

# **The Roman Catholic Mission and Leprosy Control in Colonial Ogoja Province, Nigeria, 1936-1960**

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## **Short abstract**

This thesis examines the role of the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) in leprosy control in colonial Ogoja Province, south-eastern Nigeria, between 1936, when the mission was first invited to co-ordinate leprosy work, and 1960, when Nigeria achieved national independence and ceased to be administered as part of the British Empire. My analysis focuses on the RCM Ogoja leprosy scheme, founded in 1945 after almost a decade of failed efforts and war-induced delay, under the auspices of St. Patrick's Missionary Society (Kiltegan) and administered by the Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM), two recently founded and predominantly Irish Catholic missionary societies. This scheme offers a useful template for the examination of the role of mission in the construction of colonial administration, the local and international ramifications of decolonisation, and the evolution of ideologies and genealogies of development and global public health.

As the parameters of mission-government co-operation altered in the years leading up to Nigerian independence, the character of mission services came to seem less distinct from those provided by local, regional and national government bodies. In this thesis, I have contended that a focus on the specificities of ideology, bureaucracy and technology of missionary leprosy control challenges dominant teleologies of late colonialism imposed by nationalist and development history narratives, allowing us to dovetail our account of a particular and ostensibly marginal service with broader narratives of late colonial development politics, and to texture these narratives in a manner which proves vital to understanding Nigeria's encounter with the world at large.

In conclusion, transformations in the nature of the effective contract between mission and government altered the context in which Catholic missionary welfare services were provided, and in the case of leprosy control, interacted with fundamental technological and capacity changes to create a complex and, at times, fraught medical politics needing careful negotiation from all parties. Examined from the viewpoint of missionaries, this process sheds an interesting light on the processes of decolonisation and the politics of independence in Nigeria.