“Entanglement” as a concept in recent research on Christian missions in the South Pacific and Africa

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Abstract
This article provides a short overview of ‘entanglement’ in recent histories of mission, examining what distinguishes it from earlier conceptualisations of cross-cultural encounters. This article locates the emergence of the term in the social sciences and global histories of empire, and explores its current influence in studies of Christian evangelism in imperial and colonial contexts. This article shows the strengths of recent works on entanglement, while indicating some new research avenues for scholars of mission. The discussion primarily focuses on research on Africa and the South Pacific.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long experimented with various frameworks to encapsulate the dramatic shifts initiated by cross-cultural encounters. Inspired by research in anthropology and linguistics, historians have used the terms hybridity, creolisation and syncretism to explain the dynamic character of cultural and religious change. Most recently, the concept of ‘entanglement’ has proliferated in historical works on Christian missions, particularly in South Pacific and Africanist scholarship. Newly published works discuss entangled spaces, cultural categories and bodies of knowledge. Despite the current prevalence of the term, commentary on its historiographical and theoretical origins is scarce.

A review of the literature reveals how historians and other scholars have used the term in various ways. In some works, entanglement principally describes a condition: the coming together of empires or the interconnected physical and religious worlds of European and Indigenous peoples. In other works—missionary histories, especially—it...
has developed into more of an analytical approach, a way of unpacking or perhaps disentangling diverse forms of agency which have interacted to drive cross-cultural transformations. Occasionally, it is difficult to separate the literature into these two groups: some scholars write about entangled worlds while also promoting the analytical potential of the term. To avoid entanglement becoming a catch-all term for all forms of connection in missionary research, it is important to reflect on these usages and their theoretical foundations. Otherwise, scholarship risks obscuring the cultural and environmental contexts of diverse sites of mission and empire.

This article, therefore, sketches a genealogy of ‘entanglement’ in missionary scholarship. It begins by locating the origins of term in the social sciences and global histories of empire. Next, it explores recent works which use entanglement to guide histories of mission. The final section of the article indicates some problems in the literature, and points towards new research avenues for missionary scholars. These include paying further attention to the materiality of knowledge and engaging with some current perspectives in Indigenous Studies. The article mostly examines research on Christian missionary societies in Africa and the South Pacific. Foundational anthropological and historical studies of colonialism and religious change in these regions have encouraged scholars to explore entangled histories.

2 | ANTHROPOLOGY AND ENTANGLED HISTORIES OF EMPIRE

From the 1960s to the 1980s, historians typically conflated missionaries with the destructive forces of empire, depicting them as actively undermining and destroying Indigenous cultural practices and beliefs. Reflecting much more thorough analysis of Indigenous evangelists and their role in transmitting Christian beliefs, scholars complicated this portrayal in subsequent years. In addition to exploring religious change, the study of Indigenous Christianity has involved tracing histories of resistance during periods of massive political and social change. Other studies have shown how converts forged new Christian identities and vigorously turned away from former practices, highlighting the diverse and complex reasons for conversion. Various terms emerged in the literature to capture the mixing of old and new beliefs, collaboration and resistance, refiguration and refusal.

Drawing from research in linguistics, historians discussed, for example, the theme of cultural translation: how Christian beliefs were translated and adapted in accordance with the local context. Translation emphasises the conscious efforts of individuals; however, it neglects the more unconscious elements behind religious change, as Peter Burke notes. Alternatively, the metaphor of ‘hybridity’ from botany presents the opposite problem, ‘omitting human agency altogether’. Creolisation was a further precursor to entanglement. In linguistics, creolisation refers to the merging of two languages to create a third. In missionary history, the term stipulates a blending of cultural traditions, born out of the encounters. The term syncretism also focuses on the creation of a new system of religious beliefs, the amalgamation of old and new cosmology. Syncretism and other blended notions of religious belief have contested connotations. Missionaries often rallied against syncretism, arguing that it represented a failure of evangelism.

The current turn to ‘entanglement’ in missionary scholarship can be tied to global histories of empire and their embrace of developments in the social sciences. For decades now, historians have disrupted binary understandings of the ‘metropole’ and ‘colony’ in imperial history. Christopher Bayly’s influential research stipulated the multidirectional flow of goods and ideas across sites of empire in Africa, Asia, South America and the Pacific in the 18th and 19th centuries. From the 1990s, historians of the new imperial history configured material and intellectual networks which spanned the globe, challenging national framings of Britain’s past in particular. These studies focused on the mobility of cultural knowledge and how ideas of race, gender, class and religion moved along imperial channels. Among these historians, Tony Ballantyne is known for characterising empire as an assemblage of overlapping webs. In addition to communicating the complex circulation of cultural traffic, the web metaphor conveys the unstable nature of imperial networks: ‘Empires, like webs, were both fragile, prone to crises where
important threads are broken or structural nodes destroyed, yet also dynamic, being constantly remade and reconfigured through concerted thought and effort.\textsuperscript{14}

In turn, historians of the early modern Atlantic used entanglement to describe the complicated relationships that developed between European empires and colonies in Africa and the Americas. Eliga Gould, for example, argued that the Spanish and British empires were part of an interconnected system in the eighteenth 18th century, a system that was asymmetrical due to the military dominance of Spain. Comparative history, according to Gould, does not adequately explain why the imperial strategies of Britain and Spain intersected, nor does it account for the political alliances that were forged across national borders.\textsuperscript{15} Building on this work, Ralph Bauer and Marcy Norton narrowed in on the cultural encounter, and depicted entangled worlds between Indigenous peoples and Europeans in the Atlantic. The term, they suggest, helps to symbolise the ‘dynamic processes of intercultural exchange, conflict, and transformation in the early modern Atlantic world’.\textsuperscript{16} Rather than attempting to account for the impact of one culture on another, it leaves room for the ‘continuous and unresolved tensions’ of colonial contact.\textsuperscript{17}

Research in historical and cultural anthropology has played a key role in establishing entanglement as a condition of these complex colonial histories, especially Nicholas Thomas's work on material culture. Through fieldwork and archival research, Thomas studied how Pacific people and European newcomers exchanged goods, concluding that the value of goods was always context specific. Objects become ‘entangled’ when they are recontextualised in cross-cultural interactions, taking on old and new appropriations.\textsuperscript{18} While challenging dichotomous readings of the cultural encounter, Thomas emphasised the power imbalances of colonial histories. In a metaphorical sense, entanglement conveys unevenness and the condition of becoming ensnared, symbolising the shifting asymmetries of power in cross-cultural relationships. As well as helping to promote entanglement as a descriptive term, Thomas argued for greater analysis of diverse and multi-directional forms of agency. His work joined a broader conversation about the need to study ‘both sides’ of the colonial encounter in Pacific anthropology. The historian Greg Dening—who trained in anthropology—long argued for this approach, especially in his research on beach crossings.\textsuperscript{19}

The philosopher of science Bruno Latour has been highly influential in shaping histories of interconnection, multi-directional communication pathways and the rethinking of binaries. Helping to fashion entanglement into more of an explicitly analytical approach, Latour’s research depicts networks in which entangled social and natural actors move on equal terms. In his Reassembling the Social, he argues that agency (not to be confused with intentionality) should be assigned to human and non-human actors, writing: ‘Action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled’.\textsuperscript{20} His research on the history of science and technology exemplifies how human and nonhuman actors can be studied in an interwoven framework. In a book on germ theory in 19th-century France, for instance, he treats both human and non-human actors (for example, microbes) as integral to the scientific revolution.\textsuperscript{21}

In the past two decades, Latour’s writing on Actor-Network theory has inspired imperial historians to disentangle the diverse forms of agency which constituted empire, whether human or non-human. Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, for instance, reference Latour when conceptualising humanitarianism and how individual experiences affected broader societal contexts.\textsuperscript{22} Likewise, studies of colonial knowledge describe the technological ‘assemblages’ that enabled the global movement of texts in the modern period. This was not simply a history of humans writing, but one of the ships, printing presses, paper, pens, and animals interacting and working together.\textsuperscript{23} On the etymological origins of ‘entanglement’, Bauer and Norton explain that the earliest definition of ‘tangle’ was a type of seaweed, a word that developed from maritime culture. Referencing Latour, they argue that this ‘reminds us of the need to transcend epistemologically in defensible nature-culture binaries that arose in tandem with European colonial ideologies legitimating conquests of indigenous people’.\textsuperscript{24}

As colonial and imperial historians came to reconfigure understandings of agency, Indigenous mobilities and the local sites of empire came into much greater focus. Jane Carey and Jane Lydon argued for the study of Indigenous participation within ‘global networks of power and mobility’, responding to earlier writings on mobility which
privileged border-crossing Europeans. Moreover, as suggested above in relation to the new imperial history, scholars began to describe how the local intersected with the global. Situating New Zealand within a global context of empire, Ballantyne compares places like small colonial towns to ‘knot-like conjunctures where the ceaseless small-scale mobilities of life in the location interlocked into the more extensive networks that enabled the regular movement of people, things and words in and out of the location’. Attuned to the agencies of Indigenous peoples and places, this research on mobility brought more complicated readings of missionary ties to empire, especially regarding cultural knowledge production.

Extensive literature has debated the ties between missionaries and European empire-building. Prior to research on Indigenous mobilities, postcolonial literary scholarship influenced thinking on how missionaries contributed to ‘cultural imperialism’. Susan Thorne, for example, examined how the printed propaganda of missionary societies circulated in England, entering Sunday schools and popular literature and influencing how ordinary Britons conceived of their relationship to empire. While illustrating the cultural and social significance of the missionary movement in Britain, Thorne’s approach evoked the metropole/periphery divide that has since been contested by the new imperial history.

Studies of Indigenous language texts and mission translation helped to uncover Indigenous agencies in the histories of missionary knowledge production. Across different sites of evangelism, the translation of the Bible and other sacred texts into Indigenous languages was a complicated and often decades long process. The process revealed how meanings flexed and adapted to new cultural systems, incorporating both Indigenous and newcomer agencies. For instance, regarding the evangelical entry of John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress into Africa, Isabel Hofmeyr interprets mission translation as ‘opening fields of manoeuvre’. Missionaries relied on convert expertise, and African Christian beliefs could alter the translated product: ‘the complexity of the operation meant that any mission translation was shaped in a web of negotiation, disagreement, and contradiction’.

As well as exploring intellectual shifts, scholars moved towards analysing how missionary histories intersected with the material world, how cross-cultural bodily interactions and the exchange of goods transformed both Indigenous and European cultures. One of the unique aspects of missionary research is the wealth of textual records. The numerous diaries, letters and reports of individual missionaries offer glimpses into their personal and environmental worlds: their ambitions and religious beliefs, physical health and material complaints. From the late twentieth century, when historical and cultural anthropologists came to reject claims of objectivity and grand narratives of human societies (interrogating the colonial legacies of the discipline), missionary texts attracted key anthropological studies. Moving away from questions of evangelical ‘bias’, historians similarly started to interpret missionary archives as socially and environmentally inflected sources. Individual missionaries underwent religious and cultural transformations due to migration and cross-cultural exchange—and these processes affected how they recorded, organised, and mobilised knowledge. Richard White’s work on the ‘middle ground’ is useful for conceptualising these dynamics: the creative misunderstandings and conciliation that developed across cultural boundaries. Furthermore, on the tensions that defined missionary contributions to early forms of scientific knowledge, Jane Samson conceives of missionaries as both ‘othering’ and ‘brothering’ Indigenous peoples. In arguing for the spread of the gospel, missionaries attempted to document universal principles between Christian and non-Christian peoples, as well as the socio-cultural factors that divided them.

A picture emerged in the literature of the entangled relationship between missions and empires, a relationship which encompassed shifting and asymmetrical forms of power between Indigenous and European peoples. To encapsulate the intellectual and material transformations of missionary histories, Ballantyne tells of the ‘cultural entanglements’ of empire in a monograph on the Church Missionary Society in the north of Te Ika-a-Māui (the North Island in New Zealand). In defining the term, he draws upon Sarah Nuttall’s research. Employing entanglement to describe cultural expression in post-apartheid South Africa, Nuttall writes that it is a ‘condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited’. The term ‘may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness.’
In Ballantyne’s monograph, entanglement features as an alternative to the model of the ‘encounter’, which he argues suggests momentary meetings or colliding worlds between Māori and missionaries. Instead, he argues that ‘te ao Māori’ and the customs of the British were drawn together and interwoven in new and durable, if unpredictable ways.39 For instance, he shows that the mission stations were not exclusively European spaces. They interwove a network of Māori patrons, translators, teachers and students. This spatial reading of how the mission stations developed weakens arguments about ‘white picket fences’ dividing Māori and European worlds in early New Zealand.40

Entanglement serves as both a symbolic term for characterising these complex relationships as well as an analytical framework for explaining empire. In unpacking a set of actors that constituted empire, Ballantyne focuses on the materiality of the body, arguing that debates over its management drove ‘new models of work, faith, and cosmology’ between Māori and missionaries.51 Interrogating both Indigenous and European cultural understandings of the body—and thus, their agencies—is central to the study. According to Ballantyne, cross-cultural interactions resembled ‘knot-like-structures which laced together various vectors of motion and different lines of cultural influence’.52 Moreover, in addressing the inequalities that shaped empires, he calls attention to the uneven and messy character of knots, their ability to exert pressure, and to slip and fail. In the long term, cross-cultural entanglement could destabilise or undercut Indigenous formations, which became ‘laced into the expansive world of imperial connections’.43

3 ENTANGLED HISTORIES OF MISSION AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE

Entangled histories of mission and religious change mark a clear departure from the ‘dialectic’ reading of missionary encounters, as formulated in the landmark study by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff.44 In the decades since the publication of this two-volume study of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in southern Africa, historians have contested the hegemony it ascribes to the European side of the encounter. Elizabeth Elbourne remarks that a dialectic model does not explain why Christianity rapidly moved ‘out of the hands of the missionaries and settlers who brought it’, and that it ‘is not always wise to take missionaries at their word’.45 The printed reports of missionary societies typically minimised the role that Indigenous evangelists played in spreading Christianity. In rejecting the dialectic model, historians working with the concept of entanglement have instead examined multidirectional forms of interaction, the interweaving of ‘diverse historical subjects such as the body, health, religion, trade, and exchange with each other and with the material world’.46

There has been a focus on global entanglements in these works, evoking the turn to transnational cultural networks in the new imperial history. Birgit Meyer, for example, promotes entanglement as an analytical tool for the study of religion in and from Africa. On the shared religious histories between Africa and Europe, Meyer writes that entanglement ‘cannot be reduced to straightforward relations between A and B, but involves a complex, dynamic formation that scholars are to unpack’.47 Taking an entangled approach, therefore, involves interrogating cultural categories which can help decolonise scholarly practice. In terms of religion, tracing past translations helps to ‘spotlight alternative possibilities and break open the concept of religion as narrowly understood from a European, Christian angle’.48 Overall, Meyer argues for a more materialist interpretation of religion, arguing that a ‘de-materialised, mentalistic understanding has served as the yardstick to classify other religions of the world’.49

In Meyer’s study of the Bremen Mission among the Ewe in Ghana, a more materialist approach has involved highlighting the contradictions of the Protestant German missionaries. As well as preaching against ‘heathendom and idolatry’, the missionaries ‘purported a new mentality and possibilities for participation as producers, traders, and consumers in the modern colonial economy’. Thus, a lot of their work was ‘worldly and mundane’ even if they complained about the ‘materialism and lack of spirituality of their converts’.50 Meyer also argues that European
contexts should be considered ‘frontier zones in which religious and other differences are negotiated’.\textsuperscript{51} Regarding colonial collections in European museums, she contends that missionary ideas of religion shaped how objects were collected in Africa and the new meanings they were ascribed in Europe. Consequently, ‘these objects enshrine colonial entanglements and ask to be unpacked through a collaborative effort that involves African and European scholars, curators, and priests’.\textsuperscript{52}

As previously suggested, a key theme in entangled histories of mission is the porosity of boundaries between Indigenous and European missionary worlds, the messy lines of communication which influenced how both Indigenous peoples and missionaries produced and appropriated knowledge. Thus, in contrast to earlier conceptualisations of missionary history, entangled histories typically analyse how both missionaries and local peoples were affected and transformed by contact. David Maxwell’s *Religious Entanglements* explores intersecting and divergent knowledge pathways between African communities, the colonial state and missionary societies. A study that is deeply embedded in place, the book narrows in on the British Pentecostal missionary William F. P. Burton and his intimate interactions with the Luba Katanga in the Belgian Congo.

Throughout the study, Maxwell directs attention to the physicality of cross-cultural engagements and how disease and death shape the spiritual and emotional contours of contact on the ground. On missionary knowledge production and scientific research, Maxwell describes the ‘lateral connections that overlapped with empire but extended beyond it’.\textsuperscript{53} For instance, he shows how Burton’s linguistic and ethnographical work in colonial Katanga encompassed a diverse and sometimes competing range of actors, motivations and outlets. Translating the Bible into the local vernacular presented Burton and other Pentecostals with the opportunity to Christianise Luba cosmology. This was a process that could displace and alter meaning. When translating the Old Testament, Burton and his colleague removed words that they considered ‘distasteful’ or thought would encourage ‘superstition’, inserting transliterations over pre-existing terms.\textsuperscript{54} Yet, it was also a collaborative, creative process that interwove the expertise of African linguists, who supplied vocabulary and consequently ensured that they transferred their own images and ideas into the gospels.\textsuperscript{55} In its messy configuration, entanglement allows room for the volatile nature of missionary relationships with local peoples and the unintended trajectories that Christian ideas could travel. Writing on the topic of continuity and change, Maxwell highlights generational tensions between European missionaries and the Luba evangelists who tired of missionary paternalism and broke away to form independent churches. Some of these new religious movements developed anti-colonial ideologies or engaged in labour protests.\textsuperscript{56}

Thus, in both the works of Meyer and Maxwell, entangled histories of mission involve the re-examination of cultural categories, exploring the blurred boundaries between religion and science, for example. For this reason, missionary medicine is another topic that historians have interpreted through the concept of entanglement. Linda Maria Ratschiller Nasim’s newly published monograph traces how Swiss missionary doctors in west Africa and Europe contributed to the ‘making of hygiene’, or the coming together of notions of scientific health, colonial cleanliness and religious purity. According to Nasim, the study ‘moves beyond the dichotomy of dominance and resistance to examine how entanglements of hygiene between West Africa and Europe around 1900 shaped religious, scientific and colonial bodies of knowledge’.\textsuperscript{57} Missionaries from the Basel Mission became interested in non-European systems of knowledge, relying on intermediaries, while also brokering knowledge in multiple directions.\textsuperscript{58} Nasim builds on the concept of entanglement by discussing interwoven ‘spaces of knowledge’. In this study, they are religious, scientific and colonial—and while there are institutional, personal and thematic overlaps between them, connection does not imply that ‘immobility, disjuncture and ignorance are forgotten’.\textsuperscript{59} Different actors within these spaces possess ‘more or less power ... depending on their position and reputation as laypeople, informants or experts, which influences whether their opinions are accepted as knowledge’.\textsuperscript{60} The focus on hygiene—a key marker of difference in colonial discourse—serves as a way of synthesising all of the complex layers and paths that missionary knowledge traversed.
4 SOME PROBLEMS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Some of the potential problems with entanglement as both a descriptive term and an analytical framing relate to the critiques made against the cultural turn in historical writing more generally. Primarily, this is a debate about scale and the methodology. How well do entangled histories convey intersections between local and global processes? What sources are historians using to make claims about cross-cultural entanglement? Sebastian Conrad remarks on the tendency in some histories of global connection to romanticise ‘individual experiences of border crossing and globalization’, to see the world through the ‘eyes of the protagonists’, and to obscure ‘larger structures unless the historical actors themselves are cognizant of them’. In other words, broader historical processes, changes and continuities may get lost in an entangled framework which concentrates on encounters and interconnections.

The most convincing studies of missionary entanglements, however, incorporate a range of sources: correspondence, journals, photographs, serial publications and objects, for example. This evokes Emma Wild-Wood’s contention that mission scholars should ‘triangulate’ different types of sources. With regard to attempting to capture a ‘polyvocal perspective’ of historical processes, missionary archives are most revealing when they are analysed alongside colonial records, oral histories and printed texts. Relatedly, important studies in recent years have demonstrated how Indigenous communities harnessed the written word to challenge colonialism and forge new social and political identities, focusing on Indigenous-language newspapers, for instance. These studies contest colonial demarcation between ‘literate’ and ‘non-literate’ societies, and instead highlight the dynamic relationship between orality and the written word. Working against these colonial demarcation opens up a much wider and more illuminating source base.

Some scholars have criticised entangled histories for being overly nebulous. Doug Munroe bemoaned the postmodernists of Pacific Islands historiography who insist that the past is such a cacophony of ‘messy entanglements’ and indecipherable chaos as to preclude meaningful explanation. A related point of contention is that entanglement does not fully acknowledge power, the unequal outcomes of colonial contact, and histories of resistance and rejection. A similar critique has been directed at descriptions of imperial networks: unreflective usage of terms to convey connection can obscure structural inequalities and hierarchies within networks and create the impression that connectedness was a ‘self-generated process’.

In missionary scholarship, there is a risk that entanglement becomes a slippery term for describing all forms of conversion and religious transformation, across vastly different political, social and cultural contexts. In an edited book on rethinking the terms ‘conversion’ and ‘syncretism’, Elbourne pertinently describes colonial histories in which conversion to Christianity was a violent, coercive process. However, the aim of this article has been to show that entanglement—in both its descriptive and analytical sense—is a way of conceptualising connection. Thinking about multi-directional forms of agency can help to illuminate both the creative and destructive processes of cross-cultural connection, processes that were embedded in local contexts which could become bound up in histories of globalisation or empire. In this way, entanglement does not foreclose conflict or breakages in historical networks.

To avoid the ‘messiness’ that Munro described, it is helpful to further draw out the materialities of missionary histories and their embeddedness in specific environments. Current research in Indigenous Studies and oceanic history offer new ways of thinking about the material cultures, which shape and enable different forms of cross-cultural entanglement. Wayne Te Kaawa, for example, writes of the need for decolonial theologies and of theo-moana, which denotes deep connections between Christian theology and te moana (or the ocean) for Pacific peoples. Focusing on the ocean also means rethinking the temporality of Christian missions. Missionary scholarship typically traces the history of global Christianity from the arrival of European evangelists to the formation of Indigenous churches. Meanwhile, studies which centre the ocean have demonstrated the enduring significance of waterways to Indigenous cultural life from precolonial times, especially in the Pacific context.
Damon Salesa’s research configures an ‘Indigenous Ocean’, and highlights Pacific peoples’ longstanding mobility across the water, contesting the notion that the ‘local’ context is a static formation. In a chapter in his most recent publication on the Indigenous Ocean, he describes how Christian beliefs became entangled with ideas of ancestral spirituality in 19th-century Sāmoa. ‘Christianity’, as Salesa writes, ‘brought new materials and ideas to Sāmoa, but these had to be integrated into an already living and ordered universe of Sāmoan meanings’. More widely, his book argues for a decolonial framework and for research which is ‘proximate’ to and co-designed with the Indigenous communities who are studied. For scholars of mission, engaging with this research may help to further decentre European missionaries, bringing more complex and nuanced understandings of religious change. Most of the examples in the article describe entanglements between mission stations in precolonial or colonial contexts and Europe. There is ample research to be done on the trans-local entanglements which have shaped the global history of Christianity.

A focus on materiality additionally opens up new ways of thinking about missionary knowledge and the making of texts. In most of the cited examples of entanglement in this article, knowledge features as the key topic of enquiry: how it is exchanged and transformed through evangelistic activity and cross-cultural engagement. In the past two decades, historians of empire and colonialism have produced innovative studies about the material making of texts, helping to ground histories of knowledge production in local and globally connected sites. Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr, for example, describe the ‘scissor and paste’ quality of periodicals, which they connect to the incoherent and uneven shape of empire. Their edited collection shows the potential of analysing one text and its journey across different sites of empire, showing how different sites could inspire alternate readings and appropriations.

Focusing on the materiality of written texts—examining their production and circulation—offers plenty of research avenues for scholars of mission. For one thing, missionary archives offer rare insights into the handling of print. The recently digitised LMS archive on the Pacific and Australian missions, for example, presents decades of missionary requests for printed texts from the late 18th century. These requests shed light on missionary connections to Britain and other sites of mission, as well as their material and intellectual worlds in the mission stations. Furthermore, the increased digitisation of missionary archives and printed material (especially the periodicals of missionary societies) has made it easier to trace the historical movement and elaboration of missionary writings: where missionary letters and journals were printed and recycled. In unpacking the local and global trajectories of these texts, missionary print may receive the same analytical lens that Meyer advocates regarding objects in colonial museums.

5 | CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed the turn to entangled histories in recent research on Christian missions. In contrast to earlier conceptualisations, which stressed the hegemony of missionaries or articulated blended forms of Christianity, this body of scholarship explores exchange and both the creative and destructive processes of cross-cultural connection. The article has located the genealogy of ‘entanglement’ in global histories of empire and anthropological writing. The cultural turn in imperial history encouraged a zooming-in on religion, human relationships and the body, bringing missionary archives to the forefront of research, as well as studies of how the local intersected with the global. Histories of mission moved away from binary models of the ‘encounter’, analysing complex forms of interaction in local and global contexts. In charting these historiographical developments, the article has narrowed in on the varied usages of entanglement (which sometime merge together). In some works, entanglement features largely as a descriptive or metaphorical term, symbolising overlapping cultural worlds and empires. In other works—recent missionary histories especially—it speaks more to the diverse forms of agency which have interacted to drive historical change, including the complex process of religious transformation in imperial and colonial contexts. As well as indicating some points of contention in the literature, the article’s final section highlighted some new
research avenues for scholars of mission. These relate to drawing out the materialities of missionary histories, especially with regard to oceanic history, and the making and circulation of print.

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ENDNOTES
3 Eva Schalbroeck reviews ‘entangled approaches’ in recent works on Christianity and cross-cultural histories; however, the broader theoretical and historiographical origins are not the focus of the article. See, Eva Schalbroeck, ‘Untangling (Missionary) Entanglements: Recent Work on Christianisation and Cross-Cultural Contact and the Case for an Entangled Approach’, Itinerario (2023): 1–12.
10 Burke, What is Cultural History?
13 See, for example, Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters In World History (Durham, Duke University Press, 2005); Alan Lester, Imperial Networks: Creating identities in Nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain (Abingdon, Routledge 2005); Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
17 Bauer and Norton, 11.
24 Bauer and Norton, 1–2.
29 See footnote 15.
34 Ballantyne, for example, interprets missionary texts as ‘inflected by their location and conditions of production’. See Ballantyne, *Entanglements of Empire*, 14.
37 Samson, 1–11.
40 Ballantyne, Entanglements of Empire, 70.

41 Ballantyne, Entanglements of Empire, 9

42 Ballantyne, Entanglements of Empire, 18.

43 Ballantyne, Entanglements of Empire, 18.


46 Maxwell, Religious Entanglements, 11.


48 Meyer, 163.

49 Meyer, 169.

50 Meyer, 169.

51 Meyer, 172.

52 Meyer, 174.

53 Maxwell, Religious Entanglements, 8.

54 Maxwell, Religious Entanglements, 186

55 Maxwell, Religious Entanglements, 188.

56 Maxwell, Religious Entanglements, 88–89


58 Ratschiller Nasim, 23.

59 Ratschiller Nasim, 26.

60 Ratschiller Nasim, 26.

61 (Conrad, 2016), 131.


66 (Conrad, 2016), 127–128.


69 Wayne Te Kaawa, ‘Revisioning Christianity through an Oceania Lens’, in Restoring Identities: The Contextualising Story of Christianity in Oceania, eds. Upolu Lumä Vaai and Mark A. Lampert (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2023), 135–136. See also,

70 See also Conrad’s comments on scholarship regarding the Indian Ocean. Conrad, 120.


73 Salesa, An Indigenous Ocean, 11.

74 Sujit Sivasundaram, Alison Bashford and David Armitage have encouraged the exploration of trans-local histories, favouring this trajectory in future research over transnational histories. See Sujit Sivasundaram, Alison Bashford and David Armitage, ‘Writing World Oceanic History’, in Oceanic Histories, eds. Sujit Sivasundaram, Alison Bashford and David Armitage, 4–5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

75 See these studies, for example, Andrew van der Vlies, Print, Text and Book Cultures in South Africa (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012); Derek R. Peterson, Emma Hunter, and Stephanie Newell, African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016); Hofmeyr, Dockside Reading: Hydrocolonialism and the Custom House (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

76 Antoinette Burton and Hofmeyr, Ten Books that Shaped the British Empire: Creating an Imperial Commons (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

77 Burton and Hofmeyr, Ten Books That Shaped the British Empire: Creating an Imperial Commons (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).


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