

Title—Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire

Authors—Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton

Year—2009

Categories: Gender, Empire, Migration, Colonialism, Space

Place: The World (Focus: Pacific and United States)

Time: 1850-1950

Argument Synopsis:

Ballantyne and Burton's edited collection rejects the tendency to see the geography of empire as a network of flows, or in terms of fixed sites—instead, they emphasize the mobility of imperial actors. The essays are mostly focused in the later nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The bulk of the essays are concerned with the Pacific and the American West. The collection attempts to link metropole and colonial margins, bodies and space, gender and mobility, race and sexuality, and intimacy and the imperial public sphere. Ballantyne and Burton underscore that empire was a self-consciously spatializing project, with colonizers both attempting to impose their own topographies on conquered space and to unmake preexisting maps of native communities. The collection seeks to argue that the asymmetrical social relations produced by colonialism must be anchored in a critical reading of space that remains attentive to local contexts as well as the networks and exchanges that worked over long distances.

Ballantyne and Burton argue that the histories of empire must take into account the policies of space, but also must understand how and why intimate mobilities framed the very base on which imperial power was designed and enacted. The collection is divided into three parts. The first part highlights the full range and analytical potential of intimacy, examining the ways it structured and was structured by the greatly extended spatial domain of imperial systems. The second part focuses on the sexual encounters at the heart of migration and colonial contact. The third part engages the phenomenon of particular bodies on the move. Adrian Carton's essay is focused on the connections between cross-racial intimacy and the construction of whiteness in early colonial India. He highlights how the establishment of intimate relations across boundaries of race & religion & subsequent development of mixed family units was an essential element to the Portuguese colonial project in South Asia

Ballantyne and Burton identify various gaps within the literature on empire and the intimate, especially regarding the role and perception of space. They claim that studies of the intimate have tended to conceive of the intimate as operating as a localizing domain. The essays in this collection reassess the localization paradigm through their sensitivity to the complex relationships between intimacy and mobility—they ask not just how intimacy was constructed, but also how it was embodied across empires. They claim that the space of intimacy makes gender legible and heterosexuality normative when it is taken to be simply local. Ballantyne and Burton push for the use of 'translocal' as a means of tendering the gender politics of global systems more complex and the intimacies of empire more available to critical analysis. Importantly, Ballantyne and Burton reject the notion that the private and the public are segregated from one another.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Imperial spaces did not emerge from either self-evident or static geographies, nor did they exist in mutual isolation
- Empire was an intimate project at all levels, but intimacy was not the only way empire functioned
- Connections between intimacy and mobility are especially striking in settler colonies because of the centrality of migration and demographic domination as instruments of colonization