Textile Production and Trade

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1. Introduction

Textile industries have historically been a common first step in the industrialization process. For example, traditional handicraft textile manufacturing in Great Britain became mechanized during the Industrial Revolution, a transformation that contributed to rapid economic growth. In Africa, successful textile-based industrialization and related economic development has proven more difficult. Instead, much industrialization in 20th-century Africa was based on extractive industries, like mining and oil drilling. This type of industrialization tends to limit economic growth. Countries that depend on exporting natural resources often invest less in other sectors and can quickly fall into economic crisis due to swings in global prices for their main resource export.

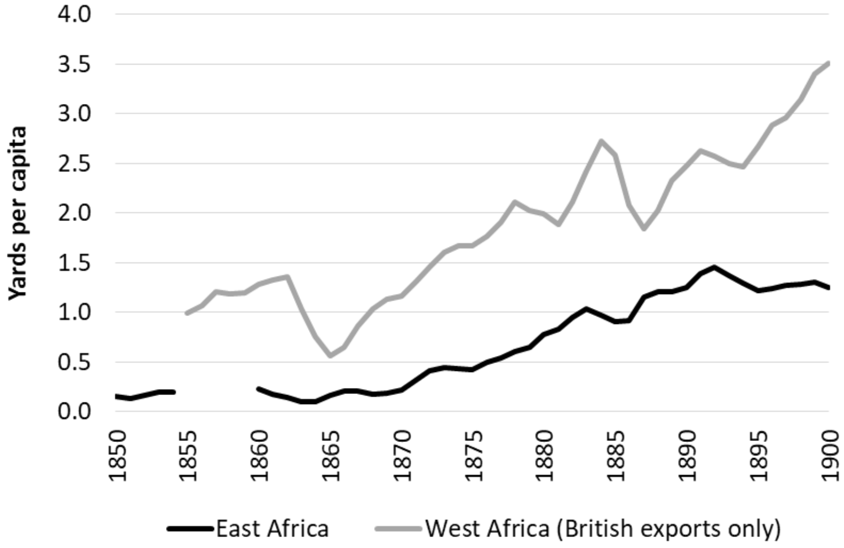
Although textile factories have emerged in some African countries, the industry is still limited, and the vast majority of the cloth consumed in contemporary Africa comes from abroad. This includes new cloth produced in China and India and large quantities of second-hand clothing exported from Europe and the United States. Why does Africa rely so heavily on imported cloth? Did the continent lack the necessary handicraft textile traditions that have elsewhere formed the basis for industrialization? The answer is "no." In fact, there are centuries-old traditions of textile production in much of sub-Saharan Africa, although the development of the industry differed across time and space. In this chapter, we explore the history of handicraft textile manufacturing in Africa. We pay particular attention to East and West Africa, which had very different industrial experiences. As we will see, handicraft cloth industries lasted much longer in West Africa than in much of East Africa.

Why did cloth industries disappear?

Textiles have been made by hand across sub-Saharan Africa for centuries. However, a number of these industries were declining and even disappearing by the start of the 20th century, especially in East Africa. Some theorists have assumed that textile industries declined due to competition with low-cost, factory-made cloth imported from places like Europe, the United States, and India. This, they argue, was related to the 19th-century colonization of Africa, when trade with the external world increased dramatically. This is known as ***deindustrialization theory*** and became popularized during the 1960s and 1970s. Although the arguments of deindustrialization theory may seem convincing at face value, the theory is based largely on assumptions instead of empirical evidence. Flaws in this theory become apparent when we look more closely at the history of trade and textile manufacturing in different regions of sub-Saharan Africa.

It is true that cloth imports into sub-Saharan Africa grew substantially, especially from the 19th century onward. However, the amounts imported differed between regions. As Figure 1 shows, imports of cloth per capita (per person) were much higher in West Africa than in East Africa. Despite comparatively larger amounts of imported cloth in West Africa, this region's industry remained particularly strong. Meanwhile, cloth production disappeared by the end of the 19th century in much East Africa, where cloth imports were significantly lower. This paradox suggests that the mere presence of imported cloth did not determine whether textile industries survived or disappeared. There is more to the story. In this chapter, we will explore why East and West Africa had such different industrial experiences during the 19th and early 20th centuries. For West Africa, we will highlight the large cloth-producing area encompassing modern-day Nigeria, which included numerous important textile centers. For East Africa, we will consider the decline of textile manufacturing in Tanzania and Malawi. But as we will see, there was some industrial diversity within East Africa. Textile industries were much stronger in the northern parts of the region, particularly Ethiopia and Somalia, than in the rest of East Africa.

Figure 1: Imports of factory-made cloth into East and West Africa, 1850-1900



Sources: British, American, and Indian trade reports and shipping records. Note: East Africa's imports include cloth exported from India, the United States, and Britain. West Africa's imports include only the share exported from Britain, meaning that even more cloth was probably imported into West Africa than is show here.

We will uncover a number of *regional characteristics* that influenced the ability of a region to sustain viable industries and cope with competition from imported cloth. First, we begin by looking at the importance of a long history of textile manufacturing. Established *textile traditions* are much older in West Africa than in most of East Africa, which allowed strong industries to develop and mature several centuries before the rise of cloth imports. Second, we will consider how the *environment*, *population density* and *trade networks* related to more substantial industries and larger *consumer markets* in West Africa compared with most of East Africa. Third, we will explore how West Africa's local *institutions* (practices and policies) helped encourage industrial textile development before the colonial period. Fourth, we will compare how industries in East and West Africa were affected by increasing *global trade* during the 19th century. Fifth, we will learn how different *colonial institutions* and interventions in East and West Africa impacted domestic textile industries. Finally, we will consider how insights from Africa's industrial past may provide clues for future industrialization on the continent.

2. Cotton textile production in East and West Africa

A first notable difference between the longer-lasting industries of West Africa versus the earlier-disappearing industries in most of East Africa lies in the length of their industrial histories. West Africa has a longer history of established industries. The region's fertile environment enabled high agricultural yields of both cotton crops required to weave cloth and food crops to support a dense population. As we will see, these conditions helped create large consumer markets, stimulated commercial trading, and promoted the development of centralized states that encouraged industrial growth. West Africa's long history of industrial production and trade provided more time to develop techniques, create distinctive products, and establish consumer loyalty to regional "brands" prior to a rapid increase in global trade in the 19th and 20th centuries. These factors gave West African cloth industries a special advantage when competing with imported cloth from Europe and India that most East African industries did not have.

The East-West spread of textile traditions

The earliest cotton textile production on the continent probably occurred by the fourth century in the relatively well-populated areas of the Nile valley in Egypt, where raw cotton could be grown locally or imported from India via the Red Sea and Nile River trade routes. Cotton cultivation and cloth production techniques spread westward as merchants travelled along trans-Saharan trade routes. Weaving and the use of cloth as a form of currency was reported in the Senegal River Valley of West Africa by the eleventh century. Manufacturing techniques reached southern Nigeria by the thirteenth century. This early introduction of cotton cloth in West Africa helped stimulate relatively high levels of cloth consumption in the region. A large local demand for cloth was important for encouraging further development of local industries.

In West Africa, different regions began specializing in particular cloths, and consumer markets for a wide array of domestic cotton textiles developed. This long history of strong local demand for domestic cloth helped local weavers compete with foreign-made cloth once imports started gradually increasing from the fifteenth century as European merchants began trading along the African coast. In particular, the growth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the sixteenth to the early 19th century caused an increase in cloth imports. European merchants brought an array of manufactured goods to exchange for slaves, especially European firearms and Indian and European cloth.

These imported cloths were certainly consumed in West Africa, but European and Indian cloth did not fully meet the diverse demands of West African consumers, which had developed over the preceding centuries. In fact, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European merchants acquired varieties of West African cloth from the Bight of Benin for bartering along the coast. Dutch traders found that they needed domestic striped cloths if they wanted to barter for gold on the Gold Coast, whereas indigo-dyed blue cloths were used to purchase ivory and slaves in Gabon and Angola.

Delayed development in East Africa

In contrast with West Africa, cotton textile production became established comparatively late in most of East Africa, with clothing long consisting of skins or bark cloth, made by pounding the bark of trees. Cotton textile fragments dating to perhaps the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries have been excavated in the Lower Zambezi River area of Mozambique in southern East Africa. However, German ethnologist Heinrich Schurtz found in the 19th century that the region's cotton cloth industries were still in an early developmental stage. The products and methods of production were simpler than the more complex varieties that had developed in West Africa. Compare, for example, the plain, uniformly grey *machila* cloth characteristic of 19th-century southern Malawi's Lower Shire Valley in Image 1 with the complexity of 19th-century *kente* cloth from Ghana in Image 2, which is comprised of a variety of thin cloth strips woven with colored yarn and then stitched together to produce geometric patterns.

Image 1: Mang'anja loom and cloth, 19th c.

Source: National Museum of Scotland.

Image 2: *Kente* cloth, late 19th to early 20th c.

Source: Brooklyn Museum.

Cotton cloth production likely spread even later into the interior of central East Africa. This part of East Africa was secluded due to a lack of riverways linking the coast and interior, which slowed the introduction of cloth-making techniques from abroad. We do know that central East African weavers were creating patterned cloth in places like Ufipa in southwestern Tanzania by the mid-19th century. But these industries likely developed relatively late since cotton cloth continued to face intense competition from alternative domestic garments (bark cloth, raffia, and skins) up to beginning of the 20th century.

Some parts of East Africa, namely Ethiopia and Somalia in the Horn region of northern East Africa, experienced earlier development of textile industries. For example, in Mogadishu, Muslim immigrants introduced cloth production already by the thirteenth century. These also happen to be the areas of East Africa where textile manufacturing lasted the longest, underscoring the importance of a long history of textile production for the strength of local industries.

Production methods

As we have seen, hand-made cloth products in West Africa tended to be more complex and intricate than in most of East Africa. This was made possible by various production methods that developed in West Africa over several centuries. In some areas of East Africa, fine patterned cloths were manufactured by the 19th century, but the production of these varieties was very slow. In southern Malawi, for example, an intricate patterned cloth could take up to nine months to complete, while a patterned West African *kente* cloth could be produced in one week. This was because *production methods* were less advanced in East Africa. The simple *ground loom* (so-called because it rested horizontally on the ground) used in much of East Africa slowed production. In West Africa, in contrast, a greater variety of looms had begun developing by the seventeenth century. These included varieties of *treadle looms*, which sped up the weaving of patterned cloth through the use of foot pedals to separate different colored threads. West African weavers also used wide vertical cotton looms; the wide frame allowed them to produce large pieces of cloth quickly. These innovations were linked with the longer history of textile manufacturing in West Africa, which provided ample time to develop more advanced production methods compared with much of East Africa.

3. Population density, trade networks and consumer markets

We now turn to two more important factors: *population density* and *consumer markets*. A large population settled closely together is an asset for developing industries. Large populations provide cotton cultivators, textile workers, and consumers for cloth industries. West Africa has historically been more densely populated than most of sub-Saharan Africa. This is related to geographic and environmental characteristics that allow the area to produce enough food to support large groups of people. These environmental conditions also enabled the region to grow large quantities of cotton and indigo (a plant used to dye cloth) to supply the cloth industry with the necessary *raw materials*.

Nigeria, in particular, includes three densely populated areas: the Hausa region in the north, Igboland in the southeast, and the Yoruba area in the southwest. Sophisticated textile industries emerged relatively early here and in much of West Africa. Urban centers began to grow from the fifteenth century, and regional divisions of labor emerged, indicating a maturing economy. An artisan class developed in a number of cities, with distinctive spinning, weaving, dyeing, and embroidering professionals. Importantly, strong demand for cloth among large consumer markets allowed many manufacturers to support themselves almost entirely by their trade. This, in turn, allowed industries to continue to develop.

At the same time, West Africa developed sophisticated *trade networks* across the region that helped create *export markets* for cloth producers. Three distinctive ecological zones – desert, savanna and rainforest, ranging from north to south – became closely integrated through these trade networks. Each zone had its own economic specializations and products, influenced by its particular environment, which stimulated trade between the zones. As a result, textile producers could send their products to consumers living far away. For example, the northern Nigerian city of Kano produced indigo-dyed cotton cloth that was in high demand among consumers in desert regions to the north. Strong connections between these regions also stimulated the flow of *capital* (investment money) and *labor* (cotton cultivators and textile workers), which helped boost West African industry. By the eighteenth century, wealthy desert-zone financiers were investing in textile production in the savanna, while many immigrants moved to major textile centers to work in the industry.

Differences within East Africa

Turning to East Africa, we find more diverse levels of population density and consumer markets across the region. In the north, the fertile highlands of Ethiopia were among the most densely populated parts of sub-Saharan Africa. In the highlands, steady rainfall and various altitudes support a wide variety of high-yielding crops, including cotton used in the textile industry. This region had a much stronger textile industry compared to far less densely populated and less fertile parts of East Africa to the south. The cool climate of the Ethiopian plateau created strong demand for cloth among the region's large population. In fact, nearly all of the cloth made in Ethiopia was consumed within the country. To the east of Ethiopia, in contrast, coastal Somalia's dry climate and lower agricultural yields did not support extensive cotton growing or the large populations that create substantial local markets. However, this coastal region's textile industry enjoyed a strategic *geographic* position that helped solve these problems: coastal producers could import raw cotton from other places, including India, and export cloth to consumers located all along the seaboard and in the large interior markets of southern Ethiopia. For example, the majority of cloth produced in Mogadishu on the Benadir Coast was sent to external consumers.

Lightly populated East African areas further south, in Tanzania and Malawi, did not enjoy the large local consumer markets of Ethiopia, nor did they have the location-related trade benefits of Somalia. Most cloth-producing centers were relatively isolated, situated in fairly small fertile pockets located in the deep interior, so they did not have good access to export markets. Textile producers in southern Malawi's Lower Shire Valley region did send their cloth to Lower Zambezi consumers (in Mozambique) via the Shire River, but the scale of this trade was much smaller than Mogadishu's ocean-based exchange. In river-scarce Tanzania, which lacked waterway transportation, trade between distant communities was even more scarce. Here, cloth could only be transported long distances by foot, making it more difficult and costly to reach distant consumers. A combination of lower population densities and more limited trading opportunities kept the industries in places like Tanzania and Malawi small in scale. This small scale, in turn, slowed the further development of cloth manufacturing since growth tends to stimulate innovation, as we have seen in the case of West Africa.

5. Industry and institutions

We now turn to the role of *institutions* in influencing the development of textile industries in East and West Africa. Institutions are the formal and informal rules and norms that govern society. Many economists believe that the characteristics of institutions strongly impact how societies and economies develop. There were a number of unique institutions in pre-colonial West Africa that were particularly beneficial for the growth of the region's textile industry. Many of these institutions were less common in East Africa.

Cloth currency

The exchange of currency is an institution based on the agreement among people about what counts as money. In West Africa, traders began accepting and using cloth as a form of money from the eleventh century onward. This was known as *cloth currency*. As we can see in Image 3, which depicts cloth currency from Liberia, it typically consisted of narrow cloth strips wound onto spools that could be cut to a certain length and/or sewn together to form different currency denominations. The popularity of this cloth currency helped boost weaving in regions specializing in the production of cloth strips. For example, this was the case for Tiv weavers in southeastern Nigeria's Tivland. The use of cloth currency continued to stimulate domestic industry in many parts of West Africa into the colonial era. It even circulated in some areas up to the mid-20th century.

Image 3: Cloth currency strips from Liberia

Source: Smithsonian National Museum of African Art.

In East Africa, in contrast, the use of domestic cloth as a form of currency was much less common. Cotton cloth was used as a form of money in Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique, but it was mostly imported cloth (from the United States, Britain and India) rather than domestic cloth that circulated as currency. Thus, the boost to local industry provided by cloth currency institutions in West Africa was not similarly enjoyed by East African cloth producers.

Large states

Another important regional difference is the early development of large, centralized states in densely populated areas of pre-colonial West Africa compared with a scarcity of such states in much of East Africa. States can help stimulate manufacturing through pro-industry and pro-trade policies. Consider the case of northern Nigeria's large Sokoto Caliphate, which actively encouraged textile production through pro-industry policies. For example, weavers, tailors, and indigo dye producers were often exempted from taxation. At the same time, the government encouraged industrial growth through reduced *costs of production*. This included improved training to increase *labor efficiency* (which determines the amount of product that a single worker can produce) and reductions in the *cost of transportation*. In fact, the already substantial, long-established trade carried on between West Africa's ecological zones intensified during the 19th century under the Caliphate's pro-trade policies.

Image 4: Dyeing pits in Kano, Nigeria
Source: Wikimedia Commons (Andy Musa Chantu, 2015).

The powerful military of the Sokoto Caliphate also played a role in expanding the textile industry. Through military campaigns, the Caliphate acquired many slaves, who were used as laborers in both the textile industry and on plantations that cultivated the raw materials needed for manufacturing (raw cotton, indigo for dyeing, and even food to feed artisans). Recall that a large population is important for supplying both labor and consumers for textile industries.

Although enslaved workers with little or no income probably could not purchase large amounts of cloth, the consumption of textiles expanded overall in the Sokoto Caliphate. Rising demand stimulated the development of larger and more efficient operations (referred to as *economies of scale*) in the Caliphate's famous cloth-dyeing industry in Kano. 19th-century producers invented larger dyeing vats that allowed them to dye more cloth using the same amount of labor time. This reduced the costs of production and sped up output. These methods are still in use today, as we can see in Image 4, in which a contemporary cloth-maker uses a large dye pit in Kano.

In East Africa, in contrast, there were few large, centralized states. Those that did exist generally did not focus on the development of domestic industries. The kingdom of Ufipa in Tanzania, for example, was a relatively sophisticated state compared with other, typically decentralized East African societies. The rulers of Ufipa encouraged trade but did not actively invest in industry. This was related to the different evolution of trade in West versus East Africa. West African merchants and states had much to gain by investing in the largescale regional trade of domestic manufactures. But in most of East Africa, trade was mainly focused on exporting profitable raw materials, like ivory, to global traders. States tend to promote sectors and activities that they believe will generate the greatest profit. Thus, the policies of Ufipa's government were focused more on attracting ivory traders than on developing the textile industry. Likewise, many contemporary states choose to focus more on profitable *extractive industries* than on developing manufacturing industries.

6. The impact of global trade

During the 19th century, trade between sub-Saharan Africa and other world regions expanded rapidly. As we learned in this chapter's introduction, proponents of *dependency theory* assume that an increase in cloth imports undermined domestic African industries. Thus, in their view, global trade constrained industrial development in Africa. However, as we will see, West African textile industries actually experienced a number of benefits by engaging with the global economy, more so than was the case in East Africa. This was partly possible because the early industrial advantages in West Africa that we have explored in sections 2-5 put the region in a strong industrial position by the 19th century.

Cash-crop profits and consumer demand

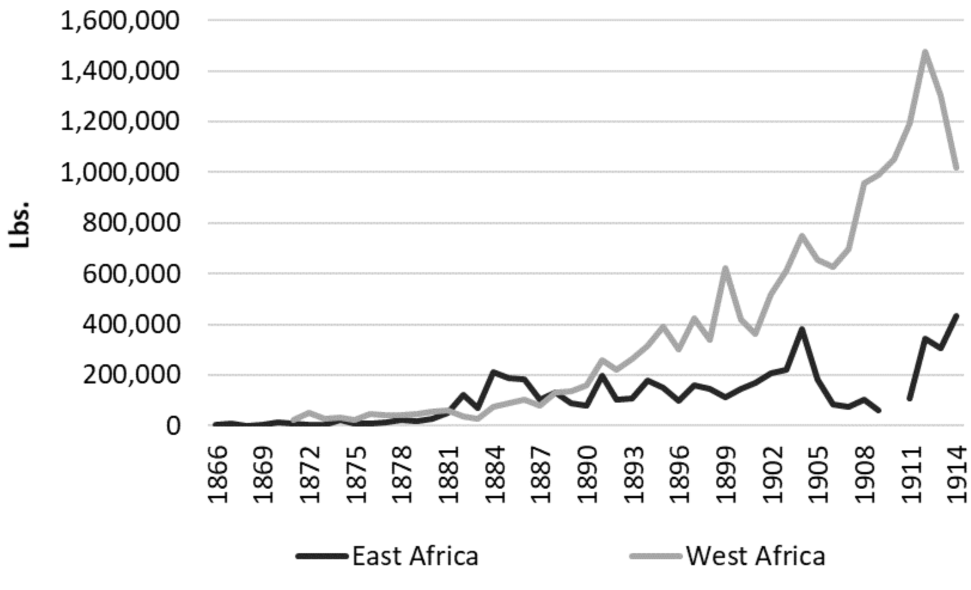
By the 19th century, West Africa was exporting numerous *cash crops* to meet rising demand for raw materials in industrializing world regions. For example, southern Nigeria's Igboland began exporting large amounts of palm oil, which was shipped coastward along riverways. This sort of global trade could help invigorate domestic textile industries. As people became wealthier from the profits of palm oil exports, they could purchase more cloth. Some of the cloth they purchased was imported, especially from Britain, but much of it was locally made. As demand for cloth grew alongside rising incomes, the textile industry expanded. Igbo women even developed new, more intricately patterned cloths called *Akwete*. This helps illustrate the relationship between different sectors within a single economy. Here, expansion in the global-oriented agricultural sector aided growth in the local-oriented industrial sector.

Most East African textile industries did not enjoy the industry-stimulating benefits of increased incomes from cash-crop exporting. This had to do with local geographic factors. East African industrial centers were often situated far inland, with poor access to coastal trading centers. This reduced the potential profits of cash-crop exports. This was the case, for example, for the textile-producing kingdom of Ufipa, which was located deep within the river-scarce interior of Tanzania. The high cost of transporting agricultural products by foot to distant coastal markets made it impossible for the region to raise incomes via cash-crop exports.

The effects of imported manufactures

We have looked at how global exports could stimulate African textile industries, but how did imports of cloth and other cotton products from places like Britain, India, and the United States impact local industries? As we saw in Figure 1, cloth imports grew more quickly in 19th-century West Africa than in East Africa. But many West African textile industries continued to develop in the midst of rising cloth imports from overseas. In fact, *competition* from imported cloth often stimulated local innovation. For example, some Igbo weavers began reproducing popular imported Indian and English patterns. Importantly, the development of new domestic products like these was aided by the increasing use of imported yarn, especially from Britain. Spinning yarn by hand requires a great deal of time, making it a very *labor intensive* part of the production process. The importation of this *industrial input* from Britain thus helped increase *industrial productivity* and also helped broaden the range of possible cloth colors. As Figure 2 shows, imports of British-made yarn into West Africa increased rapidly by the late-19th century, quickly exceeding yarn imports into East Africa.

Figure 2: Yarn imports into West Africa and East Africa, 1866-1914



Sources: British and Indian annual trade reports, 1866-1914.

Yarn imports were nearly non-existent in most of interior East Africa. In the case of Tanzania, largescale importation of yarn was simply not possible due to the high cost of transporting goods by foot to the deep interior. However, yarn imported from both India and Britain *was* used in the more resilient industrial areas of Somalia and Ethiopia in northern East Africa. In fact, most of the yarn imports into East Africa illustrated in Figure 2 went to this region. Weavers in coastal Mogadishu used colored imported yarn to make striped cloth. Increasing amounts of yarn were also imported into landlocked Ethiopia after the Ethio-Djibouti Railway opened in 1901. Imported industrial inputs helped local weavers lower the cost of producing Ethiopian *shamma* togas. This helped them compete with cheap imported cloth from Europe, India, and the United States. But, importantly, producers could not enjoy these benefits unless there was first a cost-effective means of transporting imported industrial inputs to textile-producing regions.

7. The impact of colonial rule

During the 19th century, much of sub-Saharan Africa was colonized by European powers. How did colonial rule affect domestic industries? As we will see, the impact differed per region. This had to do with (1) the types of colonial interventions that each region experienced and (2) the strength of the existing industries, which helped determine how well they could cope with colonial pressures.

Taxation

As we have already learned in section 5, *institutions* influenced the development of industries during the pre-colonial period. During the colonial period, colonizers imposed a number of new *colonial institutions*. Some of these institutions proved disruptive for domestic industries, especially in East Africa.

One such institution was taxation. Colonial powers imposed new taxes on the regions they colonized. These tax demands created problems for households that did not have the money to pay them. In German East Africa (modern-day Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi), colonizers levied a *hut tax* on all adult men in the early 20th century. In the cloth-producing Ufipa region, most men did not have the money needed to pay their taxes. As a result, many men migrated to the coast to work for wages on European-owned plantations. This *labor migration* quickly reduced the supply of textile workers living in Ufipa, causing the cloth industry to collapse. These types of taxes levied on individuals (known as *direct taxation*) were common in much of East Africa. In West Africa, in contrast, tax revenue was mostly raised by taxing the region’s extensive trade (known as *indirect taxation*) instead of taxing people. Potentially disruptive direct taxation thus remained comparatively limited in much of West Africa.

Case study: cotton imperialism in British Nigeria

In some cases, colonizers viewed a decline of domestic textile manufacturing as potentially beneficial for the *metropole*, or colonizing country. In their view, European manufacturers could sell more factory-made cloth to the colonies if they did not face competition from locally made cloth. At the same time, they could purchase more raw cotton from the colonies (to use in European industries) if this cotton was not used by African weavers. For this reason, deindustrialization theorists have argued that colonial rule was detrimental for domestic industries. However, as the case of Nigeria in British West Africa illustrates, strong local industries could persevere even when colonial powers tried to interfere with local industries.

During the early 20th century, the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA) actively attempted to turn Britain's Nigerian colonies into the main source of raw cotton for the British textile industry and a major market for British cloth. Both goals were thwarted by the strong domestic textile industry for two main reasons. First, the BCGA established very low purchasing prices for Nigerian raw cotton in an effort to lower the cost of raw materials for the British textile industry. However, local textile producers in Nigeria were willing to pay much higher prices, so African farmers simply sold their raw cotton to local manufacturers instead of to the British. Second, British-made textiles struggled to compete with locally made cloth. The domestic cloth was reportedly more durable and aesthetically appealing for many consumers.
The British did succeed in securing large amounts raw cotton in another colony: Uganda. The Protectorate of Uganda would eventually become the biggest raw cotton exporter in British Africa. Importantly, however, no cotton textile industry had ever existed in Uganda, so the British faced no competition from local manufacturers.

8. Manufacturing in the 20th century

In West Africa, regional patterns of cloth production and trade continued and evolved during and after the colonial period. As the 20th century progressed, cloth import levels continued to rise. Newly industrialized countries, like Japan and eventually China also began sending large quantities of cloth to sub-Saharan Africa. But local handicraft manufacturers in much of West Africa persevered.

By the mid-1960s, it was estimated that 50 million yards of cloth were annually woven by hand in Nigeria alone. Around mid-century, the Tiv people in the Benue State (in southeastern Nigeria) were still weaving at least half of their own clothing and also produced large quantities for regional trade. The introduction of motor transportation allowed Bùnú weavers in southwestern Nigeria to send increasing amounts of cloth to Igboland, although this trade was eventually disrupted by the Nigerian Civil War in 1967. And in Igboland, *Akwete* weaving techniques continued to spread throughout the region. As we see in Image 5, female weavers in the region are still using these methods. Today, cloth production still thrives and supplements household incomes in southern Nigeria as consumers continue to demand high-quality domestic cloth with strong cultural value.

Image 5: Woman weaving *Akwete* cloth on a broad loom
Source: Wikimedia Commons (photographer: Ekekeh Ubadire Obiama, 2017).

In northern Nigeria, in contrast, hand-loom weaving would show greater decline from around the 1920s. This was likely tied to certain changes in the region that affected its supply of textile *labor* and *consumer markets*. First of all, northern Nigeria's economy had long depended on slave labor, but slavery ended during the colonial period. Formerly enslaved textile workers and cotton cultivators could now choose to pursue other employment opportunities. Secondly, the large trans-Saharan caravan trade began declining by the start of the 1920s. This reduced access to important *export markets* for northern Nigerian cloth. However, the region's ancient textile industry in Kano did not simply disappear. Trade relations with desert people remained intact, if diminished. Even today, Tuareg people continue to wear the characteristic indigo veils dyed in the large vats seen above in Image 4.

Turning back to East Africa, the textile industries of most of the region had already disappeared by the beginning of the 20th century, having suffered from smaller consumer markets and more disruptive colonial interventions. However, in those areas of northern East Africa that had larger consumer markets, production continued much longer. On the Benadir Coast, at least 1,000 households were reportedly weaving in the 1950s. The industry would only substantially fade with the violent social and economic disruption brought by civil war in the late 20th century. In neighboring Ethiopia, hand weaving traditions were still spreading in the early 21st century, with farmers increasingly taking up weaving to generate additional income.

9. Industrialization in sub-Saharan Africa

As we have seen, handicraft manufacturing has persisted in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. However, these traditional industries did not lead to widespread industrialization. Early post-colonial governments in both East and West Africa attempted to stimulate factory-based textile manufacturing during the 1960s and 1970s by investing in industry and discouraging cloth imports via trade barriers, including tariffs or even bans on imported cloth. This is known as *import-substitution industrialization*. However, these initiatives had only limited success in most African countries, which still lacked the necessary skilled laborers and financial capital to effectively operate and maintain large machine-based factories. These import-substitution industrialization policies were largely abandoned by the 1980s and 1990s when African countries were forced to remove trade barriers in exchange for financial loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The removal of these barriers opened African countries to vast imports of cheap cloth from newly industrialized countries in Asia, as well as largescale imports of second-hand clothing from Europe and the United States.

However, as we have seen in this chapter, competition from imports does not necessarily mean that local industries cannot develop and even flourish. Conditions are changing in Africa. Perhaps more than ever before, the continent is becoming better positioned to industrialize. First of all, Africa now has far more of the skilled labor that is needed to develop and manage manufacturing industries. At the same time, the continent's population is booming, creating large and growing domestic consumer markets in sub-Saharan African countries, which we have seen is a vital ingredient for developing industries. Moreover, the spread of mechanized transportation in Africa provides opportunities for greater regional trade of domestic manufactures. Finally, Africa is attracting large sums of foreign direct investment (FDI) from Asian countries that are seeking to outsource their manufacturing enterprises. Investments from abroad have already boosted industrialization in places like Mauritius, Madagascar, and Ethiopia. Crucially, however, industrialization requires reliable electricity sources, which much of the continent still lacks. Correcting this deficiency will require targeted state policies. Just as we saw in the case of West Africa's pre-colonial textile industry, governments play an important role in creating the necessary business environment for industries to flourish.

10. Conclusion

Sub-Saharan Africa has had a long history of textile manufacturing, but the development of weaving industries differed between regions. Handicraft textile industries survived and even thrived in West Africa and the northern part of East Africa before, during, and after the colonial period. Meanwhile, many textile industries in the rest of East Africa collapsed by the beginning of the 20th century. Deindustrialization theory points to rising global trade during the colonial period as a cause of industrial decline. But we have seen that there is much more to the story. Rather than only looking at *external factors* (like global trade and colonial intervention), it is important to consider different *regional characteristics* that influenced the strength of domestic industries. By exploring these characteristics we can learn important lessons about what enables industries to grow and thrive.

We have seen that a longer history of textile manufacturing in West Africa compared with most of East Africa provided a longer period of time to develop strong *consumer demand* and more complex *production techniques*. This would, in turn, help the industry compete with machine-made imports from overseas during the 19th century. We also saw that it is useful to have a *fertile environment* that can supply large amounts of raw cotton and feed a *dense population* since people provide both *labor* for industry and *consumers* for products. *Trade networks* that link industrial centers to other areas are also important since they allow manufacturers to send their products to *export markets*. West Africa had all of these production and trade advantages, whereas most of East Africa did not, with the notable exceptions of Ethiopia and Somalia.

Additionally, West Africa had numerous large states that helped develop *institutions* to further stimulate domestic manufacturing and trade. In East Africa, in contrast, large states were rare. Those that did exist focused more on encouraging profitable ivory trading than promoting less profitable industries. Well-crafted *state policies* that promoted industrial growth were a key ingredient for industrial vitality. All of these benefits led to the development of West African industries that were strong enough to compete with imported cloth and cope with colonial interventions by the 19th century. In short, global trade and colonization certainly affected sub-Saharan African textile industries, but the consequences of these external forces were heavily influenced by a number of local conditions.

Africa's handicraft textile traditions did not lead to widespread industrialization in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, today, a combination of higher-quality education, growing consumer markets, and foreign direct investment may provide the necessary boost to jumpstart African industrialization in the years to come.

Study questions

1. What is deindustrialization theory? Is this theory convincing? Why or why not?

2. Textile industries developed earlier in West Africa than in much of East Africa. How did this longer history of manufacturing help West African textile industries compete with rising cloth imports during the 19th century?

3. Large pre-colonial states were more common in West Africa than in East Africa. Why were large states beneficial for the development of textile industries?

4. Historically, West Africa has been more densely populated than most of East Africa. What is population density and why might a higher population density be beneficial for domestic industries?

5. Some scholars have argued that cloth imports into sub-Saharan Africa destroyed local industries in the 19th century. Others have argued that imports helped stimulate local manufacturing. Provide two possible arguments for each perspective. Which do you find most convincing, and why?

Suggested readings

Alpers, E. A. (2009) *East Africa and the Indian Ocean*, Princeton: Markus Wiener, chapter 5: "*Futa Benaadir*: Continuity and change in the traditional cotton texitile industry of southern Somalia, c. 1840-1980," pp. 79-98.

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Davison, P. and P. Harries (1980) "Cotton weaving in south-east Africa: Its history and technology," *Textile History* 11(1): 175-192.

Frederick, K. (2020) *Twilight of an industry in East Africa: Global trade, colonial rule, and textile manufacturing, 1830-1940*, London etc.: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Kriger, C. E. (2006) *Cloth in West African History*, Lanham: AltaMira Press.

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