

**Entanglements of Empire:
Missionaries, Māori, and the Question of the Body**

TONY BALLANTYNE

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Missionary archives are a rich resource for historical research, something clearly demonstrated in Tony Ballantyne's work. In *Entanglements of Empire* he has offered 'a close reading of the archives of evangelization' (p.255), drawing in particular on the Church Missionary Society (CMS) papers in the Hocken Library in Dunedin. These are supplemented with other missionary and colonial records and seen through a highly refined interpretive framework to provide an invigorating, satisfying and sometimes provocative account of Māori and Protestant missionary 'entanglements' in pre-Treaty New Zealand.

The use of 'entanglements' to frame the cross-cultural engagement points to a dynamic relationship, something that was developing, even before the missionaries arrived in New Zealand. Māori such as Te Pahi, Ruatara and Hongi Hika were great adventurers, going to Australia and beyond. The entangled relationships became more and more complex as missionaries from 1814 came and lived among Māori, and they increasingly influenced and interacted with each other. Māori were great adopters, adapters and innovators of new European technology, agricultural practices, religious ideas, literacy and weapons, using these things for their own ends. The missionaries, for their part, came as change agents, wanting to transform Māori, their society, beliefs and practices; in the entangled process both groups were changed.

Ballantyne's reading of the archives leaves well behind the 'Fatal Impact' approach to history and sees Māori as active participants and leaders in the process of social, political, religious and economic change brought about by their engagement with missionaries and the European world. The sophisticated approach Ballantyne develops, builds on, but goes well beyond the work of Judith Binney on Thomas Kendall and the historical debates of a previous generation. In those debates, Binney, John Owens and others disputed with each other the nature and causes of the changes that took place in Māori society in the pre-Treaty period, and the extent to which Māori were 'converted'.

The way in which the body was understood in material, physical, spiritual and cosmological senses by both Māori and missionaries, and

the exchanges, debate and conflicts to which this gave rise are at the core of the author's work. The Introduction recognises the overwhelming differences between the traditional Māori and European worlds. Slavery, tattooing and cannibalism were indicative of these differences. For the missionaries, their assumptions were challenged by their encounters with *atua*, *tapu* and *noa*, which had profound implications for gender and the way people lived. The missionary archives are taken as 'situated texts' which Māori helped shape. Taking Greg Denning's lead, Ballantyne sees that there are both historical and anthropological dimensions to the negotiation and translation which they reflect.

The first chapter examines 'Exploration, Empire and Evangelization' setting the missionary enterprise within an imperial framework, not apart from it. Marsden, who founded the CMS mission in New Zealand, is thus seen as dependent on commercial and political imperial networks. His understanding of the civilizing and improving role of the gospel brought together practical agricultural arts which he pioneered in Australia, his developing contact and friendship with Māori and his evangelical missionary commitment. Marsden's disappointing and abandoned attempts to work with Aborigines were overtaken by his optimistic evaluation of Māori potential for being civilized and Christianized. Both evangelical and imperial rhetoric were used to justify the mission with prospective benefits for Britain and Māori.

Marsden, 'Te Matenga', and Māori developed a close relationship in which reciprocity were seen in the hospitality (*manākitanga*) which he offered at Parramatta and Māori gave to the missionaries in New Zealand. There was, however, a divergence between the Māori and missionary expectations which easily gave rise to misunderstandings. Ballantyne concludes that the early missionaries were dependent on their Māori hosts in a very conflicted, fractured political context in which Hongi Hika asserted his dominance. There is a question, however, as to whether Marsden in the 1820s realised the tensions between Christianity, commerce and colonization, as Ballantyne concludes, or whether he was bypassed by the changing circumstances and leadership of the mission in New Zealand.

The body figures in the second chapter through the changes brought to the Māori world by the mission stations and the reorganisation of the way people lived. The proximity of the first stations at Hohi to Ruatara's Rangihoua pā, and at Kerikeri to Hongi's Kororipo pā, placed the missionary settlements under the eye of their Māori patrons. The later developments at Paihia (1823) with the building of a missionary

vessel and the establishment of a farm at Waimate (1830) helped loosen the missionaries' dependence on Māori for travel and food. Ballantyne emphasises the novelty of the domestic spaces provided by missionary housing where, after the pioneering phase, nuclear families lived, ate and slept, contrasting with the Māori community where food was banned. Missionary and Māori gender boundaries diverged. Attitudes to cutting hair, cleanliness and clothing were part of 'the remaking of the Māori body', what Ballantyne refers to as 'a key marker of the transformative project of evangelization' (p.87).

Attempts to impose evangelically ordered daily work routines on Māori clashed with traditional ways of organizing labour which were influenced by the demands of seasonal harvests. In contrast, the introduction of strict Sunday observance attracted early Māori interest and is seen by Ballantyne as stimulating the reassessment of traditional ways of thinking with implications for Māori understandings of time and cosmology.

Missionary ideals always struggled with practical and human realities, with inter-missionary strife and sexual transgressions causing tensions and divisions. The evangelical idealisation of marriage and the family unit was undermined by the sexual indiscretions of some missionaries. Ballantyne provides a detailed account of William Yate's sexual relationships with Māori boys and his shipboard affair with Edward Denison. Despite Yate's denials, the evidence against him is compelling. Other instances of missionary failings are also given, leading to the conclusion that 'these infractions sapped the morale of the mission' and undermined its 'moral authority' in regulating the 'social and sexual order' (p.171). While this was so to some extent, the counter-balancing influence of other missionary families and their children, their entanglement with Māori and the trust that developed between them resulted in Māori adopting, adapting and absorbing evangelical mores.

The evangelical understanding of death is illustrated by Ballantyne through the missionary experience and their funerary practices and Christian beliefs. These are clearly drawn out and contrasted with Māori understandings and practices. Death for the missionaries became a didactic and evangelistic moment when preaching about the sacrificial death of Jesus and the promised after-life was opportune. Death also provided missionaries with a window into the powerful Māori understandings of death, tapu, ritual and their cosmology.

The challenges brought by confrontations around the meaning of life and death were caught up in the conversion accounts which the

missionaries used to justify their mission to their supporters. Ballantyne emphasises the importance of the missionary press in Britain in creating broader 'humanitarian narratives', evoking sympathy for the 'suffering Māori' which undergirded missionary support for their protection against potential economic or colonial exploitation. What was happening in New Zealand became entangled in the larger imperial debates over the treatment of 'aborigines' and a stimulant for British political intervention, leading ultimately to Captain Hobson's arrival and the Treaty of Waitangi. The ambiguity in the evangelical understanding of 'protection' is seen by Ballantyne as enabling colonial 'expansion rather than preventing it' with the 'alienation of sovereignty... designed to defend the interests of an enfeebled people' (p.249).

Ballantyne's book is a stimulating, highly nuanced, interpretive history of aspects of missionary and Māori entanglement and the broader imperial implications of this. Hopefully, it will take readers back to the missionary texts on which it draws so extensively. The Marsden online archive at the Hocken Library (<http://marsdenarchive.otago.ac.nz/>) now gives web access to much of that very early material. The importance of this book lies in providing new ways of seeing the missionary and Māori cross-cultural exchanges, which not only fundamentally changed their worlds, but impacted on the very foundation and emergence of New Zealand as a nation and its place in the world.

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