

preface

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, we have been busy managing an editorial transition. We are thrilled to welcome our new Editorial Director, Dr. Ashwini Tambe, who has been a member of the *Feminist Studies* editorial collective. She replaces Dr. Claire Moses, who retired after thirty-five years of dedicated and visionary leadership. Claire's signature contributions to the journal and the field will be celebrated in our special issue this fall. Since taking over, Ashwini has worked with past and current members of the *Feminist Studies* editorial collective to identify future directions for the journal. In short order, with the inspired and creative support of *Feminist Studies* staff Karla Mantilla and Brittany Fremaux, she has expanded our online presence by strategically using social media and introducing a webpage to help professors use our articles and special issues as teaching tools (see www.feminist-studies.org/classroom). A website feature for ongoing "Conversations" about topics published in the journal is also in the works. Ashwini has revamped our News & Views section to serve as a forum for representing the range of feminist viewpoints on current topics. We are excited about the future of the journal and look forward to continuing our tradition of publishing cutting-edge, innovative feminist scholarship, as well as strengthening our coverage of transnational issues and expanding our readership around the world.

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This issue of *Feminist Studies* opens with Michelle Hartman's call for a translation practice informed by an "ethics of difference." The essays collected here all expand, explore, and critique this concept in a range of contexts and discourses. "Sameness" appears as the enemy of feminism, even as some of our authors acknowledge the power of identification in much feminist work and feminist history. Hartman argues that lazy Western translators absorb all Arab women into the category of the "oppressed," while

Roshanak Kheshti critiques other kinds of reifying gestures within the emerging field of Iranian gender and sexuality studies. Asha Nadkarni cautions against what she sees as a quasi-eugenic turn in feminist history in which the uncomfortable racial politics of some early US feminists are elided in an unconscious gesture of “cleansing.” David Valentine looks at the naturalization of the non-transsexual body, arguing that failing to see the decision not to transition as a meaningful act is to refuse to fully acknowledge the politics of gender difference. Continuing the theme of body modification, L. Ayu Saraswati asks over forty Indonesian women why they use skin-whitening products and comes up with some surprising answers about women’s feelings about looking “different.” We offer this issue as an attempt to challenge the tyranny of the same and to encourage further exploration of the effects and affect of difference—to use one of the central terms in Naomi Greyser’s review essay on feminism and affect studies.

The issue begins with Michelle Hartman’s provocative analysis, in “Gender, Genre, and the (Missing) Gazelle: Arab Women Writers and the Politics of Translation,” of the politics of translating Arabic women’s writing into English. Through detailed discussion of translations of the poems of Al-Khansa’, a seventh-century writer in the Arabian Peninsula, and *Misk al-Ghazal/Women of Sand and Myrrh*, a 1988 novel by Lebanese author Hanan al-Shaykh, Hartman shows how these disparate writings are subtly and not-so-subtly altered in translation to emphasize the “oppression” of Arab women’s lives for a Western audience. Al-Khansa’, for example, is described in many Western anthologies and reference works as an idiosyncratic writer whose passionate laments for her dead brothers go against the grain of her literary culture. In fact, as Hartman shows, the elegiac tradition in which Al-Khansa’ wrote was highly conventional and dominated by women: Al-Khansa’ was able to assert herself within, not against, the terms of her own society. Furthermore, the rendering of Al-Khansa’ as unattractive, which originates in an Arabic epithet frequently translated as “snub-nosed,” is a fundamental misunderstanding of the Arabic context, in which “snub-nosed” is a common metonym for the gazelle, emblematic of feminine beauty and grace. The implication that assertive women are rendered as masculine or ugly in the Arabic context is not supported by the facts of Al-Khansa’'s case.

Similar distortions inform the Western reception of *Misk al-Ghazal*. The title literally translates as *The Gazelle's Musk* and evokes the wedding and eventual independence and empowerment of Tamr, one of the novel's female narrators. The English title, *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, de-emphasizes Tamr's story and instead highlights and exoticizes the four narrators whose stories make up the text. Tamr's story is further marginalized by the re-ordering of the different sections in the English translation so that the novel in English begins and ends with the voice of Suha, a Lebanese woman who flees an unnamed Arabian Gulf country for a war-torn Beirut. But in the Arabic original, Tamr's section, which ends with her opening a shop and establishing her independence, closes the novel. Hartman points out that in both cases, Arab women's strength is presented to a Western audience as defying the societies in which they live, rather than developing out of them. To combat this kind of distortion, she calls for a practice of translation that is "foreignizing" rather than "domesticating," embracing the differences within and between Arab societies, as well as between the Arab world and the West. Only then, she argues, will we see a translation informed by feminist ethics and an "ethic of difference."

The call for a more nuanced engagement with Middle Eastern women's realities is echoed in Roshanak Kheshti's review essay "Can the Memoirist Speak? Representing Iranian Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Recent Popular and Scholarly Publications." In this essay, Kheshti questions the threads that bind both popular and scholarly publications on Iranian women. These threads, deftly crafted as "the veil," become the symbol of Iranian women's oppression and lack of agency for both academic and trade presses. What is particularly troubling for Kheshti is that the "oppression" of the veil is conveyed as a common reality for Iranian women despite the fact that this narrative tends to be generated primarily through autobiographical writings. In order to disrupt the West-versus-rest binary and veiled logic of popular academic and trade memoirs, Kheshti identifies and engages an emerging body of literature that, in her estimation, challenges these assumptions.

Kheshti's review includes Mino Moallem's *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister*, in which Moallem argues that renderings of Iranian women are constituted more by capitalist practices of modernity than by popular

presumptions about Iranian tradition. As Kheshti notes, Moallem's work disrupts the language of culture and tradition by arguing that fundamentalist rhetoric is both "constitutive of and constituted by modern notions of gender and sexuality." Kheshti also explores Nima Naghibi's historicization of the "abject Persian woman" in *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*. Naghibi traces the consolidation of this figure in the writings of British and American women from as early as the mid-nineteenth century. The "abject Persian woman" emerges in these literatures as the "other" of British and American women's "progress." Naghibi's project of historicization is in keeping with Kheshti's commitment to fracturing the homogenizing effects of global sisterhood in representations of Iranian women.

Among Kheshti's review selections we also find Negar Mottahedeh's *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema*. In this text Mottahedeh explores the growth of "women's cinema" under the modesty codes of Ayatollah Khomeini. This investigation presents an interesting counter-narrative for Kheshti, for while these modesty codes required women represented in film to be veiled, they also generated a "new syntax of shot relations"—one that decentered the classic Hollywood male-centered filmic gaze. In keeping with Kheshti's desire to read Iranian women's realities against the grain, Mottahedeh's work allows us to think counter-intuitively about the ways in which policies aimed to constrain women were nonetheless used by women filmmakers to enable the growth of a woman-centered filmic practice in Iranian cinema. In addition, Kheshti discusses Afsaneh Najmabadi's *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, whose engagement with non-heteronormative narratives of love and desire both disrupts contemporary representations of Iranian women and ushers into our imagination the possibilities of queer theory in Iranian gender studies. The latter becomes the focus of Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi's edited volume *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*. Situating itself firmly in Kheshti's desire to derail simplified readings of Muslim women, *Islamicate Sexualities* sets out to simultaneously posit and question the importance of sexuality as a category of analysis in what the authors refer to as "Islamicate" texts. Kheshti finally assesses Pardis Mahdavi's *Passionate Uprisings* and Janet Afary's *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* for the

ways they might benefit from the analytical and methodological strengths of the aforementioned texts. In addition to Kheshti's insightful readings of the texts presented, she introduces us to a body of literature that is firmly charting a new trajectory that may be considered Iranian gender and sexuality studies.

Kheshti's review makes a strong argument for expanding the analytical field of visibility for Iranian women. L. Ayu Saraswati calls for a similar expansion of the modes of interrogation applied to women's use of skin-whitening products. In "*Malu*: Coloring Shame and Shaming the Color of Beauty in Transnational Indonesia," Saraswati points to the growing body of literature on the global proliferation of skin-whitening products. What is innovative about Saraswati's analysis is that she explores the topic from the perspective of the users of skin-whitening products in Indonesia, where such products generate the highest revenue in the cosmetics industry. Saraswati interviews forty-six female users of these products. As with Hartman's discussion of Al-Khansa's poetry, standards of beauty re-emerge as a category that allows us to explore the dissonances and intricacies of meanings that travel between different cultural worlds. In this piece Saraswati argues that despite an awareness of the health hazards associated with skin-whitening products, women's increasing use of them may best be explained by what she identifies the "gendered management of affect," a concept that prefigures and complements Naomi Greyer's review essay on affect theory in this issue.

Saraswati's interviews aim to capture the role that feeling and affect play in Indonesian women's responses to their social order and hierarchies of beauty. The primary affective sentiment that governs the use of skin-whitening products, Saraswati argues, is that of *malu*, or shame. Saraswati explores the histories and cultures whose collision produces this shame, and finds that the hierarchies and complex intersections of race, ethnicity, and color do not readily align in expected ways in the Indonesian context. As one respondent notes: "I think white Indonesians are different from bule [white foreigner] whites. Bule have freckles. Indonesian white is natural. . . . I personally like Indonesians. They [bule] were born white. But their white is different from our white." In this manner,

Saraswati explains how the female body becomes the very site of articulating differences and within which a range of strategies are deployed to cover a woman's shame.

That lives are made and unmade at the intersection of history and memory is a theme that guides Rebecca Jennison's "Painting Life Back into History—Hung Liu's 'Hard-Won' Feminist Art." In this passionate discussion of Chinese American artist Hung Liu's work, Jennison invites us to engage the complexities of this intersection. Drawing on in-depth interviews and a sixteen-year love of the artist's work, Jennison examines the prominence that the thematic concerns of history, identity, citizenship, and memory hold for Liu. Liu's own border crossings of national and political systems, coupled with her own fractured sense of belonging in both China and the United States, have all inspired many of her well-known pieces such as *Resident Alien*, *Strange Fruit*, and *Where is Mao?* For Jennison, Liu's art is emblematic of what it means to see "history as a verb"—a phrase that Liu uses to evoke history as a living artifact that "is always flowing forward." Sensitive to this dynamism in Liu's art, Jennison explores both the inter-temporality of Liu's work and the power of her creative voice to recraft history and memory. Liu's engagement with militarism and sexual violence invites the viewer to challenge the invisibility of women who have been subjected to state violence. This is so whether we are viewing the young girls in *First Spring Thunder* (2011) who may be covering their ears because of the dragonflies that flit playfully around them or to muffle the distant sounds of war; or whether we are called on to defy the anonymity of Korean "comfort women" in the series *Strange Fruit* (2001). Jennison's discussion reveals an artist who demonstrates a profound commitment to ensuring that women's voices and memories will eventually comprise what we know as history.

History and memory are at issue also in "Reproducing Feminism in *Jasmine* and 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" in which author Asha Nadkarni traces what she calls the "eugenic impulse" in two very dissimilar literary texts. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist classic "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) end very differently. Gilman's protagonist is confined to her room after the birth of her child, and she

becomes increasingly delusional as the story progresses. *Jasmine*, on the other hand, ends with its central character who has immigrated from India to the United States, enjoying a successful, integrated life as a US feminist. Nadkarni argues that these very divergent narratives are both haunted by the intrusion of the “unfit.” Drawing on Sue Lanser’s classic study in *Feminist Studies* (Volume 15, Number 3), Nadkarni sees Gilman’s tale as encoding its author’s fear of Asian immigration, while Mukerjee’s apparently more “liberated” novel implicitly presents its main character as the ideal immigrant, whose exceptionality is proved by the failings of the other, less evolved, immigrant women among whom she lives. Even though Mukherjee’s criteria for fitness are explicitly cultural or psychological rather than genetic, Nadkarni shows how these terms frequently mask a biological determinism that is not so far from Gilman’s fear of the internalized “other” in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Nadkarni argues that in reclaiming only those aspects of Gilman’s thought that we find palatable, contemporary feminism risks making a eugenic gesture of its own, in which, as she puts it, “the past and present need to be cleansed of difference and conflict in order to ensure feminism’s future.” The affective investments of contemporary feminism in different versions of its past need to be relentlessly deconstructed and challenged.

In this vein, Naomi Greyser’s review essay examines recent books that explore or exemplify the complex relationship of feminism to affect studies. Noting that “affect” usually refers to embodied effects and “emotion” to their social, narrated form, Greyser welcomes the slippage between the two and the shared insight of affect studies and feminism that the personal, the political, and the social are intertwined. The volumes Greyser reviews include Ann Cvetkovich’s recent exploration of the “affective archive,” *An Archive of Feelings*; Deborah B. Gould’s *Moving Politics*, a history of ACT UP that examines the ways in which emotions “generate and foreclose political horizons”; and Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*, which explores envy, anxiety, paranoia, irritation, “animatedness” (the ways in which racialized subjects are presumed to be both emotional and manipulable), and the wonderfully named “stuplimity” (a postmodern mixture of stupefaction and boredom). In particular, Greyser focuses, somewhat skeptically, on Ngai’s

suggestion that feminists reinvest in envy as the only agonistic emotion that is focused on inequality.

Greyser also takes issue with Sarah Ahmed's admonition in *The Promise of Happiness* that we attend more to the ways that unhappiness is a challenge to social ideals. Although Greyser welcomes the insight that figures who are conventionally perceived as unhappy—in Ahmed's formulation, the "feminist killjoy," the "angry black woman," and the "unhappy queer" among others—might be exposing both the terms and the desirability of happiness as it is currently socially conceived, she also worries that "finding happiness among the wretched of the earth risks minimizing not just wretchedness but also the conditions that produce it." She is more comfortable with Clare Hemmings's suggestion in *Why Stories Matter* that three meta-narratives have guided feminist scholarship over the past ten years: the "progress narrative," in which false unity and essentialism have been left behind; the "loss narrative," in which feminism has been depoliticized by postfeminism, fragmentation, and institutionalization; and the "return narrative," in which a combination of postmodern feminism and a politics of embodiment offer a way out of what Greyser, following Hemmings, identifies as the current feminist impasse. Finally, Greyser reviews Robyn Wiegman's recent book, *Object Lessons*, which discusses the role of affect in feminist scholarship and the politics of academic inquiry. Greyser's richly detailed mapping of the intersections between feminism and affect studies ends on a hopeful note: "I understand affect studies not as a pre-poststructuralist or post-poststructuralist formation that returns to notions of wholeness but rather a way to try to wholly live, dwelling within, contributing to, and benefiting from feminism."

The creative pieces in this issue approach the question of the ethics of difference from a variety of directions. Laura Madeline Wiseman's poetic sequence "My Imaginary Cock" and Joy Ladin's "That Australian Smile" explore the fantasies and pleasures of a body exploring its differences from itself. The (presumably female-bodied) speaker in "My Imaginary Cock" playfully imagines a phallic companion who buys her Christmas presents, cooks her dinner, and even cheats on her. Both herself and not herself, her imaginary penis instructs her in the art of pleasure but also confronts her with her own loneliness. The speaker in "That Australian Smile" is in the

process of transitioning from male to female, and a chance smile from a passing man stimulates a series of reflections on what it might mean to feel, in the words of the popular song, “like a natural woman.” The speaker remembers her sense of self-estrangement when she made love as a man to her wife, and analyzes a new, uncomfortable delight in the sexist attentions of men now that she is a woman.

However, what it means to inhabit and claim an identity as natural is immediately contested in David Valentine’s “Sue E. Generous: Toward a Theory of Non-Transsexuality.” This piece provokes us to consider “non-transsexuality” as a subject position with heuristic possibilities. By positioning non-transsexuality as a subject location, Valentine sets about to denaturalize any mode of queer and feminist logics that would posit sex-reassignment surgery (SRS) as politically retrograde. Valentine invites the reader to consider the normative impulses at work when we see SRS as a choice and additionally, as a choice that is deemed suspect. Valentine maintains that to posit SRS as a choice and one that we should interrogate keeps the biological body as the presumptive and, by extension, unquestionable form of embodiment. In a bid to destabilize these presumptions, Valentine asks “why do those of us who are non-transsexuals choose not to have sex-reassignment surgery?” This becomes a question that forces the respondent to consider what is consolidated by the very privilege of not having to pose the question. Further, it is a question that brings into relief and goes on to challenge what Valentine refers to as the “visceral imagining [by non-transsexuals] of SRS performed *on their own bodies*.” In other words, Valentine casts non-transsexual resistance to SRS as a form of visceral empathy that is normalizing at its core—a sense of “I would never do that to me!” Questions of “appropriate” agentive acts and the institutionalization and medicalization of such acts are key components of Valentine’s exploration. As an analytical category, Valentine prompts the reader to consider how the accusatory “how could you?” with reference to SRS veils the everyday gendered acts that non-transsexuals depend on and perform in order to consolidate their own non-transsexuality. In “Sue E. Generous,” Valentine not only prompts us to think otherwise but also shows us how to. This is a piece that denaturalizes our working understandings of concepts, questioning the incommensurability of discussions

that posit SRS as analogous to other forms of enhancement surgeries and making a careful and well-crafted argument for the complexities of gender variance in contemporary society.

The complex pleasures of discontinuity appear also in Elizabeth Swados's poem "Bi Bi." Rejecting any coherence of bodies, the speaker imagines a tangle of limbs, like a pile of gardening tools in the back of a truck, and asks whether it matters, "at this age," who "keeps the crows from following you?" Discontinuity is a central theme also in Mohja Kahf's story "The Girl from Mecca," in which two Muslim women on a road trip offer a ride to an apparently devout Muslim hitchhiker. The twists and turns of her story confront her chauffeurs with the fluidity of identities in the postmodern world and demonstrate the young passenger's adeptness at manipulating the prejudices and ignorance of both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences.

The News & Views forum in this issue marks the anniversary of SlutWalk, a "viral event" that engaged feminists across the world over the past year. The forum presents impassioned first-person accounts of marches in Toronto, Philadelphia, Bhopal, and New Delhi, as well as reflections on the forms of feminism that are elevated, and cast aside, by such activism. Andrea O'Reilly, a professor at York University, chronicles the unfolding of the first march in Toronto and also responds to criticisms of the event that have ensued since. Hannah Altman, a college-age organizer of the Philadelphia march, recounts the meaning and important lessons in strategy learned from the experience. Durba Mitra critically reflects on how the concept of SlutWalk has been taken up and reconfigured in locations in India, while Kathy Miriam asks us to carefully interrogate the titillation that undergirds the media attention that SlutWalk receives. In this way, the forum represents the best impulses among us: celebrating the work that young and old women do to contest violence and affirm their sexual rights, and also dissecting the operation of patriarchal, imperial, and corporate power.

Suzanne Raitt and Michelle Rowley,
for the editorial collective