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# Genealogical Violence: Mormon (Mis)Appropriation of Māori Cultural Memory through Falsification of Whakapapa

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## Article

# Genealogical Violence: Mormon (Mis)Appropriation of Māori Cultural Memory through Falsification of Whakapapa

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**Abstract:** The study examines how members of the historically white possessive and supremacist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the United States (mis)appropriated Māori genealogy, known as whakapapa. The Mormon use of whakapapa to promote Mormon cultural memory and narratives perpetuates settler/invader colonialism and white supremacy, as this paper shows. The research discusses Church racism against Native Americans and Pacific Peoples. This paper uses Anthropologist Thomas Murphy's scholarship to demonstrate how problematic the Book of Mormon's religio-colonial identity of Lamanites is for these groups. Application of Aileen Moreton-Robinson's white possessive doctrine and Hemopereki Simon's adaptation to cover Church-Indigenous relations and the salvation contract is discussed. We explore collective and cultural memory, and discuss key Māori concepts like Mana, Taonga, Tapu, and Whakapapa. A brief review of LDS scholar Louis C. Midgley's views on Church culture, including Herewini Jone's whakapapa wānanga, is followed by a discussion of Māori cultural considerations and issues. The paper concludes that the alteration perpetuates settler/invader colonialism and Pacific peoples' racialization and white supremacy. Genetic science and human migration studies contradict Mormon identity narratives and suggest the BOM is spiritual rather than historical. Finally, the paper suggests promoting intercultural engagement on Mormon (mis)appropriation of taonga Māori.

**Keywords:** whakapapa; Mormonism; white possessive; settler/invader colonialism; cultural (mis) appropriation; LDS Church; Critical Indigenous Studies; Lamanites; genealogy



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## 1. Introduction

Video One: “A Māori Creation Story in Sand—Ranginui and Papatūānuku”. By Marcus Winter. (<https://youtu.be/g1Kpekzygp0> (accessed on 12 January 2024)).

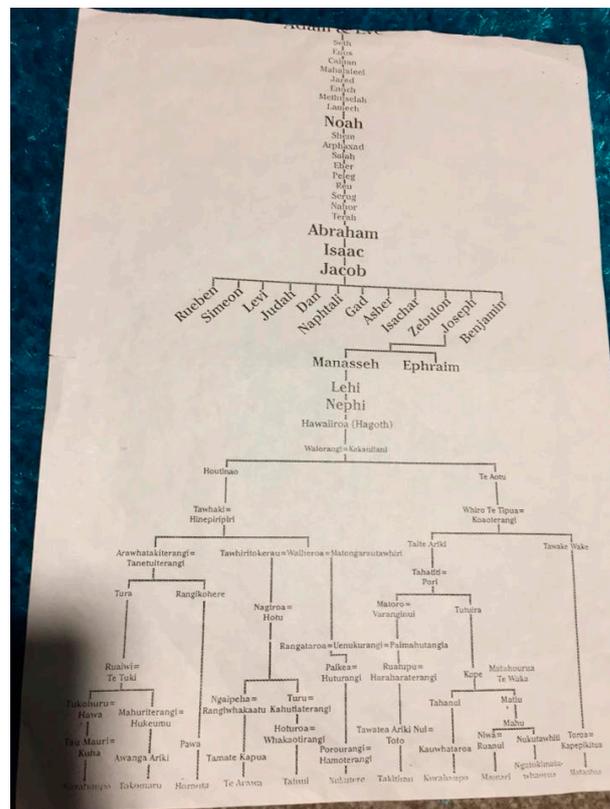
According to a traditional retelling of Te Orokohanga, The Māori story of creation, Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) were in a great embrace. In that love, they bore children, Ngā Atua (the gods), into the darkness between them. In some accounts, they had seventy-two offspring. One day, Ngā Atua grew tired of being in the dark and debated whether they should part from their parents. Some agreed, while others dissented. Eventually, it was Tāne (the god of forests and birds) who parted from his parents and brought his siblings into Te Ao Mārama or the world of light.<sup>1</sup> From this story, Te Orokohanga, Māori derive their values, tikanga or law, and original instructions (Jones 2014; Nelson 2008). Kaa and Willis (2021) comment that this is also the source of mana (spiritual power) and manaakitanga (care). Te Orokohanga is also the source of whakapapa, Māori people's genealogical connectedness to the world, the gods, and their ancestors.

Whakapapa is the most powerful wellspring of belonging in Māori culture. I have learned, as a fact since childhood, that the sky, the earth, the gods, and all Māori people are my kin. I have felt the colonisers' violence against the land and people as violence against myself. It is then perhaps not surprising that the colonial religions—forces of cultural imperialism seeking to make Māori belong to the colonial order rather than to

themselves—have seized upon whakapapa and distorted it for their own ends. This paper examines a case study of “genealogical violence”, that is, the cultural misappropriation of whakapapa in proselytising efforts by members of the United States-based, and the historically white supremacist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I first encountered the activities studied herein while studying other cultural misappropriations by Māori Mormons, which I knew of from discussions with friends and whānau. In the course of this research, I stumbled upon a whakapapa (genealogy) chart in the Facebook Group, “LDS New Zealand Church History.” To my great dismay, the whakapapa was altered in a way that I considered to be a fundamental falsification of Māori belief.

Instead of this whakapapa originating from Ranginui and Papatūānuku, at the top of this sheet were Adam and Eve. Designed to validate Latter-day Saint faith that the Book of Mormon and Church are “true”, the whakapapa sheet connected Adam and Eve to Te Iwi Māori through the Book of Mormon character Hagoth. (See Figure 1) The Book of Mormon narrates that Hagoth built a fleet of ships, filled them with settlers and provisions, only to set sail from the Americas, and were presumed lost at sea around 55 BCE (Alma 63:5–8). Many Latter-day Saints believe Hagoth’s lost expedition settled Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (Pacific Ocean) a belief reported as fact on this whakapapa sheet.



**Figure 1.** Mormon Whakapapa Sheet (Adam & Eve to Ngā Tūpuna). (Source: Kahika-Nicolas 2018; Also see Appendix A).

As I wrote in a previous article on the Mormon missionary (mis)appropriation of haka, tampering with Māori cultural artefacts for use as missionary props is a form of colonial violence (Simon 2024a). Advancing settler interests through the use of fraudulent folklore would be sufficiently offensive even without the additional crime of doctoring whakapapa, which is closely analogous to defacing a sacred text.

As Māori society moved toward decolonising politics in the latter part of the 20th century, Māori scholarship moved toward Kaupapa Māori research and decolonising approaches to research (Simon 2022a; L. Smith 2021). Reclaiming our knowledge in an

academic context entails taking back the meanings and processes of whakapapa (Mahuika 2019). We must restore our freedom to decide who we are and what rights we have, and we must reject the restrictive categories others have imposed on us (Jackson 1998, p. 73). This is important for two reasons:

1. Indigenous Researchers are agents of change for our communities and interpreters of Māori culture to settler religious communities and scholars of religion (Ka'ai 2008);
2. Māori religion is not found in sacred books or doctrines; the culture is the religion. Historical evidence suggests that Māori people and their religion have been consistently open to collective reflection, evaluation, and questioning in search of that which is tika, the right way (Hēnare 1998).

Indigenous scholars consistently engage in the task of elucidating perspectives of Indigenous groups to individuals who are of non-Indigenous descent. They share their narratives, explicate their beliefs and rituals, and introduce concepts that have yet to be contemplated by those outside an Indigenous community (Simon 2022b, 2023a). As critical Indigenous studies scholars, one of our professional obligations is to explain our peoples' critical analyses and positions to institutions and people(s) that historically and presently misconstrue our culture as a justification for discrimination, oppression, and extermination. This includes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the Mormon church (see Jackson 1998; Ka'ai 2008; Hēnare 1998; Little Bear 2012 as cited in Simon 2022b).

The decolonial endeavour in Te Ao Māori has been in progress for a period of four decades (Colvin 2018; Simon 2022b). This is the seventh article in a series that aims to familiarise Mormon and Lamanite Studies with Critical Indigenous Studies. It aims to engage members, scholars, and leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in critical intercultural dialogue (see James 1999). Te Ao Māori's cultural reclamation coincides with efforts from within the Church to address and challenge its authoritarian and Americentric institutional culture (Colvin 2017; Cf. Simon 2022b).

In the Book of Mormon, Indigenous peoples are imagined as belonging to the "wilderness", and white "Gentiles" are imagined as having a manifest destiny to locate and preach to the Indigenous "Lamanite", directing Lamanite destiny and co-inheriting Lamanite land. The Book of Mormon, as historically interpreted by the Church, also racialises Indigenous people as "Lamanites", divinely cursed with dark skin to mark a dark moral nature. Indigenous adherents, cast as physically and morally inferior, can only be redeemed and perfected by white intervention (Simon 2022b, 2023a). This can easily be seen as a reproduction of colonial and racist discourses about Indigeneity (Simon 2022b).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is at odds with the anti-colonial and decolonial trend in Te Ao Māori, which emerged in the 1960s and continues today (Simon 2022a, 2022b).<sup>2</sup> This paradigm shift in Te Ao Māori thinking has spawned movements to promote the language and culture and to secure the future of our uri whakatipu (descendants). Aotearoa New Zealand is changing as a society to be more inclusive of Te Ao Māori. Increasing the awareness of colonial history and increasing Te Reo Māori and tā moko (Māori skin art) representation on national news broadcasts are just two examples (Dewes 2022; NewstalkZB 2022).

This Kaupapa Māori writing inquiry articulates a decolonising critique of cultural (mis)appropriation, that is, the capture and alteration of whakapapa by the Church and its members. By introducing critical Indigenous studies into Mormon studies, I do not intend to dictate anyone's beliefs, but rather to initiate an important scholarly discussion. When religious theologies, doctrines, or practices seek to change Māori culture, I have the right and responsibility to the ngā uri whakatupu as a critical Kaupapa Māori scholar to reply and question. To that end, this essay's motivating question is as follows:

How do the LDS Church and its adherents alter whakapapa for the purposes and aims of the Church, and why is this act offensive to Indigenous people?

To answer this question, the essay will first outline a positionality and methodology I have utilised across my published works engaging the Latter-day Saint Church. It will move to then explain Mormon theological assertions around Indigenous identity through

the lens of anthropologist Thomas Murphy's analysis of the Book of Mormon as a racist text. Following this, I will summarise my previous work translating key theory from Critical Indigenous Studies, Moreton-Robinson's analysis of "the White Possessive", to the field of Mormon studies. To help further our understanding, the concepts of collective and cultural memory, and whakapapa will be explained. This will set the stage for a discussion of the (mis)appropriation of Indigenous identity and whakapapa by Māori Mormons in the case of the whakapapa sheet affirming that Māori are descended from Adam and Eve through Hagoth as the Kānaka Māoli kūpuna (or tupuna), Hawai'iloa. This article will contextualise this case within Māori Mormonism, with a particular focus on the "wānanga" held by the late Mormon Bishop Herewini Jones. Finally, an exploration of the implications of this research will take place.

## 2. Positionality

In relation to Mormonism, I wrote in a previous study that:

My being pro-indigenous does not make me anti-Mormonism; it just shows that I have spent a significant time thinking and wanting to engage in dialogue with the Church and its scholars and members. Actually, it has taken me more than ten years to actively think about this and write these papers. (Simon 2022a, p. 2; also see Simon 2022b)

(Mis)appropriation of whakapapa may seem too trivial to criticise in an academic study, but it is not trivial to Māori. For that reason, it supplies a valuable opening for intercultural dialogue with LDS scholars, members and leadership, especially those exploring issues related to Indigeneity (see Aikau 2012; Baca 2008; Brooks and Colvin 2018; Hernandez 2021; Rensink and Hafen 2019; Murphy and Baca 2016, 2020; Murphy 2019, 2020; Murphy et al. 2022; King 2023; C. Smith 2016; Palmer 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Boxer 2009, 2015).

Engagement with Critical Kaupapa Māori Research, I argue, offers an important corrective to Mormon studies on several fundamental issues (Simon 2022a, pp. 6–7). The most relevant to the current case study are:

1. The relationship of Mormonism and other restorationist traditions to settler colonialism;
2. The inappropriateness of imposing a colonial identity label such as "Lamanite" upon Indigenous groups or people;
3. The problematic position of whiteness in Mormon culture and doctrine;
4. The importance of maintaining the cultural integrity of our own cultures to Māori people;
5. The need for cultural engagement between Māori and Mormons;
6. The historical and scientific falsity of the Book of Mormon's assertions about Indigenous ancestry (to the extent that Latter-day Saint racial folklore is even rooted in the text and not just an interpretive gloss).<sup>3</sup>

## 3. Mahi Tuhituhi as (Post-) Qualitative Writing Inquiry

This study utilises the Mahi Tuhituhi methodology, which is a (post-) qualitative Kaupapa Māori research approach developed by Georgina Stewart (2021). Kaupapa Māori research is considered a fundamental and well-established Indigenous research practice, which aligns with the objectives of this article. Mahi Tuhituhi is a method of Kaupapa Māori research that examines the use of academic writing to promote critical Māori principles and political objectives. Mahi Tuhituhi is a method that aligns with the perspective of Kaupapa Māori, which involves using written language to challenge the Eurocentric "archive" that forms the foundation of the academic system (Stewart 2021; Simon 2022c, 2023a, 2023c, 2024a, 2024b).

In the piece titled "Kaupapa Māori Research, Understanding Writing as a Māori Method of Enquiry" (Stewart 2021), Stewart (2021) explains that writing enables Māori academics to challenge and expand the limits of conventional academic traditions and

procedures. The ethical considerations involved in writing and research practices of any kind are significant and can greatly benefit from the principles of Kaupapa Māori. These principles prioritise two main actions: (1) critically examining one's own assumptions, ideas, and judgements, while also using empirical and qualitative research methods; and (2) promoting and practising Māori concepts of community, ethics, intellectual discussion, and sovereignty in academic settings. This aims to challenge Western knowledge norms, regain control of Māori representation in public discourse, and situate research within Māori histories and perspectives (Stewart 2021).

In the field of qualitative social science research, the act of “conducting interviews” has essentially become interchangeable with the process of “engaging in research.” This indicates a more general and deep-rooted trust in “empirical data” and “method”, which implies the lasting influence of a limited view of science (Pipi et al. 2004; Simon 2022c, 2023a, 2023c, 2024a, 2024b; Sorell 2013; Stewart 2021). The disparity is particularly noticeable in Māori research due to the focus on prioritising Māori perspectives and a cultural preference for direct interpersonal methods, such as “kanohi-ki-te-kanohi” or “kanohi kitea” (Pipi et al. 2004). To address this imbalance, Kaupapa Māori research prioritises the activity, experience, or process of Māori textual production as a means of correction. The aim is to pinpoint the specific instances during the process of creating written material where rigid or inadequate Western academic research standards subtly influence one's choices, disguised as the deceptive impartiality of “methodology.”

From a Kaupapa Māori standpoint, it is essential to thoroughly examine every research decision, ranging from the initial selection of the subject matter to the intricate details of methodological and stylistic choices. An essential aspect of Kaupapa Māori research involves the readiness to critically examine and challenge one's own notions and assessments (Stewart 2021). As Stewart (2021, pp. 41–42) highlights:

I am bound to write from my identity as a Māori, but my arguments also apply more generally under the umbrella category of Indigenous research . . . ‘writing’ (in English, Te Reo Māori or both) is a powerful method for exploring what it means to be Māori: a way to interrogate Māori subjectivities and advance Māori political aspirations. (Stewart 2021, pp. 1, 41–42)

The approach taken in the present article consciously aligns with these principles. The present article deliberately adheres to these principles. Mahi Tuhituhi offers me a method for conducting responsive Indigenous research that is based on critical analysis. It is imperative to amplify the perspectives of Māori communities that have historically been suppressed or misrepresented by Eurocentric research or policy methods (Simon 2022c, 2023a, 2023c, 2024a, 2024b). However, this project is not yet finished and therefore cannot be considered to have a radical political stance, as Kaupapa Māori praxis does. This can only happen if Māori ethical standards, research methodologies, and spiritual or philosophical beliefs are properly incorporated into the writing and knowledge production processes with due respect. Put simply, if uri (descendants) are the manifestation of our tupuna (ancestors), then those stories, realities, whakairo (thoughts and teachings), pūmanawa (traits), feelings, mātauranga (traditional knowledge), stories, and preferences become visible through writing (Simon 2022c, p. 123). Without this, Kaupapa Māori research risks succumbing to what G. Smith (2012) calls “domestication.”

Mahi Tuhituhi facilitates an examination of Indigenous politics and policy, with an awareness that Kaupapa Māori research is driven by political motivations. The reflexive nature of this (post-) qualitative enquiry expands to examine collective political and intellectual assertions regarding truth and authority (Stewart 2021, pp. 41–54). This highlights the significance of the viewpoint derived from critical Indigenous studies in enlightening or achieving māramatanga in other fields of study.

#### 4. Lamanites, Racism, and Other Book of Mormon Issues

Hernandez (2021) observes, “the Church as an institution through its canonical text, *The Book of Mormon*, have constructed a religio-colonial identity known as ‘Lamanites.’” This

term refers “to Indigenous peoples of the ‘Americas’ and ‘Polynesia’ and their descendants . . . who are believed by Latter-day Saints to be descendants of Book of Mormon peoples” (Hernandez 2021; Also see Simon 2022b).

Many modern-day Latter-day Saints hold that Polynesians are descendants of the Book of Mormon character Lehi (Aikau 2012). Indigenous people find this teaching regarding Lamanites problematic because the Book of Mormon repeatedly represents the dark-skinned Lamanites as a lower and less civilised race than their white-skinned counterparts, the “Nephites” and “Gentiles” (Simon 2022b, 2023a, 2024a; Crowfoot 2021; Murphy and Southerton 2003; Southerton 2004, 2020; Murphy et al. 2022; Murphy 2002, 2003a, 2005, 2006; Murphy and Baca 2016, 2020; Tenney 2018; Mormon Stories 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

The Book of Mormon teaches that God anciently cursed the wicked progenitors of Indigenous American peoples with dark skin. According to Tenney (2018), the cursing narrative linked Indigenous ancestry and biology to moral corruption, reflecting the 19th-century racial theories that shaped the Mormon canon. The Book of Mormon was authored so that Lamanites might learn about their ancestors (Simon 2022b). As the ancient Lamanites “dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers”, the Church has sent missionaries to them for almost two centuries (D&C 3:18–20). Continuing with the thematic linkage of skin colour to spiritual condition, the Book of Mormon envisions that redeemed Indigenous people will miraculously become “white and delightsome”, or “pure and delightsome”, as the phrase appears in post-1840 editions (2 Nephi 30:6). Despite the 1840 revision, many present-day Latter-day Saints continue to regard the literal whitening of Indigenous people as a Book of Mormon promise and missionary objective.

Although the Book of Mormon narrative principally concerned itself with Native Americans, most modern Latter-day Saints also regard Tāngata Moana or Pacific Peoples as descendants of Hagoth included within the scope of the Lamanite curse. The Book of Mormon and The Church have historically implied that Tāngata Moana descended from Hagoth, a Nephite shipbuilder who lost numerous ships at sea during a colonising mission circa 55 BCE (Alma 63:5–8). Tāngata Moana are derived from Nephi, not his evil brother Laman, but this is a distinction without a difference because the Book of Mormon envisions the “Nephite” and “Lamanite” groupings as the product of multiple skin-colour cursing and racial reassignment events. The book treats these primarily as racial groups assigned by divine skin-colour alteration rather than ancestry, repeatedly changing Lamanites into Nephites and vice versa depending on their moral condition.

For instance, in 3 Nephi 2:12–16, Lamanites convert and are “numbered among the Nephites; and the curse was taken from them.” In 4 Nephi, Nephites and Lamanites merge for nearly a century as a white-skinned race, only for self-proclaimed “Lamanite” gangs to reappear and slaughter the Nephites in an apocalyptic conflict. Although “there is no explicit reference to the restoration of the dark skin” in this narrative at the end of the Book of Mormon, a prophecy foreshadowing it in the book’s early pages (1 Nephi 12:22–23) strongly implies that this skin-colour “mark” of the curse is reimposed (Turner 1989). The darker skin tone of Tāngata Moana suggests that their ancestors also fell into sin and became Lamanites through a skin-colour curse, despite their Nephite ancestry. The Church’s othering of Te Moananui-a-Kiwa is “presumptive and covert racism” (Simon 2022b, p. 379).

The Book of Mormon classifies Indigenous peoples as “Lamanites” in order to justify oppression. The Latter-day Saint’s belief imposes a rigid soteriological hierarchy, in which a historically white male priesthood monopolises salvation and humanises people of colour. Indeed, as late as 1978, the Church officially barred Black people not only from positions of priesthood authority but also from accessing temple rituals considered required for full salvation (Mauss 2003; Harris 2022; Bringhurst 2022; Brooks 2020). While official Church discourse has downplayed the white supremacy theme since lifting the ban in 1978, it remains popular in folk Latter-day Saint teachings at the congregational level (Brooks 2012).

White supremacy is the main defect of the Latter-day Saint belief (Colvin 2015; Simon 2022b, 2023a, n.d.), but I argue that the principle of white possession also animates the Latter-day Saint's religious practice (Simon 2022b). The Church's beliefs have also justified Indigenous peoples' forced conversion and absorption into white American and Mormon civilisation, which cost them their land, culture, and identity (Boxer 2009, 2015). Further, the Church hierarchy remains explicitly hostile to Indigenous people's cultures, if not to their race. Since Latter-day Saints admit no valid spiritual power beyond the Church's priestly structure, Church leaders teach that salvation requires Indigenous peoples to abandon their cultures and adopt the "Gospel culture" in their place (Simon 2022b).

In 2012, the Latter-day Saint Apostle Dallin H. Oaks urged Church members all over the world to adopt the homogenising "Gospel culture" of the American Church in lieu of any local or family cultural practices that conflict with it, including traditional marriage and funeral rites (Oaks 2012). With this initiative, the Church aims to erase the culture of modern Te Ao Māori and replace it with settler/invaser colonial practices and colonised Indigenous identity as "Lamanites." Lamanitism, therefore, positions itself in explicit opposition to Māori tikanga, which contradicts the Church's offensive claims to spiritual authority and power over Māori. The Church's call for Māori members to adopt "Gospel culture" as a replacement for Māori culture is a frontal assault on the Māori cultural renaissance and ontology (Simon 2022b).

My Māori identity and culturally informed ontology directly contravene the Church's view of Indigenous peoples as morally fallen and spiritually cursed communities that must be whitened and perfected (Simon 2022b, 2023a). Māori culture is traditionally memorised which traces their descent from Indigenous gods rather than from Christian biblical figures. In more modern times, whakapapa has become written down and archived (Simon n.d.). My academic training still provides further warrant for speaking out against the Church's views, because modern science exposes both biological race and east-to-west models of intercontinental human migration as scientific frauds (See Simon 2022b; Crowfoot 2021; Murphy and Southerton 2003; Southerton 2004, 2020; Murphy et al. 2022; Murphy 2002, 2003a, 2005, 2006; Murphy and Baca 2016, 2020; Tenney 2018; Mormon Stories 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

Upon examination and analysis, the concept of race is found to be an unreliable and troublesome system of representation that lacks any association with biological reality. Hence, race can be considered as a societal fabrication, while also being a tangible aspect of society, particularly for individuals who have been subjected to the process of being categorised by race, leading to reduced life prospects, and unjustified declines in quality of life and even mortality. Although there is a distressing correlation between skin colour and life outcomes, biology does not serve as the causal mechanism. Political, economic, social, and cultural factors collectively influence the situation (Simon 2022b, 2023a).

In this article, I will use the word "race" to describe a complex of racial systems and formations that have worked together over time to create social divides and reproduce race-based power structures (Colvin 2015 as cited in Simon 2022b). Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that: "The discursive formation of Anglocentric whiteness is a relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible, dominant and pervasive" (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 79). While a growing literature recognises Mormonism as a settler-colonial institution, this has rarely been explored outside the North American context (Boxer 2009; Brooks and Colvin 2018; Murphy 2020; Murphy et al. 2022; Brooks 2020; Griffith Forthcoming; Aikau 2012; Simon 2022a, 2022b, 2023c, 2024a, n.d.; C. Smith 2016). This article can be thought of as a case study of how Mormonism perpetuates colonialism and reproduces white supremacy.

Twenty years ago, Thomas Murphy wrote an essay titled "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics" (Murphy 2002, pp. 44–77), which he followed up with "Simply Implausible: DNA and a Mesoamerican Setting for the Book of Mormon" (Murphy 2003b). More recently, Murphy has returned to Mormon studies after a stint in Indigenous envi-

ronmental anthropology. In a 2022 interview with *Mormon Stories*, he summarised and updated his findings on the Book of Mormon and Indigenous DNA ([Mormon Stories 2022](#)).

According to Murphy, Mormon theology acknowledges that the Book of Mormon contains “mistakes of men”, meaning scribal errors. The BOM is sacred scripture to Mormons, but its writers’ imperfections make it human. Murphy, however, argues that the errors in the book go well beyond mere typographical, spelling, and translation mistakes. He shows that the Book of Mormon’s views on race and gender directly contradict modern scientific findings from the fields of biology and genetics and belong firmly to the nineteenth-century context in which the Latter-day Saints’ founding prophet Joseph Smith purported to translate the text ([Mormon Stories 2022](#); also see [Murphy 2005, 2019, 2020](#); [Murphy et al. 2022](#); [Simon 2023a](#)).

The conglomeration of ideas packaged together in the Book of Mormon is found nowhere else but in New York State in the United States in the 1820s. Murphy notes that the Book of Mormon’s views on race and gender reflect nineteenth-century myths and stereotypes, such as the Moundbuilder Myth, rather than ideas from Indigenous cultures in North America (or Te Moananui). Race itself, signified by skin colour, was an obsession particular to Americans and Europeans of this time ([Mormon Stories 2022](#)). In addition to anachronistic ideology, the Book of Mormon also contains anachronistic mentions of horses, cattle, oxen, sheep, swine, goats, elephants, wheeled chariots, wheat, silk, steel, and iron, none of which actually existed in the Book of Mormon’s pre-Columbian American setting ([Runnells 2017](#)).

The *Mormon Stories* episode, featuring Murphy, includes a discussion of the contemporary Church’s shift away from overt racial theory in its theological discourse. The youngest cohort of Church members is unaware that the Book of Mormon mentions skin ([Mormon Stories 2022](#)). For older members, however, reinterpreting the Book of Mormon may still require arrogating to oneself a hermeneutical authority, usually reserved for leaders of the Church. Murphy endorses this bottom-up approach to making Latter-day Saint theology less insulting and alienating through community engagement with outsiders, including Indigenous groups. Like Murphy, I support re-evaluating and recontextualising the BOM to deconstruct racism and misogyny in its text ([Mormon Stories 2022](#); [Murphy 2005](#)).

To further our understanding of the problematic nature between the Church and Indigenous Peoples, the next section will discuss the place of Moreton-Robinson’s white possessive doctrine and the Author’s Salvation Contract.

## 5. The White Possessive Doctrine and the Salvation Contract

Like state sovereignty, salvific authority legitimises settler/invasor domination over Indigenous people. Narratives of discovery and salvation civilise violence and dispossession. The white possessive Church rejects Indigenous spirituality, and with it the Indigenous calls for decolonisation and the assertions of cultural and spiritual autonomy that flow therefrom. Indigenous cultures’ “original instructions” contradict the Church’s monopolistic claims of salvation and truth (See [Nelson 2008](#); [Simon 2022b, 2023a](#)).

Despite the Church’s efforts to “deracialise” and to conceal its white possessiveness, it is increasingly recognised as an institution that is settler/invasor colonial and historically white supremacist. However, Mormon studies have mostly focused on North America and rarely investigated outside that context. Furthermore, Mormon studies scholars’ attention to decolonisation has been antithetical to decolonisation or postcolonial at best ([Simon 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2024a](#); [Brooks and Colvin 2018](#)). Due to its isolation from critical Indigenous studies, Mormon studies have rarely addressed decolonisation as such. To legitimately “decolonise”, the Church must leave Indigenous land ([Simon 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2024a, n.d.](#)).

Mormon studies scholars need to engage with non-Mormon and critical Indigenous studies scholars on the topics of settler/invasor colonialism and decolonisation. Racism is a major issue, as Mormon studies scholars have recognised, but possession is an even bigger issue, and its importance has not been well understood in Mormon studies. Mormon and

religious studies theorists should particularly familiarise themselves with Aileen Moreton-Robinson's theorisation of the White Possessive Doctrine (See [Simon 2022b](#)). Originally applied to Indigenous-state relations, this analytical concept has applicability well outside that domain, including to Mormon and religious studies.

In Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere, churches and governments have sought to extinguish Indigenous cultures and languages in what amounts to cultural genocide ([Colvin 2017](#); [Simon 2022b](#)). In the Latter-day Saint context, this has included a long history of "Indian" adoption and education programs that separated Indigenous children from their parents and placed them with white families (See [Boxer 2015](#); [Jacobs 2016](#)). Even adult Indigenous adherents, moreover, are folded into a totalising settler/invader-colonial Church culture which leaves little room for—and shows little tolerance toward—Indigenous community involvement. Theology, in short, is the continuation of colonial warfare by other means, resulting in Indigenous cultural death (See [Simon 2022b](#)).

Churches and governments also collaborate in dehumanising Aotearoa New Zealand's Indigenous people by undermining their mana and tapu and appropriating their cultures and identities to legitimise the plunder of their land. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints promotes obedience to settlers/invaders in exchange for "gifts" of revelation, priesthood power, and salvation, while the New Zealand government promotes obedience to the state in exchange for "human rights" ([Simon 2016, 2022b, 2022c, 2023a, 2024a](#)). Neither acknowledges that Indigenous people already possess rights, sovereignty, and spiritual power of their own.

Summarizing Moreton-Robinson's notion of the White Possessive Doctrine, [Simon \(2022b\)](#) comments:

In this [settler/invader colonial] system, the Crown promotes that only the Crown can hold possession within the territory of the nation state. While doing so, governments dehumanized hapū and iwi in order to legitimize their actions and then sought to make us fully human by exercising benevolence and virtue in its many forms. In this act, the government has a need to look benevolent to remove the moral position held by hapu and iwi away from them. That that possession works ideologically (as a set of beliefs) to render and neutralize the nation as a white possessive (i.e., Sovereignty was ceded to the Crown). 'White possessive sovereignty' is what results of that possession—this is where the administration is usually white and is patriarchally male. Through the law the government legislated the legal theft of Indigenous lands (New Zealand Land Wars and incidents like Ngatapa or Rangiaowhia of the Indigenous population).<sup>4</sup> (also see [Simon 2016, 2021, 2022c](#))

According to [Moreton-Robinson \(2015\)](#), patriarchal white sovereignty's possessive logic intellectually and discursively naturalises the nation as a white possession. Patriarchal white sovereignty is based on unlawful possession and manifests most strongly in the Crown and judiciary. The Crown owns its territory, the foundation of the nation-state. Like the Crown, the Church claims truth and redemption. The Church legitimises Indigenous oppression by calling Indigenous people "Lamanites", archiving whakapapa, and delegitimising mana. Mormons believe Indigenous people can only become completely human through the agency of white saviours practising charity and virtue. The Church recognises Indigenous identity, culture, and spirituality only on its terms ([Simon 2022b, 2023a, 2024b, n.d.](#)).

White possessiveness ignores historical colonial violence and hinders Indigenous understanding of that history, which deprived Māori of land, language, spirituality, and culture, contributing to current social, economic, and religious disparities ([O'Malley 2019](#); [Simon 2016](#); [Walker 2004](#)). This historical amnesia portrays Aotearoa New Zealand as a fair, peaceful, post-racist nation. The Church has profited from this amnesia and ignores persistent racialisation in its own culture and institutions ([Colvin 2018](#)). White Mormons can enjoy the benefits of being "white and delightful" while also moving freely and

un-self-consciously in a church that professes to have transcended racism while continuing to value settler/invasader worldviews.

Like the government, the Church does not view Indigenous people as fully human; full humanity is only acquired through Church affiliation. To separate from the church is to fall into barbarism and to roam the forest is an uncivilised Lamanite (Simon 2022b; Cf Simon 2021). Piety, Mormonism, and salvation, in contrast, are civilised and respectable. Mormonism uses Lamanite existence to substantiate its truth claims, portraying Indigenous peoples as fallen savages in need of salvation. This premise underpins Mormon missionary work in Indigenous communities (Hernandez 2021). The Church tells Indigenous peoples that if they obey white patriarchy, they may stay on their land and become “white and delightful.” Otherwise, they will be silenced, evicted, and erased (Simon 2022b).

## 6. Collective and Cultural Memory

This essay is related to “collective memory” or “cultural memory”, that is, the depiction of the past and its translation into common cultural knowledge by successive generations through “vehicles of memory.” Halbwachs and Coser’s (1992) seminal work states that memory helps people live in groups and communities, which helps them form memories (AlSadaty 2018). Assmann (1995) emphasises that the concept of “collective memory” challenges and improves upon the concept of “racial memory” (e.g., in Jungian psychology), which was too biologically deterministic. Confino (1997) defines collective memory as “the representation of the past and the making of it into a common cultural knowledge by successive generations in ‘vehicles of memory’ such as books, films, museums, commemorations, and others.” Another writer calls culture “objectivised” in “texts, images, rites, buildings, monuments, cities, or even landscapes” (Green 2008, p. 104; Assmann 2011, p. 128). Social memory impacts group identification and survival (Simon 2015).

Assmann (2011) notes that while individuals preserve and recall memories in their minds, memorials and cultural practices generate a collective memory. Key experiences must be repeated and concretised to define a group. This process of memory construction stores cultural symbols and knowledge and must be comprehended through institutionalised heritage (Assmann 1995). Cultural artefacts, such as mōteatea or whakapapa, can hold memories for those who have invested in them (Assmann 2011; Simon 2023b, 2024b). Like haka, whakapapa is a cultural emblem that creates community identification and preserves collective memory in Māori society (Simon 2015). These cultural objects represent and convey traditional Māori beliefs. Therefore, whakapapa, like waiata or haka, is integral to Māori identity, as it preserves Māori language and customs (Ka’ai-Mahuta 2010).

Collective memory shapes ethnic, national, and religious identities (Cairns and Roe 2002). It helps groups “construct identity” in social settings (Assmann 1995, p. 130). Cultural memory changes with each generation and is renegotiated to match contemporary requirements. It always includes current information, requiring self-reconstruction. “Identities and memories are highly selective, inscriptive rather than descriptive, serving specific interests and ideological positions”, writes John Gillis (1994, p. 4). Assmann (2011) says that memory vehicles can maintain or delete memory. Power, identity, ideology, social limitations, and memory support each other. Cultural memory speaks to commemorative and material entities that shape group legacy to reactivate a beneficial past (Simon 2015, 2019, 2023b, 2024b).

Assmann (1995) differentiates cultural from communicative memory. Communication spreads interactive memories. For instance, one person or group may tell another a joke or a story about their own actions. Communicative memories are short-term “everyday memories”, in contrast to cultural memories that have the ability to span centuries (Hirst and Manier 2008). Communicative memories become “objectivised culture” or the “culturally institutionalised legacy of a society.” (Hirst and Manier 2008; Simon 2023b) Verbal memories are carried on and reside in everyone. Symbols preserve cultural memories “in the world.” Cultural memories may become the “mode of reality” when people become aware of them and absorb them into society’s view (Hirst and Manier 2008).

## 7. Key Māori Concepts: Mana, Taonga, Tapu, and Whakapapa

A taonga is “something that is valued or considered precious” (Silveira 2018). Over many years, the Waitangi Tribunal has carefully defined “taonga”, as used in the Treaties of Waitangi, as a tangible or intangible item or matter of special cultural significance (Stephens 2011). In the Te Reo Claim, the Waitangi Tribunal states (Waitangi Tribunal 1986):

But even describing Te Reo as a taonga understates its importance. The language is clearly a taonga of quite transcendent importance to Māori, and few other taonga could rival its status. Without it, Māori identity would be fundamentally undermined, as would the very existence of Māori as a distinguishable people. (p. 1 as cited in Stephens 2011, p. 64)

I would argue that whakapapa is one of the very few taonga that counts as equal to Te Reo in its centrality to Māori identity. Its alteration has very serious and complex implications for Māori. In particular, it is a degradation of mana and tapu. Along these same lines, Rachael Ka'ai-Mahuta (2019) points out that “Data [like whakapapa] can be described as a taonga, a living treasure, because of its strategic importance to Māori” (p. 27). Traditionally, the value of whakapapa was partly a function of the relative inaccessibility of detailed information. Broadly speaking, while people would know their own whakapapa, “not all whakapapa is available to all people” (Silveira 2018, p. 6).

Elsdon Best characterises the tapu system as a network of restrictions that deeply influenced the daily lives of indigenous people. The laws of tapu governed various aspects of life such as birth, marriage, illness, passing away, burial, exhumation, and all industries. These rules apply to every member of the community without exception. Disobeying these rules meant disaster for the individual, but the gods, not iwi, imposed punishment (Best 1982). According to Michael Shirres (1982), tapu is the “potentiality for power while mana is the power itself.” Tania Ka'ai explains the interrelatedness of mana and tapu by saying:

Everything in the world pertains to mana and tapu, although to varying degrees. Hierarchical structures in Māori society demonstrate this through the notion of ariki (paramount chief), rangatira (chief of a hapū), tūtūā (commoner) and taurekareka (slave). (Ka'ai 2008, p. 59)

Ka'ai (2008) continues:

Understanding one's whakapapa is essential in determining status in Māori society. Therefore, mana and tapu can be inherited. . . . Māori society continues to recognise inherited mana and tapu of individuals and their collective, whānau, hapū and iwi. Furthermore, mana can be acquired in leadership by the action of people. This is recognised by the actions of individuals in support of their collective groups. Mana and tapu in these instances are recognised by Māori people when they show support for these people. (p. 59)

Carwyn Jones (2014) asserts that “mana is the central concept that underlies Māori leadership and accountability” (p. 194). Māori Marsden (1975) describes mana as “spiritual power and authority as opposed to the purely psychic and natural force—ihi” (p. 145), and Margaret Mutu (2011) defines it as “power, authority, ownership, status, influence, dignity, respect derived from the gods” (p. 145). There are many types of mana. It is a central concept of our Indigenous ontology and is inseparable from our authority over our homelands and our position as uri of Ranginui, Papatuanuku, and Ngā Atua. It describes and affirms our belonging to the environment and the land.

According to an explanatory paper from The Ministry of Justice (2001):

Mana and tapu govern Māori order and dispute. Mana and tapu are the practical forces of the kāwai tūpuna [ancestors] in everyday matters, and the need to defend them from insult, excessive generosity, war, or mākuutu [sorcery] through utu made life turbulent. Mana and tapu inspired great hospitality and feasting, aristocratic rituals and alliances, the construction of pā and whareniui. Virtually every Māori activity, ceremonial or otherwise, involves mana and tapu. It's key

to personal and group integrity. . . . Ignoring the mana and tapu of individuals and their collectives would be considered takahi mana, which would have consequences. Māori exert a lot of energy respecting mana and tapu because the consequences are often hard to reverse and can damage a person's reputation for life. (p. 55, cited in [Ka'ai 2008](#), p. 60)

Takahi mana entails certain consequences and future debts. By engaging in takahi mana, people accept reciprocity or utu. Their choice could rebound on them. The [Ministry of Justice \(2001\)](#) further comments:

To takahi mana can cause great whakamā (shame and embarrassment). Māori avoid this concept because it can have the effect of causing a stigma on the collective. This again supports the notion that collective interests are held above individual ones. Ultimately, shame can be brought upon the collective through the actions of an individual and therefore, the collective has to take responsibility for this. "Thus, if you are representing a particular group, you must act in a manner that does not bring disgrace on them". (p. 55, as cited in [Ka'ai 2008](#), p. 60)

I have previously noted that there are three key points in relation to tapu and whakapapa: (1) tapu means "sacred"; (2) whakapapa is considered tapu; and (3), traditionally, the more whakapapa you know, the more tapu you are ([Simon 2019](#)). [Silveira \(2018\)](#) writes:

kaumātua (elders) were reluctant to give certain information as they believed that it was tapu and was given to them under certain circumstances and only under those circumstances will they give it on. The principle of tapu and noa was strongly held with many of the kaumatua and kuia and provided a justification for restricting the distribution of information or mātauranga. (p. 5)

We will now examine the concept of whakapapa, particularly in relation to Latter-day Saint notions of genealogy and family history.

From the beginning, whakapapa described life and our place in it. This fundamental concept of whakapapa persists among non-Māori and ourselves; everything has a whakapapa. Tīpene O'Regan emphasises the ongoing connection between ancestors and Māori in the present—between ethics and genealogy. "My past", he says, "is not a dead thing to be examined on the post-mortem bench of science without my consent and without an active recognition that I and my whakapapa are alive and kicking" ([O'Regan 1987](#), p. 142). Māori commentators have been advocating for Pākehā and non-Māori to relinquish their role as "experts" in Māori culture and to allow Māori to reclaim their expertise for the past decade ([Mahuika 2019](#)). [Mahuika \(2019\)](#) emphasises the importance of living whakapapa to understand it rather than merely using it when convenient as the colonisers have done.

Whakapapa is a complex and well-known Māori concept. It describes generations in a lineage, genealogy, or family tree and includes all interactions, not just humans. Trees, birds, mountains, rivers, and events can have whakapapa. Whakapapa incorporates organisms, materials, and ecological and morphological relationships. It organises environmental data and the people's embeddedness in their environs. Mātauranga is organised by whakapapa ([Hudson et al. 2007](#), p. 43). Jude [Roberts et al. \(2006\)](#) add that everyone—animal, mountain, lake, star, and river—has a whakapapa or habitat. Understanding whakapapa is crucial for comprehending Māori worldviews and relationships. Everything and everyone is connected by genealogy.

Whakapapa typifies the traditional Māori identity and social organisation, but it is just as vital to modern Māori welfare. The word is derived from "papa", which means "strong foundation", and "whaka", which means "becoming." Taken literally, then, Whakapapa means "to lie flat, to place in layers one upon another" ([Rāmekā 2012](#)), or more broadly, "laying a foundation." This foundation both establishes a kaupapa (purpose) and forms an identity. Whakapapa explains and highlights the most important interpersonal connections. As an expression of whanaungatanga (kinship), it is a persistent identity marker ([Hudson et al. 2007](#), p. 44).

In the holistic and cyclical Māori worldview, humans are connected to all living things and to the atua, who hold control over various areas. Traditional Māori beliefs are linked by a whakapapa that connects spiritual and physical aspects. This idea includes human interactions and relationships between persons and their environment. This thickly braided whakapapa makes defining customary notions challenging because each idea is defined by its relationship with other concepts (Ka'ai 2008, p. 58).

The most common definition of whakapapa is “genealogical table”, which describes group affiliations. Whakapapa is more complicated than kinship mapping or “genealogy”, however. According to Forster (2019), connectedness to ancestors, the environment, and future generations create relationships of obligation and rules for action, such that whakapapa determines ethics. Silveira (2018) emphasises that whakapapa is about connectedness. Te Ao Māori values relationships between humans and nature, with the understanding that everything has a creator and a whakapapa.

Makereti Papakura (1938) observes that Whakapapa is regarded as “most important to a Māori” (p. 37). Māori practices around whakapapa reflect this fact. Traditionally, for instance, the recitation of whakapapa was often delivered through oral mnemonic devices, such as waiata (song), oriori (chants), and/or kōrero (stories) to protect the integrity of memory (Taiapa 2017). This knowledge was also captured in visual representations such as elaborate carvings, motifs, and symbolic messages encoded inside and outside the wharehau (ancestral house) (Taonui 2005).

In a very real sense, Whakapapa is the bloodline that binds tipuna (ancestors) and mōrehu (descendants) to their culture, language, and identity (Taiapa 2017). It reminds them of their ancient origins, present conditions, and future aspirations. Moreover, whakapapa determines not only Māori identity but also Māori action in the world. To falsify or alter whakapapa is to falsify the moral core from which our actions stem.

## 8. A Mormon Whakapapa Sheet

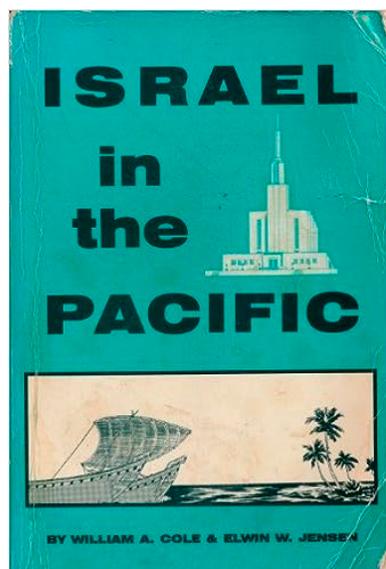
The faithful Latter-day Saint scholar Louis C. Midgley (2014) writes of the origin of this whakapapa sheet:

The growing interest in traditional Māori lore and learning among Latter-day Saints is commendable. Herewini Jones, a skilled teacher, started wānanga for Māori in the late 1990s to explore the connection between Māori matakite and the restored gospel. Herewini Jones' exceptional teaching was completely supported by Richard Hunter, Auckland Mission President from 1998 to 1999. Paul Mendenhall, a Māori speaker who succeeded President Hunter in 1999, frequently used it. (p. 62)

He also wrote that:

This public instruction in arcane lore and whakapapa (genealogy) shows LDS connections. Since 1998, Herewini Jones' wānanga has been a key tool for converting new Saints, deepening their faith, and reuniting in complete fellowship. This effort helped Māori see that their esoteric lore and tikanga (ruling rule, habit, regulating authority, proper method) align with a genuine faith in God. I believe this lesson strengthens faith. Other LDS Māori scholars can now investigate the impact of traditional wānanga teachings on the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ among Māori and their impact on Māori Saints' faith. Newton is seeing some of his predictions come true. (Midgley 2014, p. 62)

These efforts, particularly by Māori Mormons, to appropriate and alter whakapapa represent an attempt to keep The Church relevant in modern Te Ao Māori. They ask Māori, and more broadly the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific, to believe in the Church's demonstrably racist salvific truth and to trust in the honour of its demonstrably abusive institutions. The Church actively encourages this activity and cultivates knowledge infrastructure aimed at such appropriation, for instance in publications such as *Israel in The Pacific*. (See Figure 2)



**Figure 2.** The Front Cover of Cole & Jensen’s *Israel in The Pacific*.

The above “wānanga”, mentioned by Midgley, is still taking place, to some degree, as you can see them being advertised by video on social media. This is despite the death of figures such as their chief proponent Herewini Jones in 2021.

### 9. Cultural Issues and Considerations

It is common to see the Latter-day Saint literature proclaim that the Church holds no “official” position on Hagoth and his supposed position as an ancestor of Tāngata Moana. However, as previously stated, the Mormon Church, like other invading entities, has its own particular “culture of colonisation”, including norms aimed at maintaining plausible deniability around its continuing complicity in racism and Indigenous dispossession (Simon 2022a). The Church’s continued presence as a settler/invader colonising force on Indigenous land and its members’ collective actions and attitudes toward Indigenous peoples speak volumes, whether official or not.

I point this out because the Church trains its members to “testify” to the truth and validity of the Book of Mormon. Testimony is a non-reflexive and non-reciprocal form of discourse. It permits ideas and information to flow in only one direction, outward, not inward. Like conquest, it seeks to absorb and change the other without being changed by the other. As such, it is an inherently imperialistic discourse. When I call for Latter-day Saints to engage in critical Indigenous studies, I mean that they must lay aside the testimonial mode of discourse and take up the conversational mode of discourse, with all its implied openness and mutuality. They must prepare themselves, when the other holds up a mirror, to look bravely into it and to see themselves from new and unflattering angles.

Te Ao Māori offers a compelling model for such discussion. We consider it ethical or tika to engage in debate and to self-reflexively question so the collective may find an acceptable way forward that has depth and is true or correct. Our cultural decision-making is consensus-driven and performed for the benefit of the collective (Simon 2022a, 2022b, 2023b). However, Latter-day Saints need not become Māori to embrace these values, for there warrant for such an engagement in their own tradition. The Church’s founding prophet Joseph Smith urged Latter-day Saints to “receive truth, let it come from whence it may” (Hedges et al. 2015; J. Smith 2002, p. 324). Additionally, the Church itself has acknowledged in its Gospel Topics Essays that the Book of Mormon is primarily a spiritual rather than historical text, which, unlike the Bible, does not describe independently verifiable historical events (Murphy and Baca 2020; Simon 2023a).

As a scholar, my job is not to testify; it is to search, discover, evaluate, engage, and educate. When approached in this mode, the claim that Māori or Tāngata Moana descend

from Hagoth appears untenable. DNA research and human migration studies have conclusively proven that there is no genealogical link between Native Americans and Israelites (Murphy 2002, 2003b; Murphy and Baca 2020; Mormon Stories 2022; Southerton 2004, 2020; Simon 2023a). Given the racial and technological anachronisms contained within the Book of Mormon that date the document to the nineteenth-century United States, there is no reason to believe that Hagoth existed, let alone that he is Hawai'iloa, the ancient Polynesian discoverer and founder of Hawai'i (Simon 2023a; Also see Mormon Stories 2022).

The Church, like capitalism, “must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere” (Renton 2005) to sell its product, salvation and the realisation of its salvific truth. It goes hand-in-hand with settler/invasor colonialism and tacitly shares the settler/invasor goal of removing or erasing indigeneity and transforming Māori into ideal Westernised or Americanised “spiritual consumers” of its product. Recognising, perhaps, that it cannot replace Māori culture or values in a day, it instead replaces them in an incremental or piecemeal way. By replacing Ranginui and Papatūānuku with Adam and Eve, the Church strips away Māori people's genealogical relationship to the Indigenous community and begins the process of converting them into individual consumers who can be sold “perfectibility” through “works” for salvation. The alteration of whakapapa towards Adam and Eve, as demonstrated above the Indigenous Pacific, particularly Māori, are racialised and cursed twice over. Firstly, by the Hagoth discourse and secondly, via the Adam and Eve through Cain story from the Bible (see Genesis 4: 1–26).

Yet, whakapapa is not a modular mechanical system comprised of widgets that can be interchangeably swapped out. To transform sacred Māori whakapapa into a Christian family tree is to hollow out its moral core, to hinder Māori from fulfilling their “original instructions”, to strip away and overtake the mana of hapū and iwi, to delete the knowledge of our interrelatedness with animals and the physical world, and to collectively kill off Te Ao Māori.

All of this is performed to promote a belief system that, as demonstrated above, is significantly racist, and an institutional infrastructure and administration run by rich white men and animated by a possessive logic. That logic aims to civilise the Indigenous population through white patriarchal salvation. Our “salvation” as indigenous peoples is predicated on the belief that we are part of the “wilderness” and that the Church has a divine manifest destiny to find, preach to, and civilise us. In doing so, they lay claim to ownership of Indigenous spirituality, culture, and belief systems. However, it must be noted that the Church is only interested in the ‘anthro’ aspects of whakapapa for that is what can be “religiously saved”.

Latter-day Saint theology is deeply influenced by early capitalist theory, and it shares that theory's faith in the inevitable march of “progress” and the moral superiority of urbanist individualism over holistic communal ways of living in the natural environment. To capitalists, “progress” and “civilisation” have always meant subdividing, enclosing, and privatising land so that it can be possessed by white settler/invasors. Privatisation of the land, in turn, has always required the absorption or displacement of Indigenous inhabitants. To Latter-day Saints, our position as “Lamanites” in the wilderness means it is only a matter of time before we and our lands become the possession of white patriarchal systems of spiritual and economic “development” that will remodel us in the imperial image. It goes without saying that such views harm Māori culture and identity and create conflict with the decolonising direction of contemporary Te Ao Māori.

For Māori Church members, it can be conceived as an attempt to reconcile their Mormon belief with their Māori culture. Unfortunately, it is not an innocent one. Due to the lack of knowledge available to some whānau and rangatahi Māori (Māori youth), some groups of Māori do not have a strong background in cultural knowledge due to the effects of colonising forces. Thus, Mormon whakapapa alteration can cause real harm as these forms of promotion target rangatahi with the intention of fraudulently attracting them into or retaining them in the Church. I would argue that, because this form of whakapapa

is historically and scientifically falsifiable, it also risks causing distress when a rangatahi reaches adulthood and starts to experience doubts in the Church narrative.

Like haka and waiata, which are Māori forms of memorialisation and commemoration, whakapapa operates in a similar fashion. It communicates values and meanings, such as mātauranga, based on shared knowledge. Ceremonies and formal community events employ them to reinforce cultural messages. Trained specialists foster mātauranga performance, promoting a normative self-image of Māori groups and values. They provide cultural symbols and mātauranga to strengthen the Māori self-image. They have also preserved memories of war and its aftermath in individual iwi chronicles. Haka and waiata embody cultural and community memory (Simon 2015, pp. 90–91; Also see Simon 2023b).

The danger here is that whakapapa defines identity in Te Ao Māori and is a taonga of significant importance. Like haka, it encodes cultural memories that provide a normative image of the group, for instance by identifying the group as Ngāti Toa. When the whakapapa is falsified, its purpose is subverted, and it is made to reinforce the cultural memory of Mormons instead of Māori. In fact, it promotes the opposite of cultural memory, a cultural forgetting of the settler/invaser nature of Mormonism and its role in cultural genocide. Since whakapapa is the essence of our identity as collectives of Indigenous Peoples, hapū and iwi are being violated, and so are Māori values central to our tapu and mana.

## 10. Conclusions

The alteration of whakapapa in Aotearoa New Zealand, or mo'okū'auhau from Hawai'i, is a form of cultural genocide and violence aimed at the white patriarchal possession of Indigenous people and Indigenous land. It is a continuation of the settler/invaser colonial invasion by other means. It is a violation of mana motuhake (Indigenous Sovereignty) and of all that Māori hold tapu, or sacred. It also perpetuates the racialisation of Pacific peoples and the legacy of white supremacy.

Mormon falsification of whakapapa is all the more outrageous because it is rooted in demonstrably false historical claims. Findings from genetic science and human migration studies directly contradict the Book of Mormon's claims about Indigenous ancestry. The book may be viewed as a spiritual manual or narrative, but not as a factual historical text. Viewed this way, the alterations made to whakapapa make no sense.

Mormon appropriation of taonga Māori highlights the need for greater intercultural engagement, as well as greater engagement of academic disciplines such as religious studies with critical Indigenous studies. Cultural appropriation hinders Te Ao Māori's efforts to decolonise, not only by diluting the sources of Māori cultural distinctiveness but also by enlisting Māori adherents as promoters of settler/invaser ways. Instead of undermining the Māori cultural renaissance, settlers/invasers must listen to it, learn from it, and heed its call to decolonise.

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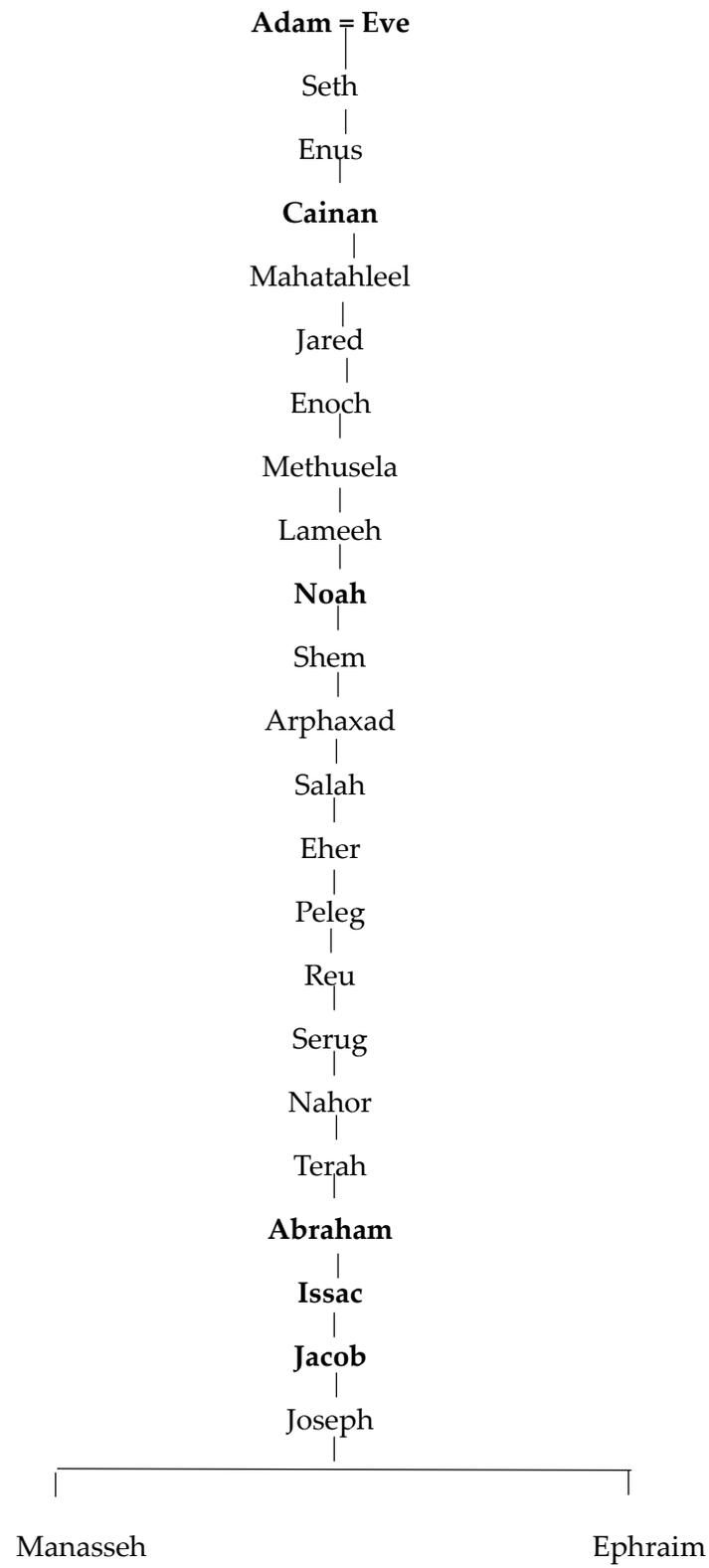
**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

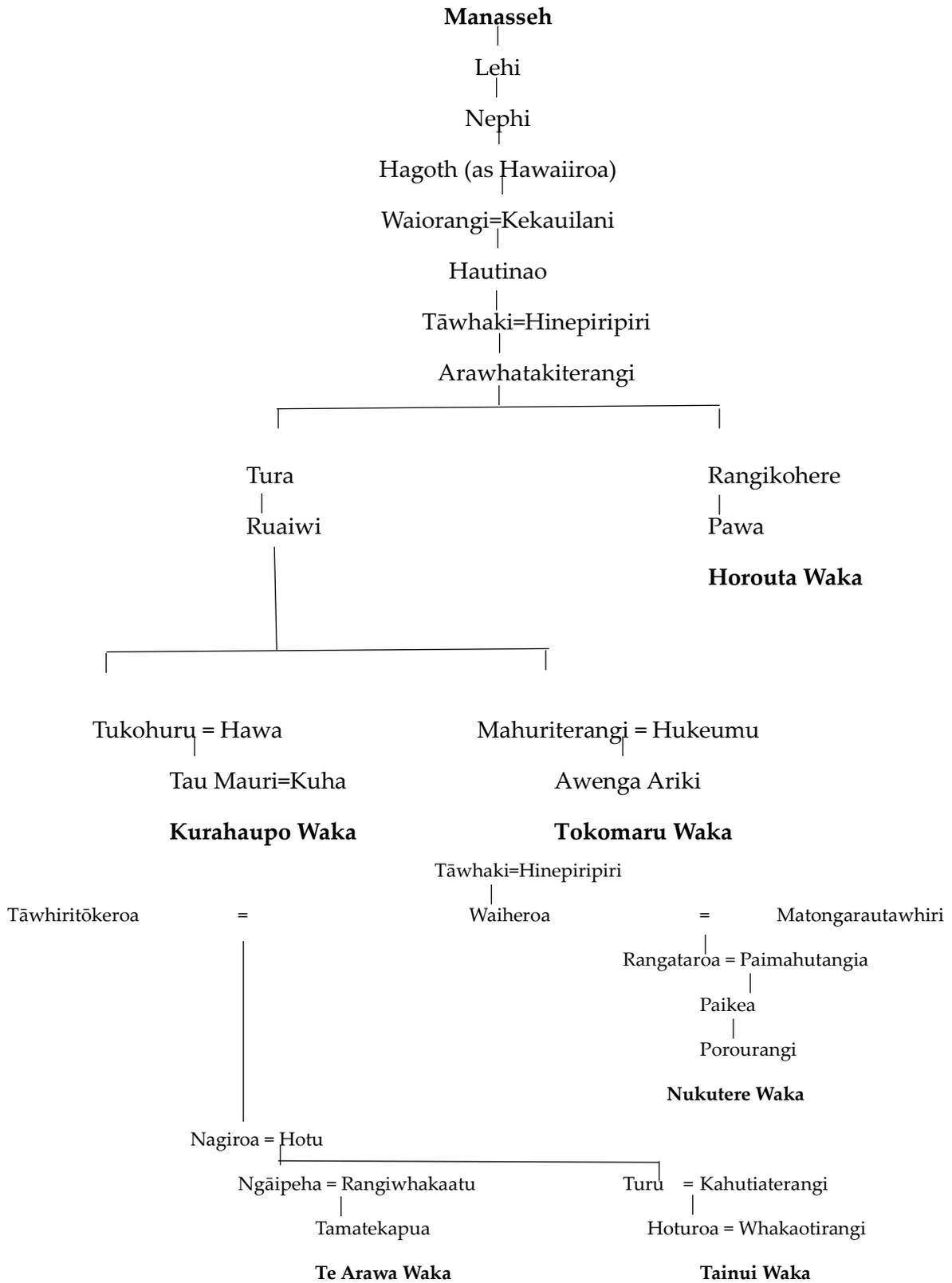
**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

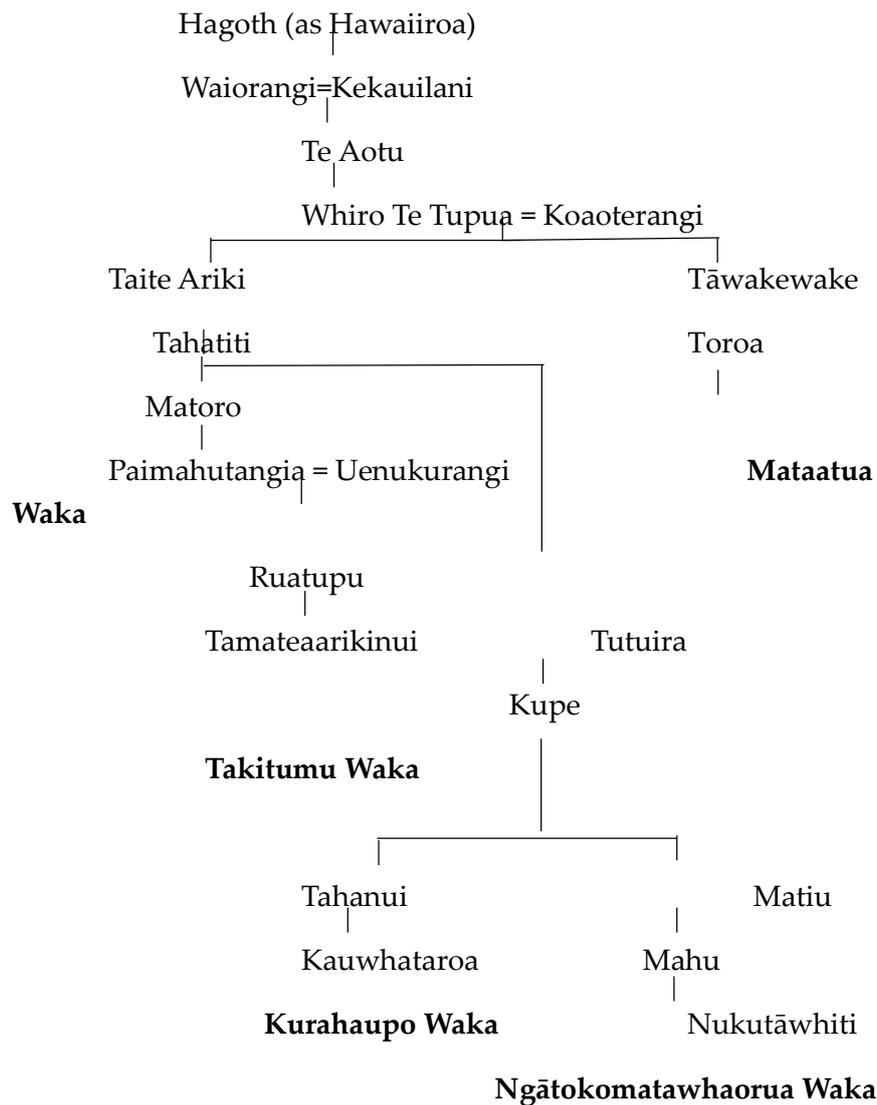
**Data Availability Statement:** For the purposes of transparency the Author has made the information on the whakapapa sheet (see Figure 1) discussed in this research available as Appendix A. However, no new data was created as a result of this study.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Appendix A**







## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For a more fuller explanation of Te Orokohanga see (Winter 2020). A Māori Creation Story in Sand—Ranginui and Papatūānuku. YouTube video. Available online: <https://youtu.be/g1Kpekzyyg0> (accessed on 12 January 2024).
- <sup>2</sup> As a side effect of this turn towards decolonisation and increase in political consciousness, the number of Māori identifying as atheists is on the increase. This is also having an impact on Māori church attendance. For more information on these phenomena refer to (Rahmani and Adds 2023): <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/503554/maori-atheism-on-the-rise-legacy-of-colonisation-driving-decline-in-traditional-christian-beliefs> (accessed on 12 January 2024).
- <sup>3</sup> Refer to the Church essay on Lamanites and DNA, “Book of Mormon and DNA Studies”, at [www.lds.org/topics/book-of-mormon-and-dna-studies](http://www.lds.org/topics/book-of-mormon-and-dna-studies) (accessed on 12 January 2024). In this essay, the Church has tentatively acknowledged that the Book of Mormon is more of a spiritual than historical nature. For a critique of this essay, please refer to Murphy, Thomas, and Angelo Baca. 2020. DNA and the Book of Mormon: Science, Settlers, and Scripture. The LDS Gospel Topics Series: A Scholarly Engagement. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, pp. 69–95.
- <sup>4</sup> For a more indepth exploration of the issues raised here see (Simon 2016, 2021, 2022b, 2022c; Williams 2006; Belich 2013; Kidman et al. 2018; Kidman et al. 2022; Wynsley 2019; Coromandel-Wander 2013; RNZ 2021).

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