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Spackman, Barbara. *Accidental Orientalists: Modern Italian Travelers in Ottoman Lands*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017. Pp. 244. ISBN: 9781786940209. £85 (hardcover).

Barbara Spackman's *Accidental Orientalists: Modern Italian Travelers in Ottoman Lands* (2017) is the latest addition in the Transnational Italian Cultures Series from Liverpool University. Building upon Rhiannon Noel Welsh's inaugural volume, *Vital Subjects: Race and Biopolitics in Italy* (2016), Spackman examines Italian national culture beyond the peninsula by investigating transnational migrations throughout the Mediterranean. Carefully researched and crafted with a theoretically expansive framework, Spackman's study explores the "weak national identities" of displaced Italian travelers to Ottoman-governed lands in the period leading up to Italian Unification through the first decades of the twentieth century (4). Framing the subject position of exiles, deserters and opportunists as "Accidental Orientalists," Spackman pinpoints moments of encounter between Italians and Ottomans that reveal a complicated set of exchanges based on linguistic mastery, religious conversion, and sartorial presentation.

Spackman's text introduces fresh perspectives on the East-West encounter through the unintentional motives of each traveler. Separate from British and French Orientalisms of the nineteenth century, which were shaped by state-backed imperial aspirations and disseminated through literature, Spackman affirms that Italian Orientalism lacked a unified nation-state and institutionalized colonial enterprise for most of the nineteenth century. Those specific circumstances create what she calls, "simultaneous multiplicity and singularity" (4). In other words, the presence of travelers from the Italian peninsula in Ottoman territories uncovers a set of malleable cultural and national affiliations that unsettle the established European conception of an Islamic Orient.

In the first chapter Spackman focuses on Amalia Nizzoli's memoir of travels to Egypt between 1819 and 1828. Pulling from the notion of "oikos," a perception of home as it refers to departure or return for those in transit discussed by Georges Van den Abbeele in *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (1992) and referenced throughout this work, Spackman elucidates Nizzoli's origin first as displaced in the wake of the Napoleonic invasion and second as a traveler at the whim of multiple detours. Thus, Nizzoli is adrift, already a subordinate within European hierarchies who finds herself within Europe's "external other," the Ottoman Empire (18). Within this context, Spackman convincingly argues that the harem emerges as a traditionally Orientalized space, but also as a mirror to reflect Nizzoli's own Italianness and the instability of this identification. While the geographic and cultural detours enjoin Nizzoli to an Italian identity, the harem—a space where she speaks Arabic and wears Turkish dress—ultimately underscores the potential reversals between Orientalized and Italianized subjects.

Returning to the harem in the second chapter, Spackman considers the works of Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, a Lombard aristocrat and pro-nationalist exile living in Anatolia in the 1850s. Unlike Nizzoli's shifting identity, Belgiojoso's "oikos" is her position within a privileged class, which will shape her depiction of the harem as a threat to respectable women's propriety. Spackman efficiently postulates "filthiness" as a stand in for class transgression where "bodies and property come into illicit contact" (57). She also rightly highlights Belgiojoso's attempt to disabuse Western readers of an eroticized Orient as also born of the very Orientalist impulses that it seeks to supplant. The chapter finds its most cogent voice in the analysis of Belgiojoso's later ruminations on the Italian nation and women, whose need for performative femininity the writer likens to barbarism, but whose liberation must be subsumed to the higher cause of nation building. Pairing this with the aristocrat's fiction praising Turkish character, Spackman shapes Belgiojoso's identity as a woman mediated through a set of comparisons between Italian and Islamicate gender relations.

The third chapter shifts from the harem to men masquerading in Mecca. Spackman builds

her examination upon Linda William's cinematic theories of "passing" and "posing" in *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (2001), whereby the former represents a verisimilar adoption of cultural affiliation and the latter an affected performance. In the case studies that follow, two contemporaries of Nizzoli are of note: Giovanni Finati and Giovanni Belzoni. Finati's journey from deserter to Albanian prisoner to Muslim convert, what Spackman terms an "ambivalent subjectivization," challenges European hegemony in Egypt and the Levant and offers new sources of knowledge about Mecca originating outside of the Orientalist archive (101). A similar reversal of European superiority is evident in Spackman's reading of Belzoni's narratives that suggest an "alternate stage" wherein the Turks deceive the unwitting Franks and are wise to the multiple layers of dissimulation deployed throughout the empire (139). While Spackman's approach to these narratives skillfully foregrounds an Italian national identity imagined against a continuous engagement with an Ottoman other, the chapter's focus on male writers sounds a somewhat discordant note that detracts from those female narratives that otherwise dominate the study.

In the closing chapter on Leda Rafanelli, Spackman is particularly persuasive and pushes the theoretical work of the previous examples forward to the very different national context of the *ventennio*, where Fascist identity is bound to imperial expansion. In a study of novels, short stories and a series of photographs, Spackman theorizes Rafanelli's pro-Islamism within a highly constructed "Orientalized femininity" based on rigid gender binaries and comprised chiefly of cross-cultural dressing (155). In contrast to the unsettling depictions of the harem in Nizzoli and Belgiojoso, Rafanelli introduces it as an ordinary household space where women perform daily work in the 1921 novel *Incantamento/ Enchantment*. The main character, an Egyptian Muslim, proclaims that the resentments between women typically associated with polygamy are born instead from the fallacy of Western monogamy. Spackman astutely reads the protagonist's act of dressing and undressing as a means to reveal the faithlessness of the Italian male and the subsequent folly of traditional Italian femininity. The chapter gains momentum near the end, where Spackman's own enthusiasm is apparent in Rafanelli's attempt to create a harmony between races, species, and the East-West cultural divide by means of a "reaffirmation and biologization of sexual difference" (184).

Accidental Orientalists is a meticulous consideration of narratives from Italian travelers to Egypt and the Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Spackman shows how the volatile and precarious nature of national affiliation pry open the space between European Orientalist and the Ottoman other to reveal multiple perspectives on the "clash of civilizations" in the Mediterranean basin. Much of the work rests in Spackman's focus on female writers who present the possibility of an intersectional look at transnational migrations. This is an important book with few shortcomings. As a reader, I would have appreciated a more robust theoretical orientation of gender in the introduction to reinforce the intersectional potential of Spackman's analyses. In addition, the rather exhaustive engagement with British Orientalism in some chapters slightly detracts from the singularity of the Italian narratives in question. These are minor concerns, however, that do not eclipse the value of the vast world of migrations that Spackman has brought to life.

Spackman's scholarship represents an inspiring engagement with Mediterranean and Italian postcolonial studies. This volume would be of interest to scholars of modern Italy, migration literature, and gender studies. The book evaluates primary texts in English, French, and Italian that could easily fit within upper-level undergraduate or graduate seminars on migration or postcolonial literature, while the theoretical conclusions might open up discussions of race, gender, and class within and beyond the Italian context.

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