

## 9. The Spectrum of Mormon Documentaries

Our discussion of six documentaries starts with a short synopsis and an overview of the empirical facts, the hermeneutic horizons and affiliations of the social actors involved. As fig. 84 highlights, the analysis focuses on Mormon filmmakers' involvement in the narrative, whether as visible in the image, audible in the sound score, or present in the gaze of the camera. We are particularly concerned to establish how the Mormon filmmaker interacts with the world that he or she frames with the camera and in which reading mode the argument of moral reasoning is expressed in the space of representation.

### 9.1. *Mormons and the race debate*

The first documentary, *Sisterz in Zion* (US 2006, 61') by Melissa Puente, tells a successful integration story. The film portrays young and recently converted LDS women from New York City who come from low-income and immigrant families. They travel to a camp called *Especially for Youth*, held at Brigham Young University, in Provo/UT, and organized by the LDS. The film accompanies the five women from New York City to Provo/UT, observes them during the camp, and then stays with them as they return home. The narration relates the camp's activities, with a focus on the experiences of these particular women. Although these women mention that they feel like outsiders because they are the only non-Caucasian women, the film depicts their experience as generally positive. The narrative shows Mormon faith expressed in songs and prayer practices overcoming cultural differences.

The production *Sisterz in Zion* has close ties to the LDS Church. It was produced by Brigham Young University and the production company American Fork (Utah) is partner of the LDS affiliated company Covenant Communications. The documentary was first shown on Brigham Young University television (BYUtv), which is connected to the LDS Church and owned by Brigham Young University. The filmmaker Melissa Puente is a

former Brigham Young University student<sup>567</sup> and at the time of the production was an LDS Church youth leader. Puente was president of the Young Women Organization, the LDS organisation for young women, in Manhattan and graduated from the film school at Brigham Young University.<sup>568</sup> Puente's hermeneutic horizons provides her with insider knowledge of her topic and, additionally, her affiliation enables her access to the institution she is depicting. Her loyalties are to the church's teachings, which she knows well. The hermeneutic horizons of the social actors take two forms. The women from New York City came originally from the Caribbean, South America and Asia; they are all converts and stem from low-income families. The young Caucasian LDS women have their roots mainly in the Midwest and come from a more prosperous background, as their expensive leisure time activities such as skiing and watersports indicate. The teenagers from NYC explicitly note that they have never experienced such activities. We can assume that social actors from both sides wish their contribution to satisfy the director and other LDS officials, with further opportunities within the church organization in mind. They are in a way dependent on Melissa Puente if they are to make a positive impression that will be appreciated by the church. The LDS converts from New York City, especially the Latina women, tend to stick together, as they mention in the interviews. Their sense of being different became more acute during the camp and is expressed through cultural activities such as listening to hip-hop music, but also in speaking English with a Spanish accent and vocabulary (Spanglish); their clothing and behavior are also different.

The camera provides a *solidary gaze*, close to the social actors as it observes the young women and has them tell their own stories, for example when they introduce themselves. At the same time the documentary promotes LDS diversity by using the young women to prove that the church is open to people from different backgrounds. In a scene portraying a meeting at the camp in Provo (24 minutes into the film) a "love circle" is depicted, in which individuals hug their neighbors and say, "I love you." This

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567 Cody Clark, "Teens from Different Worlds Become One: In Spirit in New LDS Documentary," *Daily Herald*, October 13, 2006, [http://www.heraldextra.com/lifestyles/teens-from-different-worlds-become-one-in-spirit-in-new/article\\_d877d125-65cb-5c42-af75-702205054fce.html](http://www.heraldextra.com/lifestyles/teens-from-different-worlds-become-one-in-spirit-in-new/article_d877d125-65cb-5c42-af75-702205054fce.html).

568 John M. Murphy and Leslee Thorne-Murphy, "Sisterz in Zion, Directed by Melissa Puente," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 4 (2006): 4.

practice is used to foster bonds between the participants. The camera is placed within the circle, as if itself a participant (Fig. 87–89).



*Fig. 87 The camera participates in the circle of love. The protagonists seem uncomfortable with the intimacy of the situation (Sisterz in Zion, 00:22:24).*



*Fig. 88/ Fig. 89 The participants are more relaxed as they watch friends from NYC or the Caucasian teenagers hugging (Sisterz in Zion, 00:22:29/ 00:24:50).*

In another situation the camera gaze is noted and commented upon by one of the social actors. The NYC teenagers are rehearsing the Latino dance Merengue, to be performed at the contest. They are very engaged, loud and excited, but at the same time they seem nervous, unsure if the jury will approve of their performance. Sereda is suddenly aware of the camera and signals her dislike of the situation and of the camera's recording the scene (Fig. 90–92).



Fig. 90/ Fig. 91/ Fig. 92 Sereda realizes that the camera is observing, shakes her head to signal her disapproval, laughs and waves in order to say: “Stop filming!” (*Sisterz in Zion*, 00:33:04/ 00:33:05/ 00:33:06).

The camera is acquainted with the social actors but they are not as one. The filmmaker is in a privileged position, allowed to observe this compromising situation in which a single social actor demonstrates discomfort. The NYC teenagers are depicted as the other, as different from their Caucasian friends.

On the surface the narration’s ethical mode of reasoning defends the principle of equality. When the NYC teenagers are depicted as other, however, boundaries are drawn, with some excluded and some included.<sup>569</sup> This mode of othering raises a challenging question: for the LDS Church everyone is the same, but how can that be realized? The film aims to show how differences might be resolved. Additionally, the story is told from the perspective of an integrated and experienced LDS member who seeks to present the church’s efforts at creating equality between Caucasians and non-Caucasians against the ambivalent and challenging history of how the church has dealt with racism.<sup>570</sup> Some LDS Mormons have an immigrant background, while others do not; their origins may shape their interpretative framework. Particular focus is directed here, however, on people from the Caribbean and South America and on young adults who are members of the church or interested in church activities.

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569 Wimmer, “The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory”; Mark A. Pachucki, Sabrina Pendergrass, and Michèle Lamont, “Boundary Processes: Recent Theoretical Developments and New Contributions,” *Poetics, Culture lines: Emerging research on boundaries*, 35, no. 6 (December 1, 2007): 331–51; Lamont and Molnár, “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences.”

570 See more on this topic in Margaret Blair Young and Darius Aidan Gray, “Mormons and Race,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, ed. Terry L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 363–385.

Also dealing with the challenging topic of race in the LDS Church, *Nobody Knows. The Untold Story of Black Mormons* (Darius A. Gray and Margaret B. Young, US 2008, 73') adopts a historical perspective. In a partially apologetic mode and partially informative mode, the film reconstructs the contested issue in LDS Church history of discrimination against black Mormons between the founding of the church and the granting of equal access to the priesthood; until 1978 only Caucasian men could become priests.<sup>571</sup> This documentary also provides a success story. The film's narrative is largely reproduced in a chapter in an introduction to Mormonism written by the directors.<sup>572</sup> The chapter provides an instructive historical and theological overview of the role of race in Mormonism. The opening credits announce that this is an independent project, highlighting that the film does not necessarily represent the official position of the LDS Church. The filmmakers, Gray (Fig. 93) and Blair Young (Fig. 94), appear several times in front of the camera. Gray additionally represents two perspectives within the narration, for he both interviews and is interviewed. He recounts his own experiences as a member of the church, introducing himself at the start with "I'm a proud black man." Yet he is not explicitly identified in the opening titles as one of the documentary's directors; that information is reserved for the closing credits, leaving the audience establish this fact for themselves at the moment. Presented as a successful and integrated black Mormon role model, Darius Gray is also interviewed in the documentary *Meet the Mormons* (Blair Treu, US 2014, 78'), which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The gaze in *Nobody Knows* is largely academic, with interviews of university scholars such as well-known professor of sociology and religious studies Armand L. Mauss (Fig. 95) and professor Newell Bringhurst (Fig. 96).

Filmed as talking heads, these experts are left to address the audience interrupted. Other social actors, mainly African Americans appear as oral witnesses to the history of the LDS Church and people of color and to recount how black people now feel towards the LDS Church (fig. 97/98).

Most of the numerous black people interviewed are LDS members. Sometimes the speaker's name fades in. In other instances the speaker is anonymous, as is the case for the woman who tells the story of black Mormon woman Jane Manning James bringing flour to a starving (white) Mormon mother (fig. 99), a story that is partly reenacted.

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571 Blair Young and Gray.

572 Blair Young and Gray.



Fig. 93/ Fig. 94 Directors Darius A. Gray and Blair Young stage themselves and look at each other (*Nobody Knows*, 00:02:03 / 00:06:51).



Fig. 95/ Fig. 96 Armand L. Mauss and Newell Bringhurst provide their professional and authoritative view of LDS Church history in relation to black people (*Nobody Knows*, 00:12:10 / 00:31:52).

Some apologetic voices are heard. Caucasian author and LDS member Gregory Prince tells the story of an LDS apostle in the 1950s who traveled to Hawaii, where he met an extraordinary male LDS member with African ancestors (fig. 100). The apostle asked the president if an exception could be made in this instance that would allow this man to enter the priesthood. According to Prince the president denied the request but in his response made clear that the exclusion of black men from the priesthood was policy and not doctrine. Prince's central message is that the attitude toward black Mormons was not theologically driven. Their exclusion and subsequent inclusion reflected church rules only and is evidence of the LDS Church's ability to adapt to shifting circumstances.



*Fig. 97/ Fig. 98* Although he is not a Mormon, Pastor Cecil provides a very moderate view of the LDS Church's racial history. His opinion is similar to that of attorney and LDS Relief Society president Marguerite Driessen (*Nobody Knows*, 00:17:51/ 00:47:13).



*Fig. 99* Sitting at the memorial to Jane Manning James, this woman tells the story of the venerated black Mormon (*Nobody Knows*, 00:10:08).

*Fig. 100* Gregory Prince, author and LDS member, provides a refreshingly critical view of LDS history (*Nobody Knows*, 00:23:32).

Other interviewees speak out on how the church should acknowledge historical discrimination. Marvin Perkins, for example, proposes that church leaders should explain its erroneous practice (fig. 101): "We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light knowledge that is now committed to the world." Others speak with perhaps surprising openness about their experiences of discrimination. Thus Tamu Smith states (fig. 102): "First time when I was called a nigger I was in the Salt Lake temple."

Like the directors, most of the social actors are loyal to the LDS Church, even as they might criticize it. The film provides a diversity of well-chosen



Fig. 101 Marvin Perkins is introduced as an entrepreneur and lecturer (*Nobody Knows*, 00:47:43).

Fig. 102 Tamu Smith is an author and actress (*Nobody Knows*, 00:49:30).



Fig. 103 The director interviews the jazz musician Paul Gill in the intimate setting of a church (*Nobody Knows*, 00:16:15).

contemporary voices on the LDS Church's history of engagement with race. The final scene, in which the director Gray resumes the conversation with Paul Gill, a Jazz musician, condenses the broader aim of the narrative into a single sequence. Gill is the only social actor to be shown together with Gray in a two shot. Gray appears to place himself within the same ideological space as his interviewee, as the following analysis will show (fig. 103).

At the beginning of the sequence Gray listens to Paul Gill's music performance (fig 104). The camera zooms in to Gray to show his emotions and he is evidently moved (fig. 105).



*Fig. 104 / Fig. 105 Director Gray becomes focus of the narration. It is also his story that has been told (Nobody Knows, 01:08:54/ 01:09:07).*



*Fig. 106 / Fig. 107 The film ends with feelings of sadness and empathy being expressed as the director Gray hugs the emotional jazz musician Gill (Nobody Knows, 01:10:05/ 01:10:40).*

Gray asks Gill: “If you have the power to do the one change what would that be? Gill answers: “... To convince others that the Gospel is true... to let them understand how I feel and why I feel ... to have that ability.” Gill becomes emotional and starts to cry (fig. 106). The camera’s gaze is now fixed on Gill as before it was fixed on Gray. After giving Gill a tissue to wipe away his tears, Gray hugs him (fig. 107).

It seems that the director has found his alter ego in Paul Gill, for the musician expresses exactly how Gray feels. The closeness is made visible in the two-shot and close-ups of the director and the social actor. Even though Gill’s experience as an African American was often humiliating, he still feels loyal to the church. His identification as a Latter-day Saint is not

to be questioned. But he needs to find a way to synchronize his experience of discrimination with his loyalties to the church and his religious identity.

Gray and Gill share an affiliation with the church that needs to come to terms with the church's history of racial discrimination. Gray defends his continued membership of the LDS Church through *Nobody Knows*, which vocalizes problem aspects of the church but has as its final message that, as Gill says, the most important goal must be "to convince others that the Gospel is true." The documentary ends with a "higher truth" that prevails over the challenging and not fully rehabilitated history of the church. Gray has forgiven the church its wrongdoing. The audience have to choose whether to follow Gray's path to forgiveness. To do so might be an option for loyal black LDS members and for a broader membership who no longer have to be ashamed of belonging to a formerly racist church. But to do so might be far harder for former LDS members who left the church because of discrimination and are unable or do not want to overcome their disappointment and anger. From this perspective the documentary's take on a problematic chapter of LDS history might seem too simplistic. The documentary's self-proclaimed mode of moral reasoning, stated on the DVD cover, is "the right to know," to which might be added, "and to forgive", as the narration's moral reasoning. Gray has forgiven the church its error and in turn now seeks forgiveness from the black Mormons in the narrative and in the audience and also of all others who are troubled by the LDS Church's racial history and policy. In this sense *Nobody Knows*. *The Untold Story of Black Mormons* and *Sisterz in Zion* are similar, for they both present the LDS Church in a positive light by distinguishing between us and them. "Them", the others, are those who do not accept that the church's racialized policy has changed and that racism now belongs to the LDS past.

## 9.2. Who are the Mormons?

We turn now to two documentaries that function in an entertaining mode that is reinforced by humor based on the limited knowledge of Mormons in the United States and Europe. The directors, producers, and hosts Daryn Tufts and Jed Knudsen turn the tables on their ignorant subjects in the low-budget production *American Mormon* (US 2005, 35') and its sequel, *American Mormon in Europe* (US 2006, 50'), which was made with a more substantial budget and is twenty minutes longer. The narrative concerns two Mormon directors from Salt Lake City, UT, who want to establish

what people think about Mormons, about who they are and what they believe. They mostly reveal their identity only at the end of each conversation. Commentary is given on the often error-filled answers by way of inserted graphics and goofy sounds, which ridicule the misinterpretations of Mormonism. The opening title of *American Mormon* announces the theme of the documentary: "What you are about to see is real. Real people." "Real people" fades and a superimposition follows: "Real answers." Finally, a new title appears: "Really" (00:02:23–00:02:31).

The opening titles and their cartoon style can be understood as helping the audience understand the two Mormon protagonists as comic figures (fig. 108): they travel the United States in their white car accompanied by a peppy music score with a dominant electric rock guitar.

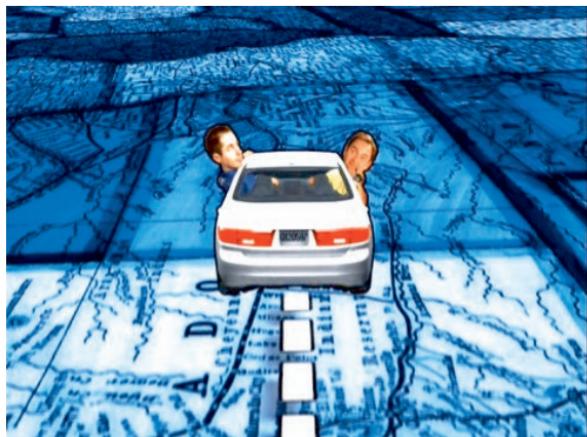


Fig. 108 The music accompanying the opening credits announces the documentary mode as funny and light-hearted (*American Mormon*, 00:01:28).

Tufts and Knudsen seek to demonstrate through humor the lack of accurate knowledge of what Mormonism is. *American Mormon in Europe* follows the same strategy, but this time Tufts and Knudsen travel to Europe, as the title suggests. They continue to ask people in the streets about Mormonism but in this sequel they also research recent history at the Berlin mission and visit the first mission in Europe, founded in Herefordshire, in the United Kingdom, by Wilford Woodruff. Tufts and Knudsen are Mormons and also former LDS missionaries. We would expect their hermeneutic horizons to be profoundly shaped by these experiences. They evidently know how to approach and engage people on the street, with

Tufts particularly self-confident in front of the camera. In *American Mormon* Knudsen is behind the camera and Tufts in front, but in the sequel Knudsen also conducts interviews. They talk with Mormons and non-Mormons, including Amish people, in the United States, and with Americans and a diversity of Europeans from Italy, France, Germany, and England among other countries. The European social actors know little about Mormons and many have never previously met a Mormon.

The filmmakers are specifically interested in German Mormons. In *American Mormon in Europe* an extended digression documents the Mormon community in Berlin. Knudsen talks with German Mormons in Berlin about the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the reunification of Germany the following year. The German Mormons they interview identify strongly with the church. For them the reunification of Germany also meant the reunification of the Berlin stake, which had been divided for almost four decades.<sup>573</sup>

The loyalties of the filmmakers are explicitly expressed in the film style. For example, they feel an obvious familiarity with two future missionaries whom they encounter in the streets of Las Vegas in *American Mormon* and are eager to present them in a positive light, unlike the occasions when wrong answers met with ridiculing sound elements or titles. With the exception of the two future Mormon missionaries in Las Vegas, the loyalties of the other social actors who appear in this first documentary are not in line with narration's affinities. In the sequel, however, Mormons from wards in England, Italy and Germany who are interviewed clearly are in sympathy with the filmmakers. While all of the Mormon social actors know that Knudsen and Tufts are from their own church; non-Mormons are ignorant of their affiliation and their church. The filmmakers do not compromise their own group, but they do expose non-Mormons for that ignorance. The privileging and validating gaze of the two filmmakers is introduced at the beginning of both productions: in *American Mormon* Tufts and Knudsen talk to the camera, revealing their identity as Mormons and providing information about Mormons with references to, for example, "thousands and thousands of missionaries around the world" or Mormon celebrities (Fig. 109).

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573 A "stake" is a unit used in the LDS Church for a community; each community consists of several "wards."



Fig. 109 Knudsen and Tufts bow toward the camera and talk to the audience. They want to draw the audience onto their side (*American Mormon*, 00:00:03).

Fig. 110 Beside the well-chosen shirts Knudsen and Tufts repeat an introduction to the narration that is similar to that in *American Mormon* (*American Mormon in Europe*, 00:00:02).

Referring to a headline in the *Times* magazine the directors note that Mormonism is the fastest growing religion in the world. They appear to be selling Mormonism as a successful and widely practiced religion. This information also suggests to the audience that people who know so little about Mormonism must be very ignorant. In the opening sequence of the second, Europe-focused documentary, Tufts and Knudsen talk again into the camera, inviting the audience to join them on their journey (fig. 110).

Film clips in which Mormons are obviously misrepresented or ridiculed are inserted to show “pretty interesting” ideas, as Tufts ironically describes these concepts. Additional factual information is presented, such as that since 1995 there have been more Mormons outside than inside the United States; the explanation is that “This church had gone global” (00:01:45). They then reveal the two questions they will ask non-Mormons (1) and Mormons (2) they encounter in Europe (00:01:55):

- 1) What do people think about the Mormons around the world?
- 2) What is it like being a Latter-day Saint outside America, the country where the religion was founded?

Using animated images the opening credits show where they will travel: Rome, Berlin, Paris, London, the Vatican and famous sites like the Eiffel Tower, the Pantheon, Stonehenge, and the Arc de Triomphe. The title of the second part then repeats elements from the first: “once again, what you’re about to see is real.” After a while “Really” is added to the sentence, which then fades out so that only “Really” remains.

We can explore a number of scenes from *American Mormon* to establish how the camera is employed to comment on the social actors' answers. For example, when Tufts asks two women – probably mother and daughter – what they know about Mormons, the elder women describes them as “backward”. Tufts asks, “Do Mormons use microphones?” The woman answers, “I think they are still churning butter.” Tufts comments on this answer by grimacing into the camera such that the social actors cannot see his response (fig. 111).



Fig. 111 Tufts reacts with a grimace as commentary on the social actor's answer that “Mormons are still churning butter” (*American Mormon*, 00:08:12).

Fig. 112 The young man challenges Tuft's patience as he refuses to answer his question and instead invents an adventurous story (*American Mormon*, 00:05:27).

On another occasion, rather than answer Tuft's question as to who Mormons are directly, a young man at Venice Beach in Santa Monica invents his own story. Tufts initially listens but soon signals with his hand that the story is taking too long. A ticking clock, advancing the time after each cut, is imposed to highlight that the young man's exhaustive story is boring (fig. 112).

Sometimes people questions in turn, with Tufts expected to respond. He often fails to react to such queries. When a woman asks: “Did you – did you see *The Passion* by the way? Wasn't it ... [the woman hesitates to go deeper, she seems surprised by her bravery] of the Christ? Tufts in turn hesitates, conveying the impression that he is unsure whether he should admit he has seen the movie. After a short pause he says as he gazes into the camera (fig. 113): “I did see *The Passion*. I rented it from a place called *Cleanfix*, actually.”



Fig. 113 Tufts again talks with the camera, behind which his colleague Knudsen is standing (*American Mormon*, 00:12:40).

Fig. 114 Tufts stands with the musicians and it seems that his loyalties are fully with them (*American Mormon*, 00:23:44).

*Cleanflix* is a streaming platform, its name alluding to the more popular *Netflix*. With this reference Tufts tells the audience and the couple that he is aware of the negative judgments about *The Passion of the Christ* (Gibson, US 2006), specifically from the LDS Church. He also knows that representatives of his church might learn of his response.<sup>574</sup> The scene shows that the filmmaker's gaze is more interested in the filmmaker's own standing and performance than in the views of the social actors. The hosts' behavior changes when they meet the two Mormon street musicians who will soon serve as missionaries (fig. 114).

As the titles suggest, the filmmakers are on the search for other Mormons. Tufts' gaze on the two Mormon street performers in Las Vegas is unlike that used in previous scenes and he reveals early on that he is also Mormon. It seems that he does not want to compromise the two young Mormons. On learning that the two young street musicians are from Salt Lake City, Tufts immediately changes his attitude. Rather than mock them, he expresses hearty familiarity and exuberant sympathy. His loyalties are immediately clear. He stands at the same distance from the camera as the two men and stages the two social actors in a very positive light. Although Tufts and Knudsen encounter these colored T-shirt wearing Mormons on the Las Vegas strip, but this misleading and compromising situation will soon be rectified. In the credits of *American Mormon* a photograph

<sup>574</sup> The film is explicit in its depiction of violence and use of language, which is against LDS film policy.

of the two men is inserted in which they are neatly and tidily dressed in the suits of missionaries (fig. 115/116).



Fig. 115/ Fig. 116 In the end credits the two street musicians encountered in Las Vegas are presented as neatly dressed young men ready to serve their mission and as still having fun (*American Mormon in Europe*, 00:33:35/ 00.33.40).

The titles tell where they will serve – one in Oregon and one in the Philippines. *American Mormon* ends with Tuft's voice: "To both of you and to all you other missionaries out there. We wanna wish you the very best as you go out and really talk to people about the Mormons." These closing words from the host summarize the intent behind the documentary. As former missionaries, Tufts and Knudsen seek to show why it is important for Mormons to talk to non-Mormons about Mormonism. They want the world to know who Mormons really are. The film is designed in part to motivate future missionaries, by showing the lack of knowledge about Mormonism in the United States and the humor that can emerge in tackling ignorance. There was evident potential for a sequel, with Europeans perhaps even less well informed than the people they encountered in the United States.

*American Mormon in Europe* adds another story line, combining it with the existing pattern of asking questions with the interviewee very unsure of the answer. Tufts provides further information that again seems to be intended for his audience rather than for the social actors. The first question, presented in a title, is: "What do they know about Utah?" The passers-by indicate that the answer is "very little." Their wrong answers are used as an opening sequence and are compared with those that would be given by Mormons responding to the same question.

For example, when Tufts meets a group of young women who don't know where Utah is, he draws a map in the air to instruct them (fig. 117).



Fig. 117 *That Tufts is the center of attention is expressed by his proximity to the camera. He even covers some of the social actors (American Mormon in Europe, 00:04:23).*

Fig. 118 *Tufts even pushes people aside so that they don't stand in the way of the camera. His behavior says that the space in front of the camera does not belong to the social actor; it is Tuft's space (American Mormon in Europe, 00:29:03).*

The host is the center of attention, with the interviewees listening and seemingly amused. He sits in front of one social actor and obscures her from our sight. Later Tufts turns so that the interviewees do not block the camera's view of him (fig. 118).

On another occasion a social actor returns his question by asking, “Do you know the shape of Israel?” Tufts tries to draw Israel but gives up, admitting that he doesn't know its form. Then he states about religion: “There is a religion that is headquartered in Utah.” One social actor guesses: “It must be Catholic?” Tufts replies, (fig.119) : “uuu … good guess. The Catholic church is – their headquarters are in Rome.”

Even though his answer is only partly right – namely the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church are in the Vatican City, he allies with the audience, who probably know full well that Utah is not associated with the Roman Catholic Church, by looking again into the camera.

Often the host is very close to the social actors. Tufts is of above-average height, which intensifies the impression of too great closeness, as in the case of the two Frenchmen in front of the Eiffel Tower (fig 120).

The editing combines all the answers into a continuous flow in which a lack of knowledge about Mormonism is exposed. Some of the social actors overtly claim to know certain Mormons as soon as Tufts mentions them; for others the names mean nothing. Knudsen also conducts interviews in Europe, but unlike Tufts he interviews only Mormons and he asks them



Fig. 119 The social actor responds seriously to the questions in a strong German accent, from Saxony. He seems ignorant for although the host does not speak his language, he outclasses the young German man with greater knowledge of Mormonism (American Mormon in Europe, 00:06:47).

Fig. 120 The two French men in front of the Eiffel Tower have to look up to the host. Had the host taken a short step to the side, the unfavorable position of the interviewees could have been avoided (American Mormon in Europe, 00:07:12).



Fig. 121 The Mormon German woman looks into the camera while Knudsen is focused upon her (American Mormon in Europe, 00:09:05).

Fig. 122 Relaxed, Knudsen listens to a French Mormon who praises Utah and the number of people who speak French (American Mormon in Europe, 00:09:54).

what they know about Utah. His style as a host is different, with almost no comments and leaving more space for the social actors, so that they sometimes even dare to look at the camera (fig. 121).

Knudsen intervenes less and seems to listen without judging. He often turns slightly away from the camera and in doing so allows the social actors to be frontally visible (fig. 122/fig. 123).



*Fig. 123 The Italian Mormon in Rome faces straight on to the camera whereas Knudsen is turned away. Again the host's reactions and interventions are limited and very reluctant (American Mormon in Europe, 00:35:19).*

*Fig. 124 Knudsen shows great patience and respect for the social actors. Here a German woman starts to cry when she talks about her memories of visiting the temple with her family (American Mormon in Europe, 00:18:17).*

This interviewer's evident attachment to his interviewees seems to be based on their shared religious affiliation and also appears to be a product of a less dominant and more tentative personality. This attitude generates closeness and intimacy during conversations, as is the case with a Mormon woman in Germany who starts to cry when she tells of a particular experience in going to the temple with her family (fig. 124). Knudsen listens attentively to this personal and precious memory. Elegiac music intensifies the emotional charge. Knudsen's respectful presence leaves space for the social actors.

The narration repeatedly highlights how little non-Mormons know about Mormonism and Mormons. In a repetitive pattern, passers-by are asked how many Mormons live in their country. Their guesses are contrasted with the actual numbers, which are superimposed (fig. 125).



Fig. 125 Asked if there are many Mormons in England, two English women respond in the negative. The correct information is superimposed for the audience: 138,441 Mormons currently live in England (American Mormon in Europe, 00:20:19).

Fig. 126 The social actors claim the space in front of the camera. Knudsen conducts a serious conversation based on genuine attention and authentic interest (American Mormon in Europe, 00:45:48).

The narration goes even further. If a guess is very far from the correct number, an intertitle “huh?” appears as commentary. This is also the case when an interviewee has no English or cannot comprehend what Tufts is asking.

After almost 45 minutes a new topic is introduced – the Mormon ward in Berlin, with discussion of how a member’s life was before the Wall came down and how it changed subsequently. The tone of the documentary becomes more serious. Knudsen listens with empathy and interest to the stories the Berlin Mormons tell him (fig. 126).

As the Berlin Mormons recall their history, their emotions often fill the space before the camera. The host’s gaze again is intimate and suggests his respect for the people and their stories.

In the closing sequence of the film, the moments at the end of each conversation when Tufts reveals he is a Mormon are connected together by editing. When the hidden camera is revealed, the passers-by who have been interviewed feel they have been caught out, a pattern known from other similarly staged television shows (fig. 127).

Finally, both Mormons and non-Mormons are asked for advice for Mormons in Utah. In general the answers are positive and encouraging: “Stay strong!” (00:47:57). “Find out for yourself!” (00:48:05). “Search a lot for the right friends!” (00:48:17). “Fulfill your callings!” (00:48:21). “My testimony is – für Gott ist nichts unmöglich” (00:50:07). As a woman says these last



Fig. 127 When Tufts explains that they are Mormons, people respond with surprise and sometimes with embarrassment at their own previous comments (*American Mormon in Europe*, 00:47:24).

words, she starts to cry. Tufts again interrupts and comments and Knudsen listens.

We turn now to the moral reasoning applied in the narration of *American Mormon* and *American Mormon in Europe*. On one hand, the filmmakers are telling the documentary's audience that they should not take the non-Mormon world too seriously, that non-Mormons are simply ignorant. On the other hand, Tufts and Knudsen promote the Mormon faith by letting audience and non-Mormon social actors know that they have a sense of humor. There is a tit-for-tat approach here: as long as they are making fun of us, we are allowed to make fun of them and their ignorance. The mode of moral reasoning can therefore be described as adjusting for equality. This approach embraces the experience of many Mormons in being the other or "peculiar people".<sup>575</sup> The film's narration is based in reciprocity and refers to the Mormon experience of being different.

What audience do the makers have in mind? Spectators who know little about Mormons might be less interested in the narration because the humor mostly works when the viewers' frame of reference includes a degree of knowledge about Mormonism, at least more than the average non-Mormon social actor possesses. We can assume that Mormons find the documentaries particularly funny. The documentaries may have an additional relevance for future missionaries: at the end of *American Mormon* the hosts

575 Fluhman, *A Peculiar People*; Decker and Austin, *Peculiar Portrayals*.

explicitly state that “Mormons should go and talk to people about the Mormons and Mormonism,” which can be understood as a call to mission.

### 9.3. The LDS Church and Mormon truth, historical and global

Whereas the documentaries discussed up to this point have mainly been generated on the initiative of producers and filmmakers, the last two films we shall analyze were produced by two leading Mormon institutions. The LDS Church is responsible for *Meet the Mormons* (Blair Treu, US 2014, 78') and Brigham Young University for *Journey of Faith* (Peter Johnson, US 2006, 86'). The first film was a surprise success, making \$6,047,363 at the US box office.<sup>576</sup> It was made to replace an older introductory film on Mormonism that was shown at the church visitor centers, but the test audiences were so positive about *Meet the Mormons* that the producers decided it should first be screened in public theaters. The second documentary, *Journey of Faith*, is a more educational and historical film. The end credits acknowledge the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies at Brigham Young University and Timpanogos Entertainment. Most of the experts who are interviewed teach at Brigham Young University, which is affiliated with the LDS Church. The sequel, *Journey of Faith: The New World*, was produced one year later, again directed by Peter Johnson, and continues the story of how Lehi and his descendants arrived and settled in Central America.

*Meet the Mormons* is a corporate video in the form of a documentary that promotes the Mormon faith by depicting outstanding Mormon social actors with above average capabilities who are embedded in impressive landscapes and filmed by an empathic and supportive camera. The representation of Mormonism is entirely controlled by the LDS. Neither film includes critical voices. *Meet the Mormons* shows contemporary places and people, whereas in *Journey of Faith* the people and places are historical. The latter tells the story of an Israelite tribe that Mormons understand as their ancestors. The tribe fled Israel out of fear of persecution. As a historical event, the story poses a different challenge for the documentary mode, although the documentaries share the aim of presenting Mormonism and the LDS Church at their best. The discussion that follows will consider how this goal is achieved and what kind of moral reasoning is applied.

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576 “Meet the Mormons (2014) – Box Office Mojo.”

*Meet the Mormons* provides portraits of six Mormons. They live or work(ed) in different countries and talk about their successful lives, what they have achieved, and how their Mormon faith influences their lives. The protagonists are introduced with intertitles: *The Bishop* Jermaine Sullivan works as an academic counselor and is now stake president in Atlanta, GA; *The Coach* Ken Niumatalolo is a head college football coach in the US; *The Fighter* Carolina Muñoz Marin is a mixed martial arts fighter from Costa Rica; *The Humanitarian* Bishnu Adhikari is an engineer born in Nepal who now lives in the US; *The Candy Bomber* Gail Halvorsen, a pilot during the Berlin Airlift, lives in the US; *The Missionary Mom* Dawn Armstrong resides in the US. The social actors represent the church as a global institution for they include individuals from countries other than the US and Americans who live and work in foreign countries.

The analysis here will focus on *The Humanitarian*. The sequence depicts and explains how the Mormon faith can be lived by someone who does not come from a Mormon or American cultural and religious background. The message is that the LDS Church family accepts members of various cultural origins. The clip also emphasizes that Mormons are Christians. Although it does not address religious practices and rituals directly, the protagonist and his wife explain in some detail their relationship to Jesus Christ. At another point a picture of the protagonist's baptism is inserted to illustrate his conversion to the LDS Church. *Meet the Mormons* is professionally and conventionally told, which is in keeping with the director's professional background. An experienced director, Blair Treu has worked for the Disney Channel and is himself a Mormon. He graduated from Brigham Young University and works now for the official Mormon TV BYUtV, located in Provo, UT.

Two cultures influence the hermeneutic horizons of the protagonist Bishnu Adhikari, *The Humanitarian*, an attribution explained by the narration. Adhikari was partly educated in the US and lived with his wife and three children in Kathmandu. From the start the narration connects Bishnu Adhikari strongly with his Hindu and Nepalese heritage; only toward the end of this section do we see the LDS Church meetinghouse, after the protagonist has spoken of experiencing the presence of God on the "summit of Mount Everest." A traveling shot of the impressive Nepalese mountain landscape from a bird's eye view introduces this new topic. Adhikari met Mormon missionaries in Russia, where he was also baptized; we see the image of his baptism while hearing Adhikari speak repeatedly of how happy he is about his decision to be baptized. The protagonist's Hindu background is called "cultural practices and family tradition"; his current

affiliation with the LDS Church is called “faith”. Adhikari claims: “Becoming a Christian doesn’t mean to abandon your culture.” His wife, who shares her husband’s religious affiliation, is also involved in church activities and directs the choir at the LDS Church meetinghouse.

*Meet the Mormons* is a commissioned film, and the filmmaker’s loyalty is to the commissioning the LDS Church. At the time he made this documentary, Blair was already involved in the *I’m a Mormon* campaign, and the stylistic and narrative similarities are conspicuous. To some extent the documentary is an extended version of that campaign’s videos.<sup>577</sup> The social actors endorse the church, a loyalty echoed by supporting parties who are largely family members and co-workers. Succinctly put: this is a Mormon narrative about Mormons, who represent themselves through their activities and visually. This strategy is fostered by moderator Jenna Kim Jones, an entertainer who is a Mormon. She opens the documentary by asking people at Times Square in New York City what they know about Mormons. She acts as guide throughout the narration of *Meet the Mormons* and introduces the protagonists in voice-overs. Jones also appears in one of the shorts from the *I’m a Mormon* campaign. The narrative of *Meet the Mormons* is focussed largely on social actors from the United States, with one protagonist from South America and, in the “extras”, one woman from Italy who lives in the United States. Those responsible for the production and those who appear within the documentary are all affiliated with the LDS Church; the diversity within the documentary comes from the latter’s cultural backgrounds. As we shall see, the camera gaze in the section entitled *The Humanitarian* (00:47:44-00:58:40) portrays this loyalty to the church along with a particular cultural diversity.

The sequence starts with several bird’s eye shots of Hindu temples in Kathmandu and mountains. A woman is dancing a traditional Hindu dance, and images of the lively town of Kathmandu at night are accompanied by rhythmic music of Hindi pop. In the first shot Bishnu Adhikari is sitting on a chair speaking to the camera (00:49:12): “I love my country Nepal.” The setting changes, and the protagonist is now with his family in the kitchen of his home. The camera is in the middle of the kitchen like a guest (fig. 128). Bishnu Adhikari introduces his wife and each of his children by name (Fig. 129–132).

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<sup>577</sup> See chapter 4 in this book.



Fig. 128 The camera is invited to stay close to the Adhikari family (*Meet the Mormons*, 00:49:15).

Fig. 129 “My wife, Mangala” (*Meet the Mormons*, 00:49:17).

Fig. 130 “Our first daughter, Smina” (*Meet the Mormons*, 00:49:19).

Fig. 131 “Second daughter, Rebecca” (*Meet the Mormons*, 00:49:21).

Fig. 132 “And then our son Jeewarshav” (*Meet the Mormons*, 00:49:23).

Fig. 133 The protagonist introduces us to the place where he was raised (*Meet the Mormons*, 00:49:32).

Then the camera follows Bishnu Adhikari as he visits the village where he was raised (fig. 133). Jenna Kim Jones states in the voice-over: “Bishnu and his ten siblings grew up in this remote village of Lamjung, nestled deep within the foothills of Himalayan mountain range.”



*Fig. 134/ Fig. 135/ Fig. 136/ Fig. 137/ Fig. 138/ Fig. 139/ Fig. 140 Bishnu Adikari guides the camera through his world and provides access to private spaces that otherwise would be difficult to visit. His gaze becomes the camera's gaze (Meet the Mormons, 00:50:20/ 00:50:27/ 00:50:35/ 00:51:15/ 00:51:16/ 00:51:36/ 00:51:37).*

As the protagonist tells his conversion story, the camera frames him in a close shot (fig. 134). The shot changes and Bishnu is shown alone in the landscape (fig. 135), suggesting a respectful distance is required at this important moment. Then the camera follows the dynamic protagonist (fig.

136) and becomes a passenger on board a plane (fig. 137), catching a view of the hills around Katmandu from above (fig. 138). The protagonist defines the camera gaze, showing where it should be directed, for example toward a mother and her two children when he greets them (fig 139). The protagonist opens his world to the camera, which is able to enter unobtrusively. As a local, Adhikari enables the audience to access these private spaces. On occasion the camera adopts a beneficial distance, helping localize the plot spatially (fig. 140).



*Fig. 141/ Fig. 142/ Fig. 143/ Fig. 144/ Fig. 145/ Fig. 146 The camera gaze follows a pattern whereby it is close and in the middle of the action and also provides the “bigger” picture, often of scenic surroundings (Meet the Mormons, 00:51:51/ 00:52:00/ 00:52:18/ 00:52:36 /00:52:09/ 00:52:40).*

Bishnu Adhikari meets contractors (fig. 141), visits the inhabitants of a small village (fig. 142), is invited to the opening of a school he has funded (fig. 143). Sometimes the camera seems almost invisible and it is always

discrete (fig. 144). Some activities are explained by the protagonist's commentary – he argues, for example, that education is key to escaping poverty. By inserting longshots that explain his actions, the camera integrates Adhikari within the context in which he works and acts (fig. 145/146).

The cinematographer and the director are not present; although the protagonist speaks to them a few times, as in a scene when Adhikari explains technical aspects of water resources to the filmmaker, no reaction is given. The space behind the camera remains mute (fig. 147/148).



Fig. 147 Bishnu Adhikari now talks to the cinematographer but there is no reaction (*Meet the Mormons*, 00:53:02).

Fig. 148 The protagonist turns around and looks to the left of the camera toward someone. He is explaining how he will bring water to the valley (*Meet the Mormons*, 00:53:10).

The only permitted interaction is between the protagonist and his social entourage. When school children line the path, the camera looks on with Adhikari's gaze (fig. 149). He comments that he feels uncomfortable when people give him extra emphasis. The line with the school children is very long. The camera again reveals Adhikari's extraordinary context (fig. 150/151), at the same time staying very close in this shot (fig. 152). During the adulation of this LDS Church member, he himself comments in the voice-over: "As a son of our Heavenly Father, they and myself in His eyes are equal." On one occasion a local man addresses the director, but the director does not respond. He strictly observes only, with his presence expressed exclusively through the camera lens, and does not engage personally with the social actors.



*Fig. 149/ Fig. 150/ Fig. 151/ Fig. 152 The camera is very present, but the director hides behind it. Questions from social actors remain unanswered (Meet the Mormons, 00:53:27/ 00:53:46/ 00:54:00/ 00:54:05).*

The protagonist is presented not only undertaking his professional duties but also dancing at a private party. The scene tells the audience that Mormons can relax and have fun. Within the LDS Church meetinghouse they evince greater seriousness. The humanitarian's life is presented as manifold, vivid, and accountable.

The closing scene brings the narration back to the village where it started. The protagonist affirms his Mormon belonging and the joy it brings with his comment (00:56:19) "I am so very happy that I made that decision." Finally, he visits his father, greeting him by touching his forehead to his father's feet (fig. 153). The gesture is filmed in slow motion, adding an emotional layer. The gesture indicates the highest respect, his daughter explains. Adhikari's father comments in the voice-over and then as a talking head (fig. 154): "I feel very blessed to be respected like that. I feel really blessed to be respected by my son."<sup>578</sup> The narration connects Bishnu Adhikari's more recent affiliation with the LDS Church to his family heritage, showing how they can be combined.

After more than 10 minutes in which a successful man is presented at his best – engaged in his community, supporting the less privileged and

<sup>578</sup> Original language is Nepalese. The dialogue is taken from the subtitles of the DVD.



Fig. 153/ Fig. 154 At the end of section entitled *The Humanitarian*, the protagonist returns to his village, where he meets his father (Meet the Mormons, 00:57:38/ 00:57:48).

with seemingly boundless energy – a summary of the message of this section is provided, as the very decent protagonist recounts (00:48:41): “I’m not close to the perfection but I’m perfect in one thing – I’m perfect in trying.” Not just his behavior but also his self-assessment is humble.

The modes of moral reasoning in *Meet the Mormons* adopt a variety of strategies. Generally, the narrative defends the Mormon worldview and its people: Mormon faith is Christian and global, tolerant and open to other cultures. Mormons are exceptional and successful. Their faith enables them to achieve. The only voices heard in the documentary are affirming of the church. No experts appear anywhere in this documentary – normal Mormons are inherently sufficient to prove the worth of Mormonism.

The film is likely to be of particular interest to Mormons, for whom it can provide self-affirmation. The response of the audience will depend very much on their experiences with Mormons. Past negative experiences may result in a refusal to cooperate with the message, a sense that here again Mormons are telling only half-truths. Non-Mormons with little knowledge of Mormonism and Mormons themselves will likely be impressed by the diversity of the church membership, by their success and positivity, with the documentary thus fostering mission and enhancing the image of the church. The educational aspect is certainly less significant, with little new factual information communicated. The ethical space in *Meet the Mormons* matches the LDS Church’s worldview, with its wish to promote the integrity of its members and their success. The documentary does not tackle Mormon dogmatic teachings or exclusivity.

An educational purpose is central to our last example of a Mormon documentary. *Journey of Faith* is intended as validation of *The Book of Mormon*. As we will see, a good number of experts address Lehi’s journey from Jerusalem to America and propose how he and his flock survived in the

desert.<sup>579</sup> The opening title of *Journey of Faith* highlights the scholarly nature of the narrative (00:00:11): “This documentary is based on current research into the epic journey of Lehi and his family through the Arabian Peninsula to the Americas. These are the Middle Eastern locations where Lehi likely traveled.” The account begins in Jerusalem and tells how Lehi refused to adapt to the adulterous lifestyle of his contemporaries, who were “not living the spirit of the law [of Moses] that was given to them” (00:07:17). Under serious threat from his opponents, Lehi is told by God to leave Jerusalem with his tribe.

Experts from a wide range of fields – archeology, history, ancient scripture, law, and classical antiquity, philosophy, Islamic studies, Arabic, political science, botany, plant ecology, and Middle Eastern history – use their authority to bolster the narrative of *The Book of Mormon*. The case is made with repeated examples, presented largely within a repeated structure. First an event from *The Book of Mormon* is described or read. By adding further evidence, an expert located at the relevant site or in a studio reassures the audience that the events that have been described did indeed happen. The expert explains why the excerpt from the text seems valid from the perspective of that expert’s field of study. Additionally, the narrative argues that while *The Book of Mormon* is consistent with recent scientific findings, Joseph Smith could not have known that evidence – Joseph Smith was a genuine prophet, with his translation of the golden plates from “reformed Egyptian”<sup>580</sup> to English a product of divine revelation.<sup>581</sup> The various claims made through the documentary are never contradictory and complement the argument perfectly. The whole narration functions as a unified and harmonized defense of the validity of *The Book of Mormon*.

LDS-affiliated institutions, which the end credits reference, form the production context. Most of the experts who appear in the narration teach at Brigham Young University, which is affiliated with the LDS Church. Their university affiliation is not stated in the narration, which could suggest a desire to conceal that relationship. The sequel, *Journey of Faith: The New world*, recounts in similar style how Lehi and his descendants arrived in Central America and the events that followed.

<sup>579</sup> According to *The Book of Mormon*, Lehi was a prophet in Jerusalem (approximately 600 BC) who guided his tribe to the Americas and is understood by Mormons as their forefather.

<sup>580</sup> Joseph Smith and Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *The Book of Mormon*, trans. Joseph Smith (New York et al.: Penguin Classics, 2008), 548.

<sup>581</sup> “..., I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.” See Smith and Maffly-Kipp, 3.

The hermeneutic horizons and loyalties of filmmaker and producer Peter Johnson are a product of his LDS Church membership. Johnson first worked in the Hollywood film industry and later produced and directed for Brigham Young Motion Pictures.<sup>582</sup> Johnson has a personal commitment to convincing the audience that Joseph Smith's story is authentic. The hermeneutic horizons of the specialists in the film are similarly influenced by their Mormon affiliations, specifically to Brigham Young University. Their contributions make evident their belief in *The Book of Mormon*. Their testimony seeks to provide evidence in support of their worldview, for example by proving that the town of Nahem existed. An emotional mode is also activated, as, for example, when the subject of the role of women in ancient times is broached.

The social actors' loyalties intersect with their hermeneutic horizons, with the majority of those who contribute LDS members who are defending their own church's position. Through their specialized knowledge they are able to furnish the argument with credibility. Through their appearance and statements they also prove their loyalty to their religious institution and its teachings. As in *Meet the Mormons*, the social actors gain from their participation by voicing religious and institutional self-affirmation.

As noted, two strategies for the argument are applied. We see both factual and emotional modes operating in a sequence about Sariah, Lehi's wife, launched by kitschy shots of sunsets over the sea and mountains. The director is neither visible nor audible. Our analysis will reveal that *Journey of Faith* seeks to be objective, concealing the relativity of the historical narrative.

The sequence starts with Virginia H. Pearce, introduced as an educator and author (fig. 155). "It's impossible not to love this story!" she enthuses, smiling empathically and happily.

She explains admiringly how Nephi prioritizes his family, suggesting that even today for a man to do so is extraordinary. A drawing depicting Sariah, Lehi's wife, is inserted (fig. 156).

The second expert in the sequence addresses ancient texts. Ann N. Madsen explains the role of women during Lehi's time (fig. 157): "Men had power and the women had influence."

Madsen's point is that in ancient times while women were not vocal in public, their husbands listened to their opinions in private. A male expert describes the challenges of managing domestic tasks during the journey

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582 "Films by Latter-Day Saints: Directors, Producers," accessed February 24, 2018, <http://www.ldsfilm.com/dir.html#Pro>.



Fig. 155 Virginia H. Pearce opens the sequence, addressing the role of women during Lehi's journey to America while smiling warmly and empathetically (*Journey of Faith*, 00:18:44).

Fig. 156 The drawing shows Lehi's wife during a rest on the journey. Sariah is preparing food. In light of the challenges of preparing food for so many people, experts deem her contribution outstanding (*Journey of Faith*, 00:19:03).



Fig. 157 Ann N. Madsen explains that in these times men paid attention to their wives only in private (*Journey of Faith*, 00:19:03).

Fig. 158 The drawing puts Sariah behind Lehi and shows the moment when Lehi tells Sariah that he has been told by God to leave Jerusalem (*Journey of Faith*, 00:20:50).

and an additional female expert then illustrates in detail how bread could be made at that time, describing each step. Pearce then highlights the important constellation of the family in *The Book of Mormon*. It's a "real family" with problems and tensions, as another male academic mentions in a serious tone. Talking about pressures and rivalries within a family, Pearce becomes more emotional (00:20:35): "We see sibling rivalries, we see tension, and we can imagine what that does to a mother."

Shortly afterward Pearce shows empathy with Sariah, with a slight tremor in her voice: (00:20:50): "I imagine that the moment Lehi told her about what the Lord had instructed him to do, she anticipated what this

would do to her family.” Another drawing is inserted, to illustrate Pearce’s comment (fig. 158).

Then two male experts explain that Lehi’s sons, Laman and Lemuel, belonged to the ruling class in Judea and viewed their father as a “class traitor” (00:21:13). In Lehi’s family and its conflicts the experts see Judea in microcosm. Even though the two sons do not want to join the journey, they are loyal to their father, the experts repeat and emphasize. We should note that as soon as the topic changes to the relationship between father and sons, all the expert commentary is by men. These experts conclude that Laman and Lemuel transferred their anger with their father to their brother Nephi. Then Pearce brings an emotional component into the story with the comment (00:23:10): “The thing that is heartbreaking for me, women I know who have children like Laman and Lemuel often take great comfort, great comfort, if they still have a loving relationship with family members. They will say they have left the faith, but we still love one another, and we still have a good time together. And there is great comfort in that for the women. But Sariah never ever had that. And that breaks my heart for her.”

This short sequence makes evident how the relationship between women and men should function, with specific and distinct roles within the family. The historical account is used to draw a picture of the ideal Mormon family structure, in which the husband and father is the leader, the sons are loyal to their father, the wife follows her husband in whatever he does, is responsible for the preparation of food and further domestic duties, and will love her children even if they don’t behave. The narration uses *The Book of Mormon* as evidence in support of contemporary family values.

Another strand to the argument in this documentary is to show that *The Book of Mormon* contains accurate information that could not have been known to Joseph Smith – its narrative therefore was not invented. Thus, for example, a map showing the travels of Lehi and his tribe includes a place named “Nahom”, where Nephi’s father-in-law was supposedly buried (Fig. 159):



Fig. 159 A map with a red line that moves across the Arabian Peninsula is inserted to show Lehi's journey (*Journey of Faith*, 00:33:26).

William J. Hamblin, whose subject is Middle Eastern history, comments (00:37:31): “The chances of finding that exact name from that time in that exact place by random chance are just astronomical.” The town of Nahom is mentioned in *The Book of Mormon*, yet it was unknown in the time of Joseph Smith. LDS Church archeologists believe that they have now located Nahom. The film shows ruins and the pillars of a temple on which the name “Nahom” is inscribed with the three letters *NHM*, from which Joseph Smith deduced the name *Nahom* (fig. 160).

The documentary claims that three further temples are also inscribed with the name *Nahom*. Thus the narrative provides visual evidence and oral claims that the place existed (fig. 161). Most of the experts here are male and they support each other’s positions.

Scholar of law and antiquity John W. Welch brings home this point (00:39:05): “The witnesses tell us that Joseph didn’t even know that the city of Jerusalem had walls around it. But if he didn’t know that there was a wall around Jerusalem, he certainly didn’t know that there was a city or a site out in Yemen called Nahom.” A female expert comments (00:39:33): “One has to ask the question how could Joseph Smith possibly have known Nahom?”, highlighting Joseph Smith’s miraculous knowledge as indirect proof of the authenticity of *The Book of Mormon*.

The moral reasoning in this historical documentary combines three reading modes: personal belief, emotional involvement, and scholarly rhetoric. The last of these is adopted to propose that *The Book of Mormon* has historic pedigree and that its contents will be empirically proven. Mor-

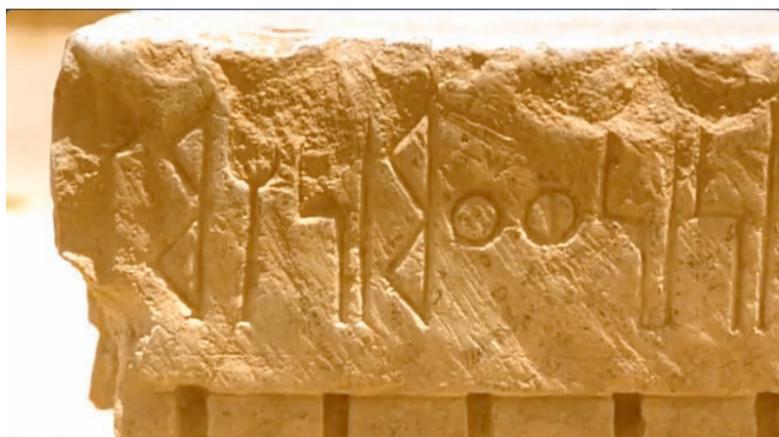


Fig. 160 The letters NHM are inscribed on this pillar. Joseph Smith could not have known of the city, which was not discovered until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet it appears in *The Book of Mormon* (Journey of Faith, 00:38:42).



Fig. 161: The narration explains that three temples have been found on an archeologic site on which NHM is inscribed. The longshot of the archeological excavation should prove the existence of Nahom (Journey of Faith, 00:38:59).

mon theology is a separate matter, but, the film suggests, archeological evidence supports the story of Lehi and therefore also *The Book of Mormon*. The evidence for Lehi's journey from Jerusalem to the sea is apparently overwhelming – no opposing voices are heard. The narrative appears both strong and authentic and suggests that the facts and belief are in accord. At

the meta level, the documentary intertwines the interpretation of historical sources and the educational, cultural and religious background of the interpreting scholar. The lack of transparency about the experts' hermeneutic horizons casts some doubt on the credibility of their views.

The mode of moral reasoning distinguishes between male and female voices. The mostly male experts provide cognitive and intellectual support for the argument that is presented. The female specialists, Pearce and Madson, show how *The Book of Mormon* and its wisdom touch its reader emotionally. They have empathy for the characters in the story, whose views and experiences they seek to convey. This combination of factual evidence and emotion is presented as supporting the veracity of *The Book of Mormon*. The rational mode of the argument is enhanced by an emotional mode, which supports the LDS Church's insistence on an individually experienced faith. In the moral mode *Journey of Faith* combines right living with the evidence of historical fact.

The documentary reinforces Mormon beliefs and loyalties. The moral reasoning provides reassurance against doubt. While some knowledge of *The Book of Mormon* will help the viewer access the narration's purpose, those who know little of *The Book of Mormon* are also addressed. The documentary's rational mode, in its presentation of historical fact, will probably be attractive to those in the latter category, who will then learn of Mormon history and Mormon values as they are inscribed in Lehi's story and explained by experts.

#### 9.4. Participants' loyalties and their impact

These Mormon documentaries are intended for both Mormon and non-Mormon audiences, even though their affinities and frames of reference are quite different. The documentaries tell stories that can both convince the non-believer and fortify the believer. They do not engage contrary views, although doing so could add credibility for a non-Mormon audience.

The filmmakers' loyalties are to the LDS Church as an institution. They are advocates of their faith, an attitude that, as we have seen, is inscribed in the gaze of the camera. Their hermeneutic horizons are often determined by a broad familiarity with Mormon history, as in the case of the experts and director of *Journey of Faith*, or with contemporary Mormonism, as in the case of Tufts and Knudsen in *American Mormon* and *American Mormon in Europe*. The documentaries may even exclude non-Mormons who lack

specific knowledge of Mormonism or do not share the loyalties of church members. All these documentaries make a strong case for the truth of Mormonism, but they draw on values that are not necessarily shared with a non-Mormon audience, and in so doing risk becoming a focus for further criticism of Mormonism. Their moral reasoning would not then correspond with the goal they pursue. The closeness of the camera, of the director's gaze, to the social actors could fortify that negative estimation.

Other than the expert scholars, the Mormons who appear here before the camera openly recount their lives and personal experiences. They are instrumental for the documentaries' credibility. Despite all their variety, the Mormon social actors in these documentaries represent the dominant view of the LDS Church. This unity may help convince the audience. What do they gain by participating? Their involvement in the production, both their presence and their words, may strengthen their ties to the institutional church. Is so, both parties benefit. But what if the social actor's opinion changes and no longer corresponds with the original message of the documentary? The film still exists and may well be available to view in various contexts, particularly online. In this instance neither party – participant nor institution – would benefit as previously; indeed, both may now be disadvantaged. Whether the documentary should still be distributed becomes an ethical concern. The moral dimension of a longer-term perspective on distribution applies not only to Mormon documentaries but also to documentaries produced in non-Mormon contexts, as the following chapter will show.