



Tony Ballantyne, Antoinette Burton, eds. *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005. xii + 445 pp. \$89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-3455-2; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3467-5.



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Close Contact, Crossing Boundaries

In *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton have assembled a first-rate collection of essays that re-energizes the concept of “world history.” The body, as the editors note, is the first colonial encounter and the most intimate colony. The earliest European travelers describe natives as “bodies,” and imperial projects manage, police, and transform individual bodies. Bodies, the editors argue, are the first-line agents in historical encounters, and placing them in the methodological foreground offers “students of world history the chance to understand the extent to which such powerfully embodied colonial encounters structured the workings of transnational communities and global circuits of power” (p. 406).

This book is also a terrific read. These narratives of worldwide colonial encounters—including, for example, an African woman’s diplomatic and personal engagement with seventeenth-century Dutch settlers, a conservative Ottoman diplomat’s warm intellectual friendship with a worldly Russian woman, and an English family man’s experience of settler imperialism on the cusp of in-

stitutionalized racism—all serve to remind the reader not only that history rests on individual encounters, but that history is “story,” coming from individual feeling and experience. The variety and quality of these diverse narratives make the book attractive to the general reader, and *Bodies in Contact* indeed could be useful in the undergraduate classroom.

World history as a discipline is, as the editors note, under contention. Ballantyne and Burton argue that despite academia’s increased emphasis on globalization and the well-recognized effects of imperialism and colonization, world history as a subject area has not received the attention it merits. The editors note that, in fact, scholarship from a multitude of disciplines is integral to world history, and they suggest that scholars could benefit by learning from each other. This is certainly true. But in the busy professional lives of most teacher/scholars, how does one find time to read research from other disciplines? How often does an Ottoman historian pick up literary criticism, and when can the busy Medievalist find time to read anthropology?

Ballantyne and Burton, themselves specialists in

studies of imperialism and colonialism, appreciate the dilemma of the over-extended teacher/scholar. *Bodies in Contact* is in a sense the world history course packet that we all wish we had time to put together. It concerns not only colonial “contact zones,” in Mary Louise Pratt’s influential phrase, but also scholarly ones. The essays mirror the editors’ purpose of uniting a disparate audience: just as interactions between individuals are at the heart of “globalization,” so is cross-disciplinary dialogue a main point of this volume. The editors do not forget that their readers are also educators. Just as colonialism and empire building “shape everyday life at a global level, influencing the languages we speak, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the music we listen to, and the arts and culture we are inspired by” (p. 1), so has the legacy of colonialism shaped our classrooms.

Rich with historical and personal detail, this volume is accessible to students as well as to scholars in a variety of fields. Even as it makes scholarly diversity its essential argument, *Bodies in Contact* displays a strong thematic unity strengthened by the originality and solid documentation behind each essay. The editors here have assembled expert voices that rarely appear together in the same forum. In a field dominated by area studies, in which most scholars specialize both geographically and temporally, this collection is remarkable.

Most of the essays have appeared in expanded form elsewhere; the editors here have brought them together here in a format more accessible for non-specialist readers.

The editors divide the collection into three sections, framed by a useful introduction and conclusion that carefully delineate the unifying theme. The three sections have chronological coherence, the first being the early modern period, the second the height of European imperialism, and the third the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Each section includes widely diverse geographical areas and cultural encounters, linked by individuals’ physical experiences of colonialism.

Section 1, “The Thresholds of Modernity: Mapping Genders,” provides revelatory insights into early colonial negotiations. Essays here emphasize “the place of race, gender, and sexuality in empire building during the early modern period” and demonstrate the “centrality of the body” in the “dynamics of cross-cultural contact” (p. 5). Roots of future imperial racism appear in the early modern period’s visions of masculinity and colonialism’s discourse of gender. Most strikingly, these essays break down familiar and inadequate dichotomies and illustrate

the moments at which colonialism and empire became gendered and racialized.

Section 1 moves among several continents. Rosalind O’Hanlon’s essay explores the cross-cultural tensions of masculinity within South Asian Mughal society in the eighteenth century. Emma Jinhua Teng demonstrates how Chinese Qing dynasty colonizers in other parts of Asia used the discourse of gender to demarcate the “civilized” from the “uncivilized.” Jennifer L. Morgan shows how seventeenth-century English depictions of the female African body as “monstrous” abetted the colonizing project. Rebecca Overmyer-Velázquez explores how the competing dualism in the “collision of two cosmologies,” Spanish Christianity and Aztec belief, changed views of women’s sexuality. Julia C. Wells’s essay on “Eva’s Men” presents a moving story of an African woman’s personal and political affiliations with the Dutch East India Company: her narrative uses European sources to discover as much as possible about “Eva’s” hidden voice. The final essay in this section returns us to Europe to view the effect of worldwide colonialism on those who remained at home: Sean Quinlan shows how eighteenth-century French ideas about hygiene, climate, and the body spilled over from the institution of slavery and demonstrates how the ambivalences and fears of colonial expansion extended even to those who would never leave Europe.

The second section, “Global Empires, Local Encounters,” explores the impact of colonial law and bureaucracy on the intimate and everyday aspects of an individual’s life. Mary Ann Fay’s essay follows the financial and personal history of an ex-slave woman in pre-Napoleonic Egypt, and in so doing illustrates Ottoman constructs of gender and citizenship. Fay’s essay is especially valuable in a World History volume because it shows the complex workings of a non-European empire in a way too rarely seen in Eurocentric scholarship. Fay demonstrates, for example, that women in early modern Islamic societies enjoyed greater property rights than did most European and North American women at the same period. Similarly, Fay makes abundant use of primary documents to explain the nuances of non-racialized Ottoman slavery and the laws relating to women’s ownership, administration, and inheritance of property.

English-language primary sources can usefully be re-interrogated to reveal new information about colonial relationships, as Adele Perry’s essay on British Columbia shows. Hybridity in the form of marriage and business relations between Europeans and native North Ameri-

cans flourished into the nineteenth century, and mixed-race families were instrumental in building up trade in Canada; however, when the British government increased its administrative networks, such families were viewed in racialized terms and were shut out of social and power structures.

Similarly, Lucy Eldersveld Murphy examines white immigrant accounts written in English that tell the story of the “public mothers” of the American West, some of whose names still linger in the Great Lakes area. These Creole women mediated domestic quarrels and treated family illnesses, negotiating the personal affairs of white and native communities. This essay illustrates the mutuality of purpose among the early populations of the American West, and remind us of how white American hegemony has suppressed such voices until they all but disappeared.

Mrinalini Sinha also uses sources written in English to examine British sexism and racism in men’s clubs in colonial India, organizations that were not simply reproductions of London clubs, but that served as a “privileged site for mediating the contradictory logic of Eurocentrism in the creation of a distinctive colonial public sphere” (p. 184). Not only did such clubs exclude English women and “native” men, but they refined their definition of “whiteness” to exclude the lower-class British in India. Protecting white women from native men established the gendered racism of the clubs, but the concept of “clubbability” that eliminated lower-class whites further limited the colonial definition of “whiteness.”

Patrick F. McDevitt’s essay on team sports in Ireland reminds us that colonial racism was not restricted to matters of skin color. Images of Irish manhood countered the memories of the Irish Famine (1845-1847) and the revival of “ancient traditions” of hurling was an important part of the modernizing mission of Irish independence.

Elisa Camiscioli’s essay on French anxiety over early-twentieth-century low birth rates shows the rhetorical re-configuration of certain immigrant populations. In an effort to keep France “white,” pronatalists “re-wrote” Italian, Spanish, and Polish immigrants so that they exemplified French values of hard work and family, thus maintaining hierarchical racial distinctions and countering the declining “French” birthrate.

In “Race Hysteria, Darwin 1938,” Fiona Paisley delineates multi-cultural interactions in an Australian town where an Aboriginal man was accused of raping a white woman. The incident illustrates not only the ambiva-

lence and complexities of racialized sexuality in the settler communities, but it also brings out the complex cultural organization among European and Asian settlers.

Heidi Gengenbach presents a very different kind of narrative in which colonized bodies of women in southern Mozambique undergo a literal erasure (p. 337). Women used body markings to mark community affiliations and record history; however, European missionaries, in a “near religious crusade” that extended into the twentieth century sought to eliminate women’s tattoos (p. 255). Gengenbach’s sources include travelers’ accounts, earlier works of anthropology, and her own interviews.

The final section of *Bodies in Contact*, “The Mobility of Politics and the Politics of Mobility,” crosses time periods and directly gets at the heart of the book’s theme: people meeting people.

Carter Vaughn Findley, with his conservative yet curious Ottoman traveler who “returned the gaze,” introduces readers to the Ottoman Empire’s “double imperialism.” Ahmed Midhat, an “Occidentalizer” who made a study of Western culture and mores, exemplifies the independent, multinational Ottoman empire that had “slipped into economic and political dependence” on the West (p. 278). Findley’s essay, like Emma Jinhua Teng’s and Mary Ann Fay’s, expands the reader’s understanding of “empire” and cross-cultural encounters.

Similarly, Siobhan Lambert Hurley writes of an indefatigable female Muslim traveler who navigated Indian, British and Ottoman colonial structures and brought the “private” activity of religious practice into the public arena. Even as she affirmed her Muslim identity, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam’s travels and ideas dovetailed with and challenged women’s nationalist activities in the Middle East and female emancipation movements in American and Europe.

Joseph S. Alter looks at the project of “modernizing” the national body in India in the early years of independence. The discourse of nationalism made use of the Hindu concept of masculine celibacy. Just as in McDevitt’s essay the image of Irish manhood sought to counteract the memories of English repression, so here two styles of masculinity assume ideological importance: libertine masculinity is tied to an “ideology of domination” in which the Western cult of “freedom” enslaves India, and the brahmachari that advocates “self-control, balance, and integration of the self” is linked with “natural truth” and the newly independent India (p. 316).

In a fascinating essay on gender and colonialism in Soviet Uzbekistan, Shoshana Keller details the doomed struggle of Uzbek women to satisfy the demands of both their own culture and the imperial Soviet one. Here, one's reactions as reader reflects the deep ambivalences of the colonial project: while cheering the efforts of native Uzbeks to maintain their own religion and culture in the face of Soviet oppression, one also winces at the abuse of women that occurs in the name of that culture. The bodies of women paid a high price: the demands of the Russians put Uzbek women in "a terrible bind" and the tensions generated in response to Soviet reforms resulted in the beating, rape, and murder of thousands of women.

Similarly, Mire Koikari depicts the ambivalence towards and punishment of women inherent in American attempts to raise the status of women in post-World War II Japan. The American missionary style of benign colonialism resurfaced during the U.S. occupation of Japan as women's bodies became the site of a campaign against Oriental male oppression. Koikari argues that, in the view of many Americans, U.S. imperialism was a contradiction in terms: Americans sought only to "civilize" and "modernize" Japanese women; at the same time, the Americans left women alone to shoulder the shame and the blame for venereal disease resulting from sexual relations with American soldiers. Most importantly, Koikari notes that colonial studies' familiar binary frameworks are inadequate as analytical tools to examine cases such as the U.S. occupation of Japan. This observation can apply as well to studies of other "imperial" relationships documented in *Bodies in Contact*.

Hyun Sook Kim's discussion of Korean "comfort women" also highlights the importance of female bod-

ies in constructions of history and nation. The powerful, formerly hidden narratives of these women function as political acts that "puncture received and authoritative versions of national and imperial pasts" (p. 415).

Melani McAlister's essay makes an unusual and illuminating link between African-American movements of the 1960s and the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. In the struggle to define American "blackness," the black body was at stake. Black American Christians had long identified with the biblical Hebrews, but in a "religious re-mapping of the world" (p. 388) the growing Nation of Islam in America turned to the Arab Muslims and criticized the internal colonization of blacks in the U.S.

Overall, *Bodies in Contact* harnesses the concept of "globalization" and reinvigorates the term. The editors focus on "bodies" in order to dramatize the conditions created by transnational encounters and to remind us that it is the "small stories" that can bring alive the process of globalization and the idea of "world history."

Fifty years ago a world history class likely would have studied ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, the Byzantine Near East, and Japan and China, with perhaps a glance at the Ottomans and a wink at the Mughals. More recently, world history or world civilizations courses have focused determinedly on what used to be the "other"—Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, and the Middle East (South America is still all too often neglected). As more scholars have specialized in area studies, world history has too often been marginalized as a discipline. Ballantyne and Burton not only challenge the practice of teaching "the West and the rest," but they here suggest ways that the history classroom can reimagine the relationship between the metropole and its colonies and begin to reconceive the idea of world history.

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