We became... slaves. Well, the missionaries came and said that there will be no more slavery. No more slavery. They fought against the Fulbe. Even against the slavery in the palace [of the lamido]. The missionaries entered and brought out the slaves by force. Their children are now doctors and nurses and all sorts of things. That's why the Dii accepted the missionaries. To be saved from slavery, from oppression. And it is really thanks to you that we are saved.¹

Several voices in the modern historical and anthropological debate on mission and colonisation argue that even if the Christian mission sometimes was separated from the colonial mission as such, mission was still 'colonisation of the African mind'.² The Congolese philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe even argues that in this encounter, to become Christian was the only possible position for the African in order to survive (Mudimbe 1988: 47–48). This chapter thus seeks to shed light on one aspect of the complex history of colonisation, mission, and religious conversion by answering the two following questions: How does the Dii-generation who received the first missionaries, looking back and re-constructing their past, explain their conversion to Christianity? And how do they evaluate the role of the first Norwegian missionaries in this social and religious reorientation?

¹ Interview informant 19, a Dii Muslim, Mbé 15 December 2005. « Nous devenons... ses esclaves. Bon, les missionnaires sont venus dire qu’il n’y a pas d’esclavage. Il n’y a pas d’esclavage. Ils ont fait cette lutte avec les Foulbés. Même les esclaves qu’il a mis dans son palais, les missionnaires arrivent à arracher ces esclaves-là. Les enfants sont maintenant des docteurs, des infirmiers... ils sont là. Voilà pourquoi les Dii acceptaient les missionnaires... pour être sauvés d’esclavage, des menaces. Et c’est vraiment... nous sommes sauvés grâce à vous. » All translations from French to English by the author.

Methodological Considerations

Having worked as a missionary in northern Cameroon for several years my general impression was that critique of the mission on several levels was common among the present day Christians, but not so among the old Dii generation. This impression was confirmed when I, as earlier mentioned, read Muller’s works. He was surprised by the positive historical presentation of Dii relations to the Whites in general, and to the Norwegian missionaries in particular (Muller 1997). In order to map these close relations between the missionaries and the first Dii Christians, I entered into a ‘long conversation’ with some of the pioneer Dii Christians. I also received interesting information through adoption of the feminist ‘study-up’ approach which led me to interview also Muslim informants who had been in contact with the missionaries but had rejected their message. My local geographical and sociolinguistic knowledge made the interviews interesting encounters and raised many questions related to reconstruction of history, construction of identity through self-narration, and my own influence and situatedness.

Having discussed several methodological questions in chapter one, I will here only briefly comment upon the use of oral historical sources. Personal memory, what Jan Vansina calls ‘reminiscence’, is never a random collection of memories, but is “part of an organized whole of memories that tend to project a consistent image of the narrator and, in many cases, a justification of his or her life.” (Vansina 1985: 8). Memories are also selected and interpreted in a social setting where the individual is constantly interacting with significant others. It is therefore to be expected that my Dii Christian informants with time have undergone some kind of common remembrance selection that is both related to society and to each individual’s present view of reality and the world (Vansina 1985: 190). What will be of interest in the following then, is to find out how the first Dii Christians together have constructed a Dii discourse on conversion and missionaries, and what events and elements that have been worth selecting in order to create this narrative. The story that follows is one that I was presented by my

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3 Due to the sensitive information that I collected related to religious conviction and potential ethnic conflicts I have chosen to anonymise my informants. The Christian informants will in the footnotes be numbered from 1 to 15 whereas the Muslim informants will be numbered from 16 to 21. The first time an informant is introduced, the date and the place of the interview will be mentioned.