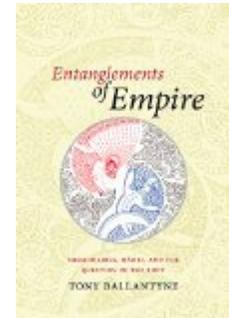


Tony Ballantyne. *Entanglements of Empire: Missionaries, Māori, and the Question of the Body.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. 376 pp. \$94.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8223-5817-6.



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In August 1837, a group of Anglican missionaries belonging to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) assembled at Waimate, one of their stations in the Bay of Islands, in northern New Zealand. There the party proceeded to torch a cottage, destroying the property within it and even shooting dead a horse. A week of prayer and fasting followed. The unfortunate horse's owner, William Yate, had been dismissed from the CMS months earlier, following allegations of an inappropriate relationship with one of the crew on board the *Prince Regent* during its journey from England to New Zealand a year earlier. That in turn had resulted in several Māori male youths coming forward to testify that Yate had engaged in sex acts with them.

Yate was hardly the first or last missionary to fall from grace, even within New Zealand. Yet as Tony Ballantyne argues in his new work, a close reading of Yate's case has often been framed in terms of questions of sexual identity rather than the broader context of his dealings with other missionaries and Māori. Although Yate portrayed

himself as a victim of injustice (and that image was largely upheld in historian Judith Binney's work on the missionary), Ballantyne paints a much darker portrait of the man, whose ego alienated him from missionary colleagues and who, according to this new account, almost certainly coerced, bullied, or misled multiple Māori boys into their various sexual encounters.[1]

This provocative and challenging new reading of the Yate story is one of many incidents to feature in Ballantyne's account of the place of the body in missionary and Māori exchanges in northern New Zealand between 1814 (when the first mission station was established) and 1840, when the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi heralded entry into the formal British Empire. Yet Ballantyne's focus is neither exclusively sexual nor unduly restrictive. Employing a broad sweep of bodily practices and exchanges allows Ballantyne to examine many aspects of everyday Māori and missionary interactions. After a period of relative

neglect, this is a topic that has been of keen interest to New Zealand historians in recent times.

Ballantyne tackles contending missionary and Māori understandings of such matters as space, labor, sex, and death, with considerable insight and ability. Arguably he overstates the novelty of his overarching argument that we should view these interactions as forms of “entanglement” rather than “meetings” or “encounters.” It is a notion well established in Pacific historiography thanks to the work of Nicholas Thomas (and also one referenced in my own study of pre-1840 New Zealand).[2] In any case, the preferred metaphor is ultimately less significant than the substance it is intended to convey, and here Ballantyne’s work sits comfortably within the recent historiography that overturns earlier depictions of missionaries overcoming initial hazards and trials to eventually triumph over heathen “natives.”

To the extent that the concept of “conversion” has any validity at all, such a process was never straightforward, with both parties influencing each other. As Ballantyne describes it, the missionaries did not, and could not, carve out “little Englands” for themselves but instead were confronted by Māori with their own cultural priorities and practices. The world of missionaries and Māori was one of constant “translation, compromise, and struggle” (p. 97). In spatial terms, missionaries were nearly always required to live where Māori told them—sometimes in accordance with Māori cultural preferences (especially in the earliest phase, when multiple families might be forced to live under the same roof, Māori-style, and without segregation of the sexes).

For Māori, work was outcome-focused and dictated by the wider needs of the community, whereas missionaries viewed the act of laboring as an inherent good in its own right. The result was that Māori worked on their own terms and in their own time, disappointing initial missionary hopes (led by Sydney chaplain Samuel Marsden) that “civilization” was a potential path to evange-

lization. Death and disease were ever-present realities for both Māori and missionary families in the era before 1840. In a striking analysis, Ballantyne calculates that missionary wives were especially vulnerable, dying on average some thirty years younger than their husbands. But interring and commemorating the dead was a complicated process in a land lacking consecrated cemeteries. Missionaries frequently had to make do in the early days by burying their wives, children, or colleagues in their own gardens. Meanwhile, Māori notions of *tapu* (sacred or subject to ceremonial restrictions) were not lightly defied.

Māori might have retained the upper hand locally, but Ballantyne argues that they could not control how they were represented in European texts. By the late 1830s, this became crucial as the British government contemplated further intervention in New Zealand and found itself to a large degree reliant on information supplied by missionaries and other “respectable” eyewitnesses for its understanding of what was happening on the ground. As the missionaries became increasingly gloomy as to the prospect of preventing significant colonization altogether, many concluded that there was no alternative to British annexation of New Zealand. That view increasingly influenced and clouded their reports, transforming Māori from the “hypermasculine” and martial people of James Cook’s time into weak and vulnerable victims of European contact. Colonization, at least in the missionary and humanitarian worldview, was to proceed cautiously and in tandem with the protection of Māori interests. Inevitably (although it is not a particular focus of Ballantyne’s work) the latter of these two incompatible objectives would eventually give way.

Considering its focus on the body, some matters might have merited more attention. Ballantyne registers missionary abhorrence of such practices as prostitution, cannibalism, and infanticide but fails to explore how Māori might have viewed these in any kind of sustained way. Given

recent sensationalist accounts of Māori cannibalism especially, a careful and scholarly reappraisal of this topic would have been particularly timely.

There is the occasional slip. Abel Tasman did not name his discovery “Zeelandia Nova” but “Staten Landt” (the new name came later, inserted by Dutch cartographers after their own province of Zeeland). Overall, however, this is a work of considerable depth and value. In arguing that “entanglements of empire before 1840 neither destroyed Māori culture nor left it untouched,” Ballantyne seeks to challenge the view of unconstrained Māori agency while at the same time rejecting older “Fatal Impact” analyses (p. 257). Debate over the extent to which Māori were in control of their own destinies in this era remains a lively (and at times politically charged) affair, because it informs wider arguments about the context in which the Treaty of Waitangi was entered. Ballantyne’s work will in the future be essential reading for anyone wishing to understand and engage in this discussion.

Notes

[1]. Judith Binney, “Whatever Happened to Poor Mr Yate? An Exercise in Voyeurism,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 9 (1975): 111-125.

[2]. Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Vincent O’Malley, *The Meeting Place: Māori and Pākehā Encounters, 1642-1840* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2012), 7.

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