African History through the lens of Economics

Questions and Answers - Week 6

Tuesday March 8, Main Lecture 6: Colonization I. Introduction. Human Capital and Infrastructure *with Elias Papaioannou and Leonard Wantchekon*

Wednesday March 9, Special Lecture 8: On the Legacy of Christian Missions *with Etienne Le Rossignol, Catherine Guirkinger and Dozie Okoye*

Please visit our course website to access the recorded lectures and slides of each session. Due to the high volume of questions received during the live Q&A, we have prepared this document, which addresses a selection of questions that were not possible to answer during the lecture.

Tuesday 8 March; lectures by Elias and Leonard

Question 1. There is evidence that more colonial settlement corresponds to more development, up to the present today. Does this suggest that some African countries have benefited from colonisation? Are there any positive effects of colonisation which those populations would not have achieved on their own? Is it possible to speculate about the level of development that African societies would have achieved without colonialism?

These are important but challenging questions. Addressing them is problematic because of the difficulty of forming a reasonable 'counterfactual' – it is impossible to know how a given African population, group, region or country would have developed had there been no colonisation. This is an analytical problem: we don't know what the trajectory would have looked like in the alternative scenario. We can try comparing Africa, and African countries and populations, to other places in the world that did not experience European colonisation, but there are few such places. Besides, colonisation was such a big 'event' that it impacted all economies, even those that were not colonised.

Research sometimes compares African countries that experienced imperial rule to countries and regions in other parts of the world, but these comparisons are also problematic. This is because Asian and Latin America countries, regions and groups differ from those of Africa in terms of geography, pre-colonial cultures and institutions, ecology, disease environment and many more respects. Moreover, colonial rule and its main components also differed across the world. This is one reason why it is very hard to know whether something would have happened without colonisation. It is also why we can't meaningfully compare the experiences of African countries and populations with those of Asian countries (such as the group who became known as 'Asian tigers') who went some way towards 'catching up' with the developed countries in the West.

Another reason why these questions are hard to answer is because the colonial experience was a 'bundle' of different components: colonialism affected factors relating to institutions, culture, economic specialisation, human-capital accumulation, religion, health and so on to varying extents, and the impact of these factors varied from place to place and period to period.

The paper by Easterly and Levine (2016) documents a positive correlation between European settlement and contemporary incomes per capita. The authors suggest that this is because the negative effects of colonialism, such as extractive institutions and oppression, were more than offset by the technologies and human capital that Europeans brought with them. Note, however, that this relationship is simply a *correlation* and does not prove that there is a positive *effect* of European colonisation on development.

Moreover, within the continent of Africa, variation in colonial settlement was relatively low compared to, say, a difference across continents (or, for example a difference between the US (very large settlement) and the relatively large settlements in colonial Africa) so this argument is less compelling in explaining variations in development within Africa.

Having said that, we discuss throughout Week 6 (and in subsequent weeks) various 'pros and cons' of, for example, colonial missions, colonial infrastructure investment and other colonial interventions. Research suggests that there are positive effects of some colonial interventions in Africa, but these effects often come with even stronger negative consequences.

In subsequent parts of this Q&A, we address more specific questions that the audience asked regarding the incentives of the colonial powers, missions, their effects (both positive and negative), persistence of those effects, generalisability of some of the findings, and so on. Subsequent weeks will address some of the questions that the audience posed during this week's Q&A, so please stay tuned!

Question 2. Did almost all colonies begin as "extractive" institutions (based on the AJR classification)? What factors affected the extent of such institutions?

In Africa, most countries were indeed viewed by colonial authorities as places from which to extract rents and resources. However, even within this very broad paradigm, there was considerable variation in the extent of violence (think of concession colonies in Belgian Congo as an extreme example), extent of mineral extraction, and extent of trade in crops, etc. (See the 'macro regions' classification developed by Samir Amin and others, outlined by Elias in the lecture.)

Direct vs. indirect rule also introduced significant variations in the extent to which institutions were extractive, and in the strength and persistence of colonial interventions. In India, Iyer (2010) documents that indirectly governed regions outperform those governed directly, partly due to better institutions and public-goods provision. Suggestive evidence from Bertocchi and Canova (2002) points towards former British colonies (mostly governed indirectly) being less volatile than former French colonies (mostly governed directly). Finally, recent research by Carl Muller-Crepon (2021) documents two important effects. First, indirect rule strengthened the capacity of local governments, which led to better institutions and public-goods provision: tax revenues from cash crops in indirectly ruled areas were more efficiently spent compared to directly ruled areas. Moreover, in countries under former British rule, there is a stronger correlation between pre-colonial political centralisation and contemporary prestige of traditional institutions and leaders.

Question 3. How can we be confident that any positive effects attributed to colonial education were not actually caused by selective access to education based on privileged position or some other political factor? What is the role of 'selection' in terms of where colonial powers invested and who had access to education? How does this affect the way we interpret the consequences of colonialism?

This is a great question. The main argument is that those who had access to education were relatively randomly chosen from the population. Leonard and coauthors provide statistical evidence consistent with this. For their argument and the evidence, see this paper.

The findings of Jedwab et al. (2019), however, show that there were strong selection patterns of where missions would go. They favoured healthier and more developed areas, with less resistance from locals (both military and religious). After taking these patterns into account, the authors report less favourable findings regarding the impact of missions on African development.

Question 4. Can we make the discussion more Afro-centric? We know the role of European powers during colonisation, but what about the role of indigenous Africans? What role did they play in funding and demanding education, and in other areas?

African people were (and are) at the centre of African development prospects, both historically and today. Key factors that affected events during the colonial period included local development and resistance to colonisation. This mattered greatly in terms of the overall mode of colonisation and the extent to which colonisers settled in particular areas; see Acemoglu et al. (2002). However, Huillery (2011) demonstrated that, in French-speaking colonial Africa, colonists tended to settle in more prosperous areas. Moreover, as Huillery (2011) shows, hostility of the African population towards the colonial powers reduced settlements and colonial investments.

Professor Richard Reid has a recent paper on this subject that discusses in more general terms various ways in which the research on the 'Scramble for Africa' and the early colonisation period can be made more Africa-centred. This sees the process of partitioning the continent "as part of an ongoing, endogenously shaped but often exogenously connected, transformation in political, economic, and social organisation and behavior" (Reid 2021).

Another paper by Huillery (2009) documents that local demand for education by African people was very important in driving subsequent development and persistence effects. Once initial investments were made by colonial missions, local demand ensured that these places got more education later on as well. Missionary schools were also often run on the initiative of Africans. Demand for education and striving for independence were also important in movements for empowerment and decolonisation.

Overall, research on African economic history and development remains insufficiently Afro-centred. One of the goals of this course is to address this issue and to understand where to put more effort; to guage from the audience where additional research is needed and which perspectives may be missing.

Question 5. What are the differences across religions (Christianity vs Islam) and across denominations in terms of how colonial religious institutions were met? What are the differences in how they affected development?

Regarding the differences between Protestant and Catholic denominations, arguably the main one was the gender-based difference in education provision. As emphasised in Nunn (2014), Protestant missions were much more favourable for female education than Catholic missions. This stemmed from the overall greater importance placed on female education by the Protestant church relative to the Catholic church. Similar evidence on the difference between Protestant and Catholic missions was reported in the lecture by Catherine Guirkinger on Wednesday: Catholic missions pursued pro-natalist policies and increased fertility in exposed populations.

Dozie's paper documents that social disruption was caused by conflict between 'old' and 'new' rules and authorities. Traditional elites were losing control over their subjects due to the introduction of alternative worldviews, etc., by the Christian missions. This led to lower trust and more social disorder and imprisonments, etc., as per Dozie's paper (more on this and related research below).

As Jedwab et al. (2019) show, Muslim centres were avoided by Christian missions: distance to Muslim centres is positively correlated with Christian missionary presence (the further away from Muslim centres, the more Christian missionary activity). Similar results are reported in the recent paper by Bauer et al. (2022), who found that missionaries were less active in areas with Islamic rule. The authors show that this has implications for development: investments by colonial governments and missionaries were lower in such areas, which lowered development prospects. Comparing pre-colonial kingdoms ruled by Islamic rulers to those places with traditional or no religion (or even stateless places), the authors find that the former are less developed today, having less light density, less education and higher infant mortality.

Wednesday 9 March; lectures by Etienne, Catherine and Dozie

Question 1. European motivations in missionary activities and colonial education

Where did the Christian missionaries get their funding? Were European missionaries working in Africa really concerned with making Africans 'true Christians', or did they have other goals? Was there any commonality of objectives between colonisers and missionaries? Were missions simply agents of colonial administration?

Initially, missionaries were funded by donations in Europe (church collections) and by congregations. Eventually, some missions became self-sufficient (i.e., they had farms producing their food, etc.). Protestant missions also received money from private donors and from origin countries, as well as from land grants from the state. Catholic missions received direct financial support from the colonial state. It's important to note that some of the missions were founded by wealthy African chiefs themselves. (This was the case in the port cities of Bonny and Lagos in Nigeria.)

The goals of missionaries were plural: on the one hand, to spread the gospel and to help end the slave trades (White Fathers in East Africa, for example), etc. On the other hand, as we heard in the lecture by Catherine Guirkinger, missions often reflected colonial ideas and goals (pro-natalism being one such example).

Historians also record that missions often worked with the colonial state to 'control' and pacify local populations (there is even evidence of violence by some of the Catholic congregations in colonial Africa).

It is important to note, however, that missionary work began in West Africa centuries before colonialism (including, for example, Jesuit priests in Sierra Leone in the 1600s). So, missions certainly acted with a degree of independence from the metropoles.

As noted in the lecture on Tuesday, March 8, by Leonard, and studied in more detail in Ogunyemi (2015), southern Nigeria had a relatively well-developed system of secondary education, almost entirely based on missionary schools, with limited support from the colonial state; some degree of the independence and positive goals of missions and educators is also observed here .

In some cases, especially in Francophone and Lusophone Africa, missions and the colonial administration largely worked together and in other cases they did not. It should be noted that a majority (80% or more) of missionaries in places such as Nigeria and Ghana were Africans. To investigate these issues further, please see the following:

Barnes, A. E. (1995). *Evangelization where it is not wanted: Colonial administrators and missionaries in Northern Nigeria during the first third of the twentieth century. Journal of Religion in Africa*, 412-441.

Fields, K. E. (1982). *Christian Missionaries as Anticolonial Militants. Theory and Society*, *11*(1), 95-108.

Question 2. The education curriculum of missions and colonial education

Did the missions and the colonial administrations collaborate in developing the education curriculum? Who decided not to focus on secondary/tertiary education – the colonial masters or the missionaries?

There was not a lot of collaboration until after the Clifford report on British Africa (1924-1925). Primary education came under some regulation at that point and the government provided grants to mission schools that met certain standards. Most mission schools did not meet the standards required for these grants. This varies by country, of course.

Missions did establish secondary schools, but these were mainly in wealthy areas where locals could finance such schools. Secondary schools did not have value for the mission as a tool for evangelisation compared to elementary schools, so they only existed where the local population could finance them.

The colonial administration also did not show much interest in secondary/tertiary education. Reasons varied; for a full discussion see the following:

Ajayi, J. F. (1996). *The African Experience with Higher Education*. Ohio University Press, Scott Quadrangle, Athens, OH 45701.

Special Section on BLM: Education for Control and Liberation in Africa and Among the Black Diaspora

Speaking of the consequences, what are the effects of the colonial curriculum on occupation structure? Did colonial powers restrict or shape the curriculum in a certain way? Did this have a lasting impact on the occupational structure or the undersupply of certain professions?

Yes, there were restrictions on the curriculum, with attendant consequences in terms of the types of work Africans could access. The sources above discuss this; see also the following:

Ball, S. J. (1983). *Imperialism, social control and the colonial curriculum in Africa. Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *15*(3), 237-263.

Ball, S. J. (2005). *Education policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. Routledge.

Question 3. Definitions and measurements

How is the 'importance of religion' measured in Africa and elsewhere? What is 'moralising god'? Can this concept be biased from the 'Western perspective'? What sources and measurements do we have to investigate these issues?

The 'importance of religion' is usually gauged by self-reported measures, such as in the Gallup World Poll used in Etienne's paper. Another way of measuring religiosity and religious participation in Africa is via the Afrobarometer, which has a set of questions on religiosity, participation in religious groups, and trust in traditional and religious leaders, etc.

The Murdock map and Ethnographic Atlas of pre-colonial and early colonial norms and religious beliefs is another source that includes the 'moralising gods' measure (Murdock 1959; *Africa: Its peoples and their culture history*). ('Moralising god' is when people believe in a supernatural being that is believed to have created all reality and who is the 'ultimate governor'.) Since the author was American, with limited professional experience in Africa, it's reasonable to think that this data may be biased; the issue, however, is whether there is a better source out there.

Pew Religion Surveys Religion – Research and Data from the Pew Research Center is another source of cross-country data on religious beliefs and actions.

There are other sources, such as The Association of Religion Data Archives | Quality Data on Religion (thearda.com), that have data on congregations, adherents to various religions across the world, and many other interesting data.

Question 4. Persistence of colonial education and its mechanisms

How strong is persistence of education and fertility behaviour, etc.? Through which transmission channels (other than supply of schools) might the effect of missions on education have persisted until today? For example, might it also be the case that the effect of the missions on women and African society is directly or indirectly responsible for contemporary attitudes of Africans towards pro-choice policies and birthrates?

Several recent papers by Stelios, Elias and co-authors on intergenerational mobility in Africa investigate these issues (see geoim_africa_final_revision.pdf - Google Drive for measuring and discussing factors behind the variation in intergenerational mobility in education. (The follow-up paper, IM_relig_final.pdf - Google Drive, focuses on the role of religion and how it interacts with intergenerational persistence and mobility.)

Regarding the mechanisms, it could be that the effect of missions on education is through the cultural channel (preference for education), alongside the 'supply of schools' channel. However, the supply of

schools by missions, and the lack of supply by the state, seem very important. In particular, Okoye and Pongou (2021) have a working paper that discusses issues of persistence. One key finding is that, in places where governments themselves built schools, the effects of missionary presence on education and other outcomes are much smaller. This implies that the supply of schools was important. The following also discusses some of the effects of missions on sexual behavior:

Cagé, J., Rueda, V., Greenwood, J., Kircher, P., Santos, C., & Tertilt, M. *Saving souls, hurting bodies: Missions, health investments, and HIV prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa*.

There is evidence on the importance of direct vs. indirect rule for how persistent the effects of missions are. The explanation is that, under direct rule, the state was more involved in cultural change, even in areas without missions. The French, for example, used a policy of assimilation and missionaries might have assisted in this; hence the effect of missions may be muted. For more on this topic, see:

Lewis, M. D. (1962). *One hundred million Frenchmen: the "assimilation" theory in French colonial policy*. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *4*(2), 129-153.

Under indirect rule, in contrast, the state was much less involved and the main drivers of social change were missionaries. This is why we see the effect of missions being more pronounced and persistent under indirect rule. In addition to the paper by Okoye (2021), we recommend the following:

Crowder, M. (1964). *Indirect rule – French and British style*. *Africa*, *34*(3), 197-205.

Question 5. The pros and cons of missions for Africa in general

Sometimes it seems that the lecturers focus on the positive impacts of missions and colonial education. What were the main downsides? It's hard to credit colonial education for positive outcomes, given that such education was often motivated by the profit incentive and self-interest in exploiting people in Africa.

On the 'positive' side of missionary activities and colonial education, see the following:

- Increased social mobility: Wantchekon et al. (2015).
- Contemporary education: Wantchekon et al. (2015) and Huillery (2009).
- Empowerment, aspirations, and subsequent demand for education: Huillery (2009) and Wantchekon (2019)
- Lower fertility and more equal gender roles (in some cases; mostly Protestant missions): Guirkinger and Villar (2022).
- More 'universal' social norms and morality; trust in strangers, lower in-group bias, etc: Bergeron (2020).

On the negative side:

- Increase in fertility, especially for Catholic missions: Guirkinger and Villar (2022).
- Effects of direct pro-natalist colonial interventions and how market forces may have counterbalanced such policies: Canning, Mabeu and Pongou (2022).
- Inequality (which persists until today, including inequality in political representation (see the research on birthplace regions of politicians and how these are linked to colonial education provision): Ricart-Huguet (2021).
- Lower trust in traditional leaders and overall: Okoye (2021).
- Anti-gay attitudes: Ananyev and Poyker (2021).

It is important to emphasise that, while missions may have built stronger inter-ethnic trust (as shown in Bergeron (2020)), they may also have engendered antagonism towards other, non-Christian religions,

which may spur conflict. This is in line with the findings of Okoye (2021), who shows that traditional beliefs and authorities were in conflict with new Christian norms. This is important as it adds dimensionality to the discussion of identity and conflict: while missions may have lessened one type of out-group bias (based on ethnicity), they may have increased another dimension of out-group bias.

There are additional areas where missionary activities contributed a lot, such as the fight over polygamy. As discussed in much detail in Becker (2022), Christian missions insisted on monogamy; hence in places with higher prevalence of polygamy, education enrolment remained lower (up until today). However, missions also affected the social norm of polygamy itself, which also created social conflict. The paper by James Fenske (2015) analyses the effects of historical colonial education on contemporary norms of polygamy and finds a negative effect (decrease in polygamy in areas with a higher exposure to colonial missionary education). Contemporary education, however, shows no effect on social norms of polygamy.

Question 6. The generalisability of findings from specific countries/populations to other places and contexts

Is there any evidence on the influence of missions outside Africa? How different are the effects of Catholic vs. Protestant missions in Africa compared to global outcomes in Western European countries and elsewhere?

Some of the findings we discussed might be generalisable, but others might be less so. For example, Bergeron (2020) might not be generalisable to parts of West Africa where Islam was already present or had some influence. The actions of Catholic missions varied, depending on whether they were competing with Protestants or officially backed by the state. There are important heterogeneities in terms of persistence strength that are also discussed in the papers by Stelios, Elias and co-authors here geoim_africa_final_revision.pdf - Google Drive and here IM_relig_final.pdf - Google Drive. Overall, more work needs to be done on heterogeneity.

Certain findings are more stable. For example, the differences between the impact of Catholic and Protestant missions resonate with other findings in Africa (see, for example, the work of Nathan Nunn).

There is evidence from Western Europe suggesting that Protestant reforms contributed to a decrease in the gender gap in education, thereby promoting some forms of women emancipation; see Becker and Woessmann (2008).

The paper by Felipe Valencia Caicedo (2021), *The Mission: Human Capital Transmission, Economic Persistence, and Culture in South America* (repec.org), is one of the most credible to explore this issue, in the context of Latin America. The author shows that Jesuit missions founded as far back as the early 17th century in modern-day Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay increased educational attainment, and this effect persists today, more than 250 years after the expulsion of the Jesuit order.

There is also research on Protestant missions in China; see Chen, et al. *The long-term effects of Protestant activities in China*. Also available here.

For Mexico, see: Waldinger, M. (2017). *The long-run effects of missionary orders in Mexico*. *Journal of Development Economics*, 127, 355-378. Also available here.

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