

## **The Marginality of 'Irish Mormonism': Confronting Irish Boundaries of Belonging**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article builds upon existing literature which demonstrates the complex interconnections of Catholicism, Irishness, and whiteness in the Republic of Ireland. Using this multifaceted inter-relationship between religious, national, and racial identities as its starting point, this article analyses negotiations of Irishness, community, and belonging amongst adherents of Mormonism in Ireland.

This article firstly argues that as members of a minority religion Mormons in Ireland of all backgrounds are stigmatised and marginalised from Irish narratives of 'belonging'. Secondly, this article determines that as the majority of Mormons in Ireland are white Irish, in keeping with the majority population, they view themselves and are viewed by others as both insiders and outsiders within their own country. Thirdly, this article demonstrates how Mormons in Ireland with racialised identities also navigate a complex system of racial, religious, and national affiliations. Thus, this article establishes that Mormons of all backgrounds in Ireland struggle to gain acceptance and belonging within the national narrative of belonging.

Finally, this article identifies the processes through which Mormons in Ireland work to create belonging to the national narrative. For some, emphasising their identity as Christian is a way to find commonality with the majority Catholic population in Ireland. For others, a celebration and reinterpretation of Irishness is used as a tool to build a dual sense of belonging; to others within an increasingly diverse Mormon community in Ireland, and to the wider society.

### **KEYWORDS**

Irish religion, Mormonism, Latter-day Saints, belonging, Irishness, religious minorities, whiteness, ethnography

## *Introduction*

Can members of minority religious communities in Ireland be considered, and consider themselves, to be truly Irish? This paper intends to examine this question, using ethnographic data from one year's fieldwork across two field sites in the Republic of Ireland. During the years of 2014-2016 I spent time getting to know two Mormon congregations in Ireland with between 50 to 70 regularly attending members. I have named these congregations Appleby and Sweetwater. During my time with these communities I developed a deep understanding of the complex and subtle processes at work to build and maintain an 'Irish' identity.

Mormonism in Ireland has a long history, with the first missionaries arriving in Dublin in 1850. However, Mormonism was poorly received in Ireland from the start, with direct opposition from Catholic clergy fuelling negative encounters (Barlow, 1968; Card, 1978). It has since struggled to increase its representation amongst the general population which is still predominantly Catholic. Recent census figures calculate the Mormon population to be 0.03% of the general population, which is spread across the country in just 13 congregations (Central Statistics Office, 2017).

The history of Irish Mormonism illustrates that from the beginning its relationship with, and against, Irish Catholicism has been central to its development and to its positioning within Irish society. In the contemporary era, such complex relationships continue. I argue in this paper that Irish Mormonism struggles to move beyond the periphery of Irish society due to the intermingling of Catholicism and whiteness in understandings of Irish national identity. Thus, Mormons of all backgrounds in Ireland are excluded from the national narrative of belonging.

## *Negotiating the interconnections of national, religious and racial identities*

Numerous studies in other contexts have explored similar negotiations of religious, racial, and national identities with religious minorities. Research with Muslim Bangladeshis in London's East End reported complex and conflicting articulations of social identities which incorporate composite understandings of religious, ethnic, and national identities (Eade, 1997b, 1997a). Muslim women in Britain similarly negotiate multiple, overlapping, and conflicting identities, and like Jews in Paris, are also subject to the wider public discourses regarding the presentation of their identities (Dwyer, 1999, 2000; Endelstein and Ryan, 2013; Meer, Dwyer and Modood, 2009). Such research confirms the existence of 'counter-narratives of belonging' which challenge dominant discourses of national belonging (Eade, 1997a, p. 145).

However, in Ireland the inter-relationships between an Irish national identity, religious identity as Catholic, and whiteness as a racial identity remain a relatively overlooked component of identity creation and management. This is despite rapid social change and immigration which has increasingly challenged such associations (Fanning, Howard and O' Boyle, 2010; Fanning, 2014). According to the dominant discourse, to be Irish is to be white, and Ireland is still a predominantly white country where 82% of people

in Ireland identify with the Census category of 'White Irish' and a further 8% identifying as 'Other Irish' (Ignatiev, 1995; Lentin, 2001; Central Statistics Office, 2017; Joseph, 2018).

Lentin (2007) illustrates the creation of Ireland as a 'racial state' (Goldberg, 2002) in which Irishness has been constructed as white, and built into the nation state itself. Lentin (2012) suggests that whiteness in Ireland has been created as ethnically and racially homogeneous, and has been normalised and made invisible to scrutiny. This is despite recent statistics which demonstrate Ireland's increasing diversity, where 18% of the country now identify outside of the core identification of 'white Irish' (Central Statistics Office, 2017). In explaining such strong boundary making in modern understandings of Irishness, we can look to Kuhling and Keohane (2007, p. 67) who argue that:

One of the explanations for why Ireland has retained an overwhelmingly assimilationist view of multiculturalism can be identified within the perceived need to construct a homogenous view of the 'true Irish' people and culture as a form of resistance to colonial repression.

Through this lens, we can see that Ireland's treatment of minorities is representative of Irish attitudes towards those who are considered more generally to be outsiders, due to Ireland's history as a colonised people. In understanding the complex construction and maintenance of 'Irishness' as incorporating both religion and race, this helps us to contextualise the response of Irish people and State towards all minorities, including Mormons.

Ireland's troubled relationship with outsiders which Lentin (2007) articulates is visible through studies of religious minorities in Ireland who have a strong African-Irish adherence, such as Ireland's Pentecostal communities which demonstrates that racism is a commonplace experience for these groups. Similarly, research with Ireland's Muslim communities highlights how they have been positioned as a 'migrant religion', and navigate perceptions of Islam in Ireland as a racialised faith (Ugba, 2009; Carr, 2011; Maguire and Murphy, 2012; Scharbrodt, 2015).

Such research firstly confirms that those who are not white in Ireland are racialised as 'other' and are subject to marginalisation and discrimination. Secondly, in the case of racialised religious identities, their religious and racial differences intermingle and become entwined, supporting outside perceptions of the individual as a an 'outsider' (Carr, 2011, p. 578). Such racialising processes of religious minorities construct both the majority and minority groups as homogenous; at once positioning them as inherently distinct and different from each other, whilst masking the heterogeneity within each category.

Research with adherents of racialised religions is a particularly strong field of growth in the Irish study of religions. They are an important component to understanding modern religion in Ireland. However, the growth of these faiths in Ireland are primarily fuelled by immigration (Kmec, 2017; Ritter and Kmec, 2017; Röder, 2017). Thus, these groups have a different

experience of life as a religious minority than majority white Irish religious minorities such as Ireland's Protestant communities. As racialised religions, many Muslim and Pentecostal adherents manage minority racial and ethnic identities alongside their religious identity, and others engage with them on the basis of their racialised religious status.

Relatively little is understood about majority white religious minorities in Ireland, where research is less plentiful. Notable exceptions to this include research with Ireland's traditional Protestant communities who are often adherents to the Church of Ireland, a form of Anglicanism. Concealment of Protestant identities in a majority Catholic environment remains common. Despite being Ireland's largest religious minority, Irish protestants are frequently excluded or marginalised from full belonging to the category of 'Irish' due to their religious status (Butler and Ruane, 2009; Ruane and Todd, 2009; Crawford 2011; Ruane, 2010; Nuttall, 2015; Walsh, 2015).

These experiences amongst Ireland's Protestant communities can be explained through recognising that national identity as Irish and religious identity as Catholic are deeply intertwined in Irish consciousness and difficult to separate (Inglis, 2004, 2007, 2014; White, 2006; Halikiopoulou, 2008; Ruane and Todd, 2009). Thus, although white religious minorities in Ireland may not find their faith racialised in the manner of other groups, they too are excluded from the national narrative which has been built around Catholicism.

Yet recently, it appears that Irish Catholicism is in crisis. Typical indicators of religiosity illustrate an overall decline in Catholicism in Ireland. The numbers identifying as Catholic have dropped from the highest figure of 94.9% of the population in 1961 to 78.3 per cent in 2016. 6% of this drop has occurred within the last five years (Central Statistics Office, 2012, 2017). Attendance at Catholic church services is poor, and predominantly represented by older generations (Martin, 2011). Such declines might indicate that Catholicism will become less significant as a marker of Irish identity in the future.

However, as Ganiel (2016) has noted, it is too simplistic to argue that Catholicism is in retreat. Personal faith remains high and other religions and New Religious Movements (NRMs) are growing, where growth is visible most notably in Pentecostalism and Islam. Furthermore, alternative spiritualities and New Age Movements (NAMs) are attracting new adherents (Flynn, 2006; Ugba, 2008; Gierak, 2011; Kuhling, 2011; McGarry, 2012).

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, relying only on typical indicators of religiosity obscures Ireland's continuing relationship with Catholicism. This continued, if changed relationship, persists in influencing Irish people's self-understanding of their own religious and national identities. Catholicism remains key as an anchor for cultural identifications in Ireland, and whilst often hidden in individuals' everyday lives, emerges as a category of importance when faced with the 'other' (Inglis, 2004, 2007). Catholicism also continues to be the framework through which those of other religions and no religion make sense of their own identities (Sakaranaho, 2003; Ganiel and Mitchell, 2006; Ganiel, 2016b, 2016a). There is also a growth in those who continue to identify as Catholic whilst incorporating a bricolage approach to their spirituality through the incorporation of other practices

such as tarot cards or New Age healing techniques (Inglis, 2007; Brownlee, 2011).

Evaluating change in the Irish religious landscape, Ganiel (2016b, p. 4) suggests that Ireland is moving into a new era; one in which a 'post-Catholic' Ireland is characterised by the fall of the Catholic 'monopoly' (Inglis, 1998), whilst still being informed and shaped by those same traditions. We can summarise the contemporary Irish religious landscape by noting that Catholicism is undergoing significant changes which do not simply open up a space in which smaller religions can thrive. Religious minorities in Ireland are marginalised from the national narrative of belonging. This is achieved through a racialising of religious identities which are not white and not Irish, and through continuing to define those who are not Catholic as less than truly Irish.

To understand Irish Mormonism, we must place it within this wider context. Mormonism, like Ireland more generally, contains within it a culture of whiteness which has been created and sustained by its historical legacies. This traditionally American representation is increasingly being challenged as Mormonism moves beyond its US heartland (Mauss, 2007; Haws, 2013; Weitsing Inouye, 2014; Reeve, 2015; Mason and Turner, 2016; Rutherford, 2016).

This development is also reflected in Ireland, where the Mormon demographic profile is significantly more diverse than the wider society. 57% of Mormons in Ireland are 'white Irish', 8.1% identify with the census categories of 'black Irish' or 'any other black' ethnic background, and a further 7.1% identify as 'Asian Irish' or 'any other Asian' background (Central Statistics Office, 2017). Thus, when I describe Mormonism as a 'white' religion, I do not mean to imply that there is not a sizeable number of minority groups within Mormonism in Ireland. However, Mormonism like Ireland more generally rests upon a presumption of whiteness which minority Mormons struggle to navigate.

The only sociological research conducted with Mormons in Ireland prior to this research was that of Cosgrove's (2013) PhD research on religious stigma and discrimination in Ireland. This research incorporated eight in-depth interviews with representatives of eight religious minorities including Mormons, alongside a much larger survey of those same minority groups. Cosgrove (2013) was conscious of a strong overlap in Ireland in conceptions of whiteness, Catholicism, and Irishness. To engage with this complexity, she deliberately sought out religious minorities in Ireland who were majority white, to better understand how management strategies for religious identity in Ireland are enacted by those who are members of the majority based on ethnicity and nationality, yet a minority on the basis of religion. Cosgrove (2013) found that 49% of her mainly white Irish Mormon survey respondents had concealed their religious identity within the previous five years, often to avoid perceived stigmatisation from the majority.

Below, I confirm Cosgrove's findings regarding Mormon perceptions of stigmatisation using data from a year's fieldwork with the two Mormon congregations of this study. The participants of this research demonstrate clearly that Mormons of all nationalities and racial identities, including white

Irish, understand stigmatisation to be a normal part of the Mormon experience in Ireland.

*Stigmatisation, marginalisation and concealment: Irish Mormonism in the everyday*

The participants of this study represented a diverse mix of age groups, gender, and nationalities. Through in-depth interviews, conversations before and after church, and an analysis of 'talks' given during church services, it became apparent that the stigmatisation of a Mormon religious identity in Ireland is a universalising experience for Mormons of all backgrounds. The participants of this study indicated that they understood that this is directly connected to the narrative of Ireland as homogenous, and Ireland's historical attitudes towards the 'other' which still linger in the contemporary era. Although I did find tensions between Church members in Ireland based on perceived ethnic or national differences, all Mormons were able to find a sense of commonality with other Church members about their experiences of exclusion and marginalisation based on their religious identities. Thus, exclusion becomes a route to belonging "inside church".

As the visible 'face' of the Church, Mormon missionaries who proselytise on the streets and who wear distinctive missionary clothing and badges, are often a target for those who don't respect religious difference. They experience verbal and sometimes physical abuse. One white American missionary recounted to me her negative experiences during life as a Mormon missionary:

As soon as they see the badge, they say "oh no, don't talk to me". And you're trying to skirt around it, I'm wondering do I have the plague? I'm just trying to give a card to someone once, and I just said "hi, how are you?" and he just looked at me like what the heck? And then I was like "oh I was just going to give you this card", so I took a step, just a tiny bit of a step towards him, and he like, full on like ran away from me and started screaming "GET AWAY".

However, the missionaries' experiences were also echoed by many participants of this research who were not missionaries, and therefore not as visible to the majority. Most had encountered stigma and stereotyping, with some encountering physical violence such as bottle throwing (James, Appleby), being spat at on the street (James, Appleby), and threatening behaviour (Andrei, Sweetwater).

Anna, a white Irish convert from Catholicism in her 40s, tells me of the stereotyping she has experienced:

I was at a funeral one night, and I was standing in the kitchen. There was one particular woman...She was standing there and she said "so I can't believe you're actually Mormon. I can't believe it". And I just thought okay keep your voice down. And she's like "just, wow! I watched this documentary...." And I just thought oh no she's gonna say Channel 4 [the tv channel], you know? I just wanted the ground to open up. I was actually not embarrassed that I was Mormon, because

that part doesn't come into it. But I was actually embarrassed for her. Because I was thinking hang on a second, you are here to cater the food for this event, everyone here knows me and has known me for 15 years, so you're the one who's making an eejit out of yourself... Because she is just like "oh my gosh you know they're just so weird". And I'm going "no, actually I'm not. I don't think I'm weird". And then I go and I turn around to Louise and I'm like "am I? Am I weird?". I don't like doing that to people, but I had to make her feel a little bit uncomfortable because she was coming out with some crazy stuff. "Yeah they get married really early and they get married when they're like 15" and I just was like "well I don't know that person".

Often, these negative encounters are framed by the participants of this research as normal, almost a taken for granted part of being a minority religion in a homogenous country. Maura, a white Irish elderly woman from Appleby, casually mentioned to me as we walked along a corridor one morning on our way to the main Sunday service called Sacrament Meeting; 'people think we are like a cult, you know, but we aren't, we are like a family. We have our ups and downs and get over them. We are just ordinary people'. I was struck by the casual way in which the revealing comment was inserted into an otherwise mundane conversation, but for Maura, these experiences form part of her everyday life and this is reflected in her everyday discourse.

Most participants were reluctant to outwardly accuse the majority of deliberate discrimination against them, choosing instead to frame negative encounters in a discourse that emphasised the majority's lack of knowledge of Mormonism. Anna, the missionaries, and many others told me that the Irish were mostly 'ignorant' (Elder Prince, a missionary based in Sweetwater) about Mormonism. One participant recalled that he has been chastised by others for eating meat- in the mistaken belief that Mormons are vegetarian. The participants and I often swapped stories of how our explanations of Mormonism had often caused confusion, when others conflated Mormonism with other religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Mennonites. It is this context which allows Mormons in Ireland to argue that if they are stigmatised, it is through a lack of knowledge on the part of the majority, rather than a lack of acceptance of diversity. As Cutler (2006, p. 698) has observed in a study of Jews in the Southern US 'bible belt', this strategy of interpreting stigma against minorities as a lack of awareness, allows religious minorities 'to protect their self-perception' and to 'navigate their day to day lives'.

The ubiquity of the stigmatisation of Mormon experience in Ireland leads the participants of this study to mainly navigate encounters with the majority with an emphasis on subtle concealment. This is a confirmation of Cosgrove's (2013) observations that religious minorities in Ireland are directly and indirectly hiding their religious status from the majority, and that a fear of stigma or abuse are often part of the rationalisation for these decisions. Anna explained to me why she didn't tell anyone in her children's Catholic schools that they were Mormon:

I didn't tell them what we were, to be honest with you. Because I just didn't want the, you know "they have more than one wife, they're from Utah", you know the usual. So I just said "no we are just a different religion, we're just not Catholic". I left it like that for ages and ages. I don't go out of my way to tell people. If they ask I will tell them, but I don't go out of my way.

I found that Mormon adherents in Ireland will sometimes choose to explicitly reveal their religious identity, though this is less common than strategies of concealment and is often revealed in response to specific events or encounters with the majority. A white Irish convert from Catholicism in his 40s whom I have named Jason, told me why he decided to confront others' engagement with his religious status. It was precipitated by the way in which he felt his child's faith was not being accommodated appropriately by the rural Catholic school which his son attended:

Jason: In primary school religion goes throughout the day, prayers, and preparations for the sacraments, holidays and celebrations... It's everywhere. So, we would try to get them to disengage, to not be teaching our son and they just could not let him. It just wasn't physically possible.

Hazel: Were they used to dealing with children of different religions?

Jason: They really were. I think there was, there was a couple of Muslims in the class with dark skin, so they were treated much differently because they were seen as an ethnic minority, so they went out of their way. Because we were white Irish from a different background, they just, it would be ignored... If you want to be anonymous, it's easy. If you want to be different and not make a fuss about it, it's okay. But if you want to make a fuss about it, there is resistance because you are not *that* different.

Jason and his wife were so upset by their experiences that Jason's wife became heavily involved with the establishment of a new multi-denominational school in their local area, and their second child attended primary school in that new school.

Jason's experience is reflective of the complexity of managing religious pluralism in modernity as described by Davie (2000, 2014). In noting tendencies within Europe to welcome acceptance of ethnic diversity whilst rejecting religious diversity, Davie (2014, p. 616) reminds us that 'the management of ethnic pluralism overlaps with the management of religious pluralism but is not coterminous with it'. In Jason's case, he maintains that his son's white Irish identity prevented an understanding of his religious difference in a way that his classmates who were also of a minority faith but were not white, did not experience. Yet, the ability of the white Irish participants of this research to choose when and how to reveal or conceal their religious identity illustrates a white privilege which racialised religious minorities in Ireland do not experience. Jason and his family are



simultaneously part of Ireland's majority and minority groups and have to navigate their way through this dual status carefully.

A key social space in which members often reflect upon their own identity management is within the workplace. Many participants who spoke with me about the intersections of religion and the workplace were clear that they did not see the workplace as an appropriate space to begin a conversation about religion. One participant joked with me; 'we don't really go around asking people what they think [about religion]' (Maureen, Appleby). Work becomes a site where religious identities are hidden, both consciously and unconsciously.

Despite the generally invisible nature of religious identity within the workplace and other spaces, there are cases where this is revealed by choice or by necessity. This can be seen in the case of Sue in Appleby, a second-generation white Irish Mormon who is one of the only Mormon teachers in the State. Sue is a primary school teacher in a Catholic school and must provide Catholic religious teaching as a key part of her employment. Her employers and the inspectors who evaluate her teaching, are aware of her religious status. Sue deliberately ensures that her teaching of religion is exemplary, as she feels vulnerable due to her religious difference:

It's just, when I know I'm different I don't want anyone to come back and say, 'you never taught religion because you are...' you know what I mean? I always, that box is always ticked for me. And I'm one of the first ones to go to the Principal and say, "look we are coming into Lent, we should be going to Mass at least once a week now here".

In the US, Cadge and Sigalow (2013) have observed two strategies used by healthcare chaplains when working in hospitals with patients and families of a different faith to themselves. They identify 'neutralizing' (2013, p. 193) as a way to speak of spirituality in broad terms, and to focus on the commonalities of the different faiths. They identify 'code-switching' (2013, p. 193) as switching between the religious language, rituals and practices of the people whom they work with. Sue utilises both strategies in her work; neutralizing, by focusing on what Mormonism and Catholicism have in common with each other, and code switching by familiarising herself with the language and practices of Catholicism through an explicit embrace of the majority religion that surrounds her.

Sue tries to integrate her own positive experiences of her Mormon faith into her Catholic teaching practice such as her creation of 'Pope-Watch', a teaching tool designed to pique the children's interest in the appointment of a new Pope:

I was recording at home what was going on, because the different colour smoke for when the Pope was elected. And this is back in the days of videos and we'd watch ten minutes of the video of the wrong colour smoke coming up, and then they'd see the change and they were all excited. Like, my religion would be important for me, and I do what I can to make religion important for them, regardless of what

that religion is. Because there is going to be times in their lives they are going to need it.

For Sue, the contours of her religious difference are made visible through her work, and she manages this through an embrace of the majority religion that surrounds her. Sue describes this approach, including the management of her own children's education within Catholic schools, as 'pragmatic'.

Whereas Sue's strategy of engagement with a Catholic educational system has been to embrace the elements she feels she can adopt, Jason's strategy has been more combative, arising from a sense of exclusion and inequality that he struggles to ignore. Sue is a second-generation Mormon, who has experienced being the outsider all her life. Her sister mentioned to me in church one day that they 'know no different' than being Mormon in a Catholic majority country. In contrast, Jason converted to Mormonism as a teenager and so has not had such experiences all his life. His son's very different experiences of religion in school, to his own experiences at a similar age is a source of frustration to him and may explain why he has chosen to engage with the Catholic school system in such a differing way to that of Sue.

Chase is a white American business consultant in his 40s who was 'born into' the Church. He told me how Mormon advice against drinking alcohol sometimes has the potential to make his religious identity visible in work spaces:

If I'm somewhere on business and I don't want religion to come into things, and they'd ask me if I want something to drink, sometimes I don't make a big deal, I don't drink but I won't say it's about religion I'll say "I just don't drink for health reasons" or whatever. But I don't always have to bring it up- "no because I'm Mormon", which probably I should do all the time. But I weigh it, I don't know. It depends if I want to make it an issue, I can. if I don't want to make an issue, I don't.

Chase, like many white Mormons, is not immediately racialised as 'different' and so has the ability to hide his difference should he choose to. Like Anna, Chase is careful about how he addresses his faith and depending on the context, he will hide his religious identity, particularly when on business. This privatisation of religious identity amongst Mormons in Ireland, particularly white Mormons, causes a paradox to emerge. The hegemony of Catholicism in Irish everyday life and its ongoing association with Irishness continues unchallenged, as alternative expressions of religiosity which could challenge such assumptions are hidden.

***'It was a traitorous act - to be Mormon, and then Protestant as well':  
Mormonism in the hierarchy of Irishness***

As the previous analysis demonstrates, participants who are white Irish are assumed to be Catholic, and they often choose to conceal their religious identities to avoid stigma and marginalisation. However, due to the close association between Catholicism and Irish national identity, I have found that

these white Mormons struggle to be seen by others as fully Irish in contexts where their Mormon religious identity is known. Additionally, I find that these participants struggle to view themselves as fully Irish within such an environment, having absorbed understandings of Irishness from the majority population of which they are also a part.

Above, Jason argued that being a white Irish Mormon makes accommodation of his religion more difficult, because his white Irish status allows him to still be viewed as an insider. Yet, others have also told me that simultaneously, Mormonism is not associated with a sense of being Irish and so Irish converts to Catholicism are thought by others to have in some way, lost a part of their national identity, thereby becoming outsiders.

Seán is a retired white Irish convert in his 70s who is frustrated that others in Irish society struggle to accept he has not lost something of his Irishness in his conversion to Mormonism:

I served in the Army Reserve for 37 years. When I became a member [of the Church], I went to my Company Commander at the time and said I want to change my army record [on religion] and the immediate reaction was “oh I will organise for you to meet a Jesuit friend of mine”. And I said, “hold on a second, I’m second-in-command of the company of soldiers, do you not think that I have the ability to decide, you know, who or what it is that I want to follow?”

“Oh yeah, yeah, but I mean they are brainwashed”

He then for me, unknown to me at the time, I arrived in one evening and he said, “the Battalion Commander wants to talk to you”. So, I went up to the Battalion Commander and he bared his teeth at me like a dog. When I told him I wanted the record changed, he goes “ARRRRGGGHHH”... [Seán mimics someone lunging across a table, growling aggressively].

Seán believes he understands where these attitudes stem from:

With the Army, the distinct impression I got was that it was a traitorous act. I mean to be Mormon, and then Protestant as well you know?

It is clear then, that Seán’s conversion to Mormonism was constructed by his superiors in the Army as a rejection of Catholicism, and due to its connection to Protestantism, a rejection of Irishness itself.

Suzanne in Sweetwater shares Seán’s strong sense of patriotism. Suzanne is a white convert in her 30s. I spent the Easter of 2016 conducting fieldwork within the Sweetwater congregation (referred to within Mormonism as a ‘branch’). That Easter Sunday helped me to better understand Suzanne’s Irishness. Easter 2016 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Irish Easter Rising, a 1916 Dublin rebellion against British occupation. After the unsuccessful rebellion was quashed, key rebel leaders were executed, creating a martyrdom around their personas which was

subsequently used to fuel a popular backlash against the British in Ireland. The Rising therefore became a key event in Ireland's eventual independence from the British.

The anniversary was not referred to at the lectern by congregational leadership that day. I initially assumed this to be due to the Church's tendency to avoid engaging in political discussion. However, reference was made on another occasion by the congregational leader (called the 'Branch President') to the anniversary of a Day of Independence celebrated in his home country. Despite the lack of official recognition in church, the Easter Rising commemoration was discussed by the congregation in casual conversations amongst themselves; usually by asking each other if they were planning on attending a commemoration ceremony being held in Dublin later that afternoon.

In Sacrament meeting that day I noticed that Suzanne and her mother Mavis were wearing shades of pastel green and yellow; Easter colours, I thought to myself. Pinned to their chests, were small pins of the Irish flag, which I assumed to be a visible commemoration of the Rising's anniversary. I felt that their physical commemoration of the event through their clothing was a significant statement of identity. Suzanne and Mavis had converted to Mormonism from the Church of Ireland. Suzanne's motivation for conversion was the sense of exclusion she felt in her old faith community, based on social class differences. Her perception of difference continued after conversion to Mormonism, by showing awareness of distinctions between Irish Mormons and other Irish.

During a conversation with me in between church meetings one Sunday, Suzanne stated that 'Irish people in the Church are different to Irish-Irish people'. Her description of Irish non-Mormons as 'Irish-Irish' also implies that Irish Mormons such as herself, are less Irish than others. She shows understanding, as Séan does also, that Mormonism is incompatible with the Irish identity, and has internalised these understandings to form part of her own self-perception.

As I spent more time with Suzanne and her mainly Irish friends in church, I came to understand that Suzanne was resentful of the other nationalities within the branch particularly the large group of Americans. Her friend Marilyn told me that Suzanne 'thinks they take over'. In conversation with me, Suzanne referred to her Irish friends from the branch as 'regular people'; her language constructing the others in the branch as unusual in some way. In recent years, changes to the ethnic and national makeup of the Sweetwater branch has resulted in white Irish Mormons becoming a minority within church. Already feeling marginalised by the majority Catholic society due to her Mormon religious identity, Suzanne now also felt marginalised within the branch as one of the few regularly attending white Irish people in a diverse congregation.

Suzanne and Séan's experiences highlight ongoing understandings of Irishness as incorporating Catholicism. Though Séan appears to be committed to challenging such assumptions, Suzanne seems to have internalised what Garner (2005, p. 79) refers to in another context as a 'hierarchy of Irishness'. She inadvertently refers to herself as being less than 'Irish-Irish' due to her

religion. Thus, we can see that as a member of the majority due to her white Irish status, Suzanne has internalised dominant perceptions of the 'other'.

*'They are not so visible like me': managing multiple marginalisation as a religious and racial minority*

Mormons in Ireland who are neither white nor Irish also navigate a complex system of racial, religious, and national affiliations. Of the 30 interviewees for this research, almost half were not Irish-born. In addition to interviewees, I also developed relationships with other Mormons who were not white or Irish during my year's fieldwork. Their opinions and experiences have helped to shape my understanding of those who cannot use Irish birth as a claim to belonging.

Matthew is a black African in his 40s, who has settled in well to his local congregation in Appleby. Matthew's experiences as are his alone and are in no way intended to be representative of all black Mormons in Ireland. Rather, his articulation of his identity as a black African Mormon living in Ireland serves as an insight into the experiences of those who experience multiple marginalisation both inside and outside of church, as a racialised migrant who is a member of a stigmatised religious minority.

Matthew attends church in Appleby with his wife and children and has lived in Ireland since 2008. He converted to Mormonism in 2013 after some time spent attending a local black Pentecostal church which is housed in the same industrial estate as the current Appleby branch. As one of the only black families in the Appleby branch and the only black interviewee of this research, he told me of his sense of responsibility to grow the black Mormon community in Appleby:

Matthew: I think my presence in the Church, it makes a big difference because I was the first, no, the second [black] member of the Church in Appleby. And there are some who are black, but not my colour! So they are not so visible like me.

Hazel: Are you conscious of how visible you are?

Matthew: Oh yeah! [Laughs]...and I managed to bring a new member who was also from [his home country]. They are now a member of the Church. More of my colour are coming to church. Because they see me there and they see me with my family, and they hear- of course people will not tell you, but they hear and they know what's going on in my family. And they want to experience that in their family.

Matthew feels that his identity as a black African Mormon in Ireland is changing the racial profile of the local Mormon branch; he speaks of how 'visible' he is in church, and how his presence makes a 'big difference'.

However, Matthew also indicates an awareness that his religious conversion is being discussed by people he knows in Appleby's black African community; 'people will not tell you, but they hear and they know, what's going on in my family'. Matthew thus indicates that is he also adapting the religious makeup of the black African community in Appleby itself; 'more of my colour are coming to church'. Many black Africans in his local area attend the Pentecostal church just across the road from the Mormon building. Matthew initially did the same and found it wasn't a good fit for him, before switching to attend the Mormon church services which are attended by a predominantly white membership in Appleby. His awareness of the discussion this has caused in the local African community in Appleby hints at his understanding that his conversion has breached cultural conventions within that community.

In Sweetwater, cultural assumptions behind racialised identities were a cause of branch conflict. Some Sweetwater members were disappointed at the performance of the Branch President, originally from Southeast Asia, who was in place during the time of my fieldwork. His most strident critics were some of the Irish members of the congregation; particularly Suzanne, her mother Mavis, her South American husband Michael, and some of her Irish friends. I heard criticism about the Branch President from others also, including those from both North and South America. Unhappiness with the Branch President was therefore not solely experienced amongst the Irish. However, others' complaints to me about the Branch President were less forthright than those of the Irish group, which suggested to me that the Irish members were opposed to something significant regarding their understanding of how the Branch President performed his role.

The criticisms from the Irish were wide ranging; they claimed he was too traditional in his attitudes to women, he didn't make enough effort to support social activities in the branch, he was biased towards members from the US, and that he was overly concerned with his home country in Southeast Asia and not enough with Ireland. The vocal nature of the Irish group's complaints meant that it was commonly known in Sweetwater that some members were deeply unhappy with their Branch President, leading to poor relationships between some members. Additionally, the tight-knit Southeast Asian membership tended to sit and socialise together in church and social events, highlighting obvious divisions along racial and national lines.

The validity of the criticisms of the Branch President from the Irish group does not concern me, so much as what these concerns represent. In her studies of congregational cultures, Edgell (1999) argues that congregational leaders can reaffirm the current path of the group or shift the congregation onto a new path for the future. In Sweetwater, I suspect this is the true cause of the concerns with the Branch President. Over dinner one evening in her apartment with her mother Mavis and husband Michael, Suzanne and Mavis agreed that the current President was being compared to the previous white European leader. As a Southeast Asian, the Branch President was racially marked as different from the mostly white Irish group. It is possible that the Branch President's visible difference made his distinction from the previous

white President more acute and aided in maintaining perceptions that he was also culturally different from the predominantly white Irish group.

Evidence of this comes from Suzanne's husband, South American Michael. During a conversation about a recent branch visit to the United Kingdom (UK) to visit Ireland's closest Mormon temple, he cited the cultural background of the Branch President, his wife, and another couple from the same country, in his justification for his dislike of the Branch President:

Maybe he has a problem with his own culture, because I remember he always talks about [his home country]. He never stopped talking about [his home country] and for him, his wife has to always be very patient. Say like, when you are in the airport and you are going through security; he's standing there with his arms crossed, and she is using all the bags and getting the buggy put through, and he is just standing there, you know what I mean? And that is just his culture.

Michael appears to be suggesting that the Branch President's cultural background and his emphasis on his country of origin is the explanation for his dislike of him. It is interesting that South American Michael, as a fellow immigrant to Ireland, is so forthright in his dislike of these cultural differences.

However, getting to know Michael over the course of my time in Sweetwater, I came to understand that an embrace of Irishness and Irish culture was very important to Michael. On St. Patrick's Day, Ireland's national holiday, Michael arrived at the branch party dressed head to toe in a green suit and a leprechaun tie. He and Suzanne were also serious fans of traditional Irish music and they travelled all over Ireland to follow one well-known traditional Irish band at their live appearances. He frequently mentioned his love of Ireland in casual conversations with me. As a non-Irish Mormon living in Ireland, Michael appears to have fully embraced a particular form of Irishness and evaluates the identities of other non-Irish Mormons such as the Branch President, around this understanding of the place he has created for himself in Irish society.

Michael and his wife Suzanne both appear to have internalised dominant understandings about the 'true' Irish. Suzanne describes Irish people who are not Mormon (and who are presumably, Catholic) as 'Irish-Irish'. She describes those who are Irish and Mormon as 'different'. However, when Irish Mormons are discussed by her in relation to non-Irish Mormons, they are then described as 'regular people'. Similarly, Michael's judgement of the Branch President, a fellow immigrant to Ireland, appears to be based on how smoothly, or not, he has integrated his own values and culture with that of Ireland's. Thus, a hierarchy emerges in which those who are racially marked as different and make little effort to integrate themselves into Irish culture, are positioned at the bottom.

This exploration of the congregational dynamics of Sweetwater illustrates an important point regarding how minority religions in Ireland engage with the majority culture. Within Sweetwater, a diverse congregation of a minority religion, dominant understandings of Irishness are taken from

the majority culture and are used in church to maintain the marginalisation of those Mormons in Ireland who cannot identify with the majority on the basis of nationality, race, or cultural affinity.

### *Routes to belonging: Christianity and Irish culture as modes of connection*

I have determined thus far that Mormons in Ireland of all backgrounds are stigmatised and marginalised. I have argued that Irish converts to Mormonism are perceived to have lost something of their national identity in the conversion process. I have emphasised that those Mormons in Ireland who are racially marked as 'other' experience multiple marginalisation both inside and outside of their religious congregations.

However, despite these challenges of being Mormon in Ireland, this research also establishes the processes through which Mormons in Ireland work to create 'ways of belonging' (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 11). Various tools can be utilised to cross boundaries of belonging. Watson (2009, p. 317) finds that 'adaptive dexterity' on the part of religious minorities is key to finding belonging. Ebaugh and Saltzman Chafetz (2000) argue that the use of native languages within church in multicultural congregations can be a source of ethnic solidarity, but also a source of tension between groups. Regional, national, and even international networks have been found to be a source of transformation and revitalisation for US immigrant religions (Yang and Ebaugh, 2001), whilst others have highlighted how Christianity is used to create belonging to English (Storm, 2013) and British (Storm, 2011; Day, 2013) categories.

I contend that within Irish Mormonism, Christianity and Irishness are cultural crossing points- where those previously identified as 'other' due to religious and/or ethnic identity can attempt to create a sense of belonging. For some, highlighting their identity as Christian is a way to find commonality with the majority Catholic population in Ireland. For others, a celebration and reinterpretation of Irishness is used as a tool to build a dual sense of belonging; to others within an increasingly diverse Mormon community in Ireland, and to wider society.

Matthew, the only black interviewee of this research, works as a hospital porter. Serving meals to patients brings him in regular direct contact with the majority population. He tells me of the ways in which the patients assume he might be Muslim because he is black, and of their subtle attempts to discern if he is Muslim or Christian. He says:

I always go direct to what the patient asked me. When they ask me my country, I tell them. If they ask me my religion, I can tell them but nobody has ever asked me. But always they ask me my first name. They always ask me. They want to know. Because Christian- we have to do things in a Christian way with love, but there are some people who don't do it that way, but once they ask my name, they know I'm Christian.



Matthew knows that his biblical name symbolises Christianity to his patients, and for many of them, that is enough:

The people, once they know that we are Christian, they have that acceptance which comes to them. But when you tell them a different religion which is not Christian, then they have different feeling. There are people from neighbouring countries [to his home country] like Rwanda and Kenya and Tanzania, but someone, you can see him or her in the distance, and you know that he is from Kenya. The way he walks or the way she is dressed. It is the same with Christianity. Once they know your name, they start to study you.

Both he and his patients never mention 'Muslim', 'Christian', or 'Mormon', but both understand the unstated query and response that lies behind the exchange about names. In Ireland, to be non-white is to immediately be labelled as an outsider, and both Matthew and his patients understand this.

These processes of identification are common across the island of Ireland, as exemplified by Larsen (1982) who argued that in Northern Ireland coded language and euphemisms are used to navigate public references to religion. He suggests that 'to display open interest in the religion of anyone present or being referred to is incompatible with the norms of decent behaviour' (Larsen, 1982, p. 138).

For Matthew, emphasising his Christianity is a way for him to connect with those Irish people who view him as an outsider by virtue of his skin colour. Matthew therefore uses Christianity to move inside Irish conceptions of belonging, just as Suzanne and Seán use their nationality to disrupt the marginalisation they feel they experience on the basis of their faith. Matthew suggests that his patients seem relieved to know that he is Christian. However, I suggest that behind the knowledge that he is Christian is an assumption that he is Catholic or a member of one of the mainstream Protestant denominations. Matthew has never told his patients that his particular form of Christianity is Mormonism, and I suspect that if he did, he would be viewed as a stranger once more.

In Sweetwater, my fieldwork coincided with St. Patrick's Day; Ireland's national holiday, and the branch held a St. Patrick's Day party in the church building on a Saturday evening. The party was planned and delivered by Suzanne. As the branch incorporated a small number of Irish who are a minority within a congregation with many nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, the party offered an opportunity to see how 'Irishness' would be approached by the diverse congregation.

The congregation had been asked in advance by Suzanne to bring 'Irish food' with them for the party. It was emphasised that if they were unfamiliar with traditional Irish dishes they could choose to bring along food decorated in Irish colours, or with an Irish theme. Similarly, they were asked to wear Irish colours and costumes. My field note record of the evening shows how the congregation approached the task of representing Irishness:

There is a wide variety of foods, people have brought Leek and Potato soup, Irish stew, Mikado and Kimberly biscuits, Jacob's cream

crackers with cheese and jam, Shepherd's Pie. There are also plenty of sweets and cakes decorated with green food colouring. People are wearing lots of green clothes. Some are wearing comedy ties. Many Southeast Asians are using face paint to draw shamrocks, green hearts, and the tricolour on their faces. Michael is dressed entirely head to toe in a bright green outfit. I am wearing a gaudy pair of green, flashing earrings that say 'Irish'.

Suzanne had organised party games, and particularly used a game of Bingo to educate the congregation on aspects of Irish history, culture, and literature, and language. My fieldnotes record my admiration of the thought and effort Suzanne had put into her party game preparations:

I play the St. Patrick's Day Bingo game with [white American] Mandy and her children, that Suzanne has organised. Suzanne has put a lot of effort into it; she has hand-drawn the bingo cards beautifully, and each square on the bingo card relates to an element of Irish culture, history, or language. She has included items like a dolman, a crannog, an Irish Wolfhound, Newgrange, Bram Stoker, James Joyce...and St. Bridget's Cross, on each square. She has also included Irish words like "Ceol" [music] and "Slán" [goodbye]. Suzanne also takes the time to explain each reference as she calls out each new bingo square.

I was intrigued to see the inclusion of the St. Bridget's Cross in the Bingo game. St. Bridget is an Irish saint highly venerated within Irish Catholicism. Mormonism does not celebrate saints, as Catholicism does. Similarly, St Patrick's day is a Catholic religious holiday celebrating a figure of Catholic significance, despite its conflation with Ireland's national holiday. The broad acceptability of this holiday within Irish Mormonism reveals the ways in which Catholicism and national identity are entwined in Ireland and the acceptance of this by minority religions such as Mormonism.

The party culminated with the singing of the Irish national anthem, made more difficult by the fact that the anthem is in Irish, a language unfamiliar to almost all of the many non-Irish people present. Suzanne came up with a solution for the multinational congregation:

After all the games, Suzanne hands out a phonetical version of the national anthem. Most of the adults don't know the words because they don't speak Irish. I notice as we begin to sing that many of them look a little nervous. American Abbey is joking about how bad everyone is going to be at this task. Once we begin, I notice that the children; most of whom are Southeast Asian, are singing very enthusiastically, they are full of pride, and they clearly know all the words. In fact, in many ways they are leading their parents and other adults through the anthem. At the end, I tell Abbey that she succeeded in singing her first ever Irish song and she smiles broadly back at me.

This celebration represented for Suzanne far more than a simple party. The

party offered an opportunity to bond with others under the umbrella of an Irish identity, and to invoke Irish tradition despite the diverse nature of the congregation being proof of Ireland's changing society.

Additionally, the embrace of the face paints by the Southeast Asian adults, the ease with which their children sung the national anthem-being already familiar with it from school, and the abundant use of clothing as a marker of identity by those such as Michael who attended in a bright lime green suit, all show how non-Irish and non-white Mormons can mobilise Irishness as a tool to create a sense of belonging despite their minority religious status. In this case, it appears that the congregation could coalesce around an Irish cultural identity which is intermingled with Catholicism, and it became a way for them to overcome some of their challenges as a group.

### *Conclusion*

In modern Ireland, an intermingling of whiteness, Catholicism, and Irishness has resulted in a complex experience of religion, race, and nationality for both white Irish and non-white Irish Mormons. An acute awareness of stigmatisation leads Mormons in Ireland to conceal their religious identities as a strategy to avoid negative encounters. However, this concealment makes the Mormon experience invisible in Ireland. It perpetuates stereotypes in Ireland of Mormonism as a foreign and unusual religion. Additionally, this concealment blurs the reality of the religious landscape in modern Ireland, which is more heterogenous than the national narrative about religion in Ireland allows. Thus, religious minorities including Mormonism, continue to be marginalised from the national narrative about 'Irish religion'.

This examination of the lived experiences of those who are members of a religious minority but who have *not* been racially marked as members of a 'migrant religion', establishes that 'passing' as an Irish Catholic continues to be a necessary strategy to avoid negative encounters. Yet, even those who are white Irish and so more able to utilise this technique, find themselves on the periphery of belonging once their religious identities are revealed. Those who *are* racially marked as 'other' must contend with multiple marginalisation. This transcends the boundaries of their faith, as both inside and outside church they navigate communities who see their (assumed) differences from that community as central to their identities.

Both white and non-white Mormons in Ireland are challenging perceptions about the intersections of nationality, religion, and race. Though the Mormon presence in Ireland is small, each member is confronting the boundaries of Irish belonging through their lived experiences as a Mormon in Ireland. Though a more public presentation of their faith would better challenge the association between Catholicism and Irishness, such challenges are fraught with difficulties. Thus, Irish Mormonism continues to exist on the periphery of Ireland's conceptions of belonging whilst simultaneously utilising those conceptions to negotiate and enforce their own community boundaries.

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