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## Profit and Prophecy: The Polynesian Cultural Center and Lā'ie's Recurrent Colonialism

THE MORMONS IN THE small town of Lā'ie, Hawai'i, say that there are three pillars of their community—the spiritual, the educational, and the cultural—and that these are represented respectively by the Hawai'i temple, the Hawai'i campus of Brigham Young University, and the Polynesian Cultural Center. This trio of institutions is said to exemplify Mormonism, a religion that places a high value on education and culture. But this is a too facile explanation of Lā'ie's development and of its famed theme park, the Polynesian Cultural Center. Each of Lā'ie's "pillars" has been anchored firmly in the pronouncements of ecclesiastical emissaries from the mainland, men revered as prophets. And the Center, or PCC, rose only in part as a celebration of culture. Instead, it is a church-operated enterprise much like the old Lā'ie sugar plantation established by Mormon missionaries more than a century ago, and it returned Lā'ie to a state of Mormon colonization reminiscent of that time.

According to some sources, ancient Lā'ie was a sacred place of refuge in which fugitives could find sanctuary, even from royal ire, if they could reach the place ahead of their pursuers and receive purification ceremonies from the resident priests.<sup>1</sup> Mod-

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ern Mormon writers have invoked this ancient image to parallel the church's designation of Lā'ie in 1865 as the "gathering place" where Hawaiian converts to Mormonism could live apart from the rest of the world under the tutelage of missionaries from Utah.<sup>2</sup> But isolation and tutelage were not the only benefits to be gained. The gathering place also provided the location and the work force to establish a colonial industry that would make the missionary effort in Hawai'i economically self-supporting and a contributor to the new church's expanding economic network.<sup>3</sup> And again, in the latter half of the twentieth century, the church has provided employment, income, and prosperity to Lā'ie in the 30 years since the PCC opened. In both cases, however, the economic benefits have been at the expense of local economic self-determination and entrepreneurialism. Then as now, the church brought Lā'ie's resources into global exchange in a way that established in Lā'ie a type of colonial condition known as "dependency."

Dependency theory addresses global economies and has been influential in the last 30 years among researchers who oppose theories of modernization and economic development for Third World nations. Dependency theory contends that a global capitalist system tends to establish "core" regions that benefit substantially from colonization of "peripheral" regions that supply resources for the core and which then become helplessly underdeveloped because they are dominated by the core economies.<sup>4</sup> In other words, development, of necessity, breeds chronic underdevelopment. Theotonio Dos Santos's definition of dependency is often cited:

By dependency we mean a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies, and between these and world trade, assumes the form of dependence when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and be self-sustaining, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion.<sup>5</sup>

For more than a century, first through the sugar plantation, then through the PCC, the economy of Lā'ie has been "conditioned" not by a foreign nation, but by emissaries from a church in a distant country with express regional economic goals that have rendered Lā'ie underdeveloped and dependent.

#### MISSIONARIES, CONVERTS, AND TOURISTS

Mormon missionaries originally came to Lā'ie shortly after they first arrived in Hawai'i in December 1850. This was only three years after the Mormon exodus to the Salt Lake Valley in Utah, during a fervent period of colonization of the American West and worldwide missionizing.<sup>6</sup> Finding little success among the Caucasians living in Hawai'i, the missionaries soon turned their attention to converting the Native Hawaiians. By 1855, the Mormon population was 4,650, with more than 50 organized congregations scattered through several Island villages, including Lā'ie; however, membership fluctuated erratically because of disease and because many Hawaiian converts fell away from the church.<sup>7</sup> In addition, many of the most devoted converts in villages like Lā'ie left when the first gathering place was established in the Pālāwai Basin on Lāna'i in 1854.<sup>8</sup> The Lāna'i colony failed a decade later, however, due to a combination of drought, crop failure, and the political opportunism of the colony's leader, Walter Murray Gibson.<sup>9</sup>

After the Lāna'i failure, the Mormons needed a new place to find refuge from the world. In 1865, the church purchased the 6,000-acre Lā'ie plantation on O'ahu for \$14,000 from Thomas T. Dougherty, the former American consul in Honolulu. This was to be the Mormons' new gathering place. The purchase included several hundred head of livestock, a few farm buildings, and a handful of small Hawaiian villages, among them Lā'ie.<sup>10</sup>

Popular accounts of the selection of Lā'ie as the new gathering place associate the event with a heavenly manifestation. David W. Cummings relates that Brigham Young, who was then the prophet and president of the church, appeared in a dream to Francis A. Hammond, one of the missionaries charged with find-



FIG. 1. Lā'ie as it looked about the time it was purchased by Mormon missionaries. The photograph, taken near the current temple site, shows Goat Island in the bay and, on the far-right shoreline, the boat house, later site of the *hukilau*. (Courtesy BYU-Hawai'i Archives.)

ing the new gathering place. In Hammond's dream, Young indicated that Lā'ie was the chosen spot, a pronouncement much like his famous words, "This is the right place," uttered when the Mormon exodus reached the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. On the strength of this visionary confirmation, Hammond promptly bought the Lā'ie land.<sup>11</sup> This was only the first of several visions and prophecies that assured Lā'ie's uncertain existence and have become part of the lore of Lā'ie.

The Mormon colonization of Lā'ie occurred at a pivotal point in the history of Hawai'i and of the church. The capital, land, technical skills, and other resources had been amassed to propel the Hawaiian sugar industry into profitability on the world market.<sup>12</sup> Soon the Hawaiian sugar plantations outstripped the local labor pool. In 1865, the same year the Mormons purchased Lā'ie plantation, cane growers elsewhere in the kingdom imported the first 615 Chinese laborers from Kwangtung to work their fields. Japanese workers followed in 1868. Later came the Portuguese,

Filipinos, and others in what was the beginning of Hawai'i's unique multiculturalism.<sup>13</sup>

The mid-nineteenth century was also crucial for Mormonism. Between 1850 and 1890, the church sent great numbers of its mainland members on "economic missions" to perform gainful labors and build the Lord's kingdom. These "missionaries" were called to mine gold and lead, manufacture iron, raise silk, maintain express companies, farm cotton, learn telegraphy, mill textiles, and build factories, towns, and temples.<sup>14</sup>

Lā'ie was one of these chosen spots. According to Joseph H. Spurrier, the Lā'ie gathering site was intended to be an "agricultural mission," and the families that came from Utah after Lā'ie was purchased were sent as agricultural missionaries, not just evangelists.<sup>15</sup> In Brigham Young's plan, the Lā'ie plantation was to produce cotton and sugar that could be shipped to Utah to enter the flow of the vast redistribution of goods and crops that made up the early Mormon economic system.<sup>16</sup> In 1869, the manager and spiritual leader of the Lā'ie plantation opened a sugar trade with Utah. For years thereafter, regular shipments of Lā'ie sugar went to the church's headquarters in Utah, even when sugar prices were higher in Hawai'i.<sup>17</sup>

Lā'ie was not initially bountiful, however. After experiments with several types of crops, sugar cane was selected as the major crop to be produced in Lā'ie. But sugar cane requires vast amounts of water, and water was scarce in Lā'ie. For 20 years, the Hawaiian converts and the missionaries struggled to produce only a poor grade of sugar. All the while, new converts arriving at the gathering place required houses and employment. Homes, a meeting house, and a chapel were built to accommodate the growing population, but the limited water supply kept sugar cane production and life in general at disappointing levels.

With the Utah missionaries in positions of authority over the local work force,<sup>18</sup> Lā'ie was a dependent colony of the church. Lā'ie's economic and social affairs were controlled and directed by the church, which was essentially a foreign power ruling from a great distance through its appointed emissaries. Lā'ie's main resource, sugar, was grown primarily for export not to open markets, which might have increased Lā'ie's economic develop-

ment and self-determination, but through the church's system of internal regional redistribution.<sup>19</sup> Nor was the land made available for purchase to the local church members who worked the plantation. Instead, title to the land was first in the name of the plantation president. In 1879, the title was transferred to the president of the church in Utah.<sup>20</sup> Owned by the church, the land was rented to the tenants, with each family receiving enough land for a home and a garden.<sup>21</sup> In 1866, the president of the plantation, himself an emissary from Utah, stated in a church gathering that Lā'ie

. . . was purchased by the servants of God [i.e., the missionaries] and it [is] entirely under their control and direction. It is expected of the native brethren that come here to work [to] prove their condition by laboring under the direction of the servants of God and receive a just remuneration for all their labors.<sup>22</sup>

Even during these early times, Lā'ie was not without its notable visitors and sightseers. King Kalākaua, Queen Kapi'olani, and their attendants came repeatedly to Lā'ie to attend meetings, conferences, and celebrations. The king was attentive to the Mormon community partly because the birth rate among the Hawaiians in Lā'ie was higher than anywhere else in his kingdom.<sup>23</sup> The queen was impressed by the Mormon women's organization known as the Relief Society and in 1877 used it as a model for a women's organization among her own followers. Later she and this organization founded the maternity hospital that still bears her name.<sup>24</sup>

Even divine appointments and royal attention, however, could not alleviate the growing disappointment of the missionaries and the Hawaiian converts over the poor prospects of making Lā'ie a success. In response to their complaints, Joseph F. Smith, nephew of the prophet Joseph Smith and a former missionary to Hawai'i who himself later became the prophet and president of the church, made a prophecy in 1885. At the time, he was living in Hawai'i to evade imprisonment in Utah for plural marriage. While consoling in its effect on the Mormons of Lā'ie, the prophecy indicates the bleakness of their existence:

Do not complain because of the many trials which come to you, because of the barrenness of the land, the lack of water, the scarcity of foods to which you are accustomed, and the poverty as well. Be patient, for the day is coming when this land will become a most beautiful land. Water shall spring forth in abundance, and upon the barren land you now see, the Saints will build homes, taro will be planted, and there will be plenty to eat and drink. Many trees will be planted and this place will become verdant, the fragrance of flowers will fill the air, and trees which are now seen growing on the mountains will be moved by the Saints and will grow in this place near the sea, and because of the great beauty of the land, inland birds will come here and sing their songs.<sup>25</sup>

The words gave Lā'ie Mormons the heart to persevere. They redoubled efforts to locate sources of water and shortly brought in a number of artesian wells that supplied the promised abundance of water. The plantation was saved, and its productivity increased significantly. In 1868, for example, the plantation produced only 16 tons of sugar. In 1895, the sugar crop was 339 tons. In 1918, the total was 3,103 tons.<sup>26</sup>

Prosperity brought expansion of the plantation in 1895, which in turn provided work for more than the 90 to 100 workers employed there up to that time. Lā'ie was growing. From a population of 377 in 1874, Mormons in Lā'ie numbered more than a thousand in the 1920s, and by then they shared the area with a number of nonmembers of various ethnicities.<sup>27</sup>

According to Comfort Margaret Bock, the Lā'ie plantation made the Hawai'i mission self-supporting by 1900. By that time, the mission, with headquarters in Lā'ie, instead of Salt Lake City, furnished the funds to build new chapels and provide financial assistance to needy members in Hawai'i.<sup>28</sup> This turn of events strengthened the faith of the Mormons in the prophetic powers of Smith and their other leaders and added to Lā'ie's aura of holiness.

#### THE TEMPLE IN HAWAI'I

The great love Joseph F. Smith had for the Hawaiians may explain why Lā'ie was chosen as the location for the first temple to

be constructed outside the continental United States. In 1915 Smith himself, by then president of the church, announced the temple and selected the site. Construction of the temple again linked Lā'ie with prophecy because in 1900, George Q. Cannon, a member of the church's presidency at the time, had visited Lā'ie and Honolulu. He promised the congregations that their faithfulness would earn them the opportunity to participate in the sacred temple ceremonies.<sup>29</sup> Although he apparently made no mention of where or how this would occur, his statements came to be regarded as prophecies foretelling the construction of a temple in Hawai'i. Cannon was highly revered in the Islands. He was one of the original Mormon missionaries who came to Hawai'i in 1850; he is credited with translating the Book of Mormon into Hawaiian with the assistance of a local Hawaiian convert; he was perhaps the first to preach that Polynesians are Israelites descended from Book of Mormon peoples, an important Mormon doctrine; and he was the strongest proponent of converting Hawaiians instead of Caucasians in the earliest days of Mormon evangelization in the Islands.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Lā'ie's temple, like the colony itself, came to be endowed with prophetic stature.

The Hawai'i temple was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, 1919, by Heber J. Grant, who had succeeded to the presidency of the church after Joseph F. Smith died. Referring to the Hawaiians as "descendants of Lehi," a Book of Mormon prophet, Grant accurately predicted that the attraction of the temple would make Lā'ie a gathering place for converts from across Polynesia.<sup>31</sup> Once completed, the Hawai'i temple began to attract two groups of people. The first group were Polynesian converts drawn to Lā'ie by the desire to perform sacred temple ceremonies. Many settled permanently, thus giving Lā'ie a multiethnic Polynesian mix.

The second group of people attracted to the temple were tourists intrigued by reports of the unusual edifice on the remote side of the island. Situated on an elevated plot overlooking the ocean and the coast road, the squarish white temple juts 50 feet above landscaped terraces and reflecting pools. Its crisp lines, sharply cropped into three distinct levels, are a striking curiosity even today. During the first decades after its construction, when there were few other buildings nearby and before the palm and banyan





FIG. 2. The Hawai'i temple at the time of its dedication, with the visitor's center buildings in front. (Courtesy BYU-Hawai'i Archives.)

trees matured, the stark temple must have looked like a mirage to travelers who ventured as far as Oahu's north shore. Tourist guide books of the period include the temple as the main attraction in coastal tours, making comparisons between the visual effect of the Lā'ie temple and that of the Taj Mahal.<sup>32</sup> Expecting visitors, temple planners included an information bureau on the grounds where attendants still answer tourists' questions, distribute Mormon literature, and lead guided tours of the grounds.

#### THE HUKILAU

These venturesome tourists were part of a rising tide of visitors that would eventually restructure Hawai'i's economy and reinforce Lā'ie's colonial status. In the late 1800s, as many as 500–800 tourists visited Hawai'i and generated about \$500,000 annually. In 1923, the number had risen to 12,000 annually, and in 1931 about 16,000 visited the Islands.<sup>33</sup> Although these numbers sound insignificant compared to current counts, they prefigure an industry

that boomed in the 1960s and 1970s to displace sugar and pineapple as Hawai'i's paramount economic staple.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike the business travelers who passed through Hawai'i on their journeys to and from other destinations, the tourists were drawn to Hawai'i as their preferred destination. Sightseers on leisure excursions, they were lured to Hawai'i by advertising campaigns that began in the late nineteenth century. The precursor of the Hawaii Visitors Bureau was formed in 1892,<sup>35</sup> and by the early 1900s, images of hula girls with ukuleles had become symbols of Hawai'i, even sparking controversies about the acceptability of such exaggerated depictions.<sup>36</sup> In 1935, the famous "Hawaii Calls" radio program began airing its idyllic renditions to a worldwide audience.<sup>37</sup> And in another type of campaign, World War II brought countless service men and women through the Islands in what was surely the greatest cross-cultural encounter ever seen to that time.

As the tourism industry in Hawai'i was growing, the Lā'ie sugar industry declined. The plantation fell into serious debt during the 1920s. Unable to compete with the much larger and better equipped Kahuku Plantation Company, whose land adjoined Lā'ie, church leaders leased most of its sugar cane acreage to Kahuku in 1931 for 25 years in an attempt to maximize Lā'ie's net return. The lease was then renewed in 1953. With this lease, the church ceased providing employment to the residents of Lā'ie. By then, the administration of the Hawai'i mission had already been separated from management of the plantation and was transferred to Honolulu, where travel and communications were more easily effected and where a large concentration of Mormons was developing.<sup>38</sup> This combination of events brought Lā'ie to an economic standstill. Many of the residents moved away, and temple activity virtually ceased. World War II brought temporary relief to the stagnation as large numbers of Mormon servicemen and other visitors frequented Lā'ie. The war's end, however, returned Lā'ie to its slump.<sup>39</sup>

This period ended Lā'ie's first colonial phase. Lā'ie produced no goods sought by the church system, and the church no longer provided residents with employment. The isolation of Lā'ie from the outside world had been irrevocably broken, and the mission

administration had relocated to Honolulu. Lā'ie's response to its economic crisis was to look outward for new income sources instead of upward to the church hierarchy for its welfare. The presence of large numbers of outsiders in Hawai'i opened new visions to the residents of Lā'ie, and in 1948, exploitation of the tourist market began with the reintroduction of the well-known *hukilau* on the shore of Lā'ie Bay.

This popular weekend tourist attraction began in 1937 to raise funds to build the Mormon Tabernacle on Beretania Street in Honolulu and continued for several years.<sup>40</sup> It reappeared in 1948 and brought considerable sums of money into the economy of Lā'ie during the 1950s and 1960s, until the PCC opened. According to Bernard Francis Pierce, the *hukilau*

. . . derives its name from the Hawaiian form of fishing whereby people on the beach pull (*huki*) on both ends of a long fish net with leaves (*lau*) attached to it, which has been spread in an arc from the beach by a canoe.<sup>41</sup>

Each *hukilau* attracted several hundred tourists from Honolulu. After the tourists helped pull the nets and the fish to shore, the residents of Lā'ie entertained them with songs, dances, activities, storytelling, and feasting. The program for the first *hukilau* included curio and beverage booths, souvenirs, snacks, and strolling musicians. Activities included setting the net in the bay and pulling it in, net making and patching, singing, ukulele playing, historical narrations, and other attractions. Then a splendid noon *lū'au* was followed by a program of songs and dances performed solo as well as by duets and other groups.<sup>42</sup>

The entire operation was devised and executed by the residents of Lā'ie, who showed a truly entrepreneurial flair for entertaining tourists and marketing the multicultural talents of their village:

When the first tourist-filled taxis arrived . . . the *hukilau* grounds were transformed: coconut fronds covered the lanai and booths were decorated with colorful hibiscus, ti plants, ferns, ieie and other tropical foliage; picket fences were hidden by coconut fronds and at intervals tall banana trees "sprouted." The well-stocked

curio booth, and tempting food booths, Kodak film booth were ready to accommodate the guests and the kamaainas, too.<sup>43</sup>

When it opened in 1963, the PCC adopted some of the successes of the *hukilau*. The general pattern of cultural activities, a sumptuous meal, and a culminating performance of songs and dances became the basic PCC program. Many of those who performed at the *hukilau* became part of the Center's original cast. The PCC did not continue the actual *hukilau*, but audience participation in other activities such as dances and games became a hallmark of the Center.

The PCC, however, introduced several differences into Lā'ie's tourist operation. First, it greatly escalated Lā'ie's involvement in tourism by going after a much larger tourist market. Second, it transferred direction of Lā'ie's tourist operation to Caucasian managers from the mainland. Whereas the *hukilau* was devised and managed by the residents of Lā'ie, the PCC managers are appointed at church headquarters in Utah and are governed by a board of trustees composed largely of church leaders there. This gives the PCC management what has been called a "big white brother" image.<sup>44</sup> Third, employees at the PCC, especially the performers, are mostly young college students who are not permanent residents of Lā'ie, and many of whom know little about the art forms and traditions of their home islands.

#### THE CHURCH COLLEGE OF HAWAI'I

Establishment of the PCC in 1963, nearly 100 years after Lā'ie's original colonization, constitutes the recolonization of Lā'ie and the firm reentry of the mainland Mormon organization and its nonlocal administrators into Lā'ie's economic affairs. The Church College of Hawai'i was both a precursor and a motive for this recolonization. The college opened in 1955, but it was the fulfillment of an ambition begun in 1921 by Apostle David O. McKay. In that year, McKay visited Lā'ie elementary school and attended a flag-raising ceremony performed by the students. Among the students were Hawaiians, Samoans, Caucasians, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos. The sight of this multiethnic group

of children saluting the American flag greatly impressed McKay. Displaying a religious nationalism characteristic of Mormonism, McKay stated:

I felt like bowing in prayer and thanksgiving for the glorious country which is doing so much for all these nationalities. But more than that, when I realize that these same boys and girls have the opportunity of participating in all the blessings of the gospel which will transform the American into a real citizen of the Kingdom of God, I feel to praise His name for the glorious privileges vouchsafed to this generation.<sup>45</sup>

As the story is commonly heard in Lāʻie, McKay's experience at the flag raising was also accompanied by a vision of the future establishment of the Church College of Hawaiʻi. Actually, it was on the following day on Maui that McKay decided to recommend that a college be built in Lāʻie for the benefit of the members there.<sup>46</sup>

The college was finally built three decades later, soon after McKay succeeded to the church presidency. At the ground breaking in 1955, he bolstered enthusiasm for the college by prophesying about the influence it would have in the wider Pacific region, including China and Japan, and added,

We dedicate our actions . . . that this college, and the temple, and the town of Lāʻie may become a missionary factor, influencing not thousands, not tens of thousands, but millions of people who will come seeking to know what this town and its significance are.<sup>47</sup>

Originally a two-year college, the Church College later became a four-year institution. Like many others, the college went through a period of turmoil during the early 1970s when disputes over curriculum relevance and student radicalism became issues of administrative alarm. Confrontations were frequent between the administration, the faculty, and the students before church leaders in Utah stabilized the college by changing presidents and making it a satellite campus of Brigham Young University in Provo.<sup>48</sup> Its name then became Brigham Young University-

Hawai'i Campus, or BYU-Hawai'i. Presidents of the college have all been mainlanders appointed at church headquarters in Utah.

#### THE POLYNESIAN CULTURAL CENTER

After the college opened, church officials tried to attract new businesses to the community that would provide jobs for the students, but the response was disappointing. Natural resources likewise offered little prospect for economic development. Sugar had already proved inadequate to support the community. Coral for cement manufacture and local clay deposits were not considered extensive enough to meet the long-term objectives of the college. The popularity of the *hukilau*, however, suggested that Lā'ie's tourist market was its most lasting and promising resource.<sup>49</sup> The residents of Lā'ie themselves and their Polynesian cultural expressions offered the greatest promise for economic development.

Richard Wootten, president of the Church College, and several faculty, together with Edward Clissold and Wendell Mendenhall, non-Polynesian church leaders in Hawai'i, may be called the founding fathers of the PCC.<sup>50</sup> Theirs was the plan to build an attraction where large numbers of students could pay for their education by entertaining tourists with Polynesian songs and dances. When the idea of the PCC was publicly introduced, however, it was met with considerable opposition from some Lā'ie residents and from certain members of the highest councils of the church in Utah. Local opponents resented their lack of input in the decision and opposed the idea that the proposed Center would be managed by outsiders. Also, some feared that the Center would create an undesirable Waikiki-like environment in Lā'ie and favored expansion of the locally controlled *hukilau*, which had proved very successful.<sup>51</sup> Opponents in Utah argued that the church should not become involved in a commercial venture of this sort and feared the negative effect a large influx of tourists, promoters, and the Hollywood-style show people who were to choreograph the productions would have on the community of Lā'ie and its residents.<sup>52</sup>

When two apostles returned to Utah from a fact-finding visit to

Lā'ie and advised President McKay not to proceed with the PCC, the project appeared doomed. But Wendell Mendenhall, a personal friend of McKay, appealed directly to him to support construction of the Center. McKay listened to final arguments from his advisors and ended discussion on the matter by announcing that the PCC would be built.<sup>53</sup>

Just as McKay had single-handedly founded the Church College, whose existence required the establishment of some major economic venture in Lā'ie to support its long-term continuation, he also made the final decision in favor of the PCC as that economic venture. Nevertheless, many individuals, even within in the governing bodies of the church, remained openly opposed to the Center.<sup>54</sup>

Fittingly, the PCC was constructed on land adjoining the Church College. Providing the college's students with a means of earning money to pay for their education was the primary motive for building the Center.<sup>55</sup> Today, as many as 700 of the 2,000 students normally enrolled at BYU-Hawai'i may be employed there as tour guides, village performers, dancers, musicians, concessioners, stage hands, office staff, and general workers.

Although providing local employment was not one of the Center's stated goals, it employs approximately 300 others in addition to the BYU-Hawai'i students. Most of its nonstudent employees are permanent residents of Lā'ie. Some of them are former BYU-Hawai'i students who never found other employment, and some have been there for many years. In fact, a few remain who were performers in the *hukilau*.

A second purpose of the PCC is to provide direct financial aid to BYU-Hawai'i.<sup>56</sup> By 1982, the Center was donating more than \$1 million yearly to the university for unrestricted use.<sup>57</sup> By 1985, the financial commitment of the Center to the university was \$2.5 million.<sup>58</sup> The Center has also provided up to \$300,000 annually in direct funding to the Institute for Polynesian Studies, a research institute whose offices are located on the campus and whose staff includes BYU-Hawai'i faculty.

The third stated purpose of the PCC is to preserve the culture of Polynesia.<sup>59</sup> The PCC management considers the Center to be a living museum in which a relatively small number of Polynesian

craftsmen, dancers, carvers, and others teach traditional art forms and other cultural practices to tourists and to the student performers. These art forms are thus preserved by bringing the experienced artisans and performers into contact with young Polynesian neophytes. From the artisans, the young learn routines composed of dances, ceremonies, games, food preparation, songs, carving, costuming, building, and other material culture. Once learned, the routines are performed daily, and in some cases several times each day, for tourists at the Center's several village replicas, in pageants and stage revues, and in the creation and display of material objects such as sculpture, carving, weaving, and costuming.

Very often the students are wholly unfamiliar with the traditional customs and arts of their own homelands when they begin work at the PCC. In the words of one student interviewed for this study, "We are rookies at culture." Many of them must learn even very basic historical facts by memorizing a prepared script. A Maori interviewee, a student from New Zealand, stated:

Everything that I know now [i.e., about Maori culture] I learned at PCC. I learned about each building, what it meant. I learned how to sing certain songs we have, like for Waitangi Day [i.e., annual observance of the 1840 treaty between the Maori and the British]. I learned how to pronounce the language properly, I learned how to move properly the way they did when you do the poi [i.e., light balls on strings used in dancing] and when you dance. I became more proud of my culture than I was in New Zealand.

Over time, the PCC management became more selective in their original aim to "preserve" Polynesian culture.<sup>60</sup> It became apparent that preservation of entire multiple cultures was an unrealistic goal. The PCC was not intended to be a research institution, nor would its staff include a large number of trained and expensive scholars capable of guiding such an effort. More importantly, the PCC would not venture into aspects of Polynesian culture that are incompatible with Mormon morality, on the one hand, or with the predictable preconceptions of tourists on the



other. Instead, the Center adopted the goal of preserving selected aspects of Polynesian culture and heritage which were generally compatible with Mormon standards and which could be presented in a satisfying way to extremely large numbers of tourists. It is often said that the PCC preserves "the best" of Polynesian culture, the best, that is, according to the PCC management, who see culture with a Mormon selectivity. Max E. Stanton observes that while the performing arts and material culture are represented, traditional Polynesian world views, social organizations, and religious customs are "painfully absent" from the PCC. He adds that the PCC presents a "model" culture that "selectively attempts to portray the best of those tangible, believable aspects of Polynesian culture with which the tourist can identify."<sup>61</sup>

The activities of the PCC also include promotion of Mormonism to the visiting tourists. Little active proselyting is conducted in the Center as this would undoubtedly offend many of the tourists. But often the tourists leave themselves open to proselytism, which the employees are quick to take advantage of. As one young Hawaiian interviewee, a student carver, observed:

[T]he place that we have the carving is in front of a big map area of Polynesia, so part of our lecture was the origins of the Polynesian people. We try to take them back through the origins of Polynesia. There are a lot of people interested in just that. The origins of Polynesia—who came, where they came from—the Polynesian people. That always opened doors for us, especially the guys that I worked with were all returned missionaries. And so it gave us an opportunity to explain about the Book of Mormon, and the connection [i.e., of the book] with the Polynesian people. That was always good.

Also, free tram tours of Lā'ie are offered which conduct tourists to the nearby temple grounds, where they may become engaged in conversation by missionaries and be shown church-oriented videotapes. The tram then takes them to the university to view a monumental mosaic depicting David O. McKay at the Lā'ie school flag raising. In addition, the guides and "villagers" in the Center are encouraged to refer to the Mormon church, its connection with the PCC and BYU-Hawai'i, and its effect for good

in the lives of the students. Many of the students are themselves former missionaries and are quite adept at delivering polished, yet spontaneous presentations of Mormonism's attributes and beliefs if given the opportunity. Frequently these discussions include mention of the church's esteem for Polynesian culture and heritage and assert the church's encouragement of appropriate cultural and artistic expression among its adherents, a message that is not likely to be lost on the Center's multinational clientele.

Once underway, the PCC supplanted the *hukilau*, from which it borrowed many of its formal elements. But the Center had other forerunners as well. As early as 1951, Mormon apostle Matthew Cowley proposed that Maori craftsmen come from New Zealand and construct a large traditional *whare whakaire* (carved house) in Lā'ie to provide communal lodging for Maori who came to attend the temple.<sup>62</sup>

Known as "the apostle for the Polynesians," Cowley had spent much of his life in Polynesia as a representative of the church. He knew that the journey from New Zealand to Lā'ie to receive the sacred temple ordinances was costly for the Maori and believed that the communal house would make their stay more economical. He also suggested that the house be on display to the public and that the Maori perform traditional songs and dances for the tourists who came to see the temple. This would provide money for their passage home and acquaint tourists with Maori arts, especially their spectacular wood carving. He also suggested that other islanders—Tongans, Samoans, Tahitians—also have their own "little villages" in Lā'ie to attract the tourists.<sup>63</sup>

Cowley's proposal was for something quite different from the *hukilau*, but it would nonetheless have been a venture directed by the Polynesians themselves for their direct benefit, unlike the PCC. His suggestion interested some of the local church leaders in Lā'ie, but no immediate action came of it.

Yet many Mormons attribute to Cowley the inspiration that led to the PCC, and not to Clissold, Wootten, and Mendenhall. Linking Cowley, an apostle, to the its inception lends the Center its own sacred stature. Cowley's simple plan to help his beloved Maori thus became a prophetic vision, and the PCC became the fulfillment of his prophecy.<sup>64</sup> This puts the Center on an equal footing with the temple and the university—Lā'ie's other pillars,

each of which is considered a fulfillment of prophecy—and elevates the PCC above the *hukilau*, which was the result of local initiative, but which lacked any comparable claim to prophetic origin. Actually, Cowley's concept of little villages sounds quite different from the PCC. Cowley envisioned dwellings, not replicas, to benefit those who sacrificed their savings and traveled to Lā'ie to participate in sacred temple ceremonies, not to attend college. The proceeds would have been moderate, the performances simple and authentic, and the patrons would have been tourists who came to investigate the temple. Cowley's plan contained no suggestion of a theme park on the order of the PCC.

Cowley died before the Church College was founded. Had he lived, he may have been persuaded to revise his vision of little villages to feature student performers and to earmark the proceeds for the college instead of temple attenders. But by 1959, these other intentions had developed far enough among church and college leaders for them to test a Polynesian dance revue performed by students from the college. Faculty members assembled a troupe of students, trained them, rehearsed them, and staged them at various locations in Honolulu with color and bravura.<sup>65</sup>

The result, called "Polynesian Panorama," was a hit. Two years of shuttling Church College students back and forth to Waikīkī for performances convinced decision-makers that a spirited, tourist-oriented Polynesian revue with a student cast was definitely marketable. And although some argued that Lā'ie was too far from Honolulu, others insisted that the success of the *hukilau* demonstrated that the Mormon gathering place, the ancient place of refuge, could draw audiences large enough to make the venture profitable. The decision to proceed was made by McKay, and when it opened, the PCC included the gathered huts vaguely resembling Cowley's little villages, the audience participation, cultural activities, and feast of the *hukilau*, and the staged extravagance of the Polynesian Panorama.

#### FROM PROPHETS TO PLAYERS

Contrary to original expectations, the night show and not the villages proved to be the main attraction and the major revenue producer at the PCC.<sup>66</sup> But even the run of spectacular night shows

that marked the opening of the Center did not make the PCC an immediate financial success. The initial shows received favorable reviews, but the distance of Lā'ie from the hotels and other tourist spots in Waikīkī kept attendance low. After four years, the Center had lost a total of \$740,000.<sup>67</sup> Often the night show performers on stage nearly outnumbered the tourists in the audience. Church leaders in Utah, some of whom had remained opposed to the Center's existence, seriously considered closing it during the early years of its operation.<sup>68</sup>

The Center did not begin to turn a profit until its management struck a deal with the tour bus companies to include the Center in their publicity and their itineraries and to bus their passengers to the Center. Initially, the PCC management had refused to deal with these companies, insisting that the Center's reputation alone would attract the tourists without their help. The Center's management infuriated the tour companies by saying that one day the companies would seek permission to bring their passengers to the Center. But in the face of financial disaster, the PCC management reversed their position and courted the tour companies, granting them a 30 percent return of all profits the Center made on their passengers.<sup>69</sup> Thus, like the commercial motivation behind its inception, the eventual success of the PCC as a cultural exposition and an entertainment center was also the result of shrewd business arrangements.

#### A NEW KIND OF PLANTATION

Tourism has been called Hawai'i's "new kind of sugar."<sup>70</sup> Following that analogy, the PCC as an enterprise employing a thousand persons in Lā'ie and as Lā'ie's economic base recalls the nineteenth-century economic missions sponsored by the church, specifically the Lā'ie sugar plantation. For decades the plantation served similar functions for the church in Hawai'i during that earlier period. The circumstances of the Center's inception, its imposition on the village of Lā'ie, and its administration *étrangère* reestablished religious economic colonialism on O'ahu's windward shore.

The Center is remarkable because it has continued the church's colonial enterprise into the twentieth century. It is unique because

instead of natural resources, it exploits the diverse ethnic cultural practices of an entire Mormon community to further the major immediate regional programs of the church, namely, BYU-Hawai'i. And the church still owns most of the land in Lā'ie.

Once a remote Mormon sanctuary, Lā'ie now entertains a million tourists each year at the PCC, in keeping with McKay's prediction, and the Mormons of Lā'ie count this as a direct fulfillment of divine prophecy. Similarly, Joseph F. Smith's prediction that desolate Lā'ie would become verdant and prosperous has also come to pass. Mormons in Lā'ie attribute the fulfillment of both prophecies to the success of the PCC. But while the PCC relieved the economic stagnation that followed the demise of Lā'ie's sugar industry, it also displaced the *hukilau*, and with it, Lā'ie's budding entrepreneurialism, and returned Lā'ie to a condition of economic dependence on the church and its imported emissaries. The PCC capitalized on a valuable local resource—Polynesian ethnicity—and wrested local control away from that unique resource for the sake of regional religious concerns.

Church leaders in Utah could have addressed only the spiritual needs of its converts in Hawai'i, and in Lā'ie specifically, and allowed them to determine their own economic development. This is especially true of the *hukilau* episode, when a local economic project was set aside by the church leadership in favor of a much larger development enterprise imported by the church for its own regional purposes. But twice in a 100-year period, with the strength of prophetic authority, the church prescribed development programs that forced Lā'ie's economy to be wholly dependent on the larger church organization and undermined possibilities of local initiative. As a result, Lā'ie was forced into a condition of colonial underdevelopment. The community could not support itself when the church-run sugar plantation failed. And later, when Lā'ie began to develop its own tourism industry, that resource was appropriated by mainland powers and inflated to a scale that the residents of Lā'ie by themselves could not now maintain unassisted. Today, if the church were to discontinue the PCC and the university (and there has been talk recently among church leaders from Utah of just such a possibility), Lā'ie would again be in very difficult economic circumstances.

Historically, the temple and the college—two of Lā'ie's "pil-

lars"—may have preceded the PCC. In the social structure of Lā'ie, however, the PCC is a new version of the sugar plantation laid out by Brigham Young's economic missionaries. The pillars of modern Lā'ie are built not so much on a religious-educational-cultural triad, but on an economic imperative and social hierarchy reminiscent of the nineteenth-century sugar plantation when the Polynesians labored under the direction of the servants of the Lord.

## NOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> David W. Cummings, *Centennial History of Laie* (Lā'ie: n.p., 1965) n.p.; Robert O'Brien, *Hands Across the Water: The Story of the Polynesian Cultural Center* (Lā'ie, The Center, 1983) 35.
- <sup>3</sup> Cummings, *Centennial History of Laie* n.p.
- <sup>4</sup> For a classic application of the dependency school of thought, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic P, 1974).
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983) xvii.
- <sup>6</sup> William E. Berrett, *The Restored Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1965) 272-96.
- <sup>7</sup> See R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1986) 104-06, 115, 135.
- <sup>8</sup> Comfort Margaret Bock, "The Church in the Hawaiian Islands," thesis, U of Hawai'i, 1941, 56; Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 115, 123.
- <sup>9</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 115-16, 123-24.
- <sup>10</sup> Joseph H. Spurrier, "The Life and Times of Early Missionaries to Polynesia," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference, Mormon Pacific History Society* (1981) 45.
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- <sup>12</sup> Clarence E. Glick, *Sojourners and Settlers: Chinese Migrants in Hawaii* (Honolulu: Hawaii Chinese History Center and UP of Hawaii, 1980) 4-5, 10-11.
- <sup>13</sup> Joseph H. Spurrier, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: Hawaii Honolulu Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978) 17-18; Glick, *Sojourners* 10, 12.
- <sup>14</sup> Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1820-1900* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1958) 33.
- <sup>15</sup> Spurrier, *The Church* 17.
- <sup>16</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 129.

- <sup>17</sup> Bock, "The Church in the Hawaiian Islands" 66; Lance Chase, "Laie Life, 1850-1883," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference, Mormon Pacific Historical Society* (1981) 94.
- <sup>18</sup> Pierce, "Acculturation of Samoans" 15.
- <sup>19</sup> See George Dalton, ed., *Economic Development and Social Change: The Modernization of Village Communities* (Garden City, NJ: Natural History P, 1971) 17-19 for a discussion of economic colonialism.
- <sup>20</sup> Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 2, 1854-1874, *Twenty Critical Years* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1953) 104.
- <sup>21</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 126, 130.
- <sup>22</sup> Quoted in Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 130.
- <sup>23</sup> Chase, "Laie Life" 95, 99.
- <sup>24</sup> Spurrier, *The Church* 20.
- <sup>25</sup> See Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 142.
- <sup>26</sup> Chase, "Laie Life" 93; Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 149.
- <sup>27</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 135, 147-48, 151.
- <sup>28</sup> Bock, "The Church in the Hawaiian Islands" 89.
- <sup>29</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 150.
- <sup>30</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 105-06, 150-51.
- <sup>31</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 156.
- <sup>32</sup> See Pierce, "Acculturation of Samoans" 15; Rubina Forester, "The Polynesian Cultural Center: The Realization Gone Far Beyond the Dream," *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Conference, Mormon Pacific Historical Society* (1986) 63; Cummings, *Centennial History of Laie* n.p.
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- <sup>35</sup> Joesting, *Hawaii* 261; Hooper, *Elusive Destiny* 71.
- <sup>36</sup> George S. Kanahele, ed. *Hawaiian Music and Musicians: An Illustrated History* (Honolulu: UP of Hawaii, 1979) 402; Joesting, *Hawaii* 262.
- <sup>37</sup> Kanahele, *Hawaiian Music and Musicians* 109; Hooper, *Elusive Destiny* 24.
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- <sup>42</sup> Kawahigashi, "The Hukilau Festival" 3-4.
- <sup>43</sup> Kawahigashi, "The Hukilau Festival" 13.
- <sup>44</sup> Forester, "The Polynesian Cultural Center" 70.
- <sup>45</sup> Quoted in Reuben D. Law, *The Founding of the Church College of Hawaii* (St. George, UT: Dixie College P, 1972) 28.
- <sup>46</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 180.
- <sup>47</sup> Quoted in Law, *The Founding* 67, 69.

- <sup>48</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 185.
- <sup>49</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 186; O'Brien, *Hands Across the Water* 75-76.
- <sup>50</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 184-86; Forester, "The Polynesian Cultural Center" 60; Craig Ferre, "A History of the Polynesian Cultural Center's 'Night Show': 1963-1983," diss., Brigham Young U, 1988, 25-29.
- <sup>51</sup> Forester, "The Polynesian Cultural Center" 64-65.
- <sup>52</sup> Ferre, "A History" 44.
- <sup>53</sup> Ferre, "A History" 33-34.
- <sup>54</sup> Ferre, "A History" 44.
- <sup>55</sup> Max E. Stanton, "The Polynesian Cultural Center: A Multi-Ethnic Model of Seven Pacific Cultures," *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, 2nd ed., ed. Valene L. Smith (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989) 248; Britsch, *Unto the Islands* 186-89.
- <sup>56</sup> Stanton, "The Polynesian Cultural Center" 248.
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- <sup>58</sup> Ralph Rodgers, general manager of the Polynesian Cultural Center, address to the general faculty, Brigham Young University-Hawai'i Campus, Lā'ie, 29 Aug. 1984.
- <sup>59</sup> Stanton, "The Polynesian Cultural Center" 248.
- <sup>60</sup> Stanton, "The Polynesian Cultural Center" 251-52.
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- <sup>63</sup> O'Brien, *Hands Across the Water* 73.
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- <sup>67</sup> Ferre, "A History" III.
- <sup>68</sup> Ferre, "A History" 2, 75.
- <sup>69</sup> Ferre, "A History" 74, 89, 99.
- <sup>70</sup> Ben R. Finney and Karen Ann Watson, *A New Kind of Sugar: Tourism in the Pacific* (Honolulu: East-West Center, [1975]).