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MORMONISM AND THE WHITE POSSESSIVE:  
MOVING CRITICAL INDIGENOUS STUDIES THEORY INTO THE RELIGIOUS REALM

In the closing lines of “Disentangling Binaries and The Rise of Lamanite studies”<sup>2</sup> Matthew Garrett argues that Lamanite Studies scholars’ future theoretical models should be free of “methodological flag waving.” The priority should instead be an understanding of power structures that focuses on the disadvantaged and marginalized. This approach incorporates ethnohistory’s concern with cultural context – including especially Indigenous voices and viewpoints – and can therefore illustrate how colonization unfolds through the exercise of settler/invader colonial power.<sup>3</sup> According to Garrett, quality scholarship must draw on rich Indigenous methodological traditions to begin unraveling the strands of identity and creating new understandings. This research will investigate how Indigenous peoples have had to adapt and respond their own identities within power structures that are not entirely under their control, as well as how they deal with issues of authenticity and power on the

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<sup>1</sup> Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Arawa, Waikato-Tainui, Hauraki and Mataatua. This journal article is written in memory of Blanche Kapua. E taku raukura kua riro, haere ki a rātou mā, okioki atu rā

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Garrett, "Disentangling Binaries and the Rise of Lamanite Studies," *Religion Compass* 12, no. 11 (2018): 1-8.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to point out that in my previous work I have made the assertion that settler colonialism as a concept is problematic. “A shift away from the terminology of “settler colonialism” is desirable under the present circumstances. This phrase does not adequately describe the situation from an indigenous perspective. In Aotearoa New Zealand the designation “settler” strips that person from their connection and responsibility to history and obscures their privileged position in settler/invader society. Lawson notes that “a focus on settler independence [as patriarchal white sovereignty] allows a ‘strategic disavowal of the colonizing act’ and a concomitant transformation of ‘invaders’ into ‘peaceful settlers’” (p. 160). A conceptual reframing is necessary, at least until a time when settler/invaders come to terms with their position. Deploying the term “invader” expunges the myth of fictionalized accounts of indigenous land being settled peacefully, it engages attitudes of acceptance and responsibility, and it accurately identifies the place of settler/invaders on indigenous lands as manuhiri. It has the potential to drive thinking and awareness of settler/invaders toward the actual act of “settling” as critiqued and described by Veracini (2013).” For more information on these statements refer to Hemopereki Simon, “The Critical Juncture in Aotearoa New Zealand and The Collective Future: Issues in Settler/Invader Colonial Zombiism Found in “Biculturalism”” *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* (Forthcoming). There is an extension of this argument that says settler colonialism should be returned, “Invader Colonialism” However, the Author notes that until academic consensus is reached the preferred terminology for the time being should be “Settler/Invader Colonialism.” Refer to Hemopereki Simon ‘E Pā To Hau’: Philosophy and Theory on Dispossession, Elimination, Grief, Trauma and Settler Colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Unpublished paper*. For consultation of Lawson and Veracini, as mentioned above, refer to Alan Lawson, (2004). “Postcolonial Theory And The “Settler” Subject.” In Cynthia Sugars (Ed.), *Unhomey States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004): 151-164; Lorenzo Veracini, "What's unsettling about on settling: Discussing the settler colonial present." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 17, no. 2 (2014): 235-251.

edges of those structures. Lamanite Studies is a burgeoning field that is varied, frequently contentious, and under constant revision. It has grown from its “hagiographic roots” as Garrett puts it, to incorporate a diverse spectrum of perspectives capable of dissecting the complicated ways in which Indigenous peoples connect, reject, accept, and reinterpret a non-Indigenous ideological motif.<sup>4</sup>

The present work continues a series of papers exploring Critical Indigenous Studies and its engagement with Mormon and Lamanite Studies. In line with Garrett’s observations and my own work that notes “that there is a lack of engagement between Mormon Studies and Critical Indigenous Studies,”<sup>5</sup> This essay responds to the pressing need to pursue topics related to Mormonism from a research perspective that is at once critical, culturally affirming, and grounded in Indigenous views.<sup>6</sup> The goal here is to provide a theoretical framework for Critical Indigenous Studies perspectives to emerge in Mormon and Lamanite Studies.<sup>7</sup> I therefore submit the following questions as a contribution to and critique of Lamanite Studies within the broader fields of Mormon, Cultural, and Religious Studies:

1. Which theoretical frame(s) from Critical Indigenous Studies is/are best suited to address Lamanite and Mormon issues?
2. How might we reframe current Critical Indigenous Studies Theory to undertake research on Mormon and Western religious topics?

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<sup>4</sup> Garrett, “Disentangling Binaries,” 6; The author notes that the foundations of the concept of “Lamanite Studies” and the article by Garrett will be questioned in a future paper titled “Who Stole ‘Lamanite Studies?’” by Elise Boxer. The Author also notes that Boxer’s and The Author’s work and approach to Mormon and Lamanite Studies are comparable, as they both incorporate Indigenous perspectives and worldviews. Therefore, the Author has deferred to Boxer’s forthcoming paper the Indigenous critique of “Lamanite Studies” as conceived by Garrett. Such perspectives can be challenging for non-Indigenous individuals to comprehend. However, the Author believes that the rationale for this theory paper can easily be found in Gina Colvin, Elise Boxer, Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Melissa Inouye, and Janan Graham-Russell, “Roundtable Discussion: Challenging Mormon Race Scholarship,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, No. 3 (2015): 258-281.

<sup>5</sup> Hemopereki Simon, “Hoea Te Waka ki Uta: Critical Kaupapa Māori Research and Mormon Studies Moving Forward.” *New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.25071/2563-3694.97>.

<sup>6</sup> Simon, “Hoea Te Waka ki Uta,” 2.

<sup>7</sup> This paper is grounded in the Kaupapa Māori research tradition. To understand this further (particularly in relationship to Mormonism) refer to Simon, “Hoea Te Waka ki Uta: 1-14; or more broadly, Leonie Pihama, “Kaupapa Māori Theory: Transforming Theory in Aotearoa,” *He Pukenga Kōrero* 9, no. 2 (2010): 5-14; Ella Henry, and Hone Pene, “Kaupapa Maori: Locating Indigenous Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology in the Academy,” *Organization* 8, no. 2 (2001): 234-242; Linda Smith Tuhiwāi, “Kaupapa Māori research-some kaupapa Māori principles,” in L. Pihama & K. South (Eds.), *Kaupapa Rangahau A Reader: A Collection of Readings from the Kaupapa Maori Research Workshop Series*, (Te Kotahi Research Institute, 2015): 46-52. <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/12026>.

To address these questions, the article first outlines its positionality as a basis for understanding Simon's approach to the research. The bulk of the research here focuses on describing Lamanitism in terms of its relationship to racism and whiteness.

The article therefore continues with a description of the figure of Hagoth in *The Book of Mormon*, with a particular emphasis on their relationship to Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa.<sup>8</sup>

From there the article outlines Unger's theorem of contextuality and considers how Lamanitism might be considered an "artificial context" from a Critical Indigenous Studies perspective. A discussion of the Doctrine of Discovery, Manifest Destiny, and Moana Jackson's idea of the culture of colonization is followed by a description of the "Racial Contract" and its speculative extension to Indigenous adherents of the Mormon Church.<sup>9</sup> The article then explicates important and interrelated tikanga values from Te Ao Māori<sup>10</sup> such as tapu<sup>11</sup> and mana.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, the article identifies the "white possessive" as a key doctrine for Critical Indigenous Studies and undertakes a reworking of the doctrine for its application to the Mormon Church. More specifically, I transmute the notion "white patriarchal sovereignty" into "white patriarchal salvation" in order to tailor it to critical Indigenous discussions of the Church.

In my conclusion I attempt to answer the question – What is to be done? I assert that the Church is in conflict with the cultural revival of Te Ao Māori<sup>13</sup> and the idea of "original instructions." The Church's claim to salvific truth and thinking is contradicted by my very identity and culturally informed ontology. The ensuing discussion confirms that as a colonizing entity the Church operates parallel to the government. The idea of a Lamanite people as Polynesians, which includes Māori is called into question. I provide a continuum model to explain Indigenous realities in relation to religiosity and decolonization and suggest some topics

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<sup>8</sup> Māori understanding and name for the Pacific Ocean.

<sup>9</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the official name of Mormon Church. The term Mormon has been used historically to describe adherents to this faith. Another term that has been used in more modern times is the LDS Church. For the purposes of this essay the descriptors Mormon Church and LDS Church will be used interchangeably to describe The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

<sup>10</sup> The Māori World. For the purposes of this paper, Te Reo Māori (Māori language) is the Indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand. It will not be treated as a foreign language and italicized as is normal practice within academic writing. Translations will be provided in the footnotes. Where quotations are used with translations provided, in all cases where it is necessary to convey Māori cultural understandings, Te Reo Māori words will be privileged over English.

<sup>11</sup> Sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden.

<sup>12</sup> Prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma. The author notes that there are many types of mana. However, for the the purposes of this essay the focus will be mainly around authority, control, power in relation to mana motuhake or what is best described as Indigenous sovereignty and tino rangatiratanga or self-determination.

<sup>13</sup> The Māori world.

as case studies for further investigation. The true purpose of this article is to facilitate the integration of critical Indigenous with Mormon and/or Lamanite Studies to bring about much-needed dialogue, discussion, and debate on the place of indigeneity in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.<sup>14</sup>

*Positionality*

This research is based in a Kaupapa Māori<sup>15</sup> perspective and operates at the intersections of Critical Indigenous and Cultural Studies. Concerning critical engagement with Mormonism I have previously written that:

I am not anti-Mormon...I openly realize that I cannot, and should not, try to dictate to someone what their religious belief should be, nor is that my goal. Belief is a very

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<sup>14</sup> In a recent Keynote presentation Brigham Young University scholar Ignacio Garcia commented that, "Most of my fellow congregants accepted their Indigenous roots by accepting their Lamanite identity....[T]here is no doubt that this religious identity that I grew up with is much more diffused today. Some of our youth reject the term. In this they are encouraged by Mormon intellectuals...obsessed with fighting colonialism... I never criticized my people who use the term [Lamanite, as an identity marker]. Nor have I tried to decipher the line that divides the term into colonizing and empowering parts...The term "Lamanite" was never meant to provide a history lesson; nor to define us in the outside world....[For The Church,] it was meant to tie us as Indigenous peoples to The Book of Mormon and thus made it easier to convert them. For many of us. This meant we had a religious collective bond to others like us.... [N]o doubt the term Lamanite has varied meanings depending on the space we occupy and the circumstances in which we find ourselves....[T]he fluidity of the term has us here both believer and not, self-proclaimed Lamanites and those that have left the name and its Church behind and those who rejected it from the start but could not fully escape its implications Some see it as a sign of God's love and others as one more example of the settler state. Regardless of where we stand in this debate, we must all admit that we need to know more of what this identity means to our people. We may debate the use of the term, disagree on its roots, deconstruct its meaning but unless we begin developing a history, a sociology and a theological essence for that identity we would have wasted our time here....[This workshop and Lamanite Studies] is a call to think, reflect, ponder, discuss debate, historicize and come to some consensus of how we as Lamanites can develop a perspective of who we are....I believe we are called to do something much grander in this work which is to expand beyond the literature of lamentation and the rhetoric of rage...but they cannot be the book ends to our story....[I]f you do not have faith or have belonged to the Church, then you are not a Lamanite. Because outside the Church there are no Lamanites." These statements by Garcia are important as they show a willingness to engage in a Mormon Studies scholarship in an area that traditionally was very contentious and rife with conflict. This signifies a significant and important shift. However, the Author disagrees with Garcia on the point of being faithful in order to be Lamanite. The Church teachings clearly identify peoples of Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa as Lamanite. In the decolonial context it is an identity forced on those that are non-Mormon and Indigenous and frames non-Mormon Indigenous experiences and interactions with the Church. The statement by Garcia does not reflect on the settler/invasor colonial nature of The Church and of its appropriated Indigenous identity. This point is elaborated on as part of this article. In that with Lamanite Studies at this point in the beginning of its development it is just as important to understand why, in what the Author understands "settler/invasor colonial identity marker." is rejected by Indigenous Mormons, Ex-Mormons, and Never Mormons. To fully understand a faithful position on Lamanite identity, particularly from a Chicana perspective refer to Ignacio Garcia, "My Search for a Lamanite Identity": The Mexican Revolution, Rama Mexican, Margarito, Eduardo, Aztlan, and The San Antonio 4th Ward," (Keynote Presentation at Indigenous Perspectives on the Meanings of "Lamanites", University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT. August 5, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Simon, "Hoea Te Waka ki Uta."

personal thing, as it should be. However, when your beliefs – religious theology, doctrine, or practice – seeks [*sic*] to alter my culture... I have a right and a responsibility to ngā uri whakatupu<sup>16</sup>: to reply and to question you, your teachings, are your practices. My right and need to do so is only further amplified by the fact that I am a critical Kaupapa Māori scholar.<sup>17</sup>

I suggest that there are two important reasons for this stance:

1. Indigenous Researchers are there to be change agents for our communities; we are the key to explaining our point of view to the religious and to scholars of religion.<sup>18</sup>
2. Māori religion is not found in a set of sacred books or dogma; the culture is the religion. History points to Māori people and their religion being constantly open to evaluation and questioning in order to seek that which is tika, the right way.<sup>19</sup>

Little Bear also notes that:

Aboriginal peoples are forever explaining themselves to non-Aboriginal peoples, telling their stories, explaining their beliefs and ceremonies, and introducing ideas that have never crossed the non-Aboriginal mind.<sup>20</sup>

Ka'ai, Hēnare, and Little Bear's assertions suggest that as Critical Indigenous Studies scholars, we have an obligation of our own to explain and to outline our peoples' critical positions and analyses, in this case, to The Mormon Church. It is also important to note that in terms of scholarly practice,

My being pro-Indigenous does not make me anti-Mormonism, it just shows that I have spent a significant time thinking and wanting to engage in dialogue with the Church and its scholars and members. Actually, it has taken

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<sup>16</sup> An expression taken to mean the generations that come behind you.

<sup>17</sup> Simon, "Hoea Te Waka ki Uta," 2.

<sup>18</sup> Tania Ka'ai, "Te Ha Whakawairua, Whakatinana I Te Mātauranga Māori I Te Whare Wānanga: The Validation of Indigenous Knowledge within the University Academy," *Te Kaharoa* 1, no. 1 (2008). As cited in Author, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Manuka Henare, "Te Tangata, Te Tāonga, Te Hau: Māori Concepts of Property," in *Conference on Property and the Constitution* (Hamilton: Laws and Institutions in a Bicultural Society Research Project, University of Waikato, 1998). Tika is one of the Māori ethical standards within the culture. Tika generally means correct, true, upright, right, just, fair, accurate, appropriate, lawful, proper, valid.

<sup>20</sup> Leroy Little Bear. "Traditional Knowledge and Humanities: A Perspective by a Blackfoot," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 39, no. 4 (2012): 518.

me more than ten years to actively think about this and write these papers.<sup>21</sup>

Key to this is for the religious to understand that the perspective adopted here is that of “original instructions”<sup>22</sup> and that the pursuit of “decolonization” is not an aesthetic or political choice but a fundamental and ontological necessity for Indigenous peoples.<sup>23</sup> With this positionality elaborated I turn now to explore the Church’s perspective regarding the identity and heritage of the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, Pachamama and Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa.<sup>24</sup> The next section therefore outlines the Lamanite identity described in the Book of Mormon.

### Lamanites

Hernandez observes that “The Church as an institution through its canonical text, *The Book of Mormon*, and as a people and religious culture who believe and follow it, have constructed an identity known as “Lamanites”.<sup>25</sup> He also continues to state that, “I use Lamanite to refer to Indigenous peoples of the “Americas” and “Polynesia” and their descendants who are also members of the LDS Church, who are believed by Latter-day Saints to be descendants of Book of Mormon peoples.”<sup>26</sup> According to the LDS Church:

The Book of Mormon [is considered] to be ‘an account of the former inhabitants of [the American] continent and the source from whence they sprang’. Native people

<sup>21</sup> Simon, “Hoea Te Waka ki Uta,” 2. For the purpose intercultural dialogue, the Author believes this should be critical intercultural dialogue as we are at the beginning of the development of Lamanite Studies. As we move to mature this field of study, there will be some very contentious issues that require addressing with respect to everyone's viewpoint. For more information on critical intercultural dialogue refer to Michael James, “Critical Intercultural Dialogue.” *Polity* 31, no. 4 (1999): 587-607.

<sup>22</sup> Refer to Melissa K. Nelson, ed. *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future* (Simon and Schuster, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> For more on this refer to the following sources Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021); Jenny Lee-Morgan, ed. *Decolonisation in Aotearoa: Education, research and practice*. (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2016); Waziyatawin and Micheal Yellow Bird. *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research (2005); Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization is not a metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 no.1 (2012):1-40. For a beginning point and introduction to understand the Indigenous need to decolonize the Author recommends this book, Bianca Elkington, Moana Jackson, Rebecca Kiddle, Ocean Ripeka Mercier, Michael Ross, Jennie Smeaton, and Amanda Thomas. *Imagining Decolonisation*. (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Is the Māori understanding for The Pacific Ocean. Literally translated it means The Great Ocean of Kiwa. Kiwa being a significant tūpuna (ancestor) for all Māori.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Hernandez, “A Divine Rebellion: Indigenous Sacraments among Global ‘Lamanites’,” *Religions* 12, no. 4 (2021): 283. Also for more information refer to “Lamanite” As A Religious Signifier And Settler-Colonial Encounter” University of Virginia, March 11, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkdQ3Y4lWNg>

<sup>26</sup> Hernandez, “A Divine Rebellion,” 283.

throughout the Americas and the Pacific are believed to be the descendants of the House of Israel. The Book of Mormon was 'written to the Lamanites' that they 'might come to a knowledge of their fathers'. For almost two centuries the Church has conducted a mission to the Lamanites who, according to Mormon scripture, had 'dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers'.<sup>27</sup>

Gardner further points out that

[Joseph Smith's] fascination with the region's indigenous inhabitants culminated in the Book of Mormon, which claimed to be the writings of America's prehistoric inhabitants. It told of ancient Israelites who fled to the Americas by the hand of God but ultimately fracturing into two rival empires: Nephites and Lamanites, the latter falling into apostasy and overwhelming the former. The text characterizes Nephites as usually righteous and industrious, though eventually they collapsed under the weight of their own spiritual apostasy. Lamanites exist as their primary antagonists.<sup>28</sup>

Like the Biblical Canaanites," Gardner clarifies, "Lamanites serve as a reservoir for all sinful and slothful behavior, a people cursed... but with an extraordinary (and unrealized) promise of redemption because of their covenant lineage."<sup>29</sup>

LDS Church Doctrine teaches that God cursed the wicked ancestors of contemporary Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island and Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa by darkening their skin. According to Tenney:

The tale of the Lamanites' curse created a connection between ancestry, righteousness, and Native/Indigenous people that followed commonplace racial ideologies of the 19th century and has continued to inform Mormon practice and canon. In the Book of Mormon God cursed the wicked who are the ancestors of contemporary Native people in the Americas with a darkening of skin.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> D&C 3:18-20

<sup>28</sup> Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Volume 2: 2 Nephi-Jacob*, Vol. 2 (Greg Kofford Books).

<sup>29</sup> Gardner, "Disentangling Binaries," 2.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony G. Tenney, "White and Delightful: LDS Church Doctrine and Redemptive Hegemony in Hawai'i," (Masters Thesis, The Ohio State University, 2018): 1-2; [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws\\_etd/send\\_file/send?accession=osu1524065884744273&disposition=inline](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=osu1524065884744273&disposition=inline)

This curse indicates the separation between the Nephites and Lamanites, which would create a barrier to intermarriage between the two lineages. Gardner observes that many presuppose a literal interpretation of the statement that “a skin of blackness came upon them” instead of positing an alternate reading. He also argues that many so-called Lamanites believed that conversion to Mormon religion would whiten their skin.<sup>31</sup> Mauss further states that Mormon leaders were actively involved in “the retrospective construction of Mormon lineage.”<sup>32</sup>

Exploration and deconstruction of “Race” reveals an unstable and problematic signifying system with no connection to “fact.” Race is thus both a construct *and* a reality, especially for persons whose “racialization” has produced diminished life opportunities, unwarranted decreases in quality of life, or even death. While there is a painful link between skin color and a lack of life changes, the causes are not related to skin color. Political, economic, social, and cultural factors all have a role. I follow Colvin’s lead in this article by using the word “race” to describe “a complex of racial systems and formations that have worked over time to form social divisions and reproduce race-based power structures.”<sup>33</sup>

Prior to 1978, Mormon theologians considered black skin a historically-justified sign of spiritual undeserving.<sup>34</sup> As Mueller has recently argued, attributing Mormon racial narratives to “the mortal fallibility of Mormon leaders” rather than the dictates of an immortal “heavenly class system” is a momentous gesture for the Church that will demand tremendous fortitude to massage into Mormon discourse and thought.<sup>35</sup> In Mormon scholarship, the idea of race continues its “slow burn.”<sup>36</sup> The idea of whiteness received comparatively little attention until recently. This reflects a broader reality whereby White hegemonies tend not to draw attention to their recondite, pigmentation-based exclusions – however conspicuous they may be. Theorizing whiteness is therefore an illuminating and profitable project for Mormon Studies scholars. Only by understanding whiteness do we come to comprehend the possessive character of Mormonism’s racial systems.

A developing literature in Mormon Studies addresses what Garrett describes as “Lamanite Studies.” There is also a growing

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<sup>31</sup> Gardner, *Second Witness*, as cited in Kelly Klink, “Breaking the Barrier: Māori Religious and Spiritual Entanglements at Aotea,” (Master’s thesis, The University of Waikato, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 9; as cited in Klink, “Breaking the Barrier,” 63.

<sup>33</sup> Gina Colvin, “Introduction: Theorizing Mormon Race Scholarship,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (2015): 11-21.

<sup>34</sup> Joanna Brooks, *Mormonism and White supremacy: American Religion and the Problem of Racial Innocence* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>35</sup> Max Perry Mueller, “History Lessons: Race and the LDS Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 1 (2015): 139-55; as quoted in Colvin, “Introduction,” 15.

<sup>36</sup> Colvin, “Introduction,” 15.



Indigenous critique by Indigenous Mormon Studies Scholars.<sup>37</sup> Still, there is a significant gap in conventional Mormon Studies literature. The literature does not entertain or address Indigenous peoples' right to decolonization or what that would mean for Indigenous Mormons. Practically speaking, most Indigenous Mormon scholars have taken "decolonization" to indicate continued participation in the church. Their assumption is that a decolonized church would be more inclusive of Indigeneity.<sup>38</sup> I have suggested that the best such Indigenous Mormon scholars can reasonably anticipate is a "post-colonial" church.<sup>39</sup> The Māori Anglican Church here in Aotearoa New Zealand is exemplary.<sup>40</sup> There is no theoretical framework for engaging Critical Kaupapa Māori or Critical Indigenous Research in Mormon Studies or for encouraging decolonization and the possibility of deep engagement with the Indigenous world. This is because decolonization is a key concept within Critical Indigenous studies and Mormon Studies produces a "lack of highly critical culturally affirming tuturu work."<sup>41</sup> This is by no means unique to Mormonism.

More and more scholars acknowledge Mormonism as settler colonialism.<sup>42</sup> That said, Mormon Studies predominantly focuses

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<sup>37</sup> Hernandez, "A Divine Rebellion," 280.

<sup>38</sup> Refer to Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks, *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion* (The University of Utah Press, 2018).; Farina King, "Indigenizing Mormonisms," *Mormon Studies Review* 6 (2019): 1-16.

<sup>39</sup> Simon, "Hoea Te Waka ki Uta," 1-14; Refer to Colvin and Brooks.

<sup>40</sup> Refer to Hirini Kaa, *Te Hāhi Mihinare: The Māori Anglican Church* (Bridget Williams Books, 2020); Noel Cox, "Synodical Government, Lay Leadership and the Episcopate," *Province, Journal of Credo Cymru, Autumn* (2012), available at SSRN:

<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2610843>; Jubilee Turi Hollis, "Atuatanga: Holding Te Karaitianatanga and Te Māoritanga Together Going Forward" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2013); Storm Swain, "A New Zealand Prayer Book= He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa: A Study in Postcolonial Liturgy," In *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 165-75; Jonathan Te Rire, "The Dissipation of Indigeneity Through Religion." (Master's Research Paper, 2009), <http://hdl.handle.net/10523/5188>.

<sup>41</sup> Simon, "Hoea Te Waka ki Uta," 2.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Bonds and Joshua Inwood, "Beyond White Privilege: Geographies of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism," *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 6 (2016): 715-733; Thomas Murphy, "Views from Turtle Island: Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Mormon Entanglements," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Mormonism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 751-79; Matthew Smith, "Settler Colonialism and US Home Missions," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2018); Anna-Elena Maheu, "Laying the Groundwork: Desert Spaces and the Sacralization of US Settler Colonialism," (2021); Jennifer Darrah-Okike, "Theorizing Race in Hawai'i: Centering Place, Indigeneity, and Settler Colonialism," *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 7 (2020); Veracini, Lorenzo. *The Settler Colonial Present* (Springer, 2015); Moroni Benally, "Decolonizing the Blossoming: Indigenous People's Faith in a Colonizing Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (2017): 71-78; Walter L. Hixson, "'They Promised to Take Our Land and They Took It': Settler Colonialism in the American West," In *American Settler Colonialism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 113-44.; Elise Boxer, "This is the Place!": Disrupting Mormon Settler Colonialism," *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion* (2018), 77-100; Gina Colvin, Elise Boxer, Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Melissa Inouye, and Janan Graham-Russell, "Roundtable Discussion: Challenging Mormon Race Scholarship," *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (2015): 258-81; Joshua Paddison, "Reconstruction and Mormon America," (2021), 157-62, Hokulani Aikau, *A Chosen People, A Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

on the North American context; the question of Mormon settler colonialism beyond North America has rarely been explored. Moreton-Robinson accordingly argues that: “The discursive formation of Anglocentric whiteness is a relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible, dominant and pervasive.”<sup>43</sup>

Māori religious studies scholar Gina Colvin likewise comments that

...white colonial hegemony is a political, cultural, social, economic, and theological activity that involves the continuing struggle of the powerful to win the consensus of the socially subordinate for its role in reproducing a social hierarchy where the benefits accrue to white folk. Having said that, however, whiteness must be understood in the Mormon context—in a broader sweep than its racialized ban on black male priesthood ordination. It is imperative that we add some complexity to our racial theorizing by considering the constitution of a white colonial hegemony in Mormonism.<sup>44</sup>

Simon argues that in order to engage properly in settler/invasor colonialism, decolonization and opening a path for non-Mormon and in particular Critical Indigenous Studies Scholars [is vital]. By opening space we can begin to engage in faithful and non-faithful intercultural dialogue about the place of indigeneity in Mormonism and Christianities more generally. From a critical Indigenous studies perspective it is more than race. Race [and white supremacy in Mormonism] is a significant issue but the actual problem that is the relationship intersection with between race and that is religious white possession,

What is most important to Mormon universalism is the idea that Polynesians are descendants of Lehi and thus connected to The Book of Mormon. They are a chosen people.<sup>45</sup> Recent genetic testing has disproved any link between Pasifika and the Book of Mormon; this has led to increasing critical responses to the concept of Lamanites.<sup>46</sup> To understand the linkages between this Lamanite

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<sup>43</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson, ed., *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 79. As cited in Colvin, “Introduction,” 15.

<sup>44</sup> Colvin, “Introduction,” 15.

<sup>45</sup> Hokulani “A Chosen People,” 43.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Murphy and Simon Southerton, “Genetic Research: a ‘Galileo Event’ for Mormons,” *Anthropology News* 44, no. 2 (2003): 20; Simon Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Signature Books, 2004); Simon Southerton, “The Sacred Curse: How Native American DNA Exposes Mormonism’s Lamanite Myth” (Self-Published); Thomas Murphy, “Southerton’s Losing a Lost Tribe,” (2006): 325-327; Tenney, “White and Delightful”; Thomas Murphy, “Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe, eds. (Signature: Salt Lake City, 2002), 47-77; Thomas Murphy, “Inventing Galileo,”

Mormon identity and Te Ao Māori, the next section will discuss the relevance of Hagoth to Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa.

### Hagoth

According to Robert Parson:

The story of Hagoth is recorded in just six verses (4–9) of Alma 63 [of The Book of Mormon]. Great wars between the Nephites and Lamanites had just concluded and there seemed to be a restlessness among the survivors. At that time thousands... migrated to the land northward. In 55 BC, Hagoth built an “exceedingly large ship” and launched it into the West Sea by the narrow neck of land and went north with many men, women, children, and provisions (Alma 63:5–6). This ship returned in 54 BC, was provisioned and sailed north again never to be heard from thereafter. An additional ship was launched that year, and it also was never heard from again.<sup>47</sup>

As Loveland points out however, “what we have here is an account of a colonizing movement of men, women, and children who went out in ships presumably into the Pacific Ocean... [A]ccording to tacit Mormon belief Hagoth sailed into the Pacific where he and his shipload or shiploads of people became at least part of the progenitors of the Polynesian people.”<sup>48</sup> Aikau explains that in Mormon thought the peoples of Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa<sup>49</sup> and Turtle Island are thought to be cousins that come from the same branch of the lost Tribes of Israel. Mormon belief is that Polynesians migrated from the Americas and not from Asia via the Western Pacific.<sup>50</sup> Marjorie Newton explains that “Though the Church gives no official interpretation of the Hagoth legend [i.e. a Nephite whom Polynesians allegedly descend from], it has served Mormon missionaries from Hawaii to New Zealand to give thousands of natives hope that they once again can become “white and delightful.”<sup>51</sup>

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(2004): 58-61; Thomas Murphy, "Sin, Skin, and Seed: Mistakes of Men in the Book of Mormon," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 25 (2005): 36-51; Thomas Murphy and Angelo Baca, "Rejecting Racism in Any Form: Latter-day Saint Rhetoric, Religion, and Repatriation," *Open Theology* 2, no. 1 (2016); Thomas Murphy and Angelo Baca. "DNA and the Book of Mormon: Science, Settlers, and Scripture," in *The LDS Gospel Topics Series: A Scholarly Engagement* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2020), 69-95.

<sup>47</sup> Alma 63:4–9; Robert E. Parsons, “Hagoth and the Polynesians,” in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 249–62.

<sup>48</sup> Jerry Loveland, "Hagoth and the Polynesian Tradition." *Brigham Young University Studies* 17, no. 1 (1976), 59.

<sup>49</sup> Pacific Ocean.

<sup>50</sup> Hokulani Aikau, “A Chosen People,” 42.

<sup>51</sup> Marjorie Newton. *Mormon and Māori* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 24; The Author acknowledges that Hagoth is considered a Book of Mormon character that is

Māori Mormon and Religious Studies scholar Gina Colvin comments that:

The Hagoth myth is as intransigent as the Great Fleet myth and the Moriori myth. All of which have been largely discredited or bear some very prominent question marks over them. However, all of them have held because they serve some function in either the cultural politics of New Zealand or the religious politics of the Church in New Zealand.<sup>52</sup>

### Unger's Contextuality

For the purposes of this article, it is important to comprehend Unger's understanding of "contextuality." I approach it here by way of James Youngblood Henderson's adaptation of the concept for work on Indigeneity.<sup>53</sup> In the simplest terms, this theory posits that the many social contexts of the human world can be broken down into two categories: a natural context and an artificial context. For Unger, contextuality refers to the way that people's mental and social lives are shaped by the beliefs or aspirations that they take for granted. These might be either institutional or imaginative and they serve to depict how the world truly is, as well as a set of assumptions about how ideas and languages are (or can be) formed. They function as a foundation for describing and validating worldviews. These worldviews are artificial in the sense that they are founded on assumptions about human nature or society rather than the reality that persists regardless of people's beliefs about it or attitudes towards it.<sup>54</sup>

Unger's second premise is that these worldviews are contingent and subject to alteration. That said, such transformations are rare and fleeting. Other powerful notions

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Nephite. For a faithful Māori perspective Robert Joseph, in this panel discussion, stated that the modern Māori faithful position considers that because Hagoth was Nephite Māori, by implication, were not Lamanites, per se. This position in conflict was the historical teachings of the Church around Polynesians and Lamanitism. It would be advisable for some faithful Māori or Pasifika scholar to explore this phenomenon and its many contradictions and potential implications. Refer to Thomas Murphy, Amanda Hendrix-Komoto, Robert Joseph and Sarah Newcomb, "Reflections on the discourses about "Lamanites"" (Panel Presentation at Indigenous Perspectives on the Meanings of "Lamanites", University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT. August 5, 2022). Such assertions by Joseph further highlights what Ignacio Garcia terms, "The faultlines with Lamanite Identity." Refer to Ignacio Garcia, "My Search for a Lamanite Identity." The Author also points out regardless of the people grouping that Hagoth comes from, as asserted by Joseph, either group from a Kaupapa Māori or non-Mormon perspective is still an appropriation of Indigenous identity (e.g Ngāti Hine to Nephite or Lamanite).

<sup>52</sup> Gina Colvin, "What ever happened to Hagoth?" *KiwiMormon* (blog), February 19, 2012, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/kiwimormon/2012/02/what-ever-happened-to-hagoth>. For an understanding of the settler/invasor myth surrounding the Moriori people refer to Michael King. *Moriori: a people rediscovered*. (Auckland: Penguin, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> James Youngblood Henderson, "The Context of the State of Nature," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (2000): 11-38.

<sup>54</sup> Henderson, "The Context of the State of Nature," 12.

about traits that make one explanatory or society-making approach superior to another can be augmented or updated in any setting. As a result, small-scale, everyday changes in a setting might develop into a more unconstrained transformation: "At any point, people may think or associate with one another in ways that overstep the bounds of the conditioned universes in which they have moved till then." Even before one purposefully and openly updates the framework of thinking, one may already be perceiving or thinking in ways that conflict with it. One's findings may be hard to test, validate, or even make sense of within accessible modes of explanation and discourse; alternatively, they may contradict the fundamental conceptions of reality embedded in these forms.<sup>55</sup>

Because the context is perceived as "normal" or "natural" and is generally impervious to ideas or actions, changes to artificial context are rare. This immunity is maintained by ignoring the boundary between routine and change, which prevents its conditionality from being questioned or exposed to revision and conflict.<sup>56</sup> However, as Unger points out, the more individuals are aware of conditionality, the more likely they are to be able to enact significant changes to their context(s). Through this process, as Unger puts it, "the context is constantly held up to the light and treated for what it is: a context rather than a natural order." Each of the context's elements can be paired with an activity that deconstructs its immunity. The less you have to choose between keeping a particular context and letting it go for the sake of what it excludes, the better.<sup>57</sup> Thus, as Henderson says:

Indigenous people must remember that modern thought is conditional upon this assumption. If this assumption about the state of nature is wrong, then Indigenous peoples have the right to reject modern thought and assert a new assumption for the state of nature and an Indigenous theory of society.<sup>58</sup>

By understanding how contexts stick together, come apart, and get remade, people can disrupt the "implicit, often involuntary alliance between the apologetics of established order, and the explanation of past or present society," and they can understand how the failures of certain artificial contexts prevent people from revising them. Faced with the power of human-made legal orders of colonization, Indigenous peoples need a deeper understanding

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>57</sup> Unger, *Social Theory: Its Situation and Its Task: A Critical Introduction to Politics, a Work in Constructive Social Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 18-25, as cited in Henderson, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Henderson, "The Context of the State of Nature," 13.

of the modernist theory of context and its immunity to transformation.<sup>59</sup>

Unger's core contention is that reducing the distance between context-preserving procedures (law) and context-transforming conflict is essential to human empowerment and self-assertion. The ability to build organizations and to facilitate behaviors that display context-revising freedoms is crucial to human empowerment.<sup>60</sup> Indigenous peoples may learn how to create alternative contexts through comprehending manufactured contexts. This will help them end colonial legacies of dominance and oppression. A constructive awareness of circumstances also allows us to skillfully rebuild more equitable societies and human relationships. Let us now shift our attention to the artificial context of the state of nature.

In a Mormon context, Indigenous peoples are considered descendants of Lehi and thus "Lamanites." This is a purely artificial context. It is an unjustifiable assumption about the identity and origin of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, Pachamama, and Te Moana Nui-ā-Kiwa. In other words, religious thought operating within this framework is wrong. Indigenous people have a right to reject this artificial context; a context-revising freedom is key to Indigenous empowerment. We need to do away with this manufactured context of Lamanitism. Part of that is to bring about an understanding of The White Possessive in Religious settings broadly, and in Mormonism particularly. To that end, I will proceed to describe The Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny as they pertain to Mormonism.

#### *The Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny*

To help Mormon Studies scholars to understand the white possessive and the Church's entangled and intimate relationship with the white possessive state we outline the route by which Christianity and the west took hold in the Indigenous world. As such we must explain the Doctrine of Discovery. In 1493, after Columbus stumbled across the continents now referred to as "the Americas," the Pope, Alexander VI, issued a papal bull designed to prevent infighting between the Portuguese and Spanish monarchs over territory in the New World. The new bull, *Inter Caetera*, became a major document in international law surrounding claims of right by European powers to empire. This bull is considered the founding document of the Doctrine of Discovery (also referred to as 'the doctrine') It is comprised of ten

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Unger, *Social Theory*, as cited in Henderson, "The Context of the State of Nature," 14.

parts or elements.<sup>61</sup> Six of these are of crucial importance to this essay:

1. **First discovery.** The first European country to discover lands unknown to other Europeans gained property and sovereign rights over the lands. However, first discovery alone was often considered to create only an incomplete title for newly found lands.

2. **Native title.** After first discovery, Indigenous nations and peoples were considered by the European legal system to have lost the full property rights and ownership of their lands. They only retained occupancy and use rights. Nevertheless, these rights could ostensibly last forever if Indigenous people never consented to sell: they could only sell to the government that held the power of pre-emption over their lands. Thus, native title is considered a limited form of ownership.

3. **Indigenous nations' limited sovereign and commercial rights.** After first discovery, Indigenous nations and peoples were also considered to have lost some of their inherent sovereign powers and their rights to free trade and diplomatic relations internationally. Thereafter, they were only supposed to deal with the European government that had first discovered them.

4. **Terra nullius.** This term means a land or earth that was empty, null or void. The phrase *vacuum domicilium* was also sometimes used to describe this element. It literally means an empty or vacant home or domicile. Under this element, lands that were not possessed or occupied by any person or nation, or were occupied by non-Europeans but were not being used in a way that European legal systems understood and/or approved, were considered empty and wasted, and available to be claimed. Europeans were very liberal in applying this definition to the lands of Indigenous peoples. Europeans often considered lands that were owned, occupied, and actively used by Indigenous peoples as vacant and available for discovery claims if they were not being properly used according to European laws and cultures.

5. **Conquest.** This element has two different definitions. It referred to the rights Europeans claimed to acquire by winning military victories over Indigenous peoples. We

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<sup>61</sup> Hemopereki Simon, "Te Arewhana kei roto i Te Ruma: An Indigenous Neo-Disputatio on Settler Society, Nullifying Te Tiriti, 'Natural Resources' and our Collective Future in Aotearoa New Zealand." *Te Kaharoa* 9, no. 1 (2016): 62-64, <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v9i1.6>

will see that definition reflected in Spanish, English, and American ideas of 'just wars' that allegedly justified the invasion, conquest, and acquisition of Indigenous lands in certain circumstances.

**6. Christianity and Civilization.** These two aspects of the Doctrine of Discovery are interrelated. This is because according to European logic people from Europe were superior and civilized and that eternal salvation provided by the death of Christ on the Cross was required by the Indigenous population.<sup>62</sup> These ideas are ultimately underpinned by the idea that Indigenous lands, bodies, and beings are to be possessed by white colonial/settler colonial powers and in this case religious institutions. These two elements were used as the key justifications for the actions of colonial and religious powers.<sup>63</sup>

The Doctrine of Discovery was encoded into Western churches' practice as a belief that Christians are superior to non-believing heathens and pagans. This is part of what Moana Jackson calls, 'the culture of colonization'.<sup>64</sup> Simon states that the original idea of British colonization was the notion of "plante." This is a key concept in the philosophy underpinning the justifications and development of British colonization. The concept called for Britain to "plante" Britishness on the lands, minds, and people of the desired possession; in this case, Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>65</sup> In terms of Mormonism and Christianity the settler/invaser colonial nature of plante suggests an end goal of total possession of Indigenous spirituality and culture. The difference here is that it is not the land that is being possessed, at least initially, but the soul of the Indigenous person; the process is one of normalizing Mormonism and all its peculiarities in Indigenous social settings.

In the political sphere conquest and *terra nullius* establish white patriarchal sovereignty and white possession. European

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<sup>62</sup> Miller, Robert J. *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny*. Praeger Pub Text, 2006; Miller, Robert J., Jacinta Ruru, Larissa Behrendt, and Tracey Lindberg. *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies*. Oxford University Press, 2010 as cited in Author, 2016; Also refer to Robert J. Miller, "The Doctrine of Discovery: The International Law of Colonialism." *Indigenous Peoples' JL Culture & Resistance* 5 (2019): 35.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409 as cited in Hokulani Aikau, *A Chosen People, a Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i*, 42-43.

<sup>64</sup> Moana Jackson, 2009 as cited in Author, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Simon, "Te Arewhana kei roto i Te Ruma," 64. For more on the concept of 'plante' and the historical philosophy behind British colonization, refer to Christopher Tomlins, 'The Legal Cartography of Colonization, the Legal Polyphony of Settlement: English Intrusions on the American Mainland in the Seventeenth Century', *Law & Social Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (2001). Note that in the context of colonization, to 'plante' means to transplant the European civilized society and norms upon the lands of Indigenous people.



powers “discovered” Indigenous lands and targeted them for possession by military conquest. Conquest is a term of art however, which “meant that even without war or military engagement they were already considered a conquered people.” As such it is important to mention that the foundation of the Doctrine was created by the Catholic Church, in particular the Pope, so that “Christian Princes” or monarchs could legally take control of Indigenous lands and enable European powers to usurp their rights legally. Consequently, Indigenous peoples are legally considered subhuman to this day. These accepted European principles of conquest had to be modified to fit the United States’ context (e.g., by the Supreme Court), but the consistent underlying premise was that Indigenous Nations could not be left in complete ownership of the US.<sup>66</sup> This is reflected in Mormon thought by the principle that pagan Lamanites (and thus Indigenous people) cannot be trusted to properly govern their own souls or spiritual fates. Broadly speaking, the predominantly Christian religious context of the United States could not tolerate Indigenous spiritual autonomy. In Mormon terms, the subhuman Lamanites were not considered capable of shepherding themselves towards the correct salvation. Thus, a form of “Conquest” by the Western Church and in this case The LDS Church is enacted.

While the Mormon Church was not around in 1492, it is the beneficiary of settler/invasor colonial developments in the “Americas.” It developed as a result of the possessive attitudes and actions of more mainstream churches and the normalization of Christianity as part and parcel of the takeover of Indigenous land on Turtle Island. The development of Mormonism is intimately linked to white possession of the United States. Its continued march westward the eventual expansion of its mission to the Lamanites in Polynesia speaks not only to a possession of land but to a possession of the culture and spirituality of the Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, Pachamama and Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.<sup>67</sup> The idea of Zion in Utah embodies manifest destiny, made most explicit in church leaders’ decision to send missionaries into Te Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa.<sup>68</sup> The construction of the colony in Aotearoa New Zealand is intricately linked to the development of the church and its New Zealand mission.

Simon (2020) comments that

“...[what the] British did in terms of colonization was promote a system where race and British superiority shaped the law in Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, it created a society based on white possession where the

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<sup>66</sup> Simon, “Te Arewahana kei roto i Te Ruma,” 64.

<sup>67</sup> Pacific Ocean.

<sup>68</sup> Pacific Ocean.

traditional law of the Indigenous population, tikanga,<sup>69</sup> is butchered and/or suppressed in that it is incorporated into general law in ways that suit the colonizer and are usually morphed into ways the colonizer understands. This is also where the imported law is crafted to the needs and desires of the colonizing population over those that originally held mana whenua.<sup>70</sup> This pathway is shaped and approved by the Judiciary and government policy. As an example, the principles of the Treaty were created by the Court of Appeal and have ever since been incorporated into government policy in regards to Māori issues and rights.<sup>71</sup>

Mormonism mimics this process by promoting a religious ideology wherein the superiority of Nephites as the “good” people from the Book of Mormon is encoded as their being literally, “white and delightsome.” Indigenous populations are considered part of the “chosen people” as well – as Lamanites – but their non-White skin is understood to reflect both a curse and a history of spiritual depravity and evildoing.

The settler/invader project “New Zealand” suppresses and butchers tikanga.<sup>72</sup> In a parallel way, the Church seeks to alter tikanga in the form of traditional values and knowledge rather than traditional (political) law. This is done in ways that suit the settler/invader and their modes of understanding. Imported law is crafted to the needs and desires of the colonizing population over those that originally held mana whenua.<sup>73</sup> Culturally, Māori Church members alter whakapapa<sup>74</sup> and Kōrero Tūpuna<sup>75</sup> to keep in line with Church teachings and doctrine; consider for instance the notion that Tāne is said to be the literal biblical Adam.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Traditional customs, the original Indigenous legal system; Literally means the right or correct way things are done.

<sup>70</sup> Territorial rights, power from the land, authority over land or territory, jurisdiction over land or territory - power associated with possession and occupation of tribal land. The nation's history and legends are based in the lands they have occupied over generations and the land provides sustenance for the people and to provide hospitality for guests; Literally, the authority to speak for the land.

<sup>71</sup> Simon, “Te Arewhana kei roto i Te Ruma,” 64.

<sup>72</sup> Traditional customs, the original Indigenous legal system; Literally means the right or correct way things are done.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Lineage, descent

<sup>75</sup> Ancestral information, narratives, stories and histories. Also commonly referred to as Kōrero Tuku Iho.

<sup>76</sup> This is a practice that is particular to Māori Mormons. This is a phenomenon that is a journal article in its own right and is set to be discussed as journal article four in this series. Historically, the teaching of such material was conducted by wānanga run by Bishop Herewini Jones. These wānanga were initially supported by the Church leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand due to their faith-promoting nature. Over time the Church withdrew its support for the initiative. Not much is written or has been produced on the wānanga held by Jones. However, for faithful discussions on this phenomenon refer to Louis C. Midgley, “Māori Latter-day Saint Faith: Some Preliminary Remarks” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day*

Underpinning this is a claim by the Church to a form of Universal Truth where their version of salvation is the only correct way. This claim of truth is amplified by the practice of post-mortem baptism. The idea that Māori descend from one of the Lost Tribes of Israel is not a new religious idea to Te Ao Māori<sup>77</sup> since colonization.<sup>78</sup> The difference here between The LDS Church and other religious beliefs like Ringatū<sup>79</sup> is that the latter hold it as a belief without actively affirming (better: enforcing) its literal truth.

### *The Salvation Contract*

Mills argues that white supremacy is attributable to The Racial Contract which is an approach for comprehending the core logic of racial dominance and how it forms Western and other polities.<sup>80</sup> The Settler Contract, a colonial expression of The Racial Contract, is a racial dominance paradigm that explains how colonialism continues to shape settler communities.<sup>81</sup> MacDonald et al. claim that the Settler Contract is more than a concept; it is a technique that can be seen in the historical, deliberate, and cumulative repercussions of political decisions that control settler communities.<sup>82</sup> Kidman et al. further suggest that the Settler Contract “is realized through building cultural and historical amnesia into the epistemological structures (policy, curriculum, and pedagogy) to benefit the descendants of settlers.”<sup>83</sup>

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*Saint Faith and Scholarship* 8 no.1 (2014): 62-64; Prepare To Serve, “The Maori = Descendants of Hagoth, a Book of Mormon people, (n.d.), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGQt-5ogivQ>. The Author believes that while this is problematic for non-Mormon Māori in terms of decolonial politics, original instructions, authenticity, and cultural representation the Author believes this is part of traditional Church teachings around Young Earth Creationist and Anti-Science tendencies. To the Author’s understanding this is where The D&C asserts that the earth is only 7,000 years old and that there was no death before 4,000 BCE. The other part of this is the adherence of the Indigenous adherents to make sense of Church teachings and their place within those teachings and their demonstration to be seen to follow The Church and their salvation contract.

<sup>77</sup> The Māori World.

<sup>78</sup> Refer to Bronwyn Elsmore, *Mana from Heaven: A Century of Māori Prophets in New Zealand* (Flaxroots, 2020); Newton, “*Mormon and Maori*”

<sup>79</sup> For more understanding of The Ringatū Church refer to Wi Tarei, “A church called Ringatu.” In *Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Maoritanga*, ed. Michael King (Auckland: Raupo, 2011): 138-143; Judith Binney, *Redemption Songs: A Life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki*. (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Charles W. Mills, “The Racial Contract as Methodology (Not Hypothesis),” *Philosophia Africana* 5, no. 1 (2002): 75-99.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 387-409; Carole Pateman, “The Settler Contract,” In *The Contract and Domination*, ed. Carole Pateman and Charles Mills (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35-78, as cited in Liana MacDonald, Avery Smith, and Hine Funaki, “When Am I Supposed to Teach Māori and Find the Time to Learn it?: Settler Affirmations in Aotearoa New Zealand Schools.” *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 56, no. 2 (2021): 165-180.

<sup>82</sup> MacDonald, Smith, and Funaki, “When Am I supposed to Teach...?” 165-180.

<sup>83</sup> Joanna Kidman, Adreanne Ormond, and Liana MacDonald, “Everyday Hope: Indigenous Aims of Education in Settler-Colonial Societies,” In *Indigenous Philosophies of Education*

Given how Aotearoa New Zealand is treated by Mormonism and western religiosity more broadly, I contend that we can and should identify something I term “The Salvation Contract” in addition to the interrelated Racial and Settler contracts. This Salvation Contract is realized through cultural and historical amnesia and erasure to the benefit of the Church and its adherents. The religious environment consequently reproduces the hidden racial ontology in which practice, teaching, religious, and doctrinal decisions generate a silencing discourse that is racial in nature.<sup>84</sup> Mormonism’s racial discourse of silencing mediates ignorance about the structuring force of colonization through everyday interactions. This process attends to settler sensibilities in two ways. First, obscuring historical colonial violence shelters Indigenous adherents from the true nature of religious settlement/invasion which severed Māori from land, language, spirituality, and culture, and which accounts for the social, economic, and religious disparities between Māori and non-Māori today.<sup>85</sup>

Secondly, cultural and historical amnesia contributes to the misconception that contemporary New Zealand society has transcended racism and achieved fair and peaceable race relations. The Church has traditionally overlooked the racialization of Church culture and structures. This ultimately allows white church members to retain their soteriological privileges of being “white and delightful,” including the ability to move comfortably through a religion that prioritizes settler/invaser religious worldviews.<sup>86</sup> For Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa<sup>87</sup> this means you are from Hagoth and are therefore subhuman until you die. Full humanity is only achievable through adherence and obedience to Church teachings. As suggested by Goulet’s Development Ethics, a full form of spirituality can only proceed from the recognition of full humanness in government and development.<sup>88</sup>

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*Around the World*, eds. John Petrovic and Roxanne M. Mitchell, Vol. 19. (NY: Routledge, 2018): 95–108.

<sup>84</sup> Liana MacDonald, “The Same as Everyone Else’: How Academically Successful Indigenous Secondary School Students Respond to a Hidden Curriculum of Settler Silencing,” *Whiteness and Education* 4, no. 1 (2019): 38–52; Liana MacDonald, “Whose Story Counts? Staking a Claim for Diverse Bicultural Narratives in New Zealand Secondary Schools,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 25, no. 1 (2022): 55–72.

<sup>85</sup> For how this works in Aotearoa New Zealand society more generally refer to Vincent O’Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800–2000* (Bridget Williams Books, 2016); Vincent O’Malley, *The New Zealand Wars: Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa* (Bridget Williams Books, 2019); Ranginui Walker, *Ka whawhai tonu mātou* (Penguin, 2004), as cited in MacDonald, Smith, and Funaki. “When Am I Supposed to Teach...?”

<sup>86</sup> Brooks, “Mormonism and White supremacy;” Joanna Brooks, “The Possessive Investment in Rightness: White Supremacy and the Mormon Movement.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no. 3 (2018): 45–82; Boxer et al., 258–281; Colvin, “Introduction.”

<sup>87</sup> Pacific Ocean.

<sup>88</sup> Refer to Author Hemopereki Simon. “You’re Giving Me A Headache: A Political-Cultural Textual Critique Of Alt/Far-Right Anti-Indigenous Thought On Indigenous Issues In Aotearoa New Zealand.” *Sites: A Journal Of Social Anthropology And Cultural Studies* 17, no.

Wilderness as a state of savagery linked to the need for salvation and the “restored gospel” to be in wilderness like our ancestors is to be like the uncivilized and more precisely like Lamanites. Mormonism fundamentally needs to believe that Lamanites exist so that the universal truth claims are validated. There is a need to believe that we as Indigenous peoples and in particular Māori are fallen and as a result are savages requiring the saving of the lord or in the one true Church. To be religious, in this case Mormon and saved, is civilized. This is the premise of Mormonism: be obedient to the Church and this Lamanite problem for you as an Indigenous person will go away as you become “white and delightful” and you will not have your land totally taken from you. The Church creates an artificial context by which Indigenous peoples must become subservient and observant of the church, in other words silenced to be worthy of white patriarchal salvation. This enabled the death of Indigenous peoples who impeded “progress”. Governments dehumanized Indigenous peoples in order to legitimize their actions and then sought to make us fully human by exercising benevolence and virtue in its many forms. Within Mormonism, the exercising of white patriarchal salvation and authority achieves these ends.

*The White Possessive Doctrine*<sup>89</sup>

I would assert that a similar thing has taken place here in Aotearoa New Zealand as in the Indigenous World at large. Much like the settler/invaser colonial government, the Church facilitates the death of Indigenous people not in a literal sense but in the sense that Gospel and Church culture hinders their ability to engage their Indigenous culture and language.<sup>90</sup> This is made worse by what I have described in terms of “hui fatigue,” which occurs when Indigenous peoples are called to excessive engagement with the government.<sup>91</sup> A similar thing happens in the Mormon Church where Indigenous adherents must participate in works for salvation and/or Church callings, and the effect is greater on Indigenous adherents than their white coreligionists. The amount of time dedicated to this throughout one’s lifetime

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2 (2021): 101; Des Gasper, “Denis Goulet and the project of development ethics: Choices in methodology, focus and organization.” *Journal of Human Development* 9 no. 3 (2008): 453–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880802236755>

<sup>89</sup> This portion of this article is an adaptation of Simon’s 2016 journal article. The focus of that article was on issues relating to the white possessive government. For the purpose of this research the Author is adapting the statements in relation to government to apply to the “white possessive church.” The author believes this theorem applies to Western Christianity (broadly conceived). For the purposes of this article, however, the Author has chosen to apply the key concepts to The Mormon Church.

<sup>90</sup> Refer to Gina Colvin, “There’s No Such Thing as a Gospel Culture,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (2017): 57-70.

<sup>91</sup> Simon, “Te Arewhana kei roto i Te Ruma,” 61.

leaves little room for learning and/or maintaining language and culture. This is a form of settler/invader colonial cultural death of the Indigenous person. That death may not take place immediately but like the state, the Church uses the labor of Indigenous persons until they die.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Mormon possessiveness does not end at death because of their true claim to the correct salvation.

Like the government, the Church is responsible for facilitating and appropriating indigenous cultures and identities worldwide including Aotearoa New Zealand through the creation of a mission. The Church has focused on spirituality and culture, whereas the government created processes to take land in Aotearoa New Zealand through the Native Land Court. The Church and the government undermined the fundamental values of mana<sup>93</sup> and tapu<sup>94</sup> and actively sought to dehumanize the Indigenous population of Aotearoa New Zealand. While the government accomplished this through exclusionary performances of benevolence, virtue, and “human rights,” the Church promoted obedience and the “gifts” of revelation, priesthood authority, and salvation.

Summarizing the White Possessive Doctrine Simon comments:

“In this system The Crown promotes that only the Crown can hold possession within the territory of the nation state. While doing so Governments dehumanized hapū and iwi in order to legitimize their actions and then sought to make us fully human by exercising benevolence and virtue in its many forms. In this act the government has a need to look benevolent to remove the moral position held by hapu<sup>95</sup> and iwi<sup>96</sup> away from them. That that possession works ideologically (as a set of beliefs) to render and neutralize the nation as a white possessive (i.e. Sovereignty was ceded to the Crown). ‘white possessive sovereignty’ is what results from that possession – this is where the administration is usually white and is patriarchally male. Through the law the government legislated the legal theft of Indigenous lands (New Zealand Land Wars and

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<sup>92</sup> While the white possessive government the concept of labor may include a right to taxation of sovereign Indigenous people. In the context of the white possessive church this takes place with tithing.

<sup>93</sup> Prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma.

<sup>94</sup> Sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden.

<sup>95</sup> Clan.

<sup>96</sup> Indigenous Nation.

incidents like Ngatapa<sup>97</sup> or Rangiaowhia<sup>98</sup> of the Indigenous population.<sup>99</sup>

Moreton-Robinson further contends that:

“Reveal[ing] how the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty works ideologically, that is it operates at the level of beliefs, and discursively at the level of epistemology, to naturalize the nation as a white possession. Australia was acquired in the name of the King of England. As such patriarchal white sovereignty is a regime of power that derives from the illegal act of possession and is most acutely manifested in the form of the Crown and the judiciary. The Crown holds exclusive possession of its territory, which is the very foundation of the nation-state.”

In a way that parallels the Crown’s strategy, the Church promotes its version of salvation as being the truest. It maintains that through doctrine and the priesthood it has a monopoly on salvation. In exercising its ordinances, doctrines, and teachings the Church seeks to legitimize its suppression of Indigenous peoples by providing them with a new religio-colonial imagined identity as Lamanites. With this identity they dehumanize Indigenous people; in their imagined reality our full humanity is only achieved through their exercise of benevolence and virtue in its many forms. This includes storing whakapapa in an archive and removing mana from Indigenous peoples.

What the Church is doing is possession and that possession works ideologically (as a set of beliefs) to neutralize the Indigenous collective as a white possessive (i.e., Polynesians are Lamanites; Their ancestor is Hagoth from the Book of Mormon). Just as white possession of government results in white patriarchal sovereignty, Church dogma enacts “patriarchal white salvation”<sup>100</sup> – wherein the priesthood and administration are also predominantly white

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<sup>97</sup> Refer to Joe Williams, "Colonization Stories from Across the Pacific," *APLPJ* 7 (2006): 67-69; James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (Auckland University Press, 2013), 211-78; Wynsley Wrigley, "Marking 'Horrors of Ngatapa,'" *Gisborne Herald*, 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Refer to Hazel Coromandel-Wander, "Koorero Tuku Iho: Waahine Maaori: Voices from the Embers of Rangiaowhia" (Master’s Thesis, Massey University, 2013); RNZ, 2021. NZ Wars: Stories of Tainui - Extended Interview - Tom Roa. Online Interview Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rLxajGE-rQ>.

<sup>99</sup> Refer to Simon, "You’re Giving Me a Headache," 97-128; Hemopereki Simon, "The Importance of Settler/Invader Responsibilities to Decolonisation and The Collective Future as Highlighted in Ngoi Pēwhairangi’s “Whakarongo”" *Journal of Global Indigeneity* 5 no.3 (2021): 1-22; Simon, "The Critical Juncture in Aotearoa New Zealand and The Collective Future;" Hemopereki Simon, "Indigenous Impostor: Aotearoa New Zealand Settler/Invader Identity “Tāngata Tiriti” as a Zombie Concept and White Possession" Unpublished Paper.

<sup>100</sup> The Author has adapted this concept from patriarchal white sovereignty. For more information on this refer to Aileen Moreton-Robinson. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

and patriarchally male. However, in this case it is not Indigenous lands that are taken but Indigenous spirituality and culture. In the case of the Mormon Church collective taonga has been taken, captured, and used inappropriately (i.e., enacting ordinances like proxy baptism and breaking tapu).<sup>101</sup>

According to Moreton-Robinson, international literature about Indigenous sovereignty and rights has proliferated since the 1990's. This literature raises fundamental questions about democratic statecraft. It also poses philosophical challenges to key concepts such as democracy and sovereignty. Certain Mormon practices are intended as correlates equivalents to the political concepts of democracy and sovereignty, for instance the "restored" priesthood, the divine nature of The Book of Mormon, and salvation. These inform a Church culture which uses salvation like the state uses human rights. Thus:

"sovereignty is born of war enabled by a mythology of the divine right of kings. Sovereign absolutism was marked by gender and race in the seventeenth century, though race was considered a linguistic marker. Patriarchal white sovereign absolutism, though internally fractured, waged war to appropriate land and resources. Thus, the foundations of modern sovereignty has a gendered and racial ontology - that is, sovereignty's divine being as a regime of power is constituted by and through gender and race."<sup>102</sup>

Mormon salvation is born of a war between those who are righteous and faithful and those who follow the original instructions that inform the epistemology and ontology of being Indigenous from their tūpuna.<sup>103</sup> Like patriarchal white sovereignty, this is underpinned by a societal race war. The ideas within the Book of Mormon reflect 18<sup>th</sup> century ideas of race in North America and other racialized states like Aotearoa New Zealand.

Accusations of plagiarism have long plagued the Book of Mormon.<sup>104</sup> Thomas Murphy's recent work makes it clear that Joseph Smith indeed appropriated the history and culture of the

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<sup>101</sup> Sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden.

<sup>102</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "Virtuous Racial States: The Possessive Logic of Patriarchal White Sovereignty and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," *Griffith Law Review* 20, no. 3 (2011): 644-5.

<sup>103</sup> Ancestor.

<sup>104</sup> Fawn McKay Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (Vintage, 1995); Mormon Stories, "Sources of Inspiration and Content," Accessed 28 April, 2022, <https://mormonstories.org/truth-claims/the-books/the-book-of-mormon/book-of-mormon-sources-of-inspiration-and-content/>



Six Nations Confederacy, particularly that of the Iroquois.<sup>105</sup> As a canonical text, *The Book of Mormon* informs Church practices and teachings; it is nevertheless a book that is far from being divine in its supposed origins. Salvation's foundations are also gendered and racially ontological. Like sovereign power, salvific power is a form of self-realization for the church and its claims to universal truth and virtue. This is where will and possession operate discursively. Virtue functions as a form of usable property within the Doctrine of Discovery; in other words, the provision of Salvation functions as a civilizing cure for savagery. Everything hinges on the right and mission to civilize. On this pretense the white possessive Church – like the white possessive state – provided a rationale for salvific wills to take possession of Indigenous peoples' culture and spirituality.

The Church professes its virtuous mission whenever the Church asserts ownership of universal truth as a path forward for Indigenous people as Lamanites. This possessiveness manifests in some strange ways. Gospel topic essays for instance, are hidden in an obscure part of the Church's website where discussions around normalizing the spiritual nature of the Book of Mormon, in that it is not literal history or truth, cannot take place as well as the recognition that there is no scientific basis that Native Americans and Polynesians are related to each other through DNA. The Church removes the agency and ability to be sovereign and Māori, and actively undermines the mana of the Indigenous persons and nations. The Church enacts the "culture of colonization" as the "culture of Mormonism." It should be mentioned in this context also that Church leaders have been aware of validity issues around *The Book of Mormon* since the 1920s and have been hiding this from the faithful in what I would argue are highly unethical ways.<sup>106</sup>

Whenever the Church stakes a claim to ownership of the universal truth over and against Indigenous culture and spirituality, this becomes part of the normative rules for interaction and social engagement among the Church's membership. In terms of white possessive state sovereignty this dynamic plays out in the relationship between the state and the judiciary. In the Church the same sort of dynamic plays out between the patriarchal white men at the top and the disciplinary committees that enforce acceptable behavior and implement the threat of excommunication with all its

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<sup>105</sup> Murphy, "Views from Turtle Island,"; also refer to this commentary on his research: "Mormonism LIVE: 072: Neophytes & Lamanites In the Book of Mormon," <https://youtu.be/phBjt09n9A0>

<sup>106</sup> Shannon Caldwell Montez, "The Secret Mormon Meetings of 1922" (Master's Thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 2019); Also refer to Mormon Stories Podcast, "1346: Shannon Caldwell Montez - The Secret Mormon Meetings of 1922," <https://mormonstories.org/podcast/shannon-caldwell-montez-the-secret-mormon-meetings-of-1922/>

devastating consequences for Mormon families. Thus, it is possession and virtue that together comprise the ontological structure of patriarchal white salvation and sovereignty. This is reinforced by “its socio-discursive functioning within society enabled by the body of the state.” However, in relation to the Church the body of the Church and the functioning of its members enable that operation.

Moreton-Robinson furthers this argument:

“As part of state-formation and regulation, patriarchal white sovereignty is mobilized through a possessive logic that operates. This is a form of rationalization rather than a set of positions that produce a more or less inevitable answer, which is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the state’s ownership, control and domination. The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty is compelled to deny and refuse what it cannot own – Indigenous sovereignty.”<sup>107</sup>

A possessive logic underpins the Church’s formation and regulation of patriarchal white salvation. As with the state’s white patriarchal sovereignty, this is a form of rationalization rather than a set of positions that produce a more or less inevitable answer. This is underscored by an excessive desire by the Church and its adherents to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the Church’s ownership, control, and domination.

The possessive logic of patriarchal white salvation is compelled to deny and refuse what it cannot own – the spirituality and culture of the Indigenous other. This illustrates how claims for *mana motuhake*<sup>108</sup> and decolonized Kauapapa Māori existence challenges the Church’s conceptions of salvation and truth. The literature on the Mormon church is limited in part by a focus on a post-colonial church as the pathway forward for Indigeneity within the Church.<sup>109</sup> Rhetoric that emphasizes Māori as descendants of Hagoth ignores our colonial experience and the effort Māori have made to claw back and revitalize our language and culture. Such arguments only preserve the status quo, and continue to legitimize the incursions of the white possessive church in the lives of Indigenous peoples. Invocations of the post-colonial Church can be likened to the Indigenous inclusion policy framework enacted by the white possessive government of Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1980s.<sup>110</sup> It also shows how much the church has invested, modified, and justified its existence while

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<sup>107</sup> Moreton-Robinson, “Virtuous Racial States,” 641-658.

<sup>108</sup> Indigenous sovereignty.

<sup>109</sup> Refer to Colvin and Brooks, “Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion”

<sup>110</sup> Refer to Simon, “The Critical Juncture in Aotearoa New Zealand and The Collective Future.”

maintaining its claim to white patriarchal salvation and its possessive stake in the hearts and mind of Indigenous peoples, who they ultimately see as subhuman.

Adapting Simon's previous work, there is a comparative here between those on the alt/far right and Mormonism. The vision of Kaupapa Māori adherents is to create a modern existence in which there is space to "be Māori." The vision also includes living in a culturally inspired or tikanga-based way; ensuring that their children grow up in a culturally-rich learning environment, and ensuring ways of being for whānau that are not a life of socioeconomic struggle or of being "rawa kore." This vision is collective and involves multiple generations. For my own whānau, I add that the vision includes enabling the repair of multi-generational trauma as a result of settler colonialism based on white possession. Given the great lack of understanding that the authors demonstrate in relation to history, tikanga<sup>111</sup> and mātauranga,<sup>112</sup> I believe that non-Māori and some church adherents will never be able to understand why living in a Kaupapa Māori way would be of importance to Māori.<sup>113</sup>

The theft of Indigenous spirituality and culture has been ratified by the bestowing and acknowledging the property rights of white people as adherents to the Church. Only white possession and performance of virtue are validated and therefore privileged as a basis for salvation. The possessive white logic of patriarchal white salvation utilizing the Book of Mormon is deployed in defining those who are worthy - White people - as those who are not Lamanite. It confers a form of privilege by basing access to Church entitlements - including traditionally whom one can marry and what level of heaven one may occupy - on one's status as either Lamanite or non-Lamanite.

Our analysis of racism clearly demonstrates how possession is deeply embedded in the history, politics, and doctrinal treatment of Indigenous peoples, especially those on Turtle Island, Pachamama, and Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa.<sup>114</sup> It also highlights how Indigenous claims to decolonization, culture, and spirituality as "original instructions" deeply challenge the Church, its ties to the Doctrine of Discovery, and its conceptualization of white patriarchal salvation. My analysis suggests that recent developments in Mormon Studies scholarship heralding the creation of a post-colonial church are best understood as a transformation rather than an elimination of the Church's white possessive context. Such suggestions are unhelpful to those trying

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<sup>111</sup> Traditional customs, the original Indigenous legal system; Literally means the right or correct way things are done.

<sup>112</sup> Traditional Indigenous Knowledge; also commonly termed as mātauranga Māori.

<sup>113</sup> Simon, "You're Giving Me a Headache," 106.

<sup>114</sup> Pacific Ocean.

to engage in decolonized existence. This is because for the Church to be “decolonized” it would not exist on anywhere near indigeneity and/or Indigenous lands. The idea of a decolonized church, as I have noted in *New Sociology*, “seems antithetical to the concept of decolonization.”<sup>115</sup> Part of the problem here is that Mormon Studies has not had much interaction with critical Indigenous studies and thus has not really begun the work of decolonization or becoming the more achievable “post-colonial.”<sup>116</sup>

We must explore how academic practices within Mormon and religious studies normalize modes of rationality that facilitate the subjugation of Indigenous peoples, sever them from their original instructions, and mask the Church’s investments in patriarchal white salvation and whiteness. Moving forward we must ask about the extent to which white possession circulates as a regime of truth that simultaneously constitutes white subjectivity and circumscribes the spiritual possibilities of Indigenous spirituality and culture. With missionary zeal, the Church has already determined what is best for ‘their’ Indigenous peoples by defining what types of Indigenous religiosity and ways of being are acceptable; in this way, they stake a possessive claim to us as a paternal and civilizing right. By deploying virtue as a strategic device and usable property the Church dispossesses Indigenous peoples from their spirituality and their moral value.

### Discussion – What is to be done?

The emergence of ‘Gospel culture’ in recent years has meant that the Church is challenging the reality of Māori and the current cultural revival. This cultural revival has been picking up steam since the 1980s and is changing the face of modern Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>117</sup> The actions of the Church are a form of settler colonialism. The Church is trying to maintain itself and its

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<sup>115</sup> Simon, “Hoea Te Waka ki Uta,” 1.

<sup>116</sup> In addition to the resource provided in footnote 33 on the postcolonial turn in the Anglican Church here in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Author believes that a good starting place for the Mormon Church would be the recent work of Thomas Murphy, Elise Boxer and Gina Colvin. The author hereby recommends as an absolute starting point for this discussion to begin with refer to Thomas Murphy, “Decolonization on the Salish Sea: A Tribal Journey back to Mormon Studies.” *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2018): 47-66. The author would also like to highlight that with the impact of social issues on the Church there is a significant need for hope-based change as articulated by Moana Jackson. Tackling women’s, racism and GBLTQIA+ issues within the Church should not be done in isolation from this post-colonial turn. The need for significant institutional change cannot be understated. For a faithful senior Church official view on the future change within the Church refer to Mormon Stories Podcast, “1418: The Future Of Mormonism – Roger Hendrix,” (2021, April 12), <https://mormonstories.org/podcast/the-future-of-mormonism-roger-hendrix/>. For more on the comments by Moana Jackson refer to Moana Jackson, “Imagining Decolonisation with Moana Jackson - BWB Talks,” (2021, May 7), <https://fb.watch/fl8jao7u1B/>

<sup>117</sup> Anecdotally, the Author has been told that the Church is trying to make an active effort to roll this policy back.

relevance in the modernity of Te Ao Māori<sup>118</sup> and to relate the current cultural revival back to the religio-colonial identity of Indigenous people as “Lamanites.” Lamanitism is in absolute conflict with the idea of “original instructions” and with Indigenous peoples’ pursuit of decolonization. The more researchers like myself find a place in Mormon Studies, the more credibility the field – particularly Global Mormon Studies – will enjoy in the long run.<sup>119</sup> I also affirm that the Church’s teachings cast my identity and culturally-informed ontology as an offense insofar as it contradicts the authority of the Church and its salvific truth. It challenges the validity of the Church’s imagination of Indigenous as lost in a moral and cultural wilderness.

There is no substantive difference between the Church and the White possessive government. Like the ‘Crown’ calls on Māori to believe ‘treaty-truth’ we are being called to have faith in another colonially abusive institution. Lamanitism is part and parcel of the Church’s “solution” to Indigeneity: absolute obedience. Drawing on Moreton-Robinson’s idea of “patriarchal white sovereignty” I argue that Māori are being asked to believe in “patriarchal white salvation.” We are courted by a Church whose structures and belief systems are built on white supremacy; its infrastructure, administration, thinking, practices, doctrine, and ordinances rely on white (and generally middle-class) men who exercise their/its possessive logic. ‘Our salvation’ as Indigenous peoples is based on the notion that we are a part of the “wilderness,” and it is reinforced by the church’s adoption of manifest destiny - to locate and preach to the “Lamanite,” thereby claiming and owning my Indigenous spirituality and belief system. Because of our location in the wilderness, the Church affirms it is only a matter of time before a white man/missionary/bishop can possess my soul; I will always be subhuman and incapable of understanding their soteriological truth. In accordance with “Lamanitism,” the Church regards Indigenous peoples as racialized tribes. As Southerton points out, the Church’s view of Polynesia’s othering is a presumptive and covert type of racism. The Church presupposes the right and the skills necessary to speak on behalf of Indigenous Mormons. For Indigenous Mormons and Indigenous Peoples in general to follow Goulet’s Development Ethics frame of thought, the Church would need to publicly abandon the notion of absolute truth. To this end I would draw more public attention to a section of the LDS Church’s General Topic Essays that states: “Although the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is more spiritual than historical, some people have wondered whether the migrations it describes are compatible with scientific studies of ancient

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<sup>118</sup> The Māori world.

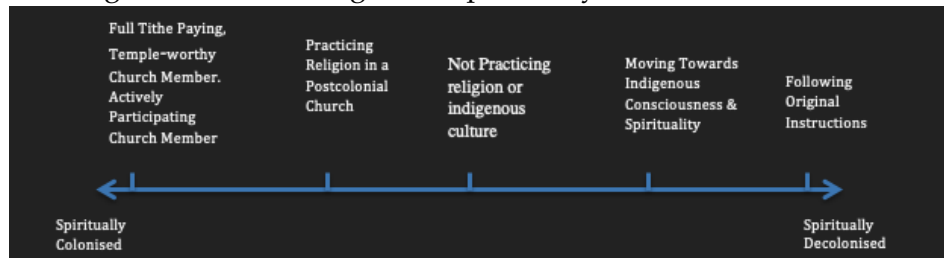
<sup>119</sup> Simon, “Hoea Te Waka ki Uta,” 2.

America.”<sup>120</sup> In this context particular focus and emphasis should also be given to the work of Simon Southerton.

In contrast to orthodox Mormonism, in Te Ao Māori<sup>121</sup> It is considered ethical or tika to engage in debate and questioning so that the collective may find an acceptable way forward that has depth and is true or correct. This is what is represented in the other ethical standard, pono.<sup>122</sup> Our cultural decision making was done for the benefit of the collective; everything was consensus driven.

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Figure One: The Indigenous Spirituality Continuum



For critical scholars like myself the ideal is for every Indigenous person to achieve full decolonization. But I am also a realist. The effects of religion and of colonization more broadly are vast. No one exists in a social vacuum. What is essential to remember here is that Mormon leaders teach the abandonment of Indigenous culture wherever that culture obstructs one’s submission to Jesus, the church leaders, or the patriarchy. This is considered necessary to enter the celestial kingdom.<sup>124</sup> With high-demand religions like Mormonism we have a continuum that is best described by a two directional arrow. At one end you have a state of being colonized by full adherence to the Church; the Church possesses your Indigenous soul. Slightly down the line you have the suggestions of a post-colonial church that is culturally accepting and inclusive. Next is openly questioning the church on a path to decolonization, and at the end is full decolonization. There are barriers for every Indigenous person to achieve full

<sup>120</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, “Book of Mormon and DNA Studies,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/book-of-mormon-and-dna-studies?lang=eng>. The Author notes that the Church has consistently changed this essay and it is written in a faith promoting way for a considered critique refer to Murphy, Thomas W., and Angelo Baca. “DNA and the Book of Mormon: Science, Settlers, and Scripture.” *The LDS Gospel Topics Series: A Scholarly Engagement* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2020) (2020): 69-95.

<sup>121</sup> The Māori world.

<sup>122</sup> Truthfulness that has depth; pono is the other key ethical standard with tika in Te Ao Māori. Refer to Simon, “Hoea Te Waka ki Uta,”

<sup>123</sup> Simon noted that this is why when engaging i.n Kaupapa Māori Research. Refer to Simon, “Hoea Te Waka ki Uta.”

<sup>124</sup> Prepare To Serve, “The Maori = Descendants of Hagoth, a Book of Mormon people, (n.d.), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGQt-5ogjvQ>

decolonization. It must be noted that the reality of being Indigenous is difficult such that individuals may move anywhere along the line throughout their lives. Also, the ideal is not always achievable. Barriers include lack of access to language, culture, identity, and knowledge. There is a lot of "deprogramming" that must take place for a person exiting a high-demand religion. The minimum that the Mormon church must do to achieve a kind of middle ground is for it to become truthful with its members. Ultimately, scholars who deal with issues relating to the Mormon Church should also identify their perspectives and where they sit in relation to their work.

Church leaders perpetuate fallacies and positions they know are wrong and they have begun to indoctrinate the younger generation as an attempt to stem the tide of defunct or inactive members.<sup>125</sup> From a Māori ethical viewpoint, this is wrong and not tika because the Church is not being pono with its members. They are not able to explore the depth of their belief because the Church masks the truth and known fact. Excommunication is used as a tactic to silence those that do try to provide truth and light to the situation. The best contemporary examples are Fawn Brodie, Jeremy Runnells, Sandra Tanner, John Dehlin, Thomas Murphy, Gina Colvin, and Simon Southerton.<sup>126</sup> All were threatened with or were excommunicated because they challenged the Church's power, truth claims or attempting to move the Church into modernity. From the Church's perspective their refusal to be silent constituted a breach of their salvation contract. If Church leadership expects members to tithe 10%, the least that they could do is act in an ethical manner according to be tika and pono in addressing the beliefs of their adherents and particularly the Indigenous members who endure so much in the name of loyalty

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<sup>125</sup> Mormon Stories Podcast, "Mormon Correlated Inoculation: A Panel Discussion," (2021, November 4), <https://mormonstories.org/podcast/mormon-inoculation/>

<sup>126</sup> The author notes the most ridiculous action in this regard was the excommunication of Natasha Helfer, a qualified sex therapist, who was asserting healthy ways around sexuality for Church members. The patriarchy and Church leadership in enacting withdrawal of membership continue to ignore significant issues around healthy intimate relationships, including how to be a sexual being, that are facing Church members. The author asserts fact here, for example, that it is considered healthy to engage in masturbation, for Māori it is against original instructions to think otherwise as Indigenous people practiced healthy approaches and attitudes to sex. For more information on Natasha Helfer case refer to Mormon Stories Podcast, "1420: Natasha Helfer's Apostasy Trial For Sexual Health Advocacy," (2021, April 21), <https://mormonstories.org/podcast/natasha-helfers-apostasy-trial-for-sexual-health-advocacy/>; Mormon Stories Podcast, "1426: Natasha Helfer Excommunication Debrief" (2021, May 4), <https://mormonstories.org/podcast/natasha-helfer-excommunication-debrief/>; Larry Curtis, "Marriage, family and sex therapist officially notified of excommunication from LDS Church," *KUTV*, April 22, 2021, <https://kutv.com/news/local/therapist-officially-notified-of-excommunication-from-lds-church/>; Adam Forgie, "LDS sex therapist faces excommunication for teachings in line with mental health science," *KUTV*, April 17, 2021, <https://kutv.com/news/local/lds-sex-therapist-faces-excommunication-for-teachings-in-line-with-mental-health-science>.

and salvation. In being tika and pono the Church would need to be openly honest about Church history and practices.

Moving this research forward will mean engaging examples and case studies from Critical Indigenous Studies that represent issues that may be considered offensive or wrong to Māori. This is especially important to those of us pursuing decolonization. Questions that focus on mana wāhine<sup>127</sup> and sexuality, church ordinance practices, indigenous data sovereignty and the Church's capture of mātauranga and culture. This critical engagement is ultimately meant to facilitate much-needed intercultural dialogue. This article will hopefully serve as an important step towards a robust critical Indigenous studies perspective on the kinds of theory and practice that can inform these necessary debates and intercultural dialogues.

Tēnā Koutou Katoa.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Women's empowerment.

<sup>128</sup> The Author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the journal editor Prof. Carl Raschke. Additional thanks need to be given to Byron Rangiwai, Sarah Newcombe, Thomas Murphy, Farina King, Jason Palmer, Tara Brabazon, David Stirrup, Elise Boxer, Kelly Klink, Gina Colvin, Ignacio Garcia, University of Otago Library, University of Kent Templeton Library, University of Waikato Library, Taupō Public Library, Massey University Albany Library, Mills College Library and Mormon Stories Podcast, and my MAI ki Tāmaki crew for all the support that went into creating this article. Ngā mihi mahana ki a koutou katoa.