

Student Writing

The Geographies of Maori–Mormonism and the Creation of a Cross-Cultural Hybrid

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This paper explores how the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints attracted a large Maori following in late 19th century New Zealand, and examines key features of Maori–Mormonism at this time. It focuses on how the alienation of Maori lands during the New Zealand Wars led to Maori resistance of British-based religion. Mormonism attracted Maori because it was non-British, fulfilled Maori prophecies, coincided with some pre-existing Maori values, and provided Maori an inspiring ancestral path. However Maori also resisted attacks that Mormon missionaries launched on aspects of their traditional culture. This paper suggests that newly produced Maori–Mormon (hybrid) spaces were largely shaped by Mormon missionaries' embracement of 'acceptable' Maori culture, and missionary attempts to undercut Maori traditions that conflicted with Latter-day Saint doctrines.

Introduction

In New Zealand, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has often been called a Maori church (Barber & Gilgen, 1996; Britsch, 1986). Likewise, Latter-day Saints have always prided

themselves for their success in attracting Maori to the Mormon Church—particularly where other churches have failed (Lineham, 1991). Why is it that Mormonism has such a strong Maori following, and when did it gain authenticity among the Maori? For the Mormon mission, was it a case of being in the right place at the right time? Or was it that Mormonism offered more to the Maori way of life than we might expect? This paper examines the means by which Maori were drawn to Mormonism (i.e., land grievances, prophecies, and cultural compatibility), and places a particular emphasis on the concept of hybridity. According to Johnston et al (2000), hybridity refers to those processes that transgress and displace conceptual boundaries, “and in doing so, produce something ontologically new” (p. 364). Valentine (2001) provides a much simpler definition: “The new forms produced by the...combining or mixing of cultures” (p.343). This paper explores how the mixing of *Maoritangi* (Maori culture) and Mormonism produced new hybrid spaces. It continues with an analysis of how resistance led to the production of Maori–Mormon spaces and, additionally, how it fashioned these hybrid spaces. It examines how LDS missionaries used the geographies of exclusion to ascertain power in newly produced Maori–Mormon spaces. In an attempt to undermine the earliest stages of Maori–Mormonism, this paper predominantly focuses on the period from 1880–1900. It should also be noted that the term “Maori” in this paper is used in regards to those drawn to Mormonism, and not always representative of Maori as a whole. Finally, while some of the evidence presented in this paper is derived from Mormon scholars, some, also, is based on secondary sources. The potential for bias in these sources is critically considered. While Mormonism provided Maori hope in the face of dispossession and anguish, Maori–Mormon spaces were largely shaped by Maori resistance to Mormonism, and the agency of LDS missionaries in those spaces.

Maori–Mormonism: When and to What Extent?

Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in New Zealand in 1854; however, their attempts at spreading Mormonism to European New Zealanders were largely ineffective (Christensen, 1991; Hunt, 1977; Lineham, 1991). LDS missionaries were equally aware of the Maori at this time, but claimed Maori were satisfied with Catholic and Protestant religions (Britsch, 1986). It wasn’t until 1881 that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “launched a sustained mission to the Maori” (Underwood, 2000: 133). By 1884, the Church

enlisted a predominantly Maori membership of approximately 1,100 with 16 Maori branches throughout New Zealand. By 1887 this number grew to approximately 2,600 and, by 1900, it reached 4,000, with 79 church branches throughout New Zealand (Britsch, 1986). From 1890–1900, Mormonism accounted for between 8–10% of the Maori population (Barber, 1995; Britsch, 1986; Lineham, 1991; Underwood, 2000) and, by 1992, claimed approximately 45,000 people of Maori ancestry, and 15% of the Maori population (Barber, 1995; Barber & Gilgen, 1996).

Maori Land, and the British Connection

Land grievances were partly responsible for attracting Maori to Mormonism. The alienation of Maori lands during the New Zealand wars (1863–1872) deterritorialized Maori of approximately 1.32 million hectares (3.25 million acres), leaving them physically and spiritually wounded (Macdonald, 1995). By the early 1900s, Maori controlled just 2.02 million hectares (5 million acres) of the original 26.7 million hectares (66 million acres) guaranteed to them under the Treaty of Waitangi (Ihimaera, 1975; Britsch, 1986). From 1850–1900, the Maori population dropped by more than 50,000, and talk of “Maori extinction” streamed through European discussion (Barber, 1995; Binney, 1995). The New Zealand Wars created a strong sense of Maori hatred and distrust of Europeans, as Maori associated British-aligned Christianity (particularly Anglicanism) with the loss of their lands. Prior to the New Zealand Wars, British missionaries had lived with Maori, and had helped draft and then promote the Treaty of Waitangi among Maori (Barber & Gilgen, 1996). The treaty guaranteed Maori the “exclusive protection of their lands” (Orange, 1987). Maori regarded it with spiritual authority, and equated it to a sacred promise from God (Barber & Gilgen, 1996; Macdonald, 1995; Orange, 2002). Orange (2002) explains: “Maori leaders believed that missionary advice was wise...and could be trusted” (p.34). This is important because many missionaries abandoned Maori and assisted the British army in confiscating Maori land during the New Zealand Wars (Lineham, 1991; Underwood, 2000). Macdonald (1995) portrays a sense of the post-1872 Maori sentiment of betrayal: “You [British missionaries] taught us to pray and while we looked up to Heaven you stole our land” (p. 13). Lineham (1991) states: “a protest against the [Anglican] church was almost always a political statement about the loss of land” (p. 77). Land grievances heavily wounded the credibility of British Christianity in the eyes of Maori.

Maori Predictions

Maori believed that *rangatiras* (chiefs) and *tohungas* (healers) possessed “the gift of insight,” and, thus, were able to predict the future. In 1881, a prominent *rangatira* predicted the coming of a new form of worship specifically for Maori (Hunt, 1977; Lineham, 1991; Underwood, 2000). The *rangatira* spoke of Maori letting the new church into their communities and allowing for its emergence (Barber, 1995; Hunt, 1977; Schwimmer, 1965). As Britsch (1986) points out, similar *rangatira* predictions ensued: “...the church for the Maori people has not come among us. You will recognize it when it comes. Its missionaries will travel in pairs...they will learn our language and teach us the gospel in our own tongue” (p. 275). Maori heavily valued spiritual insight and, when LDS missionaries arrived with a “new religion,” Maori perceived it as a fulfillment of *rangatira* prophecies. Maori were given a reason to investigate Mormon doctrines, and in doing so, follow the recommendations of their *rangatira* (Britsch, 1986; Schwimmer, 1965; Underwood, 2000). Lineham (1991) explains that the initial surge and spread of Maori–Mormonism was largely attributable to the conversion of prominent *rangatira*. Furthermore, LDS missionaries proclaimed these prophecies prepared Maori for the coming of the “the only true Church of Jesus Christ” (Hunt, 1977: 8). This was a Mormon geopolitical strategy to obtain Maori interest, and therefore acquire power in Maori spaces.

Resistance to British Christianity

In 1880 Latter-day Saints in the United States received notice from missionaries that Maori were “ripe for conversion” (Britsch, 1986; Hunt, 1977). As a former New Zealand mission president expressed: “We have the salvation of the Maori on our hands, and it is imperative that our elders study the Maori, his mind, characteristics, likes and dislikes...” (as cited in Lineham, 1991: 71). Prior to the LDS arrival, many Maori resisted British Christianity because of its association with the alienation of Maori land. When Mormon missionaries arrived, and evidently fulfilled Maori prophecies, they offered Maori a faith “in opposition” to Anglicanism. LDS missionaries proclaimed that they had come to redeem Maori and “restore Christianity.” They told Maori they were not British and that all other churches were corrupt and polluted (Lineham, 1991). Because of prior Maori–British hostilities, LDS decrees of religious corruption resonated deeply with Maori, and reaffirmed pre-

existing Maori views regarding the deceitful nature of British religion (Schwimmer, 1965). Following the New Zealand Wars, Maori sought to ensure that the link between Anglicanism and the seizure and resale of their lands to settlers—in breach of the *Treaty of Waitangi*—did not go unnoticed (Hunt, 1977; Lineham, 1991; Orange, 1987; Underwood, 2000). Mormonism offered a means by which Maori could resist British religion and, in doing so, adopt a new “non-British” faith. In becoming Mormon, Maori endeavoured to boycott or “snub” British subjects at large (Lineham, 1991; Underwood, 2000).

These actions illustrate a form of political resistance (as described in Johnston et al., 2000), in that Maori resisted British Christianity because of its association with land confiscations and oppression of Maori. In opposing the dominant British discourses of the 1880s, Maori chose Mormonism as an identity of resistance. Furthermore, Sharp et al (2000) point out that power is present “in the ability to resist,” and in the ability of resisters “to become empowered in the act of resistance” (p. 3). Mormonism empowered Maori in the act of resisting British religion.

In a comparable example, Dombrowski (2001) examines how many Native Americans in Southeast Alaska turned to Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism partly because they felt long-standing Presbyterian and Salvation Army churches had abandoned them. Despite successes in the early 1900s, these long-standing churches failed to maintain services in the early 1970s as pastors arrived and departed frequently and, consequently, closed for extended periods of time. Many Alaskan Natives felt a sense of neglect and abandonment when it seemed these churches displayed little commitment to their communities. After a number of Evangelical and Pentecostal missions to Southeast Alaska in the early 1970s, churches such as the Assembly of God quickly established and provided regular services in communities. The new Evangelical support base came primarily from disgruntled Alaskans that were previously a part of the Presbyterian and Salvation Army churches. The Evangelical and Pentecostal churches have been most successful in villages with high unemployed and marginalized populations—“those villages hardest hit by economic collapse of the 1960s and 1970s” (Dombrowski, 2001: 146). The rise of Evangelicalism in Southeast Alaska in the 1970s and Maori–Mormonism in the late 19th century are, to a certain extent, comparable in that both movements emerged and grew when indigenous peoples harboured resentful feelings towards (resisted) churches they had previously supported. This, combined with the

adversities attributed to an immediate loss of lands for 19th century Maori, and rising hardships in Southeast Alaskan Natives, left indigenous spirits yearning for revival. Both Maori and Native Alaskans were vulnerable to encroaching Mormon and Evangelical movements.

Almost all of the Maori–Mormon converts between 1880–1900 were former Anglicans and Anglican clergy (Britsch, 1986; Hunt, 1977; Lineham, 1991). While Lineham (1991) suggests LDS missionaries never argued against “settlers’ seizure of Maori lands,” Barber (1995) explains they became known for their “unwillingness to acquire land”—perhaps as a strategy to gain Maori approval. But the Mormons heavily criticized the Anglicans, claiming that they lacked direction, stumbled through prayers, and expected to be given land. Latter-day Saints also used space to promote the growth of Maori–Mormonism. For example they often raised the United States flag over Maori *Maraes* (meeting houses) proclaiming that it was a symbol of Maori restoration (Lineham, 1991).

A Culmination of Prior Influences ?

It is important that these prior influences be addressed because they immensely contributed to the production of new Maori–Mormon (hybrid) spaces. As Morris and Fondahl state: “Multiple influences on the production of social space will produce hybrid space” (p. 109). It was these multiple influences (the New Zealand Wars, the non-British appeal, Maori predictions, etc.) that created favourable spaces for Latter-day Saints to modify and convert from Maori–Anglican into Maori–Mormon. Lefebvre (1991) explains that there are “underpinnings” that never disappear and remain as new spaces are produced. The link between Maori deterritorialization, resistance to British Christianity, Maori prophecies, and Mormonism clearly illustrate Lefebvre’s point.

Variable Spread of Maori–Mormonism

The growth of Maori–Mormonism in the late 19th century did not occur simultaneously in all regions of New Zealand (Underwood, 2000). Maori deterritorialization occurred in varying degrees, based on Europeans’ perceptions of the land’s “usefulness,” and Maori populations varied drastically across New Zealand (i.e., ninety percent of the Maori population on the North Island) (Cumberland, 1970). Mormonism had the greatest impact in northern, southern, and eastern regions of the North Island

(Barber & Gilgen, 1996; Hunt, 1977). Regions that also corresponded to areas where lands purchased from Maori in 1860 were the highest (Figure 1) (Orange, 2002). This relationship further reinforces the link between Maori deterritorialization and Mormonism.



Figure 1 Land ownership in 1860—North Island (shaded areas represent land purchased from Maori by 1860)
Source: Orange, 2002.

Cultural Compatibility

Latter-day Saints missionaries, unlike many Europeans in the 1880s, experienced Maori culture and learned Maori language firsthand (Barber & Gilgen, 1996; Hunt, 1977; Lineham, 1991). Lineham (1991) explains that “an aura of continuity of Maori and Mormon customs [ensued]” (p.90). The Mormons were deeply intrigued and mystified by Maori culture, and Maori appreciated the high level of interest the Mormons showed in their traditions (Lineham, 1991). Missionaries presented Mormonism as a fuller and more correct version of pre-existing Maori beliefs pertaining to the supreme Maori god *Lo* (Schwimmer, 1965). Maori found Latter-day Saint emphasis on genealogy, eternal families, and church community extremely appealing because they coincided with the Maori focus on *whakapapa* (genealogy), *whanua* (enlarged family) and the Maori desire to find their place in the bible (Hunt, 1977; Lineham, 1991). Missionaries appreciated the way Maori visualized the landscape—as a recollection of genealogy (e.g., geographic features were named after ancestral personalities) (Cole & Jensen, 1961; Patterson, 2000). Britsch (1986) suggests that Maori viewed the adoption of Mormonism as a “restoration of traditional sacramentals [but] in a modified form” (p. 276). As Mormon elders taught LDS history, they likened themselves to the Maori—as a persecuted people in the United States. In this way, the Mormons and Maori produced spaces of mutual support. Barker’s (1967) examination of the Maori–Mormon connection explains that historical, social, and mythological similarities between the two cultures produced bonds of sympathy and understanding (as cited in Britsch, 1986). Historians believe that these similarities provide the most basic explanation for the creation of Maori–Mormonism and the production of these hybrid spaces.

An Identity through the *Book of Mormon*

Orange (2002) confirms that, by 1840, nearly half of Maori pursued some kind of European Christian belief. When the Mormon mission began, many Maori already identified themselves with Israel because of prior missionary influences and bible translations. Because of this, many Maori believed that their worship of the supreme Maori god *Lo* originated in Israel (Schwimmer, 1967; Underwood, 2002). Mormonism was presented as a fuller and more correct version of pre-existing Maori beliefs (Hunt, 1977). However, it was the *Book of Mormon* that largely appealed to Maori,

as it provided Maori a rooted identity (Lineham, 1991). It offered Maori an ancestral path that stretched back further than their ancestral homeland—*Hawaiki*—an island thought to be located “somewhere” in East Polynesia (Ihimareia, 1975; Lineham, 1991; Macdonald 1995). Maori songs and *Whakapapa* (genealogies) linked Maori to one of seven canoes that sailed from *Hawaiki* to New Zealand in approximately 1000 A.D. (an event called the “Great Migration”). Maori were therefore able to trace their histories back to one of the original canoes that delivered their predecessors to New Zealand (Cole & Jensen, 1961, Hunt, 1977; Ihimareia, 1975). As Underwood (2000) explains: “Mormon accounts... penetrate that misty prehistory prior to the sailing [from *Hawaiki*]” (p.139); as such, missionaries claimed that the *Book of Mormon* traced Maori origins back through Fiji–Hawaii–America—and from there to Israel (the holy land) (Lineham, 1991). The Mormons regarded Maori (and all Polynesians) as descendents of a *Book of Mormon* people who fled Israel for the Americas and direct descendents of Hagoth (and his people), who sailed from the American mainland to Hawaii and eventually occupied all of the Pacific Islands (Clement, 1980; Cole & Jensen, 1961; Douglas, 1974; Underwood, 2000). The Mormons declared that the *Book of Mormon* was Maori’s history book, and the “true” history of God’s spreading of Maori ancestors; missionaries also described Maori as a “lost tribe of Israel” (Douglas, 1974; Hunt, 1977). Maori found LDS doctrines interesting, inspiring, and largely convincing—they “listened with breathless interest” (Lineham, 1991: 82).

Empowering Hybridity

Massey (1994) explains that there are “empowering forms” that can lead to hybridity. Maori attraction to Mormonism exemplifies one of these forms, in that Mormonism provided Maori an “empowering” ancestral link and a motivation to further examine LDS doctrines. Mormonism “provided an unusually rich, culturally compatible resource for shaping and proclaiming their [Maori] identity” (Underwood, 2000: 134). Mormonism helped Maori cope with the losses of their *whanua* (enlarged family) following the New Zealand Wars. The Mormon belief in eternal families (reunification of the *whanua*), salvation for the deceased, and the physical resurrection of the dead “in the not so distant future” resonated deeply with a spiritually deprived race (Britsch, 1986; Cole & Jensen; Schwimmer, 1967).

Resistance to Mormonism, and Disempowering Hybridity

While it would seem some Mormon historians (Britsch, 1986; Cole & Jensen, 1961; Underwood, 2000) depict LDS missionaries as “encouraging of Maori culture,” and Maori conversion to Mormonism as “rosy”—these accounts are somewhat inaccurate. The Mormons encouraged Maori music, history, mythology, dance, and arts (Cole & Jensen, 1961; Christensen, 1991; Hunt, 1977); however, they also demanded that Maori conform to certain LDS standards. Converted Maori often *resisted* LDS attempts to exterminate *Tangihangas* (traditional funerals), *tohungas* (Maori healers), tattoos, and prayers (Lineham, 1991). Although it was customary for Maori to have physical interaction with the deceased during their traditional funeral-like tributes, LDS missionaries insisted that funeral casks be covered (Schwimmer, 1965). Furthermore, they thought Maori funerals were too elaborate and portrayed too much emotion (Lineham, 1991; Schwimmer, 1965).

Power struggles were common between missionaries and newly converted Maori. Missionaries believed that it was their duty (as per the responsibility of the upper Mormon priesthood) to heal ailing and war torn Maori (Barber & Gilgen, 1996; BYU, 2002). However, healing was also a significant component of Maori life because of the traditional role of the *tohunga* (healer) (Hunt, 1977). LDS leaders feared *tohungas* undermined the divinity of the Mormon Church, and attempted to suppress this component of Maori culture by threatening to excommunicate Maori who regularly visited them. However, despite the church’s opposition, many Maori insisted on visiting traditional healers (Barber, 1995; Barber & Gilgen, 1996; Lineham, 1991). This cultural tug-of-war exemplifies two competing forms of resistance: Mormons resisting Maori customs, and Maori resisting Mormon attempts to suppress traditional Maori customs.

While Mormonism attempted to terminate some Maori customs, it did not completely transform Maori culture. Mormonism allowed for the perpetuation and adaptation of some Maori customs, rather than complete suppression of Maori culture. Lineham (1991) explains: “no religious message can simply be stripped of one set of cultural associations and reclothed with others” (p. 93). Mormonism selectively mixed with Maori culture and, in doing so, produced new hybrid spaces. *Hui taus* (annual Maori–Mormon conferences) were spaces of “selective” cultural mixing. *Hui taus* were distinctively Maori—characterized by formal (Mormon-compatible) Maori *powhiris* (welcomes), *hakas* (dances of challenge), and

hongis (nose rubbings) (Britsch, 1986). These were all aspects of Maori culture that Mormonism embraced. American and Maori–Mormons often promoted the *Hui tau* as a symbol of Mormonism’s support of Maori traditions (Britsch, 1986). However, Lineham (1991) argues that the conferences’ embracement of Maori tradition was somewhat cautious. Rather than transforming the culture of Maori–Mormons, missionaries “restyled” it to suit Mormonism.

LDS efforts to exclude Maori customs illustrates how hybrid spaces can be disempowering. Morris & Fondahl (2002) explain that power is a key variable in “the way dominant groups fashion social space” (p. 109). Furthermore, Sharp et al (2000) describe *dominating power* as “power which attempts to discipline, silence, prohibit or repress difference of dissent” (p. 2). The Mormons were both dominating and disempowering. Missionaries acquired power in Maori spaces because Maori (due to deterritorialization, depopulation, and disease) were physically and spiritually “powerless.” Maori interest in Mormonism as a potentially trustworthy, non-British, and culturally compatible belief inspired Maori, and thus gave LDS missionaries power as the “empowerers.” Although Latter-day Saints were a minority religious group in the 1880s, they were able to use this power to “fashion” traditional Maori spaces. While many Maori resisted and continued to practice traditional customs, others felt a certain degree of pressures to fulfill LDS requests. Though some Maori and Mormon beliefs were compatible, Maori–Mormon spaces were also places of power struggles between two distinct cultures.

Mormonism’s Racialism and Exclusion of Maori

While both Britsch (1986) and Hunt (1977) suggest that LDS missionaries generally showed a lack of racial prejudice towards Maori, others have disagreed (e.g. Barber, 1995, Lineham, 1991; Schwimmer, 1965). Maori were not “first choice” converts when Latter-day Saints first arrived in 1854—Europeans were. When the Maori mission finally began, many missionaries believed LDS doctrines offered Maori a way to be elevated from their “fallen and degraded conditions” (Lineham, 1991). Furthermore, missionaries endeavoured to prevent Maori–Mormons from immigrating to Utah, except for prominent and wealthy tribal leaders. New Zealand mission presidents ordered missionaries to be careful of how they spoke of Utah, and instructed them to simply immerse Maori in LDS doctrines (Britsch, 1986; Lineham, 1991).

The *Book of Mormon* equates white skin with moral superiority and dark skin with moral deprivation (Douglas, 1974). Missionaries told Maori that they had inherited dark skins because of their ancestors' disobedience of God's commandments (i.e., the Lord had cursed Maori ancestors). This was how the Mormons accounted for the "degraded and savage condition" of Maori. Maori–Mormons accepted that they would receive white skins as a privilege in the near future—a prophecy from the *Book of Mormon* (Cole & Jensen, 1961; Lineham, 1991; Douglas, 1974). "It is part of doctrine that Maori will acquire white skin ... and those aspects that are contradictory to Mormonism will disappear [in the millennium] (Schwimmer, 1967: 8). Missionaries used skin colour to control the actions of Maori. For example, when missionaries felt Maori appreciated their doctrines, they highlighted the Maori connection with Israel. However, when missionaries felt Maori had acted disrespectfully, they reminded Maori that their dark skins were already a sign of past transgressions (Lineham, 1991). Because the *Book of Mormon* instils "difference" between classes of people, American missionaries were deemed racially superior to Maori; as such, Maori were made subordinate in newly produced Maori–Mormon spaces.

It is standard for all "good standing" Latter-day Saint men to be ordained to the Aaronic (lower) and then Melchizedek (higher) priesthood. These priesthoods are further subdivided into three ordinal ranks (BYU, 2002). In 1885, Maori men were offered ordinations to the Aaronic priesthood, and missionaries reminded Maori that the Anglican Church waited much longer before Maori were elevated within its ranks (Lineham, 1991). While Britcsh (1986) states that many Maori were ordained to the Mormon priesthood, he fails to mention the movements and rankings of Maori within the priesthood. After the age of twelve Mormon boys normally "climb" the ranks (two years per stage) of the Aaronic priesthood (Schwimmer, 1967). In the late 19th century, Maori were oftentimes not offered ordinations above the lowest Aaronic rank (Lineham, 1991). This suggests missionaries were opposed to Maori attaining ranks similar to their own. Perhaps missionaries feared that elevating Maori would jeopardise their own agency.

Conclusion

Maori became Mormon because it was non-British, fulfilled Maori prophecies, coincided with some Maori beliefs, and provided Maori an inspiring ancestral path. Although there were differ-

ences between the relative cultural compatibilities of LDS doctrines and Maori customs, statistics show that Maori–Mormonism grew between 1890–1900. Overall, this would suggest that the forces that empowered Maori to become Mormon were stronger than those forces that also disempowered Maori (embedded in resistance, exclusion, and racialism). While this paper has touched the major geographic themes of Maori Mormonism, it has left many unanswered questions. How did New Zealand law influence the production of Maori–Mormon spaces? How did a lack of Maori literacy impact the way Mormon doctrines were understood, and to what extent do contemporary Maori–Mormons feel that the *Book of Mormon* has delivered on its promise of racial equity? These questions deserve future geographic inquiry.

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