

PERCEPTIONS OF BASEL MISSION HISTORY IN GHANA

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***Abstract:** On occasion of the two hundred years jubilee of the founding of Basel Mission, the article traces its impact in Ghana. It analyses three inside and outside perspectives on Basel Mission; one is dealing with the so called Salem tradition in Abokobi, a historic mission station; another is looking at the use of Basel Mission fragments in a mega-church, Lighthouse Chapel International; and the third example refers to Basel Mission legacy for local politics in Akuapem. In all selected case-studies Basel Mission serves as imaginative source of collective memory, impacting current discourses on religion and society in Ghana.*

Key Word: Basel Mission, Ghana Christianity; Lighthouse Chapel International, Religion and Society

Introduction

In 2015, Basel Evangelical Missionary Society celebrated its two hundred years' anniversary. Founded in and by pietistic, Swiss and German milieus on 25th September 1815, one of the oldest continental mission societies in Europe soon after began to exert its most felt impact in diverse African regions. By 1870, roughly half a century of its existence, Basel Mission claimed the most consistent contingent of missionaries on the African continent. The arguably most spectacular advances in mission were made on the West African Gold Coast. Basel mission's presence there gave rise to the oldest continuously existing church in the country, today's Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), founded in 1828. Basel Mission holds a privileged status in the annals of the church, which is visible, among others, in its proclamation to co-celebrate the Basel Mission jubilee in 2015.

The decision to co-celebrate 200 years of the Basel Mission in Switzerland was proclaimed at the 14th General Assembly of the PCG held in August 2014 in Abetifi, one of the historic Basel Mission stations in the Kwahu Presbytery.¹ The programme listed special memorial services on 25th September 2015; public lectures and a video documentary with a focus on historical reflections on the work of the Basel Mission in Ghana and its impact on current affairs, among others.

The commemorative activities should find a climax with special services on all levels of PCG structures on 18th December 2015, a date that reminds all that has gone into history books as the day of arrival of the first Basel missionaries at the Gold Coast in 1828. This programme line-up shows the prominent place of Basel Mission in official representations of PCG church history. Yet, Basel mission history seems to be a constructive point of reference for outside perceptions as well. Its fragments form part of identity politics of other churches and of political discourses in Ghana as well.

This article engages indifferent readings of the oldest Christian church tradition in modern Ghanaian history. It seeks to decode the Basel Mission cipher not in official representations of Basel Mission history but by analysing unofficial sources and strategies of adoption of Basel Mission history. In what follows I interpret three events that occurred during the visit of a mixed group of academic staff and students of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Basel in Ghana in January and February 2015. The first case-study looks at the collective memory production in another historic Basel Mission station, Abokobi; the second identifies the selective usage of Basel Mission traditions in Lighthouse Chapel International; the third

¹ <http://pcgonline.org/index.php/news/38-200-years-of-basel-mission-launched> (accessed 15 June 2015).

observes current staging of Basel Mission history in the realm of local politics in Akuapem.

I. Basel Mission as Collective Identity Marker

In a meeting at the Abokobi palace, Nii Samuel Adjetei Mohenu, Chief of Abokobi at the outskirts of Accra, assured vehemently that all “Abokobians will forever remain Presbyterians” and strictly honour their “Basel” origins. He exemplified that “no other church than the Basel church will ever be allowed” in Abokobi.² The statement by Nii Mohenu reminds on a pathos formula that praises a religious monoculture as a means to forge and keep a strong internal social cohesion of all people living in Abokobi. Like his predecessors Nii Mohenu is labelled the only “Christian” traditional authority in the whole of Ghana. His office is not hereditary but democratically mandated through election by the citizens of Abokobi; his regalia depict Christian symbols such as a Bible or a cross and he refrains from certain sacrificial rituals at enstoolment and other public ceremonies. Nonetheless, he is fully accepted and respected by his fellow Chiefs and acts as representative of Ga Chiefs in that region around Accra.

Nii Mohenu’s determination on a Presbyterian monopole is rooted in the history of Abokobi. Abokobi was founded by Basel Mission in 1854 as a model settlement. It was the first Basel mission station that operated solely and from its beginning along the “Salem pattern”.³ The Salem pattern of social organisation is described as a territorial space for communal living according to rules that were seen as supporting a Christian lifestyle. The guidelines were normative

² Personal notes on visit to Abokobi, 31 January 2015; a report on this visit appeared in “Ghana’s leading community newspaper”, *Your Neighbourhood*, 4-17 February 2015: 6.

³ On the historical roots of Abokobi see Peter A. Schweizer, *Survivors on the Gold Coast: The Basel Missionaries in Colonial Ghana* (Accra: Smartline Publishing, 2000), 56-58.

and binding; they did not tolerate any deviation of behaviour by inhabitants. In positive terms those sets of rules sought to guarantee social autonomy and individual safety within the boundaries of a Salem. This Salem concept was a socio-religious experiment implemented by south-western German pietistic milieus, adjacent to Switzerland. The rural based south-western German pietism strongly influenced Basel Mission; it was the geographic and social area of origin of numerous Basel missionaries. The most known Salem prototypes were Kornthal and Wilhelmsdorf; from the experiences there the Salem pattern was introduced to the Gold Coast.⁴

In 1854 missionaries bought land in the aftermath of colonial wars around Christiansborg along the coast to provide a safe surrounding inland for uprooted migrants of war. Many of those who settled in Abokobi already belonged to the early Christian community, others converted to Christianity. Abokobi developed into a prosperous and self-reliant rural community. It soon became known as an autonomous Christian place characterized by its communal, self-sustaining way of living, excellent infrastructure and administration, and the running of schools (including a school for girls).

Abokobi's fame as an important and growing Basel mission station spread far and wide. It became a hub of missionary action around figures such as missionary Johannes Zimmermann (1825-1876) who translated the Bible into Ga language, or prominent African converts such as Paul Mohenu (1809-1886), a former traditional healer who after his conversion gained a profile as prolific evangelist. In the annals of PCG, Paul Mohenu is considered an African pioneer of Basel

⁴ See the early study by Paul Jenkins, "Villagers as Missionaries: Württemberg Pietism as a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Movement," *Missiology: An International Review* 8, no. 4 (1980): 425-43.

Mission history in Ghana.⁵ Nii Samuel Adjetei Mohenu is a descendant to Paul Mohenu.

Abokobi's historical narrative of an autarkic community seems to be endangered. Nii Mohenu's pathetic insistence on conserving Abokobi's Presbyterian image draws on cultural memory. Throughout its history Abokobi obviously gained knowledge to demarcate its self-ruling territory; "Abokobians" learned techniques to preserve its Basel Mission culture from colonial to post-colonial times; and they were determined to defend Abokobi as the symbolic sanctuary of Presbyterianism over Ghana's political turbulences in recent decades. Now, Nii Mohenu raised serious concerns about the future of the peculiar religio-political Salem model that Abokobi still represents.⁶ One concern was about a pending court case on the acquisition of land by the missionaries and the legal procedures around the establishment of Abokobi in the 1850s. The other concern was about the pressure of urbanisation on the vast rural Abokobi terrain. Metropolitan Accra has surrounded Abokobi and with it comes a highly diversified and pluralistic religious landscape.

Nii Mohenu explained joint plans and initiatives in communal development with the political entities around. But what worried him the most were the sound of Pentecostal vigils and the calls to prayer from mosques erected in direct vicinity to the outer boundaries of Abokobi. It was a matter of time, according to him, that people would disrespect the sovereignty of Abokobi. In other words, the

⁵ See Edward Martinus Lartey-Odjidja, *Paul Mohenu, the Converted Fetish-Priest*. Pioneer Series (Accra 1963).

⁶ The Basel Mission Salem model was not unique to Abokobi but applied to most historic Basel mission stations. Except Abokobi, however, all other Salems were laid out as isolated areas within existing villages or towns. Formerly located mostly at the outskirts of towns, all those Salems in Ghana are now fully integrated into the overall community with no exemplary legal authority anymore.

transformation of a pure Presbyterian outlook into a religious heterogeneous community was at stake.

The Basel Mission Salem pattern aroused considerable controversies in Ghanaian historical perspective. In PCG's representation of church history it is seen as "innovative and practical response" to the once prevailing fabric of society. In PCG's perspective "traditional society was held together by the adherence of all members to rules and taboos established and passed on from generation to generation". Converts to Christianity who did not more conform to these norms were regarded as threats to authority. Missionaries had to face the problem of converts who were treated as pariah, as social and cultural outsiders to mainstream society. "The Salem system was their solution to this problem."⁷ However, the Salem system has been criticised because "the new converts were completely uprooted from among their own people ... in order to preserve them from falling back to non-Christian practises."⁸ Some consequences of the Salem pattern were the disruption of "traditional" societies, the cultural alienation of converts and their re-direction to Western values and norms, and an antagonistic drive against other religions.

In sum, the erratic avow that "Abokobians will forever remain Presbyterians" encodes the Salem vision of a closed Christian community so intensely linked to metaphors of boundary. Nii Mohenu feared the loss of Abokobi's exceptional status amidst a different religious and social environment. Engrained in this fear was his concern to save rural patterns of life in an urban context, paired with a threat to internal religious cohesion and social control. He envisioned to loose autonomy of action inside the borders of Abokobi. His care for Salem traditions and Presbyterian identity was not only

⁷ Quoted from a rubric of its own, "The Salem pattern" in the official account of PCG history, see <http://pcgonline.org/index.php/about-us/history-of-pcg> (last accessed 16 June 2015).

⁸ J. Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History*, Volume I (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 67.

characterized by a repulsion of alternative religious expressions; he wanted to cultivate the legacy of Basel Mission in an otherwise plural society organised around principles of religious freedom and movement.

II. Basel Mission History in Lighthouse Chapel International Church Growth Narratives

Another interpretation of Basel Mission history comes from Lighthouse Chapel International (LCI), a mega-church with global aspirations belonging to the broad neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic wave of the 1980s. LCI was founded in 1987 by Dag Heward-Mills, a trained medical doctor, in Accra. LCI prioritizes mission strategies related to the church's growth movement. In LCI mission profile Switzerland appears prominently. Heward-Mills' mother hails from Basel and LCI congregations belong to the first generation of so-called migrant churches in Switzerland. First established in Switzerland in 1992, LCI congregations are spread meanwhile all over the country. LCI Switzerland plays an important role in the continental mission of the church, hosting Europe Mission conferences and main institutions of internal theological training. However, most of its congregants are migrants, mostly of West African background. In church life the Swiss connection of LCI and the Basel family roots of its founding Bishop are relatively common knowledge. Therefore, it may not come as a surprise to realize that Basel mission history pops up from time to time in sermons of leading Pastors and Bishops or narratives on church activities outside Africa. Such Basel Mission related stories do not belong to a fixe repertoire of LCI history. The links to Basel Mission are also not needed in order to give an account of LCI ecclesiastic genesis. Rather than belonging to the historical canon of LCI, the linkages to Basel Mission surface at certain occasions. One such occasion was a meeting I had with Bishop Oko Bortei-Doku, a leading Bishop of the church at the end of January, 2015 at the LCI headquarters in Accra.

It was not my first contact with LCI. I had had encounters with members of Swiss LCI congregations before in diverse settings in

Switzerland and had established some relationships to the church Headquarters in Accra over the last years. But this was the first time I met Bishop Oko. He was one of the four assisting Bishops to the church founder Bishop Dag Heward-Mills and had been appointed a bishop of “The Qodesh”, the Headquarters of LCI, some months before our conversation. The meeting took place on a Sunday, before and after church services. Due to my Basel University attachment our conversation was directed several times to Basel Mission. Bishop Oko surprised me with his family saga: his family background is Presbyterian; more precisely, his great-grandfather was a Basel Mission convert who later on founded the “Basel Mission church” in his village. Over generations the family grew up in Basel Mission tradition and Presbyterian Church life.

Seemingly, Bishop Oko changed his message in the service that followed our discussion. He altered his sermon in this second service on that Sunday by inserting a passage on the historical beginnings of Basel Mission at the Gold Coast. He reiterated the fate of the pioneering Basel missionaries who died at the Gold Coast after weeks and months upon arrival. Notwithstanding this, the Basel headquarters did not end the “mission” and continued to send missionaries to the Gold Coast with its doubtful marker of a Malaria infested “Whiteman`s grave”. Bishop Oko praised Basel Mission credibility to continue bringing the “Good News” to West Africa despite their unfortunate experiences. He praised the uncompromising dedication of missionaries to serve Basel Mission at the peril of losing their lives. According to him, such missionary zeal combined with the integrity of an institution, brought out the paradigmatic characteristics of any church.

How do I interpret this narrative of Basel Mission history by a leading representative of LCI at the church`s international headquarter? Time, place and author give some indication. My personal communication with Bishop Oko Bortei-Doku and my notes of a Sunday

service at The Qodesh in Accra from 25th January, 2015 stood in context of the LCI's annual motto: "Our Year of Serving the Lord". At the beginning of 2015 Bishop Oko sensitized his large audience for the significance of this year's theme. He explicated the general meaning of "Christian service" as personal "sacrifice" for the church. He disclosed Basel Mission and missionaries as prototype sacrificial servants for the growth of Christianity. The Basel Mission historical fragment became part and parcel of actual LCI church's growth strategies.

These strategies demand the decisive, indiscriminate and unquestioning effort by members to bring in all personal energy in the service of the church. The enduring ethics of church members and their selfless but church-oriented comportment are recurring themes in internal theological education schedules. The LCI theological canon is mirrored by the enormous corpus of literature authored by Dag Heward-Mills. In his writings, most popular among LCI members, the notions of suffering, losing and sacrificing are positively filled; loyalty, persistence and adhering to rules are authoritative values regularly exemplified in the core series of his publications such as the "Church Building Series".⁹In sum, Bishop Oko's perspective on Basel Mission history at the Gold Coast is consonant with the LCI self-identification as part of the church growth movement. His narrative selects an initial episode of Basel Mission presence in a way that allows integrating it into LCI ecclesiological schemes. The historical review extracts the twin notions of discipline and discipleship as plausible key elements in the annual *leitmotiv* of "Serving the Lord", respectively serving the church.

In our meeting, Bishop Oko also expressed his dissonance with contemporary Basel mission history. If he unfolded early Basel Mission

⁹ See for instance Dag Heward-Mills, *Church Growth ... It is Possible* (Benin City: Hosanna, 2012), with a Foreword by David Yonggi Cho, his spiritual teacher in church growth theology.

endeavours as decoding archetypal formula of church growth, more recent developments provoked his stern disapproval. He directed my attention to an urban “prayer march” in Basel led by Bishop Heward-Mills some years back. On invitation by LCI Switzerland church members from all over Switzerland and Europe protested against internal decisions made by Basel Mission and its ecumenical body of stakeholders in Mission 21 concerning the old Basel Mission Headquarters, a massive building dating back to mid-19th century.

Around the turn of the millennium Basel Mission had to reorganize its means of income in order to survive. It decided to facilitate the running of modern conference activities and rented out a section of its several storage buildings to a business partner. Parts of the mission house was changed into a restaurant cum hotel. The decision helped Basel Mission to consolidate its financial resources and to address a wider public that made good use of the conference facilities offered. Yet, when the conversion of the Basel Mission Headquarters into a popular modern conference centre was being read at LCI, it emphasized decline of Western Christianity. The LCI crusade from the city centre to the mission house protested against the alleged betrayal of Basel Mission heritage to a business model. For Bishop Oko this incidence demonstrated “how far Western Christianity had declined in recent years.”

His comment entails a whole complex of arguments: immanently, he states that LCI is walking the historic footsteps of the early Basel mission. The “prayer walk” to the mission house demonstrates the self-understanding of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement as the new dynamic players in global Christianity. Bishop Oko’s controversial diagnosis of selling out Christianity envisions a change in

missionary agency: the great spirit of the 19th “century of mission”¹⁰, once represented by principal mission societies, is preserved in international mega-churches. The missionary enterprise of occidental Christianity continues to be vital in present age migrant Christianity in Europe. Migrant Christianity is about replacing the dying churches in the erstwhile centres of globalising Christianity. Thus, without naming it Bishop Oko engages the standard cipher of a “reverse mission” in the supposed spiritual desert of Europe prevalent in the current discourse on Word Christianity and its southward shifts.¹¹

At this point there is no empirical evidence of “reverse mission” capacities of migrant churches in Europe.¹²This revelation also affects

¹⁰ The expression is by Gustav Warneck (1834-1910), the German founder of mission studies as an academic discipline. Warneck coined it as the title of a booklet in which he analyses the global expansion of 19th century occidental Christianity and the history of mission societies: *Warum ist das 19. Jahrhundert ein Missionsjahrhundert?* (Halle: J. Fricke, 1880). It was popularized in Anglophone mission studies by Yale mission historian Kenneth Latourette (1884-1968) in mid-20th century, see his *A History of Christianity, Volume II: AD 1500 – Ad 1975* (San Francisco: Harper, 1953).

¹¹On the much debated notion of “reverse mission” and its main concepts see Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 169-182. The invention of this term dates back to the moratorium debate in the 1970s. For a compact critique of the discourse on World Christianity and the “reverse mission” aspect therein, see Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 32-61.

¹²See Paul Freston, “Reverse Mission: A Discourse in Search of Reality?” *Pentecostal Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Research on the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* 9, no. 2 (2010): 153-174. In quantitative terms the “New Black Majority Churches” in metropolitan England seem to make a difference. But their membership remains restricted to African and Caribbean immigrants, too, see Andrew Rogers, “Walking down the Old Kent Road: A Story of New Black Majority Churches in a London Borough,” in *Babel is Everywhere! Migrant Readings from Africa, Europe and Asia*, ed. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Andreas Fröchtling and Andreas Kunz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 199-214. The only exception of the rule is Nigerian led “Embassy for the Blessed Kingdom of God to All Nations” in Kiev (Ukraine). When this church developed its diaconal profile a few years ago, it attracted socially deprived Ukrainians in this predominantly Eastern Orthodox Christian country under formerly communist rule, see J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “An African Pentecostal on Mission in Eastern Europe: The Church of the ‘Embassy of God’ in the Ukraine,” *Pneuma: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 27 no. 2 (2005): 297-321; Jehu J. Hanciles,

LCI's presence in Europe. In-depth studies on LCI Switzerland are still missing, yet, Legon based sociologist of religion Michael Okyerefo presents some findings on the Lighthouse Chapel congregation in Vienna (Austria). The picture he draws contrasts completely with LCI's aspirations. He concludes by saying that LCI represents nothing else than "a global South enclave in the global North".¹³ At this stage the social reality of LCI's presence in continental Europe seems to be better characterized by notions of solitude, separateness, and isolation from the main population, rather than by the self-styled motifs of sovereignty, autonomy and strategic competency in missionary action in the 'spiritual desert' of Europe.

III. Basel Mission Memory in Local Politics

Specific politics of Basel mission memory relates to the historic "mission field" of the Akuapem state. 1928 is considered the founding date of Basel Mission at the Gold Coast, due to the arrival of a first group of missionaries at Christiansborg. They all died within months. The second group of missionaries arrived in 1932. One missionary, Andreas Riis, survived and directed his activities to the Akuapem mountains. In 1835, he was invited by the Omanhene of Akuapem, Nana Addo Dankwa, to settle in Akropong, the capital of Akuapem state. By this move the Akuapem range developed into the heartland of Basel Mission presence at the Gold Coast.¹⁴ The traditions and narratives of Basel Mission history are well preserved in the whole of Akuapem state; the commemorative activities in relation to the Basel Mission jubilee deserve particular attention.

Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 120-121.

¹³ Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, "Transnational Dynamics in African Christianity: How Global is the Lighthouse Chapel International Missionary Mandate?" *Journal of Africana Religions* 2, no. 1 (2014): 104.

¹⁴ For a recent historical Basel mission account of Akuapem, see Adam Mohr, *Enchanted Calvinism: Labor, Migration, Afflicting Spirits, and Christian Therapy in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2013).

On 8th February, 2015, a durbar by the Akuapem Chiefs was held in Akropong in commemoration of Basel mission history. This durbar, organised by the Akuapem Traditional Council in cooperation with PCG Akuapem Presbytery and the Swiss Embassy in Ghana, marked the initial event in a series of activities to celebrate the Basel Mission anniversary and the arrival of the first Basel missionary in Akuapem about 180 years ago. The durbar was the first public meeting of the Akuapem Traditional Council after a longer period of political conflicts over matters of land policy and local development among others.¹⁵ The public gathering comprised of two main proceedings: a first part of public speeches by representatives of the Akuapem Traditional Council and the Swiss Ambassador; a second part saw the opening of an exhibition on Basel Mission in Ghana at the Omanhene's Palace.

In his address the Okuapenhene, Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa emphasized the historic and present impact of Basel Mission on social change in Ghana.¹⁶ He pointed out some main sectors with high relevance for the nation's development. These sectors included the introduction of formal education, (including a variety of craftsmanship), the implementation of novel techniques in agriculture by missionaries as well as their successful experiments with new cash crops such as cocoa. The arrival of Basel Mission also helped to expand trading networks or brought innovations in architecture and infrastructure. In addition to the innovations by Basel missionaries, the Swiss Ambassador to Ghana, Gerhard Brugger added that the health sector was also a key area of Basel Mission impact on society. He

¹⁵ In preparation of this durbar an official meeting with Akuapem Chiefs, representatives of Akuapem Presbytery of the PCG and Basel University, as well as Swiss-Ghanaian business partners had taken place some weeks before at the Swiss Embassy in Accra, on invitation by the Swiss Ambassador, Gerhard Brugger.

¹⁶ The Okuapenhene could not attend personally because of his health condition. His message was delivered by the Gyaasehene of Akuapem Traditional Area, Nana Osim Kwatia II who is also the Chief of Amanokrom.

stressed the pioneering establishment of schools and hospitals by Basel Mission with substantial contributions by private donors. The first public school built by missionaries at Akropong – in fact, the first of its kind in Ghana received a complete modern library. The Ambassador announced the intention of the Embassy to provide selected Presbyterian hospitals across the country with cancer screening centres. The Embassy was embarking on a “greening Akuapem” project. This project refers to recycling efforts of plastic waste to form concrete blocks as a means to generate employment in Akuapem towns. He encouraged local authorities to put into practice similar policies for the benefit of local people and future development in the spirit of Basel missionaries.¹⁷

The durbar set a clear focus on practical benefits in connection with Basel mission and development, understood in terms of material prosperity, brought by missionaries. The exhibition diversified this heritage of Basel Mission by a broader range of cultural changes. The exhibition was entitled: “The Basel Mission in Ghana – Dedicated to God, Industrious, Innovative, Disciplined and Resilient”. The curator, Prof. Irene K. Odotei (Executive Director of the University of Ghana based Institute for Research, Advocacy and Training)¹⁸ sub-divided Basel mission history into five sections, namely education, health, economics, culture, and gender. The exhibition outlined important stages of mission history in Ghana by photographic evidence, some of a rare quality found in various private and public archives.

¹⁷ For both speeches see <http://pcgonline.org/index.php/news/146-the-role-of-basel-missionaries-still-relevant-in-ghana-okuapehene> (last accessed 18 June 2015). As spokesperson of a delegation from Basel University, I was invited to give a short address as well, in which I indicated that Basel mission history plays an important role in research and teaching programs; I also highlighted the close relationship between the Faculty of Theology and Basel Mission/Mission 21, and the intensifying exchange with between Basel University and Ghanaian universities.

¹⁸ See for more details <http://insrat.org/> (accessed 18 June 2015).

Basel mission history was also spelled out in its entanglement and conflicts with colonial administrations. In some aspects, this exhibition underscored several recurring themes that turned up in the speeches before. However, visitors were informed with much more detailed accounts on Basel Mission educational policies, experimental farming schemes, or the advancement of commercial networks, infrastructure and transportation. Two sub-sections, on “culture” and on “gender”, presented new perspectives on Basel mission activities. The cultural section dived into Basel mission enrichment of local music by introducing unusual music instruments, rhythms and expressions such as choral music.

The section on “gender” gave specific attention to missionary family life, the idea of monogamy and the nuclear family. It also touched the issue of so-called mixed marriages and the significance of formal education for girls, opening up new avenues of female self-reliance and economic autonomy.¹⁹

In sum, this durbar in February 2015 mirrored Basel mission history in a constructive perspective. Basel mission, or the 19th century missionary movement as such, was either clad in a post-colonial cloud of scepticism over the alleged destruction of local agency, or it was the introduction of Christianity associated with concepts of cultural imperialism. On the contrary, the theological motivation of all the missionary enterprise was respected, more explicitly during the exhibition part. Yet, in no case a description of contact zones, of controversies and arguments pro and con, of interruptions and new beginnings, took place.

The perspective on mission history was positive throughout, claiming the multidirectional incentives of cultural interchange. The

¹⁹ See also the unpublished comment to the exhibition by Irene K. Odotei, “The Basel Mission in Ghana – Dedicated to God, Industrious, Innovative, Disciplined and Resilient” (photocopied Akropong, 2015, six pages).

speeches and the exhibition spelled out innovative dimensions of “development” as core achievements of the Basel Mission.

The collective memory stored served as a holistic concept of development which is of utmost importance for the transformation of local Ghanaian ways of life. The Basel Mission’s impact comprised of material innovations alongside spiritual transformation. It was described as long-lasting, effective and touching social, economic and cultural aspects of life. These changes affected society in general, and were not limited to the boundaries of a Basel mission station.

Finally, an importance of this durbar was building up trustworthy and constructive relations with the Akuapem traditional authorities again. In this perspective the Basel Mission legacy was used as prototype of creative local politics that combined social cooperation and efficient management of projects to tackle existing problems in society. In this way, Basel Mission served as a critical template against current policies of local government.

IV. Concluding Remarks

The Basel Mission jubilee year 2015 serves as a quarry for producing variants of collective memories. The representations of Basel Mission history in Gold Coast can be said to be inter-twinned with the history of the locals. All three inside and outside perspectives of portrayed here presents the Basel Mission as an authorizing aetiology. The identification with genuine Basel Mission history transcends by far the ecclesial inheritor, the PCG, but inspires self-presentations of other churches and debates in the public sphere. The commemorative pointer in all these *imaginaires* is of an affirmative and constructive character.

The interpretations of the *longue durée* of Basel mission history in Ghana highlight diverse fragments, be they social patterns of communal living, the selfless motivation of missionaries, or the design,

implementation and management of projects for social change. Only in nuanced readings of this kind can critique land issues as well as Basel Mission policies of creating separate socio-cultural spaces that are difficult to maintain in current contexts. Despite the different theological formats and narrative themes, all discourse formations traced here ascertain Basel Mission religio-cultural agency, its prime socio-political impact within the orbit of Ghanaian history.

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