

The Economic Origins of 20th Century Decolonisation in West Africa

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What's the puzzle?

***The contrasting patterns of decolonisation in
the Britain & France empires in West Africa***

Tasks of this Paper

- ❑ Attempt an economic explanation of the different paths of decolonisation in the British & French West African colonies.
- ❑ An approach anchored on the nature of human capital transfers from the colonisers' to the indigenous elites of the colonies.

Structure of Presentation

- I. Highlight distinguishing features of British & French Colonial Educational Practices in SSA
- II. Contrast the perceptions & reactions of African elites to the decolonisation discourse
- III. The Model
- IV. Empirical Evidence
- V. Conclusion

I – Distinguishing Features of British Colonial Educational Practice in Black Africa

- ***The striking particularity of British imperialism is its emphasis on commercial & economic gain:***

Lord Lugard once remarked:

‘We hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonise, to trade and to govern’

- ***Operationalisation necessitated ‘indirect rule’***

I – Distinguishing Features of British Colonial Educational Practice in Black Africa

Unanticipated consequence of “indirect rule” is that colonial educational policy was streamlined to match local realities (“village schools”):

‘Our purpose is to strengthen the solid elements in the countryside...before the irresponsible body of half-educated officials, students and town riff-raffs take control of the public mind’ – Colonial Governor of Berber Province

I – Distinguishing Features of British Colonial Educational Practice in Black Africa

Advisory Committee on Native Education prescribed:

“Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life....”

Two important consequences of the British educational policy of “strengthening the solid elements of the countryside” are:

- 1) Formation of an elite that was more inclined to entering into violent confrontation with the British colonial authorities – since a native elite that depended on the colonial bureaucracy for its survival was never created.*
- 2) Education received by the native elites helped to reinforce their traditional & cultural ties with the masses*

I – Reactions of Anglophone Black African Elites to British Decolonisation Discourse

- **Thorn (2000:5) recounts a much told African joke:**
'When the whiteman came to Africa, we (the Africans) had the land and he (the whiteman) had the bibles. He said, let us close our eyes and pray. When we opened them again, he had the land and we had the bibles!'
- **Nkwame Nkrumah:**
"How is it possible, I asked myself, for a revolution to succeed without arms and ammunition? After months of studying Gandhi's policy and watching the effect it had, I began to see that, when backed by a strong political organisation, it could be the solution to the colonial problem"

I – Reactions of Anglophone Black African Elites to the British Decolonisation Discourse

Nyerere's account in 1962: 'Everybody was a worker...Not only was the capitalist or the landed exploiter unknown...[but] capitalist exploitation was impossible. Loitering was an unthinkable disgrace...The advent of colonialism has changed all this. In the old days, the African had never aspired to the possession of personal wealth for the purpose of dominating any of his fellows. He never had labourers or factory hands to do his work for him, but then came the foreign capitalists. They were wealthy and powerful. And the African naturally started wanting to be wealthy too. While nothing seems inherently wrong with that, it has unfortunately led to exploitation. There was now need for Africans to "re-educate" themselves, to regain their former attitude of mind...in rejecting the capitalist attitude of mind which colonialism brought into Africa, we must reject also the capitalist methods which go with it'

II – Distinguishing Features of French Colonial Educational Practice in Black Africa

- ***The striking particularity of French imperialism or “assimilation” is its emphasis on the notion of colonies being one and indivisible with France.***

Thus, approach to education in French colonies hinged on “*Frenchifying black Africans*”

Gifford & Louis (1971:697): *‘history textbooks in use in French Africa were written in such a way as to encourage Africans to deny the validity of their own cultural traditions and to admire instead those of the French’*

II – Distinguishing Features of French Colonial Educational Practice in Black Africa

○ ***Implications of the assimilatory French colonial education policy:***

- 1) *Installation of a two-tiered system of governance*
- 2) *Formation of a native elite that was **less** inclined to entering into violent confrontation with the French – since these elite depended largely on the colonial bureaucracy for its survival.*
- 3) *Education received by the elites contributed in alienating them from their own society and countrymen*

II – Reactions of Francophone Black African Elites to French Decolonisation Discourse

- **Houphouët Boigny's declaration in 1951:**

“independence was not the best solution for Africa”

- **Houphouët Boigny's declaration in 1957:**

“If Côte d'Ivoire had been colonised by the Anglo-Saxons, there is no doubt that we would have chosen independence even at the cost of economic disadvantages. But in France we think we catch a note of human fraternity”

II – Reactions of Francophone Black African Elites to French Decolonisation Discourse

- **Leopold Senghor of Senegal in 1955:**

- ❖ *“What I fear is that, in the future, under the fatal pressure of African liberation, we might be induced to leave the French orbit. We must stay not only in the French Union but in the French Republic”*

- ❖ *‘To be “a Frenchman above all” is an excellent prescription on the political level’*

- **Blaise Diagne, in Paris (1921):**

- “his loyalty to France came ahead of his loyalty to other blacks”*

III – The Model

Objective: Use the nature of human capital transfers from colonisers' to the native elites in explaining the different paths of decolonisation in West Africa.

Description of the Game:

- We assume a 3-player game: - Coloniser, Indigenous Elites & Masses.
- *Y*, represents *Gross Output produced in the colony*
- *The coloniser transfers a part of Y (called X) to the elites in form of human capital development (or education). The masses receive instead a fixed subsistence allowance.*
- *Thus, the coloniser's rents, net of subsistence payments to masses is:* $(Y - X - C_m^c)$
- *Where C_m^c is the cost of maintaining stability in the colony*

III The Model

- The society starts in colonisation.

Coloniser's Choices

- The strategic choices of the coloniser are: continue colonial rule (stay) or leave colony to its own destiny (decolonise)
- If coloniser decides to stay, its pay-off is: $Y - X - C_m^c$
- If he decides to leave, its pay-off can be either zero or $Q > 0$, depending on the behaviour of the elites

Elite's Choices

- The strategic choices of the elites during colonisation & decolonisation can be to either cooperate or not cooperate with coloniser

III The Model

Elite's Choices

- Cooperation during colonisation gives pay-off of $\frac{X}{L^e}$
- Non-Cooperation during colonisation gives:
 - Pay-off range from zero (elites killed) to full appropriation of coloniser's rents (coloniser evicted).
 - BUT elites' pay-off is uncertain or determined by probabilities of success or failure in the rebellion
 - The probability of elites' winning a rebellion critically depends on the support of the masses.
 - If masses are in support of elites, the proba of successful rebellion is higher

III The Model

Elite's Choices

- Cooperation after independence means elites must pay an amount Q , to coloniser, as *quid pro quo*, for coloniser's protection of elites' power against subversion by the masses.
- Non-Cooperation after independence means $Q=0$ and elites have to incur cost of maintaining stability

Choice of the Masses

- Masses make irreversible choice during colonisation & decolonisation whether to cooperate with elites or not

III The Model

Choice of the Masses

- Cooperation during colonisation & decolonisation is a function of elites' credibility
- Elites' credibility is defined by the nature of educational transfers they receive from coloniser
 - If education received by the elites emphasizes "assimilation", then elites are *non-credible* implying that masses never cooperate with elites' choices.
 - In contrast, when education emphasizes "local adaptation", then elites are *credible*, implying that masses always cooperate with them.
- Cooperation and non-cooperation of masses always gives a fixed pay-off

III – The Model

Nature fixes the order of Probabilities as thus:

$$0 < p_w'' < p_w < p_w' < 1$$

- p_w'' is the proba of non-credible elites winning a war of independence against colonisation
- p_w is the proba of non-credible elites winning a post-independence war of rebellion engaged with the masses
- p_w' is the proba of the 'non-credible elite – coloniser' front winning a post-independence war of rebellion engaged with masses
- p_w''' is the proba of credible elites winning a war of independence against colonisation
- Furthermore, $0 < p_w'' < p_w''' < 1$

III – The Model

Definition 1:

- When the coloniser follows a “non-alienation” strategy (“British”), the elites is more connected with the masses and is therefore perceived by the latter as “credible”. In this case, the size of the elite is larger and the cost of repression for the coloniser is zero, for simplicity.

Thus, during colonial rule, the payoffs for the coloniser and native elites is respectively:

$$(Y - X), \frac{X}{L^e}$$

III – The Model

Definition 2:

- When the coloniser follows an “assimilation” strategy (“French”), the elite is alienated from the masses and is therefore perceived by the latter as “*non-credible*”. Thus, the coloniser incurs a cost of repression, C_m^c

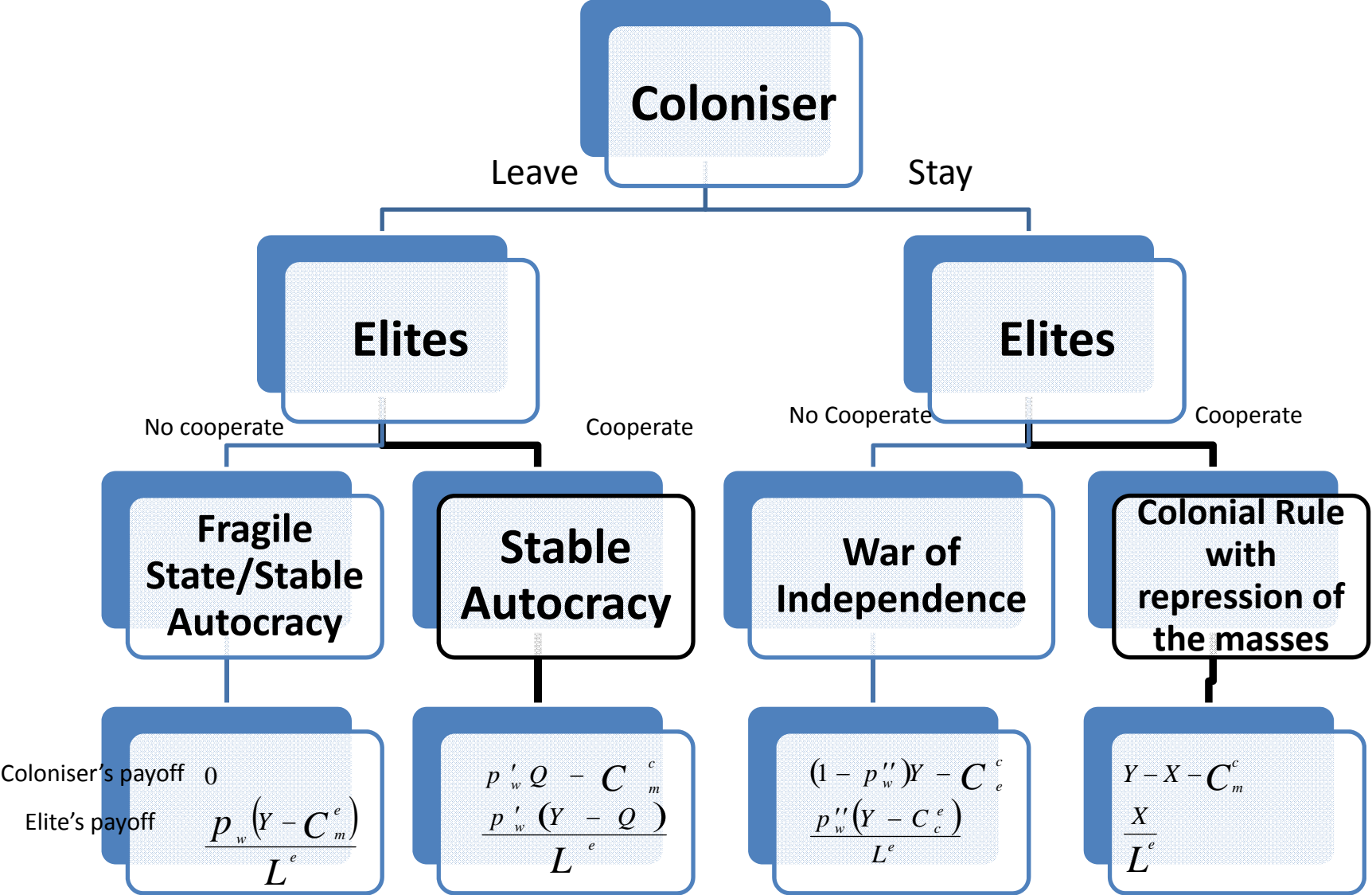
Thus, during colonial rule, the payoffs for the coloniser and native elites is respectively:

$$\left(Y - X - C_m^c \right), \frac{X}{L^e}$$

III The Model

- For analytical simplicity, we divide the game into two sub-games:
 - **Subgame I: when masses always cooperate**
 - **Subgame II: when masses never cooperate**
- We then solve each sub-game by backward induction

Sub-game I: Colonisation & Decolonisation with Assimilated or Non-Credible Elites – Masses Never Cooperate with Elites



Solution of Sub-game I

Proposition 1: There exists a range of feasible values of Q , that is, $\frac{Y - X}{p'_w} < Q < C_m^e$ for which the coloniser's payoff from decolonising are higher than those from colonial rule.

Proof: Assimilated elites always cooperate with coloniser after independence iff:

$$\frac{p'_w (Y - Q)}{L^e} > \frac{p_w (Y - C_m^e)}{L^e}$$

$$\Rightarrow Q < (1 - \alpha) C_m^e + \alpha Y \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

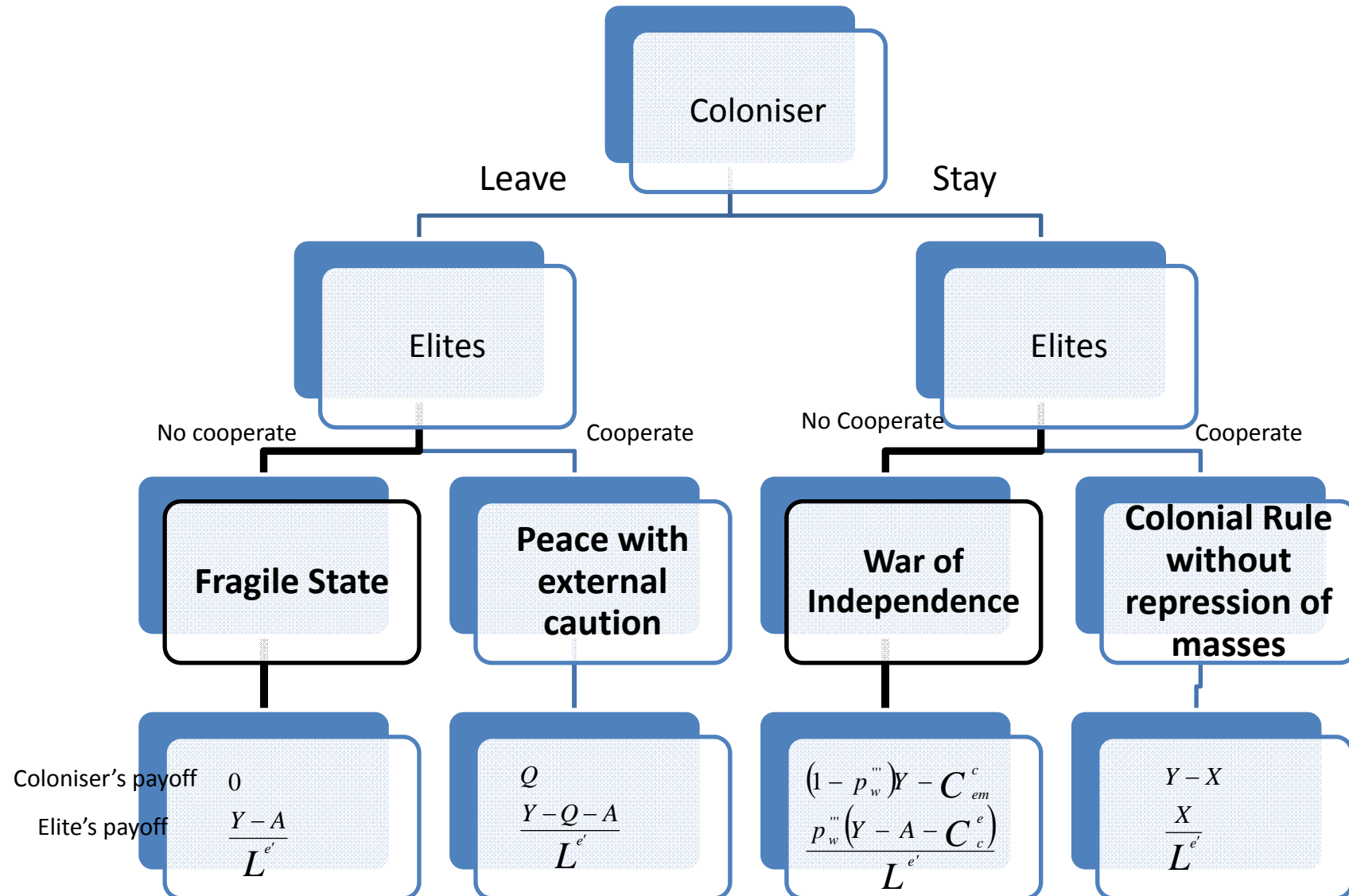
The coloniser's dominant strategy is to decolonise iff:

$$p'_w Q - C_m^c > Y - X - C_m^c$$

$$\Rightarrow Q > \frac{Y - X}{p'_w} \dots\dots\dots \dots\dots\dots \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

Combining (1) & (2) gives solution above.

Sub-game II: Colonisation & Decolonisation with Independent or Credible Elites – Masses Always Cooperate with Elites



Solution of Sub-game II

Proposition 2: As the probability of nationalist elites winning a war of independence against the coloniser approaches unity, the coloniser is better-off quitting the scene.

Proposition 3: There exists a range of feasible values of output, Y , $\left(\frac{X}{p_w'''} + A + C_c^{e'}\right) < Y < \frac{C_{em}^c}{(1 - p_w''')}$ for which decolonisation happens

❖ During colonisation, elites are winning to fight coloniser iff:

$$\frac{p_w'''}{L^{e'}} (Y - A - C_c^{e'}) > \frac{X}{L^{e'}} \rightarrow p_w'' (Y - A - C_c^{e'}) > X$$

$$\Rightarrow Y > \left(\frac{X}{p_w'''} + A + C_c^{e'} \right)$$

❖ Decolonisation thus, happens because:

$$0 > (1 - p_w'')Y - C_{em}^c \Rightarrow \frac{C_{em}^c}{(1 - p_w'')} > Y$$

$$\Rightarrow Y < \frac{C_{em}^c}{(1 - p_w'')}$$

Summary of Predictions of the Model

Two important differences between French & British Models of Colonisation & Decolonisation in West Africa:

- French colonisation was generally more repressive. Decolonisation was faster & more peaceful in French colonies**
- Former French colonies were more politically stable post-independence**

Do we have any evidence in support of these predictions and the key assumptions of the model?

Yes!

IV - The Model & Empirical Evidence

French West African States						British West African States							
	INDEP	COUPS ^a	TMIS ^b	PRISON ^c	INC DIST ^d	REPRESS ^e		INDEP	COUPS ^a	TMIS ^b	PRISON ^c	INC DIST ^d	REPRESS ^e
Burkina Faso	1960	13	39		362		Gambia	1965	3	11			0
Benin	1960	15	45		9.39	0	Ghana	1957	22	54	0.03	38.2	21
Central A. Rep	1960	10	32		102.9	1	Nigeria	1960	12	40		30.6	15
Chad	1960	5	13		9.6	1	Sierra Leone	1961	16	48		14.9	3
Congo Rep	1960	10	26			9							
Gabon	1960	4	6			0							
Guinea	1958	12	22		131.6	0							
Ivory Coast	1960	6	14	0.07	14.5	1							
Mali	1960	7	15		348.2	9							
Mauritania	1960	10	24		705.1	7							
Niger	1960	6	22		47.4	1							
Senegal	1960	1	3		39.8	1							
Togo	1960	11	31			10							
Average	1959.8	8.5	22.5		177.1	3.3	Average	1960.7	13.2	38.2		27.9	9.7

a: Coups include the number of plots, failed and successful coups from 1956 to 2001, McGowan (2003).

b: Total Military Intervention Score (TMIS) captures trends in coup behaviour during 1956-2001, McGowan (2003).

c: Average number of prisoners of criminal offences in 1936 as a percentage of country's population. Source: Asiwaju (2000:53) for Ivorian figures, Kay & Stephen (1972) for Ghanaian figures.

d: Income distance at independence, calculated by taking the ratio of income of top 10% and bottom 10% of population, figures available from World Income Inequality datasets

e: Number of cases of repression recorded between 1950 and year of independence, obtained from Alesina et al (1992) datasets

V - Conclusion

- ✓ We have argued that at the *core* of the strategic interaction between the colonisers' and the elites' of former colonies is the ideology behind colonial educational policy
- ✓ Where this ideology emphasized the notion of **assimilation**, the system generally tended to produce elites that depended highly on the coloniser for their livelihood, hence necessitating a continuation of the imperial relationship even after independence was granted

V - Conclusion

- ✓ On the contrary, where the ideology emphasized the “**strengthening of the *solid elements***” of the countryside, the system tended to produce a bunch of elites that were quite independent of the coloniser and consequently had little to lose from a disruption of the imperial relationship at independence.
- ✓ The results of the model shed light into why the French decolonisation process in West Africa was generally smooth and transitioned from colonialism to neo-colonialism whereas British decolonisations in West Africa were generally antagonistic, culminating in complete independence from England.

Further Research

- Look into other scenarios once one relaxes our key assumptions about the choices of the elites and the masses, in order to explain the paths of decolonisations in different parts of the world