Seth Quartey is an interdisciplinary scholar located between the humanities, history, and social theory, with a background in sociology and a PhD in German.

His book, based on extensive research in the Basel Mission archives, is a fascinating comparative biography of three Basel missionaries in the West African Gold Coast during the 19th century. This was a Swiss missionary society, with many German missionaries and at least one of dual African and European heritage, operating in a part of Africa controlled by Danish (until 1850) and British colonizers. The book compares three categories, or “types”: a male German missionary (Andreas Riis), a German missionary woman (Rosine Widmann), and a missionary of mixed African and Danish descent (Carl Christian Reindorf).

Missionaries are an increasingly important focus in colonial studies, because they were almost always in the forefront of European contact and settlement during the modern colonial period. But whether missionaries were “handmaidens of colonialism,” as some have suggested, or whether their projects were instead sometimes at odds with the colonizers’ mission, is an important and underanalyzed area.
Seth Quartey’s book adds a new wrinkle to this by contrasting missionaries of different genders and ethnicities.

There has been increasing interest in German precolonial fantasies and colonial practices in recent years, but still very little research on the activities of Germans in colonial settings dominated by other European powers, or on German women. And there has been almost nothing written on missionaries of mixed African and European heritage in colonial settings. For example, there has been very little research on the progeny of marriages between German missionaries from the Rhenish Missionary Society and Southwest African Nama women during the 19th century. The present book therefore begins to fill a number of lacunae in the existing literature.

As a Ghanaian, Dr. Quartey is uniquely positioned to address these problems since his country grew out of the British Gold Coast, throwing off colonial rule in 1957. Like that nation’s founder, Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Quartey earned his PhD in the United States, where he now teaches.

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PREFACE

The centrality of missions and missionaries in the colonizing process on the Gold Coast has been acknowledged. However, mainstream studies on missions often understate the extent to which everyday human drama, colonial discourse, and activities were central to relationships between missionaries and local inhabitants for the sake of convenient and abstract labels that project missionaries as “educators” and “developers” of culture that justify the colonial enterprise. Although some literature related to the Basel Missionaries does admit in a sentence or two, that “the missionary enterprise was also fraught with errors, human shortcomings, and characteristic limitation of horizon, they do not attempt to aggressively pursue these themes.” Generally, they are preoccupied with neocolonialist interpretations which define the encounters as “a cross-cultural ‘two-way street’” to create a fulfilling whole. Some of these seminal studies include: Peter A Schweizer’s, Survivors on the Gold Coast. The Basel Missionaries in Colonial Ghana. 2nd ed. (Accra: Smartline Publishing, 2001); Peter Haenger’s, Slaves and Slaveholders on the Gold Coast: Towards an Understanding of Social Bondage in West Africa (Basel: P. Schett Publishing, 2000); and John Miller’s, The Social Control of Religious Zeal (New Brunswick,
N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994). Furthermore, more often than not, historians situate the age of German imperialism around 1884 when Otto von Bismarck cabled the German colonialist, Lüderitz, in Cape Town to proclaim that region a German \textit{Schutzgebiet}. Ultimately, earlier colonial ambitions to gain power and control, and also shape colonized bodies along Eurocentric ideological lines remained insignificant for many historians. In reality, as Susan Zantop argued in \textit{Colonial Fantasies} (1997), the establishment of German colonies and enclaves, however, preceded that official proclamation of German colonialism. Germany, Zantop wrote, had, “a long history of small-scale colonial ventures, large-scale colonialist theories, and a myriad of colonial fantasies, from the sixteenth century onward” (1).

This book is a historical inquiry into the \textit{practices} of German missionaries of the Basel Mission \textit{Evangelische Missionsgesellschaft Basel} in pre-colonial Gold Coast, West Africa, in the nineteenth century. It examines how the missionaries were involved in a complex set of racial, gender, and cultural negotiations with the local inhabitants to suggest that viewing missionaries from a single deterministic position as “educators” is misleading. Particular focus is on Andreas Riis (1804–1854), Rosine Widmann (1828–1909), and Carl Christian Reindorf (1834–1917). \textit{Practices} are defined as the different aspects of discourse and activities that took place between Basel Missionaries and locals, to put a human face to their relationships, interests, and motives. \textit{Practices} refer not to questions of religious “education” and “civilization,” ventures that foremost present the missionary in paradigmatic pastoral traditions as “heroic,” and religious figures with the sole aim of integrating the colonized into a “culturally” superior world system. Rather, \textit{practices} refer to the articulation of values, thought, rhetorical devices, ethnography, cultural perceptions, colonial subjectivity, symbolisms of power, and marginalizing relational complexities that perpetuate European values during this pre-colonial encounter, and are continuously ignored when it comes to investigating missionaries in colonial Gold Coast. Theoretically, this study is informed by Tzvetan Todorov’s \textit{The Conquest of America} and postcolonial studies scholarship and engages in a discourse analysis of missionary
Preface

and colonial sources. Initially, this study intended to follow this promotional trend entrenched in academics, a trend that deems it as superfluous, or resist critical discussions of missionaries when it comes to colonial Africa. Somehow, it is not easy for a critical mind to sign up to the faux-academic prints.

To escape this prevailing climate of opinion, the author spent some time between 2000 and 2002 in the Basel Mission Archive in Basel, Switzerland, to find original handwritten nineteenth-century sources in German that tell the informal history of the Basel Mission missionary and represent more truth than the formal falsehood. Here exist documents beset with not only religious writings, but also complex secular themes encompassing anthropology and ethology that place the encounter within the wider context of German and European travel literature. Reading the missionaries’ reports revealed, beneath an apparent peaceful surface, contradictions triggered by notions of cultural superiority, identity and anthropological undertones that have been nondescript and coincide in the ways of studying missionaries on the Gold Coast. Included in these categories were materials on intermarriages, miscegenation, medicine, purchases of land, joint mission and colonial government expeditions against the Ashanti, mission ordinances, trading companies and shipping lines, and other reports on life histories that reflect more about the mission’s intent. If one effect is to reinforce such emergence of identity and hierarchical relationships, then it is the correlation between the colonial environment and missionaries, which the sources revealed, that are often misrepresented under the euphemism and fallacy of “educator” immune from the influence of current literary interpretation. To some extent, this book allows us, if we are to follow Tzvetan Todorov’s perception of history, “to reflect upon ourselves, to discover resemblances as well as differences” because self-knowledge develops through the knowledge of others. The book will be an important scholarly resource for scholars and students of German colonialism, African History, and Cultural Studies.

The book is organized as follows. The first part begins with an overview devoted to the history of the Gold Coast, literature and the
interpretation of the sources. The analysis makes reference to Tzvetan Todorov, whose concerns include the intersection of European “signs” with non-European cultures as a process of eroding the non-European cultural landscapes, the struggle for spaces, the shaping of identity, and forming intrinsic relationships to facilitate the dominance of European principles. Todorov proclaims a theory in which the concept of signs, multiple discourse and identities are perceived as criteria for judging missionaries. The concept of signs was rooted in the fifteenth century science of “discovery,” which used race narratives to construct societal ideas of aesthetic, control, and exclusion through European lenses and consciousness. This theoretical approach will help redress these imbalances by offering alternative interpretations. Included in this section is also a review of Europe’s colonization, a brief history of the Gold Coast, and the establishment of Christianity. It is a good chance to contextualize discursive and historical moments as they merge in the colonial environment, and how they take issue with the sociopolitical events of that age, particularly in the grounding of Christian missions.

The literature addresses two competing schools of thought. The first, places emphasis on discourses of missionary colonialism and anthropology as established by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich Fabri, and Gustav Warneck, *inter alia*, calling attention to their contributions to mission history, and then illuminates how they do not go into missionary practices in depth, or make only a limited contribution to the question posed. The second gives the reader a basic understanding of the complex relationships where the missionary applies and integrates his cultural principles as a measure of power in the Gold Coast, after this defining insight, the history of the Basel Mission and its initial transitional phase on the Gold Coast are investigated. These insights enable us to recognize how European unity of thought was brought to serve the mission’s interests. Beginning at Chapter Three, the focus is on the individual missionaries, Andreas Riis, Rosine Widmann, and Carl Reindorf. Each chapter breaks down components of their cultural background and suggests that the practices of the white male missionary, the *Missionsfrau*, and the local recruited
missionary serve as an entry point into a consideration of the social importance of gender or gender-specific perspectives conditioned in the colonial environment. The result showed how closely missionaries were linked with the colonial environment and the extent to which cultural differences and worldview were grounded in practices. The study manifests certain features and a critical view of traditional mission historiography by making an important intervention of German missionaries’ involvement in the pre-colonial to draw attention to a more nuanced treatment of mission sources enabling a deeper understanding of colonial encounters. This book is particularly useful because it makes clear distinctions between other studies by showing how intellectual history, gender, and “race” mattered in determining power relations in the colonized world, a problem to which as it turns out, remains unsolved and the contemporary world is still dealing with it.

Religion consists of dual complementary strands, namely the word and the disseminator of the word. Often, when the word reaches its destination, it has been diluted to suit the messenger’s taste. Trying to discover such misadventures is like venturing into new territories. Thus, let us proceed with open eyes and minds to learn something new. Indeed something new, which will throw old beliefs overboard in the face of new evidence that reveal the nature of discourses, activities, melancholia, and trauma fundamental to colonial relationships between missionaries and local inhabitants. These new pieces of evidence not only help us to recover the past, they also illuminate how such behaviors are common in contemporary human relationships.