Creating regional identity, moral orders and spatial contiguity: imagined landscapes of Mormon Americanization

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I explore how moral orders, regional identity, and regional space were simultaneously reconstructed in the Mormon culture region during a period of great social change. Careful attention to the concept of moral orders helps us understand how regions are culturally constructed. In addition, I urge more attention to the spatial form of such regional cultural constructions. In recent years, scholars have been prone to disregard contiguity as deserving of spatial theorizing. I argue, to the contrary, that we need to understand how, where and why contiguities arise. I use the example of the Mormon culture region's reworked moral orders that utilize cultural visions of particular natural environments to demonstrate this point.

A prominent figure in the fictional literature for Mormon youth from a century ago was the pure and innocent Latter-day Saint young woman. This figure typically worked hard and was unselfish. She was mostly unfamiliar with the vices that tempt young women who had more time on their hands. But in spite of her innocence, she had a solid education and an appreciation for civilization’s niceties. She typically lived on the edge of poverty and knew that her own hard work made the difference between her family’s comfort (if minimal) and desperation. She was eminently capable as a housewife and possessed a sweet, undemanding personality, making her attractive to young men seeking a wife. If she had a weakness, it invariably lay in her attraction to non-Mormon city boys, who possessed smooth public manners and promised her a life of greater sophistication and comfort than she had hitherto enjoyed. The point of stories with such a figure was to show how she overcame, or occasionally was destroyed by, her attraction to such characters. With many slight variations, authors of literature for Mormon (especially female) youth repeated this general story over and over.

As such, this figure is important, if not especially remarkable geographically. These
stories produced a particular gendered morality within a religious group. But they also significantly combined this morality with the assertion of both regional identity and an imagined sense of contiguous regional space. This innocent Mormon young woman typically grew up in a rural setting and was strongly bound to both family and community. Many authors strengthened and regionalized these ties by setting her hometown in a mountainous natural environment. She either realized that staying within her community was the best course before marriage, or (if she married her temptation) she regained, and often won her husband over to, the values and lifestyle of her upbringing. These stories not only produced a particular gendered morality, but also recreated a particular vision of region during a time of great change for Mormons.

The Americanization of the Mormon culture region

Many scholars describe this period at the end of the nineteenth century as one of 'Americanization' for Mormons. Institutional survival for the church necessitated change, as the federal government decided to solve the perceived 'Mormon problem.' Indeed, Mormons adopted a number of practices by choice and by force, such that Utah could no longer be seen as un-American by other Americans. Although polygamy ended officially in 1890. Within a few years, Mormon leaders disbanded the LDS political party and non-Mormons dissolved their anti-Mormon political party. These moves paved the way for Utah's statehood in 1896. Prior to the 1890s, the Latter-day Saints de-emphasized their communitarian and separatist economic ideals in favor of capitalist accommodation. The Americanization of Utah meant that Mormons and non-Mormons joined forces in political parties, social clubs and economic pursuits. It meant that Mormon church leaders no longer exercised complete dominance over political and economic activities within the region. It meant that the remnants of Mormon polygamy and authoritarian political/economic power rapidly dwindled, and faced constant challenge. And it meant demographic change, with both rapid urbanization and the proportion of Mormons in Utah falling from around 80% to its lowest post-1860 level of 55% in 1920. But, as in the rest of the country, Americanization did not preclude the development of regional difference. Inhabitants sought to retain a sense of regional distinctiveness. They emerged from the period more strongly Americanized but still also strongly regionally socialized. A sense of region did not disappear in the process of Americanization, but it surely was transformed, in large measure through reworkings of regional moral orders. Moral considerations have been important in some past geographical accounts of regional development and change. Yet the topic has never been a central theme in the new regional geography. Morality deserves more attention. Within contemporary cultural geography, morality and region are particularly problematic concepts. Geographers too often write about morality in apparently mutually exclusive value-laden terms. The concept of region likewise needs fuller conceptualization. Three important issues relating to region deserve brief consideration here: how regions relate to places, the relationship of region to morality and the spatial structure of regions.
Moral orders

Geographers usually address morality in one of two ways: it comes in either for condemnation or for praise. We try either to avoid the moral or to obtain it. The first (strongly Foucauldian) category insists that morality matters because of its ability to condemn people who are different. Moral geographies, according to this view, are those spaces and places created by the powerful to banish, exclude or reform those who transgress socially dominant codes of right and wrong. Places with moral content are thus seen to be (usually illegitimately) imposed upon people who may not share the morality. In the second category, sometimes more explicitly aligned with ‘ethics’ or ‘justice’, authors bring a moral sensibility to the analysis of spaces and places. They call for the production of more moral places, or ask geographers to illuminate the relationships of places and spaces to morally valued norms. Authors like Sack and Entwistle agree with the Foucauldians that places are constituted through cultural rules of inclusion or exclusion, but more willingly assume that the creation of communities (which is always a process of inclusions and exclusions) may sometimes have more virtues than vices. Places are particularly powerful entities through which people assert communal morality.

Both categories have weaknesses and strengths. Work in the first category seldom adequately addresses the place of morality within society. It is almost as if this position asks people to abandon moral judgements, in an uncritical tolerance of difference. I believe that moralities and moral places are not simply elitist or controlling (though they often are), but also something that people always produce (at least in the West) – even critical geographers. Tolerance of diversity is a type of morality; it is not what happens when we banish morality. Such accounts do not allow enough understanding of how regional spaces are created by anything but a one-sided process of hegemonic imposition. Yet this first category is important because we need to understand the oppressions and exclusions resulting from drives to specific moralities. Work in the second category sometimes obscures these exclusions. A tendency exists to essentialize morality without fully disclosing the ways in which particular moralities are very much social constructions – even if the drive to morality (and to create shared and relatively durable structures of moral orders) might be considered a universal, or close to it (perhaps a ‘Western universal’?).

I view moral order as a set of definitions regarding what is proper to do and what can reasonably be expected from others, or the sense of what people feel they owe one another as members of a community. The moral order of a group or area represents a popular consensus regarding the legitimacy of practices. Moral orders may or may not correspond with actual practices. But widespread action around such norms can often easily be mobilized. These rules and norms define what is and is not permissible for ‘good’ members of society.

The creation of moral orders depends on the human ability to reflect on action. In a strictly originary sense, practice is ontologically prior to moral orders. But in a practical sense, moral order stands in a dialectical relationship with practice, relational in the sense that Sack suggests that the moral helps constitute place and self. People reflect on behaviour, and abstract moral principles out of these behaviours. In turn, these moral
principles affect future behaviour, sometimes consciously but often also subconsciously, as when the principles have been internalized or institutionalized. Moral order exists as a sense of right and wrong as often as it constitutes formalized explication of principles. Practice always occurs through reference to morality, just as morality exists only through reference to practice.

Morality, spatial practice and spatial imagination in the creation of regions

Most contemporary conceptualizing about regions occurs in relation to the more general concept of place. I want to argue that region does not simply equate with place, but is instead an important subset of place. And like another subset – the nation-state – region deserves careful theoretical consideration in its own right. Here, Paasi’s work helps greatly. Paasi argues that region and (what we might call small-scale) place are both historically and geographically constituted. But they are distinct categories. Place refers to individually experienced ‘situated episodes of life history’. Region, to Paasi, precedes place. It has a longer historical duration and is ‘a representation of “higher-scale history” into which inhabitants are socialised as part of the reproduction of the society... [It is] a social and cultural category with an explicit collective dimension representing institutional practices sedimented in the history of the region’.

Regions interest me precisely because of the mutually constitutive relationship between the social and the cultural, or, we might say, between territorial imaginations and territorially organized social processes. Paasi’s major cultural concept is ‘structure of expectation’, which he derives from Raymond Williams’s structure of feeling and Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus. This concept refers to the conscious and subconscious socialization of regional inhabitants into particular norms and identities; it suggests how regional imaginations and expectations (including moral orders) might persist over time, indeed over generations. Region, as a territorial confluence of social and imaginative structures, shapes human action, identity and consciousness.

Society’s moral contests sometimes assume regional form. They do so when the practices to which they stand in recursive relationship are themselves regionally constituted. It is no longer unusual to suggest that discursive/imaginative constructions of space and social constructions of space stand in dialectical relationship to each other. Indeed, this claim has become virtually an article of faith within much of post-structuralist geography, although sometimes the social is unwisely reduced to the discursive in that literature. Yet the literature has barely begun to specify precisely how this dialectical relationship plays out within regions. Richard Peet, in one example, suggests that discourses stem from a particular power-environmental setting – a place. He links discourses about region to practice through the capacity of discourse to operate as ideological claims to power. Presumably, actors with great social power have, over time, the ability to enforce their vision of place or region in space. Paasi’s concept of structure of expectation posits a similar process – though he takes more pains to insist that the process happens slowly – with powerful (and often outside) actors enforcing their discursive visions through the creation of regional institutions that in turn affect people’s practices. These examples suggest that
a simple, rapid or fully determinative correspondence between spatial discourse and spatial practice is unlikely to be found. At most, changing discourses and practices each enable (rather than determine) subsequent changes in the other. The relationship between discourse and practice becomes particularly complex when the aim of discourse is to claim regional space in a cultural – and not primarily political or economic – manner (as Mormons did during Americanization). Nevertheless, I believe, discourses that assert regional existence can contribute to the construction of regional space – even contiguous regional space.

Spatial structure of regional moral orders

Paasi vitally emphasizes a temporal dimension of regions and wisely does not derive place from space; but questions of spatial structure still arise. Regions, I would suggest, like nations, can only exist only through the widespread act of imagining a community or home; regional inhabitants cannot possibly know most other inhabitants personally, but nevertheless can feel affinity for those unknown fellow citizens. Such assertions of community often utilize territoriality; that is, by imagining a home, regional inhabitants lay claim to a territory, attempting to assign rules or meaning to what happens within regional spaces. But, as many studying processes of globalization point out, such imaginations no longer (if they ever did) necessarily incorporate bounded physical spaces. Instead, they tell us, contemporary places (or regions) have only thinly identifiable distinctions between inside or outside, or have no contiguous inside at all, more precisely resembling networks of multiple time-space processes. Certainly these non-contiguous geographies deserve analysis. Struggles and relations exist that make it impossible to analyse a region simply from the ‘inside’. As a result, many seem eager to scrap contiguity as a feature of regions. But we also need to consider how contiguity continues to be created, even if sometimes by non-contiguous processes. Contiguity deserves more careful conceptualization by cultural geographers in light of globalization, rather than banishment from the geographical lexicon. People continue to conceive of contiguous regional identities and entities and to act upon those conceptions; we ignore this fact at our intellectual peril.

Scholars sometimes use the term ‘contiguous’ to refer to adjacent spaces – to neighbouring bounded places, for example. Here, however, I rely on another meaning: continuousness of key processes/features within space. Complete spatial homogeneity of these processes or features is not necessary; there may even be small areas of absence. But contiguity to me means that with relatively few exceptions the characterizing processes or features are more or less present throughout a continuous, unbroken area of physical space. Such contiguity may be produced formally, as in states. It may also be created less formally, as in the contiguity of communities relatively separated from others over long periods; this is the traditional concept of culture regions. It may be produced through a spatial concentration of economic processes, as in so-called functional regions or in urban labour markets; limitations of transport, communication and fixed capital often ensured spatially organized contiguity. Some suggest that various features of the contemporary world (postmodernity, late capitalism, globalization, for example) have
begun to make many such contiguities implausible, however.

I agree that contiguity often no longer exists where we once expected to find it. But I do not agree that it no longer exists at all. Traditional culture regions may no longer be tenable, yet contemporary social and imaginative processes create contiguous regional spaces.

Consider as one example the world’s non-homogeneous distribution of identity groups. Members of any particular identity group may not be distributed contiguously; diasporas exist. But such group members sometimes form enough of a critical, contiguous mass in parts of the world that social processes are constituted partly through existence of that critical mass. Unique social debates exist in space because of the differing spatial presence of identity groups; these debates sometimes permeate the social and imaginative processes of areas to such an extent that we can say the areas constitute separate regions. This does not mean that social processes unrelated to the identity group(s) do not also affect people regionally; all aspects of life do not derive from a single source. It does mean that within the region it is difficult not to be affected by social debates deriving from the presence of one or more identity groups.

The imaginative efforts of identity groups may also produce contiguity. Such groups typically try to claim special possession of a place. One effective way to do so is by mapping characteristics of the physical environment onto the social environment, particularly onto the identity group itself. These physical characterizations often utilize a limited number of dominating attributes – mountainous terrain, rolling hills, black earth, open spaces, for example – that themselves are arranged contiguously (in a general manner, if not a strictly technical one). These imagined contiguities may not precisely correspond with the socially organized contiguities, but the two contiguities are typically brought into relationship with each other. Imaginations of regions affect – although they do not determine – the socio-spatial trajectories of regionalized debates.

The Mormon culture region transformed

A Mormon culture region, with unique practices and power structures, originated from mid-nineteenth-century LDS settlement in the American Great Basin. The new region assumed spatial form through practical and cultural efforts to build a new LDS Zion. The desert ‘blossomed as a rose’ both materially and imaginatively. The region became noted mostly for its practices of polygamy, de facto theocracy and communitarian economics. The relative separation of Mormons from the rest of the United States had withered, however, by the 1870s and 1880s. The accelerating settlement of white non-Mormons added a new layer to the region’s structure. Non-Mormons increasingly resisted LDS hegemony. By 1920 the region was transformed. Unique Mormon practices did not cease immediately, but became less important than a new and unique regional dynamic in which social debates were commonly read through the Mormon/non-Mormon rivalry. Evidence for such debates can be found throughout most of Utah, much of Idaho, large parts of Arizona and smaller parts of Wyoming, Nevada and Colorado. The Americanization process between 1880 and 1920 shifted the balance of power toward non-Mormons, and extra-regional actors like the American federal government,
Protestant churches, eastern capitalists and British travel writers joined regional non-
Mormons in trying to change regional practices and moral orders. These extra regional
forces applied their efforts to a spatially specific part of the world. As with processes
involved with globalizations today, powerful actors sought to homogenize a distinctive
regional space into surrounding spaces. And, also like today’s globalizations, the targeted
group (Mormons, in this case) responded in ways that do not precisely fit the opposing
terms of ‘capitulation’ or ‘resistance’. Their negotiations with the ‘colonizing’ forces were
somewhat more complex.\textsuperscript{31}

In this paper I concentrate on two aspects of these negotiations. Mormons reworked
their own moral orders to find an acceptable place within American society; in the process
they reaffirmed the significance of both their group identity and a regional home. Non-
Mormons, for their part, sought to reconcile regional difference with American identity.
In these shifts, contiguous regional space figured importantly, if sometimes implicitly
more than explicitly. Contiguity resulted from discursive appeals to land and nature.\textsuperscript{32}
The vignettes that follow provide an overview of three reworked moral orders – those
relating to gender, economy and national identity.\textsuperscript{33}

\section*{Victorian rurality}

Gender systems constitute moral order because such systems comprise expectations
about what is proper and what type of relations people owe one another as categorized
individuals. The concept of moral order points to the durability and strength of particular
gender systems. People view gender ideologies as more than simple cultural conventions
that can easily be altered or replaced. Instead they see violations to these moral orders
as ‘disturbing transgressions, an invitation to chaos and evil’.\textsuperscript{34}

The figure of the innocent LDS woman mentioned at the outset underwent important
changes over the period, even while remaining a constant presence in LDS youth
literature. Most importantly, she lost a good deal of autonomy from men (and desire for
autonomy) by 1920. ‘The western boom’, printed serially in the first two volumes (1890
and 1891) of the \textit{Young Woman’s Journal}, provides a good example early in the period.\textsuperscript{35}
The heroine married a non-Mormon and moved with him to a California boomtown. She
soon realized that the promise of greater wealth elsewhere was misleading; she lived
more comfortably in her Utah home. But she eagerly went to work, and soon she and
her husband prospered. Her regional identity came under immediate attack when a
neighbour advised her for the sake of her social status not to let others know she hailed
from Utah. She responded by defending polygamy (her own family was polygamous) and
her upbringing. ‘I shall never stoop to sail under false colors, nor permit my parents to
be vilified in my presence. I should feel like a traitor if I cast undeserved opprobrium
upon the soil that nurtured me.’\textsuperscript{36} The author also marked the woman’s regional identity
by her later realization that Californians differed from Utahns in their generosity toward
others. She became a community oddity for giving food to tramps willingly and consist-
tently. When her husband disapproved, she stood up to his criticism. She convinced him
that she had a mind and a will of her own and was not a servant to be ordered around.
Eventually she returned to Utah, but only after effecting much social and moral good.
Contrast this young woman with one in a story published 30 years later. Maizie was an innocent country girl, living and working in the city for the first time. There a young man attracted her attention. He 'knows how to treat a lady, and that’s more than I can say for most of the swains back home. The home boys are good enough, but they wouldn’t know what to do with a dress suit if they had one, and they don’t know what a salad fork is made for.' He tempted her to go away for the weekend with him, and only the clever thinking of her wise female work supervisor saved her from doing so. She extricated herself from the situation only with a weak excuse to her suitor that she had to leave temporarily. After showing interest in the young man, she possessed little power to stand by her convictions and back them up with her own authority. Maizie was ‘an outdoor blossom withering in the greenhouse of city existence’. She was simultaneously ‘capable of making some good man happy’ and susceptible ‘to becoming a toy’ in the city boy’s hands.

Despite periods of relative separation from other Americans and despite the strong influence of polygamy, Victorian ideals of love always influenced nineteenth-century Mormon women. Expectations of deep spiritual communion pervaded through many polygamous relationships, making them more disappointing for the women involved than they might otherwise have been. Still, other not entirely compatible norms held some importance. Nineteenth-century Mormon women had most effectively countered the Victorian notion that women live fulfilling lives only to the extent that they cherish and are cherished by their husbands. Men, according to this ideal, should adore women for possessing attributes lacking in males. Important female characteristics were virtue, refinement, dependence, delicacy, vulnerability and even weakness – ‘selfless abnegation’, in Kern’s terms. Mormons did not often eliminate adoration as a lover’s norm. But they often argued that it should not dominate relationships. A YLMIA member wrote:

Woman, without having lost anything of her gentleness and grace, no longer accepts that once famous axiom, ‘man should support woman.’ She cares not for adoration alone, but wants to carry her intellect and activity into spheres suited to her.

More valued than women’s dependence upon men was male/female interdependence. Marital happiness was to arise not from an idealized notion of womanly virtue, but rather from mutual understanding and respect for men’s and women’s different burdens.

Mormon culture taught that love ought to exist between marriage partners. And Mormons shared with other middle-class white Americans the sense that love meant sharing a unique identity with and completely revealing oneself to one’s partner. It meant that one’s partner (though more likely the woman in reality) gave himself or herself up completely for the other partner’s happiness. But Mormon women often utilized such Victorian discourse to invert hegemonic meanings and argue for greater female authority, as Foucault argues is always possible. Victorian/romantic tendencies in LDS love stories continually ran into the equally Mormon impulse to prioritize earned respect above blind love, strength above vulnerability and interdependence above dependence.

But the balance of power in normative LDS culture shifted toward a Victorian ethos between 1890 and 1920; the previously modifying impulses gradually weakened.
Americanization brought a number of changes regionally; competing moral orders accompanied new practices. In the 1890s the new polygamous marriages (mostly) ended and national pressures forced polygamous women out of leadership within Utah's suffrage movement. Utah ratified female suffrage in 1896; those advocating greater female power had achieved their most immediate goal. Men's and women's productive labour within the family became increasingly separated spatially as wage labour began to replace owner-operated agriculture as the dominant regional relation of production. The LDS church itself embarked on a project of bureaucratic centralization in the 1910s; LDS women's organizations, which had previously been relatively autonomous, became more formally tied to male priesthood authority. LDS women, of the upper and upper middle classes especially, began to join with their non-Mormon counterparts in club movements and other associations in the 1900s and 1910s, particularly in urban areas. In this context the moral orders perpetuated in LDS female literature began more closely to resemble the orders that literature had critiqued in the late nineteenth century.

The continuing discursive effort to differentiate Mormons from non-Mormons aided the shift toward Victorianism. Mormons, like other groups, found reason amid Americanization to preserve symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Redefinitions of LDS and non-LDS lovers bolstered this project. The Mormon media separated LDS lovers from non-LDS lovers and increasingly ascribed Victorian characteristics to the former. Authors often accomplished this separation through regionalizing inscriptions of purity and innocence.

A very unsubtle play from 1900, intended to 'illustrate the lesson in Ethics', exemplifies this point. A young LDS man, Fred, saw in a dream the consequences of pursuing an alluring, urbane, and non-Mormon young woman, Marcia. A subsequent dream contrasted this vision with his potential relationship with a sweet Mormon young woman, Rose. Marcia was scheming, manipulative, and (significantly) eager to leave Utah. In Fred's first dream, she tried aggressively to win Fred, inverting preferred gender roles. While doing so, she confided to her sister, Ethelyn:

I am determined to make this country beau bow to my will. He has much to thank me for, now, in the freedom of thought and spirit which I have helped him to; he shall have yet more gratitude, for I am quite resolved to make him so dissatisfied with his tame and stupid surroundings and friends that he will be glad to escape.

As Fred's dream continued, he married Marcia, they moved to New York City, and she turned into a greedy, caste-conscious manipulator. 'I am sick of America; I want to live in England, where people are put in their proper places and kept there;' she said. 'I've taught [Fred] to break loose from his stupid Puritanical, Mormon notions....' Ethelyn, impressed by Fred's Utah innocence, played her sister's foil. Marcia, having grown tired of Fred, told Ethelyn she should have married Fred instead.

Ethelyn: – Indeed I wish he had asked me. Or his fine old Uncle John; I never saw such strong, handsome men, and such good men as I met in Utah.

Marcia: – How many times must I ask you not to repeat Utah or anything connected with it. I am so ashamed of ever having seen the place that I cannot endure one word about it.
Fred’s subsequent dream contrasted this decadence with the potential love and happiness with faithful Rose in a Utah ‘cottage home’.53

In this and similar stories, ideals of interdependence and respect still existed. But the balance shifted over time. Love no longer derived from interdependence and respect; rather, the latter characteristics followed love. Thus, Mormon culture more strongly assumed Victorian ideals with a re-presented Utah symbolizing Victorian love – youth, beauty, innocence, purity, a place to experience deepest reality and a refuge from an incomprehending world. Earlier LDS literature had also used regionality to moralize about taking non-Mormon spouses.54 What was new around the turn of the century and thereafter were more explicit claims about the necessity of romantic love, and its impossibility outside Utah and the Mormon/Mormon marriage relation. Movement away from the region symbolized abandonment of both faith and the potential for true and fulfilling love. The region alone, symbolized as either hilly, mountainous terrain or rural villages, housed one’s intimate confidant of the soul.55 Narratives of morality can help constitute and reconstitute regions. These love tales both reclaimed the region for church members who felt its distinctiveness threatened and eased Mormons into altered norms of love. Reconstituting region and remaking gender norms were not separate projects.

Region appeared most often through differentiating Mormons from non-Mormons. Early in the period, the sense that a regional home belonged almost exclusively to Mormons was strongest. The region constituted a metonym for gender moral orders. It represented all that LDS young women were supposed to represent and strive for in their own lives: virtue, innocence, authenticity and safety. It symbolically opposed a rather undifferentiated outside world. After 1910, a few representational elements shifted. The region was less exclusively the Mormons’ home (although that characteristic did not disappear entirely). Instead, it was more exclusively a mountainous and/or dry rural environment. Now regional virtue opposed the allure, deception, decadence, danger and insincerity represented by the east (mostly the eastern United States, but also occasionally Europe) and by cities (which is where easterners who didn’t stay east lived). Innocence and virtue now resided more broadly in western rural living than necessarily living close to the centre of Zion. These stories created a sense of implied contiguity for this regionalized morality through reference to a particular physical environment (with associated social environments) that was found in a generally contiguous area. If complete contiguity did not exist, it was because a few urban areas (Salt Lake City and Ogden, for example) were small holes in the blanket of a dry, mountainous rural environment. Scholars note that nature often represents female virtue and provides a sense of refuge from urbanism, but, I submit, appeals to nature can additionally create an implied sense of regional contiguity.

A wealthy desert

Economic systems constitute moral orders. Such systems provide sets of expectations about morally proper and improper action. Much work explicates the ‘moral economy’ of groups faced with the onslaught of capitalist and/or colonialisystem.56 In addition, Wuthnow argues that the capitalist market system provides people with a sense of self-
worth, and structures much of their participation in public life: 'It is an integral aspect of our basic values and our assumptions about reality.' Threats to the market or to the economic system more broadly challenge not only the welfare of those who benefit most from the system but the widely distributed and deeply held set of social expectations accompanying the system.  

Americanizing Mormons reworked their economic expectations. In the Mormon culture region, Americanization brought increasingly pervasive capitalist wage-labour relations as communitarian practices weakened. At the same time many Mormons continued to hope to live off the land. Whites had already claimed most of the area’s arable land by 1880, but plots available through the allocation of Native American lands continued to excite individual and corporate (mostly mining) excitement. Thus within Mormonism itself, the ‘colonization’ of ‘Zion’ was beginning to wind down, but did not reach its end until about 1915. The shift in relative population from rural to urban areas was well under way, however, and in the twentieth century’s first decades a few church leaders reacted by propounding an LDS back-to-the-farm movement. In that decade, mineral companies began to compete for land with owner-operated farms on the fringes of urban areas. Though slower in Utah than in other western states, the trend was well under way towards a significant population holding no title to land. Economic moral orders changed in subtle but important ways in the midst of these material changes; the altered moral orders simultaneously produced contiguity effects.

The LDS discourse of regional success reveals shifts in moral orders with the help of appeals to regional land and nature. When the 1905 opening of the Uintah Indian Reservation to white settlement brought numerous non-Mormons to Utah (as well as attracting both Utah Mormons and Utah non-Mormons), a local newspaper criticized wealth-seekers while implying that Mormons success evidenced divine favour:

Had the sturdy pioneers who first entered this state ... become so easily discouraged ..., we would never be enjoying the advantages we do today ... But they were real homeseekers and, bending steadily to their work, accomplished what they sought.  

Latter-day Saints believed that their diligence, combined with God’s blessing, resulted in economic success. But such success only adequately manifested itself in a challenging physical environment. In 1880 future church president Wilford Woodruff told the Saints:

When I look at this assembly and contemplate the work of this people in these valleys and in the surrounding Territories; when I perceive how this desert is occupied, how the Latter-day Saints are progressing, how they are cultivating the earth, building temples, halls, tabernacles, schoolhouses, towns and villages, I marvel at the work of the Lord.  

The reference to ‘this desert’ at once signals the magnitude of the accomplishment as well as the contiguity of Mormon space. The following decades saw a multiplication of similar statements by church leaders with emphases on a dry western environment. God had helped them turn a difficult land into a prospering region. And they thought, based on their earlier progress, that they were destined to achieve greater wealth and prosperity than any other people. This discourse of regional material success was another means through which Mormons sought to retain identity as the Lord’s chosen people after they retreated from polygamy and communitarianism as cultural markers.
But while this discourse remained strong during these decades, the LDS approach to wealth shifted. Early expressions emphasized church unity as well as the success of whole communities and even the whole region. George Q. Cannon told Saints in 1898 that a young man is better off employing himself than seeking employment from others.

He can do it in this country… There is no need to go to California, Montana, or to the mines; go to some place in the State and build the State up, build up Zion, and take examples from those who have preceded us, who have shown what can be done in building up a commonwealth and making a rich people.63

The following year, Seymour B. Young spoke of colony building when he told of the ‘redemption of this soil that was so sterile and forbidding in its appearance when the pioneers landed upon it’.64

But after 1900 private wealth assumed increasing priority. In 1915, for example, Apostle/US Senator Reed Smoot moved responsibility for creating material wealth from the church toward private initiative.

I believe that God intends that as the people grow in the spiritual things of life, so shall they be blessed with the temporal things of life. We have heard many testimonies during this conference of the wonderful prosperity of the people of Utah, and I am so thankful for it.

Although he emphasized regional wealth, his remaining comments made it clear that such wealth stemmed more from individual efforts (of both labour and accumulation) than collective work.65 In LDS cultural logic, wealth increasingly resulted from individual initiative and individual deservedness; Mormons decreasingly saw wealth as a community attribute.

John Henry Smith pointed in 1909 to individualistic notions of embracing thrift and shunning idleness. And he suggested that Mormons ought to involve themselves more in the ‘development of business interests, [to] secure themselves a part in the coming tide of prosperity’.66 A year later he touted (what was almost surely) the Uintah Indian Reservation as one of the finest areas of the world,

a place where good homes can be built, where ample water, by labor can be secured, and where industrious men, in the course of a few years, can stand in the possession of opulence and wealth.67

The description of the physical environment implies spatial contiguity of the Mormon region and temporal contiguity with earlier Mormon economic success, even while the moral focus simultaneously shifted toward accumulation of individual wealth and individual disposal of such wealth. Such a discursive shift enabled (to take one example) Mormon and non-Mormon colonization of the Uintah Indian Reservation to proceed relatively smoothly despite predictions of a religiously motivated controversy over LDS communal settlement.68

The national wilds

Ideals of national loyalty/identity also make strong moral claims about what kinds of behaviour and attitudes are proper; they too comprise moral orders. Not only do nations
mark out a community to which one either belongs or does not belong, but they also
imply proper dispositions toward this imagined entity. And just as with the moral
orderings of gender and the economy, specific moral orders of national loyalty are more
often than not naturalized and considered as the only possible set of proper dispositions.
While Mormons sometimes invoked moral orders to maintain a distinction between LDS
and non-LDS, regional inhabitants occasionally created moral orders emphasizing
cooperation and peaceful coexistence between Mormons and non-Mormons. One such
case related to national loyalty.

Questions regarding their national loyalty had hovered over Mormons since Joseph
Smith’s day. Smith’s opponents used the charge of treason to bring him to ‘justice’. Once
in the Great Basin, non-Mormons continued to accuse the Saints of not possessing
national loyalty. The federal government withheld statehood from Utah – dearly sought
after by Mormon leaders – until officials felt that Mormonism’s ‘un-American’ ambitions
were sufficiently broken. The statehood struggle, along with the interrelated battle over
polygamy, has long been the most visible sign of the Americanization process. In the
nineteenth century, regional non-Mormons perceived themselves as cultural strangers in
a land of polygamy and communal economics; they felt illegitimately powerless to enforce
nationally dominant norms. They consistently feared that Mormons sought to establish
a ‘kingdom’ within, but relatively autonomous from the United States. Mormons often
expressed loyalty to US institutions, but also used sufficiently ambiguous rhetoric to make
the government worry about designs for a state independent of the United States. On
the other hand, they consistently felt that national loyalty obliged them to complain when
their rights to worship differently were not upheld.

However, the Mormons’ relationship with the federal government changed greatly
between 1880 and 1920. Legislation curtailed the LDS church’s power by making it easier
to crack down on polygamists, disenfranchising Mormons, disqualifying Mormons from
authority within the judicial system and confiscating church property. This legislation
provoked significant change in the church before it was withdrawn, with polygamy and
political dictation ending in the 1890s. Mormons thereafter joined national political
parties and sought common political cause with regional non-Mormons for the first time.
By 1896, Utah’s normalized politics had convinced the federal government to allow Utah
to become a state. In the years that followed, smaller battles remained. Most importantly,
1904 began four years of controversy within Utah and neighbouring states (most
particularly Idaho) over the seating of LDS Apostle Reed Smoot in the United States
Senate and the revival of an anti-Mormon political party. Smoot’s opponents felt that he
could not honestly defend the US Constitution as high church leader, and that the church
itself had neither eliminated polygamy nor ceased to exercise widespread political
influence. The American Party revived the agenda of the nineteenth century’s Liberal
Party by placing the elimination of LDS political power foremost on its agenda. These
years also brought other changes of importance to projects of nationalism. For the first
time, non-Mormon immigrants became as numerous as Mormon immigrants. Unlike
Mormons, who had historically been given the opportunity to settle land within LDS
colonization schemes, non-Mormon immigrants came predominantly to labour in mining
and other extractive industries. Southern Europeans in the 1900s and 1910s were seen
by both Mormons and non-Mormons as a potentially corrosive influence on American culture regionally. Compared to these immigrants, native-born Latter-day Saints began to appear more acceptably American.

In the sphere of culture, significant discursive effort— from both LDS and non-LDS—went to ensure that Mormons held the proper relationship to the nation and with fellow national citizens. Interpretations by both Mormons and non-Mormons of LDS regional history being a fundamental part of the larger development of the American West make this point clear. An 1889 editorial from the non-Mormon Salt Lake City Daily Tribune signalled the beginnings of a shift from conceptualizing Mormon history as an anti-American (or at least nationally neutral) project to viewing it as piece of the larger American saga:

We think the Mormon people should celebrate Pioneer day [the LDS commemoration of arrival into the Salt Lake Valley] with more enthusiasm. It is their greatest day; it will continue so long as they people Utah. The coming hither of that little band was a great event… It is on such steps that history mounts its stairs, and such an event should be honored.72

Later expressions developed the theme further. In an 1898 Pioneer Day celebration, non-Mormons praised the work of the Saints. C.C. Goodwin, publisher of the Daily Tribune, said that the Mormon ‘pioneers came here to found and build up a new civilization’.73 Mormons were increasingly portrayed as coming not to escape American civilization, but rather to establish American civilization in an uncivilized and barren land.74 The characterization of the Mormons’ entrance into the Salt Lake Valley as a ‘great event’ and the founding of a ‘new civilization’ depended on a particular characterization of a contiguous natural environment.75 In 1907, the Tribune stated:

We…join heartily in the spirit with the appropriate celebration of the day [Pioneer Day], and trust that as the years go by the observances of the day will broaden, and will lose their rigid sectarian character, taking on more the shape that such observances do in other States, as a civic remembrance of the pioneers who first brought such civilization as they had to the wilds and unbroken wastes of America…76

Mormons were increasingly of similar minds; they also framed Mormon history in terms of national progress and western development. Early on, clear Mormon/non-Mormon mistrust was simultaneously present.

Some sneers have been indulged in by persons who are ever ready to misinterpret the motives and acts of the majority of our people over the fact that the Twenty-fourth of July holds so dear a place in their hearts. But have we not all good reason to commemorate the day when the pilgrim band who led the way to these valleys came out of the canyon after their weary journey, planted the flag of our country upon this then Mexican soil and marked the spot for this fine and prosperous city?77

Later Mormon expressions decreasingly noted the mistrust.

The entrance of the Pioneers in Salt Lake Valley… will always be gratefully and reverently remembered in this region as one of the great events in the history of our country during this century. It was but a small band… but it was the advance guard of the hosts that under Providence were destined to conquer an immense region for civilization and for the
heaven-born principles of which the American Constitution is the most perfect expression in existence.\textsuperscript{78}

Throughout the early twentieth century, little separated the way Mormons viewed the LDS pioneers’ contributions to regional history and American history from the way non-Mormons viewed those same issues; both groups implicitly relied upon a vision of contiguous regional space (one that referred to specific physical and potentially colonizable characteristics) to make their cases. Mormon and regional history came less and less to justify complaints against the nation. In the early twentieth century, both Mormons and non-Mormons used LDS and regional history to affirm a particular moral order of national loyalty and identity. This particular moral order in turn allowed them jointly, for example, to more easily and hegemonically condemn and repress those who brought complaints against the nation, such as the radical Left in the late 1910s.\textsuperscript{79}

Conclusion

The Mormon culture region underwent significant changes around the end of the nineteenth century. Americanization did away with some of the most obviously distinctive Mormon practices. Yet Mormons continued to assert a regionalized home, often through moral narratives designed also to perpetuate LDS identity. And Mormon/non-Mormon difference remained fundamentally important to social debates within a particular space.\textsuperscript{80} Regional inhabitants mutually reworked moral orders and a sense of regional identity in the process of Americanization. Changes in social practices prompted reimagined moral meaning. Mormons and non-Mormons utilized region-asserting narratives while simultaneously shifting moral orders of gender, wealth and national identity. These altered moral orders dialectically helped set a context for regional practices I have hinted at here (and more fully detailed elsewhere\textsuperscript{81}) to assume legitimacy.

Contests over moral order also produced visions of contiguous regional space. The key link between regional contiguity and moral orders, in this instance, were representations of the natural environment – imagined landscapes. Both Mormons and non-Mormons depended on notions of a previously wild, arid, mountainous, largely rural and (at least implicitly) contiguous western space in order to reconstitute moral orders. Of course, such discursive visions did not immediately produce a replicated contiguity in social practice. The relationship between discourse and practice is not so simple. Nevertheless, I believe, these contiguous regional imaginations did spatially focus continuing practices by Mormons through which they sought to perpetuate their identity. There was nothing inevitable about the way the imagined landscapes established the particular moral orders of Victorian gender relations, individualized wealth and loyal American identity. But it is significant that the natural environment played such a key role in establishing cultural imaginations. This particular instance of regional re-creation occurred a century ago. But the general processes I point to are not simply aspects of a long-gone past. While conceptualizing contiguity is not in academic fashion today, we should remember that identity groups still appeal to (contiguous) natural environments – as Mormons did a century ago – in order to create both moral orders and senses of regional homes.
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Notes

1. ‘Mormon’ refers to a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I use ‘Mormons,’ ‘LDS’ (or Latter-day Saints), and ‘Saints’ synonymously. ‘Non-Mormon’ and ‘non-LDS’ refer to (usually white) people who did not belong to the LDS church.


8. See also D.M. Smith’s somewhat different descriptions of geographical work on the moral in Moral geographies: ethics in a world of difference (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

9. The best example of many is perhaps D. Sibley, Geographies of exclusion: society and difference in the West (London, Routledge, 1995).


17. A. Paasi, ‘Deconstructing regions: notes on the scales of spatial life’, Environment and planning

Ibid., p. 248.

Ibid., p. 249. Emphasis original.


Paasi, ‘Deconstructing regions’.


E. Yorgason, Transformation of the Mormon culture region (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, in press).


Essentially, these were imagined landscapes. As such, they produced effects that many scholars have identified: claiming places for various social groups, concealing and naturalizing power relations, representing and justifying social differences, and aestheticizing moral judgements. The key to my argument here, however, is that these imagined landscapes not only claimed a place, but also implied a specific spatial structure for that place. On landscapes see S. Daniels, ‘Marxism, culture, and the duplicity of landscape’, in R. Peet and N. Thrift, eds, New models in geography: the political-economy perspective (London, Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 196–220; D. Mitchell, The lie of the land: migrant workers and the California landscape (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Each discussion depends on research and more detailed analysis undertaken as part of a larger project: Yorgason, ‘The transformation of the Mormon culture region’. Each refers to region-producing processes. The section on ‘Victorian rurality’ derives from research that seeks to answer the question of why the vibrant Mormon feminist movement of the late nineteenth century so quickly lost vitality in the twentieth. It explores how an identity group (Mormons) sought to assert both distinctiveness from American society and a sense of belonging within and relative control over, relationships within a region. The section specifically arises from detailed analysis of gender norms produced by LDS youth organizations and the movement for women’s rights. The Young Woman’s Journal (hereafter YWJ) references stem from analysis of 83 love stories published by that journal in sampled (every 5) years, in addition to analysis of non-fiction
articles dealing with gender. The section entitled ‘A wealthy desert’ derives from the region-producing processes of physically claiming space through colonization and interpretively claiming space through assigning meaning to that space. It examines regional debates over continuing white settlement of regional lands around the turn of the century. Arguments made in that section distil analysis of scores of government documents and newspaper articles, as well as hundreds of addresses by church leaders in LDS general conferences, among other sources. ‘The National Wilds’ focuses on regional persistence through an exploration of historical representations of the region’s initial creation. It utilizes close analysis of issues of national loyalty from newspaper reports of regional Fourth of July and Pioneer Day celebrations in sampled years. More generally, it summarizes findings from a wide variety of sources regarding regional debates over the issue of national loyalty.


36 The Young Woman’s Journal was the magazine of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association, an organization for young LDS women.

37 YWJ 1 (1890), p. 243.


40 Ibid., p. 608.

41 Although estimates of how many LDS women were involved with polygamy vary widely, there is no doubt that it held a strong place in normative Mormon female culture, as both an aspired-to model of selflessness and a dreaded vision of never completely fulfilling relations of love.


43 E. Jakeman, ‘We tread the dust’, YWJ 1 (1890), pp. 103–13; Shurlock, ‘Woman’s power’, YWJ 1 (1890), pp. 442–5; Marie, Affectionately inscribed to my husband, Woman’s Exponent 24 (1895), p. 11.


45 Kern, An ordered love, p. 64.

46 M. Foucault, The history of sexuality: I: An introduction (New York, Pantheon, 1990) pp. 100–2; ‘Mormon’ women’s protest. An appeal for freedom, justice and equal rights. The ladies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints protest against the tyranny and indecency of federal officials in Utah, and against their own disfranchisement without cause. Full account of proceedings at the great mass meeting held in the Theatre, Salt Lake City Utah, Saturday, March 6, 1886 (Salt Lake City, Deseret News Printers [1886]), pp. 28–33, 37.


50 Ibid., p. 71.
Eiban Yorgason

51 Ibid., pp. 72–3.
52 Ibid., p. 73.
53 Ibid., p. 76.
56 Most notable is J.C. Scott, The moral economy of the peasant: rebellion and subsistence in Southeast Asia (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1976).
57 Wuthnow, Meaning and moral order, quote from p. 79.
59 Wasatch Wave (1 Sept. 1905). This newspaper maintained a strong LDS editorial slant.
60 W. Woodruff, General conference reports (Apr. 1880), pp. 5–14, quote from p. 10.
63 G.Q. Cannon, General conference reports (Oct. 1898), pp. 3–6, quote from p. 5.
64 S.B. Young, General conference reports (Oct. 1899), pp. 55–60, quote from p. 58.
68 C.W. Fuller, 'Land rush in Zion: opening of the Uncompahgre and Uintah Indian Reservations' (PhD, Brigham Young University, 1990).
69 Anderson, Imagined communities.
71 At least they ended officially. It is well known that polygamy continued among decreasing numbers after the church officially disavowed it (and before the church began excommunicating for polygamy), just as some leaders continued to dictate politically. But the official end meant that most Saints effectively put both practices behind them.
72 Salt Lake City Daily Tribune (25 July 1889).
73 Ibid., (26 July 1898).
74 See report of the prayer by Revd Dr Iliff opening the celebration, in ibid.
75 It also relied upon a racist characterization of its previous inhabitants as lacking culture.
76 Daily Tribune (24 July 1907).
77 Salt Lake City Deseret News (23 July 1890).
78 Ibid. (23 July 1898).
80 Yorgason, Transformation of the Mormon culture region.
81 Ibid.