

Title—Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History
Authors—Antoinette Burton & Tony Ballantyne
Year—2005

Categories: Gender, Empire, Colonialism, Sexuality/Sex

Place: The World

Time: 1500-1960

Argument Synopsis:

An essay collection, *Bodies in Contact* strives to use a world historical lens for the study of empires, emphasizing the role played by cross-cultural encounters. Burton and Ballantyne argue that empires have not just been enablers of global processes, but have created new forms of economic activity, political practice, and cultural performance. Their anthology is focused on the extent to which women's bodies have been a subject of **concern, scrutiny, anxiety, and surveillance** across time and place; for the purposes of their collection within the context of empire. The collection emphasizes the centrality of bodies as sites through which imperial and colonial power was imagined and exercised. It reconsiders the place of women and gender within imperial history.

The anthology is divided into three sections. The first section, "Thresholds of Modernity: Mapping Genders," focuses on the place of race, gender and sexuality in empire building during the early modern period; underscoring the centrality of the body in the articulation of imperial ideologies and the dynamics of cross-cultural contact. The second section, "Global Empires, Local Encounters," examines an array of specific local colonial encounters from the end of the eighteenth to the middle of the twentieth, highlight how the boundaries of race and gender were reinforced in the age of colonial modernity. The third section, "Mobility of Politics and the Politics of Mobility," focuses on the battles over empire from the end of the nineteenth to the late twentieth century, demonstrating how the modern world was shaped by greater mobility during imperial era.

The essays gathered in this collection are focused across a wide range of times and places. Burton and Ballantyne conclude their anthology with a reflection on the place of gender within the historiography of world history. They argue that the large-scale perspective of world history has tended to render women invisible, or if they are present as oddities of exemplars because of their gender. They claim race has been consistently recognized in ways gender has not because race fits in better with the kinds of questions explored by world historians. Burton and Ballantyne posit that this issue can be mitigated through a **focus on the body**. Through a focus on the body, the essays in this collection aim to make visible the material consequences of colonial regimes for embodied subjectivities, their communities, and their political cultures across the globe.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Tracking the historical trajectories of bodies helps to denaturalize the geographies inherited in women's and gender and world histories
- Imperial and colonial power was imagined and exercised through the body as a site
- Race has been considered more frequently in world history when compared to gender