

Withdrawal of the state: the provision of primary schooling in Mozambique under *indigenato*

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After the Second World War, there was a generalised move among colonial states in Africa towards greater intervention in the provision of schooling. The Portuguese colonial state in Mozambique, by contrast, withdrew from the direct running of schools for the black population and granted an almost exclusive monopoly to Catholic missions, transferring to them the previously state-run schools. This paper examines why, looking at the case of Mozambique in the context of the racial discrimination regime known as *indigenato*, which shaped educational policies in the Portuguese colonies.

The literature on schooling in colonial Africa often refers to this generalised process of secularisation, but there has been no specific treatment explaining the reasons for it from a quantitative perspective, or tracing variations in the process across different African colonies. However, understanding the long-term development of education systems is important to improve educational outcomes today, given that historical factors may still impede progress (Chaudhary & Garg, 2015, p. 938). This is especially the case for a country such as Mozambique, ranked closed to the bottom in international classifications of income and educational outcomes, and where the long colonial occupation of the twentieth century still looms large.

Education in Mozambique under *indigenato*

Educational policies in Portuguese Africa were embedded in a larger system of racial discrimination known as *indigenato*. Formally lasting until 1961, *indigenato* distinguished between *civilizados* (the so-called civilised), who had rights similar to the citizens of Portugal, and *indígenas* (natives), who did not. Under *indigenato*, primary education in Mozambique was divided into two main types. ‘Elementary’ education (*ensino primario elementar e complementar*), targeted at the *civilizados*, was subject to the same legislation as education provided in the metropolis, and purportedly had the same goals and programs as those in force in Lisbon. ‘Rudimentary’ education (*ensino primario rudimentar*), on the other hand, was meant only for *indígenas* and was of very poor quality.

This paper focuses on the most representative population group of Mozambican colonial society under *indigenato*, the black children enrolled in rudimentary education. Since its inception in 1930, the main providers of rudimentary education were the colonial state, Portuguese Catholic missions, and foreign Protestant missions. I examine the major shift in providers that took place in the early years of rudimentary schooling. In 1930, the colonial state provided schooling to 27% of black children enrolled in rudimentary education, gradually declining to 15% by 1941, and then dropping to 3% in 1942 (Table 1). The opposite trend took place in the case of Catholic missions, which already represented 49% of total enrolment in 1930, growing to 78% by 1941, and then jumping to 91% in 1942.

Table 1: *Enrolment numbers for black children in rudimentary schooling, 1930-1960*

Year	Enrolment of black children (male and female) in <i>ensino primario rudimentar</i>						
	Total enrolment	State		Portuguese Catholic missions		Protestant missions	
		Enrolment	% total	Enrolment	% total	Enrolment	% total
1930	32,080	8,674	27.0	15,693	48.9	7,713	24.0
1935	45,841	10,554	23.0	28,527	62.2	6,760	14.7
1941	79,946	12,346	15.4	62,766	78.5	4,834	6.0
1942	90,058	3,081	3.4	82,296	91.4	4,681	5.2
1945	107,612	3,231	3.0	98,177	91.2	6,204	5.8
1950	152,866	3,569	2.3	141,662	92.7	7,635	5.0
1955	240,559	1,158	0.5	232,923	96.8	6,478	2.7
1960	346,364	266	0.1	339,323	98.0	6,775	2.0

Source: Own elaboration from yearbooks for the colony of Mozambique, 1930-1960

The proximate explanation for these contrasting trends is obvious. The 1940 *Concordata* and the 1941 *Estatuto Missionário* signed between the Portuguese corporatist dictatorship of *Estado Novo* (1933-1974) and the Catholic Church deepened their pre-existing alliance. Article 66 of *Estatuto Missionário* granted Catholic missions a near monopoly on the education of the black population, and provided for the transfer of rudimentary schools previously run by the state to Catholic missions established in Mozambique. The first transfer of schools took place as a result of legislation passed in 1941, *Portaria* n° 4669 of 13 August, which brought about the turning point in enrolment observed between 1941-2 (Table 1). Similar transfers would continue to take place through equivalent pieces of legislation as late as the end of the 1950s.

The question therefore becomes: why did the Portuguese colonial government withdraw, relying on missions for the provision of schooling at a time when the rest of European colonial states were moving towards greater hands-on intervention in African education? I test two hypotheses in this regard.

Saving in the provision of public goods

The first place to look for an explanation to the shift is the comparatively weak financial situation of the Portuguese government. In the Portuguese mainland, *Estado Novo* sought to reduce illiteracy ‘at a minimum of cost, even if parsimony meant having to lower standards’ (Palma & Reis, 2020, p. 8). In the colonies, *Estado Novo* implemented a strict policy of budget balance that severely constrained the capacity of the colonial state to invest in public goods (Alexopoulou, 2018). Expansion of schooling for the black population, a stated objective of colonial officials in Mozambique, would have clashed with such policies of austerity. Consequently, *Hypothesis 1* for this study is that primary schooling of the African population was made a monopoly of Catholic missions in order to cut expenditure of the colonial government in Mozambique.

Given that Catholic missions were subject to control and funded by the colonial government, the shift to provision by missions cannot be understood as a straightforward outsourcing of costs. If *Hypothesis 1* is true, funding Catholic missions must have been a cheaper way for the state to provide rudimentary education to the black population than directly running schools. In 1930, the *Inspector da Instrução Pública* in Mozambique, the highest colonial official for education matters, suggested that ‘missions should take charge of rudimentary schooling and state schools of elementary schooling. This division of labour would benefit students and generate savings for the State’.¹ An unidentified colonial official summarised the 1938 annual report written by the *Prelado*, the highest Catholic ecclesiastical authority in Mozambique at the time. Upon doing so, he described missionaries as the best option for the provision of health and education services, arguing that no one could provide those services better or at a cheaper cost.²

To corroborate whether potential savings would have indeed been apparent to colonial officials in the years leading up to the 1941 shift, I calculate colonial state expenditure per child enrolled, comparing unitary costs for schools directly run by the colonial government against figures for Catholic mission schools between 1936-41. If the shift was a cost-saving strategy, we would expect government expenditure per child on state-provided education to be higher than that in mission-run schools.

I collect data on expenditure from colonial budgets and expenditure accounts, and enrolment data from general statistical yearbooks for the colony. Unfortunately, expenditure data for state-run rudimentary schools is more detailed than expenditure data for rudimentary schools run by Catholic missions. Colonial budgets and accounts do not allow to distinguish, within total state expenditure earmarked and subsequently spent on Catholic missions, quantities specifically destined for the provision of primary rudimentary schooling by Catholic missions. Ultimately, therefore, I can only compare colonial state expenditure on state-run schools (per child enrolled in such schools) against total colonial state expenditure on Catholic missions (per child enrolled in rudimentary schools run by missions). This biases the comparison against Catholic missions, because they provided a number of services to the colonial state beyond rudimentary schooling, from health services to religious conversion and other types of schooling.

When analysing the costs of providing education, we must calculate measures at a regional level. Providing services in some areas of the colony was costlier than others, owing to geography and existing infrastructure, and local factors influencing the demand for schooling may have also affected measures of expenditure per student. Therefore, I calculate unitary costs at the regional level of *distrito*, and I focus the

¹ Own translation from the report written by the *Inspector*, included in *Anuário do Ensino 1930. Colónia de Moçambique. Instrução Pública*. Page 223.

² *Informação N° 109*, administrative document attached to *Relatório do Prelado de Moçambique* (1938). AHU 2344 1B MU.

comparison on *distritos* in which both the state and Catholic missions had a significant presence: Lourenço Marques, Inhambane, and Moçambique (Table 2).³

Table 2: Comparison of expenditure measures between state-run and Catholic mission schools, per distrito, 1936 and 1941

Distrito	Year	Provider of rudimentary education					
		State			Catholic missions		
		Total cost	Enrolment	Cost per enrolled	Total cost	Enrolment	Cost per enrolled
Lourenço Marques	1936	366,600	3,692	99	1,836,667	15,581	118
	1941	364,320	4,204	87	2,070,161	34,565	60
Inhambane	1936	223,300	1,900	118	983,169	3,084	319
	1941	204,533	1,792	114	1,110,771	13,234	84
Moçambique	1936	187,371	1,622	116	521,695	2,104	248
	1941	189,943	1,895	100	899,010	7,833	115
Total	1936	1,278,175	11,852	108	4,781,989	28,569	167
	1941	1,217,158	12,300	99	6,564,613	63,475	103

Source: Own elaboration from budgets, expenditure accounts, and yearbooks for the colony of Mozambique

In 1936, unitary costs in these regions were higher for Catholic mission schools than for state-run schools. By 1941, however, despite the imbalance in the construction of our measures, unitary costs in the *distritos* of Lourenço Marques and Inhambane were lower for schools run by Catholic missions than for state-run rudimentary schools.⁴ Thus, in Lourenço Marques and Inhambane, the centre of Catholic mission activity during the period of study, provision of primary schooling for the black population through the funding of Catholic missions would have been a cheaper option for the colonial state than running schools itself. This difference in unitary costs would favour Catholic missions even more if the implicit cost of other services provided by missions could be discounted.

Transferring rudimentary schooling responsibilities to Catholic missions generated savings for the state because school network development by missions was decoupled from state expenditure on missions. Between 1936 and 1941, expenditure on Catholic missions in Lourenço Marques and Inhambane increased by 13%, while expenditure for Moçambique increased 72% (Table 2). On the other hand, enrolment in rudimentary schools run by Catholic missions, during the same period, increased by 122% in Lourenço Marques, 329% in Inhambane, and 272% in Moçambique (Table 2). Overall, therefore, the quantitative data is supportive of the first hypothesis.

Counteracting Protestant influence

Protestant missions in Mozambique faced a wide array of obstacles designed by the colonial state to limit their influence (Newitt, 1995). Indeed, Table 1 shows how their relative importance among providers of rudimentary schooling quickly decreased. Catholic missions may have been a part of this strategy, competing for converts and students in the areas where Protestant missions were established. Thus, *Hypothesis 2* for this study is that primary schooling of the African population was made a monopoly of Catholic missions in order to counteract the influence of Protestant missions in Mozambique.

Primary sources show that Catholic authorities constantly highlighted Protestantism as a threat in their reports to colonial officials, presenting Catholic missions as the solution to such a threat.⁵ According to the racist rhetoric prevalent among colonial circles, Protestant missions could have the effect of ‘denationalising’ the black population and generating instability within the colony. Consequently, Catholic

³ These three *distritos* represented approximately 60% of enrolment in state-run rudimentary schools in the period between 1936-41. For Catholic rudimentary schools they represented 73% in 1936, and grew in importance up to 88% in 1941. Figure 1 shows location of *distritos*.

⁴ In *distrito* of Moçambique, the original gap had almost closed by 1941, but state-run schools still showed lower unitary costs. In order to determine whether Catholic missions were also a more efficient option in this *distrito*, further work needs to be done on estimating the cost of other services provided by missions.

⁵ *Prelazia de Moçambique e DGMR. Relatório referente ao ano de 1922 (Doc 30)*. AHU 2344 1B MU; *Relatório do Prelado de Moçambique* (1938). AHU 2344 1B MU.

authorities called for the expansion of Catholic missions in areas where Protestant missions were present, whether these were inside of Mozambique or near the border with neighbouring colonies.⁶ Importantly for this second hypothesis, missionary schools were considered one of the tools to counterbalance Protestant influence.

Obviously, Catholic authorities had every reason to present Catholic missions as the solution to a purported Protestant threat, but this rhetoric was also prevalent among non-ecclesiastical administration circles. Colonial legislation such as *Decreto* 12:485 attributed a deleterious influence to foreign missions and claimed the need to counteract it through the action of Catholic missions, while the *Governador Geral*, the highest-ranking colonial official in Mozambique, expressly advocated for the use of Catholic missions as a way of indirectly limiting the influence of Protestantism.⁷

To test whether Catholic missions were indeed being used to counteract the influence of Protestant missions, I build a new geo-referenced dataset of the location of Catholic and Protestant missions in Mozambique between 1922 and 1942 (Figure 1), using a variety of published and unpublished sources.⁸ I divide the colony into a grid of 20 x 20 km cells, and I run logistic regressions in which the dependent variable is a binary indicator which takes value of 1 if there is at least one Catholic mission located in that cell for a particular year. The main independent variables measure distance of each cell to the closest Protestant mission inside of Mozambique, outside, and either inside or outside of the colony. I also include a battery of control variables which have been found to influence missionary expansion in colonial Africa (Jedwab et al., 2019).

Table 3 shows results for the main specification, in which cells are defined as being close to a Protestant mission, the binary independent variable taking value of 1, if the cells are within 28 km.⁹ The effect of distance to Protestant missions outside of the colony is not significant. This is expected, given that only one Catholic mission out of 61 existing in 1942 was located within 28km of a Protestant mission in a neighbouring colony. However, the odds ratio coefficient estimate for distance to Protestant missions inside of Mozambique is above one and significant: once the effect of control variables is discounted, cells which are close to Protestant missions inside of Mozambique are more likely to contain a Catholic mission. This lends support to *Hypothesis 2*. Results are robust to measuring distance to Protestant missions as a continuous variable, as well as to a series of additional checks, such as the exclusion of different geographical areas in the colony.

⁶ *Prelazia de Moçambique e DGMR. Relatório referente ao ano de 1922 (Doc 30)*. AHU 2344 1B MU; *Missões. Arquidiocese de Lourenço Marques. Relatório do Prelado referente ao ano de 1942*. AHU 2344 1B MU.

⁷ *Relatório do Governador Geral de Moçambique. Respeitante ao período de 20 de Março de 1940 a 31 de Dezembro de 1942. Volume I*. Pages 115-116.

⁸ These sources include colonial yearbooks, the atlas by Beach & Fahs (1925), and unpublished reports archived in AHU (2344 1B MU).

⁹ 28km is the “distance that a healthy adult travels by foot per day on flat terrain” (Fernández-Villaverde et al., 2020), which I take as the minimum radius of influence of a Protestant mission.

Table 3: *Logistic regressions for Catholic missions in 1942*

<i>Predictors</i>	R1: Catholic missions in 1942			R2: Catholic missions in 1942		
	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
Distance to closest Protestant mission inside/outside Mozambique [28km threshold]	3.01 *	1.15 – 7.66	0.022			
Distance to closest Protestant mission outside Mozambique [28km threshold]				0.45	0.05 – 2.18	0.374
Distance to closest Protestant mission inside Mozambique [28km threshold]				7.21 ***	2.34 – 21.66	<0.001
Observations	2086			2086		
R ² Tjur	0.171			0.185		

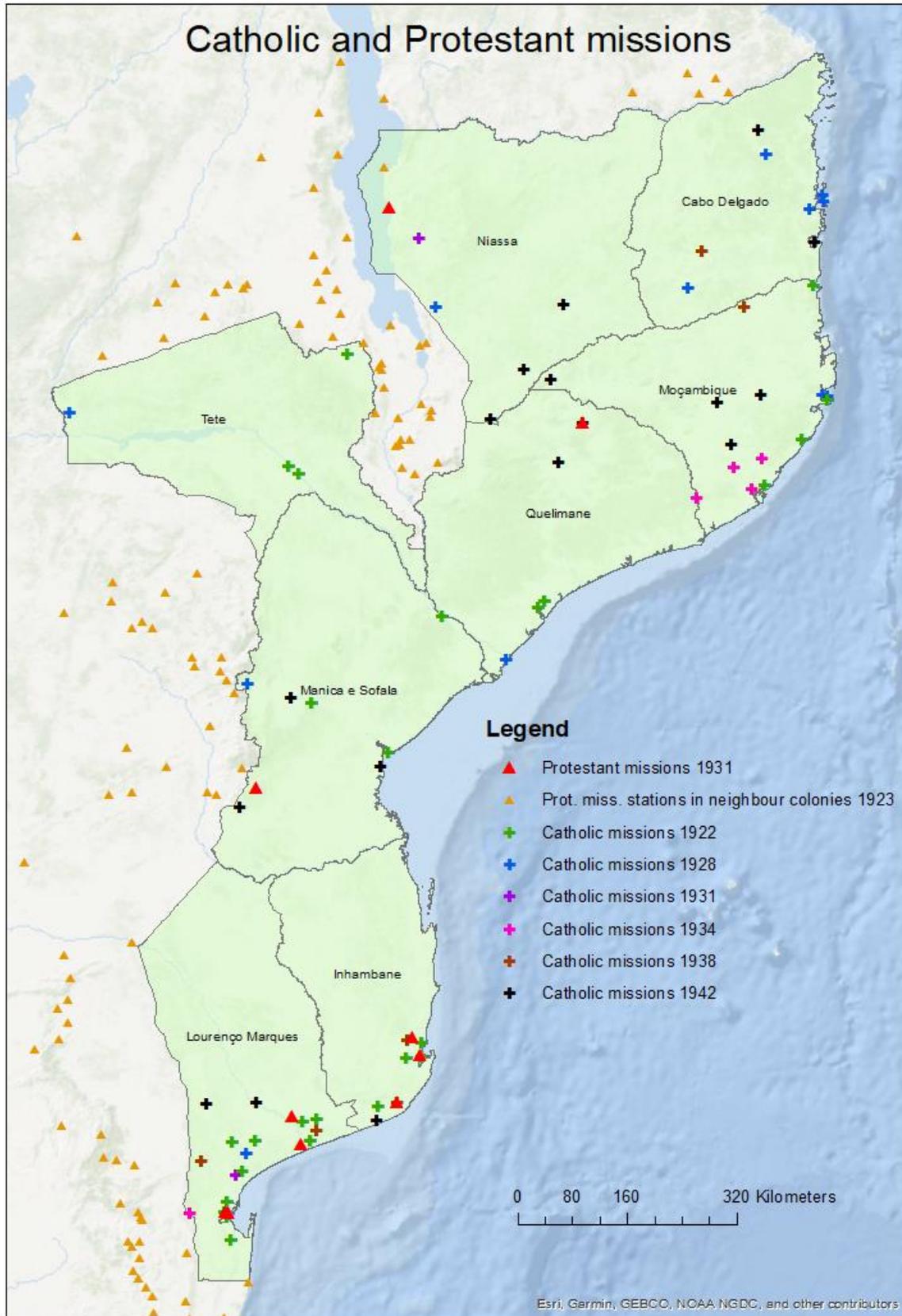
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Note: All controls are included: measures of accessibility, population density, administrative divisions, precipitation and temperature data, nutrient availability, and agroecological zones.

Conclusions

This paper has shown that financial and ideological reasons were behind the withdrawal of the state in Mozambique and the shift to Catholic mission provision of primary schooling for the black population. By analysing the case of a comparatively weak colonial power, I contribute to a better understanding of the political economy of public goods provision in colonial Africa, where states faced a number of mutually countervailing imperatives (Young, 1994). In Mozambique, the provision of public goods served the legitimacy imperative by indoctrinating black children in the basic tenets of imperial ideology, but this had to be balanced against the revenue imperative, constrained as the Mozambican colonial state was by austerity measures under *Estado Novo*. Transferring schooling responsibilities to cheaper mission schools was a solution to this dilemma, which also allowed the colonial state to persecute the security imperative: Catholic missions were used as a tool to limit the influence of Protestant missions, considered a threat to colonial rule in Mozambique.

Figure 1: Protestant and Catholic missions 1922-1942



Source: Own elaboration from the constructed dataset

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