POLYNESIAN SAINTS:
IN-BETWEEN THE LIVED RELIGION OF POLYNESIAN IDENTITIES AND
MORMON IDENTITIES

by

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Pulynesian Saints: In-Between the Lived Religion of Polynesian Identities and Mormon Identities

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Abstract:

La‘ie, Hawai‘i is considered to be a Mormon colony since it is home to the Mormon La‘ie temple, a church college (Brigham Young University-Hawai‘i), and the ever-popular Polynesian Cultural Center. Here Polynesian cultures thrive and are learned, beautified, and shared by Polynesian saints who have a love for both their religious and cultural identities. Hawaiian activists argue that western colonization, in this case Mormon colonization, should not exploit and market their culture and traditions as it cheapens their heritage and interferes with their native identities. I contend that these Polynesian saints are able in varying degrees to sustain and re-assert their cultural identities while concurrently maintaining their Mormon identities. These two dominant lifestyles can be simultaneously cultivated whether on native land, such as La‘ie, or diasporically, such as the case of the former Iosepa, Utah, another Mormon Polynesian colony of faithful saints who immigrated to the Salt Lake Valley.
To my wife
Amber

and

Three amazing children;
Tiegan,
Teya,
Kiyoshi
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“The 42-acre Polynesian Cultural Center represents eight island cultures and over 15 million square miles of the vast South Pacific. Our island villages will give you a first-hand look at these diverse and fascinating cultures. It’s essentially a whirlwind tour of Polynesia, with native guides who help visitors experience their games, language, crafts, music and history. We also introduce guests to the most authentic of Hawaiian luaus.”

When thinking of Hawai‘i, I always pictured the blue ocean, sandy beaches, and the rich array of tropical colors that paint the backdrop of the world that has been depicted on postcards and in Elvis Presley movies. However, as I began my preparations for my first field experience in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, I reflected on my previous trips to Hawai‘i and realized that there is a world behind those postcards and movies that I had not seen or maybe I just refused to acknowledge. What I have come to realize is that, although the tourist experience is marketed and commercialized, the locals are able to outwardly express their culture and solidify their Hawaiian identities. As a tourist, I have discovered how rich the Hawaiian culture is through hula performances, beautiful music, tasty foods at luaus, and the art of making intricate flower and leaf leis. Visitors can witness all of these cultural entities in hotels, restaurants, parks, or the all-inclusive Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC).

The PCC is a Mormon Church-owned cultural theme park in La‘ie, Hawai‘i on the island of O‘ahu, that includes eight Polynesian villages and other areas that focus on traditions.

1 Taken from the Polynesian Cultural Center Home Website: http://www.polynesia.com/

2 The official name of the Mormon Church is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This name is said to have been given by revelation from God to Joseph Smith in 1838. While the term “Mormon Church” has long been publicly applied to the Church as a nickname, it is not an authorized title, and the Church discourages its use. Taken from: http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/style-guide. However, for the purpose of my paper I will refer to the LDS Church and its members as the

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and rituals of the different Polynesian populations. The PCC boasts that it is the number-one paid attraction in Hawai‘i. With the influence of Mormonism, religious and cultural beliefs and practices co-exist at the PCC. The purpose behind the PCC is threefold: one, to preserve the various cultural wonders that existed throughout Polynesia in ancient times as well as to display new and changing traditions; second, to serve as a form of employment for Polynesian students attending Brigham Young University Hawai‘i, assisting with cost of college and living; and third, to serve as a form of proselytizing the Mormon religious beliefs and practices in hopes of converting others. Venice Wineera, a former employee of the PCC writes, “The PCC’s planners and builders hoped to construct a site that would be educational and entertaining, a type of museum and cultural theme park rolled into one. The organizers also wanted it to be an effective missionary tool to introduce visitors to the LDS Church.”

Through performance of dances and traditions, Brigham Young University Hawai‘i (BYU-Hawai‘i) students have been able to express a sense of pride for their culture. A booklet produced by the PCC boasts, “Thanks to both the steadfastness of people who quietly nurtured aspects of their heritage, and efforts such

Mormon Church and Mormons. I do so, because of my conversations with members of Polynesian groups that belong to the LDS Church. In these conversations I have learned that they identify themselves as Mormon or members of the Mormon Church.

3 La‘ie gets its name from the legend of La‘ieikawai, a young woman whose beauty captured the hearts of many suitors and whose connection to nature was legendary. Taken from Hokulani K. Aikau. “Resisting Exile in the Homeland: He Mo’oleno No La‘ie” American Indian Quarterly; Winter 2008; 32, 1. Page 72.

4 I am using the word “Polynesian” over “Native Hawaiian” due to the multiple Polynesian nationalities and complexities surrounding the Polynesian Mormon colonies (La‘ie and Iosepa). I use the term Polynesian in the most general way to encompass the people and culture, whereas the term Hawaiian is used in a geographical sense.

as that of the Polynesian Cultural Center, there is currently a strong renaissance of Hawaiian culture throughout the Islands. Young people studying their past develop pride in their heritage and face the future with confidence.” At the PCC, one can feel the aloha spirit and witness the beauty of the people through dance, song and traditional practices.

However, some Native Hawaiian activists say that the PCC has been commercialized and colonized by westerners only to result in a Disney-like attraction crossed with a Mormon stage show. In my thesis, I will examine how La‘ie and its addition of the PCC is a cultural space that was colonized for religious reasons and explore how Mormon Polynesians have been able to maintain their Mormon religious identities while still having a connection and or reconnection to their Polynesian identities. I will further my argument about maintaining dual identities by introducing Iosepa, Utah, another 19th Century Mormon Polynesian colony, in which I will elaborate on the idea of diasporic Hawaiians sustaining a connection to their native land.

Seldom has a culture been so widely shared with outsiders but strongly cultivated and maintained from within as is the case with Polynesian concepts of tradition and identity. As mentioned before, there is debate over whether or not sharing their culture is beneficial for the

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7 In order to examine these dynamic narratives of identities, I would like to refer to Armand Mauss to provide a clearer look into the construction and use of identity by Hawaiian Mormons. Even though his research is based on American Indians that converted to Mormonism, I see resemblances between Native Hawaiians and American Indians in their complicated understanding of identities. These resemblances emerge in how these two diverse groups are depicted in The Book of Mormon, for both their ethnic identities are theorized and determined within the same religious text. The Book of Mormon suggests that Native Americans and Polynesians are descendants of Lamanites and Nephites respectively. This crisis of identity at times can shape one’s pattern of social interaction, resulting in changing one’s self-identity to meet social system norms or to resist dominant pressures. Through this complex discourse, an understanding of self is constructed. Taken from Armand Mauss. All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage. University of Illinois Press. Urbana and Chicago. 2003. Page 129.
locals or the tourists. Still, Polynesians who entertain in these cultural centers find themselves having to defend their identities amongst their disapproving peers. Like Polynesians, Mormons have a long history of defending their claims to land and culture to westerners, so, for many Polynesians this new form of Christianity was appealing. Polynesian converts to Mormonism were just as passionate about their newfound religion as their homeland culture, and many learned to adopt Mormon culture into their lifestyles.\(^8\) Our task, then, is to understand how this theology of Polynesians as Nephites is embraced and then lived by Polynesians, and how their culture is reconfigured in the process.

Hawaiian scholar, Hokulani K. Aikau argues that “Through stories, the past, present, and future exist simultaneously; just as single strands of hala (pandanas leaf) are woven together to become something altogether new, individual stories, when threaded through one another, produce a complex pattern of associations and meanings that at once maintain a resemblance to the original while becoming something entirely distinct.”\(^9\) However, at times this conflict between the two identities was unsettling for some. By exploring the construction and use of identity, many Hawaiians are able to stay connected to their historical roots and ancestral ties while interweaving and balancing another dominant lifestyle. This interweaving of both the Polynesians traditions and identities with Mormon beliefs was and is still very present in La‘ie, Hawai‘i, a Mormon center, and in some ways visible in Iosepa, Utah, a Mormon colony for Polynesians.

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\(^8\) I would like to clarify that American Indians are portrayed in *The Book of Mormon* as the wicked and sinful Lamanites, which is much different from how Polynesians have been portrayed. Polynesians have been described by some Mormon scholars as being descendants of Hagoth, a Nephite explorer.

My contribution to this complex context is to argue that Polynesian Saints who inhabited Mormon colonies, such as La‘ie, Hawai‘i, and Iosepa, Utah, as well as those working at the PCC and/or attending BYU-Hawai‘i today, are able in varying degrees to sustain and re-assert their cultural identities through the rituals and traditions they practice and the opportunities enabled by the Mormon Church. Even though the Mormon Church history in Hawai‘i is undeniably colonial, it is important to consider the ways Polynesian Saints have been able to resist complete colonization, unlike other ethnic minority groups that have converted to Mormonism. I do not contend that the Mormon Church purposely set out to preserve the cultural roots and traditions of Polynesians; it is an instructive and consequential coincidence of history that some beliefs and practices coincided with each other. Thus, Polynesians have been able to engage the space of these intersections as a means to sustain their Polynesian identity.

To illuminate my argument, I will primarily engage the theoretical approach outlined by R. Orsi on his idea of in-betweeness and lived religion.\textsuperscript{10} He relates narrative interpretation of experiences between two worlds through notions of identity construction. For my purpose, I view the in-betweeness of the two worlds as being the religious world and cultural world of a Polynesian Mormon and the meaning of the identities that are constructed between the two worlds. To describe lived religion, he states, “Religious practice and imagination is an ongoing, dynamic relation with realities and structures of everyday life in particular times and places.”\textsuperscript{11} In regards to R. Orsi’s argument on lived religion, Susanna Morrill argues, “This concept describes how members of any given religious community make meaningful and workable sense


of the institutional, ritual and theological structures with which they live.”¹² By exploring how lived religion is formulated, he argues that religion influences the ways in which we organize ourselves and usually intersects in important ways with what might be called official or institutional religions. It is important to clarify that the in-betweeness of lived religion whether deliberate or unintentional is happening in everyday lives through the interpretation of experiences. For instance, he argues that religion can shape and influence “how the dead are buried, children disciplined, the past and future imagined, moral boundaries established and challenged, homes constructed, maintained, and destroyed, the gods and spirits worshiped and importuned, and so on.”¹³

With Orsi’s theory in mind, I will introduce two Hawaiian scholars whose work has contributed to my theoretical argument. Both Hokulani K. Aikau’s and Ty P. Kawika Tengan’s work on identity construction are connected to the process of negotiating between identities. Engaging the concept of decolonization, I will explore Tengan’s strategies of remembering and recreating the ways of the people of old, for example, healing from experiences of shame and traumatized memories both internally and socially is first necessary in the process of decolonization. He argues, “Not only are these efforts at decolonizing the mind, but they are also acts of self-determination as community members seek to assert control over the destiny of


the lahui (people, nation, collective)\textsuperscript{14} while defining the self (through group membership) as Hawaiians struggling with the burdens of history.\textsuperscript{15}

In order to understand Polynesian Mormons in their struggle with “the burden of history,” I will examine a range of documents pertaining to local histories and cultural expressions. I will supplement this historical work with my own observation as to both La‘ie and Iosepa. Through direct contact with Mormon and non-Mormon Polynesians, I have witnessed the process of how identity construction is experienced and articulated within these Polynesian Mormon communities. Indirectly, I will use my interactions with Mormon Polynesians to assist in framing my argument on the ability to negotiate between Polynesian identities and Mormon identities. By examining articles, books, and online commentary in conjunction with the historical context produced by Polynesian scholars, non-native scholars and Mormon scholars that have weighed in on the argument about identity construction and the idea of in-betweeness, I will reinterpret these primary sources based upon both my theoretical argument and my own observations and experiences within both of these communities. In doing so, I hope to add a fresh and unique perspective to the study of religion.

In this paper, I will first provide a historical overview of Mormonism’s influence on Polynesian populations in their homelands and other Mormon communities. I will include how the Mormon religion and the Polynesian religion(s) have a convergence in an social forum, including a deep interest in genealogy. The next section will be on La‘ie, Hawai‘i where I will analyze how La‘ie went from a plantation town to a thriving tourist site where hundreds of


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. Page 67.
visitors are bused in daily from the other side of the island. I will also introduce the developmental background of PCC, BYU-Hawai‘i and the Iosepa canoe in more depth. In the final section, I will look at the larger voyage from Hawai‘i to Iosepa, Utah. I will explore the idea behind diasporic Polynesian Mormons and their connections to traditional Polynesian practices and rituals. I will conclude by filling out my argument that the Mormon Church has indirectly enabled Polynesian identity survival in La‘ie and beyond
CHAPTER II
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

“Our histories should make us aware of some of the problems, obstacles, objections, and difficulties Church members have faced. It would be especially instructive to know the particular problems of applying Church procedures and programs in the Pacific because of the differing cultural and social backgrounds among the people.”

Since the first arrival of Polynesians on the Hawaiian Islands by outrigger canoe, there have been several theories regarding the migration of Polynesians to Hawai‘i. One theory suggests a single settlement. A second theory suggests multiple settlements over an extended time period. Not possessing a written language, the histories of Hawai‘i and its inhabitants have been handed down through oral traditions, especially genealogies, ancient artifacts and rituals. Being that there are no written records of the first inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands, there is much debate regarding the dates of first contact. Archaeological evidence supports the theory that Polynesians from the Marquesas may have first populated the Hawaiian Islands between 400 and 500 A.D., looking for better conditions for farming. The second wave of migration came around 1,200 A.D., the Tahitians, who then conquered the settled islanders resulting in Tahitian customs, legends, and language becoming the Hawaiian way of life. Martha Beckwith argues, “Later migrations certainly took off from Tahiti, as is distinctly recorded in old chants and legends and further proved by linguistic identities and corresponding forms of culture between the two areas.” These claims are further strengthened by archeologists Kenneth Emory and


Yoshihiko Sinoto’s argument that, “A secondary, politically significant migration from Tahiti with linguistic and archeological evidence that appeared to show that whereas the first settlers to arrive in Hawai‘i came from the Marquesas, high-status Tahitian voyagers arrived later.” These cultural memories are necessarily partial and contested.

Today, the Hawaiian alphabet consists of 16 letters and their language is beautifully spoken and written. Literature has been written to document as much as can be recalled to guarantee that future generations will learn from and gain an understanding of their roots. One such piece of literature that is highly esteemed by scholars of Hawaiian history is David Malo’s, Hawaiian Antiquities. Malo’s writings first published in 1838 in Hawaiian provide insight to the old ways, and he has been regarded at times as “the great authority and repository of Hawaiian lore.” Even though Malo’s life was influenced and framed by Christianity, his account of ceremonies and ritual concepts is remarkably rich. He provides written descriptions ranging from how genealogy played a major part in their understanding of the past to the importance of chants and hula to the art fishing and food preparation to the manner in which gods and deities were worshipped.

These old ways of life began to change in 1778. On his voyage as captain of the Resolution, British explorer James Cook stumbled across the Hawaiian Islands, becoming the first European to visit. He named them the Sandwich Islands after the fourth Earl of Sandwich.

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who, at the time, was the acting First Lord of the Admiralty. The Hawaiian Islands soon were bombarded with European explorers and traders who found the islands as a suitable space for trade and source of supplies. The influx of visitors to the once-isolated islands introduced diseases, such as smallpox and measles. David Stannard comments that, “disease and genocide were interdependent forces acting dynamically-whipsawing their victims between plaque and violence, each one feeding upon the other, and together driving countless numbers of entire ancient societies to the brink-and often over the brink-of total extermination.” The Hawaiians did not have resistance to these diseases, and as a result, a large percentage of Hawaiians died. To add kindling to the fire, the influence of Christianity contributed to the end of ancient practices and rituals, which, to many Hawaiians, were an affair of religion, for they served as a way of connecting and belonging to a time and space. Increasingly, missionaries deemed these traditions and rituals as wild and uncivilized and much of Hawaiian life, including education, clothing, and sexual mores, were coercively reshaped accordingly.

Similar to how Hawaiian history is passed from generation to generation, the accounts of Mormons in Hawai‘i have been passed down through oral and written tradition. When one begins to explore the influences that Mormonism has had on the Native Hawaiians (and other Polynesian groups) and their way of life, it is impossible to ignore the past. Joseph Smith Jr. sent four missionaries to the Pacific in 1843 where their religious influence began in the islands of Tubuai and Tahiti. However, it was not until Brigham Young, the second President of the

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5 The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty command the British Royal Navy.


7 Joseph Smith Jr. is the founder and first Prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He is the author of *The Book of Mormon*. 
Mormon Church, requested missionaries to be sent to Hawai`i (then referred to as the Sandwich Islands) on September 24, 1850 through his personal representative, Apostle Charles C. Rich, at the Slap Jack Bar camp in Northern California that the Mormon influence in Hawai`i increased. The first eight men selected were released from their gold mining duties and set apart as Elders to embark on this new mission.\(^8\) They arrived in Honolulu on December 12, 1850. Once there, they realized there were few whites to proselytize to as instructed, so they decided to pair off and spread out amongst the other islands.

These eight Mormon missionaries arrived in Hawai`i during a critical time in Hawaiian history. Almost 30 years prior, King Kamehameha II had declared an end to the Kapu System by eating with his mother.\(^9\) Destruction of sacred temples and the burning of their gods’ images soon followed. Gananath Obeyesekere argues, “The social psychological effect of the abolition of tabu and the destruction of idols and temples must surely have been profound. Significant elements of the old religion were displaced and the new religion was not yet established.”\(^10\) This new religion was a combination of Christianity and Westernized politics. In 1852, the Kapu system was replaced by a Massachusetts criminal code and a new constitution. Kamehameha III,


\(^9\) Kapu means: Marked with restriction, prohibitions, and spiritual qualities that govern interactions and behaviors. Ty P. Kawika Tengan. Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai`i. Duke University Press. 2008. Page 241. The kapu system was structured around the concept of protecting and maintaining mana (spiritual power), so that balance of nature stays intact and the land will remain fruitful. Every aspect of Hawaiian life was controlled by strict requirements to maintain the balance and harmony of the mana. It also served as a system of gender and rank distinction.

the King of Hawai‘i at the time, appointed William Little Lee to be a Honolulu judge. Sally Merry argues that Lee’s arrival in Hawai‘i was vital to how the new “Anglo-American” governing laws, resembling New England laws and practices transformed the Hawaiian space. This space transformed from a space “where men were stewards of the land, women exercised autonomy in conjugal relationships, and family unit was an extended rather than a nuclear one,” into a space where Hawaiians felt disenfranchised. She writes, “He had spearheaded the reshaping of governance and land ownership that propelled the islands from a system of chiefly control over land occupied by a chief’s followers to a regime of fee simple, individual landownership. The opportunity for private landownership, soon made available to foreigners, proved a boon to the nascent sugar plantation economy. This economy, resting largely in foreign hands, ultimately displaced the vast majority of Hawaiian commoners from their land.” Thus began the colonizing process that has affected the way in which Polynesians understand and identify themselves.

Meanwhile, other Christian/Protestant missionaries, who had already began the process of preaching to the natives about the evilness of traditional religious beliefs and rituals, had laid a foundation of Christian gospel principles. Although the Mormon missionaries appreciated the

11 William Little Lee was a lawyer. This travel partner was Charles R. Bishop.


14 S. George Ellsworth. “New Wine and Old Bottles.” Chapter from Voyages of Faith: Explorations in Mormon Pacific History. Edited by Grant Underwood. BYU Press. 2000. Page 17. He comments on how the Tahitian language had been committed to written form, including the Bible that was shared with the Tahitians.
other Christian missionaries for laying the groundwork, they “frequently blamed indigenous degradation on the influence of Europeans and Americans,”\(^{15}\) due to what they felt was prolonged exposure to the corrupt “civilized way.” Despite other Christian missionaries who were already serving in the islands, these eight Mormon missionaries had a new message that was different from traditional Protestant or Catholic beliefs. This new message was that the ancient Church of Jesus Christ had finally been fully restored upon the earth. For a variety of complicated reasons, conversion rates to Mormonism multiplied quickly, reaching around 3000 members by 1872.\(^{16}\) This growth can be contributed to the number of missionaries assigned to the Hawaiian Islands, plus the use of native Polynesians in the missionary field.

Historically, as the number of Polynesians converting to Mormonism grew, Mormon missionaries felt the need of a place where they could gather, much like Utah for mainlander Mormons. They chose La‘ie, Hawai‘i as their religious space because it was far enough away from other religious affiliations and the land was abundant and inexpensive. Joseph F. Smith\(^{17}\) suggested La‘ie as the gathering place, but follow through came from Brigham Young. Young was a remarkable influence on the settlement, mission, and the structure of the Church in


\(^{16}\) R. Lanier Britsch’s book, Moramona: The Mormons in Hawai‘i, The Institute for Polynesian Studies. La‘ie, Hawai‘i. 1989. Page 88. Taken from the official website for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Official Resource for News Media. http://beta-newsroom.lds.org/facts-and-stats Updated on October 18, 2010. The number of Mormon members in Hawai‘i is 68,858. Including two temples (La‘ie 1919 and Kailua Kona 2000) and 134 congregations. The census was not broken up into area or sites.

\(^{17}\) Joseph F. Smith is the nephew of Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of the Mormon Church. Joseph F. Smith’s father was Hyrum Smith. He was sixth President of the LDS Church. He was the last President of the LDS Church to have personally known the founder of the Mormon Religion.
Hawai‘i. Being that Young never traveled to Hawai‘i to supervise the establishment of the Zion in paradise, through written directions and verbal instructions he counted on a number of missionaries to direct the saints in Hawai‘i. George Q. Cannon was one of the eight missionaries first sent to serve in Hawai‘i, and he played a major role in the advancement of Mormonism in Hawai‘i. Cannon’s accomplishments are widely referenced throughout Church history, for he was able to develop lasting relationships with the locals while maintaining the overall objectives of the Mormon Church’s missionary goals.¹⁸

However, one must realize that the initial goal of the Utah missionaries (Cannon included) was not to preach and convert the Native Hawaiians and Polynesians, but to proselytize to the white sailors and other religious denominations’ missionaries that were beginning to settle in the islands of Hawai‘i. After negative responses from the haoles (white settlers), Mormon missionaries decided that their time would be best spent teaching to the Native Hawaiians/Polynesians. Due to Hawai‘i’s land ownership upheaval, both Mormons and Polynesians connected on a personal level since the Mormon Church was still under a microscope by the American government. Both communities experienced themselves as marginal to dominant public. Four years prior to the missionaries setting foot on the beaches of Hawai‘i, Joseph Smith Jr. had been killed in Carthage jail. He is death ignited the exodus from Nauvoo to the west. When placing Mormonism into American History, critics have succeeded in painting a negative picture of Mormons and their leaders. The Mormon Church has been described as a monopoly, a government within a government, a mysterious cult and a threat to democracy. These negative responses caused Mormons to flee from Nauvoo, Illinois between

¹⁸ R. Lanier Britsch’s book, Moramona: The Mormons in Hawai‘i, The Institute for Polynesian Studies. La‘ie, Hawai‘i. 1989. Lanier gives a very detailed history of the first missionaries that were sent to Hawai‘i.
1846-1869 to present today Utah, which, at the time, was in the process of becoming an U.S. territory. Because Mormons were already considered outsiders and therefore did not represent a majority of western thoughts, Polynesians were drawn to Mormonism.

Due to the welcoming response by Polynesians, the missionaries dedicated themselves to building a new Zion in “paradise”, thus creating remarkable stories of struggle and triumph while working alongside the Polynesians. Cannon wrote in his journal regarding the excitement of the Hawaiians in Keanae toward him and the other missionaries, “This was on Wednesday, and from that time until Monday we were constantly speaking, baptizing, confirming, and counseling the people. During that time there were upwards of one hundred and thirty baptized. The Spirit of the Lord was powerfully poured out, and all rejoiced; I never enjoyed myself so well before in my life.” This excitement lead to the establishment of a gathering place for the Polynesian Mormons, thus resulting in the Polynesian Mormon settlement in La’ie. La’ie was not just a Polynesian Zion; it also served as a place of employment by serving as a sugar plantation. Some of the difficulties they had to overcome were language barriers, economic growth, land ownership, and traditional practices that did not coincide with the Mormon religious beliefs. The settlement grew quickly, and in 1865 the community included 250 people--about half being

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19 At the time of the first group of Mormons entering the Utah area, the Mexican-American war was ending, which resulted in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that was signed on February 2, 1848. Under the terms of the treaty, Mexico ceded to the United States Upper California and New Mexico, including present-day Arizona and New Mexico and parts of Utah, Nevada, Colorado and Texas. Thus, becoming a U.S. territory until finally becoming States. Taken from The National Archives website: http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/guadalupe-hidalgo/

20 Laurence Moore writes, “A sense of difference has persisted so strongly among Mormon that they have probably gained an ethnic as well as a religious identity, thus becoming like the Jewish people they have always emulated.” Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans. Oxford University Press. New York. 1986. Page 44.

members of the Mormon religion. Britsch writes, “One in every fifteen Latter-day Saints in Hawai‘i lived in La‘ie at this time.”\textsuperscript{22} By 1872 that number grew to 450 members living in La‘ie, not including the 2,250 members living throughout the islands.\textsuperscript{23}

Once Mormon influence was well established in Hawai‘i, many Hawaiian Saints felt compelled to further their newfound dedication to Mormonism by migrating to Utah with other Polynesian populations in the late 1880s. Some Native Hawaiians and other Polynesians followed Church leadership’s recommendation, and with the Church’s financial support and the desire of to come to “Zion”\textsuperscript{24} where they would have an opportunity to do their temple work for themselves and their ancestors, they made the long voyage to the mainland. After the Native Hawaiians reached the Salt Lake Valley, tension began to occur between the Polynesian saints and the white Mormons. Tracey E. Panek argues, “Linguistic and cultural barriers made assimilation difficult for the Polynesians. Racial prejudice contributed to tension between the Polynesians and the larger Salt Lake community.”\textsuperscript{25} These racial tensions caused the Mormon First Presidency to make the decision that the Polynesian population would be better suited to live away from the white settlers. So, the decision was made to move them to present day Skull


\textsuperscript{23} R. Lanier Britsch. Moramona: The Mormons in Hawai‘i. The Institute for Polynesian Studies. La‘ie, Hawai‘i. 1989. In Chapters 6 & 7, Britsch provides in-depth historical information on the development of La‘ie as a gathering place for Polynesian Mormons.

\textsuperscript{24} Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders referred to Salt Lake City as the modern day Zion. A place for the gathering of God’s children.

Valley. This place was later renamed Iosepa (Hawaiian for Joseph), after Joseph F. Smith, a former missionary in Hawai‘i and counselor in the First Presidency at the time of settlement; he later became President of the Church. The climate of the settlement was dry, unwelcoming and about a two-hour drive south of Salt Lake City, so one can imagine the time it took to travel to Iosepa either by wagon or foot. The settlement was eventually closed in 1917. The main reason for the closure was that a temple was being built in Hawai‘i, where they would be able to practice vicarious ordinance work for their dead ancestors and seek out their genealogies. However, there were some underlying reasons too. The Polynesian Saints were continually stricken with diseases, which added to general discontent and unhappiness among the Polynesians. By the time the settlement was closed, Iosepa’s population was at its greatest with 228 Polynesians, and a large percentage of the population was actually born in Iosepa. It is said that the Mormon Church bought all the homes and property and even assisted those that did not have the income to return back to Hawai‘i. All but one family returned.

After the Hawai‘i temple was built, President David O. McKay encouraged the need for a Church college on O‘ahu. After much deliberation about whether the school should be established in La‘ie or Kaneohe, La‘ie was finally chosen as the site for what is now known as Brigham Young University—Hawai‘i. McKay also encouraged the Polynesian Cultural Center

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26 Joseph F. Smith is said to have had a special place in his heart for the Native Hawaiians and other Polynesian groups.


28 David O. McKay was became the Ninth President of Mormon Church in 1951, through a process called being sustained (promoted). He served at the President for nineteen years, until his death in 1970. He was ordained an apostle and member of the Quorum of the Twelve in 1906. David O. McKay was a general authority for nearly sixty-four years, longer than anyone else in LDS Church history. He is known as the President that an influence on education and the media.
(PCC) to be built near the temple and the college to give the students some livelihood in such a rural area. With a temple, a school, and a center of cultural entertainment all within close proximity to each other, faith and traditions were linked and intermixed over time; for instance, traditional dance and song and style of dress has changed in some ways, but remained the same in others. Vernice Wineera writes in her essay, “The Polynesian Cultural Center,” “Polynesian Saints feel a depth of connection, a sense of belonging as members of the LDS Church.” She continues, “The Book of Mormon sustains Polynesian identity as a covenant people of the Lord. In this way, Polynesian Church members feel confirmed in their heritage by birth, by blood, and by blessing.” Not only did the PCC become a flourishing cultural center, but it also served twofold as a religious tool used to stimulate visitors to investigate the Mormon Church and its beliefs. Paul Spickard writes, “What is not seen by the tourists is what happens when visitors are not around. Then, the employees of the Polynesian Cultural Center are hard at work, keeping alive and elaborating ancient traditions in dance, music, and art that have few other venues to nourish them.” Students and employees of the PCC became missionary enthusiasts, and in

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31 Ibid. Page 212.

32 Paul Spickard. “Race, Religion, Colonialism in the Mormon Pacific.” Taken from *Revealing the Sacred in Asian & Pacific America*. Edited by Jane Naomi Iwamura and Paul Spickard. Routledge Press. 2003. Page 116. Spickard spent seven years as a professor at BYU-Hawai‘i. He was one of a few non-Mormon professors that were faculty during that time.
addition, were able to maintain their religious faith and their connection to their heritage to continually define their role in Mormonism.

Throughout my research, I have found that certain Mormon religious beliefs coincide with those of the Hawaiian and other Polynesian religions. For instance, practices of polygamy have been prevalently noted in both Hawaiian religions and early Mormon conduct. Prior to the arrival of missionaries to the Islands, Hawaiians did not have any formalized status of marriage. It was not unusual for Hawaiians, from both Ali‘i (chief/ruler/leader) or commoners status to be involved with multiple partners; this could mean heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual relationship. These sexual encounters even involved incest among family members. Hawaiian scholar Lilikala Kameʻeleihiwa writes, “Through incest, the Aliʻi Nui, Haloa, was born, and because Aliʻi Nui are Akua (god/deity), incest is by definition a formula for creating divinity.”

This concept of maintaining a divine status was important for the purpose of proving divinity. In other words, incest among family members ensured that family lineage would secure the rights to the highest ranks of Ali‘i. This form of polygamy suited the Hawai‘i communities just right. To them, the community was closer, resulting in everyone looking out for another. With regard to the Mormon Church, the purported revelation of polygamy was received by Joseph Smith Jr. in 1843, but was practiced in secret for close to a decade before Brigham Young made it public to all of his followers in 1852. “Polygamy shocked and offended those outside the faith; and it was not readily accepted by many Mormons when they first learned of ‘the Principle’ of plural

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Yet because of their faithfulness and trust in their prophet they accepted it. In 1890, the practice of polygamy was banned within the Mormon religion.\(^{36}\)

Also, genealogical research and the path of ancestry are of great importance to both Hawaiian and Mormon traditions. Knowing where you came from is of utmost importance in both religions for spiritual connectedness and identity purposes. In one Hawaiian genealogy, a woman named Laʻilaʻi is thought to be the first human being on earth and the progenitor of the Hawaiian race, and her parents and ancestors were of the night (he po wale no). Her husband, Ke-aliʻi-wahi-lani, beheld this beautiful woman and came from the heavens to be with her.\(^{37}\) This theory is different, of course, from Christian beliefs of Adam and Eve being the first parents on earth, but tracing lineage is important in both religions. In both Mormon and Polynesian religions there is deification of ancestors and the need for genealogical knowledge to facilitate this process is great.

Exaltation of the dead are common practices in both traditions. Mormons believe in the salvation of men, both the living and the dead, and, therefore, baptisms and confirmations and other ordinances are done by proxy for the dead in order to advance them to divine godhood in heaven. As revealed by Joseph Smith Jr., “The ordinance of baptism by water, to be immersed therein in order to answer to the likeness of the dead…and come forth out of the water is in the likeness of the resurrection of the dead in coming forth out of their graves; hence, this ordinance


\(^{36}\) Ibid. Page 1.

was instituted to form a relationship with the ordinance of baptism for the dead, being in likeness of the dead.”

Many times through genealogical research, Mormon members perform ordinances for their ancestors and the records are bound both on earth and in heaven. In Polynesian beliefs, the dead are also remembered and revered. “Throughout Polynesia, the troublesome presence of a dead person reveals the existence of unfinished business that must be resolved before the soul can depart in peace.”

Polynesians rely on genealogy for a connection to their ancestors in order to strengthen their cultural identity. For example, through attachment, they conduct ceremonies to transform the deceased into animals for familial or individual protection. Like Mormons, Polynesians believe in life after death.

Both traditions embrace on-going revelation, if in varying degrees. For Mormons, this is their central claim to authority and their major difference from other forms of Christianity. For Hawaiians and other Polynesians, it is more subtle--part of being Hawaiian is to engage in receiving and understanding natural signs and visions (hoʻailona). I suspect Hawaiians found Mormon openness to revelation and signs to be similar to their own traditions.

When linking Polynesians to Mormon history, early Mormon missionaries speculated that Polynesians are the lost tribe from the House of Israel. The link lies with knowing that Hawaiians practiced customs similar to those of Israelites such as circumcision and ceremonies.

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38 Translated by Joseph Smith, Jr. The Doctrine and Covenants: Section 128, Verse 13. Additional to The Book of Mormon.


of purification relating to dead bodies, burials, and births.\textsuperscript{41} More specifically, Mormon scholars have alleged that the Polynesians are descendants of Lehi in the Book of Mormon through a character named Hagoth\textsuperscript{42}, a Nephite explorer believed to have set off to sea with his people and never returned. Some scholars believe Hagoth discovered and settled the Pacific Islands. During his presentation, “Gathering the Scattered Children of Lehi: Constructions of Whiteness and Israelite Lineage in the Pacific Islands Missions”,\textsuperscript{43} Stanley J. Thayne commented that it was George Q. Cannon’s inspiration through personal revelation to pronounce the Native Hawaiians to be descendants of Lehi, hence belonging to the lineage of Israel. Malo addresses this argument long before Cannon, but through Christianity by stating, “Perhaps these people are those spoken of in the Words of God as “the lost sheep of the House of Israel,” because on inspection we clearly see that the people of Asia are just like the inhabitants of these islands, of Tahiti and the lands adjacent.”\textsuperscript{44} This belief places the Native Hawaiians/Polynesians within a lineage of honor and respect and a somewhat chosen identity. The testimonies of the Polynesians and Native Hawaiians who believe they are descendants of Hagoth continue to be strengthened by these types of connections.

\textsuperscript{41} David Malo. \textit{Hawaiian Antiquities: Moolelo Hawai‘i}. Forgotten Books. Translation of Dr. N.B. Emerson’s of David Malo’s Hawaiian Antiquities. Published by the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum. Hawaiian Gazette CO., Ltd. 1903. Page 27. Taken from the Biographical Sketch of David Malo.

\textsuperscript{42} According to \textit{The Book of Mormon}, Hagoth was a Nephite explorer. Passage about Hagoth is in Alma 63:5-8 in the Book of Mormon.

\textsuperscript{43} This presentation was presented at the 44\textsuperscript{th} Mormon History Association Annual Conference titled, Mormonism and the Land of Lincoln: Intersections, Crossroads, and Dispersions. The conference was in Springfield, Illinois. May 21-24, 2009. I was present during the presentation.

\textsuperscript{44} David Malo. \textit{Hawaiian Antiquities: Moolelo Hawai‘i}. Forgotten Books. Translation of Dr. N.B. Emerson’s of David Malo’s Hawaiian Antiquities. Published by the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum. Hawaiian Gazette CO., Ltd. 1903. Page 6. Taken from the Biographical Sketch of David Malo.
As one can see, the history of Mormonism and its impact on Polynesians and Hawai‘i dates back well over 150 years. This interweaving of traditions and beliefs did not come without trials and tribulations. This history goes to show that negotiating between these two identities can and will be problematic and at odds with each other some of the time.
CHAPTER III

LA‘IE

When the Mormon Church bought 6000 acres of land on the north shore of O‘ahu for $12,000 in 1865, a plantation called La‘ie, they largely controlled the demographics of the area. The church leased the house lots to its members and in turn the members managed the town stores and owned and operated the sugar plantation. This “Old La‘ie,” as described by Hawaiian scholar, Hokulani K. Aikau, resembled many Polynesian towns where everyone lived together and ate together like one big family. This space was seen by insiders and outsiders in multiple ways—one being a place of refuge to cultivate a new religion where culture and religion could simultaneously exist, and another a tightly controlled space where identity was influenced by

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1 Map of O‘ahu taken from the Polynesian Cultural Center website: http://www.polynesia.com/oahu-map.html. La‘ie is the site of where the LDS Hawaiian Temple, BYU-Hawai‘i, and the Polynesian Cultural Center are located. (North Shore Area)

church predominance. Regardless, Aikau argues that the locals that lived there (mostly Hawaiians and Samoans) felt connected to the land and lived peaceably together.

As described by Aikau, two mighty events changed this small plantation village into a “New La‘ie”. One was the dedication of the Mormon temple in 1915 and the other was the opening of the PCC in 1963. The dedication of the temple brought many religious possibilities within the grasp of its members. The opportunities of temple work had been discussed frequently among the members in La‘ie and they finally were able to partake of the blessings that a temple was to provide; such as being sealed as families for all eternity, genealogy work, endowments, and baptisms for the dead. The privileges of having a temple built in La‘ie also brought the migration of more members from New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa and French Polynesia to the small rural town of La‘ie. Many of the Polynesians that migrated to Utah for the purpose of being closer to the Salt Lake Temple also returned home to La‘ie. This influx of people and cultures increased the Mormon membership in La‘ie from around 8000 in 1910 to well over 9000 in 1915.\(^3\) This growth, albeit a great occurrence for the church, also created an increase in economic struggles and a clashing of cultures, languages, and traditional beliefs. In “Old La‘ie”, since there were few whites (haoles), church services were commonly conducted in Hawaiian. Yet with so many other cultures attending meetings, a common language was something to be addressed.

The second major event that sculpted La‘ie into what is now a hub of tourism was the creation of the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC) in 1963.\(^4\) As I described in the introduction,

\(^3\) R. Lanier Britsch. Moramona: The Mormons in Hawai‘i. The Institute for Polynesian Studies. La‘ie, Hawai‘i. 1989. Page 120.

the PCC is the Mormon Church-owned cultural theme park in La‘ie, which includes eight different Polynesian villages and other cultural components that focus on traditions and rituals of the different Polynesian populations. The PCC has been viewed as one of the most premier attractions and home to, “Hawai‘i’s most authentic lu‘au at Hawai‘i’s #1 paid attractions,” which draws in millions of tourists each year. While at the PCC, tourists have the opportunity to immerse themselves in Polynesian rituals and traditions, which include eating native food, lei making, weaving headbands from coconut leaves, and learning to twirl poi balls.

When visiting the Village of Hawai‘i at the PCC, one can find the lo‘i kalo, or flooded field of kalo (taro). Kalo is a tropical plant similar to potatoes and can be baked like a potato, pounded into poi, or even made into chips or rolls. The kalo leaves taste like spinach when cooked. But kalo has a deeper connection to the Hawaiians than simply serving as a form of nourishment. The inhabitants of La‘ie witnessed their land that was once sacred kalo fields become a site where thousands of tourists would walk through. The Hawaiians have looked toward kalo for spiritual guidance and connection to their land to provide a way of life. More importantly, in Hawaiian mythology, kalo, named Haloa, was the stillborn older brother of humans. To plant kalo is to care for the older brother. To eat kalo is to consume the mana of the ancestors. Puanani Burgess comments on what kalo means symbolically and spiritually, “After all, kalo is my ancestor. If I cannot name the people who are my ancestors, I know that I can go back to kalo. It is my first ancestor and there is comfort and strength in that knowledge.” As is

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5 Taken from the Polynesian Cultural Center Home Website: [http://www.polynesia.com/](http://www.polynesia.com/). The cost of tickets for admissions to the PCC range from general admission of $60 per person to the Super Ambassador package at $225 per person.

asserted by Burgess, maintaining a connection to the land is held sacred to many Hawaiians. As a result, tension arose between the Mormon business development approach and the local Hawaiians’ desire of maintaining a connection to the old way and land. Many Hawaiians and other newly relocated Polynesians relied on the land and ocean as a means to provide for one’s family. Mormon leaders revived these traditional practices as an opportunity to profit from the old ways by maintaining and re-casting the traditions and rituals within their own domain.

I began this section with information about the major events/influences that brought about the changing landscape of La‘ie through exploring its connotation and transformation and its meaning to community members. I also want to address the issues of colonization and identities and how they shape the narrative that is being told in La‘ie of the past and present. As stated before, I argue that through opportunities enabled by the Mormon Church and its enterprises, Polynesian Saints who inhabited Mormon colonies, such as La‘ie, Hawai‘i, including those working at the PCC and/or attending BYU-Hawai‘i today, are able in varying degrees to re-assert their cultural identities through the rituals and traditions they practice. This being the basis of my argument, I turn to native and non-native scholars that have addressed these theories and examples on the subject of traditions and beliefs in Hawai‘i. I will suggest that it is possible to be a part of a colonized group, while maintaining aspects of a decolonized identity through traditions and rituals.

Aikau approaches this issue by exploring the paradox between tradition and modernity. She does so by approaching this paradox in two ways; first, by exploring the multiple meanings of the same space through oral stories occurring at different times; second, she examines the

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multiple identities that many Polynesian Christians struggle with while trying to simultaneously maintain their cultural traditions and religious beliefs. She argues, “By placing traditional stories alongside more modern stories, I intend to trouble the distinction between tradition versus modernity and indigeneity in opposition to Christianity, in this case Mormonism.”

She paints a picture of changes in La‘ie from four different perspectives through oral traditions and stories; Old La‘ie, A Polynesian Village, A Plantation Town and New La‘ie. It is through these perspectives that she argues, “Embedded in the history of the LDS Church in La‘ie is a tension between an Indigenous sense of place and the introduction of Western notions of land as private property. This relationship is further complicated in La‘ie because the majority of the Kanaka Maoli [Natives] who live there are members of the church.”

This negotiation between Polynesian identity and Mormon identity is played out in the same area over many generations through this idea of sense of place and Western influence.

Aikau clearly provides us with great insight on this discourse of multiple identities and a changing landscape that is shaped by non-native contact. She emphasizes the expense of Mormon colonization on Hawaiian people in a negative, yet justified way. I can agree that colonization has affected the ethos of the old traditional way, such as the kapu system, and that the space of Hawai‘i has become more westernized. Although I agree with aspects of this argument, I also believe there have been moments in these Mormon Polynesian colonies, such as La‘ie, when the Polynesians have been able to re-experience their culture in a contemporary way. Paul Spickard elaborates on how this is played out at the PCC by its employees. He states, “In return for entertaining the tourists, they are able to make a living practicing their art full time.

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8 Ibid. Page 72.

9 Ibid. Page 72.
What such people are doing is using the tourist expectations encouraged by the colonial institution to make a space for themselves to do their own cultural work.”

During this moment of cultural experience, cultural identity is being cultivated and shared, thus allowing the Polynesian Mormons the opportunity to connect to their ancestors’ past. This in return creates a space were Polynesian are able to re-assert their ethnic identities.

There are those, however, such as Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask, who disagree with cultural performance in such contexts. She states in her book, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i* in regard to the western influences (tourism, environmental degradation, land dispossession, cost of living) placed upon Hawaiian traditions, “While this propaganda is churned out to local residents, the commercialization of Hawaiian culture proceeds with calls for more sensitive marketing of our Native values and practices. After all, a prostitute is only as good as her income-producing talents. These talents, in Hawaiian terms, are the hula; the generosity, or aloha, of our people; the u‘i, or youthful beauty of our women and men; and the continuing allure of our lands and waters, that is, our place, Hawai‘i.”

She argues that the commercialization of Hawaiian culture continues to be practiced without really knowing the traditions beyond their meaning and these traditions and customs continue to be marketed for profit by others, who are not Native Hawaiians. This same argument can be made in regards to the Mormon Church’s influence in La‘ie, more specifically the PCC. She continues, “Thus hula dancers wear clownlike makeup, don costumes from a mix of


Polynesian cultures, and behave in a manner that is smutty and salacious rather than powerfully erotic. The distance between smutty and the erotic is precisely the distance between Western culture and Hawaiian culture.”

For some tourists, a Hawaiian visit would not be complete without hula performances that take place at hotels and resorts, or a visit to the PCC. Throughout the year there are festivals, tours, and competitions hosted at the PCC. I have had the opportunity to visit the PCC multiple times, however, at no time during any of my visits at the PCC did I find the hula dancers to be clownlike or smutty. The PCC website refers to their hula as follows; “the dancers often take special pride in their appearance, sometimes using elaborate, even elegant costumes with beautiful floral accents. The headbands of ancient times, which were made of greenery, are now intricately braided with colorful flowers and leaves into what is usually called a haku lei. Some dancers and their hula ‘families’ spend hours and hours gathering and preparing these lei and other adornments.” At the PCC, I felt that the students and employees performing the dances and traditions expressed a sense of pride for the culture. I also felt the aloha spirit and witnessed the beauty of the people through dance, song and traditional practices that some Hawaiian critics, like Trask, claim to have been commercialized by westerners.

Trask’s work is useful for me to attempt to understand how Native Hawaiians feel about western colonization. She helps me remind myself to be conscious of how I view the situation versus someone who partakes in these traditions. I have to also acknowledge that changes may have occurred between the time of Trask’s early argument and my visits to the PCC and Hawai‘i. Trask’s views do warrant some empathy; however, to expect the ancient ways to flourish

12 Ibid. Page 144.

13 Taken from the Polynesian Cultural Center Home Website: http://www.polynesia.com/
unchanged in a modernized world seems impossible and risks missing the significance of lived tradition in its in-betweeness manifestations.

Aikau’s and Trask’s scholarly work inform us of the real, undeniable cost of colonization, which has directly or indirectly resulted in maintaining Hawai‘i’s racial hierarchies. It is unquestionable that Mormonism has played a role in the colonization of Hawai‘i. Although both Aikau and Trask have strong arguments, I still argue that Mormonism is a contributor to the success of Polynesians maintaining traditions and beliefs of the past in the present time in La‘ie and other areas that have a large population of Polynesian Mormons (Utah Area). In reference to R. Orsi’s arguments about lived religion, the practice of traditional rituals of the past in the present can be seen as lived religion filling the gaps left unfilled by institutional religion. Furthering that argument, I invoke the work of John Charlot when he discusses the living experience of the traditional religion of the Polynesians. He writes, “There are many reasons for the continuation of the old religion. Most basically, Polynesians still experience it as true. They still meet the gods their forefathers told them about. They still feel the protection of their deified ancestor...Polynesian religion is really a description of Polynesian experience.” In formulating this argument I turn to a few theories and examples that provide a different perspective on the subject of traditions and beliefs in Hawai‘i.

In his article, “Courting Culture: Unexpected Relationships between Religion and Law in Contemporary Hawai‘i”, Greg Johnson analyzes the legal and cultural ramifications of engaging western laws in claiming one’s identity and cultural traditions, with specific reference to NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act 1990). Through the law,

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Johnson argues, Native Hawaiians have in some ways become more Hawaiian. By maneuvering through the western legal process, Hawaiians have brought forth their histories and traditions of the past and have firmly placed them in the present. Johnson continues, “While surely silencing many, law also provides stages for people to find and project their voices in the process of articulating cultural narratives.”

Connections through genealogy to one’s ancestors, canoeing, agricultural practices, dance/hula and past traditions have been vital in redefining and recreating Polynesian identities and histories. For example, Edward Halealoha Ayau and Ty Kawika Tengan argue that by conducting these cultural protocols and in-depth genealogy searches that native pride and awareness has increased. They write, “The original anxieties associated with the conduct of the cultural protocols have blossomed into strong expressions of Native Hawaiian pride and a renewed sense of cultural identity.”

I use the example of the PCC to reinforce this argument of how these practices and traditions are being nourished and reintroduced to the community. In reference to this argument I rely on R. Orsi, who elegantly argues, "The precise configuration of the relation between the present and the past is not inherent in the nature of history but is constituted by historians and others engaged in the work of remembering (and forgetting) as they tell stories and write histories out of the needs, desires, and fears of their present circumstances.”

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Hawaiian, Samoan, Tongan, etc., but do not discover the meaning of their ethnic background or their cultural context until they work in this culturally enhanced environment. At the same time, as church members and PCC employees, a spiritual self is being created along with a cultural self and two dominant lifestyles are now interweaved and accepted widely in this community.

Venice Wineera, a New Zealand Maori Scholar and a former PCC vice president, tells of what Polynesians receive from working at the PCC. “What the PCC gives in return to these expatriate Polynesians from their work is, in the Maori term, turangawaewae, or a place to stand with pride as tangata whenua (local tribal people) of the PCC marae. Occupying this place, employees cross daily boundaries of culture, church, and corporate enterprise as they respond to the requirements of their identities’ separate components and the demands of the job of representing themselves to others. This Polynesian concept of a place to stand from which to represent oneself to strangers and visitors is inherent in the authenticity of the place itself.”

At the PCC, the recreation and practice of rituals performed by the Polynesians becomes regarded as authentic not only to themselves, but to the visitors watching them as well. I further this argument by using Tengan’s argument for claiming one’s identity for oneself. He writes, “It is through discursive practice-ritual performance, talk story, book writing--that we come to know who we are and claim some semblance of (co) authorship in our lives as Hawaiian men.”

Pualani Kanahele, who is known for her leadership of Hui Malama (an active Native Hawaiian group that is in involved in the repatriation movement), argues, “Both worlds-logic and feeling-
have to work side by side in order for us to maintain our identity, and in order for us to be good members of our society.”

Here she is referring to the logic world as being the Christian and Western world and the feeling world as rhythm and pulses of the world of Hawai‘i. She refers to both of these worlds as a coexisting world in one place at the same time--this one place being where the ritual or tradition is being performed.

To further this argument, Ben Finney, a scholar on the work of the Hokule‘a (a double-hull voyaging canoe that is modeled after the characteristics of the double canoes of the past) writes, “This unanticipated reproduction of multiple voyaging between Hawai‘i and Tahiti, and of the way to sail through the late-spring migration window to Aotearoa, not only brings us closer to the manner of voyaging portrayed in the legends, but also evokes a quintessentially Polynesian way of thinking about and employing oral traditions that eludes us if we examine those traditions solely through Western analytical lenses.”

Like the Hokule‘a, the students in the Hawaiian Studies Program at BYU-Hawai‘i and employees at the PCC, have embarked on this same journey, by constructing and voyaging their own vessel, the Iosepa (first launched in 2001). This recreation of the old traditional ways of voyaging has the BYU-Hawai‘i students

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22 The mission of the Hawaiian Studies Program has two major parts: Malama i ke aina (Care for the land) and Malama i ke kai (Care for the ocean). Taken from the BYU-Hawai‘i website.

23 The Iosepa canoe was funded, in large part, by a grant from the W.K.Kellog Foundation and is a vital component of the Hawaiian Studies Program at the Brigham Young University Hawai‘i, serving not only as a "floating classroom," but also as a representation of the strength the Hawaiian culture is gaining. Taken from the Iosepa Blog: http://iosepablog.blogspot.com/
reconnecting to their ancestry’s old ways. The Iosepa canoe not only provided the students and the crewmembers with insight to understanding their past and culture, it can also be seen as a metaphor for the voyage of Polynesian saints from Hawai‘i to Utah in 1880s, which I will explore in the next section. Feki, a student at BYU- Hawai‘i, who assisted on the construction of the Iosepa canoe wrote on a blog, “I have learned so much from the canoe about my culture to the point that when I came back from serving a full-time mission, I decided to change my major from English to Hawaiian Studies. I have tried to become fluent in ‘Olelo Hawai‘i, but it’s not quite there yet. I can understand a lot more now, and I have a greater appreciation and understanding for my Hawaiian culture.”24 This appreciation of discovering one’s identity assists in the process of decolonization for his people and himself.

Tengan addresses this process of decolonization when he talks about the traumatized memories and shame that comes along with generational colonization. In reference to the healing and strategies needed in this process of decolonization, he argues, “Not only are these efforts at decolonizing the mind, but they are also acts of self-determination as community members seek to assert control over the destiny of the lahui while defining the self (through group membership) as Hawaiians struggling with the burdens of history.”25 Tengan continues, “I argue that healing the historic pains and memories of colonization on all levels represents the most fundamental principle of ‘Oiwi decolonization and recovery of nation, for after the healing comes the rebuilding.”26 Whether these traditions are regarded as authentic or invented, the

24 Ibid. Blog.


26 Ibid. Page 64.
practice of these forms of rituals assist in the healing process. Johnson writes, “If we resist being drawn into authenticity debates, we preserve an analytical site from which to listen for the multiple but undeniable articulations of Hawaianness expressed through these vessels of culture. These canoes work together to prompt discussions about--even argument over--the boundaries, meanings, and responsibilities of being and representing Hawaiians.”

Much like the canoeing, the performances of dance, song, and traditions at the PCC are a form of “tradition in action.”

Pualani Kanahele writes in regard to her husband’s response in questioning her ability to maintain multiple identities of being both a pro-activist Hawaiian and faithful Christian, “We were raised in a Christian setting and we are Mormon. But the people around us were Hawaiian and spoke in Hawaiian. People went to school and learned Hawaiian; we went to the ranch in the summer and everyone there was Hawaiian. And even if they were Christian, they still had their puʻolo (wrapped offering), and their puʻolo told them how to take care of their ancestors.”

By living in a Polynesian community, like Laʻie, Polynesian Mormons still have the ability to remain connected to their past despite appearing as if their identity was a creation of Mormon colonization. Instead, I feel that they were able to take the Mormon traditions and fit them within their own Polynesian identities.

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“Here lie the honored Polynesian pioneers who have sealed their testimonies in dust that God lives, Jesus is the Christ, all the presidents of the Church are Prophets of God, and the Church of Jesus Christ is true.”

1 Photo of the sculpture that was done by Jan Fisher, an LDS sculptor from La‘ie, Hawai‘i of a Polynesian warrior. “The bust sits atop a granite shaft with plaques telling the story of Iosepa and listing the names of the original settlers. Also listed are as many names as have been recorded of the 79 people interred in the graveyard.” Taken from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – Church News website: “Iosepa: Hawaiian Gem Brightened Utah Desert” September 2, 1989. Photo taken by Dominic F. Martinez. October 2009.

2 This quote is taken from the memorial at Iosepa cemetery in Toole County, Utah (Skull Valley). I copied this quote from the memorial in October of 2009. There are 79 graves in the cemetery.

3 Photo of the graveyard with landscape below. Shows what the environment of Skull Valley was like for the Polynesians. Photo taken by Dominic F. Martinez. October 2009.
This section transitions from discussion of the Iosepa canoe built at the PCC to metaphoric dialogue of the symbolism this canoe has to the Polynesian saints who migrated to Iosepa, Utah. This voyage takes on a larger meaning of both Polynesian identity and Mormon identity. The scattering of language, culture, traditions and people play out in this diasporic environment.

Many Polynesian Saints migrated to Utah in the late 1880s. On August 28, 1889 the Polynesians who had migrated to Utah were moved to Skull Valley in Tooele County, Utah, which is surrounded by the Stansbury Mountains and Cedar Mountains. The immigration brought well over 200 Polynesians to the colony, which became known as Iosepa in honor of Joseph F. Smith, who had served multiple missions in the Hawaiian Islands. It was the desire of the Polynesians to come to Zion where they would have an opportunity to do their temple work for themselves and their ancestors.

Present day narratives about Iosepa convey a sense of the Polynesians’ relationship to this space. I argue that there are two dominant narratives that are present: one, the Polynesians’ diasporic connection to Iosepa and two, the Mormon idea of a promised land and the symbolic voyage or journey to this promised land. In Iosepa, Polynesians stayed faithful through church attendance and temple work despite the long journey to the temple in Salt Lake City, which was still under construction until 1893. Meanwhile, the Polynesians still managed to maintain their identities in this strange land through cultural song, dance, and the feeling of family oneness to ensure their traditions were not lost.

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The layout of the settlement was well planned, but certainly these tropical Polynesians were out of their element in the bone-dry desert of Utah and struggled to adapt to the new climate, new language, and new foods. Their time at Iosepa was spent transforming this foreign environment into a community with irrigation, a modern water system, trees, buildings, and homes. Although the soil was not ideal for crops, they managed to create a clean and thriving farm town. The Polynesian families at Iosepa worked for the church-controlled Iosepa Agriculture and Stock Co., which continued to provide financial support. This, however, caused underlying resentment from both white members of the church and the Polynesians. The white members felt burdened by taking care of Polynesians, much like caring for one’s children, and the Polynesians felt, at times, that their work was for nothing since they did not own their homes or their crops.\(^5\) This caused unhappiness similar to the tensions among the members and the Church in La’ie.

The Polynesian Saints were not accustomed to the harsh Utah climate; the summers brought temperatures that caused the settlers to bake in the hot dry desert and the icy cold winters were definitely not any easier to endure. These challenges took their toll, and at times, it seemed that the cemetery grew faster than the town. During the time period of 1907-1916, 48 babies were born, while 29 people died.\(^6\) Adding to Iosepa's difficulties was the small outbreak of leprosy in the 1890s. Only three Polynesians contracted the feared disease, but

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they were kept isolated from the rest of the residents in a shack about one mile away from the Polynesian colony, thus leading to the formation of Utah's only known leper colony.

Even today, very few Mormons know of the history of Iosepa or that there was even a place in Utah called Iosepa. Now, the only evidence that exists of the Polynesian colony that once flourished are a few old fire hydrants and a small cemetery. This cemetery encases those who died in Iosepa before 1917, and sadly, many are babies and children. Also buried here are modern day Polynesians who felt culturally connected to this sacred area even though they had never lived in Iosepa. In the fall of 2009, I was able to visit Iosepa, Utah and while there I witnessed first hand the influence and interweaving that Polynesian traditions and Mormon beliefs have on each other. At the cemetery there is a large statue of a Polynesian warrior, which could be modeled after King Kamehameha, that stands about 40 feet high. On the back side of this memorial is the following statement: “Here lie the honored Polynesian pioneers who have sealed their testimonies in dust that God lives, Jesus is the Christ, all the presidents of the Church are Prophets of God, and the Church of Jesus Christ is true.”  

I know that this statue stands in memory of those who lost their lives in building a community, but I also view this statue as a symbol of tradition and beliefs for two different cultures and belief systems that were able to be practiced simultaneously. During that same visit, I had the opportunity to speak with two Hawaiian gentlemen and their children, who were visiting the resting place of their mother who passed away in 2005. Even though their mother never lived in Iosepa, she felt a connection to the history and love of the land and people that lived there in the past.

7 This quote is taken from the memorial at Iosepa cemetery in Toole County, Utah (Skull Valley). I copied this quote from the memorial in October of 2009. There are 79 graves in the cemetery.
This love of the land and ancestors has brought about the annual Memorial Day gathering at the site of the cemetery, which was organized by Vermin Hawes from Utah in 1980, a direct descendant of two Iosepa families. Hawes and a few others rebuilt the fence around the cemetery to help beautify the historical site. Since then Church leaders, such as President Gordon B. Hinckley, have attended this gathering and a picture of his visit is documented at the front gate of the cemetery. At this annual event, a reconnection to the past is established through chants, dance, songs, lu’au style foods, and stories. Nimachia Hernandez writes in her article, “Indigenous Identity and Story”, “The ancient Native storytelling tradition also encourage healing through the telling of traditional stories and connect indigenous people to their ancient identities, thus ensuring their survival in the natural world,”8 she continues, “Through story they reconstruct traditional relationships, subtly reinforcing the principle of homecoming, unity, and wholeness for the audience as well as the characters.”9 Ned Aikau, who has been attending these Memorial Day gatherings since his family’s move from Hawai‘i to Utah concurred with this idea of reconnecting to one’s ancestry by saying, “We come here to be Hawaiian, We come so that we can laugh loud, sing loud, and talk loud.”10

Referring back to R. Orsi, when speaking about the concept of lived religion, this diasporic space that has been created at Iosepa allows Polynesian Mormons a meaningful and workable sense of the institutional, ritual and theological structures with which they live. The Polynesians who migrated to Iosepa were able to live their religion and their culture in an

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9 Ibid. Page 77.

unwelcoming and unfamiliar space. Iosepa provides present day Polynesians on the mainland with a place in which the hunt for a connection to their Polynesian pioneer members is fulfilled. Even today, these diasporic members are able to re-assert their identities without having to go back to their national territory to feel connected to the past.

To emphasize this idea of cultural diaspora, I evoke Johnson’s research on Hawaiian inmates who were transferred to mainland prisons. He explains how these inmates had to seek familiarity to find their social niche while incarcerated, forcing them to recover their cultural language and ethnicity. I am not attempting to relate the Polynesian saints’ experiences with those of convicted inmates, however, I do find the behavior of the inmates when removed from their homeland intriguing and convincing for my argument. Johnson states, “In this way...Hawaiianess has become a greater value for them in prison than it ever was on the “outside”. … In other words, prisoners identify with Hawaiianess precisely as a means to cope with their absence from it.”\(^{11}\) Much like the Hawaiian prisoners, modern day Polynesian Mormons rely on Iosepa to provide them with a space in which they are able to revive their cultural ethnicity and background as a memory work method for their disconnectedness from their national territory. Iosepa provides them with an isolated place where they become part of the once thriving Polynesian community, and their stories can be passed down to new generations of Polynesian saints. Aikau writes, “For the people I interviewed, attending the annual Iosepa Festival is experienced as a contemporary gathering place where adults regenerate themselves and young people are raised to know themselves as Polynesian Latter-day Saints.

Iosepa is a place where they were emotionally nourished and fortified so that at the end of the long weekend they could return to communities where many felt isolated, misunderstood, and lonely.”¹² In some cases, these moments of connecting to one’s past are enough to provide relief from an environment in which they may be one of the few Polynesians in their community or workplace.

As mentioned before, the second dominant narrative of Iosepa is the symbolic voyage of traveling to the Promised Land. Similar to the Mormon pioneers who settled and transformed the Salt Lake Valley into a modern day Zion, the Polynesian saints were given the same challenge of becoming pioneers both in Laʻie and Iosepa. In relating Laʻie to Iosepa at the dedication of the bronze bust at the Iosepa graveyard, Hinckley stated, “When Laʻie was first acquired, it was a barren place, and Joseph F. Smith made a prophecy that if the people would be true and faithful, waters would become available to them and it should become a garden spot in the beautiful islands of the Pacific. Similarly, Iosepa began as a barren place, but its residents made it fruitful and beautiful.”¹³ This message of faith, desire and hard work resonates with the narrative behind being a pioneer. The Polynesians cultivated this space and fulfilled its mission in successfully creating a space for the gathering of Mormon Polynesians in both the past and present. Whether Iosepa is defined as a Polynesian colony or Mormon Church-owned community, the two narratives that are told about this space represent the interweaving of both the Polynesians traditions and identities with Mormon beliefs.


¹³ Taken from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – Church News website: “Iosepa: Hawaiian Gem Brightened Utah Desert” September 2, 1989.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

One year before Joseph Smith Jr. was killed, he stated, “Don’t let a single corner of the earth go without a mission.”¹ Six years after his death, the foundation of a mission in Hawai‘i was being laid. The first Mormon missionaries in Hawai‘i hoped to spread their gospel among the white settlers; instead, those who responded favorably were the Polynesians. Much like the other Christian denominations in Hawai‘i, the Mormon Church became a factor in the colonization of Polynesians. Because of similar cultural roots, alleged genealogical ties, and feelings of being outcasts, Mormons and Polynesians felt connected to each other. In the unfolding of their over-lapping histories, the Mormon Church indirectly and unintentionally preserved the Polynesian identity survival of Hawaiians through the colonization process of Mormon colonies La‘ie, Hawai‘i and Iosepa, Utah.

I argued that by exploring the construction and use of identity, Polynesians are able to stay connected to their historical roots and ancestral ties while interweaving and balancing another dominant lifestyle like Mormonism. I believe that this idea of negotiating between a cultural and a religious lifestyle, termed “in-betweeness” by R. Orsi, is attainable and evident in Polynesian Mormons, whether deliberate or unintentional. They are part of a institutionalized religion in which members are encouraged to obey the Word of Wisdom² and the law of chastity,


² According to the LDS Website, The Word of Wisdom is a law of health revealed by the Lord for the physical and spiritual benefit of His children. On February 27, 1833, as recorded in section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord revealed which foods are good for us to eat and which substances
create families, serve others, faithfully study the scriptures and attend church meetings as well as fulfill time consuming leadership callings in their wards and stakes. As I have argued, some Polynesian Mormons have embraced Mormon teachings, practices, and lifestyles while simultaneously sustaining and re-asserting their cultural identities. The result, in R. Orsi’s terms, is that a lived religion is established and the culmination of both religion and culture become one.

What I have learned from my research is that recognizing what it means to be both Polynesian and Mormon is a learning process for Polynesian Mormons to first understand and then live their dual identities. I have argued that Mormon colonies such as La‘ie and Iosepa assist with this in-between negotiation for members and serve as historical constituents of their heritage, customary dances, foods and traditions. Tengan writes, “In the Hawaiian cultural nationalist movement, mo‘olelo--narratives of the past and present both written and remembered-become potent and affect-rich ‘cultural tools.’” These cultural tools provide Polynesians with the necessary histories that can motivate them to find their identities whether they reside on their homeland, such as La‘ie or are uprooted to an unfamiliar territory, such as Iosepa. Moreover, these communities are structured spaces where the daily course of life shapes experiences that are both Polynesian and Mormon not because people always aim for this result, but because their everyday lives lead to this result. This, it seems to me, is a very important aspect of “lived religion.”

These multiple meanings of Polynesianess and Mormonism have been played out in both commercialized settings like La‘ie with the PCC and non-commercialized settings like Iosepa.

are not good for the human body. He also promised health, protection, knowledge, and wisdom to those who obey the Word of Wisdom.

Whether participating in dances and traditions at PCC or wanting to be buried in a cemetery thousands of miles away from your ancestors’ homeland, I argued that, in varying degrees, Polynesian Mormons affiliated with these spaces have been able to re-assert their cultural identities through the rituals and traditions they practice and the opportunities afforded to them by the Mormon Church. Canoeing, dancing, chanting, eating, or talking story all create a cultural pride and self-determination. Thus, a connection to their past is created.

Mormon Polynesians have to negotiate for themselves, individually and collectively, the meaning of their native identity and the Mormon identity. This interweaving of both Polynesian traditions and identity with Mormon beliefs was and is still very present today not only for those who still reside on native territory, but for those who have left their homelands as well. Once they find a connection to a historical space where stories and traditions are reborn and taught, the cycle is repeated for future generations.
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