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Decolonizing Lamanite Studies—A Critical and Decolonial Indigenist Perspective

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Abstract: The emergence of Lamanite Studies exemplifies the need for decolonial and Indigenous-centered reevaluations of Mormon–Indigenous relations. This article advocates for the reclamation of Indigenous identity independent of the constraints imposed by Mormon doctrine. The incorporation of Indigenous genealogies into Mormon theology results in epistemic violence, disconnecting Indigenous peoples from their ancestral identities and substituting the latter with the settler/invader colonial construct of “Lamanite”. This paper advocates for the decolonization of Indigenous identities within Mormonism, emphasizing the need for a radical intervention that prioritizes Indigenous sovereignty and self-definition over the maintenance of colonial categories. I present approaches and scholarship in Lamanite Studies that align with Indigenous land and spiritual repatriation, promoting the restoration of Indigenous epistemologies to Indigenous communities. Theoretical colonialism must be supplemented by grassroots initiatives that empower Indigenous communities to reclaim their spiritual and cultural identities.

Keywords: Mormonism; Lamanite Studies; Critical Indigenous Studies; indigenous research; indigenous politics and religion; decolonization



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1. Introduction: Decolonizing Lamanite Studies—A Critical Indigenist Perspective

The development of the “Lamanite” identity by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) reflects the continuous contradictions that exist between settler/invader colonial religiosity and Indigenous sovereignty. “Disentangling Binaries and the Rise of Lamanite Studies”, an article published in *Religion Compass* by Matthew Garrett, aims to “historicize and validate Lamanite identity” by analyzing the development of Lamanite identity and Indigenous peoples’ interactions with it (Garrett 2018). I argue that Garrett’s approach may reinforce the settler/invader¹ colonial frameworks that characterize Mormonism’s relationship with Indigenous communities, perpetuating existing racial and cultural hierarchies. My work on Mormonism and the white possessive presents a critical Indigenous and decolonial perspective, contending that Lamanite identity results from genealogical violence aimed at integrating Indigenous whakapapa (genealogy) into the Church’s soteriological framework (see Simon 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, n.d.; Simon and Le Grice n.d.).

The Lamanite identity fundamentally derives from the Book of Mormon’s account of two ancient Israelite groups—the Nephites and Lamanites—who allegedly migrated to the Americas. The Lamanites, portrayed as insubordinate and afflicted with dark skin, were characterized as spiritually deficient yet eventually capable of redemption. Mormon doctrine posits that Lamanites are descendants of ancient peoples and are foretold to

flourish spiritually via the embrace of the LDS message. This founding myth established a dichotomy between white righteousness and dark degradation, while also laying the foundations for Mormonism's racial theology.

Beginning in the nineteenth century and intensifying in the twentieth, the Lamanite label was systematically applied to Indigenous peoples throughout the Western Hemisphere—including Native Americans, Mexicans, Central and South Americans, and Polynesians. Through its global missionary impulse, the LDS Church expanded the Lamanite designation beyond the Americas, increasingly targeting Māori, Samoans, Tongans, and other Indigenous Pacific populations. Missionaries construed scriptural individuals such as Hagoth—an obscure Nephite mariner referenced in the Book of Mormon—as ancestral connections to Polynesians, so integrating these Indigenous identities into a theological lineage based on fictive Israelite ancestry through Hagoth (see [Simon 2024](#)). This expansion served both as a mechanism for spiritual conversion and as a means of genealogical appropriation, wherein the Church effectively supplanted Indigenous origin narratives with its own redeeming mythology.

My analysis positions Lamanite Studies within a comprehensive critique of the systemic racism present in the LDS Church and its function in upholding white patriarchal salvation as the normative framework for spiritual belonging. While the Church has issued Gospel Topics essays and official statements in recent years explicitly rejecting any doctrinal basis for dark skin as a divine curse (see [LDS Church 2013](#) ("Race and the Priesthood"); [Harris 2023, 2024](#)), these repudiations remain superficial when considered alongside enduring ficto-mythological connections between Māori and Tāngata Moana and Book of Mormon figures such as Hagoth (see [Simon 2024, n.d.](#)). By reframing—but not dismantling—the racialized narratives of Mormon theology, the Church retains the authority to define Indigenous identity on its own terms. These narratives operate less as sincere theological revision than as strategic manifestations of white possessiveness: they continue to appropriate and subsume Indigenous whakapapa (genealogy), undermining the mana (power/authority) and tapu (sacred) embedded in Indigenous spiritual frameworks. In doing so, they buttress structures that privilege white Mormonism's identity-making while purposefully marginalizing Indigenous sovereignty and spirituality ([Simon 2022b, 2024, n.d.](#)).

[Garrett's \(2018\)](#) inability to critically examine and/or explain the settler/invasor colonial foundations of Lamanite "religio-colonial" identity sustains what I describe as "religious settler/invasor colonialism", wherein Indigenous peoples are transformed into objects of salvation to validate LDS theological assertions. The Church's framing of Indigenous identity through the Book of Mormon constitutes a spiritual dispossession, undermining Indigenous peoples' sovereignty over their histories and identities (see [Simon 2022b, 2023b, 2024, n.d.](#)). I show that this process reflects the mechanisms of land theft and cultural erasure enacted by white possessive governments, framing the Church as an agent of settler/invasor colonial violence disguised in the rhetoric of being purposefully "divine" (see [Simon 2022b](#)).

My work focuses on ongoing diversity and ethnic and racial inclusivity and diversity challenges within the Church and highlights that the Church's theological frameworks are entrenched in and entwined with settler/invasor colonial and white possessive and supremacy origins. Racial hierarchies persist within the Church through theology and doctrines that have traditionally regarded dark skin as a divine curse (see [Brooks 2020](#); [Mueller 2017](#); [Murphy 1999, 2005](#); [Murphy and Baca 2020](#); [Bringhurst 2018](#); [Aikau 2012](#); [Simon 2022b](#); [Talmage 2019](#); [Herman 2020](#); [Tecun 2022](#); [Tenney 2018](#); [Harris 2024](#)). This points to a broader unwillingness to rectify theological racial legacies in Mormonism. My critique illuminates the need to address misappropriation within Mormon culture, particularly that of whakapapa and other cultural items (see [Simon 2023b, 2024, n.d.](#)).

Genuine engagement with Indigenous identity in Mormonism, from a decolonial and critical Indigenous view, requires the dismantling of racialized structures that influence Church leadership, theology and practices.

This article furthers my advocacy for an Indigenous-centered and decolonial re-examination of Mormon–Indigenous relations. By giving more prominence to Indigenous epistemologies, I critique the simplicity of the binaries used by [Garrett \(2018\)](#) and contend that Lamanite Studies, in his proposed and present form, perpetuate a settler/invader colonial agenda as opposed to encouraging genuine Indigenous agency. The focus on settler/invader narratives in crafting Indigenous identities destabilizes the capacity of Māori and other Indigenous groups for self-representation, thus continuing settler/invader colonial dynamics masked as religious scholarship. This is a key feature of, for example, the enduring presence of Mormon apologetics in Mormon Studies. From a Critical Indigenous and decolonial perspective, Garrett’s rereading of Lamanite identity functions less as genuine critique and more as a form of apologetics—it cushions Mormonism’s settler/invader colonial foundations by repackaging them in more palatable language, rather than deconstructing the underlying theological claims that enable spiritual dispersion and white possessiveness.

This essay advocates for the reclaiming of Indigenous identity outside—and in clear opposition—to the colonial construct of “Lamanite”. I contend that Indigenous peoples must declare and reassert their *mana motuhake* (Indigenous sovereignty) over their own cultural and spiritual narratives rather than trying to salvage an identity anchored in settler/invader colonial and racist theology. This involves deconstructing the whole concept of “Lamanite” as a genuine category rather than allowing any LDS Church attempt to absorb Indigenous identity into white patriarchal salvation. Decolonized Lamanite Studies, in my vision, completely address colonial structures and enable Indigenous people to define identity on their own terms, therefore restoring spiritual and cultural autonomy. This is particularly required for non-members of the Church and those who hold deep-rooted identities based in the epistemology and ontologies of our respective cultures.

2. Background

Matthew [Garrett \(2018\)](#) investigates the changing definition and purpose of “Lamanite” inside both the LDS Church and Mormon Studies in “Disentangling Binaries and the Rise of Lamanite Studies”. Starting with the Book of Mormon story from the eighteenth century, which shows Indigenous people of the Americas as descendants of a fallen Israelite lineage—more especially, the Lamanites, who were cursed with a dark skin because of their rebellion against the Nephites—he moves on to describe how Indigenous people are framed in this theological sense as spiritually deprived but salvageable via the restoration gospel. Garrett notes that self-identification with the Lamanite identity by Indigenous people such as the Catawba, Northwestern Shoshone, and Nahua Mormons precedes the mid-twentieth-century institutional embrace of this title. Such early statements show that Indigenous agency—in adopting, rejecting, or rereading Lamanite identity—was obvious well before formal Church approval. Still, during the middle of the 20th century, LDS leaders started aggressively advocating Lamanite identity as a crucial eschatological marker, incorporating it into institutional theology and tying it to more general missionary tactics all throughout the Americas and Polynesia. Garrett underplays the degree of early, autonomous participation with the Lamanite label among Indigenous converts, but he emphasizes how the intersection of growing Mormon theology and Indigenous religious subjectivity molded the ways Lamanitism was experienced and challenged on the ground. According to [Garrett \(2018\)](#), the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were central to the development of the Lamanite narrative (and Lamanitism).² This underscores the

focus that LDS Church leaders place on indigeneity within their prophetic and theological framework, which sees Indigenous people as spiritually fallen yet selected for divine redemption through Mormonism. Initiatives like the Indian Student Placement Program illustrate the use of educational advancement as a means of co-optation through Mormon assimilationist policies that strengthen Mormon ideas of salvation and race (see [Boxer 2015](#); [Morgan 2009](#); [Garrett 2016](#); [Riggs 2008](#); [Hafen and Rensink 2019](#)). [Garrett \(2018\)](#) argues that these programs allowed the Church to take advantage of Lamanitism and the religious-colonial identity as a way to advance assimilation. This sheds light on the duality in Mormon-Indigenous relations.

As [Garrett \(2018\)](#) explains, in the mid-twentieth century, Indigenous and Latino converts adopted the Lamanite identity, redefining the term as a tool for spiritual empowerment and social mobility. In this context, Lamanitism was a way to address marginalization, exclusion, and colonial legacies, with promises of divine help supplying hope in the face of systematic poverty and oppression. According to [Garrett \(2018\)](#), this era demonstrated the adaptability and resilience of Indigenous peoples, who steered and renegotiated the limits of Mormon theology for the benefit of their communities. Yet, I believe that his analysis overestimates the emancipatory potential of Lamanitism. In doing so, it also underestimates the role of settler/invasor colonial foundations and white patriarchal salvation (see [Simon 2022b](#)). [Garrett](#) elides how the very category arises in a theology predicated on Indigenous spiritual weakness and supports assimilation into white Mormon standards. This focus on agency under the colonial framework hides the systemic violence inherent in determining Indigenous identity based on eschatological goals of a settler/invasor religion. [Garrett's](#) narrative essentially underplays how Lamanitism functions less as a vehicle of liberation than as a tool of spiritual colonization—one that reorients Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty towards conforming with white patriarchal salvation rather than dismantling the colonial relations that generate marginalization in the first place.

[Garrett \(2018\)](#) also notes the steady decline in the official use of the term “Lamanite” in the twenty-first century. This change is linked to evolving Church policies aimed at reducing the emphasis on racialized theology. [Garrett \(2018\)](#) highlights that despite the institutional changes, Indigenous Mormons continue to engage with the Lamanite identity, actively reinterpreting its significance to resist, reclaim, or challenge Church narratives. The underlying argument here is that Lamanitism, as an identity, is a dynamic and contested area within Mormonism that justifies the fostering and development of a sub-field of Mormon Studies and a specific discipline, called “Lamanite Studies”.³

3. Disentangling Binaries: Matthew Garrett and Lamanite Identity

[Garrett \(2018\)](#) advocates for a more nuanced exploration of Mormon-Indigenous relations and challenges scholarship that simplifies the Indigenous Mormon experience as one of victimization and resistance to colonization. He promotes an ethnohistorical approach focusing on Indigenous agency and the intersections of race, religion, and power. [Garrett \(2018\)](#) recognizes the “colonial” dynamics in this context; however, his analysis reinterprets rather than deconstructs Lamanitism, proposing a reformist framework as opposed to a decolonial one. This approach aligns with the prevalent trend in Mormon Studies of refraining from critically engaging with and questioning the validity of Lamanitism and instead refocusing the attention on Indigenous interactions with the Church.

When examined through a decolonial and Critical Indigenous Studies perspective, [Garrett's \(2018\)](#) research may unintentionally work as an apology piece for Mormonism. It does so by continuing the institutional, systematic, and theological structures that define Indigenous peoples within the settler/invasorism of Mormonism. In his analysis, [Garrett](#) situates Lamanitism and the Lamanite identity as loci of negotiation, thereby implicitly

endorsing the Church's assertion and ownership of Indigenous identity while failing to critically address their epistemological validity. As I previously argued (Simon 2022a, 2024, In Press), these frameworks sustain "genealogical violence, they distort Indigenous genealogies or whakapapa to uphold the relevance and parameters of Mormon eschatology". Consequently, this article positions Garrett's (2018) research within the broader discourse on race, religion, identity, and settler/invader colonialism to advocate for more radical and equitable interventions that center Indigenous sovereignty or mana motuhake instead of the perpetuation of settler/invader colonial categories. To do so, this article aims to address the following research questions:

1. Why must Lamanite Studies, as articulated by Garrett (2018), be decolonized?
2. How does the theological framework surrounding Lamanite identity in the Book of Mormon contribute to the validation of settler and invader colonial paradigms?
3. How does the positionality of non-Indigenous scholars within Mormon Studies shape discussions of Lamanite identity?
4. How can the process of decolonizing Lamanite Studies be implemented?
5. How does Lamanite identity contribute to the ongoing genealogical and epistemic violence inflicted upon Indigenous peoples?
6. What significance does the notion of "refusal", as developed by Indigenous decolonial scholarship, hold in the critique of colonial frameworks such as Lamanitism?

With this in mind, the next section outlines my concerns regarding race and Indigeneity in Garrett's (2018) work.

4. Garrett's Indigenous Problem

Mormon theology is founded on white supremacy and settler/invader colonialism (see Simon 2022b; Colvin 2015; Colvin and Brooks 2018; Brooks 2020). The critique of the Book of Mormon's depiction of Indigenous people as Lamanites—that is, as a cursed and fallen group in need of salvation through assimilation into Mormon culture and teachings—reveals how this narrative functions as a tool of spiritual colonization rather than a benign theological metaphor (see Colvin 2018; Simon 2022b; Brooks 2020). This white possessive theological narrative reinforces the notion that whiteness is superior spiritually, embedding racial hierarchies within the LDS Church's missiology and eschatology efforts.⁴ There is a clear inability for the LDS Church to rectify the ongoing harm of its racializing history (Simon 2023a, 2023b, 2024). As Colvin (2018) shows, the racial history of the LDS Church copies the wider trends of religious paternalism and white oppression, thus upholding exclusionary structures in addition to the LDS Church's official racial discrimination. However, it should be noted that the Church cannot rectify the harm without repudiating the historical claims of the Book of Mormon (also see Simon 2023a).

The Church's initiative to classify Indigenous peoples as Lamanites is a form of spiritual colonization. Specifically, the incorporation of Indigenous whakapapa (genealogy) into Mormon theology leads to epistemic violence, separating Indigenous peoples from their ancestral identities, which are replaced with the Lamanite construct (Simon 2024). These acts of cultural erasure are part of a broader trend of Indigenous dispossession, similar to the appropriation of land by settler/invader colonial forces (Simon 2022b, 2023b, 2024, n.d.). Colvin (2018) supports this analysis, indicating that the Church's support of "gospel culture" serves as a universalizing tool that marginalizes Indigenous spiritual frameworks while elevating white, American middle-class values as the religious standards. This process negates Indigenous ontologies and reinforces a colonial framework that elevates the spiritual narratives of the colonizer above those of the colonized.

Additionally, in my work, I have identified Lamanitism as a racial ideology that constitutes a "zombie concept", namely, an outdated idea that is dead and cannot deal

with modern times but is kept alive to perpetuate the current power status quo (see [Simon 2022c, 2023a](#)). The LDS Church has adjusted its position and public discourse with regard to Lamanites; however, the foundational narratives of the Book of Mormon continue to maintain the settler/invader colonial perspective according to which Indigenous peoples are spiritually inferior but can achieve redemption through whiteness ([Simon 2022b](#)). The power structures that entrench white supremacy and possession indicate that the LDS Church's diversity-related initiatives fail to address this. In this line of thinking, [Murphy and Baca \(2016\)](#) supports my point by demonstrating how ingrained in settler/invader colonial ideas the Church's past behaviors and underlying narratives are even if it today openly condemns racism. This illustrates the limited impact that public rejection of racist ideas has on dismantling the core racial and colonial systems—what I refer to as the “zombie concept” of Lamanitism—that continue to uphold systematic white supremacy and shape church policies and community interactions (also see [Colvin 2015; Simon 2022b, 2023a, 2023b, 2024](#)).

Although efforts like the “Race and the Priesthood” (see [LDS Church 2013](#)) Gospel topics essay signal the recognition of historical injustices, they do not adequately effect the systemic changes required to dismantle established hierarchies ([Brooks 2018, 2020](#)). Authentic diversity requires both representation and the reformation of church governance to include Indigenous and non-white leadership at the highest levels. Meanwhile, the LDS Church's hesitance to cede authority over Indigenous narratives reflects a deep-seated dedication to preserving white patriarchal salvation as a core component of LDS identity and culture ([Simon 2022b, 2023a](#)).

Those who challenge the LDS Church's racial beliefs or advocate for decolonization or indigenization are typically ostracized or excommunicated; historical examples of this are George P. Lee and Margarito Bautista ([Quinn 1997; Murphy 1999, 2000; Garcia 2020; Pulido 2020](#)). These actions by Church leadership perpetuate a culture of silence, insularity, and conformity ([Simon 2023a](#)). [Colvin \(2017\)](#) also criticizes the LDS Church's disciplinary policies, claiming that opposition meets institutional resistance aimed at silencing critical Indigenous voices. The existing disciplinary framework employed by the LDS Church and its members seeks to safeguard their theological legitimacy. This occurs while marginalizing those who question the settler/invader colonial narratives within the group. Yet, notwithstanding the critiques directed at the LDS Church, targeted strategies for addressing colonial and racial narratives are available. A decolonial approach to the complete rejection of Lamanitism necessitates the reclamation of Indigenous spiritual frameworks distinct from Mormon theology ([Simon 2024](#)). In this regard, I ([Simon 2022a, 2023a](#)) highlight the significance of Indigenous-led scholarship in influencing the future of Mormon Studies, advocating for the integration of decolonial methodologies into academic and institutional discussions.

The diversity challenges encountered by the LDS Church are intricately connected to its settler/invader colonial origins and theological commitment to whiteness. The LDS Church's initiatives for inclusion should be paired with the deconstruction of power structures that maintain racial and cultural hierarchies to attain authentic progress. Focusing on Indigenous perspectives and implementing decolonial practices will allow the LDS Church to address its colonial past and promote a more inclusive and equitable future. Mormon theology and institutional practices sustain inequities, positioning the LDS Church as a locus of persistent colonial entanglement and spiritual dispossession for Indigenous and marginalized communities. My research utilizes Critical Indigenous Studies and Kaupapa Māori methodologies, whereas Colvin frames her critique within wider discourses on race, whiteness, and decolonization. Their works identify the challenges encountered by the LDS Church in terms of inclusion, the ongoing presence of racial myths, and the structural obstacles that hinder authentic diversity and justice.

5. Divergent Paths in Matthew Garrett's Work and Critical Indigenous Research

Matthew Garrett's "Disentangling Binaries and the Rise of Lamanite Studies" makes a notable contribution to the academic discussion on the evolving "Lamanite" identity in the context of Mormonism. Garrett outlines frameworks that emphasize the dynamic and adaptable aspects of race and identity within the LDS Church, acknowledging the contentious nature of the Lamanite designation and its changing interpretations by Indigenous and Latinx communities over time. Although Garrett's work seeks to address these complexities, his approach does not sufficiently engage with the settler/invasor colonial and racialized foundations of Mormon discourse. An examination of Lamanite identity must address and deconstruct the frameworks of settler/invasor colonialism; failing to do so may result in the continuation of the narratives it seeks to challenge (Simon 2022b, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, n.d.).

6. Colonial Perspectives and Power Relations

On power relations and the colonial viewpoints of Mormonism, I maintain that Garrett's work does not sufficiently deconstruct the colonial gaze embedded in the notion of Lamanite identity and Lamanitism. Although Garrett understands and recognizes the historical development of the term and its adaptation and transformation by Indigenous communities, his work still takes a Mormon-centric viewpoint. This framing within Mormon narratives unintentionally promotes settler/invasor colonial ideologies that see Indigenous identity as subject to reinterpretation rather than dismissal or refusal. Because this approach supports the supremacy of Mormon (and white) epistemologies over Indigenous worldviews, its potential for genuine decolonial engagement or actual empowerment is very limited.

The critique of the LDS Church's construction of Lamanitism and identity issues is analyzed through Aileen Moreton-Robinson's concept of the white possessive (Simon 2022b; also see Moreton-Robinson 2015). The portrayal of Indigenous peoples as Lamanites exemplifies white possession in that it represents an assertion of power and control over Indigenous lands, bodies, and spiritual narratives through religious discourse (Simon 2022b, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, n.d.). This also continues into Garrett's (2018) work, where he analyses the racial binaries in Mormon theology but lacks an explicit critical Indigenous framework, thus overlooking the structural foundations of Mormon settler/invasor colonialism. This absence demonstrates the limitations of Western academic discourse in addressing the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples, who remain impacted by the dispossessive principles of Mormonism.

Garrett's (2018) paper analyzes postmodern and ethnohistorical perspectives, while I actively promote the application of Kaupapa Māori methodologies and Critical Indigenous Studies frameworks to investigate the racial constructs present in Mormonism (Simon 2024). Frameworks centered on Indigenous perspectives are crucial for uncovering the settler/invasor colonial violence embedded in the Lamanite identity, offering pathways for decolonization that Garrett's analysis does not consider. Garrett's work unintentionally upholds the settler/invasor colonial authority of Mormon epistemology by adhering to Mormon knowledge and discourse instead of challenging it. This is common in Mormon Studies scholarship.

Garrett (2018) criticizes the existing scholarship for oversimplifying the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Mormonism, rejecting binary frameworks that categorize Indigenous communities exclusively as victims or resisters. Garrett promotes a more Mormon-affirming understanding of identity that acknowledges Indigenous agency within the constraints of LDS theology. This perspective misrepresents Indigenous scholarship,

which aims to dismantle these binaries rather than simply reversing them (Simon 2022b). Garrett's work focuses on reframing Lamanite identity rather than questioning its legitimacy, thus reinforcing the structural power imbalances present in the LDS Church's relationship with Indigenous communities. Garrett and I follow distinct approaches to Indigenous scholarship and perspectives: Garrett references "Indigenous perspectives", whereas I contend that this form of engagement does not prioritize Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies adequately. Effective decolonial efforts require Indigenous-led research that critically examines Mormon orthodoxy (Simon 2023a). This distinction highlights a notable divide between scholarships focused on reforming existing frameworks and supporting their abolition.

Although it constitutes progress in recognizing the complexities of Lamanite identity, Garrett's (2018) work ultimately embodies a reformist stance that fails to confront the colonial and racialized underpinnings of Mormon discourse. More radical interventions that challenge the LDS Church's assertions regarding Indigenous identities may include advocating for the complete rejection of the Lamanite construct, particularly from an Indigenist and decolonial standpoint (Simon 2024). Garrett's work aims to reinterpret and reclaim Lamanite identity within the framework of Mormonism, a position that is inadequate for the true decolonization and recognition of Indigenous standpoints.

Garrett's (2018) analysis inverts traditional narratives by shifting the focus from Indigenous subjugation to Indigenous agency within Mormonism. Nevertheless, this transition does not dismantle the foundational settler/invasor colonial framework that established the Lamanite identity. The failure to address underlying power dynamics results in an inversion that merely repositions Indigenous identity within the confines of Mormon theology, thereby reinforcing the LDS Church's continued control over Indigenous cultural memory and spiritual identity. The next section will explore this inversion in greater depth.

The debate over Lamanite identity in Mormonism illustrates the conflict between reinterpretation and decolonization, reflecting settler/invasor colonial systems that govern Indigenous participation in the LDS Church. Garrett explores the fluidity of Indigenous identity in Mormon theology to challenge the victim/resistor binary. Garrett believes that Indigenous Mormons can recover their Lamanite identity from a colonial symbol of insufficiency to a place of empowerment and belonging. Garrett's failure to critically engage with Mormon theology's racialized epistemology and ontology maintains its settler/invasor colonial systems.

7. Reinterpreting Lamanite Identity: Empowerment or Perpetuation?

The source of Garrett's (2018) thesis is the ability of Indigenous Mormons to reclaim their being Lamanites, in which he sees a mechanism for resilience. His research argues that by engaging with this identity on Indigenous Mormon terms, Indigenous Mormons can exercise agency and, ultimately, question the differences between fallen Lamanites and virtuous Nephites. Within dominant religious frameworks, this advocacy for "reinterpretation" is consistent with efforts to reposition marginalized identities within Western religions. These efforts result in a "sense of home" and community within the religion among Indigenous Mormons. However, within a religion that teaches and practices adherence to "following the prophet" and in which the legitimacy of leaders' guidance of the Church and its affairs is never challenged, the idea that this Lamanitism can be questioned at all is somewhat moot.

Audra Simpson's (2020) concept of the sovereignty of critique is helpful in comprehending Garrett's limitations. Simpson contends that Indigenous sovereignty goes beyond territorial control, appearing as an intellectual and cultural authority to confront colonial narratives. The right to criticize enables Indigenous researchers and communities to chal-

lenge the epistemological frameworks that support settler colonial dominance. Analysis of Mormon racial doctrine illustrates the primary need for critique: through an examination of the settler/invaser colonial origins of the Lamanite identity, I challenge the LDS Church's theological claim over Indigenous identity. Indigenous critique calls for the rejection of settler/invaser colonial narratives and the restoration of Indigenous genealogies and spiritual frameworks that exist independently of Mormonism (Simon 2024, n.d.). In contrast, Garrett's reinterpretation strategy functions within the confines of LDS theology, thereby maintaining the LDS Church's epistemological authority over Indigenous identity.

The focus of Garrett's critique is on the simplistic binary of victim/resistor that is frequently applied to Indigenous Mormons, suggesting that Lamanite identity can fluidly exist within this contradiction. By showing how Indigenous individuals can adopt multiple positions—sometimes in alignment with Church doctrine, sometimes in opposition to it—Garrett (2018) confounds traditional colonial narratives. However, I would contend that this intricacy, while useful, does not collapse the binary but strengthens it: Indigenous Mormons move from the category of fallen Lamanites to that of virtuous Nephites.

8. Garrett vs. Decolonial Refusal

Garrett (2018) identifies opportunities for empowerment within the current frameworks, whereas Colvin and I promote the rejection of settler/invaser colonial narratives. Simpson's (2014, 2017) concept of refusal involves detaching from settler/invaser colonial frameworks and reclaiming Indigenous identity beyond the classifications established by the state or religious organizations. Such efforts only serve to increase Indigenous involvement in Mormon colonial frameworks, reinforcing the LDS Church's presumptive right to control or "save" Indigenous peoples. Garrett's (2018) conception of Lamanitism as a form of resilience is thus inadequate for the restoration of genuine Indigenous sovereignty. The reclamation of Lamanitism and identity within Mormonism does not strengthen Indigenous people but rather reinforces their oppression and subjugation to the white possessive logics of Mormonism. Furthermore, the argument here is that achieving decolonization requires the dismantling of the theological and racial foundations on which Mormonism and Indigenous relationality are built rather than their reinterpretation.

Garrett's (2018) analysis is reformist and aims to empower Indigenous Mormons internally. The call for a more decolonial-indigenist-radical approach that rejects Lamanitism is needed in response. A focus on Simpson's (2020) sovereignty of critique provides a way for Indigenous scholars to challenge the colonial (mis)appropriation of Indigenous identities by Mormons. The future of Indigenous sovereignty, I argue, is grounded in refusal, critique, and survivance. This endeavor must focus on undoing the settler/invaser colonial narratives that sustain settler/invaser colonial labels instead of reinterpreting them. This acts as an affirmation, both inside and outside of Mormon contexts, of Indigenous autonomy and authority.

9. Settler/Invaser Positionality and the Limits of Reinterpretation in Lamanite Studies

The problematic nature of Garrett's (2018) approach is made worse by our understanding of his positionality, which uncritically reinforces settler/invaser colonial power dynamics. Importantly, Matthew Garrett's identity as a white, cisgender American male is problematic as it presents epistemological challenges and limitations, particularly as concerns his framing of "Lamanite Studies". As a non-Indigenous scholar in Mormon Studies, Garrett's research aims to complicate or obscure the settler/invaser colonial origins of Lamanitism. When it intersects race and Indigeneity, this positionality should make us question the "authority" and appropriateness of non-Indigenous scholars' contribution in

validating, reinterpreting, or defining Indigenous identity within a religio-colonial setting. This is especially true in the absence of any Indigenous community accountability.

Garrett's positioning supports the LDS Church's assertions regarding Indigenous identity, making LDS institutions the authority on Indigenous belonging. I contend that these approaches result in the epistemological supremacy of the LDS Church based on the idea that Mormon frameworks can incorporate and define/redefine Indigenous agency. Garrett's scholarship frequently lacks the necessary reflexivity to thoroughly examine the implications of his positionality. Reflexivity is fundamental to Kaupapa Māori and other Indigenous research methodologies, requiring scholars to critically evaluate their role in the research process, especially concerning the communities they investigate. Indigenous methodologies emphasize relational accountability, linking researchers to Indigenous communities, land, and whakapapa (genealogy). These approaches ensure that research is conducted with and for Indigenous peoples rather than about them (see [Smith 2021](#); [Simon 2022a](#)). This is a notable issue in Mormon Studies research.

Garrett's lack of connection with Indigenous communities highlights some deep concerns with representation and extractivism. These concerns are exemplified by his Lamanite Studies article, which he wrote to progress his career without truly empowering or co-creating research with an Indigenous community. It is questionable that any Indigenous benefit arose from his article. His approach also lacks a nuanced understanding of the genealogical and cultural contexts in which Indigenous peoples find themselves and the Indigenous knowledge, ontology and values that are associated with these contexts (see [Simon 2024, n.d.](#)). The acknowledgment that the work is based on the perpetuation of settler/invasor colonialism and the absence of relational accountability illuminates significant issues with Mormon Studies research methodologies when they intersect with race and Indigeneity.

The absence of relational accountability is a significant concern in settler/invasor colonial research methodologies, wherein non-Indigenous scholars frequently hold dominant roles, leaving Indigenous perspectives underrepresented. From an Indigenous Studies theory perspective, this positionality and framing of Lamanite Studies can be seen as a form of "settler moves to innocence" ([Tuck and Yang 2012](#)). Garrett's contribution is written as if social science research is not value-laden, when his research is clearly political. At least Indigenous scholars acknowledge this (see [Smith 2021](#)). [Garrett's \(2018\)](#) article denotes the inclination of settler/invasor institutions and scholars to pursue absolution and denial for their colonial complicity via acts of inclusion and reinterpretation. Garrett's research suggests that Lamanite identity might be recast as an expression of Indigenous resilience, so that the historical and theological violence embedded in Mormon colonial narratives need not be addressed. This reinterpretation presents the LDS Church as a possible locus of redemption, thus bolstering the narrative of Mormon benevolence towards Indigenous peoples.

In this "move to innocence", Garrett actively circumvents a clear critique of structural and institutional racism and theological white possession. This tendency can be criticized for perpetuating Mormonism's white possessive ideology. The LDS Church's historical representation of Lamanites as fallen descendants is an example of spiritual colonialism, in which Indigenous identities and souls are seized through conversion and assimilation ([Simon 2022b](#)). Garrett's endorsement of reinterpreting Lamanite identity rather than outright dismissal tacitly sustains a settler/invasor colonial paradigm, offering a narrative centered on reform rather than decolonization. His positionality is made even more questionable by his notable anti-diversity activism in recent years (see [Gallegos 2024](#); [Weissman 2024](#)).

Garrett's (2018) positionality matches Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2015) white possessive paradigm, which settler/invader institutions use to dominate Indigenous lands, bodies, and identities. Mormons affirmed that the Lamanite identity signified their theological claim over Indigenous peoples. Garrett's work, particularly in its critical examination of Lamanite identity, risks reinforcing the white possessive logic by operating within Mormon doctrinal frameworks. This enhances the LDS Church's capacity to delineate Indigenous identity autonomously, limiting the potential for Indigenous epistemologies to influence the discourse beyond settler/invader paradigms (Simon 2024). A notable concern is Garrett's inability to recognize that his advocacy contributes to Indigenous identity erasure (see Wolfe 2006; Veracini 2010; Kauanui 2016; Boxer 2019; Benally 2017; Simon 2024).

10. Gatekeeping and the Marginalization of Indigenous Epistemologies

Garrett's (2018) academic role points to the broader concern of gatekeeping by settlers/invaders in research concerning Indigenous populations. As a white scholar, Garrett has a significant influence on Mormon studies, with his work frequently overshadowing the contributions of Indigenous scholars. This dynamic illustrates the colonial hierarchy in academic knowledge production, where settler/invader scholars are positioned as neutral authorities on Indigenous issues, while Indigenous scholars are required to consistently prove their legitimacy (see Smith 2021). By framing Indigenous identity within Mormon theology, Garrett's work risks constraining the intellectual sovereignty of Indigenous scholars aiming to dismantle the Lamanite identity instead of merely reinterpreting it. This gatekeeping effect constricts the avenues for decolonization, favoring settler/invader viewpoints at the expense of Indigenous refusal and resistance.

Meaningful engagement in Lamanite Studies within a decolonial framework would require Garrett and other non-Indigenous scholars to extensively address their positionality and undertake actions that question their position of power and authority. Part of this is recognizing and explicitly showing the limitations of their positionality and displaying an awareness of how their work replicates and perpetuates colonial frameworks and power relations. Genuine cooperation and collaboration with Indigenous scholars through partnerships and co-authorship can contest settler/invader oppression. For Garrett and the topic of the development of Lamanite Studies, scholars like Daniel Hernandez (Mayan) or Farina King (Dine) could have easily fulfilled this role as they are actively working and leading discussion on these issues (see Hernandez 2021; King 2023). Further, the development of Lamanite Studies is already occurring without Garrett's imposition. I believe that research with significant links to Indigeneity is best left to Indigenous scholars (see Smith 2021). This would enable a cleansing influence of Indigenous epistemologies on the discourse.

The utilization of Indigenous approaches like Kaupapa Māori, alongside relational accountability and responsibility practices, will produce scholarship that is grounded in Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. Furthermore, scholars from privileged backgrounds should engage in the promotion of institutional changes that help Indigenous scholars, support repatriation within Mormon frameworks, and advocate for structural amendments in academia. Non-Indigenous scholars should ultimately oppose reformist approaches that reinterpret Lamanitism and other colonial identities. Instead, they should support Indigenous organizations and scholars that repudiate and actively question these identities and frameworks.

11. Towards Decolonizing Lamanite Studies

The development of Lamanite identity in the theology of the LDS Church is a notable social justice issue for Indigenous communities across the Americas and the Pacific. This

framework perpetuates settler/invaser colonial narratives that racialize and marginalize Indigenous peoples, thus reinforcing systemic inequality, spiritual colonization, and white supremacy. The portrayal of Indigenous peoples as “Lamanites”, identified as descendants of a cursed lineage in the Book of Mormon, illustrates a wider pattern of cultural erasure, dispossession, and assimilation. It thus reflects the extensive colonial histories experienced by Indigenous nations globally.

The persistence of the Lamanite identity has a significant impact on the psychological, cultural, and political disenfranchisement of Indigenous Mormons, undermining their autonomy and epistemological sovereignty. This racialized construct portrays Indigenous identity as spiritually deficient and incomplete without assimilation into Mormonism. This reinforces colonial narratives of savagery and the idea of redemption through proximity to whiteness. The Lamanite narrative links Indigenous salvation to the obliteration of cultural identities and the assimilation into settler/invaser colonial religious frameworks, resulting in the colonization of both body and spirit. The LDS Church’s framing of Indigenous people as theological subjects in need of redemptive cleansing for the deeds of our “supposed” ancestors through salvation is grounded in white possession that perpetuates a settler/invaser colonialism that entails epistemological and spiritual subjugation and the appropriation of Indigenous lands. Theological change is required to address these issues, including ethical responsibility and accountability, centering on restorative justice.

The aforementioned issue intersects with race, gender, and colonialism, leading to what Jade Le Grice and I term “double colonization” (see [Simon and Le Grice n.d.](#)). This reduces Indigenous women’s cultural autonomy and leadership in their communities. The anticipated framework of gender conformity within Mormon culture exacerbates the harm. LDS doctrines support patriarchal structures that marginalize Indigenous women, undermine mana wāhine (women’s authority), and regulate Indigenous female sexuality via purity narratives. Garrett does not emphasize the social justice imperative associated with these issues; they are typically not prioritized or even considered within white Mormon culture. Yet, the reclamation of Indigenous sovereignty regarding identity, spirituality, and genealogy is a significant social justice issue that requires the deconstruction of the Lamanite construct.

Lamanite identity, which originates from colonial contexts, misrepresents Indigenous histories, reduces cultural diversity, and undermines Indigenous connections to land, kinship, and spiritual practices. This framework categorizes Indigenous communities by differentiating between individuals who embrace the Lamanite label and those who reject it. Additionally, it reduces political activism by encouraging respect for religious authority rather than supporting participation in sovereignty movements. Intergenerational trauma arises from the internalization of Lamanite identity, leading Indigenous LDS members to persistently experience feelings of inferiority, cultural estrangement, and spiritual dissonance. The LDS Church’s inability to address and dismantle these myths contributes to ongoing harm, underscoring the critical necessity of structural and doctrinal reform that prioritizes Indigenous voices and knowledge systems in this discourse.

12. Recommendations for Decolonizing Lamanite Studies

As a decoloniality-based scholar and a never-Mormon raised in a culturally Indigenous way, I believe that [Garrett’s \(2018\)](#) approach to what he deems “Lamanite Studies” does not go far enough. Garrett’s frame is probably more in line with what I have described elsewhere as “post-colonial” (see [Simon 2022b](#)). However, his positionality is problematic, albeit not unusual in Mormon Studies, a field that fails to embrace and understand decolonizing research methodologies. What Garrett does not recognize is that the internalization of Lamanite identity has a broader impact on all Indigenous people; therefore, what he

terms “Lamanite Studies” requires a social justice and, where applicable, decolonial lens. Although I am not the scholar to outline an Indigenous post-colonial framework for Lamanite Studies, in this section, I propose practical steps for Lamanite Studies to move towards a decolonized frame. This requires departing from Garrett’s approach based on reform and questioning the Mormon theological framework on which the approach is built. Garrett’s approach aims to reinterpret Lamanite identity within the structures of the LDS Church. Yet, to revive Indigenous epistemological sovereignty, LDS scholars and leadership should aim for decolonial praxis. The following will outline some recommendations that could be taken forward to decolonize the idea of “Lamanite Studies”.

12.1. Dismantling the Theological Basis for Lamanite Identity

Garrett’s writing aims to mitigate, recoup, or reclaim Lamanitism⁵ as a legitimate identity. However, it does not address Lamanitism’s basis in settler/invader colonialism and in particular the fact that it can theoretically be seen as enforcing Indigenous identity erasure. To truly achieve decolonial praxis, the legitimacy of Lamanitism must be rejected and the racist, settler/invader colonial theology must be reframed. This would require eliminating the relevance of Lamanite from Mormon culture; that is, the LDS Church should rescind its position on Lamanitism publicly and, in particular, within its membership. Additionally, LDS Church leaders and scholars must reassess and—where appropriate—remove references to Lamanites from writings, church materials, and policy frameworks. This should be performed under the guidance and scrutiny of Indigenous communities and scholars. Active support must be provided to Indigenous scholars’ critiques of the Mormon theological frame and the racialized narratives in the Book of Mormon as colonizing mythology rather than divine or historical truth (as traditionally promoted by the LDS Church). Indigenous genealogies like whakapapa must be prioritized in identity discussions while refusing and rejecting Mormon theological narratives focusing on Indigenous ancestry (see [Simon 2024, n.d.](#)). Garrett’s proposition is problematic as it centers settler/invader colonial thinking that favors the individual over the collective nature of Indigenous identity and belonging. Instead, Lamanite and Mormon Studies should give Indigenous ontologies and knowledge center stage.

12.2. Prioritizing Indigenous Epistemologies and Spiritual Sovereignty

The transfer of authority is crucial for the decolonization of Lamanite Studies and Indigenous issues in Mormon Studies. Transferring authority from the settler/invader Church to Indigenous communities is essential to defining Indigenous identity and resolving spiritual issues. Academic and theological programs should be established that emphasize Indigenous cosmologies, oral traditions, and place-based knowledge rather than LDS doctrinal interpretations. Further, the incorporation of Critical Indigenous Studies, Native Studies, and relational research methodologies into Lamanite and Mormon Studies should be encouraged, integrating Indigenous sovereignty into research methodologies. Overall, the necessity of critically evaluating the allegations made by the LDS Church regarding Indigenous identity and spiritual authority necessitates engagement with Indigenous leaders, communities, and scholars.

12.3. Utilizing Refusal as a Decolonial Approach

[Garrett’s \(2018\)](#) research underscores the reclamation of Lamanite identity instead of its complete rejection. In contrast, [Simpson and I](#) would contend that refusal is an essential element of Indigenous resistance and survivance. Decolonization requires rejecting colonial classifications and supporting self-defined identities rooted in Indigenous sovereignty. To this end, education and participation in detailed discussions on Lamanitism should be promoted. In particular, Indigenous individuals must be allowed to critically examine

their faith within modern Mormon cultural contexts, even if this results in the renunciation of Lamanite identity. Notably, the creation of safe spaces for Indigenous Mormons is crucial for the unimpeded expression of their cultural identities, devoid of interference or categorization by the LDS Church. Lastly, to challenge settler definitions and honor Indigenous nations connections, advocacy for self-naming practices and Indigenous identity frameworks is needed.

12.4. Challenging and Interrupting White Possessive Logics

Lamanitism aligns with the LDS Church's needs and interests by encouraging Indigenous populations from the Pacific and the Americas to identify as Lamanites, thereby legitimizing the narratives presented in the Book of Mormon. Lamanitism enables the LDS Church to reinforce and validate its claim to Indigenous identity and spirituality from a white possessive perspective. These narratives necessitate a thorough examination of the historical and spiritual colonization perpetrated by the LDS Church. In this context, research aligned with Indigenous priorities, such as land and spiritual repatriation, should be encouraged to prioritize the reclamation of Indigenous knowledge for Indigenous communities. There must be a significant shift in missionary activities that categorize Indigenous peoples solely as "subjects of salvation".⁶ If white possessive logics are to be transformed, an emphasis must be placed on Indigenous spiritual autonomy and the active involvement of Indigenous peoples in shaping their spiritual futures. To this end, an analysis of how the LDS Church commercializes Indigenous identities to reinforce its claims of universal truth globally is necessary.

12.5. Emphasizing Indigenous Leadership in Mormon Studies

Garrett's identity as a white cisgender male researcher raises a significant issue in Mormon Studies, related to settler/invasor dominance. A decolonial and Indigenous-centric research approach demands that the research be conducted by Indigenous scholars who are trained in decolonial methodologies (see [Smith 2021](#)). This involves prioritizing Indigenous voices and adhering to the leadership of Indigenous communities and scholars in research, policy, and discourse initiatives. Establishing research collectives directed by Indigenous peoples within the field of Mormon Studies is advisable, giving precedence to Indigenous approaches and concerns. Financial and institutional support should also be provided to academics and graduate students from Indigenous communities who study Mormon–Indigenous relations. Further, there is a need to develop academic settings that support the involvement of Indigenous researchers and confront the gatekeeping mechanisms favoring settler/invasor community perspectives.

12.6. Participating in Grassroots Decolonial Practices

Decolonization on a theoretical level should be supplemented through grassroots actions that enable Indigenous populations to restore their cultural and spiritual identities. Cultural-based workshops such as wānanga or talanoa (see [Smith et al. 2019](#); [Mahuika and Mahuika 2020](#); [Matamua et al. 2023](#); [Tecun et al. 2018](#); [Fa'avae et al. 2016](#); [Ravulo 2025](#)), which study Indigenous spiritual practices beyond the Lamanite framework, should be coordinated by the community to facilitate Indigenous methods of doing things. A working relationship with Indigenous organizations and governance bodies should be developed to facilitate conversations about decolonization, cultural reclamation, and identity preservation. It is important to encourage Indigenous LDS members to express their spiritual journeys beyond the boundaries of settler/invasor colonial interpretations of theology.

13. Conclusions: Towards a Decolonial Future

The decolonization of Lamanite Studies transcends theological revision; it represents a critical struggle against the ongoing colonial domination of Indigenous peoples' bodies, lands, and souls. By rejecting [Garrett's \(2018\)](#) reformist reinterpretation and embracing a decolonial framework focused on Indigenous sovereignty, scholars and communities can dismantle the systems that sustain spiritual colonialism and reinforce Indigenous peoples' autonomy in shaping their histories, identities, and futures. Lastly, Indigenous peoples are the only appropriate group or authority to discuss and define Lamanitism; not White American Mormon scholars.

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Notes

- ¹ I use the compound modifier settler/invaser to foreground the violent, extractive, and ongoing nature of colonial occupation by distinguishing it from more benign connotations often attached to the term "settler". Following [Tuck and Yang's \(2012\)](#) assertion that "settlers are not immigrants", the invader component underscores the foundational act of Indigenous dispossession and the perpetuation of this logic in institutions, scholarship, and theology. Whereas "settler colonialism" can sometimes be framed as a historical process or policy apparatus, settler/invaser colonialism explicitly identifies colonial actors and systems—including churches and scholars—as active agents in ongoing land theft, epistemicide, and spiritual appropriation. My previous work applies this term to describe the LDS Church as a settler/invaser church, whose theological imperatives rely on spiritual possession of Indigenous identity through Lamanite discourse (see [Simon 2022b, 2023a, 2024](#)). The term is also used in reference to settler/invaser scholars who reproduce colonial logics under the guise of academic neutrality. Though the modifier is used throughout this article, I acknowledge its absence from the conclusion and will address this more explicitly in future work to ensure conceptual consistency and analytical clarity.
- ² Lamanitism is a theological and racial construct within the LDS Church that frames Indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Pacific as descendants of the "Lamanites", a group described in the Book of Mormon. According to LDS doctrine, Lamanites were believed to have been cursed with dark skin due to their disobedience, symbolizing their spiritual fall from grace. The concept ties Indigenous identity to narratives of spiritual deficiency and redemption through conversion to Mormonism, reinforcing colonial tropes of savagery and the civilizing mission of the Church. Lamanitism operates as a both religious and racial ideology, racializing Indigenous peoples within a framework that reflects settler colonial logics. It imposes a homogenized identity onto diverse Indigenous groups, flattening cultural differences to fit the LDS eschatological narrative. This framework suggests that Indigenous peoples can shed their cursed state through assimilation, aligning faithfulness and salvation with proximity to whiteness. Critics, including scholars like Gina [Colvin \(2015, 2017\)](#) and myself ([Simon 2022b](#)), argue that Lamanitism represents a form of spiritual colonization and white possessive logic, whereby the LDS Church asserts control over Indigenous identities, bodies, and genealogies. Decolonial approaches to Mormon studies challenge Lamanitism by advocating for the rejection of the Lamanite identity, the dismantling of racialized theology, and the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty over identity and spirituality. For more information, see ([Boxer 2019; Simon 2022b](#)).
- ³ Garrett uses the term "discipline", whereas I would call it a sub-field.
- ⁴ In this regard, many scholars have also highlighted the ongoing impact of the priesthood ban on African American members, which was only lifted in 1978 (See [Harris 2024](#)).
- ⁵ Lamanitism is a religion and racial ideology that racializes Indigenous peoples within settler colonial logics. It flattens Indigenous cultures to match the LDS Church's eschatological narrative and homogenizes them. This paradigm claims that Indigenous peoples can overcome their curse through assimilation, linking fidelity and salvation to whiteness (See [Boxer 2019](#)).
- ⁶ The phrase "subjects of salvation" captures how the LDS Church regards Indigenous people—not as active participants in their spiritual and cultural paths, but as passive receivers in need of divine rescue—in this essay. The Church presents Indigenous

people in a position whereby redemption is imposed from above, rather than acknowledging them as self-determining and able to reclaim their own identities and epistemologies. This dynamic supports white patriarchal norms and Church authority, hence strengthening a hierarchical structure that marginalizes Indigenous autonomy. Indigenous people thus become objects inside a colonizing framework, whose spiritual value and destiny are defined by their relationship to an externally imposed road to redemption rather than by their own self-determined, culturally grounded identities.

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