One Land. Eyeworks NZ Ltd. Six episodes, screened on TV One, 13 December 2009 –17 January 2010. Available on TVNZ Ondemand. http://tvnz.co.nz/one-land/index-group-3134642.

ONE LAND is the latest version of the historical reality television show, a follow-on from *Pioneer House* and *Colonial House*. In this 'reality' three twenty-first-century families — two Māori and one European — are placed in a 1850s frontier setting. The series follows their physical, emotional, cultural and historical acclimatization.

According to the TVNZ website, 500 families competed to spend six weeks in a replica pa and cottage at Tapapakanga Regional Park, beside the Firth of Thames. The 'winners' were the Smiths, who became the settler family, the Ririnuis (a fluent Māori-speaking Māori family), and the Dalrymples (a Māori family who 'have [n]ever experienced Māori language or culture, despite their own heritage and living in a region rich in Māori history'). While it is true that every generation sees and writes history through its own eyes, the on-screen tension between the Māori families said more about current preoccupations with cultural identity than with what was going on in New Zealand in the early 1850s.

Jerome de Groot calls reality television 'lowest common denominator television'.[1] Others welcome reality TV for offering viewers a degree of interactivity, but *One Land* lacks the viewers' polls of *Big Brother* and its ilk; interactivity starts and ends with the remote control button. Instead, its success will stand or fall on the degree to which viewers sympathize with the participants as they rough it without their iPods, SUVs and espressos, are excited by the interpersonal tension and action the show produces, and are engaged by its eye candy rating.

Historical reality television programmes should, according to Simon Schama, be distinguished from television history because 'our involvement with the characters depends on us knowing that they are really "like us", or that in so far as they can be made unlike us, the agency of that transformation is social and material — washing with lye, tying a corset'.[2] There is a lot of that in *One Land*, from cooking through to tying sanitary pads 1850-style. Some is well presented, and there is much to be learned about domestic life, hunting, gender differences and a rangatira's need not to be overshadowed by his wife, but unlike a more conventional television show, opportunities are wasted. Settler mum, Tarnia Smith, bad at cooking in the twenty-first-century, is even worse in the 1850s replica cottage. But instead of explaining the challenges of colonial cooking, the show goes for cheap laughs, showing the settler children feeding her cooking to the hens and the goat, both of which refuse the food.

Although the opening clips begin with the settler father saying ominously that 'the biggest challenge is — dare I say it? — dealing with natives', the clashes between the settlers and both Māori families are mild compared to the stoushes between the teo reo speaking Ririnuis and the Dalrymples who 'had previously shunned anything Māori'. While this process introduces an unusually large amount of Māori language to prime time, and may teach some viewers how to say 'bugger off' in Māori, the tensions overwhelm everything else, with the Dalrymples' departure from the pa and the drama about whether they will attend the 1850-style wedding between Aramoho and Toni Ririnui dominating the later episodes. Or, as one settler child puts it, will Evan Dalrymple co-operate to avoid looking like a 'douche bag' on TV?

The advisers, Amster Reedy (tikanga) and Lyndon Fraser (history), appear on camera from time to time to set some context, usually usefully, although they do not correct cast members' inaccuracies. The TVNZ website enthuses - 'with his long hair and rock and roll attire Fraser is definitely not your stereotypical stuffy historian!'. This statement's exclamation mark suggests that its writer has little knowledge of the impact that those stereotypes — Schama, David Starkey and Niall Fergusson — have had on television ratings elsewhere.

The channel's website for the show is basic. There is no classroom-related material and no links to history or heritage sites. Instead, there are brief biographies of Reedy and Fraser, and four items, each about two minutes long, featuring Eyelines staff enthusing about costumes, photography, design and production. Fraser's timeline for the 1850s usefully puts events in their local and international context, but the 12-item gallery of Victorian images, which covers the second half of the nineteenth century, is pitifully unbalanced. All the images are of Māori or of settlers in rural or frontier society. A user would have no idea that by the late nineteenth century New Zealand was one of the most urbanized societies in the world or even that settler towns existed in 1850s New Zealand.

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NOTES

1 Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, London, 2009, p.165.

2 Simon Schama, 'Television and the Trouble with History', in David Cannadine, ed., *History and the Media*, Basingstoke, 2004, p.9, cit. de Groot, p.167.