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Saints in the Land of the Porcupine:

A Study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Ashanti Region, Ghana

By Garrett Nagaishi
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Known¹ by its Akan name, *kotoko*, the porcupine is the national animal of Ghana and a proud symbol of both peace and power. While harmless and amiable when left undisturbed, the porcupine can be a formidable opponent when it feels threatened. Ghanaians do not hesitate to identify with the porcupine, naming both their national airport and national football team after the animal. The Ashanti, once one of the mightiest empires in West Africa and today a symbol of power and pride in Ghana, revere the porcupine for its courage and dignity in the face of adversity. Latter-day Saints living in Kumasi, the historic capital of the Ashanti kingdom and currently home to over two million people, have shown similar courage in the face of adversity. While the LDS Church has only existed in Kumasi for thirty-two years, membership growth has been impressive, especially within the last ten years.

The following analysis is the result of a two-week visit to Kumasi from 17-29 May 2014. Drawing from interviews of 32 members from 10 wards and branches, I will illustrate some of the ways in which the Latter-day Saints in Kumasi conceptualize their involvement in the LDS Church, especially as such processes relate to memory and history. In addition, this study will discuss various challenges that both converts and long-time members face being Latter-day Saints, including language barriers and cultural dissonance. Lastly, it will discuss aspects of Ashanti and Ghanaian culture that members believe to be beneficial, yet occasionally are at odds with customs and teachings of the Church, such as funeral rites and dress. This project will hopefully address relevant issues not only among

I would like to express my utmost appreciation to everyone who made this project possible, especially the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University for the funding to conduct research in Kumasi. I also thank those who helped in the preparation of this project and coordinated interviews with members around the Ashanti Region. They are too many to name here, though I will make every effort to give them a voice in this narrative. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to all of the members of the Bantama and Dichemso Stakes for their willingness to assist in this project, often at great personal sacrifice. It is my hope that this article will accurately portray the Church in Kumasi and represent a proud moment for Latter-day Saints.

the LDS community in Kumasi but also similar concerns held in diverse settings around the world, leading to an open dialogue amongst Church members and leaders about the future of the Church.

A Historical Sketch of the LDS Church in Kumasi

The story of the Latter-day Saints in West Africa is a particularly inspiring one in Church history. As early as the 1950s, various pamphlets and books began circulating around West Africa, particularly in Ghana and Nigeria.² Most of these materials found their way to Africa via members who had discovered the Church elsewhere, usually in Great Britain or the United States. In 1962, Raphael Frank Abraham Mensah, who was completing a distance-learning PhD in theology through the University of California, received materials from an English woman named Lilian Emily Clark who heard about Mensah's interest in having the LDS Church come to Ghana. Mensah's early following was small, but steady. One of his early followers, Reverend Joseph William Billy Johnson, began preaching from the Book of Mormon in 1964 and helped organize 10 congregations in the 14 years before the Church was officially organized in Ghana.³

Consideration was given to teaching and baptizing individuals in West Africa as early as 1960 when President David O. McKay sent Glen Fisher, a former mission president in South Africa, to Lagos, Nigeria to investigate the nature of local "LDS" congregations. Fisher reported that he thought the time was ready to send missionary couples to Sub-

² Emmanuel Abu Kissi, *Walking in the Sand: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Ghana* (rev. ed., Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 4-5.

³ E. Dale LeBaron, "African Converts without Baptism: A Unique and Inspiring Chapter in Church History," in *Speeches (Brigham Young University)*, 1998-99 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1998), 64. For another perspective of the Church in pre-Official Declaration II Ghana, see James B. Allen, "Would-Be Saints: West Africa Before 1978," *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 239-47.

Saharan Africa to baptize and organize official congregations.⁴ In 1961, as Church leaders in Salt Lake City continued to receive letters from diligent West African investigators, the First Presidency of the Church called a number of couples to Nigeria. Several trips were made over the period of five years, but the Nigerian government would not grant the missionaries the necessary visas. And when civil war broke out in 1966, Church leaders decided to terminate the assignment.

It was not until Friday, 9 June 1978 that the Church officially announced that all worthy male members could receive the priesthood and be eligible for the blessings of the temple.⁵ Two months later, Church leaders organized another fact-finding expedition, this time including Ghana. It found a number of congregations there, with most of them located along the coast at Accra, Cape Coast, and Takoradi-Sekondi. The mission also discovered a small congregation meeting in Kumasi, though there is no information about the individuals that comprised this gathering or where they met.⁶ Reports of these findings were shortly thereafter consulted by Church leaders in Salt Lake City. Then, in 1979, the West African Mission was officially organized as the first mission in West Africa.

By 1980, it appears that the absence of an official Church presence in Kumasi deterred growth in that region. When Elder Reed Clegg and J. W. B. Johnson traveled to Kumasi to see if members were still meeting, they found only one person interested in the Church. Unfortunately, this member was unable or not willing to help organize the Church there.⁷ It was not until 1982 that Church leaders found someone from Kumasi who could

⁴ E. Dale LeBaron, "Mormonism in Black Africa," in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. Douglas James Davies (New York: Cassell, 1996), 81.

⁵ For the best analysis of the history of the priesthood ban, see Edward L. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008).

⁶ Kissi, 23-4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

help organize and sustain growth in that area. Emmanuel Abu Kissi, who had joined the Church in 1979, invited his nephew, Mullings Tabi Abu-Bonsra, to Accra to learn about the LDS Church. Abu-Bonsra spent a month in Accra investigating the Church before being baptized on 10 July 1982.⁸

Abu-Bonsra returned to Kumasi shortly thereafter and began organizing a congregation of the Church. On 20 August 1982, he posted an advertisement in the *Pioneer Newspaper* inviting all interested to meet and learn about the LDS faith. A meetinghouse had been procured earlier that month at the Kumasi Centre of National Culture, or Cultural Centre as the locals call it. On 30 August, three people attended the first meeting at the Cultural Centre: Abu-Bonsra, Kissi Ampomah, and Gladys Asamoah. Two months later, ten individuals were recorded as being present at church.

The Church expanded in Kumasi at a much slower rate than elsewhere in Ghana in the years following the 1978 Official Declaration II, though this was not necessarily due to a lack of interest. Missionary couples had begun arriving in Ghana by the end of 1978 focusing most of their work in Cape Coast and the Central Region. The first set of missionaries did not arrive in Kumasi until 20 August 1983, a year after Abu-Bonsra began organizing the Church in Kumasi, and nearly five years since missionaries began proselytizing in southern Ghana. Nevertheless, it seemed that the arrival of the Housley's, the newly arrived missionary couple, was the impetus to Church growth. Four baptisms were recorded less than a month after the Housley's began their full-time proselytizing. A

⁸ The information about Abu-Bonsra included in this article is largely drawn from a pamphlet distributed by the Kumasi Stake in 2004. The pamphlet was handed out at a "20th Anniversary Celebration" commemorating the history of the Church in the Ashanti Region, entitled "An Abridged History of the Organization of the Church in the Ashanti Region." All information was provided by Abu-Bonsra, while S. S. Darko authored the pamphlet.

month after that, nine more individuals were baptized. The Kumasi group became a branch on 13 November 1983, with Abu-Bonsra as branch president, Harry Kyere Sarpong as first counselor, and Sam Opoku Appiah as second counselor.

While precise figures were not collected in this period, Church membership in Kumasi continued to grow in the mid-1980s. On 12 June 1984, Kumasi became a district with Abu-Bonsra as district president. As numbers grew, there was a greater need for more facilities. The Cultural Centre was replaced with a number of meetinghouses located in Kumasi and around the Ashanti Region. These new branches included Bantama and Dichemso which are currently the two stakes comprising the Ashanti Region. In 1985, the



Fig. 1 The Kumasi Centre of National Culture. This open-air establishment houses a number of facilities for the sharing of local arts and trades including dancing, metallurgy, and *kente* cloth weaving. Photo by author.

Ghana Accra Mission was established and there were an estimated 3,000 members living in Ghana at that time.⁹

On 14 June 1989, the government of Ghana “froze” the functions of the LDS Church in Ghana, along with several other organizations.¹⁰ According to Kissi, persecution against the LDS Church began when other Christian denominations spread false rumors about Church practices and consciously sought to associate the Church with other groups that the public found unfavorable. In particular, those opposed to the Church said that it was “practicing cultish, non-Christian behavior, doing demon worship, and preaching that blacks are cursed and that no black person will go to heaven.”¹¹ During this period, the Church removed all resident missionaries and local missionaries had to refrain from proselytizing in public. Church meetinghouses were kept under lock and key 24 hours a day. Church meetings could only be held in small groups in members’ homes, and only with family members. Kissi, who had been made acting mission president during the “freeze,” traveled to different areas of Ghana observing and counseling members. In an interview with E. Dale LeBaron, Kissi noted that ““This long period . . . caused some to lose their testimonies and to look back. The Church, as it were, had been placed in the refiner’s crucible. The chaff perished but the gold was refined.””¹² The persecutors were only partially successful in their attempt to oust Mormonism from their country.

⁹ Alexander B. Morrison, *The Dawning of a Brighter Day: The Church in Black Africa* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1990), 109.

¹⁰ Ibid., 116-17. According to a news clipping from a Ghanaian newspaper published at the time, the other banned churches were Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Nyame Sompia Church of Ekwankrom, and Jesus Christ of Dzorwulu, *Weekly Spectator*, 17 June 1989, quoted in E. Dale LeBaron, “Emmanuel Abu Kissi: A Gospel Pioneer in Ghana,” in *Pioneers in Every Land*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden, D. Brent Smith, and Everett Smith, Jr. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 217.

¹¹ Kissi, *Walking in the Sand*, 169-81.

¹² LeBaron, “Emmanuel Abu Kissi,” 218-19.

The “freeze” ended 18 months later on 30 November 1990. LeBaron suggested that it was pressures from larger churches in Ghana, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, and “external pressures” that ended the ban.¹³ Alexander B. Morrison, however, believed that it was open discussions between Ghanaian officials and LDS Church leaders that brought a “restoration” of the Church. He found that government leaders were especially oblivious to the Church’s 1978 Declaration on the priesthood and the amount of humanitarian aid that the Church had supplied to Ghanaians over the years.¹⁴ It seems natural that Morrison would hold this particular view given that he was himself part of these negotiations.

Despite any personal bias, it is likely that such transparency of Church doctrine and practices was the key to ending the ban. A common belief held by many Ghanaian officials at the time of the ban was that the LDS Church was secretly operating under the direction of the United States government, or, more specifically, the CIA. The Revolutionary Military Government of Ghana was in power in 1989 and was deeply suspicious of foreign spies, particularly from the United States. The Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) operated with McCarthy-era vigilance, and the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI) had been interviewing members of the LDS Church about their practices for some time. While civilians seemed primarily concerned about cultish and racist practices, the government appeared to be more worried about subversion. Thus, when the ban was lifted in 1990, a letter from the PNDC to the National Commission on Culture agreed to remove restrictions on the Church’s activities provisional to the Church’s “respect[ing] the laws and security of

¹³ Ibid, 219.

¹⁴ Morrison, *The Dawning of a Brighter Day*, 117.

the country” and “periodic reviews” of the Church’s activities to be reported to the government.¹⁵

During and after the “freeze”, the Church continued to see its numbers increase. In 1995, the Kumasi District declared 1,460 members, and then 1,532 a year later. As of 2004, membership in the Ashanti Region numbered 2,456.¹⁶ In that same year, Africa’s third temple was dedicated in Accra. On 30 June 2012, the Ghana Kumasi Mission was created. Today, there are 57,748 members of the Church living in Ghana.¹⁷ While this project focuses on the voices of these members, they will be best understood once more scholarship has been conducted. More research needs to be done on the history of the LDS Church in this specific region of Ghana to provide a context for these figures and what they can tell us about conversion in the Ashanti Region. The historiography of the LDS Church in Ghana focuses heavily on the two decades surrounding Official Declaration II. Much of this literature relies on the interviews conducted by E. Dale LeBaron in the 1980s and 90s. While an invaluable collection of oral histories that provide the groundwork for understanding the Church in Ghana, these interviews are dated and fail to represent the trajectory of the Church in the present century. And while source material relating to the Church in Ghana is slim for this period, what does exist seems to focus on the more heavily populated coastal areas, particularly Cape Coast and Accra.

¹⁵ Mohammed Ben-Abdallah to National Commission on Culture, 5 December 1990, quoted in Kissi, *Walking in the Sand*, 240-41.

¹⁶ Abu-Bonsra and Darko, 4-5.

¹⁷ “Facts and Statistics: Ghana,” www.mormonnewsroom.org, accessed 4 June 2014. Statistics for just the Ashanti Region are unavailable.

The Role of Memory in Conversion and Church History

This paper will attempt to illustrate an image of the Church in Kumasi based on the testimonies of those individuals that literally and figuratively built it. In so doing, it will compare and contrast certain accounts with those presented in the past, particularly from LeBaron's oral history collection. The reader must bear in mind that there are inevitably certain limitations placed on a project such as this. While LeBaron's oral history collection is the most extensive to date, it is both dated and an incomplete representation of Ghana's LDS makeup. No more than 12 of the 114 interviews that LeBaron conducted were held in Kumasi, and several of those were with members from elsewhere in Ghana who were serving local missions in Kumasi. And while nearly all of the interviews conducted in the present project were with members raised in the Ashanti Region, they only represent a very small portion of the LDS population, much less the Ashanti population at large.

Another factor that must be taken into account is one of bias and perspective. Consulting active LDS members about their experiences in the Church and about their conversion is a highly subjective undertaking. While many of the interviewees welcomed questions about conflict and tension with the Church, some members seemed hesitant to speculate ways the Church could be more effective in Ghana. This is not to say that all members must invariably have issues with the Church's operations; rather, it recognizes the fact that interviewees in any setting must constantly choose *what* information they will share, and *how* they will share it.

These conditions must be acknowledged and dealt with. But they should not invalidate any conclusions the reader may come to in his or her reading of the interviews, nor should they preclude any attempt to do so. While the craft of history certainly

endeavors to paint the most “true” portrait of past events, these biases are not to be seen as destructive to the purpose of this study. Instead, we should attempt to understand the testimonies that were voluntarily given as a contribution to the burgeoning collections of Church history. Interpreting others’ words can be dangerous indeed; but by taking a cautious approach to these interviews, it will hopefully be clear to the reader that doing so can elicit meaningful conclusions for the future of the LDS Church.

One benefit to studying the Church in Kumasi has already been mentioned: many of the first members in the Ashanti Region are still alive today. With the amount of attention this area of the world has received from Latter-day Saints worldwide, it seems urgent to have the voices and experiences of many of these members captured, both for remembrance and as instruction to future generations. In order to further understand the nature of the LDS Church in Kumasi, I interviewed over 30 members of the Church from different areas around the Ashanti Region. The ages of these members ranged from the mid-teens to over 70. In asking various local Church leaders to organize interview sessions with members of their units, I emphasized the importance of meeting with members of both sexes, who were both long-time members and recent converts, active and semi-active in church attendance, and held a variety of positions within the Church. Ideally, interviews would have also been conducted with non-members and non-active members who could have provided additional insight, though such meetings were not possible during my short visit.

Each interviewee was approached with a set of questions about family, childhood, and early experiences with the Church. In addition, they were asked to point out any particular challenges they felt members of the Church faced in the Ashanti Region, and

consider ways the Church could enhance its image around the world. These questions were not meant to steer the interviews but rather serve as idea generators for the interviewees who were unsure of what to say about their experiences. While some interviewees were much more loquacious than others, every effort was taken to allow each person to fully articulate himself or herself. The purpose of these interviews, then, was not to discover answers to any specific question, but to develop a meaningful analysis of the LDS Church in Kumasi based on the experiences and narratives of these members.

Interviews ranged in length from four minutes to just under forty minutes. While life history interviews are typically longer than these, their length represents an important characteristic of living in the Ashanti Region. In an area where meetinghouses are far apart and the cost of owning and operating a vehicle often outweighs the benefits of being able to travel, finding opportunities to meet with members across such a large area presented a serious challenge. The most convenient way, then, to meet with members from various areas around the Ashanti Region was to meet at a single central location, which happened to be the Bantama and Dicheonso Stake Center buildings. While this made accessibility to members much easier, it unfortunately meant there would be upwards of fifteen members waiting to be interviewed at any given time. Hour-long interviews would have kept people waiting for much too long and most likely disillusioned many towards the project. And because asking individuals to return at a later time was not an option, many interviews were limited to only a few questions.

Challenges such as transportation have been a persistent issue as long as missionaries have worked in Ghana. LeBaron's interviews with members in 1988 demonstrated this fact. Kissi explained that many members saw the opportunity cost of

going to church each week as too high—losing a day’s wages and paying to take a bus to the nearest meetinghouse was not worth it.¹⁸ The pervasive unreliability of members to make it to church meetings, especially during the week, led Church leaders in Ghana to institute a rule that all bishops and branch presidents *must* own a vehicle in order to be called to that position.¹⁹ Ghana’s per capita GDP has steadily risen over the past three decades²⁰ and the number of people who own cars continues to increase with the rapid growth of urban centers, including Kumasi.²¹ Nevertheless, accessibility remains an issue for many members of the Church who live in rural areas and do not have the means to travel long distances to weekly meetings.

The purpose of this project was not to establish a chronological record of the history of the Church in Kumasi, but to help readers better understand the LDS Church in Kumasi by drawing upon the experiences and observations of members there. Interviews were conducted in such a way as to ascertain the history of the Church through collective memory and experience. By asking individuals to describe events and feelings that may have taken place over a long period of time—and likely evolved during that time—one is able to sense the ebbs and flows that characterize day-to-day life. By contrast, attempting to document a strictly event-based history with dates and events runs the risk of losing much of the “humanness” that gives vibrancy and life to the past.

Joseph Kennedy Awuah is a good case in point. Born 20 July 1949 just outside of Kumasi, Awuah had a relatively typical childhood. His father was a blacksmith and farmer,

¹⁸ Emmanuel Abu Kissi, interviewed by E. Dale LeBaron, *OHPA* Box 4, Folder 5, Accra, 12 May 1988.

¹⁹ “Olive W. Nalder Mission Reminiscences, Undated,” MS 25152, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, UT.

²⁰ “Final 2012 Gross Domestic Product & Revised 2013 Gross Domestic Product,” Ghana Statistical Service, http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/GDP/GDP_2014.pdf, accessed 5 June 2014.

²¹ Eric Tetteh-Addison, “Vehicle Population and International Trend,” Ministry of Transport, http://www.unep.org/transport/pcfv/PDF/Ghana_2012/VehiclePopulation_Trends.pdf, accessed 5 June 2014.

and his mother baked and sold the crops that she helped her husband cultivate. The second of six siblings, Awuah received an elementary education and was raised in a Christian household (his mother was a Methodist while his father was a Roman Catholic). Tensions between the teachings of these two faiths led Awuah to make a conscious decision to never attend a church again. But in 1989, now married to a Pentecostal woman, Awuah saw an anti-Mormon demonstration on the television and was inexplicably interested in learning more about the LDS Church. The Church “freeze” ended in 1990, but it was not until 1992 that he was able to attend Church meetings and, soon thereafter, be baptized.

Awuah’s early exposure to the Church is not particularly unusual—many members’ first experience with the Church involves seeing some sort of LDS literature or anti-Mormon propaganda. What makes this account—and countless others like it—significant is that Awuah shares an experience that adds to our understanding of historical events in Ghana, and the effects such incidents had on the Church. The “freeze” is typically seen as either having had a positive effect (creating curiosity about the Church), or a negative effect (bad publicity and giving rise to a number of persisting rumors about Church beliefs and practices).²² Awuah’s account helps us to understand what the “freeze” actually meant in the lives of individuals. For him, this time was not so much about searching for the “true church”; in fact, as Awuah mentioned, he was uninterested in ever attending a church again. But the government ban led to a series of events that would lead to one man’s

²² Church apologists have traditionally suggested that while the “freeze” has negatively affected the Church’s image in Ghana and elsewhere around the world, the attention it has received because of the government ban has ironically created more interest in the Church. For example, see LeBaron, “Emmanuel Abu Kissi,” 219; Morrison, *The Dawning of a Brighter Day*, 117-18.

unlikely conversion. As an even more improbable consequence, Awuah attested that since that time, he has only missed a church meeting five times.²³

Certain patterns can be observed in the way members recount their conversion.

Paul Kwa Oteng Donkor related this experience of receiving the missionary lessons:

When I heard the First Vision about Joseph Smith when he was pondering about the true church, then went to ask of God, and then God appeared to him—I think that was where I got interested in the Church. Because it was also a question of which [church] was on my heart . . . because there are many churches around. So when I heard that First Vision story, I became interested. I think that most of my questions were answered there.²⁴

Such retrospective narratives as this one came up in a number of interviews. For many members, the process of conversion was never a solitary development, devoid of outside influences or historical similarities. This is not to say that members share “cookie-cutter” conversion experiences; rather, many individuals find pride in experiencing spiritual journeys that resonate with those had by LDS or Christian figures. Rebecca Akua Prempeh also compared her conversion to that of Joseph Smith, saying, “At first, I was wondering. I went to so many churches. I was [looking for] . . . a good church to join, as our leader, Joseph Smith, did.”²⁵ Church leaders, especially Joseph Smith, present to many members righteous examples of fervent contemplation of truth and an active desire to find it.

Elaborating on these ideas, we can see that “personal” memory, or the memories that are unique to each of us, can become fused with the “public” or “historical” memory, creating a new consciousness of the past that is more versatile and dynamic. The 1980s were particularly difficult years for Africans. The age of colonialism was over, but the citizens of many nations continued to feel the tightening grip of declining economies and

²³ Joseph Kennedy Awuah, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 23 May 2014.

²⁴ Paul Kwa Oteng Donkor, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

²⁵ Rebecca Akua Prempeh, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 25 May 2014.

reactionary dictatorial governments. Ghana was not an exception to this trend. As is still the case in parts of the world today, many emigrated when they decided that economic fulfillment could not be found at home. For some, this meant immigrating to the oil-rich south of Nigeria. Others ended up on different continents. Richard Samche was one of the many Ghanaians who sought refuge in Nigeria:

In the early 70s, and the early 80s, the country Ghana here was characterized by military coup d'états. And that brought a lot of hardship as a result of



Fig. 2 Rebecca Akua Prempeh standing in front of the Dichemso Meetinghouse, 25 May 2014. Photo by author.

mismanagement of the economy to the citizenry. So the old and the young decided to travel outside of the country for greener pastures. And then I happened to be one of the exodus of Ghanaians who traveled up outside and had myself landed in Nigeria, Lagos. I decided to travel there for greener pastures, in search of good. Little did I know I was rather going for something very precious, more than good . . . I was introduced to the gospel by a member of the Church whom I had worked with. His name was Charles Robert Gibbs from Scotland. He introduced me to the gospel . . . So the gospel has made me who I am today. Hitherto I wasn't anybody. But today I am somebody. The gospel has taught me a deep insight with regards to eternal perspective. I know who I am, I know what I am, I know what I would be in the future, even after this life. And that has been my greatest goal to work around. To achieve the best that is exaltation. That has been my goal.²⁶

Attempting to separate what we may consider the “historical” (military coup d'états; economic troubles, etc.) from the “personal” (meeting Charles Gibbs; being baptized) would not give the same meaning to Richard's story—the two are necessarily intertwined if Richard's account is to have historical meaning.

Members also explained significant events in their past (such as conversion) by creating a narrative of the development of their character. Asking an interviewee to simply describe their conversion process seldom elicited a brief answer or description of a single moment in time. Such a response needed to be constructed by providing a foundation for understanding not only *how*, but *why* someone made such a personal decision. Nana Yaw Poku was baptized in Japan in the mid-1980s. In telling how he came upon the Church, Nana Yaw first related how he had spent several years traveling and working in the Middle East where he gained “a different understanding of how people see other cultures and how other people, too, see other life.” This perspective helped him later on in Japan when he confronted individuals who did not agree with his religious beliefs:

Just accept it, whether you like it. You listen to it. You are not forced to accept something of that nature. This thing opened up me to know the differences if one speaks and it doesn't speak well with me, whether I will just ignore that. That has

²⁶ Richard Samche, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 17 May 2014.

helped me to know how to interact with other people. You know that? Not to push them to be angry with me. Because sometimes, if the things that he says are not in a good thought of yours, you can easily listen to it and let it bypass you (*laughs*). So it's a good help and it has helped me.²⁷

As will be discussed later, religious tolerance and cultural competence proved to be a common attribute for many of the interviewees.

Traumatic experiences can shape an individual's religious perspective. When asked to describe how he met and decided to join the Church, Isaac Agyei began by explaining the circumstances under which he met the missionaries, received the required lessons, and was baptized. Following this explanation, however, Isaac immediately continued his narrative by recounting an experience he had when he was only six years old:

Someone came to take me from the school . . . Not knowing he was taking me to somewhere else just to sell me for rituals. So from morning, about 7 am, until 9 pm, we drove through the bush. We couldn't find anyone to buy me . . . My parents had gone to the broadcasting—by then we had the BBC 1 and 2. They went to make an announcement and so and so forth, but where we were going it was bush all throughout . . . So I was with the man finding someone, a vender, a newspaper vender . . . While he was away, [the newspaper vendor] asked me “Do I know that man?” I said “No. All I know that— I don't know what came to mind. I didn't know what the man did to me and I was just following him” . . . He asked me whether I can lead him to my house. And I said yes. But we stood there for a while and my mom didn't come. So I took the man to my house and then my parents paid him whatever the amount, quantity. So this is a testimony for me. Since then, I have not relaxed . . . Since— from my six years time, yes. So all along I don't blame or joke with my Christianity. So always I've been praying to God to show me the right church to join before I die. And I saw that that was the moment.²⁸

Isaac was 47 years old when he was baptized. To cite an experience that occurred more than 40 years previous as a defining moment in his spiritual development tells us something about how conversion is framed in memory. Not only is conversion a process that continues after one's reception into the Church (a mantra that Mormons love to

²⁷ Nana Yaw Poku, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

²⁸ Isaac Agyei, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 20 May 2014.

promote), but it is a “pre-process” that extends before one’s conscious decision to formally join the church. One’s life, then, acts as a series of defining moments that culminate in the remarkable, yet almost inevitable, experience of becoming a member of the LDS Church. Indeed, such specific retrospection seems to be a common custom among those interviewed, reiterating the previous assertion that conversion cannot be seen as an isolated episode, but rather as a process that extends into the past and the future.

Some interviewees described dreams they had just before or during the time they converted to the Church. In a church that places so much emphasis on personal revelation and direct communication with deity, it should come as no surprise that members of the LDS Church would cite dreams as major turning points in their spiritual growth. Several of the individuals who began preaching LDS doctrine before the Church was officially established in West Africa described dreams that testified of the truth of the Church’s teachings. J. W. B. Johnson told of several dreams in which former Church presidents and Johnson’s deceased brother had appeared to him urging him to accept the LDS Church.²⁹ Another Church pioneer in Ghana, Priscilla Sampson-Davis, related an experience she had just after being baptized wherein she received inspiration to translate Church books and hymns into Fante (an Akan dialect).³⁰

The prevalence of dreams among those seeking religion does not seem to have abated in recent years. Ambruce Addoh described a dream he had while living in Germany in the early 1980s:

I had a dream in Germany. The dream that I had was at a cemetery. Then I saw some big grave shaking. Then a woman—an old lady—came, dressed in white, with a book in hand. And written on it: Book of Mormon. Then she pointed to me . . .

²⁹ LeBaron, “African Converts Without Baptism,” 7-8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

[pause] . . . she pointed to me [and said], ‘that book belonged to those who wanted to come out from the tomb.’ That’s my testimony. That’s my testimony and nobody can take it from me. She said that those that are shaking the earth—the tomb—this book is from those people. So I don’t joke with the Book of Mormon.³¹

Then, in 1999, Hyacinth Amanyo Nwadibia had a similar dream of people wearing white:

Even though I was attending the Anglican [Church] and do most things associated with that, I was not happy because while I’m seeing things, it’s not working out the way I desire within me. So, in fact, in 1999, I have a dream where I can say that what I desired, I saw it in a picture where a group of people, they are all wearing white. They’re all white and they’re very happy . . . I managed to write down in my bible—something I’ve never done before—I managed to put it down because I was wondering and thinking about this. It was like heaven: everyone is happy, no worries, everybody is smiling, but they’re all equal. I managed to write it down.³²

The presence of white clothing in each of the two dreams is a common symbol of purity found throughout Christendom, particularly in association with deity, angels, and heaven. The more subtle similarity between these two dreams is that they provided reassurance to some lingering question or, as Hyacinth described it, desire. In Ambruce’s case, the dream renewed his resolve to study the Book of Mormon, a common goal among new converts. He proudly explained that he has since read the Book of Mormon three times through. For Hyacinth, the dream (which came some seven years before being baptized) provided a sort of template by which he could compare the various church congregations. He knew that he liked what he saw in his dream; it was only a matter of time before he was invited to a local LDS congregation and there found his “desire.”

In each case where an interviewee described a dream, it was clear that these were exceptional, and highly memorable, occurrences. They formed the core of their conversion narratives and as such held paramount importance, usually over their meetings with

³¹ Ambruce Addoh, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 17 May 2014.

³² Hyacinth Amanyo Nwadibia, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 23 May 2014.

missionaries, first visits to church, and even their baptisms. Dreams, then, hold a place of particular importance in Ashanti belief and culture. Additional research needs to compare and contrast the ways in which members of the Church recall their conversions, and document the specific events that members attribute to their decision to be baptized. Doing so will highlight key differences between cultures, beliefs, and social taboos.

Obstacles and the Future of the Church in Kumasi

Members of the Church in Kumasi have expressed a wide range of challenges that Ghanaians face as they investigate and join the LDS Church. While many interviewees had concerns about the future of the Church that were similar to one another, they also held unique views about its future, and many speculated on ways in which Church leaders could address many of these challenges. Three issues appeared most frequently in the interviews and are thus seen in need of urgent attention: language, the conduct of church services, and the role of rumor in Ashanti society.

Drums, dancing, and death: how Church practices conflict with Ghanaian culture

Daniel Boakye said that in his view the greatest obstacle facing Ghanaians is how church meetings are conducted:

Sometimes we will meet people and they will start criticizing about the Church. You ask them why. Sometimes they will tell you, 'In that church, they don't sing, they don't clap, they don't beat drums.' So because of that, you know, people will come to church and they will like to dance, and, you know, sing and dance, meaning not singing hymns, but singing other music and dancing. You know? When they come to this church, they don't see that. They only come and sit down and sing hymns and go back. And sometimes this is one of the obstacles they face.³³

³³ Daniel Boakye (Buokrom Ward), interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

The conspicuous absence of drums, clapping, loud singing, and dancing in LDS church services is discussed in more interviews (combining the LeBaron and *KIP* interviews) than any other topic, making it one of particular interest in need of further discussion here. LeBaron's interviews, conducted only ten years after the official establishment of the Church in Ghana, highlight the disparity between Ghanaian "traditional" and protestant religious practices, and LDS practices. In the decades prior to 1978, the various congregations that operated informally as the LDS Church incorporated some of the elements of these other local churches that included drumming, dancing, and loud singing.³⁴ When full-time missionaries arrived in Ghana, these practices were barred, though some members recalled that drumming, dancing, and singing continued for a few months.³⁵

In 2014, many churches in Ghana still conduct their services this way. Thus, as the LDS Church continues to reject such practices, it is no wonder that many Christians who come to see what a Mormon church service is like will likely be disappointed. William Quaye stated it succinctly: "In Africa, or let me be specific, in Ghana, you go to other churches, they beat drums and dance. And so when they don't see those things here they are going to see the Church as boring."³⁶ And seeing that the LDS Church does things much differently than other Christian churches in Ghana has served to feed many of the rumors about Mormons that have been circulating for half a century in Ghana. Rebecca Akua

³⁴ Many of LeBaron's interviewees recalled Rebecca Mould, a woman who started one of these "LDS" congregations in Cape Coast, as being the one that really emphasized conducting church meetings this way. There is no mention of her whereabouts at the time of the interviews. See Kissi, *Walking in the Sand*, 18-9, 40-1; and throughout LeBaron, E. Dale LeBaron's Oral History Project on Africa, MSS 1937, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.

³⁵ See Emmanuel Kwesi Arthur, interviewed by E. Dale LeBaron, *OHPA* Box 2, Folder 2, Takoradi, 20 May 1988, and Emmanuel Kwasi Bondah, *OHPA* Box 2, Folder 17, Assin Foso, 16 May 1988.

³⁶ William Quaye, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

Prempeh explained that because the Church is not a “spiritual church,” it must be an evil church:

For the Latter-day Saints, we don’t shout at the top of our voices, and we do not play at the top of our voices. So they know the Church is not a spiritual church. That is why. One factor is some people say, ‘This people, when they go to Church, you don’t see them, you don’t hear them praying, they don’t do this, they are Mormon. They drink blood!’ (*laughs*). All of my sisters told me, ‘Sister, what church are you joining these days?’ I say I’m with those, and they say, ‘Ah! They drink blood! Are they wizards or are they witches?’ (*laughs*). I say listen, but some people don’t want to, because they see us not shouting or playing heavy (*imitates spiritual church dancing*). They say, ‘Ah, what are they doing? They don’t do something spiritual?’ That is why. Some people, I used to come invite them to come and see whether we drink or chop off our own flesh. But . . . they don’t want to think about it.³⁷

Drumming, dancing, and singing are not just practices imported into Ghana by protestant Christians; they are inherently Ghanaian practices that permeate many aspects of everyday life. The desire of Ghanaians to maintain these practices should be seen primarily as an effort to preserve one’s heritage, not necessarily as an outright rejection of Mormonism or its teachings.

We cannot suggest that all Ghanaians feel the same way about how church services are conducted, however, especially given the substantial growth of the Church in Ghana over the past few decades. Some members have expressed an appreciation for the peace and reverence that comes from attending an LDS Church service. Daniel Boakye described a recent experience:

I went to church—I invited somebody yesterday. One of my co-workers. So he came and said, ‘Is that how you worship?’ I said yes. ‘In fact, it’s nice. You know, because the place is very quiet. Everybody comporting herself. You don’t make noise.’ I said, ‘No. When we come to church, we are here to listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; we

³⁷ Rebecca Akua Prempeh, 25 May 2014.

are not here to make sacrifice. So why should we be coming here making noise, dance, and all those?’ So, it’s like, people are ready to hear.³⁸

Prempeh tried to reconcile the local culture with LDS Church practice by saying “But you can sing. And I love this thing, that the scriptures go deep inside your spirit. God says clap, dance, sing—you see? But they have taken that and sang so heavy, when you sing like that. You see now?”³⁹

One particular aspect of LDS church services that many Ghanaians seem to love is the hymns. Even Isaac Nii Ayi Kwei Martey’s mother, who temporarily disowned Isaac after his conversion to the Church, admittedly enjoyed the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, however, the lyrics of many of the hymns are unfamiliar to Ghanaians, presenting a challenge to those who are unable to read the English hymnals. Edmund Osei explained:

We conduct everything, every service in local language. Here the books, the hymns—especially the hymns. Because Ghanaians really love their music. And when they come and . . . we start the hymns, and they can’t join in, they feel odd or they feel out of place. And I think that is one big obstacle. We see members who have come who cannot read or cannot understand the English. They’ve come and not stayed. They’ve just left the Church like that. Not that they disobey the commandments, but just because they felt themselves out of place. Especially the hymns. The hymns. Because most of the services are conducted in Twi, but the hymns are in English. And when we sing and they can’t join in, they feel out of place.⁴¹

A small number of hymns have been translated, though mostly to the mutually intelligible Fante. Osei elaborated on these: “They are enjoying it. And I’ll tell you what: anytime those hymns are sung here, even though it is in Fante dialect, our people love it. They just love to

³⁸ Daniel Boakye (Buokrom Ward), 18 May 2014.

³⁹ Rebecca Akua Prempeh, 25 May 2014.

⁴⁰ Isaac Nii Ayi Kwei Martey, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

⁴¹ Edmund K. Osei, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

hear that. Yeah. In fact, if the hymns could be translated to the local dialect, it could really accelerate . . . people joining the Church.”⁴² Thus, while the hymns present an obstacle, they also furnish a significant opportunity for the LDS Church in Kumasi.

Church convention revolving around funerals also clashes with local customs. In Ghana, funeral rites are an exceptionally important part of one’s journey through this life and into the hereafter.⁴³ Funerals can take place over a weekend or stretch over the course of a week. While they are an occasion to mourn for the dead, they are notably cheerful and animated. In addition, deceased churchgoers often have a great deal of their funeral service costs covered by their local congregation. Anyone who has attended the funeral of a Mormon will instantly observe the striking dissimilarities between the two. Again, as it is with drumming, dancing, and singing, Ghanaians may see in LDS funeral practices an affront to their culture and tradition.

LeBaron’s interviews furnished more discussion about funerals than was seen in the recent Kumasi interviews. Most of the interviewees in the Kumasi Interviews Project who brought up funeral services did so to discuss how they are reconciling LDS practices and local customs. Francis Safoh suggested that within Ghanaian cultures, there are “good” and “bad” cultures, and even a “gospel culture.” In explaining what he believes is “good culture” in Ghana, Safoh said, “Oh, for here . . . the funeral. You see? The funeral. We do believe in funerals. Yeah. That is what I’ve seen. Because we’re going to funerals and other things. But when you come to LDS Church, then we change. You see? We go to funerals, but we don’t,

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ For more on funerals in the Ashanti Region, see Marleen de Witte, *Long Live the Dead!: Changing Funeral Celebrations ins Asante, Ghana* (Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2001) and “Money and Death: Funeral Business in Asante, Ghana,” *Africa* 73, no. 4 (2003): 531-59; and Kwame Arhin, “The Economic Implications of Transformations in Akan Funeral Rites,” *Africa* 64, no. 3 (1994): 307-22.

maybe, [indulge in] too much of this culture, you see?"⁴⁴ For Safoh, it was best to first accept and practice LDS, or "gospel", culture, and then incorporate those local practices that harmonize with LDS teachings.

Bernard Marfo was more vocal in his praise of local Ashanti culture and believed that the Church should be an active participant in preserving the local culture among its members:

What is important to me is that when we joined this church in 1986, one of our members died. It was a lady. And during that time, the Church bought a coffin, everything, and then did this thing—the funeral and celebration . . . What I've heard is that the Church is no more doing all those things. But it's part of our culture. So, me, I'd like the Church to rescind that very decision so that when somebody joins the Church, maybe he is from a poor family—that is why he came and joined the church. So when he died, I'd see the Church can buy a coffin and then give a befitting burial. It will be well. It's very important. So that very decision—that they are no more buying the coffin—is part of our [culture] . . . So they should rescind their position and know better how they can do it . . . It's very important to us.⁴⁵

Daniel Boakye provided a similar opinion about how the Church could handle this particular aspect of local tradition:

Sometimes when you go to some stake centers, some wards, somebody will die and the Church will support the family members to bury the person. But you know, when you go to a different church, sometimes they will take all the responsibilities . . . I see in this church, sometimes we only, how shall we say it, we go there just to mourn with them. But sometimes they will also sit back and say, 'My former church, this is how we are doing it. This member will die, the church will buy a coffin, the church will do this, the church will do this.' But when you come here, when a person dies, the Church will just give you a little amount of money—that is all. So this is one of the things I hope comes, and I'd like to go back. These are some of the . . . things that are obstacles.⁴⁶

As can be seen from the Church practices described above, cultural sensitivity is a prevalent, and potentially divisive, issue among members of the Church in Ghana.

⁴⁴ Francis Safoh, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 17 May 2014.

⁴⁵ Bernard Marfo, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

⁴⁶ Daniel Boakye (Buokrom Ward), 18 May 2014.

LeBaron’s interviewees seemed more determined to eliminate most traces of local culture and customs from their congregations than those from the present project. One explanation for this can be found in J.D.Y. Peel’s anthropological history of the Yoruba of Nigeria in which he found generational differences among Christian converts. The first of these generations, the earliest Christian converts, were much more likely to be strict adherents to their new faith, attempting to eschew most or all of their previous religious beliefs, though they were still deeply enmeshed in the local social structure. Succeeding generations, however, witnessed increased slackening in religious conviction, even to the point of apostasy. Peel reasoned that successive generations who were, as Latter-day Saints term it, “born in the covenant” lacked the “high costs” and “high level of commitment” that their forefathers necessarily embraced in order to accept the new religion, and hence, the new way of life.⁴⁷ In terms of this study, then, it would seem that early LDS converts in the Ashanti Region actively sought to expel lingering remnants of local religious and social culture from its ranks, while succeeding generations and later converts observed less of a threat from these practices.

A simpler and more likely explanation, however, may be that many “traditional” practices—such as polygamy and pouring libations for various celebrations⁴⁸—are simply less prevalent in Akan culture today. Ashanti culture still revels in its rich culture, seen as one of the most vibrant in West Africa. But with increased urbanization and importation of “Western” values, the presence of “traditional” practices may seem less apparent, and thus less hostile to “Western,” or Christian, values. Indeed, nearly all the interviewees who

⁴⁷ J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 268-69.

⁴⁸ Typically reserved for celebrating ascensions within the chieftaincy, this ritual involved drinking alcohol, typically schnapps. It was one of the most oft-cited aspects of “bad” culture in Ghana in LeBaron’s interviews.

broached the subjects of polygamy, chieftaincies, and “traditional” religions were middle-aged or elderly adults. Nevertheless, there are still disagreements among members of all ages over the extent to which should they participate in their local culture.

Understanding each other: the challenges and opportunities of language

On 19 May 1988, Priscilla Sampson-Davis of Cape Coast described a dream she had had shortly after being baptized 10 years before:

I wasn't asleep. I saw myself at a sacrament meeting and we were singing when I saw a personage in very bright apparel standing in front of the congregation. The Personage called me by name and requested that I come and stand by Him. . . . He then asked me why some were not singing with the others. I told him that they could not read English. . . . He asked me if I wouldn't like to help my sisters and brothers sing praises to our Heavenly Father. I said that I would do my best. Then the vision passed away. Immediately I . . . started translating the hymn “Redeemer of Israel” into Fante.⁴⁹

Though this sister was able to begin rudimentary translations of the Book of Mormon and a number of hymns in the early years of the Church in Ghana, efforts to translate the bulk of Church materials into local Ghanaian languages have been rather unremarkable.

Systematic translations of distribution materials have only been conducted in two dialects of the most widely spoken Ghanaian language, Akan (the two dialects being Twi and Fante). The Church's official website provides pages for each of these dialects, though the available translated resources only include short publications, such as the pamphlets missionaries use in their teachings, and the Church declarations on the family, Joseph Smith, and Jesus Christ. The webpages also offer selected translations of the *Liahona* and General Conference addresses. By far, the most ambitious, and useful, translation has been of the Book of Mormon.

⁴⁹ Priscilla Sampson-Davis, interviewed by E. Dale LeBaron, quoted in “African Converts without Baptism,” 8.

Nevertheless, materials used most frequently in church meetings, such as the *Teachings of the Presidents* and *Gospel Principles* manuals, are only available in English. The unavailability of materials in local languages not only makes study and classroom participation difficult, but also estranges those who feel they are “unworthy” of partaking in church meetings. One interviewee described an interaction he had had prior to the interview: “When I came, a lady brought her phone, an Android phone. All the applications are on it that she can read the bible, whatever. But she said ‘Brother, I can’t do it.’ She is going to school, but she cannot do those things. So it needs education, so members need to be educated. That’s the problem.”⁵⁰ While the congregations do their best to accommodate those who cannot speak or read English, it is noticeably difficult for the instructors (and distracting for the members), many of whom are more comfortable speaking Twi themselves, to juggle the responsibilities of teaching *and* ensuring every attendee can understand the discussion.

Two of the members interviewed in Kumasi had been involved in providing LDS materials in Twi. Samuel Antwi, one of the earliest members of the Church in the Ashanti Region, flew to Salt Lake to assist in the translation and review of General Conference talks. Another early member in Kumasi, Richard Samche, assisted in the translation of the Book of Mormon and is now a reviewer for the translation of the Doctrine and Covenants into Twi. Despite the availability of these resources online, however, few such materials are made available to members in hardcopy. In an area of the world where personal computers and tablets are rare (stable Wi-Fi or broadband availability are even more elusive), access remains limited. What complicates matters even further is that Akan is mainly used for oral

⁵⁰ Kwaku Boamah, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

communication. Akan script has not been standardized to the extent that most “Western” languages have, and thus Ghanaians rely much more on oral transmission of information than, Americans do; a complete translation of the LDS library would still do little for the millions of Ghanaians who can read neither English nor Akan.

Keeping English the dominant language in local missionary work was until recently official policy within the Kumasi Mission. Richard Samche, who at the time of the interview had just been released from his position as stake president of the Bantama Stake, explained, “The current mission president decreed that his missionaries should not baptize anybody who cannot read and write [English] at all. It is a great privilege to have the gospel . . . So when that decree came, it was a great challenge for the missionaries and priesthood leaders.”⁵¹ Fortunately, this policy was overturned in early 2014. Nevertheless, such policies regarding language capabilities, and therefore education, remain stigmatizing factors in Church proceedings and growth.

One of the most common concerns of members in LeBaron’s interviews was the language barrier in Ghana. English is the official language of Ghana, but outside of government and inter-regional matters, Ghanaians speak their local languages. As Edmund Osei put it, “In Kumasi, they like their language too much.”⁵² But language in and of itself is not the problem that Ghanaians are facing. Whether members speak English or Twi or Fante is irrelevant. What has been creating divisions among Ghanaians, however, is the insistence upon using one or the other, and not providing adequate resources to enable Ghanaians to worship in their preferred tongue.

Interviewees expressed more concerns over the conduct of Church meetings and,

⁵¹ Richard Samche, 17 May 2014.

⁵² Edmund K. Osei, 18 May 2014.

most commonly, over the language used in Church meetings and discussions, than over any other obstacle that Ghanaians face in the Church. Kwaku Boamah most vehemently supported an overhaul of the way the Church conducts meetings and marginalizes those who do not speak what the Church considers to be the “dominant” language. In his interview, Boamah responded to every question by redirecting the conversation back to education and language in the Church.⁵³ For example, in response to the question “Did you have any sort of struggles or challenges that you faced in accepting the Gospel?” Boamah responded: “No, because I was able to read and understand. So I didn’t have any problems.”⁵⁴ It was not unusual for interviewees to say that they had not faced any challenges in joining the Church. It was unusual, however, for them to give such a specific reason for the apparent lack of difficulties. This suggests not only that Boamah’s experiences with education and language in the Church were much more poignant than those had by other members, but also that this had become an issue over which he had agonized for the 16 years of his membership in the Church.

Literacy and education can be tied to many of the obstacles that Ghanaians face in accepting the LDS faith. The prevalence of rumor and hearsay in Ghana, as will be discussed later, prevents many members from attending LDS church congregations or meeting with the missionaries. But in an area of the world where English literacy is quite low and Twi materials are few, there are few alternatives to accepting the advice and admonitions of a friend, family member, or pastor. Boamah suggested bringing back a

⁵³ The same set of questions were posed to all interviewees in the Kumasi Interview Project, and included: “What sort of obstacles do Ghanaians face in accepting the Church’s doctrine?” “What could members of the Church elsewhere in the world learn from Ghanaians?” and “What message would you like to share with those who will listen to or read this interview?”

⁵⁴ Kwaku Boamah, 18 May 2014.

discarded practice to help alleviate some of these problems:

The Church has a problem in Africa and in Ghana specifically. People don't understand our temples and other things because they cannot read. That's the problem . . . So sometimes it deters members who really don't understand— who cannot read and understand themselves . . . And then the Church was having a literacy class. You know? We used to have a literacy class because members were sacrificing. You know, you get called to teach, but maybe that person is working somewhere. If the Church can get permanent members who are paid to do said jobs, it will move a long way. Because, maybe, after your work, somebody is here, let's say from 2 to 4, who will teach you how to understand English, specifically for you to be able to read the *Ensign*, the *Liahona*, the *Friend*. Get the knowledge of the Gospel. Some who are part-time or full-time—some persons will be coming for lessons after work. I think it will help the Church to grow. We want the Church to grow so that members—not growing for growing sake—but so members understand the Gospel. Yes. That is my perception.⁵⁵

Another member, Joseph Kennedy Awuah, said that he felt there is no longer an issue with language at church; people will speak whatever language they are most comfortable with and everyone else accepts that. The problem, however, rests in the issue of rumor and misconceptions about the Church as a white, English-speaking institution: “We love our language more [than English]. So that one, too, is a problem. They always say, for here, we speak English, always English. For that one, too, they don't want to come to the church.”⁵⁶ Antipathy towards the Church's practices can thus be seen as a mixture of cultural pride and fear of any establishment that resembles a colonial-era white institution.

The education and language dynamic of the Church in Kumasi has certainly changed since 1988. At that time, members and investigators had even fewer materials at their disposal, in either English or Twi, and it seems the local congregations were more likely to

⁵⁵ Kwaku Boamah, 18 May 2014. None of the interviewees gave a detailed explanation for why these English-literacy classes had stopped meeting in the past. Richard Samche said it was simply a matter of mismanagement, but that the Bantama Stake was making efforts to bring the classes back, Richard Samche, 17 May 2014.

⁵⁶ Joseph Kennedy Awuah, 23 May 2014.

conduct *all* of their meetings in Twi.⁵⁷ The language barrier still creates difficulties for many individuals who have a genuine desire to understand instructors, participate in classroom discussion, and have the skills to study Church materials, however. While rumor and hearsay may be contributing factors in dissuading individuals from learning more about the LDS Church, actual practices occurring within LDS meetinghouses have also shown to be significantly deterring for investigators. Bernard Marfo personalized the situation this way:

Well, now the greatest challenge we are facing now is, you see, most of our people, they cannot speak English. They cannot. That one has set many people aside because when they come and they see that everybody is speaking English and they can't speak English they feel shy to come . . . Because for me, I myself, I am not well educated. That's why I can't speak the English very well. That is why I can't speak it, you see? I am now at the Buokrom Ward. And we have got many people who can speak this our oral language. Because of the English, when you take them to come, they feel shy to the church.⁵⁸

Rumor, hearsay, and misconceptions about the LDS Church

As mentioned earlier, rumor remains a formidable obstacle for the growth of the LDS Church in Kumasi. The Church “freeze” of 1989 arose primarily because of the persistence of rumor and false representation of Church teachings. A number of factors contribute to the pervasiveness of hearsay, including: inaccessibility to Church materials; the inability to read and speak English; anti-Mormon programs (mostly held in various Christian congregations); and, most importantly, the historical importance of the

⁵⁷ For example, Olive Nalder's descriptions of church meetings from 1985-86 express a marked anxiety over being unable to understand anything being said in Sacrament meetings and the inability to teach classes, even the young children she was assigned to teach early on in her residency in Kumasi, “Olive W. Nalder Mission Reminiscences.” For similar concerns of foreign missionaries who struggled understanding Twi, see Tyson P. Neumann Journal, 1994-1996,” MS 15254, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, UT; and “Daniel J. Graham Journal, 1994-1996,” MS 15077, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, UT.

⁵⁸ Bernard Marfo, 18 May 2014.

transmission of information via oral communication. Among the Kumasi interviewees, rumor was the most frequently cited challenge facing the Church and often led to a list of other obstacles which are all energized by gossip.

Adu-Okae did not hesitate when asked about the greatest challenge facing members of the Church:

Misrepresentation. Misrepresentation. Because people do not understand or they do not know. They say all sorts of things against the Church. And people are not prepared to investigate to find out whether it is true or not. They believe—I don't know if you've read very much about Ghanaian culture—they believe in rumor, rumor-mongering. Someone says this and they believe. For example they tell us that 'Oh, you people have been calling saints!' That we people have been calling saints! (*Chuckles*) And a whole lot of things they talk about the Church which are not true.⁵⁹

The “calling saints” that is referred to here has to do with the name of the Church and the official designation of its members as Latter-day Saints. A common misconception worldwide, the word “Saints” is often interpreted to mean members of the Church worship saints, or that they believe each of them is an actual saint, according to the Catholic definition. Either way, no fewer than eight interviewees made a direct reference to this issue.

Martha Arkoh explained that even if people do visit a church building to learn about LDS doctrine, those who cannot understand English will turn to friends and family, many of who are not members of the Church, to learn more:

During stake conferences and the rest, if they speak English to us, some of the elderly people who are joining sometimes, they don't hear anything . . . If even they will even speak the English language, they should end it on the Twi so that those who don't understand the English language will hear something and take something home . . . And then also, sometimes the people pronounce 'Mormon' as 'mammon.' Some people pronounce 'Mormon' as 'mammon.' So they think we are worshipping what some people call 'Saints' and even some people say we drink blood and all these things. So if the person doesn't understand things very well, even the person

⁵⁹ Adu-Okae, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

cannot read to understand what the Church is about, sometimes it's a challenge to join the Church because when people say all these things to the person, they stop coming. I have seen. So, some of the things that people are facing.⁶⁰

A specific reference is made to the word "Mormon" and how it has been confused with "mammon," the biblical designation for earthly possessions. Miscommunication, then, is another reason why language remains a stumbling block for Church and member growth in Ghana.

A curious aspect of Ghanaian culture that several interviewees described is its lack of interest in research. Daniel Boakye explained, "We don't like research so much. Most people don't like research . . . When they come to the church, they will see it. But when they don't come, they will sit outside and say, 'Ah, these people, I don't know what they're doing there because always their church is very quiet. We don't see them doing these.'"⁶¹ Isaac Nii Ayi Kwei Martey shared an experience from his own investigation of the Church:

The main obstacle is that there are so many, so many theories about the Church in Ghana. And people are putting their minds to things that are not true but are false about the Church because somebody told somebody, somebody told somebody, somebody told somebody and somebody told them. And so really, too much, you know, hearsay. They are scared to even ask to know more about the Church. I have friends who do know about the Church, but they think many things about the Church like we drink blood, we have human sacrifice, and also hear things that we do. And because they hear these things from people they trust a lot, maybe their moms, their god-fearing uncles, dads, or somebody, maybe, they like so much telling them something that is false about the Church and so they put that in their minds. Like for me, the Church— there are so many things that I've heard about the Church. Before I was baptized, I thought these things were true. And it was from who I trusted and I knew I could respect. And then I really shouldn't have supposed them, but they all were false. They were not true. Yeah it's because so many people who think they trust are telling them things that are not true about the Church. That is why they do not want to join the Church.⁶²

⁶⁰ Martha Arkoh, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

⁶¹ Daniel Boakye (Buokrom Ward), 18 May 2014.

⁶² Isaac Nii Ayi Kwei Martey, 18 May 2014.

Placing trust in family, friends, and even acquaintances seems to be common throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.⁶³ And because it is often easier to learn about the Church through someone you ordinarily socialize with than visiting an unfamiliar church, it is not surprising that rumors about the Church continue to circulate.

Based on what these interviewees shared, the effect of rumor and hearsay on the future growth of the Church needs to be discussed here. But it would be culturally invasive to suggest that such social customs need to be eliminated. Paul Kwa Oteng Donkor's list of difficulties for those learning about the Church included: the word "Saints" in its name; the need for the Book of Mormon; and performing proxy baptisms and marriages for the deceased. But when asked what Mormons in the rest of the world could learn from Ghanaians, he responded:

What they can learn is that Ghanaians—I will not say all of us, but most of us—don't want to . . . go into learn and study or know what is there before they talk. But they always stand by the news that they hear and start criticizing. So what I would like the Mormons to learn is that anytime, maybe anyone is being criticized for being a part of the Church, maybe they should keep in mind that maybe that person doesn't know or hasn't come to the truth yet about the Church. That is what I want them to learn.⁶⁴

Donkor's message is unique. Instead of praising the positive aspects of Ghanaian tradition and society as most interviewees did, he is asking the world to be sympathetic to a specific aspect of Ghanaian culture. Rather than seek to eradicate Ghanaians of their tendencies toward rumor, Donkor asks that members understand local social behavior and operate within that framework.

⁶³ I refer here specifically to Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), chapters 1, 2, and 5.

⁶⁴ Paul Kwa Oteng Donkor, 18 May 2014.

In summary, rumor, hearsay, and popular misconceptions present significant barriers to Church growth in the Ashanti Region. Most members of the Church in Kumasi believe that the greatest challenges for new members are all tied together by these ubiquitous practices. But while aggravating to members who are diligently seeking to bring friends and family into the Church, rumor is deeply ingrained in Ashanti culture. Donkor's approach to this issue may be helpful in bridging cultural divides and dispelling misconceptions about the Church.

Voices from Within: What the World Can Learn from the Saints in Kumasi

As with the challenges discussed above, interviewees cited too many positive, or “good” culture, aspects of Ghanaian society to enumerate here. These ranged from the broad (“Ashanti’s are friendly”) to the narrow (“young people always give up their seats to the elderly”). This section will highlight certain areas of Ashanti society that members believe to be representative of their culture, and deserving of attention from the global LDS community. It may be over-reaching to suggest that all of these characteristics ought to be implemented in other areas of the world—doing so would invariably commit the same offence that was described earlier with regard to cultural intrusion. Nevertheless, there is value in learning how members living in other parts of the world view themselves within a LDS framework, and, conversely, how they view the Church within the context of their local culture. Doing so may add validity to the assertion made by Mormon sociologist M. Neff Smart that throughout the world there are a number of “right” ways of worshiping, and that “all are demonstrably in the right.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ M. Neff Smart, “The Challenge of Africa,” *Dialogue* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 57.

Akwaaba!: Hospitality and kinship among the Ashanti

As soon as one steps off the airplane at Kotoka International Airport in Accra, he or she will see one thing before visiting customs and border control: a large sign boasting the Ghanaian salutation, *Akwaaba!*, meaning “Welcome” in Twi. Any visitor to Ghana will undoubtedly receive such a greeting on a number of occasions and in a variety of settings. Receiving a warm welcome is not unique to Ghana, but the degree to which the “philosophy of *akwaaba*” infiltrates every aspect of interpersonal relations is. Members of the LDS Church will often note that they feel that the friendship and camaraderie of their local congregation often exceeds that of the local community in general. Kofi Ronny Nketia described his experiences within the Church in Ghana and Nigeria:

Here is this feeling that I have whenever I visit another ward which is not mine. And I think it’s even true throughout the Church. Because when I served a mission, I also felt that. And that is the interdependence that exists. And when you enter in the church—into any of the church buildings for the first time—the way they welcome you and make you feel like a part of the family and you’re not alone. For that one, I love it. Whenever I visit any other ward apart from mine that will happen. And trying to introduce themselves to you, trying to get to know you, and it’s great. Because sometimes, seriously, if you visit a ward for the first time, and even though you’re a member, and then you get there and they seem not to know you and no one walks up to you to talk to you, you feel alone. So what I’ve observed concerning members being able to approach to someone who enters the chapel for the first time and say ‘My name is that, or that,’ and then probably sometimes spending some time to greet and then to talk to people after church service, I think is a great thing that I’ve observed.⁶⁶

Openness among members extends beyond the walls of meetinghouses. Boamah explained that members mingle throughout the week and are much more willing to sacrifice their time to help others:

Ghanaians are friendly. For instance, I don’t know you, you don’t know me, but we met, we are friends now, I am laughing. Elsewhere, in the United States, it is not like that because of security and other things. But here, members are free to talk to

⁶⁶ Kofi Ronny Nketia, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 23 May 2014.

members, so I think if other members elsewhere could replicate that it would help a lot. Freely, you can just walk to any members' house, 'hello', without giving that person a call. 'Oh, I was just passing, I wanted to . . .' Then you will be welcome, you sit down, and we have some chat . . . I was telling you, for Family Home Evening and other things, members . . . will come: 'I want to have this thing with you, Brother,' without you knowing. So if elsewhere, someone also can—another Brother or Sister—can walk in, 'Brother, I know it's Monday. My husband is not in; my children have gone to school. They can read and I've also come here to have this with you.'⁶⁷

While dropping in on another family unannounced (especially during Family Home Evening) may be considered impolite in the United States, Ghanaians see it as a duty. It is indicative of the dual familial obligations that Ghanaians espouse as both members of the Church and as citizens of their nation.

The majority of interviewees who broached the subject of hospitality and affability were not referring only to the members of their ward or branch. The notion of *akwaaba* permeates nearly every part of daily life, creating a large national (and even international) community.⁶⁸ Kofi Owusu Ansah said, "The good culture we have here is here. If you see Christians—anybody—here, you see anybody as your brothers. Here, it's good culture. If I know him or I don't know him, yes, I can share everything with you. That's the Ghanaian culture."⁶⁹ As discussed earlier, it is this inclination toward open socialization that has paradoxically created much skepticism about the Church. Despite the prevalence of rumor, however, many interviewees attested to the usefulness of being able to speak to so many people uninhibited. Angela Adjei Boateng said "When we join the Church, we try to bring

⁶⁷ Kwaku Boamah, 18 May 2014.

⁶⁸ One apt example comes from LeBaron's interviews: Banyan Acquate Dadson related a particular period in Nigerian history when civil unrest prompted the United Nations to forcibly return all Ghanaians living in Nigeria back to Ghana. UN officials failed to understand the concept of extended families in Ghana and worried that many of these expatriates had no family to return to. The reality of the situation, however, was that these Ghanaians had plenty of family to return home to, though most of these were not nuclear relatives, interviewed by E. Dale LeBaron, *OHPA*, Box 3, Folder 2, Cape Coast, 18 May 1988.

⁶⁹ Kofi Owusu Ansah, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 17 May 2014.

our siblings and our families so they can join us. That is what we are doing here.”⁷⁰ Even one member who seemed particularly distrustful of rumor-mongers and those who speak ill of the Church admitted that, still, the social nature of the Ashanti’s is a very important part of their culture.⁷¹

Those who named hospitality and friendliness as the paramount characteristics of Ghanaian culture spoke of their experiences. Martha Arkoh described an experience she had when visiting Utah:

Well, those who have joined the Church, and those who are committed, we do whatever we can to bring more souls to this thing. And we are also united. When I went to America, sometimes you will not see things like that. Because some people, even when they think you are black, and you make the contribution, they think you are black, so whatever you say is not good . . . But I think when they listen to us from all over, whether you are black, or whether you are white, or whatever you are, we are all God’s spirit children . . . So we have to hear and listen to everybody’s, this thing, contribution, whatever we do. I think when I went to America—I have been to America three times—but even when [I] attend church, I think what we do: the songs, we sing the same songs; Sunday school, the same procedure; and when you go to Sacrament meeting there’s Relief Society and the rest. But some people looked down upon others and for that I have to say it. So we have to regard everybody as God’s spirit child so that the unity that we have will be OK and then all of us will learn together . . . and realize that Heavenly Father just will be pleased with all of us.⁷²

One recently returned missionary agreed that Ghanaians are very hospitable people, but believed that Nigerians were even friendlier to strangers:

I would say Ghanaians have this hospitality, but when I went to Nigeria, it was shown to me that they were more hospitable. Yeah, they— as in they embrace missionaries immediately into their ward. Even the Primary children come around, try to introduce you to the people in the ward. They tell this person “this is my mom,” and that person. But then I’ve not seen that in Ghana. Yeah, I’ve not seen that in Ghana. Even though . . . we’re all trying—Nigerians and Ghanaians are all trying to do their best—but then, I enjoyed my mission in Nigeria, especially with the

⁷⁰ Angela Adjei Boateng, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

⁷¹ Michael Budu Ainooson, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

⁷² Martha Arkoh, 18 May 2014.

people.⁷³

As one who has spent time in Ghana living among the Ashanti's, I can attest to the hospitality of Ghanaians. I am not suggesting that every single person I met was thrilled to see me any more than I could say every American is an unfriendly hermit. But one must experience the social nuances of this group to truly understand what so many of these interviewees are describing. I have included four additional excerpts from interviewees that I believe are further indicative and elucidative of this social phenomenon.

So if our light shines, Ghanaians, what we like is Ghanaians are friendly. You know the word *akwaaba* is one of our major things that we use. Everybody is welcome. And with the Twi language, everybody is able to speak the Twi language. So we are friends, we are brothers. We see ourselves as friends, and Ghanaians love these things more than even ourselves. So if members this way also inculcate that, I think we're going to go a long way. That's my belief . . . Because you are a white man and I am a black man, but I don't see myself as a black man sitting before you. I see— I don't see you as a white man. I see myself sitting before you as brothers. That's it. So members elsewhere should see members that we are all brothers and sisters working toward one goal at the end of the day.⁷⁴

We have so many cultures in this country . . . You can learn a lot in the way and manner we approach people. In fact, Ghanaians are very, very hospitable. That one is true. When a Ghanaian sees a different person from a different country, even if he doesn't have time, he will have time for you. Even if you're in a hurry. We have that kind of attitude. And I guess when you come to this country you can learn a lot. In fact, there's a lot. I can't share all. But maybe when you go out, you see it and learn from it. It will be good.⁷⁵

Ghanaians are by nature, they are . . . how should I put it? They have that culture of—they love people. Ghanaians love people. And wherever you are, they meet you for the first time, and they love you. They just love you. Apart from the nuclear family, we have extended family. Apart from the nuclear family we have extended family. You and your wife and all the people in your family and all the woman's people become one. They become like one solid family so that if something happens in the man's family, it looks like it's happening in the woman's family. So all the members of the woman's family—her mother, her father, her uncles, her nieces, her nephews—will come and share. If it is death, they will share the sorrow with you,

⁷³ Michael Brobbey, interviewed by author, *KIP*, 23 May 2014.

⁷⁴ Kwaku Boamah, 18 May 2014.

⁷⁵ Daniel Boakye (Buokrom Ward), 18 May 2014.

talk with you, and so on. Yes. I think that is one thing with Ghanaians. We share each other's problems.⁷⁶

Mormons that are living in the rest of the world . . . can learn about our hospitality . . . I think that Mormons also outside of Ghana can be more friendly towards people of other faiths. And they can be more tolerant, too, of people of other faiths. For us in Ghana here . . . people burn us as witches and wizards and all that. But we tend to be able to take it in good faith and then just smile towards them. I think that if everybody—all Mormons—are able to just show some love they will really appreciate them, and then they would come to us that we are not who they think we are.⁷⁷

Despite the fact these interviewees knew their interviews would most likely be heard and



Fig. 3 Youth from the Dichemso Ward, 25 May 2014. Photo by author.

⁷⁶ Adu-Okae, 18 May 2014.

⁷⁷ Isaac Nii Ayi Kwei Martey, 18 May 2014.

read only by members of the Church, many seemed determined to implore their fellow Saints to be yet more understanding and accepting of others. Even though many of these same members attested to the unrelenting persecution Latter-day Saints face in the Ashanti Region, these concluding thoughts underscore the mindset of *akwaaba* and show how such perseverance is necessary to be a stalwart member of the Church in Ghana.

The same but different: embracing cultural differences in a universal theology

In the decades preceding the Church's Official Declaration II, the pioneers who began preaching from the Book of Mormon across southern Ghana created local congregations that they believed resembled the official church congregations found elsewhere in the world. Many local practices, such as drumming and dancing, were incorporated into their repertoire until the Church finally arrived in West Africa and began standardizing church procedures. Today, church proceedings in Ghana are nearly identical to those found in Utah. Outside of formal worship, however, there are still some "grey areas" of local culture over which members disagree.

LeBaron's interviewees identified marriage and chieftaincy rituals as being the most divisive cultural issues, creating the most strain on personal and familial relationships. The formalities of asking for a woman's hand in marriage, referred to as "knocking," and the requisite gifts of money and alcohol, seemed to many members an outdated ceremony that contradicted Church teachings about marriage and the use of alcohol. Members also believed that rituals surrounding the chieftaincy in the Ashanti Region, particularly those that required the pouring of libations (alcohol), challenged LDS doctrine.

By comparing the 1988 interviews with those from 2014, it is evident that there is much less tension between Ashanti culture and the culture of the Church today. Not only did the Kumasi interviewees have less to say when asked about Ashanti culture and its place in the lives of Church members, they also offered far fewer specifics about either “good” or “bad” aspects of local culture. Most interviewees seemed much less preoccupied with concerns about conflicting cultural values and more wary of specific sources of contention, such as those described above (i.e., pastors preaching false information about the LDS Church). What this may suggest is that the LDS Church and its members in Kumasi have, at least to a degree, acculturated themselves into the local Ashanti tradition. Instead of witnessing overt attacks from society at large, they instead seem to originate from private and relatively isolated sources. For example, in the decade following the Declaration, the Church witnessed so many blatant assaults on its credibility that the government chose to shut down its operations from 1989 to 1990. At this point, even members of the government were distrustful of the Church’s aims in Ghana. But since then, the Church has had a comparatively healthy relationship with the Ghanaian government and people, to the point of allowing a temple to be built in Accra on the same road as the nation’s government buildings.

Because the Kumasi interviewees did not share many specific examples of either “good” or “bad” culture, only two particular local practices will be shared here. As described earlier, the Ashanti Region has been home to one of the most revered African kingdoms for centuries, and the tradition of kings, queens, and chiefs continues to this day. The Ashanti’s treasure their rich cultural heritage and are not afraid to distinguish themselves from other Ghanaians. One tension found among LeBaron’s interviewees

centered on the legitimacy of chiefs and whether or not an individual could be both a practicing Mormon and a devoted chief. Some argued that chiefs are required to participate in too many practices that clash with Church teachings, such as pouring libations.⁷⁸

Others believed that one was not obligated to perform rituals that contradicted Church doctrine; the duties associated with being a chief could not force that person to do something that he or she found unacceptable. Being a chief or queen mother is different than practicing “traditional” religion, and many chiefs in Ghana today are observant Christians and Muslims. In fact, several of LeBaron’s interviewees were chiefs and queen mothers and found no reason why their social status should be disregarded because of their faith. Even Emmanuel Kissi and his wife, Benedicta, were a chief and queen mother respectively at the time of their interviews.

Bernard Marfo’s observations of the Church and Ashanti culture were indicative of the overall feelings expressed in the Kumasi interviews:

We, the Ashanti’s, we see our culture. We have got this thing, *Asantehene*, which of recent we have celebrated his fifteenth anniversary. You see? Our culture is we have, we beat drums and other drums. And funerals: when somebody dies, also it’s part of our culture because you’ll be seeing that we the Ashanti’s: clothing black on Saturdays. That’s the funeral celebration; it’s really our culture. Because we will be attending Latter-day Saints one day, you’ll just see me wearing black and black. That means I’m going to a funeral. It’s part of our culture.⁷⁹

According to the interviewees, delighting in one’s rich cultural heritage and the perpetuation of the golden stool⁸⁰ is not something to be discouraged or placed in

⁷⁸ See, for example, Isaac Kobina Ghampson, interviewed by E. Dale LeBaron, *OHPA* Box 3, Folder 17, Cape Coast, 21 May 1988.

⁷⁹ Bernard Marfo, 18 May 2014.

⁸⁰ The golden stool is an emblem of the legitimacy of the *asantehene* and his right to rule over the Ashanti people. Queen mothers and local chiefs are also accorded stools, and even some homes have them. For more on the role of stools in Ashanti culture, see Enid Schildkrout, ed., *The Golden Stool: Studies of the Asante Center and Periphery* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1987); and Emmanuel Akyeampong and

competition with the Church. Observing local traditions, such as the celebration of the anniversary of the enstoolment of the *asantehene* or customary funeral practices, can be likened to the concept of patriotism: showing one's pride in their people and their nation. Ambruce Addoh, whose mother was a queen mother, described some of her duties: "Where I was born, the stool—it's Ashanti tradition—it's in our house. Queen and king. So my mother was a queen . . . They administer the rules and the laws of the town. If something goes wrong, they fall on them so they can arrange things right." Addoh then went on to describe the hierarchical structure of kings, queens, and chiefs, and even likened the process to one found in the Book of Mormon: "Like King Lamoni, the father. You see? They have some sorts of chiefs and their queen, just like that."⁸¹ It would have been hard to imagine one of the interviewees in 1988 making such a comparison.

Several interviewees also declared that Ghanaian clothing is one feature of Ghanaian society that they want to share with the world. Not only is Ghanaian dress attractive, it also fulfills the modesty requirements set by the Church. Richard Samche articulated it this way: "The traditional type of dress, which our women dress, is a very good one for modesty. When they put on their traditional kaba and their slit and wrapper, you see that this is a real ideal woman."⁸² Francis Safoh also cited the modesty of Ghanaian clothing and suggested that such dress would afford ideal scenarios for discussing the Church:

When you dress anyhow, they don't say anything. But here, we have to—especially the youth—all the time try to let them know what to do. They dress modestly, and, you know, not to dress things that will, I mean, attract people outside. You see? And they will always, all the time, you have to—you have to live worthy. You know? And all the time we talk—you have to talk about the Gospel and the bible and this thing,

Pashington Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power and Asante History," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 495.

⁸¹ Ambruce Addoh, 17 May 2014.

⁸² Richard Samche, 17 May 2014.

the Book of Mormon.⁸³

Women in Ghana, despite the unrelenting heat and humidity, wear conservative clothing year-round. Because Ashanti's find great pride in their brightly colored clothing, often made of world famous *kente* cloth, clothing is not just seen as a cover-up, but rather as another opportunity to show off one's culture. On Sundays, one will find the majority of LDS woman proudly sporting dresses and head wraps made of bright yellows, blues, greens, reds, and pinks.

Although the general consensus among those interviewed was that there are not any serious tensions existing between Ashanti culture and LDS culture, it was interesting to note that, for the most part, those who were most vehement about reconciling Church practices with local customs were also those who were most concerned about the existence of a language barrier within the Church in Ghana. While there is no single defining characteristic shared by these individuals that could explain such a consistency, one can make general observations. First, most of these interviewees had been or were currently holding a leadership position in the Church, such as bishopric member, quorum president, or stake high councilor. These positions require a great deal of member monitoring and would naturally involve learning what concerns existed within each ward, branch, or stake. Second, many of these particular interviewees had been members of the Church since the 1980s and 90s. Having that many years of experience in the Church would invariably create an awareness of how the Church is evolving within the Ashanti Region.

If we are to take seriously what these interviewees are suggesting, then it would be wise to reevaluate the role of language in the development of the Church in the Ashanti

⁸³ Francis Safoh, 17 May 2014.

Region. Joseph Kennedy Awuah discussed several aspects of Ashanti culture that he believed might not be important for members in the rest of the world to learn about, such as the role of miracles and rumor. But he did say, “The only thing that we may learn from Ghanaians is Ghanaians love their own language. They love their language—especially the Ashanti’s. The Ashanti’s love their own mother tongues. And at the same time too, we love people, as I already said. You see now? Very good.”⁸⁴ He later agreed that it would be much better if those who do not speak the majority language could be encouraged to sing and participate in church meetings in their preferred tongue. Language, then, is not simply a means of conveying information; it is how one connects with deity and is as much a part of a people’s identity as is the food they eat, the way they worship, and how they socialize.

Conclusion

Ashanti’s are optimistic about the future of the Church in the Ashanti Region. Each interviewee was asked to share a message with those who might read or listen to their interview, especially friends and family members. These messages were often personal testimonies that the bearer hoped would serve as permanent declarations of faith. Moreover, one common characteristic in most of these testimonies was that the interviewee would give specific examples of how their life had benefitted from being a member of the LDS Church. And in nearly every case, these were immediately recalled as if they had been prepared and recited on a number of prior occasions. One such instance comes from Daniel Boakye’s message:

I would like to share something from even King Benjamin when he was giving his sermon. One thing, it has really helped me. Like, when you are in the service of your

⁸⁴ Joseph Kennedy Awuah, 23 May 2014.

fellow beings you are really in the service of your Heavenly Father. And I know that if you do that there are so many blessings attached to it. Personally, it has helped me a lot. Like right now, I am working at the mission home as a security guard . . . That's where I get to get a job. So I know when we are in the service of our fellow beings we are in the service of our Heavenly Father.⁸⁵

As opposed to the broad, general declarations of faith LDS members are accustomed to hearing in their monthly congregational testimony meetings, testimonies such as this one suggest that members of the Ashanti Region are constantly finding ways of “spiritualizing” their experiences, and then attributing them to their religiosity and God. The way members contextualized their faith in God and the LDS Church emphasized the role of memory in conversion and highlighted the importance of relating personal experiences via “general” history. Doing so elucidated personal remembrances and energized public memory.

The enthusiasm and optimism that these Saints share speaks to the strength of LDS congregations in the Ashanti Region. Furthermore, their suggestions for improving the quality of life for LDS members, especially those at linguistic or cultural disadvantages, illustrate a common belief that there is yet a better future for the Latter-day Saints in that corner of the world. The history of the LDS Church in Ghana clearly suggests that the Church has come a long way in gaining acceptance among the Ghanaian population—from being blacklisted by the government in 1989 to having the third largest Mormon population in all of Africa. As this paper has attempted to show by contrasting the statements of LeBaron’s 1988 interviewees with those in 2014, efforts of the LDS Church and its members to ingratiate themselves with the Ghanaian government and syncretize LDS culture with local Ashanti culture have attracted increasingly larger numbers to its meetinghouses across the country. Those interviewed in Kumasi steadfastly believed that

⁸⁵ Daniel Boakye (Daban Branch), interviewed by author, *KIP*, 18 May 2014.

the Church is doing great in the Ashanti Region. Nevertheless, they also admitted that there are aspects of missionary work, worship, and LDS culture that need to be discussed and adjusted to harmonize with local social customs and traditions. As the international LDS community becomes aware of these concerns and considers the impact such variations may have on the global advancement of the Church's ideals, there will not only be a growth in Church attendance, but also a strengthening of international and inter-religious understanding and cooperation.

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