

MISSIONARIES AS IMPERIALISTS: DECOLONIAL SUBALTERNITY IN THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE ON THE COAST OF CAMEROON 1841-1914

Roland Ndille, D.Litt. et Phil (UNISA-Pretoria)

Faculty of Arts University of Buea, Cameroon

ABSTRACT: *The coming of early missionaries to the global south in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and their activities have received a two sided analysis. While a school of thought holds that the missionaries were motivated by a spiritual revival and response to the call to 'go ye therefore, and teach all nations... unto the ends of the earth... what I have commanded you'¹, Decolonial and subaltern studies hold the very strong opinion that missionaries, played an ambiguous role in preparing the grounds for European occupation and the entrenchment of coloniality. Within this civilizer-colonizer debate, I argue in this paper that there is a significant amount of historical evidence to justify that missionaries served as forerunners of colonialism and have used missionary correspondences, data on their interaction with the indigenous communities as well as critical secondary literature to present the Cameroon experience.*

KEYWORDS: Decolonial, Subaltern, *Early European Missionaries, imperialism*

INTRODUCTION

By the close of the 18th century, there was a general consensus amongst Western Europeans that they should consider sending missionaries to the rest of the world. It is now being argued that this consideration was had diverse purposes. On the one hand is the humanitarian selfless purpose such as expressed by Reverend David Bogues, a Scottish Baptist Minister who in September 1794 appealed to his brethren that

Ye were once Pagans, living in cruel and abominable idolatry. The servants of Jesus came from other lands, and preached His Gospel among you. Hence your knowledge of salvation. And ought ye not, as an equitable compensation for their kindness, to send messengers to the nations which are in like condition with yourselves of old, to entreat them that they turn from their dumb idol to the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven? Verily their debtors ye are.²

This purpose, is said to be hemmed in what Rudyard Kipling called 'the White man's burden' which meant that the West had to send 'best they have bread' to Africa '... wait in heavy harness... for the new caught sullen people... who are half devil and half child.'³ It was driven by a strong desire to genuinely serve humanity and bring about material and social changes which would improve the quality of life of those in the global south. Such calls, may have been possessed of a moral self-righteousness which led Missionaries and their sponsors to not only

¹ The Holy Bible, Mathew Chapter 28:20

² David Bogues, 'The Evangelical Magazine, Edition of September 4, 1794, cited in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Missionary_Society, note 6, accessed 4 April 2018, 10am

³ Rudyard Kipling, 'The White man's burden' in Eliot T.S. (ed.) 1962, *A choice of Kipling verse*, New York: Anchor, 1962, p.143

engage in spreading the Christian gospel but also in local agriculture, construction and rudimentary technology. These, being relevant to the improvement of indigenous community life and independent of larger cultural issues, found a small measure of acceptance in African societies.

The second position; one of binary opposites, holds that, behind this notion of the humanitarian civilizing mission, hid a much more intrinsic European agenda to use missionaries to ‘impose an alien morality and work ethos upon the local people’ and to undermine their most basic political, economic social and cultural tenets; a preponderant agenda geared towards preparing the ground for an effective European occupation.⁴ This position has long found expression in the popular phrase ‘Livingstone and his children had long laid aside the Bible and taken up the axe’ as depicted in his statue in London. This is the position that I seek to expound in this paper; a position which Mazisi Kunene has captured in his poem *Europe emphasizing that*

... Once, I saw you rushing with books from which the oracles derive their prophecies... But *now* I know the hardness of your visions: You closed the doors and chose the bridegroom of steel (the gun)... You chose her not to love but because she alone remained dedicated to silence... and from her you made your prophesies... burning others in their sleep⁵

Decolonial Subalternity as an interpretive Perspective

Decolonial Subalternity as an interpretive perspective, presents history especially the north-south contact in ways that respect and integrate the qualitative sensibilities of subaltern voices in knowledge production.⁶ As Santos has argued, such a sensitivity could be an important corrective to the presentism and eurocentrism of most available analysis; which are always characterised by a propensity to overstate the singularity of the civilizing and humanitarian mission.⁷ In Darder’s words;

The sensitivity from which decolonizing interpretive research emerges must be understood as both highly resistant to the absolute universalizing epistemological language- a language of empirical inquiry that has been predominantly anchored in fixed western epistemologies of patriarchal dominance.⁸

Because the universalized western epistemologies have subordinated subaltern voices, it has become a responsibility of the global south to seek to advance an alternative, evolving an itinerant- epistemologically fluid and flexible means of knowing the world that deterritorializes and destabilizes the fixity of knowledge⁹ characteristic of the modernist enterprise. This is what Hooks¹⁰ has termed ‘an authority of lived experiences’ or what Enrique Dussel calls ‘an ethics

⁴ South African History Online on 22-Mar-2011 available at <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/european-missionaries-southern-africa-role-missionaries> accessed 18/April 2018, 4:50am

⁵ Mazisi Kunene, ‘Europe’ in Wole Soyinka (ed), *Poems of Black Africa*. Edinburgh: Heinemann, 1975, p.20

⁶ Antonia Darder, "Decolonizing interpretive research: subaltern sensibilities and the politics of voice", *Qualitative Research Journal*, 2018, p.1 available at <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-17-00056> accessed 23/02/2018 at 08:21am

⁷ Boaventura de Souza Santos, *Another World is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, Verso, London, 2007, p. 71.

⁸ Darder, ‘Decolonizing Interpretive Research, 2018, p.3

⁹ Paraskeva, J. *Conflicts in Curriculum Theory*, Palgrave, New York, NY. 2011, p.3

¹⁰ Hooks, B, *Teaching to Transgress*, Routledge, New York, NY.1994, p.8

of liberation with a re-thinking of the totality of moral problems from the point of view and the demand of 'responsibility to the oppressed.'¹¹

Contextually, the Decolonial interpretive perspective with which the paper is uncompromisingly committed aims therefore at establishing within the general Cameroon historiography, a counter hegemonic intellectual space in which a new reading of missionary activity can unfold. Many subaltern researchers elsewhere have already drawn from the transgressive traditions of postcolonial theorists to forge inroads into the contentious terrain¹² but this has yet to be the case with the local Cameroon historiographer especially of the English expression; a site which is still heavily dominated by Eurocentric narratives of missionaries as humanitarian civilizers.

The Imperialistic role of Early European Missionaries in Cameroon

As early as 1471, there had been a permanent European presence on the coast of Cameroon. This is because the interior of Cameroon was rich in raw materials and slaves.¹³ The various European traders signed trade deals with Cameroon coastal chiefs who acted as middlemen between Europeans and those living in the hinterlands.¹⁴ These agreements barred the Europeans from penetrating the interior, giving the coastal chiefs the prerogative of trade therein.¹⁵ In one of such treaties, the Dualas; a most prominent coastal ethnic group in Cameroon had declared that;

Our wishes [is] that white men should not go up the river and trade with the Bushmen, nothing to do with our markets, they must stay here in this river and they give us trust so that we will trade with our Bushmen.¹⁶

The concept of middleman monopoly exerted by the coastal people of West Africa and especially their chiefs had been recognized and respected by European traders during the few hundred years of trade with the people of Africa leading to the scramble. This was also exacerbated by the fear of the unknown if one had to abrogate such agreements and by-pass the coastal middlemen; a fear which had pushed the British colonial office to see Africa then as 'a third-rate adjunct of the British economy, which might be worth the exertion of coastal influence, but did not justify the effort of penetration and administration inland.'¹⁷

However, new developments such as the industrial revolution made European penetration into the interior an urgent necessity.¹⁸ But this could not be achieved with the middleman monopoly of the coastal chiefs in place. The British Colonial Office actually confessed that 'with regards

¹¹ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, Duke University Press Books, Durham, NC. 2013, p142

¹² Darder, 2018, p.2

¹³ Victor Julius Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-1985: A Hundred Years of History*. Limbe: Navi-Group, 1987, p.3

¹⁴ A.C., Tamanji, "Three Instances of Western Colonial Governments and Christian Missions in Cameroon Education: 1884-1961", PhD Thesis, Loyola University, Chicago, 2011, p.28

¹⁵ K.B.C., Onwobiko, *School certificate History*, 1985, p.288

¹⁶ Edwin Ardener, *Eyewitnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon 1883-1884*. Buea: Government Press, 1968, p.57, end note 56

¹⁷ Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of imperialism in the Dark Continent*. New York: St Martin's Press. 1961, p.163

¹⁸ V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-1885*, p.19

to going beyond the coastal towns, it was a troublesome duty to manage our relations with the Oil Rivers and Cameroons Kings.’¹⁹

Wherever they landed on the coast of Africa, Europeans had to find a way out of this impasse because the sustenance of the industrial revolution in Europe depended largely on the acquisition of raw materials and the sale of European goods in the interior of Africa. The missionary enterprise therefore held the key to European penetration into the interior. The letter that King Leopold II wrote to Belgian missionaries but which was also widely circulated made clear that purpose. He instructed;

Reverends, Fathers and Dear Compatriots: The task that is given to you to fulfil is very delicate and requires much tact. You will go certainly to evangelize, but your evangelization must inspire above all *our European* interests. Your principal objective in our mission in *Africa* is never to teach the niggers to know God, this they know already.... Have courage to admit it; Your essential role is to facilitate the task of administrators and industrials, which means you will go to interpret the gospel in the way it will be the best to protect your interests in that part of the world.²⁰

According to Chiedoze Okoro, ‘all missionaries without exception carried out that mandate for their nations.... We are only lucky to have found King Leopold’s articulation of the aim of all Christian imperialist missionaries to Africa.’²¹ It goes without saying that most European home governments saw that Christian Missions ‘through their teachings, would create social conditions favourable for the pacification of Africa and promote European commercial and colonial interests.’²² This is what Joseph Nye has termed soft power. According to him the European missionary teachings possessed the quality of reconciling African people, to requirements of submission to European overlordship. Missionaries were instructed to;

Keep watch on disinteresting our savages from the richness that is plenty [in their underground. To avoid that, they get interested in it, and make you murderous] competition and dream one day to overthrow you. You have to detach from them and make them disrespect everything which gives courage to affront us. Convert always the blacks by using the whip. Institute a confessional system, which allows you to be good detectives denouncing any black that has a different consciousness contrary to that of the decision-maker.²³

The idea was that, by the use of less aggressive language, their generally peaceful, humble and friendly disposition and the messages they preached were able to solicit and obtain the cooperation of Africans in sub-Saharan Africa more readily. As Hetherington puts it,

¹⁹ Ibid, p.19

²⁰ Luiz Arnaut, ‘Letter from King Leopold II of Belgium to colonial Missionaries, 1883. Textos e documentos, Department of History, Universitat Federal Minas Gerais, available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200510060035.html> accessed 17/04/2018 at 630am. This letter was made available to Luiz Arnaut courtesy of Dr. Vera Nobles and Dr. Chiedoze Okoro. The letter which shows the real intention of the Christian missionary journey in Africa was exposed to the world by Mr. Moukouani Muikwani Bukoko, born in the Congo in 1915, and who in 1935 while working in the Congo, bought a second hand Bible from a Belgian priest who forgot the speech in the Bible.

²¹ ibid

²² K.B.C., Onwobiko, *School certificate History*, 1985, p.289

²³ Luiz Arnaut, p.2

In the 18th century, it was central to enlightenment thought that the conversion of African coastal chiefs would function, like Constantine to the Romans, in converting their people en masse. Such a rapid spread of Christianity would not only give Europeans access to the African hinterland but would make the society a fertile ground for the consumption of European goods and ideas.²⁴

It is under such conditions that Reverend John Clarke (1802-1879), from Jamaica, and his friend Dr G.K Prince, a medical practitioner arrived Cameroon as missionaries of the London Baptist Missionary Society.²⁵ Their highly publicised motive demonstrated a determination to respond to the appeal of rescuing the heathens of West Africa from bondage. The Baptist Mission Society Committee propaganda solemnly declared that

In compliance... and following what we apprehend to be the clear indications of providence, we determine, in reliance on the Divine Helping, to commence a mission to Western Africa.²⁶

From Jamaica, the two missionary explorers sailed through England (the headquarters of their church) to obtain the last coaching and blessings. In England their mission was refined by the official British government position similar to that of the Belgians of 'searching for scientific and economic goals and opening up more lands in Africa for Britain.'²⁷ According to Maboyi, it was the custom of the British government that each expedition was required to have on board at least a missionary chaplain whose objective was to use the soft power at their disposal to make their penetration into the African interior easier.²⁸

With the official British position in mind, Clarke and Prince were dispatched from England aboard a trading vessel called *the Golden Spring* belonging to the Royal West Africa Company in October, 1840, to join the Niger Expedition on arrival in Nigeria.²⁹ Unfortunately, the ship-owner cancelled the arrangement of going up the Niger River.³⁰ They landed off the coast of Cameroon on the Island of Fernando Po in January, 1841. Fernando Po already had a heavy British presence; being the hub of British trading activities on the Gulf of Guinea. It was said that the island held 'the key to the embouchure of the Niger and the command of the entire coast of the Gulf, with tributary rivers, the Calabar and the Cameroons.'³¹

For over a year, Clarke and Prince evangelized on the island and on the coast of Cameroon. Most of the chiefs they met in Cameroon regarded this initial contact as harmless.³² As events came to prove, they were wrong. In fact by the time they were living, king Williams of Bimbia had noticed that they were beginning to drift from their original evangelical purpose. On one

²⁴ N., Hetherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa 1815-1854*, London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001, p.8

²⁵ Baptist Mission Society Committee Minutes of June 3, 1840, cited in S.N., Gwei, 'Education in Cameroon: Western Pre-colonial and Colonial Antecedents and the Development of Higher Education' Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1975, p.18

²⁶ Baptist Mission Society Committee Minutes, June 3, 1840, cited in Gwei, 1975, p.18

²⁷ V.J., Ngoh, 1987, p.8

²⁸ Aaron Maboyi, 'The role of religion in Colonialism.' In *The Chronicle* April 18 2015, available online on www.chronicle.co.zw. Accessed 12/04/2018 at 6am.

²⁹ Gwei, 1975, p.19

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ E.B., Underhill, *Saker, Missionary to Africa: A Biography*. London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1958, p.40

³² P., Gifford, 'The Vanguard of Colonialism: Missionaries and the Frontier in Southern Africa in the Nineteenth Century, n.d. p.167

of their encounters he actually warned them not to get involved with his women and businesses.³³ The missionaries had reported that the king told them that 'he and his people had had enough of God's palaver.'³⁴

After Clarke and Prince's departure in February 1842, a second band of LBMS missionaries from Jamaica and England, motivated by their testimonies, landed on the island on February 16, 1844. Among them were Alexander Fuller, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Merrick, Mr and Mrs. Thomas Sturgeon, Alfred Saker and Miss Steward, a school teacher.³⁵ The missionaries worked in Fernando Po and continued to regularly visit the coastal towns of Cameroon until 1858, when they were chased out of the Island. With the complicity of Spanish Jesuit Priests, the Consul General, Don Carlos Chacon banned all other forms of worship on the island except Catholicism.³⁶

It is believed however that, the Spaniards who claimed ownership of the island felt economically and politically threatened by the heavy British presence there. According to Gwei, it was in consequence of the increase of trade in the Gulf of Guinea and the opening up by exploration of the Niger and the Cameroons rivers to Europeans that Fernando Po's strategic location gave the island a new commercial importance and thus revived the interest of its Spanish proprietors.³⁷

In 1845, the then Spanish Consul-General, Adolph Guillenard de Aragon arrived the island with a military force and some Jesuit Priests and ordered the Baptist Missionaries to leave the Island. Missionaries again were to play the imperialistic role of European governments. The reason given to the missionaries was that Spain had decided, after a long period of neglect, to build up her colonies, particularly Fernando Po. In accordance therefore with Article II of the Spanish constitution of January 1, 1845, she would no longer tolerate, either in Spain or in dependent territories, any other religion except the catholic Apostolic Roman.³⁸ He then showed them his instructions ordering them the expulsion of all Baptist missionaries from the island with all possible speed.³⁹

According to Maboyi, the scramble for Africa and in Africa was exacerbated by missionary rivalry. He argues particularly that the competition between catholic and protestant and between various orders and sects both catholic and Protestants prepared the groundwork for the missionaries to request their home governments to seek to occupy the territories in which they operated.⁴⁰

³³ V.J.Ngoh, 1987, p.8

³⁴ Lovert Elango, 'Britain and Bimbia in the Nineteenth Century, 1833-1878: A study in Anglo-Bimbian Trade and Diplomatic Relations' PhD Thesis, Boston University, 1974. , p.179

³⁵ Cameroon Baptist Convention, Education Week Manual for Baptist Schools, 2001, p.3

³⁶ V.J. Ngoh, 1987, p.10

³⁷ Gwei, 1975, p.22

³⁸ Gwei, 1975

³⁹ ibid

⁴⁰ A., Maboyi, 2015, p2

Figure 2.1 The Cameroon Estuary showing Early Missionary Posts

Source: Adapted from Fanso, V.G 1989:9

In the face of the catholic-Baptist misunderstandings in Fernando Po, the Baptist Missionaries moved permanently to the Cameroons coast on a piece of land they acquired from King Williams of Bimbia.⁴¹ With the experience in Fernando Po, Saker the lead missionary was determined to establish a permanent settlement for his brethren. He made the King to sign a land lease agreement similar to an annexation treaty. Part of it read thus;

William, Chief and the known king of Isubu...and Islands belonging thereto... declare that I, this day, make over and give unto Alfred Saker... all my right and title to the sovereignty and possession of the district herein specified... a coastline beginning at War Bay... continuing and embracing Foo Bay and thence onward to the high lands beyond the Islands of Bobia... onward N.E to join another line N.E... The territory together with all that appertains thereto... I do make over and give unto Alfred Saker... and assigns for ever for the consideration herewith annexed.⁴²

The cession of the extensive piece of land which the agreement carefully delimited in modern scientific geographical terms of cardinal points, longitudes and latitudes which the Isubu King was certainly not in a position to comprehend, is eloquent testimony of missionaries' imperialistic responsibilities. Sanneh holds that, much of the standard Western scholarship on Christian Missions proceeds by 'looking at the motives of individual missionaries.'⁴³ When this is done in view of the activities of Alfred Saker in Cameroon, one cannot help but 'conclude by faulting the entire LBMS missionary enterprise.'⁴⁴ King Williams did not understand that Alfred Saker the head missionary was using the missionary agenda to build an economic

⁴¹ Ibid. p.11

⁴² S.G. Ardener, *Eyewitnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon*, 1968, p.53

⁴³ L., Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 1990, p.88

⁴⁴ L. Sanneh, 'Christian Missions and the Western Guilt complex. *The Christian Century foundation*, p331-334 accessed 20 February 2014, 11:40am

protectorate for Britain. Immediately the deal was stroke, he wrote in his report to the BMS Committee that,

‘...there is no idea of remaining in Fernando Po. There are long endured oppressions; there are regular threats of banishment and most of all, there is a general decay of all business. Thank God, Cameroon is ours.’⁴⁵

Whatever saker meant by ‘business is bad’ but ‘Cameroon is ours’ was expressed in the purpose for which he acquired the piece of land from king Williams of Bimbia. He had explained the acquisition of the piece of land which he named Victoria as follows;

It is a home for our people, where a trade *will* be created and to which commerce *will* be drawn.... I search for a landing only... Here, if her majesty’s government sanctions and sustains our efforts, *will* be put coal stores, provision stores, building-yards, and every other essential for commerce. Here, too, a highway *will* be made into the interior, *so that* the native produce *can* be shipped in smooth water for Europe. It will be a religious, enlightened colony....⁴⁶

The totality of Saker’s report to the Baptist Mission Committee (BMC) back home highlighted greatly the trade and business opportunities that the coast of Cameroon could provide for the British. By declaring that Cameroon is ours, and that there are possibilities of penetrating into the interior, Saker was making a clarion call for British investors to consider coming to Cameroon. Very little was mentioned about the spiritual purposes of acquiring the land other than making it ‘a religiously enlightened colony.’

From the beginning, the Victoria colony which Saker established was administered on a very secular basis with the constitution of the colony emphasizing religious toleration and Saker committing himself more to secular administrative and economic activities than with spiritual matters; a situation for which he was heavily criticized to the point that the BMC sent a commission of inquiry to the colony.⁴⁷ In fact in acquiring the colony, Saker had hoped that the British crown would ultimately take it over and make it a crown colony. He had named the colony Victoria to attract British imperial and economic interests. This materialized in 1863 when the colony (Victoria) was officially made a British protectorate and Horton Johnson; a Baptist missionary was appointed Her Majesty’s Consul there.⁴⁸

The confrontations which ensued between the Christian colony of Victoria and the local isubu people, as testified by Saker himself further raises doubt as to the missionary objectives of Saker’s colony. It could be deciphered that as the colony grew, Saker’s men began to get into serious commercial rivalry with the local population to the point that the people threatened to chase Saker and his men away. He reports that;

The Isubus were [complaining] lest we should spoil their market; the islanders [complaining] lest we should intrude in their fishing grounds... Even the Bakweris (neighbours to the Isubus) are saying that we should be sent away...⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Missionary Handbook of the London Baptist Mission. August 2, 1858, p.121.

⁴⁶ E.B, Underhill, p.53

⁴⁷ Underhill, p.156

⁴⁸ Gwei, 1975, p.37

⁴⁹ Ardener, Eyewitness to the Annexation, p.53

The way the matter was settled does not indicate any God fearing approaches that Saker was expected to take. He went ahead to bribe the king. He gave him three heads of tobacco (value 1 shilling) to settle the palaver, and in his words, ‘this great dispute if it deserves the name, came to an end. It cost me not a word, and in money as a dash afterwards I paid 1 shilling and 8 pence.’⁵⁰ In 1862, to completely ensure that the King was on his side, Saker built him a new house ‘as the completion of the consideration money agreed to be paid by him, for the territory and district known as Amboise Bay.’⁵¹

While many have argued alongside the local Isubu people that Saker never bought the land on which he built his colony, it is evident from his activities that imperialist activities watered down, for the most part, his missionary agenda. Ngoh has also argued that his expulsion from Fernando Po was due primarily to economic than religious reasons.⁵²

The imperialist agenda justified the closure of their enterprise in the area the moment the British failed to annex the territory. In 1883, in the Victoria colony, when the French and German threats of annexing the area became obvious, the LBMS and their converts led by SR Brew, Joseph Michaels and Stephen Burnley wrote to Edward Hyde Hewett, Her Majesty’s British consul for the Cameroons and Calabar. The letter was a direct request for British annexation of the Victoria colony. It read that;

At a meeting of the inhabitants of this place [Victoria] held in the court house on Saturday the 24th of March 1883, it was unanimously resolved to petition you [Hewett] to use your influence to obtain for us, in whatever way you may deem best, the advantage of British rule and protection.⁵³

A similar letter and other requests for British annexation amongst the Duala people were said to have been inspired and drafted by LBMS Missionaries and traders.⁵⁴ According to Munger, the problem with missionaries, though, particularly in the 19th century, is that they were usually a route to more direct conquest. Missionaries and their families tended to feel that their home countries’ governments had a duty to protect them—sometimes from local people, but more often from pirates, raiders or other countries. This happened time and time again in Africa, where the presence of British missionaries ultimately led to the presence of British military installations and finally outright annexation as British colonies.⁵⁵

Although several of such requests were made by missionaries of the London Baptist Missionary Society for Britain to annex Cameroon, this did not materialize because of the rivalry between Britain, France and Germany to which the Germans emerged victorious. When this happened, the London Baptist Missionary Society sold all its possessions; dispensaries, schools, churches, and the lands they had acquired, to the Basel Mission and left the country. This pushed Ghislaine Ariane Gwet to argue that

⁵⁰ Ngoh, 1987, p.11

⁵¹ Underhill, Alfred Saker, p.53

⁵² Ngoh, 1987, p.12

⁵³ Victoria, Centenary Committee, *Victoria: Southern Cameroons 1858-1958*. Victoria: Basel Mission Book Depot, 1958, p.24.

⁵⁴ V.J., Ngoh, 21, K.O Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956, pp.216-217

⁵⁵ Sean Munger: *Missionaries, civilizers or conquerors; the first Missionaries to Hawaii*, 2013, accessed April 5 2018 <https://seanmunger.com/2013/12/03/civilizers-or-conquerors-the-first-missionaries-to-hawaii/>

The attitude of the London Baptist Missionaries to withdraw following the failure of Britain to annex the Cameroons gives enough reason for one to conclude that their activities in the area were seriously guided by the political imperialist orders. In this perspective, one cannot help but agree with Roger Onomo Etaba that 'the secular and sacred cooperated to push forward the agenda of the metropole.'⁵⁶

As seen with the LBMS activities on the coast of Cameroon, the position that 'colonial and commercial expansion was intimately dependent on European missionary work in Africa' is not accidental.⁵⁷ Just like the Belgian King, the British had an intrinsic objective for missionaries to help in opening up more lands for the crown and its business associates through their soft power. In the same vein, Richard Gray for instance makes allusion to the Padroado agreement, which bestowed a monopolistic control over the appointment of Roman Catholic Bishops, clergy and missionaries in Africa and East Indies on the Portuguese Crown.

In the eighteenth century the French monarch also succeeded in establishing a similar control over priests sent to Senegal. These examples justify the fact that missionaries had to see themselves as going out to fulfil their governments' political and commercial interests before that of the people they planned to rescue.⁵⁸ A popular British missionary who served in Nigeria writing to his friend back in Europe confirmed this. He explained that;

We [missionaries] are in these tropics for our own advantage and only incidentally for the good of the African.... We have not gone to the equatorial regions for religious or humanitarian motives... still less have we sought out the African in order to endow him with western civilization.... The dominating force which has taken us to Equatorial Africa is the desire for trade.⁵⁹

Norman Hetherington has also quoted a British Chaplain on the British East Indian Company ship as having said that 'we have annihilated the political importance of the natives, stripped them of their power, and laid them prostrate, without giving them anything in return.'⁶⁰ On the coast of Cameroon as well, based on the evidence above, one can confidently say that the missionaries who served there had no interest in the welfare of the inhabitants within whose area they operated. Their motives were to strip the natives of their power and lay them prostrate for exploitation. The Gikuyu of East Africa had long maintained this conviction of missionaries as imperialists in the famous proverb; 'there is no Roman priest and a European- both are the same!'⁶¹

⁵⁶ Ghislaine Ariane Gwet, 'L'ecole a Kamerun sous l'ere allemande (1884-1916): Entre Structuration et Rationalite. In *Daniel Abwa* (ed) *Il y a cent ans, les allemands quittaient le Kamerun. Histoire d'une rupture-continuite (1916-2016)*, Proceedings of the 2016 conference organized by the Cameroon History Society from the 09-11 November 2016 at the University of Yaounde I. Yaounde: The Cameroon History Society, 2017

⁵⁷ L. E., Fashole et al, *Christianity in Independent Africa*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1978, p.78

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.14

⁵⁹ G.N., Uzoigwe, *Britain and the Conquest of Africa: The Age of Salisbury*. New York: NOK. 1978, p.28

⁶⁰ Norman Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa 1815-1854*, London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001.

⁶¹ J.S., Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann. 1969, p.231

CONCLUSION

In response to an online debate on the topic that formed the central argument of this paper one participant argued that Christian or not, Missionaries will as a rule always consist of the self-serving as well as the selfless, the self-righteous as well as the righteous, those who become addicted to power in whatever form they can achieve it as well as those who thrive on love in whatever form it shows itself. She concluded that, but to those of us who look in from the outside, (the subaltern from the global south), it seems those called to be Missionaries, especially in the mostly unsupervised situations of the 19th century, more often represented the former rather than latter of all those pairs.⁶²

In this paper, my endeavour has been to present such a global south, subaltern angle of the 19th century missionary enterprise on the coast of Cameroon. This perspective lends significant historical input to the general Decolonial epistemic position that missionaries served imperial purposes. Some may say that it is not fair to blame missionaries and their (mostly) good-hearted intentions for the unintended consequences that followed from their contact with first peoples. But substantial evidence abounds in almost all parts of the world where missionaries made inroad to hold strong to the position that they were not the angels of mercy but conquerors or the foot soldiers of European/American subjugation of indigenous people.

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