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Transnational American Eyes: Examinations of Travel

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This special issue of the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* examines reasons to travel—especially via the so-called wealthy American eye—with a focus on the gendered, romantic touch of the female. The women explored in this issue shape culture, craft products to bring home, and provide for family and community. Though, they are radicals by default, as they do not adhere to gender norms, but are still confined to gendered norms as their actions reinforce expectations. These pluralisms and theoretical contradictions are what shape these intertwined discussions.

Travel is frequently viewed as not only exotic, but also a sign of culture and display of disposable wealth. Travel, accordingly, performs a crucial act for the human psyche as a literal and figurative escape. This sense of escapism derives from the actual act of tourism as well as from the voyeurism of other's global footprints. The thrust of this issue examines tourism as a cultural ambassador. From Nathaniel Hawthorne's wife, to a wealthy Bostonian socialite, to Vietnamese immigrants the American eye of body performance, social standing and place within gendered binaries evolve. The interchange of peoples and spaces enables the blurring of lines.

The articles and essays in this issue work together to show, remind, and teach us that change occurs on a variety of levels. Yet, to be cliché, it begins on the smaller, personal level first. These explorations allow the reader, with a question and a smile, to probe

into how subgroups are disenfranchised from mainstream social designs. Borders are fluid as the interchange of peoples and monetary payments, connecting them to the global front, and—ironically—trapping them in a fixed space. The traverse and transnational landscape of tourism makes the interchange of land and space more fluid, erasing traditional boundaries. Imaginary markers erode as work, leisure, and study become more accessible and expected. The transnationality of space, the legacy of connection and disconnection within regions and between nation-states, and the ease of travel reinforce its place as a fertile ground for research.

Jenny Huberman, an anthropologist, provides us with an apt ethnographic study on children, tourism, and the place of power in working-class life; her study serves as a framework for this special *JAST* issue on travel writing. Her place of education is Banaras, India, where she attempted to immerse herself within the local community, ingraining herself in a social situation with the local children, and even having a teenaged girl become her translator/guide. Her book *Ambivalent Encounters: Childhood, Tourism, and Social Change in Banaras, India* focuses on the western eye examining the daily lives of locals. In short, the "tourist gaze" centers this study as it views these riverfront children—often peddlers of tea, postcards, and inexpensive souvenirs—as cultural ambassadors of sorts. The young girls sell these token goods, the young boys—given more freedom and leisure as boys—provide tours to eager tourists, and through these interactions a space of production and consumption arises. These children are actors within this global industry, and by default, they sell the atmosphere and the idea that the "tourist gaze" can be mutually beneficial for both parties (Hubberman).

Another example of the gaze as touristic voyeurism is Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul*. He paints the city, and perhaps the larger ideal of "the Turk," with romance and—in a roundabout way—splendor. His words seamlessly take the reader through his memories of the city, and the astute reader will note that his work is neither Middle Eastern, nor Asian, nor European. Perhaps, if it had to assume a category, it serves as a gaze into his *trompe l'oeil* of Istanbul.

The concept of travel also plays into the perception of locale, because no matter what a person's class is at home, at the destination, a tourist transforms into an "upper-crust traveler that is reminiscent of the grand tour" (Bloom 5). Travel provides a metaphorical and literal excursion into (and away from) a person's sense of status (Bloom 5). Unlike the city of light and love of Paris, Istanbul is not a long-celebrated stop on the Grand Tour. Sales pitches for Paris fall under a different category, as young women dream of going to the City of Light (as the stereotype suggests), and it consistently makes for one of the most popular honeymoon destinations for US travelers. Thus, Paris confident in its own identity, and firmly placed within the western mind of discourse, does not require a sales pitch, whereas Istanbul still does as implied by the extensive international advertising sponsored by the Turkish Ministry of Tourism.

The three academic articles in this issue masterfully fit within this spectrum of discourse. Nina Ha examines the feminine and transgender voices of Vietnamese immigrants to the United States. Ha dissects the value of place, language, and perceived culture as women undergo transformations from the natal country to the new world (i.e., the United States). Her study pays particular attention to people of color as their experiences routinely clash with the idealized white culture of America.

Elisabetta Marino's powerful examination of Sophia Peabody—Nathanial Hawthorne's wife—reinforces and expands our understanding of gendered and social binaries. Peabody edited and supported her famous husband from behind the scenes as a good and dutiful wife was expected to do. Yet, she kept detailed travel diaries she later published under her maiden name. Her dissemination of her own writing was "brazen" for her era, but her travel writing provided a safety net, as she showcased the luxuries of her social class while highlighting the stationary role of women.

Tanfer Emin Tunç follows Marino's piece with a thought-provoking study of women, wealth, health, and tourism. Here, Isabella

Stewart Gardner falls dreadfully ill and her doctor prescribes travel as a cure. When she embarked on her voyage to reclaim her health, she was bedridden and needed help boarding the ship, but upon arrival in Europe, she was walking on her own and eager to leave her sickbed. She then spent her life globetrotting and acquiring art, filling up a museum in Boston she named after herself. She was the pinnacle of Grand Tour and Victorian dreams, attaining stature not just via her social class and her husband's status, but through passport stamps, trinkets and mementos, and her life beyond Boston's rigid socialite culture. Most importantly, her non-tangible gains from travel—the memories penned in her journals and letters—add another layer to our understanding of the female tourist's gaze.

The articles are followed by two amusing, heartwarming, and powerful travel narratives by contemporary women. Christine Contrada, an academic and freelance writer, takes us on a journey to Florence. Here, she discusses the nuances and proclivities of the American eye in her ethnic homeland—and the land of her heart's desire—while also walking the balance beam of complex laws for visas and residency. Lisa Tuttle, a novelist and fiction writer, recounts the story of her familial lineage and, specifically, her great-grandmother who, according to family lore, crossed the Atlantic seventeen times. While, as Tuttle notes, that is highly unlikely, it is the romance of traveling the world by steamship that still makes us want to believe the veracity of the story. These two essays take our special issue to a place of popular discourse while still illustrating the value of academic debates.

Works Cited

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