a much more complex picture of the harem than emerges from conventional histories of the Mughal empire, which tend to assume

that the harem was simply a space of pleasure into which the king could escape when he was weary of affairs of state. Rather, Lal shows, even official sources bear traces of a history of negotiation and struggle, as men and women battle over social, political, and sexual rituals. Gulbadan's text has no identifiable influences or antecedents. She seems to have invented its form herself, using the word "ahval," meaning conditions, state, circumstances, or situations, to describe what she had written. It reveals an atmosphere of "continuous debate, and tension" at court over the regulation of people's behavior and shows that imperial women were more than "clever women," as Gulbadan's first translator, Victorian scholar Annette Beveridge, describes them. Rather they wielded status and authority, intervening in the sexual and political lives of the emperor and other members of the imperial family, and even, in 1587, organizing a women's hajj, a unique event in the annals of the Mughals. Gulbadan shows the Mughal empire in the process of formation, and in drawing attention to the complexity of Gulbadan's writing, Lal reveals the biases of masculinist history and historians.

Finally, Helen Langa, in her review essay, explores the ways in which feminist scholarship has transformed the field of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American art history in the last three decades. Arguing that during that period, "we find a growing insistence that all art historical narratives be rethought from the standpoint of how gender operates in shaping culture," she identifies two distinct ways in which feminist art historians have gone about their work. The first approach she calls "recuperative strategies," and these involve the reconstruction of art history through biography, the use of theories of social construction to broaden the contexts in which women's art is assessed, and a postmodernist embrace of the concept of authorial freedom. "Cultural studies," the second methodology she discusses, emphasizes the ways in which art works are the product of "multiply intersecting systems of creation, production, and reception" and looks at the institutional sites in which art is made, shown, and sold.

Leading the second cluster of articles concerning the absence of gendered analysis and representation, Shahnaz Khan analyzes thirteen interviews she conducted between 1998 and 2002 with Pakistani women who

had either been arrested, or who were fleeing arrest, under the notorious Zina Ordinance of 1979. The Zina Ordinance was passed by the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq as part of a process of “Islamization” of the Pakistani state, and for the first time in Pakistani history, its ratification meant that illicit sex was a crime against the state. Between 1979 and 1995 over one million zina cases were filed with the police, and, although many prisoners are released after trial, the backlog of cases is such that women often face years of incarceration before their cases come to court. It is estimated that between 40 percent and 45 percent of female prisoners in Pakistan have been accused under the zina laws, and of those women, only 16 percent have actually been tried and convicted. Khan found that, for some of her interviewees, being in prison was part of a process of empowerment: some of Khan’s subjects were taking refuge in a Darul Aman, or state-sponsored shelter, as a way of escaping impoverished relatives who threatened to report the women for crimes under zina if they refused to cooperate with their husbands’ or fathers’ plans for financially advantageous marriages. Khan shows how women are vulnerable under the Zina Ordinance, largely because of the disastrous socio-economic effects of globalization, and suggests that rather than set Pakistani women up as spectacles whose oppression highlights the relative freedom of women in the West, Western feminists should develop transnational alliances that increase the resources of local NGOs while recognizing the continuity of women’s subordination around the world.

In an analysis of the production of “Madras” cotton that begins with a Lands’ End catalogue and ends with the production of the cotton in South India, Priti Ramamurthy highlights both the cultural politics of consumption in the US and those of production in the cotton fields of India. Using feminist commodity chain analysis, Ramamurthy explores the uneven impact of globalized capital not just in the realm of production as narrowly defined, but through a culturally embedded understanding of production. She shows how workers are produced as raced and gendered beings through the Lands’ End catalogue on the one hand and through the production process in India on the other. Indeed, Ramamurthy shows that the entire process of producing cotton is highly gendered, from the creation of the hybrid cotton seed (“one male flower crosses

around six female flowers,” says one of Ramamurthy’s respondents), to the differentiated treatment of and tasks allotted to the girls and boys who do the work of fertilization, through to the suicides of male small farmers unable to cope with the rocketing costs of globalized cotton production in South India.

Even as feminist scholarship has been transforming key academic fields, the commentary by Norma Fowler and her colleagues at the University of Texas shows that only partial gender parity has been achieved in the academy. A recalculation of the ways in which women faculty ranks and pay scales have been judged shows that while there are increasing numbers of women faculty and increasing parity in pay scales of men and women within a rank, women are simply not moving up the academic ranks at the same rate as men.

The creative work in this issue dramatizes some of the ways in which women’s bodies and actions have been deliberately misinterpreted and disempowered by a patriarchal world. In conversation with Scott MacDonald, Iranian-born artist Shirin Neshat discusses her portrayal of Muslim women in her photographs and installations. In this discussion of the evolution of her work, from early photographs to her present complex juxtapositions of video, still photographs, and texts, we see how portrayals of control, rage, madness, silence, and power have been Neshat’s way of coming to terms with the lives of women in the Middle East.

The speaker of Corinne Stanley’s “Luck” watches luck “hopping off/to someone else’s green pastures,” and in a wonderfully evocative and witty poem, “I’m Too Big,” Marguerite Scott describes a woman’s feeling that she occupies too much space. A number of the creative pieces in this issue explore women’s ambivalence about motherhood: Mary Ann Hudson’s poetry dramatizes a mother’s resentment of her daughter’s demands; and Alicia Ostriker brings to life the experience of a recent grandmother. Finally, Sheryl Luna reimagines the contemporary United States through a description of Chico’s Tacos, “Where the border steams with Chevron’s refinery.”

Suzanne Raitt and Raka Ray,
for the editors