Global Competition in the Local Marketplace:

The Impact of Foreign Cotton Cloth Imports on British West African Cotton Textile Industries during the Pre-colonial and Colonial Eras

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PRIMARY AGENDA				
ABSTRA	L: INTRODUCTION			
CHAPTI	ER 1: INTRODUCTION	1		
1.1 In	troduction	1		
1.2 Hi	storiography	3		
1.3 Pr	inciple Question and Theoretical Underpinnings	8		
1.3.1				
1.3.2				
1.4 M	ethodology and Organization	10		
1.4.1				
1.4.2	** *			
	Late Colonial Era (1900s)	12		
1.4.2 Organization Slave Trade Era (1700s) Pre-colonial/Early Colonial Era (1800s) Late Colonial Era (1900s) CHAPTER 2: SPACE FOR BRITISH WEST AFRICAN PRODUCTION? 2.1 A Brief History of West African Textile Production 2.1.1 Early African Textile Consumption 2.1.2 Early West African Textile Production 2.1.3 Early West African Textile Trade 2.2 Indian Cloth Imports During the Slave Trade 2.2.1 The Rise of Indian Cotton Textiles in West Africa	14			
2.1 A	Brief History of West African Textile Production	14		
2.1.1				
2.1.2				
2.1.3	Early West African Textile Trade	16		
2.2 In	dian Cloth Imports During the Slave Trade	19		
2.2.2	Indian Cotton Textiles as Competition for Local West African Product	21		
2.2.3	Colonial Agendas and Textile Competition Dynamics in British West Africa	22		
2.2.4	Qualitative Reports of Resilient West African Industries	23		
2.3 Tł	ne Rise of British Cotton Cloth in West Africa	24		
2.3.1				
2.3.2				
2.3.3	West African Cotton Cloth Production in the Nineteenth Century	30		
2.4 Bı	ritish West African Production In The Colonial Era	33		
2.4.1				
2.4.2				
2.4.3				
2.4.4				
	Unreported Re-Export Activity?			
	Foreign Cloth Re-exports and Domestic Production	43		

2.4.5	Twentieth-Century Trade in Locally Produced Cotton Cloth	44
2.4.6	Twentieth-Century Wartime Production And Export Opportunities	46
	The First World War	47
	The Second World War	48
СНАРТ	ER 3: HOW DID BRITISH WEST AFRICA COMPETE WITH BRITAIN?	49
3.1 In	come Plasticity of Cotton Cloth Consumption	50
3.2 Ex	ceptional Quality of West African Cloth	50
3.3 Lo	2.4.6 Twentieth-Century Wartime Production And Export Opportunities	51
2.4.6 Twentieth-Century Wartime Production And Export Opportunities The First World War The Second World	52	
3.5 Ra		
3.5.2	Cloth Production & Cotton Cultivation Levels in the Gold Coast & Sierra Leone	56
3.6 Gl	obalizing Trade and Resilient Industrial Adaptation	57
3.6.2	Cotton Yarn	58
3.6.3	Adaptive Industrial Focuses	59
CHAPTI	ER 4: CONCLUSION	60
4.1 Di	d British West African Producers Survive the Cotton Cloth Import Flood?	60
4.2 Av	oiding the Aggregation Problem	61
4.3 Ge	ographic Protection and the Transport Revolution	62
4.4 Pr	ice and Income Elasticity	63
4.5 Co	onnection to Post-Colonial Developments	64
REFERE	NCES	65

TABLES AND GRAPHS

Table 1.	Differentiated Imports from Britain into the Bight of Biafra, By Percent, 1661-1790
Table 2.	Average Total Annual British West African Imports of Cotton Cloth by Colony, Yards/Capital, 1924-1938
Table 3.	Average Annual British West African Cotton Cloth Imports by Variety by Colony, Yards/Capital, 1924-1938
Graph 1.	British West African Cloth Imports by Origin as a Percent of Total Regional Imports by Decade, 1699-1808
Graph 2.	Re-export of Indian Price Goods from Britain to West Africa, 1772-1849
Graph 3.	Estimate of Total Cotton Cloth Imports by Colony, Yards/Capita, 1870-1914
Graph 4.	Total Aggregated British West African Cotton Cloth Imports, Yards/Capita, 1924-1938
Graph 5.	Total British West African Cotton Cloth Imports by Aggregate Region and by Colony, Yards/Capita, 1924-1938
Graph 6.	Total British West African Cotton Cloth Imports by Colony, by Total Value (£), 1909-1938
Graph 7.	Aggregated British West African Cotton Textile Imports by Variety, Yards/Capita, 1924
Graph 8.	Colored/Printed/Dyed Cloth Imports into British West Africa by Colony, Yards/Capita, 1924-1938
Graph 9.	Total Cotton Cloth Imports into British West Africa by Colony by Total Value

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Primary Agenda

To find out how British West African domestic textile industries were affected by the rise of foreign cotton cloth imports during the pre-colonial and colonial eras.

Abstract

Rodney (1972) asserts that emerging African textile industries were destroyed by the influx of foreign (mostly Indian and later British) textiles by the time European nations had colonized the continent in the nineteenth century. Did pre-colonial and colonial Indian and British textile competition universally devastate cotton cloth industries in British West Africa, or did cotton textile industries engage with and react to foreign cotton cloth imports and industrial interference in different ways and with often more positive outcomes than Rodney (1972) suggests? This investigation employs qualitative and quantitative empirical sources, including underexploited nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial records, to begin to unravel the complex history of British West African textile production following the shock of the slave trade (which led to an influx of Indian textiles in exchange for slaves) and the industrial revolution (which perpetuated a massive influx of British textiles into the region).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Africa has long been considered a continent doomed to industrial stagnation and general economic disappointment, having suffered from anemic growth during much of the modern era, while other world regions seized the opportunity to industrialize by using textile production as a springboard to industrial advancement. However, while much is assumed, little is known about Africa's early industrial development during the precolonial and colonial periods. In this thesis, I take a closer look at the long-term development of domestic cotton cloth industries in specifically British West Africa¹ as they were affected by the rise of foreign cotton cloth imports during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹ Although this thesis spans back to the pre-colonial era, the term "British West Africa" is used to refer to the four West African areas that were eventually colonized by the British: the Gambia, the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana), Sierra Leone, and Nigeria.

During the pre-colonial era, cotton textile trading was already developing a particularly international character. As Riello and Roy (2009) marvel, "cloth created a truly global network" (p. 6). Accordingly, development of once-humble textile traditions helped generate industrial takeoffs fueled by the international marketplace, including Britain's industrial revolution² and more recently, the catch-up of several East Asian countries during the second half of the twentieth century.³ And in Latin America, despite limited success, textile production played an important role in attempted industrial takeoffs based upon import substitution in the early twentieth century.⁴

But while other world regions have utilized textile production as a foundation for subsequent industrial growth, sub-Saharan African textile industries have appeared to suffer from dismal growth for much of the modern era, even in relatively prosperous West Africa. However, this disappointed growth of West African textile industries was by no means caused by a lack of historical interest or participation in cotton production, for according to colonial-era British historians Wadsworth and Mann (1931), cotton cloth was *the* textile of choice amongst African consumers, for cotton is "far more suitable for wear in hot climates than any other textile material" (p. 118). And as this thesis demonstrates, numerous qualitative sources reveal that an extensive history of textile production did exist throughout West Africa.

Why does cotton cloth production matter? As W.A. Lewis (1978) notes, "insofar as exporting primary products is the engine of growth of developing countries, this engine beats rather more slowly than *industrial* production" (p. 65). As Rodney (1972) explains, "a product such as cotton jumped in value from the time that it went through the sophisticated processes of manufacture in Europe" (p. 241), and according to him, Africa's position within this global network became increasingly defined as an exporter of raw cotton (as opposed to finished goods), in spite of deeply entrenched historical production traditions that seem to have spanned the continent.

This thesis aims to help establish the timeline of specifically British West African industrial textile development. It traces the centuries-long transition from primarily African-oriented trade in specialized domestic textile products to more foreign-oriented trade, which saw at least part of West Africa's local raw cotton supplies exported beyond the continent. Most of these raw cotton exports were destined for mechanized European looms that produced cloth, which was then sent back to Africa to compete with local cotton textile products in domestic marketplaces.

As it turns out, in spite of growing foreign cotton textile competition and foreign intervention in trade, there is reason to believe that in many cases, local British West African textile producers *did* successfully adapt to new circumstances and continued to produce and even export cotton cloth well into the twentieth century. In fact, a great deal of qualitative evidence suggests that until at least the early twentieth century, Indian and then British traders faced direct competition with local British West African textile

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² Mokyr. 1993: Landes. 1969.

³ Vogel, 1993.

⁴ Baer, 1972, p. 7; Edwards, 2009, p. 578; Furtado, 1976, p. 115.

manufacturers, who produced quality garments to suit specific local tastes, while taking advantage of expanding trading opportunities in global markets, particularly with regard to imports of industrial inputs.

The investigation that follows poses highly relevant questions, the proposed answers to which may help to fill gaps in global textile trade and production history and, perhaps more importantly, raise further questions about Africa's *general* industrial development trajectory. For example, has sub-Saharan Africa (using British West Africa as a continental example) *always* been industrially deficient or was Africa's twentieth-century industrial and economic disappointment primarily the result of post-colonial-era factors that would only come into play during the second half of the twentieth century?

1.2 Historiography

The feeble growth of modern-era African textile industries, relative to those in other developing regions (particularly Asia), has prompted widely divergent viewpoints as to the historical role that foreign competition may have played in impeding growth and when this may have occurred. While a great deal of debate has raged over time, surprisingly little empirical evidence has been utilized to backup assumptions.

Some scholars, like Inikori (2009), argue that foreign cotton cloth imports had already gravely undermined the development of domestic West African cloth production industries during the slave trade era. According to Inikori (2009), the common European practice of exchanging foreign cotton cloth for African captives produced decidedly negative (if perhaps unintentional) consequences for the development of coastal West African textile industries. He maintains that textile proto-industry, the precursor to more substantial industrial development, failed to materialize properly in West Africa as a result of this European-African, textile-captive barter trade, which he argues, persisted from the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. In investigating the level of proto-industrial development that occurred in West Africa, Inikori (2009) has concluded that, since cotton cloth imports were not exchanged for *produced goods*, but rather for *human beings*, European traders had effectively robbed West Africa of human capital and at the same time, deterred export-focused industrial production. Consequently, during the eighteenth century:

[The] combined effects of socio-political conflict and population loss [from West Africa] ultimately held back the growth of trade and

⁵ Note that while this thesis focuses specifically on *British West* African colonies, much of the historiography and early historical information on the subject sometimes refers to the entire West African and/or sub-Saharan regions of the continent. However, I distinguish British West Africa wherever possible.

⁶ Inikori (2009) focuses his attention on the barter trade of textiles for captives, arguing that, "tens of thousands of captives [were] sold for export annually in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, [so] they [West African coastal societies] must have been filled with imported textiles and other manufactures" (p. 111). However, much of those "other manufactures" may have been comprised of guns (which were *far* more valuable than cotton cloth pieces), although this remains an obscured portion of the so-called "hidden half" of barter goods (Johnson, 1984, p. 7; Hogendorn and Gemery, 1990). Thus, Inikori may be overestimating the capacity of textile imports into West Africa during the slave trade era.

specialization, the commercializing process, and the development and geographical spread of the market economy...all of which retarded further development of manufacturing (including cotton textiles) in the area (Inikori, 2009, p. 112).

In Inikori's view, local African textile products were crowded out by the growing amount of foreign cotton cloth imports into West Africa, which included linens, woolens, and cotton goods. And while signs of proto-industrial development and export-oriented textile production *have* been identified in regions like the inland Kano emirate, Inikori (2009) argues that these West African producers were *ultimately* unsuccessful. According to him, this was at least partly the result of a general dislocation of African markets, which was caused by a "retardation of market development" with the rise of the Atlantic slave trade and infiltration of European traders into the interior. And while others (especially Johnson 1974, 1978, 1984) argue a different point of view, that native product posed a significant competitive challenge for European traders, Inikori (2009) claims to have found no convincing evidence that British textile exporters faced particular competition from West African producers.

Like Inikori (2009), dependency theorist Rodney (1972) argues that foreign trade, especially with Europe, precipitated the demise of formerly prosperous cotton textile industries across Africa during the pre-colonial period. According to Rodney (1972), by the beginning of the colonial period, most (if not all) of sub-Saharan Africa had already fallen into a dependency trap. That is, they had lost control over trans-regional trading activities and, consequently, were forced into a subordinate primary-producer role, whereby Africans began to rely on imported finished goods from India and Europe, which they acquired by exporting local primary product supplies, like raw cotton. Rodney (1972) explains how, in his view, West Africa made the industrially damning transition from cloth producer to cloth importer:

It is particularly striking that in the early centuries of trade, Europeans relied heavily on Indian cloths for resale in Africa, and they also purchased cloths on several parts of the West African coast for resale elsewhere. Morocco, Mauretania, Senegambia, Ivory Coast, Benin, Yorubaland and Loango were all exporters to other parts of Africa through European middlemen. Yet, by the time that Africa entered the colonial era, it was concentrating almost entirely on the export of raw cotton and the import of manufactured cotton cloth. This remarkable reversal is tied to technological advance in Europe and to stagnation of technology in Africa owing to the very trade with Europe (p. 113).

In marked contrast, other scholars, like Fage (1978), have argued that foreign imports did not harm, but actually *stimulated* African economies and industries, by facilitating access to manufactured goods, while providing a healthy market for African primary products.

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⁷ Inikori, 2009, p. 113

However, Inikori (2009) contends that Fage's argument is built upon "an inappropriate application of Ricardo's static comparative advantage principle to issues of structural transformation and general economic development" (p. 85). But as sections of this thesis will demonstrate, Fage (1978) was correct to argue that trade provided access to new manufactures, although many of these were actually industrial inputs, rather than finished goods. Fage (1978) is not alone in his pro-trade outlook. According to colonial-era historian McPhee (1926), an "economic revolution" occurred in British West Africa, partly as a result of trade with British suppliers and engagement with the British metropolis. McPhee (1926), however, supported the diversion of raw cotton supplies from African handlooms (even in prospering industrial regions, like northern Nigeria) to British power looms, for he did not have high confidence in African industrial textile development.

According to Rodney (1972), this process of steering Africans away from productive growth extended into the colonial period when colonial institutional policy directly and intentionally excluded Africans from industry. In East Africa, for example, British policy toward factory production overtly favored first Europeans, then Indians, and lastly native Africans as late as the 1920s. Thus, in Rodney's view, it was not only European trade that doomed African textile industries to fail, but also the biased institutional policies of the colonial metropolis.

Eltis and Jennings (1988) agree that imported textiles began to threaten African domestic production during the early colonial period, when the slave trade had been thoroughly replaced by trade in manufactures. However, instead of citing colonial institutional policy as a driving detrimental factor, they focus instead on changing price dynamics, arguing that most of these newly-traded commodity goods (largely comprised of Britishmade cotton textiles) had declined dramatically in price with the introduction of new industrial technologies, namely the factory system. As they explain, "[i]mported cloth evidently reached a wider African market in the eighteenth century but began to impinge on the domestic textile industry only as the slave trade was replaced by the traffic in commodities in the mid-nineteenth century [my italics]. This increase in imported textile use was a function of the dramatic declines in the prices of English⁸ fabrics in the nineteenth century." Thus, according to Eltis and Jennings (1988), it was not the eighteenth-century, slave-trade-fueled import of Indian cotton cloth that adversely impacted local West African cotton textile industries (as argued by Inikori and Rodney), but rather, the larger-scale, nineteenth-century import of British-produced cotton textiles. which was only made possible with improvements in production technologies.

Likewise, Klein (1999) has studied the role that slave trade era imports of Indian cotton cloth played in deterring the development of African textile industries. And like Eltis and Jennings (1988), he has found that colonial-era British textiles affected local African production far more than Indian cloths imported during the slave trade era. British West

⁸ For the purposes of this thesis, all cloth produced in present-day Britain and exported to Africa will be referred to as "British" cloth for the sake of continuity. However, some quotations refer to British cloth as "English" because the formation of Great Britain had only occurred in the early eighteenth century.

⁹ Eltis and Jennings, 1988, p. 954.

African textile production had continued well into the post-slave trade era and likely competed effectively with European textiles, at least until British producers and traders introduced exceptionally cheap cotton textile goods in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, in Klein's opinion, it was not necessarily trade with Europe *per se* that crippled local industry, but the import of specifically *British-made* textile products, which undercut local producers in a way that Indian textiles had never been able to do.

Other scholars, however, maintain that West African textile industries effectively *adapted* to changing trade and consumption dynamics, and continued to prosper even into the post-colonial period. In particular, Johnson (1974, 1978, 1984) argues that while textiles were undeniably pouring into the African market, local textile production continued to thrive, especially in areas with strong cotton growing and weaving traditions. Using her path-breaking eighteenth-century British-African trade data set, Johnson (1984) highlights the dramatic increase in foreign (mostly Indian-made, but European-transported) textile imports during the peak years of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and marvels at the vast amount of fabric entering West Africa: "The most striking fact is the sheer quantity of textiles imported into Africa – by the 1770s some two million wrapperlengths a year" (p. 10). However, she also lauds the ability of local weavers – particularly those in regions with strong local traditions of production – to have not only continued to produce cloth, but also to flourish and fiercely *compete* with new cloth varieties entering their local markets. For according to her, there is no tangible evidence of a decline in local textile production caused by increased imports.

In fact, regarding the period during and after the slave trade era, she finds that while local consumption *did* increasingly include foreign cotton cloth goods, domestic production was *not* adversely affected by these changes. Instead, the income "plasticity" (as opposed to *elasticity*) of cotton cloth consumption meant that local styles (elite and common, alike) likely incorporated a now-broader selection of garments inclusive of both foreign and local products. Thus, while foreign imports may have helped generate a "considerable change in the standards of dress" in different parts of West Africa, they did not drive out local producers and sellers.¹⁰

Kriger (2009) agrees that West African producers weathered the competition of the slave trade era, retaining their traditional production niches, but also adopting new methods and styles, resourcefully using high-quality Indian cloth imports as product models:

Textiles were imported into West Africa very selectively [and] the varieties that were most widely and consistently preferred were...plain, piece-dyed, or loom-patterned cottons...and they supplemented the well-established products of West African workshops, such as the striped and indigo-dyed 'Benin' cottons, the patterned *quaqua* cloths, the plain white *xeroes*, and the richly dyed and finished *panos pretos*. To be sure, the import trade brought changes, [but] competition spawned new production centres and marketing strategies; exotic imports inspired the invention of

¹⁰ Johnson, 1984, p. 10.

new production; and fibers, tools, and techniques were transferred to new locales. All the while, though, and amidst these changes, 'Guinea cloth' continued to be both locally produced and consumed as an enduring hallmark of West African culture (p. 126).

Unlike many other historians of African history, (including most of those introduced above), Kriger (2009) and Johnson (1974, 1978, 1984) do not erroneously aggregate West Africa (or Africa as a whole) into one falsely homogenized entity, but instead recognize that experiences of increasing trade, with its potential consequences, were felt quite differently across the region and the continent. Johnson (1984), for example, maintains that during the slave trade era, most of the imports of foreign cotton textiles (again, largely Indian cloth which was often exchanged for captives) ended up in parts of coastal West Africa that engaged in little or no local textile production activity and so had previously depended primarily upon native African textiles, made available through intra-African trade. However, she explains that later, during the colonial era, locally produced West African cotton cloth was heavily favored over cheaply made *British* cloth imports.

Thus, according to Johnson (1978), local weaving continued to flourish in many parts of West Africa well into the nineteenth century. And although she suggests that declining production in areas along the lower Niger River may have occurred in the later part of this century, this was caused not so much by impossible competition from foreign cotton textile imports as by the economic ravages of civil wars. However, she has found documented evidence of ongoing export-oriented production even in these parts of West Africa, which frequently shipped cloth to Lagos and Accra well into the second half of the nineteenth century. She also points to "flourishing" local industries along the Gambia and in Sierra Leone, where local cloth was regularly used as a form of currency and integrated into both local and export-oriented trading systems.¹² Thus, according to Johnson (1974, 1978, 1984), Indian and British textile imports into West Africa did not critically damage domestic West African textile industries.

In fact, Johnson (1984) found that local production was still thriving in West Africa up to the second half of the twentieth, even if it had failed to materialize into a globally exportoriented, factory-based production system as it had in other developing regions, like China. However, Johnson (1978) also notes a twentieth-century, interwar period of decline in local production in some parts of West Africa. In Ghana (the Gold Coast), for instance, local producers (already few in number, relative to other parts of West Africa)

While this may be true, it is also important to consider the far-reaching, trade-based impact that foreign cotton cloth imports may have had on other regions that traded with non-producing West African localities. Many (in fact, most) areas that lacked local textile production activities will have likely imported native West African textiles from other parts of West Africa that historically engaged in domestic production and export. An increase in foreign imports of cotton cloth may have easily affected these traditional West African trade patterns, potentially crowding out native West African imports, especially if the non-African

African trade patterns, potentially crowding out native West African imports, especially if the non-African imports were fairly priced and of high quality, like Indian cotton cloth. However, this may have been mitigated by the income-plastic nature of cotton cloth consumption in West Africa, as theorized by Johnson (1978) and elucidated in a subsequent section of this thesis.

¹² Johnson, 1978, p. 263-265.

began to turn to the more profitable manufacture of cocoa for export to the world at large. However, in Johnson's view, this was by no means a trend across the region. For example, Johnson (1978) points to tremendous increases in cotton yarn imports into West Africa, which continued into the 1950s, as evidence of ongoing local production. In fact, Nigeria alone, was importing over four million pounds of cotton yarn by 1961 to support a still-resilient local industry.¹³ And as Johnson (1978) remarks, "[t]his does not sound like a dying hand-loom industry" (p. 265).¹⁴ According to her, although West African production and consumption patterns *did* change with the introduction of foreign imports, local industries did not necessarily wither away, as other historians suggest (sometimes stridently, as in the case of Rodney, 1972). It seems that despite some regional similarities in experience, there is no truly *homogenous* story of West African cotton cloth production and decline, but rather there is diversity in the historical developments of local textile industries throughout West Africa. This was as true in the twentieth century as it was in the eighteenth.

This thesis employs both qualitative and quantitative sources to assess the validity of theories put forth by historians of West African textile trade and production history, and in the process, I hope to offer new insights into an old question: How did foreign cotton cloth imports into West Africa (focusing specifically on British colonial areas) affect local textile production and trade activities during the three centuries encompassing the slave trade and colonial eras?

1.3 Principle Question and Theoretical Underpinnings

1.3.1 Principle Question

The principle question addressed in this thesis is did British West African cotton cloth industries deteriorate with the rise of first Indian, and then British, cotton textile imports? Essentially, I investigate if increasing foreign cotton textile imports "crowded out" British West African product by flooding local markets or conversely, if sufficient market space continued to exist to allow for ongoing development of domestic cotton cloth industries concurrent with rising foreign imports, at least up to the late colonial period.

¹³ Johnson, 1978, p. 265.

¹⁴ Although this goes slightly beyond the temporal scope of the discussion at hand, it is interesting to note that at the time of writing (1978), Johnson perceived a decline in per capita output of local producers. In her view, by the 1970s, African population growth was necessitating a rise in the import of cotton textiles from unprecedentedly cheap sources abroad, like China. However, this does not mean that local production declined in absolute terms, and in fact, it likely increased along with increasing population pressure. Thus, local producers continued to supply a substantial (if declining) portion of locally consumed cloth up to at least the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Using both qualitative and quantitative sources, this investigation offers a more nuanced and detailed description of how British West African producers and consumers interacted with and reacted to changing composition and levels of intensity of foreign cotton cloth imports, which steadily increased from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Was a general decline in British West African cloth production initiated with the increase in imports of competitive Indian cotton piece goods during the eighteenth-century slave trade era? Or, did this process begin later, with the nineteenth-century rise in imports of cheap British cotton cloth. In this scenario, did the intensification of British imports begin to crowd out local cloth producers, ultimately generating an export-trade transition, whereby British West African traders exported large quantities of raw cotton, thus depriving local manufacturers of requisite raw materials?

Or, conversely, did some British West African producers continue to adapt, develop, and flourish into the first half of the twentieth century *in spite* of changing trade and consumption patterns? If this were the case, then Africa's (or at the very least, British West Africa's) industrial lethargy may be attributed to post-colonial changes, instead of being attached to some long-entrenched African industrial deficiency or enduring African dependency pattern.

1.3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

Inikori (2009) argues that the consequences of foreign textile imports on relative levels of development of sub-Saharan Africa's textile industries can best be assessed through the observation of the intermediary development stage between handicraft industry and mechanized production, that is, proto-industry. He singles out the proto-industrial stage as "an important measure of progress in the process of industrial development" (p. 88). whereby previously independent, small-scale producers became output-based "wage" workers, organized by merchant capitalists who control the supply of goods and tools, along with the marketing and distribution of the final product. Perhaps most important for the investigation at hand, Inikori (2009) argues that crowding out of local manufactures by cheap foreign imports strained the development of domestic textile industries in two ways: first, by saturating local consumer markets with foreign goods, and second, by creating foreign competition for raw materials (in this case, cotton), which may have been exported to purchase foreign cloth imports, thereby destroying the critical link between merchant capitalists and household producers (which forms the basis of proto-industry), and forcing one-time African producers into a consumer-based, dependent economic position.

By investigating potential dynamics of crowding out and their impact on domestic British West African production, this thesis engages fundamental questions of African dependency versus agency. The continent's developmental outcomes have often been attributed to outside (primarily European) forces that have supposedly molded African economies to suit foreign needs, which is, in my view, a highly Eurocentric conception of African economic history. For example, Rodney (1972) claims that "Europe underdeveloped Africa" by encouraging Africa to export raw materials and import manufactures (thus relegating Africa to a dependent, peripheral global economic role),

while Acemoglu et al. (2001) maintain that European-implemented colonial institutions, as opposed to African agendas and choices, shaped modern economic outcomes in former colonies ¹⁵

Conversely, Austin (2008, 2010) criticizes such dependency-based conceptualizations, arguing that African development processes have, in fact, been far more complex and varied than these models allow. For example, *dependista* Rodney (1972) asserts that, "it must be borne in mind that to be held back at one stage means that it is impossible to go on to a further stage" (p. 114). And in line with Austin's (2008, 2010) critique of the narrowness of developmental dependency theories, Rodney's theoretical contentions seem to allow for only one path to industrial development, disregarding the potential for adaptability and uniqueness of experience. Similarly, contrary to Inikori's (2009) dependency-centered assertions about the potential woes of proto-industrial failures in Africa, Johnson (1984) describes the West African cotton cloth production scheme as more of a conglomeration of countless adaptable, independent, and enduring handicraft operations undertaken by farmers (many of whom grew and consumed their own raw cotton) during the off-season.

Empirically investigating the degree to which European forces *actually* affected long-term growth may provide insights about African (in this case, specifically British West African) agency. Furthermore, this thesis addresses British West African choices, for in spite of (or perhaps alongside) the agendas of outside forces, it seems that British West African producers and consumers often actively engaged in and even embraced changing trade dynamics *by choice*. This may provide some impetus for the argument that African development has not been a mere byproduct of foreign interests, but a *combination* of local and foreign agendas.

Regardless of these questions of agency and dependency, increasing foreign imports of cotton cloth certainly did produce a new set of circumstances in which West African producers operated. Studying changing trade dynamics and associated British West African reactions provides insight into how producers and traders in different parts of British West Africa may have demonstrated varying degrees of adaptive resilience when confronted with increasing competition and changing trade and consumption patterns well into the colonial era.

1.4 Methodology and Organization

1.4.1 Methodology: A Qualitative and Quantitative Approach

This thesis engages both quantitative and qualitative sources and methods to provide a comprehensive view of British West African textile production history and development over three centuries. However, while slave trade and pre-colonial era quantitative evidence remains somewhat limited relative to evidence pertaining to the colonial era

 $^{^{15}}$ For further examples of Eurocentric dependency-based views of "peripheral" African development, see Amin, 1972; Nunn, 2008.

(fortuitously made available through the meticulous recordkeeping of British colonial officials), qualitative reports provide insight where numbers cannot.

Colonial-era quantitative questions addressed in this thesis engage a newly constructed database of British-African textile trade spanning the late-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries, which includes quantity, value, and pricing information of the diverse varieties of cotton textile imports (and occasional exports) shipped to (and from) British West Africa, as reported by merchants and colonial officials of the British Empire. These data sources, collected by bureaucratic officers and housed at the National Archives in London, are certainly, to some degree, products of colonial construction and thus likely flawed through inherent bias and error. Furthermore, these documents typically only report seaborne trade, leaving out the vast overland trading activities that almost certainly occurred throughout the region. Thus, they probably leave out important elements of trade activity, like re-exports, especially to other parts of Africa. However, they are the closest available estimates of historical trade activities in colonial British West Africa.

British West Africa (which includes the Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria) has been specifically selected for this investigation because of its particularly long and relatively well-documented history of trade with Europeans, which quickly grew to unprecedented heights with the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. European (mostly British) re-exports of Indian textiles vastly increased concomitant with the slave trade, for they were commonly employed as currency used to purchase slaves. And with the nineteenth-century decline in Indian textile production, British producers jumped at the chance to export cheap imitations of Indian goods to West Africa, although these products were met with limited enthusiasm, according to British traders and officials. However, British producers increased their exports to British West Africa when its component areas were colonized during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (earlier, relative to East Africa, and on a non-settler basis, relative to South Africa). Thus, British West Africa provides a three-century view of the effects of foreign textile imports on domestic sub-Saharan African production and consumption patterns.

1.4.2 Organization

Following Chapter 1 (which includes, historiography, theory, methodology, and organization), I begin Chapter 2 with a brief exploration of descriptive sources and evidence of traditional domestic cotton textile production in British West African colonial areas before the slave trade era. These sources illustrate that prior to the rise of foreign textile imports into Africa, western African textile production and regional trade was in the process of developing and flourishing, much the same as contemporary European and Indian textile production during roughly the same period.

¹⁶ Furthermore, *British* West Africa has been selected for its particularly rich and accessible archival sources, which provide fine details of the cloth trade, including the composition of cotton cloth imports. More still, problems that may arise in studying areas under different metropolitan governance are somewhat mitigated by primarily focusing on British West Africa, as opposed to including the French cases.

In subsequent sections of Chapter 2, I use both quantitative and qualitative evidence to ascertain whether or not African textile manufacturers continued to enjoy sufficient domestic market space during three periods (the slave trade, the pre-colonial/early colonial, and the late colonial eras) once foreign cotton cloth began to increasingly enter local markets. To investigate this question, I analyze changing competition dynamics that arose in British West Africa with the influx of foreign (mostly Indian and British) textiles and the possible effects this may have had on industrial developments within local textile industries.

As segments of analysis in Chapter 2 demonstrate, although cotton cloth imports into British West Africa *did* generally increase across the three periods under examination, there were also several notable historical periods of temporary *reprieve* from heavy imports of competitive foreign cotton cloth, during which local producers may have taken advantage of the opportunity to increase domestic cotton cloth output.

Slave Trade Era (1700s)

During the slave trade era, the first historical period under investigation, Indian imports into West Africa rose dramatically as a result of large-scale slave trafficking on the West African coast. However, according to reports of European explorers, merchants, and officials, West African textile industries continued to flourish, even as high-quality Indian textiles poured into the region. Based on qualitative and quantitative evidence, it appears that during the slave trade era, ample market space continued to exist for *both* local and foreign cotton cloth, which may have enjoyed different niches in British West African markets.

Pre-colonial/Early Colonial Era (1800s)

With the ending of the slave trade, a transition in the product composition of cotton cloth imports occurred, whereby high-quality Indian textile imports were largely replaced by primarily low-quality British cloth imports, thus providing an opportunity for local British West African cotton cloth producers to recuperate from almost a century of competition with popular Indian imports.

This portion of analysis employs qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the British West African response (both consumer and producer) to the changing quality of foreign cloth imports. The general low quality of British cotton goods seems to have deterred consumers across West Africa from purchasing these imports when local product was available. This, in turn, may have sustained, or even led to increased local production, especially given British reports of native preference for locally produced textile manufactures.

Late Colonial Era (1900s)

To investigate how foreign imports into British West Africa affected competition for consumer markets during the later colonial period (i.e., the first half of the twentieth

century), I analyze the *scale* of British cotton textile imports into British West Africa by determining the relative cotton cloth imports per capita into the four British West African colonies (again, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria).

As it turns out, while the four British West African colonies shared similar cloth import patterns (i.e., in terms of the general composition of imports, along with periods of general increase and decline), the *scale* of these imports differed substantially between colonies, with the Gambia (and to a lesser degree, the Gold Coast), importing great quantities of cotton cloth per inhabitant, although much of this was probably re-exported to other parts of West Africa. By contrast, Nigeria (and to a lesser degree, Sierra Leone), imported very little cotton cloth per person, which is probably indicative of a thoroughly entrenched local textile industry that continued to flourish well into the twentieth century. There is even evidence that parts of British West Africa continued to export locally-produced cloth to other parts of Africa and beyond.

Furthermore, McPhee (1926) points to specific historical periods (mostly wartime) when local producers across British West Africa enjoyed very low competition at the marketplace, as British textile producers faced temporary manufacturing contractions and/or barriers to foreign trade. I use the British West African textile trade database to analyze how consumption and trade dynamics changed in British West African colonies during these temporary periods of reduced import levels of foreign cotton cloth. As it turns out, some colonies, like the Gambia, seem to have taken advantage of wartime reexport opportunities, buying up scarce foreign cloth for export to cloth-hungry parts of West Africa. Other colonies, like Nigeria, may have used these opportunities to increase locally produced cloth output for export to non-producing regions of West Africa (including areas not under British territorial governance), which had become dependent upon steady inflows of foreign cotton cloth.

While Chapter 2 demonstrates that British West African producers were able to continue to produce and compete in the local marketplace through the first half of the twentieth century, Chapter 3 discusses how British West African producers were able to do so, even as foreign cotton textile imports poured into the region. Topics discussed in this chapter include the low marginal cost of West African cotton cloth production, the high quality of domestic cloth relative to the often very low quality of British cloth imports, the low cost of domestic cloth relative to potentially expensive foreign imports, and the role that supplies of raw cotton may have played in encouraging – or perhaps discouraging – cotton cloth production in British West African colonies. Naturally, evidence of a local supply of cotton may provide further evidence for continued local production because raw cotton may stimulate local industry, inviting local hands to produce finished cotton goods (i.e., the theory of linkages). However, a ready supply of raw materials may have simultaneously lured British traders, looking to exchange finished cloth for raw cotton to export back to British looms, thus proving an industrial bane rather than a boon. However, the situation appears to have varied from colony to colony, influenced by geographic location and cotton production traditions.

Finally, I examine the adaptive industrial capacity of British West African producers, many of whom took advantage of the new opportunities that globalizing trade had to offer small-scale, domestic producers. Colonial import records reveal that twentieth-century British West African producers imported a variety of cotton cloth manufacturing inputs, including cotton cards, yarn, and even a few sewing machines!

The concluding section of this thesis (Chapter 4) wraps up the questions addressed in this investigation and introduces future lines of inquiry that may provide even more insight into the complex history of West Africa's cotton cloth industries as they developed and adapted in the face of increasing foreign imports of cotton cloth from the slave trade era through the colonial period.

CHAPTER 2: SPACE FOR BRITISH WEST AFRICAN PRODUCTION?

2.1 A Brief History of West African Textile Production

Historians of West African cloth production generally agree that much of West Africa enjoyed a rich tradition of local textile production well before European traders set their sights on the West African coast. An understanding of general West African cotton cloth consumption, production, and trade activity and development prior to and during the slave trade era will reveal to what extent textile production and trade activities in British West Africa were affected by foreign competition with the emergence of the slave trade.

2.1.1 Early African Textile Consumption

Strong evidence exists to show that across sub-Saharan Africa, cotton cloth was a highly valued cultural commodity amongst the elite and the poor. As Thornton (1992) relates:

[The] consumption of cloth, much more than the consumption of iron, is a means of demonstrating prestige, because its principal use is as a bodily decoration, as protection from the elements. Accumulation of large quantities of cloth and displays of this accumulation...was available not just to the rich or powerful but also to ambitious and successful peasants, artisans, or petty traders (p. 50).

In the East African Swahili culture, for example, locally produced cotton textiles have long played a critical role in social life, even in death. For as Prestholdt (1999) explains:

[Even] those lacking the access to wealth...nonetheless consumed a variety of material goods, especially cotton. 'Though they may be very

poor and have not even sufficient food to eat during their lives,' a sixteenth-century observer reported, '[they] use every endeavor to have a piece of fine cloth or *canequim* to serve as a shroud when they die.' Therefore, more than any other manufacture material, cloth became an item of mass consumption (p. 24).

For West Africa, evidence of domestic cloth production spans back almost a full millennium. In the year 1068, a trader named al-Bakri found that the people of both Ghana (the Gold Coast) and Tadmakka (in modern-day Mali) wore cotton, silk, and brocade, which he presumed had not been produced by foreign Muslims, implying that the clothing items were likely locally produced.¹⁷ Between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, West African Igboland in southern Nigeria was praised as a thriving cotton textile-producing region, endowed with population-boosting and industry-stimulating agricultural prosperity.¹⁸ According to Kriger (2006), regionally produced cotton textiles played an important role as a form of currency along West Africa's Guinea coast commerce well into the nineteenth century.

2.1.2 Early West African Textile Production

Rodney (1972) asserts that before the slave trade era, African cloth production was technologically on par with Europe and Asia, for "cloth manufacture in the world went through a stage of handlooms and small-scale craft production...[and] up to the sixteenth century, that was the general pattern in Africa, Asia and Europe" (p. 113). Accordingly, Thornton (1992) argues that it was not some *new* demand for cotton cloth from previously naked Africans that occasioned eventual increases in foreign cotton cloth imports into Africa, but rather the *extension* of long-entrenched, complex systems of cotton cloth production, consumption and trade throughout the continent.

More still, the cotton cloth produced in West Africa may even have been arguably higher in quality than the product of European manufactures. According to Rodney (1972), "Africa had even better to offer in the form of cotton cloth, which was widely manufactured before the coming of the Europeans...[and] well into the present century, local cottons from the Guinea coast were stronger than Manchester cottons" (p. 50). According to Thornton (1992), West African Mandingo cloth was highly praised by Europeans traveling through the West African coastal region. In fact, European traders widely exchanged the cloth throughout West Africa and Portuguese traders even went so far as to take Mandingo weavers to the Cape Verde Islands to establish a cloth trade, since their production skills were so highly valued.¹⁹

Cotton cloth production remained thoroughly entrenched in West African societies well into the early nineteenth century when Scottish explorer Park (1822) journeyed along the Gambia, where he noted, "In this part of Africa…every man is sufficiently skilled in the arts of weaving, dyeing and sewing" p. 235). In spite of widespread familiarity with all

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¹⁷ Kriger, 2006, p. 74.

¹⁸ Inikori, 2009; Afigbo, 2005.

¹⁹ Thornton, 1992, p. 49.

stages of cloth production (which speaks to the cultural importance of domestic cloth production), according to Rodney (1972), specialization and division of labor had already emerged well before Europeans arrived:

Under communalism, each household met its own needs by making its own clothes, pots, mats, etc....However, economic expansion from there on was associated with specialisation and localisation of industry—people's needs being met by exchange. This trend was displayed in the principal African manufactures, and notably in the cloth industry. Cotton fibre had to be ginned (separated from the seed), then carded and spun into yarn, before being woven. Either the yarn or the woven cloth had to be dyed, and the making of the dye itself was a complex process. There was a time when all these stages would be performed by a single family or rather by the women in a single family, as in Yorubaland. But economic development was reflected in the separation of dyeing from cloth-making, and the separation of spinning from weaving. Each separation marked greater specialisation and quantitative and qualitative changes in output (Rodney, 1972, p. 51).

As a result of increasingly specialized division of labor, local output grew, facilitating more regional trade in specialized, locally produced textiles throughout West Africa.

2.1.3 Early West African Textile Trade

According to Rodney (1972), cotton cloth trade expanded rapidly in West Africa and beyond, so that "the trade [in cotton textiles] was readily distinguishable in every part of the continent between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, an excellent indicator of economic expansion and other forms of development" (p. 52).

There is evidence of highly specialized trade between inland-based textile producers, especially in the West African savanna region, and coastal consumers, which suggests that complex textile trade networks existed throughout West Africa prior to the emergence of the Atlantic slave trade. And as Inikori (2009) explains,

[The] main centers of cotton textile production in West Africa before the growth of seaborne trade with Europeans were in the savannah interior, where the medieval empires – with their commercial and Islamic learning centers – were located...Political and demographic factors interacted to create favorable conditions for the development of trade and manufacturing in the region (p. 92, 97).

As populations increased, cities naturally moved from land-intensive to labor-intensive economic activities, like manufacturing for trade. Furthermore, cotton cloth strips had already been used as currency in West Africa by the early fourteenth century, indicating

widespread production and trade integration throughout West Africa.²⁰ In line with the West African inland-coastal, production-trade specialization pattern, the Gold Coast appears to have engaged in very little, if any, textile production during the early modern period, as the local economy centered on the harvest and export of kola nuts and gold, and later, on cocoa.²¹ However, a great deal of West African textile *trading* occurred in the region, as part of what Inikori (2009) describes as "a gradually evolving inter-regional division of labor" that developed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²² Regardless of if it was a producer or trader of cotton textiles, or both, the Gold Coast played an important role in the regional specialization and dissemination of domestically produced textiles throughout West Africa.

Historically, sub-Saharan African trading patterns have proved resilient in the face of European intervention. As an example, after the Portuguese phase of intervention in West Africa during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, traditional trade patterns between the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast continued, and Dutch tradesmen found similar trade occurring when they took Axim in 1637.²³ According to Rodney (1972), however, even though this West African trade system continued into the slave trade era. by then European middlemen had taken over trading activities and created a dislocation between what were once directly integrated West African markets. As dependency theorist Rodney (1972) characteristically laments, "[t]he kind of relationship which Africa has had with Europe from the very beginning has worked in a direction opposite to the interaction of local economies. Certain inter-territorial links established on the continent were broken down after the 15th century because of European trade" (p. 59). Accordingly, Rodney (1972) argues that in place of traditional West African trading systems, a new system of "pseudo-integration" was implemented, but "this was not genuine integration of the economies of the African territories concerned. Such trade merely represented the extent of foreign penetration, thereby stifling local trades" so that different parts of Africa "looked to Europe and forgot about each other" (p. 119-22).

Contrary to Rodney's assertions, however, primary source information points to ongoing, locally controlled West African trade well into the nineteenth century. As late as the 1820s (long after European traders had penetrated West Africa), explorer Park (1822) noted sophisticated trade patterns between North and West African producers and traders, who engaged in a specialized exchange of goods: "[The Moors] purchase, from the more industrious negroes, cotton cloth and iron, as well as corn and other agricultural produce [because] the same sterility of [North African] soil which discourages cultivation, prevents it from furnishing anything on which manufacturing ingenuity can be exercised" (p. 123). Thus West African textile manufacturers not only produced enough cloth to meet *local* demand, but also to supply distant markets that consumed a great deal of cloth, yet lacked local supplies. Park's account stands as a testament to the

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²⁰ Inikori, 2009.

²¹ Johnson, 1978; Inikori, 2009.

²² Inikori, 2009, p. 96; Northrup, 1978.

²³ Rodney, 1972, p. 121.

manufacturing capacity of West African producers, for as he explains, North African consumers used a tremendous amount of imported cloth for daily wear:

The [Moorish] women wrap a piece of cotton cloth round the middle, which descends almost to the ankles. To the top of this they fasten to other pieces, one behind and one before...the head is wrapped in a piece of cotton cloth, of which one part, broader than the rest, serves to cover the face when the wearer goes abroad. On such occasion, however, many cover themselves with a very deep veil, [while the men] universally wear turbans of white cotton cloth (p. 126).

As an example of how culturally important specifically *West African* cloth was for North African consumers, Park (1822) notes how even the King of the Moors wore imported "blue cloth of superior fineness" (p. 129). Such extensive and culturally ingrained consumption of West African cloth in North Africa suggests an advanced production and trading system in the West.²⁴ More still, West African cloth was re-exported far and wide, for Moorish traders purchased West African cloth not only for consumption in textile-hungry North Africa, but also for trade with consumers in Beero, located in modern-day Somalia "where no cotton is reared, [thus] it is sold very advantageously."²⁵

West African coastal-inland trade patterns also seem to have remained intact, in spite of mounting European trade intervention, for Park (1822) noted that the Serawoolies from the Gambian region of West Africa were skilled traders, marveling that "nothing surpass[ed] their unwearied exertions, in the procuring of opulence." (p. 46). However, these coastal traders traveled far into the hinterlands to trade their procured wares, and as Park (1822) explains, "they reap considerable advantage from the sale of salt and cotton cloth in remote regions" (p.46). The fact that these systems were still in place when Park explored the West African region in 1822 is a testament to the resilience of the trading system in West Africa even after the slave trade had reached its peak.

However, European trade intervention *did* affect regional trade, but the results may not have proved to be as detrimental for West African domestic trade and production development as Rodney (1972) would have us believe. For example, Inikori (2009) points to a long-distance West African "quasi-putting out system" that was stimulated by European trade participation. For example, when Benin traders failed to stock enough cloth products for European traders, they were granted credit in goods by those traders, which were then transported to regional hinterlands, where cotton cloths were produced,

²⁴ It is quite interesting that West African producers maintained a foothold in the North African cloth trade, for there was strong regional competition from Egypt's famous production centers to the northeast, along with mounting foreign cotton cloth imports into the North African region (just as in West Africa). While it is certainly impressive that West African producers were able to continue to trade and compete in North Africa under these circumstances, it should be noted that although a direct measure of this trade is unavailable, the overall scale of trade was likely fairly small (and largely based on elite consumption) because domestic West African cloth exported to North Africa would almost certainly have been transported across the Sahara Desert, which implies extremely expensive transport costs.

²⁵ Park, 1822, p. 168.

and then returned to Benin to be handed off to European traders.²⁶ Inikori also notes the importance of copper rods, which were regularly imported to West Africa from Britain to be used as regional trade currency. Thus, to some degree, European trade may have actually helped encourage further developments in West African trade integration and associated textile production, along the lines of reasoning followed by Fage (1978) and McPhee (1926) who have maintained that trade with Europe had a stimulating effect on African development. And, in fact, it seems likely that some parts of West Africa adapted their traditional commercial roles (i.e., as producers, consumers, traders, etc.) to take advantage of changing trade patterns with the rise of foreign trade.

West African cotton cloth trade patterns appear to have survived and adapted to the entrance of European traders on the West African scene during the slave trade era. But how exactly did the product brought into West Africa affect British West African producers? Even before European textiles began to flow into Africa, European traders peddled *gujurat* cloth from the Indian subcontinent in exchange for slaves sold on the West African coast. Did British West African producers manage to compete with Indian cotton cloth imports? That is, did space still exist in local marketplaces for both foreign imports and traditional cloth products?

2.2 Indian Cloth Imports During the Slave Trade²⁷

2.2.1 The Rise of Indian Cotton Textiles in West Africa

According to Eltis and Jennings (1988), by the late seventeenth century, only a "small proportion of Africans could have been wearing imported cloth" (p. 953). However, as Riello and Roy (2009) explain, by the late-eighteenth century, "South Asia accounted for approximately a quarter of the world's textile output and almost certainly a larger percentage of the world's seaborne trade in textiles. India clothed the world" (p. 6), and this included West Africa, at least to some degree.

Indian cotton textiles began to stream into West Africa at a rapid pace with the rise of the Atlantic slave trade in the eighteenth century, which caused import commodity patterns to change substantially (Kobayashi 2012; Inikori 2009). Manufactured goods, especially Indian textiles, were used to purchase slaves, while currency imports, like copper bars and cowry shells, fell dramatically in importance, along with iron bars used for manufacturing activities. As **Table 1** illustrates, textile imports into the Bight of Biafra²⁸ began to increase as European-West African trade ties solidified in the seventeenth

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²⁶ Inikori, 2009, p. 99.

²⁷ The following discussion often refers generally to West Africa since the region had not yet been divided into colonial pieces, but whenever possible, I refer specifically to areas that would become *British* West Africa.

²⁸ The Bight of Biafra comprises the coastal region of southeastern Nigeria.

century, but by the eighteenth century, textiles made up the lion's share of total imports into the region (along with guns, which were presumably employed in the capture of slaves exchanged for *more* textiles and guns).

Table 1 Differentiated Imports from Britain into the Bight of Biafra, By Percent, 1661-1790

	Textiles (%)	Currency (%)	Iron (%)	Firearms (%)	Other (%)
1661	1.6	67.6	9.4	6.7	14.6
1662	1.6	69.4	9.7	6.9	12.5
1680	0.7	38.1	56.1	0.0	5.0
1681	0.0	44.2	45.9	0.0	10.1
1684	7.9	64.9	21.5	0.0	5.8
1690/92	10.7	30.6	35.4	0.0	23.3
1693	14.6	35.7	25.5	0.0	24.3
1701	9.3	29.9	35.5	3.2	22.1
1724	30.3	33.2	0.0	7.6	28.9
1790	37.9	6.3	10.0	39.7	6.2
1791	46.6	2.9	2.8	27.0	20.7

Source: Inikori 2009, p. 102-103 (derived from shipping cargo records held at the National Archives, London).

Wadsworth and Mann (1931) explain the West African commodity preference for textiles, which was tied to traditional cloth production and consumption patterns:

Of all materials he [the West African consumer] preferred cotton goods, being already accustomed to coarse blue and white cotton cloth of his own manufacture; and one of the earliest staples of the trade was the striped loincloths called *annabasses* which were an indispensable commodity in the cargo of every seventeenth century African trade (p. 150).

Accordingly, the value of total British exports to Africa began to increase dramatically in the middle of the eighteenth century, totaling about £635,000 during the 1750s and climbing to nearly £6,500,000 during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Johnson's decadal value-based aggregate sub-Saharan African import figures 29 demonstrate that a substantial (and rapidly growing) portion of this mounting trade was comprised of specifically cotton textiles. This was quite a change from the early eighteenth-century composition of textile imports into Africa from Britain, which were primarily woolens until the 1720s, when cotton cloth imports began to rapidly replace wool products.

²⁹ Although these figures are for the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of this trade took place in and around British West Africa, which included several gateways to the eighteenth-century African slave trade.

With many of these British-exported textiles having, in fact, been re-exported from India to Africa under the British East India Company's colonial trading system, British-made cottons would only came to play a more substantial role in West African markets in the second half of the eighteenth century, as compared to the 1720s and 1730s, for example, when they comprised only two and five percent, respectively, of total textile imports into the whole of Africa.³⁰ Thus, re-exported Indian cottons made up the greatest portion of textile exports to West Africa during the eighteenth century.

2.2.2 Indian Cotton Textiles as Competition for Local West African Product

Competition in consumer markets for cotton cloth certainly may have proved challenging for local cloth producers, previously accustomed to mostly wool-based textile imports, rather than large supplies of cotton cloth. According to Wadsworth and Mann (1931), "the bright colours [of Indian textiles], which were as brilliant after washing as before, took the negroes' [sic] fancy, and without great advantages in design or price it was difficult [for African producers] to compete with them" (p. 151). At the same time, Wadsworth and Mann (1931) theorize that in spite of this, domestic production continued to flourish, partly as a result of merchant trade agendas, for in the eyes of European traders, "there were many incentives [for African producers] to compete. [For one], it was a disadvantage for the trader to remain at the mercy of the monopolist East India Company for a part of his cargo" (p. 151). Thus, it seems to have been in the best interests of merchants to exchange not only Indian cloth products, but to also include local manufactures in their loads, in order to offset the strong hand of the British East India Company.

Riello and Roy (2009) argue that since Indian cloth served largely as a currency during the slave trade era, it came to play a very specific role in trade culture, and thus, "local and imported textiles did not necessarily compete but served different functions and often existed sided by side" (p. 10). Furthermore, complex, discriminating, cultured-based consumption preferences may have provided a specific production niche for local manufacturers with a keen understanding of local tastes in areas with long-time style-based production specialization as described by Rodney (1972). Wadsworth and Mann (1931) explain the highly variable, fashion-sensitive tastes of West Africans consumers, which provided some maneuverable space for local West African producers, whose intimate knowledge of changes in local fashions may have proved advantageous, for "even those [textiles] which were sometimes popular were at other times out of fashion, or suited only one part of the coast." (p. 150).

In any case, Johnson (1984) has offered evidence pointing to ongoing engagement with and further development of domestic textile production during the slave trade era, even

³¹ Interestingly, Riello and Roy (2009) explain that as a form of currency, cloth was not only used to purchase slaves, but also provisioned for the acquisition of other valuable commodities, including gum, which is an import intermediate input for further cloth production. As an example, French traders often exchanged Indian indigo-blue Guinea cloth for West African gum to transport back to European textile producers.

³⁰ According to Johnson's eighteenth-century British-Africa trade database, 1990.

after Indian textiles began to flood into West Africa at an unprecedented rate. According to Johnson (1984), sub-Saharan African (presumably mostly *West* African) producers even took advantage of new *export* market possibilities with the rise in demand for cloth to clothe slaves bound for the Americas: "So little did local weaving decline, in fact, that there was an export to England of 'Guinea cotton cloths' in the 1760s and 1770s, some of them re-exported to other parts of Africa, but mostly intended for the West Indies for the use of the slave population. According to Johnson (1984), this type of slave region-bound export of West African cotton cloth continued into the nineteenth century, when, for example, Brazil imported West African cloth intended for African slave populations in South America.

2.2.3 Colonial Agendas and Textile Competition Dynamics in British West Africa

Interestingly, during the second half of the eighteenth century, British colonial agendas may have inadvertently led to an increase in West African production opportunities when they attempted to supplant competing Indian cotton textiles with ill-received, chintzy British cloth goods.

First, with the Carnatic Wars (1746-63), which revolved around a prolonged colonial power struggle and ended with British domination over the subcontinent, supplies of Indian textile goods were suddenly quite limited and of generally poor quality, and were thus "insufficient to meet the demand of a rapidly growing trade, [since] the few varieties suitable for Africa which came from Madras or Bengal were for some years almost unobtainable." And with constricted supplies of Indian cloth, local producers could more readily peddle domestic country cloth to fill the supply gap, creating an incentive to increase local production output.

Naturally, British producers attempted to exploit the Indian supply shortage, and while Custom House books record the total value of cotton-linen checks from Britain as a relatively low £57,906 in 1752 (well into the Second Carnatic War), total export values only increased to about £120,000 after the conflict had already ended in 1763. As Wadsworth and Mann note (1931), wartime fluctuations in the price of raw cotton often raised the cost of these British finished cotton goods, which "often made it difficult to dispose of them" (p. 159). The upshot is that as Indian production stalled and British producers struggled with global raw cotton supply constriction, West African producers had relatively unfettered access to both local cotton supplies and local markets.

In 1774 yet another British colonial conflict affected the international raw cotton trade, and thus, British trade with West Africa. The American War of Independence interfered with international trades connected to American plantations, generating a raw cotton supply shock, which promptly limited British production. Fortunately for West Africans, who enjoyed local supplies of cotton, this global supply restriction may have provided even more market space for domestic product and allowed for the further recovery of

³² Wadsworth and Mann. 1931, p. 158.

³³ Wadsworth and Mann, 1931, p. 158.

local producers from any decline that may have been felt with the seventeenth and eighteenth century rise in Indian textile competition.

However, the sudden inaccessibility to normal American cotton supplies might have directed British traders' attention toward African supplies, which would have proved highly problematic for local producers, but British interest in African cotton supplies really only began in earnest in the nineteenth century, with the so-called "cotton famine" that occurred during the American Civil War.³⁴ Interestingly enough, British project proposals for the organized cultivation of African cotton had arisen during the second Carnatic War, but such projects were quickly abandoned, having been thwarted by the Board of Trade on the grounds that they would have provided injurious competition for cotton plantations in the British West Indies.³⁵

Accordingly, Johnson's (1990) dataset of Anglo-African trade in the eighteenth century does not show any export of raw cotton from Africa, but it does reveal that British cotton cloth exports to Africa did decrease during this period, from 74,022 in the year 1773 to a low of 5,260 in 1780. Only in 1783 did British cotton cloth exports begin to increase substantially to 162,734. Indian piece goods, too, remained very low during the wartime cotton supply constriction of the 1770s, and while they did increase again along with British cottons, Indian cotton goods had begun their permanent and precipitous decline by the turn of the nineteenth century.

2.2.4 Qualitative Reports of Resilient West African Industries

A number of descriptive primary sources point to thriving production in parts of West Africa during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, long after the peak and later decline of Indian textile imports. It was during this period that Park (1822), for example, visited the West African regions of the Gambia, Nigeria, Mali, and Niger. He described the cotton-heavy attire of the Mandingo people of the Gambia:

[Which] they themselves manufacture, and which they dye, generally of a blue colour. Men wear a loose garment, somewhat resembling a large shirt, with drawers reaching to the middle of the leg. The head is covered with a cap of white cotton cloth...The women dress themselves with two pieces of cloth: one, wrapped round the middle, descends to the ankles, and serves as a petticoat the other, thrown over the shoulders, covers the upper part of the body (p. 18).

Far from having been imported from India, these cotton garments were produced locally under an efficient and thriving system of gender-based division of labor. Park (1822) describes the local manufacturing system he witnessed amongst the Mandingo people:

[The women] are very diligent in manufacturing cotton cloth. They prepare the cotton for spinning by laying it in small quantities at a time

³⁴ McPhee, 1926.

³⁵ Wadsworth and Mann, 1931, p. 186.

upon a smooth stone or piece of wood, and rolling the seeds out with a thick iron spindle; and they spin it with the distaff. The thread is not fine, but well twisted, and makes a very durable cloth... The weaving is performed by the men [while] the women dye this cloth of a rich and lasting blue colour (p. 126).

Park praised it for its purple, glossy sheen, comparing it to the best blue produced by Indian and European artists.

Park (1822) notes that domestically produced cloth was not only bound for local bodies, but was also traded with neighboring regions in exchange for iron bars, which were scarce along the Gambia. Even with the rise of foreign trade intervention concomitant with the growth in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Gambia provides evidence for the resilience of local production and trade patterns. Interestingly, according to the *Tables of the Revenue, Population, etc. of the United Kingdom and Its Dependencies* for the year 1842, on the main settlement on the Gambia River (the Island of St. Mary), 271 individuals were employed in agriculture, 370 in commerce, and 580 in manufactures. Clearly this was a production-oriented society, at least up to the mid-nineteenth century. While this survey is quite small, it may be representative of a general pattern of local industrial engagement, especially given that Park (1822) witnessed and documented a great deal of industrial activity during his journey through the Gambia.

Altogether, this evidence seems to point to a history of ongoing cotton manufactures in the Gambia well after the trans-Atlantic slave trade (and thus Indian cotton cloth imports into West Africa) had peaked. It seems that, overall, Inikori (2009) was wrong to suggest that West African textile industries were derailed by the rise of Indian textile imports during the slave trade era. Proto-industry may have been disturbed, but according to Johnson (1984), handicraft production proliferated, keeping West African cloth products well stocked in local markets well past the height of the slave trade.

Textile producers across West Africa had largely maintained and adapted their industries to foreign competition from Indian cotton textiles during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and even enjoyed periods of lowered competition levels, thanks to volatile British colonial disputes in India and North America. Were British West African producers similarly able to find space to continue to produce and thrive in the face of a *new* textile rival as cheap, mass-produced British cotton cloth imports began to enter the market with increasing vigor during the nineteenth century?

2.3 The Rise of British Cotton Cloth in West Africa

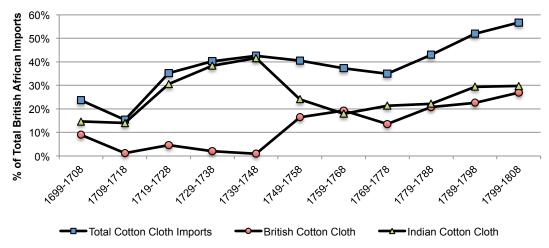
2.3.1 The Decline of Indian Cotton Cloth Imports

Signs of the impending transition from predominately Indian to predominately British textile imports had already begun to manifest as early as the mid-eighteenth century. As **Graph 1** demonstrates, between the decades of the 1740s and 1760s British cotton cloth

imports jumped from 1 to 19 percent of total British-transported imports into Africa, while Indian cotton cloth imports fell from 42 percent to 18 percent in the same period.

Graph 1

British West African Cloth Imports by Origin as a Percent of Total Regional Imports by Decade, 1699-1808



Source: Johnson (1990).

Indian cotton cloth imports into West Africa steadily dropped by both value and volume during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, at least partly as a result of traders' challenges in procuring Indian cloth through the inefficient East India Company monopoly, especially after the Carnatic Wars of the mid-eighteenth century (Wadsworth and Mann, p. 160). As **Graph 2** demonstrates, British re-exports of Indian cotton goods (referred to individually as "piece goods") to West Africa declined tremendously toward the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Graph 2
Re-export of Indian Piece Goods from Britain to West Africa, 1772 - 1849

600,000
500,000
400,000
200,000
100,000
100,000

Source: Graph from Kobayashi (2012); original source: 1772-1808, Customs 17/1-30, Kew, the National Archives, London (hereafter TNA); 1809-1849, Customs 10/1-41, TNA.

In the early nineteenth century, British re-exports of Indian cotton textiles to West Africa continued to diminish, especially as the trans-Atlantic slave trade slowed. The Indian imports that remained were almost all dyed goods, leaving the market for unbleached and bleached cotton wide open for West African and British cotton cloth products. ³⁶

The steady decrease of plain Indian textiles may have provided a good deal of space for local production of country cloths, especially if British textiles were ill received by West African consumers. As I will demonstrate using numerous primary source statements, British cloth imports did not pose the same type of competitive challenge for British West African cloth producers that the influx of high-quality Indian cloth had generated during the eighteenth century.³⁷ It appears that West African consumers considered British goods highly inadequate, most often preferring either Indian or locally produced cotton goods to their chintzy British rivals. As colonial-era historians Wadsworth and Mann (1931) explain, the eighteenth-century West African was an "exacting" customer who would never buy "materials of any kind in which the colours were dull" (p. 150). Eighteenth-century British textiles often did not satisfy these quality conditions.

As an underscore to this point, by the 1750s, Manchester textile producers had begun to manufacture special cotton textiles intended for African buyers, some of which were direct (if poor) imitations of Indian textiles. 38 Yet on the Gold Coast, where Johnson (1978) notes that local industry had already declined to no more than a trickle of minor production for local consumption (probably as a result of the influx of Indian goods coupled with already-scant local textile traditions), it seems that British traders could not push cheaply made British product, even with decreasing availability of Indian cottons in British West Africa. According to William Mollan, governor at Succondee on the Gold Coast: "Unless there were an entire prohibition to the importation of India goods, the manufactures of Great Britain could not be introduced to supplant foreign articles. Many attempts have been made at Manchester to imitate the India fabric, but they appear to be chiefly defective in the colours (some not being fixed) and in the strength of the cloth."³⁹ Accordingly, a British trader complained about low demand for British textile imports among West Africans in a letter dated 1752: "I wrote for Manchester Bejutapauts and Negannepauts [British replicas of Indian textiles], which were then in great demand, but now the Negroes [sic] have found out that they will not wash."⁴⁰

British West African consumers remained noticeably unresponsive to British cotton cloth well into the nineteenth century, particularly when compared with the substantial growth in demand for Indian cloth imports during the preceding century (refer to **Graph 2**). As

³⁶ Kobayashi, 2012.

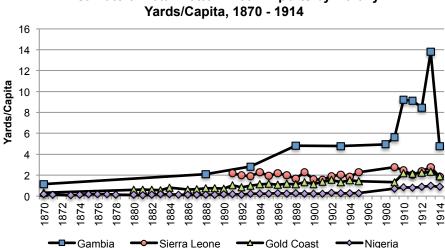
Wadsworth and Mann, 1931.

³⁸ Wadsworth and Mann, 1931, p. 154.

³⁹ Quoted from Kobayashi, 2012; original source: *British Parliamentary Papers*, 506, "Report from the Select Committee on Papers," p. 178.

⁴⁰ Quoted from Parthasarathi, 2011, p. 96.

Graph 3 illustrates, ⁴¹ per capita British West African consumption of British cotton cloth was quite low nearly sixty years after Indian cotton textile exports to West Africa had taken a permanent nose-dive. ⁴² By the 1890s, however, the Gambia began importing greater amounts of British cotton cloth at an increasing pace, especially with the onset of the First World War. ⁴³ But during the *same* period, British cotton cloth imports into Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria, increased *very* slowly, especially when considered relative to *later* twentieth-century import growth levels (as discussed in subsequent sections).



Graph 3
Estimate of Total Cotton Cloth Imports by Colony
Yards/Capita. 1870 - 1914

Sources: Cotton cloth import values derived from *Blue Books* located at TNA: the Gambia: CO 90/98-112; Sierra Leone: CO 272/68-91; the Gold Coast: CO 100/21-64; Nigeria: CO 473/1-16, CO 660/1-2. Yardage calculated using estimates for annual unit prices for cotton cloth imports derived from Feinstein (1972), Table 61: "Price Indices for Main Categories of Goods and Services, 1870-1965" (p. T132). Population data (used for per capita calculations) is derived from Manning (2009).

⁴¹ Data for quantities of cotton cloth imports are very scarce, so the per capita quantity estimates illustrated in Graph 3 have been derived using available cotton cloth import values and Feinstein's (1972) price index for British consumer goods and services (largely comprised of cotton cloth exports in this period). While this measure may not be entirely accurate since it does not account for changes in the composition of British exports, it still provides more insight into the potential *size* of the expansion of foreign cotton cloth imports into British West Africa during the nineteenth century (as corrected for major price fluctuations), at least from 1870 onward.

While it is difficult to quantitatively compare Indian cotton cloth imports (entered as unmeasured *piece goods* in Graph 2) with British cotton cloth imports (entered as measured *yards* in Graph3), it is still possible to gain a clearer picture of changing West African cloth import and consumption patterns by looking at the import levels of these varieties during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁴³ Although Graph 3 shows a sudden decrease in British cotton cloth imports into the Gambia for the year 1914, imports per capita resumed their climb soon after and reached new heights as the First World War progressed (as addressed in later portions of this thesis). The same pattern holds true for the other three colonies during the twentieth century, although their relative import levels per capita always remained significantly lower than for the Gambia.

Thus, it appears that the precipitous growth rate of cotton cloth imports into West Africa had slowed during the nineteenth century, 44 only to increase again with vigor during and after the First World War, as discussed more thoroughly in subsequent sections of this thesis. It seems that for much of the nineteenth century, British West African consumers, who had become accustomed to supplementing local cotton cloth products with high quality Indian textiles, were uninterested in cheaply produced British replicas, at least until the quality of this cloth improved in the twentieth century. That is not to say that imports of cotton cloth did not increase during the period (for as the graph demonstrates, they did), but the momentum of cotton cloth imports that had emerged during the slave trade era had clearly dwindled. While this nineteenth-century lag in British cloth imports may have proved disappointing for emerging British cloth exporters, it likely provided sufficient time and market space for local producers to retool and recover from any ill effects they may have suffered from competition with Indian cloth products during the slave trade era. For it seems that British cotton cloth only began to become a significant source of competition for local British West African producers during the colonial-era twentieth century.

As a final brief point of inquiry, why did a move from Indian to British foreign imports occur in the first place, if British goods were not superior—but rather, markedly inferior—too Indian goods? It is quite likely that the pronounced shift from British to Indian cloth imports into Africa was linked to British colonial dynamics outside of Africa, rather than to any particular quality or demand issue. It may be that the change in import patterns was the product of shifting colonial institutional agendas in British India during the second half of the eighteenth century, when industrializing Britain (the metropolis) began to push India (the colony) toward the large-scale import of new British manufactures and the export of raw materials. This, in turn, reduced Indian cotton cloth competition in West Africa to the benefit of burgeoning British producers and native British West African producers, alike. Or maybe, as Broadberry (2005) argues, it was the search for laborsaving technical advancements spurred on by high British wages that ultimately reduced unit labor costs in Britain relative to India and consequently, laid waste to India's textile manufacturing system, which according to Roy and Riello (2009) had once "clothed the world."

2.3.2 The Rise Of British Textile Imports

Regardless of the mechanisms affecting the change, British textiles began to compete with Indian manufactures during the eighteenth century and had thoroughly supplanted them in West Africa by the nineteenth century as Indian production slowed down while British manufacture of textiles destined for West African markets increased dramatically. As Eltis and Jennings (1988) note, the increasing importance of British cotton piece goods in world markets was evidenced as they came to play a critical role in nineteenth-century world trade, including the U.S. import of African commodities, the Brazilian and

⁴⁴ This was certainly true from the 1870s onward, but presumably also earlier, when Indian cotton cloth imports had suddenly diminished around 1808.

⁴⁵ SarDesai, 2007.

Cuban import of slaves, and British and French colonial trade activities, all of which came to rely (in varying degrees) on British cotton cloth.

According to Eltis and Jennings (1988), it was during this period that imports of cotton cloth (primarily British in origin) into Africa began to "impinge on the domestic textile industry" as slave trafficking was gradually replaced by trade in commodities as the nineteenth century progressed. Eltis and Jennings (1988) argue that increasing world trade in commodities, coupled with a continuing decline in British textile prices, generated a great deal of competition for local West African producers and ultimately undercut local manufacturing operations.

This argument seems quite logical at face value, but upon closer examination it becomes clear that Eltis and Jennings (1988) have failed to consider a number of important facts. For one, Africans were already importing very large amounts of foreign cotton cloth in exchange for slaves during the eighteenth century, particularly high-quality Indian manufactures (Kobayashi 2012). Even British textile imports were already increasing during the slave trade as the industrial revolution began to gain momentum. Thus, African producers had already been coping with heavy amounts of foreign cloth imports (of mostly Indian, but also British origin) well before the mid-nineteenth century, when British commodity trade with West Africa began to replace the slave trade.

Furthermore, Eltis and Jennings (1988) concede that, although British cloth imports began to expand in the mid-nineteenth century, there was still substantial space for local African production up to at least the middle of the nineteenth century, when cotton cloth import totals still varied markedly from year to year. Eltis and Jennings (1988) estimate that between 1780 and 1830 imports of British cotton cloth totaled about 0.4 yards per person per year. British cotton cloth imports began to increase more rapidly, if unsteadily, during the 1850s. In the Gold Coast, for example, imported cotton cloth reached about 1.28 yards per person in the year 1850, but then declined to only 0.44 yards per inhabitant by 1852. 46

However, cotton cloth imports into sub-Saharan Africa began to increase more heavily and steadily in the 1860s, when according to Eltis and Jennings (1988), the continent as a whole imported about three yards of cloth per person per annum, although this likely varied markedly by region. However, it is critical to recognize that, according to Eltis and Jennings, two yards of cloth was considered sufficient to supply only one full garment for one person (although it should be noted that this, too, varied by region and climate). 47 Thus, Eltis and Jennings (1988) acknowledge that foreign textile imports still accounted for only a minority of the region's textile consumption. In spite of increased textile imports by volume, local cotton textiles seem to have enjoyed plenty of space in

⁴⁶ This figure was calculated using the value of cotton cloth imported into the Gold Coast along with stable cotton cloth import prices from Mauritius (roughly 0.014 British pounds per yard) and population data estimated by Manning (2009).

Frankema and van Waijenburg (2012) have set the annual cotton cloth subsistence measure at 3 meters, or a little over three yards, per person in their construction of the African subsistence basket, based on the annual consumption of one adult male (p. 905).

domestic markets to compete right alongside Indian and British imports, for even three yards per person is simply not enough to supply a full year's clothing, especially in regions with cooler climates, like northern Nigeria.

Where eighteenth-century Indian textiles had arguably presented African producers with a competitive challenge (particularly in terms of quality), British cloth textiles shipped to Africa were almost universally considered inadequate when compared with Indian and domestic manufactures. This, in spite of the fact that British producers had been attempting to replicate Indian cloth for export to Africa since at least the 1730s. It seems that the competitive edge that Eltis and Jennigs (1988) have attributed to nineteenth-century British textile imports may not have been as pronounced as it may initially appear when looking at the growth of cloth import figures alone.

Returning to the primary question at hand, how did growing British cloth imports into British West African affect local production of cotton cloth? Did late eighteenth and nineteenth-century British cloth prove to be ruinous competition for local British West African textile producers? This seems unlikely. As the following discussion indicates, qualitative reports provide more insight into the realities of local British West African consumption of British goods and concurrent domestic production of native manufactures.

2.3.3 West African Cotton Cloth Production in the Nineteenth Century

Contrary to the assertions of Eltis and Jennings (1988) and Rodney (1972), West African domestic cloth production and local consumption almost certainly continued to flourish through the nineteenth century in spite of increasing imports figures of first Indian, and then British cotton cloth.

West African country cloth, known for its strength and durability, ⁴⁹ very likely stocked local consumer markets during the nineteenth century, providing an alternative to low-quality British manufactures as Indian products became less available, especially before British production techniques began to rapidly improve. In fact, in some ways, British colonial agendas in India may have actually helped stimulate production of textiles in West Africa, particularly during the early nineteenth-century period of transition from mostly Indian to mostly British textile imports into West Africa. A number of sources note the high level of success enjoyed by local producers in manufacturing and selling their cloth goods in West African markets during the early nineteenth century.

For example, explorer Laing (1825) noted extensive cotton growing and spinning activities in parts of what would become British West Africa during the 1820s. In his account of his travels, Laing (1825) provides in-depth discussions about the ingenious cotton cloth production methods he witnessed, proof that production remained firmly ingrained in local economies during the early nineteenth century. He describes the

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⁴⁸ Wadsworth and Mann, 1931, p. 154.

⁴⁹ Johnson, 1978.

cotton-heavy attire of the people of Kooranko and Timannee country in the southern part of modern-day Sierra Leone:

[It is] principally made of the cotton cloth manufactured in the country, dyed either in indigo which grows spontaneously, or in the bark of the neta-tree, which gives it a yellow tinge...The head-men are clothed in the long Mandingo gown, trowsers, [and] cap (p. 198).

Beyond locally produced cloth, Laing (1825) describes how other West African cotton cloth passed through Sierra Leone as part of a complex system of intra-regional West African trade:

There is a considerable advantage derived from the extensive manufacture of cloth, which ever meets with a ready market; but the natives who reside near Sierra Leone, through whose country it passes to the market, gain in a three-fold degree more than the manufacturers. They purchase tobacco at the water-side for about one shilling and sixpence per pound; and travelling into Kooranko, will barter one hundred pounds, or bars, of that commodity for two hundred country cloths; returning to Rokon, they exchange their cloth for rice at the rate of one cloth, or nine-pence sterling, for a tub of rice (p. 202-203).

Accordingly, *Blue Books* for Sierra Leone report that through the 1860s, Sierra Leone exported cotton goods, including "country cloth" to the Gambia⁵⁰ and the Windward Coast⁵¹ at large, which in turn, exported native cotton goods to Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone's cloth export trade was extensive and complex, and the price of the textiles exported seems to have varied by importer, even between neighboring regions. For example, in 1866, Sierra Leone exported cotton goods to the UK, the Gambia, Liberia, and other countries along the Windward and Leeward Coasts. The cotton textiles shipped to the UK were priced at £3.67 per package,⁵² while the cloth exported to the Gambia was priced at £9.71 per package. However, packages of cotton cloth exported to the rest of the Windward Coast, the Leeward Coast, and Liberia was priced at £32.29, £46.20, and £35.24, respectively, suggesting that different types of cloth were being exported to different places, based on local demand.⁵³ Interestingly enough, Johnson (1978) notes that in Sierra Leone, a unique cotton cloth was developed toward the end of the

⁵² In colonial *Blue Books*, quantities for British West African cloth imports and exports were often recorded in terms of "packages" up to the first quarter of the twentieth century when they began to be reported in yards.

⁵¹ In some British colonial documents, West Africa was divided into the Windward and Leeward Coasts, based on the direction of the trade winds, blowing from the Sahara to the Atlantic. The Windward Coast includes Senegambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia, while the Leeward Coast includes the Ivory and Gold Coasts, Togo, Benin, and Southern Nigeria (George, 1904, p. 454).

Based on data derived from Statistical Tables Relating to the Colonial and Other Possessions of the United Kingdom, 1866, which includes statistical data for Sierra Leone on pages 515-520.

nineteenth century and "had become something approaching a currency with which goods could be bought and court fines paid" (p. 264). It stands to reason that cloth used as a form of currency would very likely have become a commodity integral to external trade and consequently, exported to other trading regions.

Similarly, Gambian cloth exports were noteworthy during the nineteenth century, when foreign cotton cloth imports into the Gambia were still quite low (relative to later periods of intensive per capita imports into the colony). For example, according to the Gambian *Blue Book* for the year 1864, cotton cloth exports reached almost £6,800 (283,063 yards) right in the middle of the so-called "cotton famine" that occurred when the American Civil War disrupted global raw cotton trade flows.

According to Johnson (1978), cloth production and trade continued to develop and expand across British West Africa, so much so that Lagos even exported native cloth to far-reaching locales, like Brazil!⁵⁴ The popularity of domestic country cloths among British West African consumers and traders continued well into the late-nineteenth century and was certainly not lost on British officials. Johnson (1974) cites the British Governor of Lagos, Alfred Moloney, as having stated in 1889 that:

[County] cloths are now exposed for sale in every marketplace beside the European goods, and are not unlikely in time to beat them out of the markets near the coasts. [These are] conditions that should weigh with home manufacturers if they aim at replacing this native industry, and thus setting free for other agricultural work the thousands of hands employed now as weavers (p. 181).

The ability of British West African textile producers to pose a serious competitive challenge to British cloth in local markets bodes very well for the strength and development of domestic cotton cloth industries. But did this native competitive edge last into the twentieth-century colonial period? It seems that British West African preferences for native cloth did, in fact, plague British producers and traders of cotton textiles into the twentieth century. Johnson (1974) cites Frederick Lugard, General-Governor of Nigeria, who recognized and attempted to neutralize the threat posed by native industry, particularly in the north, by imposing heavy caravan tolls on native (but not British) traders in the early 1900s. He explained the design behind his policy as follows:

listed under Class B of the annual slave trade volumes of the *British Parliamentary Papers* for the years 1831-1860. It is likely that these cloths were shipped to Bahia to help clothe the extensive slave population.

⁵⁴ Eltis and Jennings (1988) also mention Lagos' cloth export trade to Brazil, as a "steady, though fairly modest, export of "country cloths" or Yoruba textiles to Bahia, a trade that survived down to the twentieth century in defiance of competition from British cottons" (p. 947). While Eltis and Jennings (1988) do not provide explicit figures for this trade, they do note that detailed descriptions of mid-nineteenth-century cloth exports to Brazil from Africa can be found in the semi-annual reports of the British consul in Bahia,

Native cloth is manufactured in great quantities and competes favourably with Manchester cottons...[and the] dyes of Kano and other large cities supply local wants to the exclusion of imported goods...Reduced to its crudest expression, the desire [is] to see native industries other than the production of raw material for export, crushed, in order that they may be superseded by imported manufactures. ⁵⁵

Based on numerous primary source reports of competition for both consumer markets and raw materials in West Africa, Johnson (1974) makes the claim that even as late as the early twentieth century, "cotton imperialism had foundered...on the unexpected obstacle that English cotton could not compete with local industry without discriminatory tolls" (p. 184). And while India's local textile industry had collapsed under the weight of British colonial influence and competition, British West African producers appear to have maintained a strong foothold in consumer markets, enough so to give British officials cause to employ biased institutional policies in their West African colonies in the interest of British textile producers, who coveted not only African consumer markets, but also sources of raw cotton and native labor.

Thus, in spite of market competition and trade interference from foreign sources, British West African producers had weathered the potential economic vagaries of the slave trade, pre-colonial and early colonial periods. However, was there still ample space for local producers to continue to effectively compete with ever-increasing cotton cloth imports from abroad during the twentieth-century colonial period? Fortunately, quantitative archival material exists for twentieth century British West African colonial trade in the form of statistical reports collected annually for individual colonies, allowing the investigation that follows to take a more quantitative tack than was possible for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I begin with an investigation of the scale and composition of British cotton textile imports into the four British West African colonies (the Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Nigeria) during the first half of the twentieth century.

2.4 British West African Production In The Colonial Era

2.4.1 Measuring the Scale of British Cloth Imports

Although many British West African producers managed to stay afloat, the British textile boom of the nineteenth century had initiated permanent changes in the overall scale and composition of trade into Africa with important, if variable, consequences for West African societies in the four British colonial territories. To analyze the twentieth-century scale of trade, I utilize a database of British-African cotton textile trade constructed from statistical data reported in colonial *Blue Books* housed at the British National Archives in London.

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⁵⁵ Quoted from Johnson, 1974, p. 183; original source: *Northern Nigeria Report, 1904*.

When measuring the scale of trade, it is helpful to consider both the value (in British pounds) and the volume of trade (in yards) because available volume per capita figures are limited, since quantity data only began to be recorded in 1924 for many colonies, hill value data extends back into the nineteenth century. However, it is critical to look at volume scale measurements whenever possible, because value measurements of traded textiles, alone, may dramatically skew the overall picture of trade activity, since textile pricing changed over time. As an example of this problem, the volume of trade between Africa and Britain increased tremendously in the first half of the nineteenth century, although this is not something that is directly reflected in the value of trade because the prices of British cloth exports dropped tremendously during the nineteenth century. Eltis and Jennings (1988) explain that "trade volumes between Africa and the Atlantic World may well have quintupled between the 1820s and 1860s rather than more than doubling, as suggested by the current value figures" (p. 941).

Thus, the volume of trade is a critically important indicator of the scale of actual consumption of imported cotton textiles, regardless of changes in the pricing of goods. And a measure of per capita consumption based on *quantity* provides insight into trade and consumption dynamics, which helps to gage the severity of potential crowding out effects that may have arisen with increasing trade in British cotton textiles in British West Africa.

The annual volume of imported cotton textiles into West Africa increased substantially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Eltis and Jennings (1988) estimate that per capita imports into the whole of West Africa averaged about 3 yards per year during the 1860s. This is significantly lower than Manning's (1982) estimate for the period 1890-1914 of about 15 yards per person in the West African Dahomey region. Unfortunately, the available quantum import information is very limited for the twentieth century before 1924, but what data *is* available provides a great deal of insight into the relative per capita imports of British West African colonies by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, when West African imports of British cotton textiles reached new heights.

2.4.2 The Aggregation Problem

When measuring the scale of foreign imports into West Africa, it seems logical to look at aggregated figures to try to get a feel for the overarching foreign cloth consumption patterns for the region as whole (see **Graph 4**).

⁵⁶ Estimates can be made back to 1912 using Nigerian unit price data; however, these estimates are not entirely reliable, since a true price convergence of British cotton cloth bound for British West Africa only occurred in the 1930s.

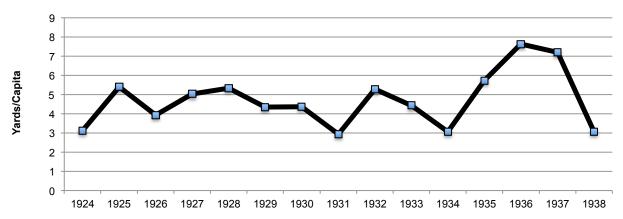
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⁵⁷ In *official* value series, prices have been held constant over time and thus these series may effectively indicate changing trends in the volume of imported goods, while *current* value series, which reflect changes in price, cannot. Unfortunately, *Blue Book* values were entered as current values.

⁵⁸ Manning, 1982, p. 124.

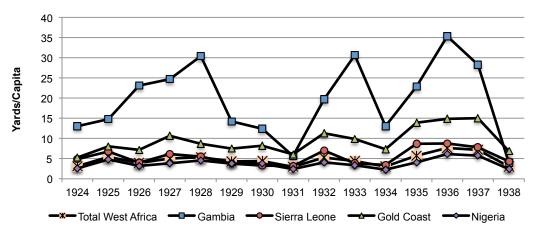
Graph 4
Total Aggregated British West African Cotton Cloth Imports
Yards/Capita, 1924 - 1938



Sources: Blue Books located at TNA: the Gambia: CO 90/98-112; Sierra Leone: CO 272/101-115; the Gold Coast: CO 100/74-88; Nigeria: CO 660/15-29. Population data (used for per capita calculations) is derived from Manning (2009).

However, while **Graph 4** beautifully illustrates the pattern of yearly fluctuations in British West African foreign cotton cloth imports during the second quarter of the twentieth century, this *aggregated* regional data conceals similarities and differences in trade and consumption patterns between the four distinct British West African colonies. As **Graph 5** demonstrates, the four colonies certainly shared similar import patterns, especially in terms of the general annual increases and decreases of cloth imports. That is, all four colonies exhibit the same basic aggregated pattern that is illustrated in **Graph 4**. However, **Graph 5** also shows that the per capita *scale* of these imports varied markedly between colonies, with per capita imports into the Gambia regularly climbing *far* above the rest, including the regional aggregate.

Graph 5
Total British West African Cotton Cloth Imports by Aggregated Region and by Colony,
Yards/Capita, 1924 - 1938



Sources: Blue Books located at TNA: the Gambia: CO 90/98-112; Sierra Leone: CO 272/101-115; the Gold Coast: CO 100/74-88; Nigeria: CO 660/15-29. Population data (for per capita calculations) is derived from Manning (2009).

Table 2 provides averaged per capita import figures for each of the British West African colonies (along with the regional aggregate), which helps to further demonstrate the basic differences and similarities between the four colonies during the same period. The comparative case of the Gambia versus Nigeria, for example, plainly demonstrates the imprecision inherent in aggregating British West African import trade data. The aggregated annual British West African per capita consumption of British cotton cloth imports averages to about 5.1 yards per person per year between 1924 and 1938. However, during the same period, Gambians imported an average of 22.1 yards per person per year, while each Nigerian only imported an average of 2.2 yards per year during the same period. Nigerian figures are more closely in line with the aggregated per capita figure, which makes sense, given that Nigeria's relative share of the total population of British West Africa is very high.

Table 2
Average Total Annual British West African Imports of Cotton Cloth by Colony
Yards/Capita, 1924 - 1938

COLONY	YARDS/CAPITA	
The Gambia	22.1	
Gold Coast	10.1	
Sierra Leone	5.4	
Nigeria	2.2	
Regional Average	5.1	

Sources: Blue Books located at TNA: the Gambia: CO 90/98-112; Sierra Leone: CO 272/101-115; the Gold Coast: CO 100/74-88; Nigeria: CO 660/15-29. Population data (used for per capita calculations) is derived from Manning (2009).

Despite rather extreme differences between the Gambia and Nigeria, there are similarities to be found between these colonies and the other two. For in the same period, the Gold Coast followed a similar though less extreme import pattern to the Gambia, importing an average of 10.1 yards per person per year. Sierra Leone, on the other hand, followed a more similar (and again, less extreme) import pattern to *Nigeria*, importing only 5.4 yards per person per year. Thus, the per capita scale of total cotton cloth imports into British West African colonies appears to range from high to low, beginning with the Gambia, followed by the Gold Coast and then Sierra Leone, and ending with Nigeria.

It is both interesting and important to note that figures for *total* imports (rather than per capita imports) differ substantially from the patterns described above. As **Graph 6** demonstrates, the Gambia, the heaviest importer by per capita scale, imported the lowest amount of cotton cloth by value (which makes sense, given the colony's small population relative to the others), while low per-capita importer Nigeria actually imported the lion's

share of British West Africa's cotton textile imports by value, but these were spread across a large population.⁵⁹

18,000,000 16,000,000 10,000,000 10,000,000 4,000,000 2,000,000 2,000,000 Gambia Sierra Leone Gold Coast Nigeria

Graph 6
Total British West African Cotton Cloth Imports by Colony by Total Value (£), 1909 - 1938

Sources: Blue Books located at TNA: the Gambia: CO 90/83-112; Sierra Leone: CO 272/101-115; the Gold Coast: CO 100/59-88; Nigeria: CO 473/10-16, CO 660/1-29.

Clearly, in the case of British West Africa, aggregated data obscures the similarities and differences between import and consumption behaviors in different colonies. And when we take a close look at data for each individual colony, it becomes clear that there is no single British West African history of textile imports and consumption, although some overarching similarities are apparent. While annual changes in import levels did tend to follow somewhat similar patterns across colonies (likely in response to global trading phenomena), each colony experienced foreign import penetration on a different *scale*. Accordingly, the four colonies tended to import differing per capita amounts the three most popular cotton textile varieties: unbleached, bleached, and colored, printed, or dyed. ⁶⁰

2.4.3 Composition of Cotton Cloth Imports by Variety

Clearly total cotton cloth imports into British West Africa differed in scale from colony to colony, but just how much of each different *type* of cotton cloth was imported into the four colonies? Although import per capita figures for each cloth variety (unbleached, bleached, colored/printed/dyed) are only available for the period 1924 to 1938, they help build a more nuanced view of foreign textile consumption patterns as they varied across British West Africa.

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⁵⁹ The discussion at hand focuses specifically on per capita import dynamics; however, the tremendous disparity in actual import totals (as illustrated by Graph 6) will become an important point in subsequent sections of this thesis.

⁶⁰ Colored, printed, or dyed cloth will henceforth be noted as "colored/printed/dyed cloth."

Examining the breakdown of cotton cloth import varieties may also help to determine if there was space for domestic industrial *niches* in particular cotton textile varieties. As **Graph 7** demonstrates, there was a decided difference in total cotton cloth imports by variety into British West Africa as a whole, with colored/printed/dyed cloth taking up the lion's share of imports, followed by bleached cotton textiles, and then finally by unbleached cotton cloth, which was the least imported cloth variety.

Yards/Capita, 1924 - 1938 5.0 4.5 4.0 3.5 Yards/Capita 3.0 2.5 2.0 1.5 1.0 0.5 0.0 1929 1930 1931 1932 1933 1934 1935 1936 1937 1938 1924 1925 1926 1927 1928 Unbleached Bleached Colored/Printed/Dyed

Graph 7
Aggregated British West African Cotton Textile Imports by Variety,
Yards/Capita, 1924 - 1938

Sources: Blue Books located at TNA: the Gambia: CO 90/98-112; Sierra Leone: CO 272/101-115; the Gold Coast: CO 100/74-88; Nigeria: CO 660/15-29. Population data (used for per capita calculations) is derived from Manning (2009).

Did this aggregated import pattern differ in composition and/or intensity by colony, offering disparate consumption and production opportunities in each colony? The following disaggregated study examines import patterns by variety and demonstrates that while the colonies did share similar import patterns, the per capita scale of popular colored/dyed/ printed cloth differed markedly by colony (see **Table 3**).

Table 3
Average Annual British West African Cotton Cloth Imports by Variety by Colony
Yards/Capita, 1924 - 1938

	Unbleached	Bleached	Colored/Printed/Dyed
The Gambia	2.3*	3.5*	10.5
Gold Coast	0.5	1.0	8.5
Sierra Leone	0.3	1.8	3.7
Nigeria	0.7	1.4	2.0

^{*} See Footnote 61.

Source: Gambia Blue Books, 1924 – 1943, TNA, CO 90/98 – 90/117. Population data (used for per capita calculations) is derived from Manning (2009).

Unbleached Cotton Cloth Per Colony

In all four colonies, unbleached cotton textiles were the least imported cotton good per capita by quantity (refer to **Table 3**). Between 1924 and 1938, the average annual import of unbleached cloth throughout British West Africa was a mere 0.63 yards per person, reaching a low of 0.35 yards in 1931 and a peak of only 1.11 yards in 1936, although imports per capita may have been somewhat higher in the Gambia.⁶¹

Did African consumers simply prefer bleached and colored/printed/dyed to unbleached cloth? This is certainly a possibility, but it is just as likely that domestically produced traditional West African "country cloth," known for its durability as compared to lowquality, mass-produced British cloth, filled this particular market niche. The fact that the Gambia imported an estimated 2.3 yards per person per year, while the three other British West African colonies imported so very little implies that these were, in fact, desired textiles, at least in the Gambia. 62 Thus, it may be assumed that Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria locally produced (or locally imported) some amount of unbleached cotton cloth, unless this type of cloth was simply not consumed on a large scale in British West Africa, which seems unlikely.

Bleached Cotton Cloth Per Colony

Aggregate figures for bleached cotton cloth imports are markedly higher than those for unbleached cotton cloth, with a British West African average of 1.4 yards person between 1924 and 1938. This pattern remains consistent in all four colonies, although the percapita scale of imports of this variety does differ somewhat, especially between Gambia and the rest of British West Africa (see **Table 3**).

There is an immediately noticeable divergence in import levels of unbleached cotton cloth relative to the more popular bleached cotton cloth, particularly in the cases of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gold Coast. 63 However, there was still likely a great deal of market space left in both categories for local producers to continue to flourish into the

⁶¹ In the case of the Gambia, bleached and unbleached cotton cloth imports were lumped together until 1938, generating an average per capita annual import total of 8.8 yards. However, based on the available data for the years 1938-1943, it is likely that imports of unbleached cotton goods amounted to roughly 2.3 yards per person per year, while imports of bleached cotton totaled about 3.5 yards per person per year. However, this is based on the assumption that import totals did not change dramatically between the 1924-1938 peacetime period and the 1938-1943 wartime period, therefore these stand-in figures may not be entirely accurate. In fact, these figures seem to underestimate the total bleached and unbleached cotton cloth imported into the Gambian region during the 1920s and early 1930s, since the per capita average for imports between 1924-1938 is 8.8 yards (bleached and unbleached data combined) per year, which is much lower than the 5.8 yards suggested by the 1938-1943 data.

⁶² That is, unless, of course, the Gambia was re-exporting this unbleached cotton cloth to other regions that demanded unbleached cloth more than the four coastal British West African colonies, although the topic of possible re-export activity will be addressed in subsequent sections.

⁶³ Interestingly, while the Gold Coast was typically a larger overall per capita importer of cotton cloth when compared with Nigeria and Sierra Leone, it actually imported the least amount of bleached cotton cloth in per capita terms.

second quarter of the twentieth century, which becomes more clear when we take a comparative look at figures for the Gambia, which was a much heavier importer of both unbleached and bleached cloth.

Bleached cotton cloth was quite obviously demanded in British West Africa, as evidenced by the relatively high per capita import estimates for bleached cloth into the Gambia as illustrated in **Table 3**. Thus, it seems very likely that local British West African producers would have provided a substantial portion of the consumed bleached cotton cloth in British West Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, both of which imported very little cotton cloth per capita to begin with (see **Graph 6**). This seems to have also been true for the Gold Coast, which imported a great deal of cotton cloth per capita, almost none of which was of the unbleached or bleached variety. However, whether the Gold Coast locally produced, regionally imported, or simply did not consume very much unbleached and bleached cloth is difficult to determine with the data at hand, especially since the Gold Coast does not possess the same deep-seated textile production history that is evident in places like Nigeria.

Colored/printed/dyed Cotton Cloth Per Colony

Of all three cotton textile varieties, colored/printed/dyed cloth presents the most interesting case. This was by far the most imported variety per capita in British West Africa (see **Graph 7**), but also the most variably imported when it comes to individual colonies (see **Table 3**).

As **Graph 8** illustrates, the Gambia's per capita imports of colored/printed/dyed cotton cloth regularly jumped between high highs (for example, 17.2 yards per person in 1933) and still relatively high lows (3.2 yards per person in 1931 and 6.1 in 1934), while the Gold Coast followed a similar, if less exaggerated pattern.

20 18 16 14 fards/Capita 12 10 8 6 4 1924 1925 1926 1927 1928 1929 1930 1931 1932 1933 1934 1935 1936 1937 1938 Gambia Sierra Leone Gold Coast

Graph 8
Colored/Printed/Dyed Cloth Imports into British West Africa by Colony,
Yards/Capita, 1924 - 1938

Sources: Blue Books located at TNA: the Gambia: CO 90/98-112; Sierra Leone: CO 272/101-115; the Gold Coast: CO 100/74-88; Nigeria: CO 660/15-29. Population data (used for per capita calculations) is derived from Manning (2009).

Relatively speaking, both Nigeria and Sierra Leone imported far less of this cloth variety per capita between 1924 and 1938, but where Nigerian colored/printed/dyed cloth imports never exceeded 2.0 yards per person per year, Sierra Leone reached a peak of 6.1 yards per person in 1935. Thus, it seems that although colored/printed/dyed cloth was the largest cotton cloth import variety in every colony, there was still ample space for local product of this variety in the markets of Nigeria and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Sierra Leone, while the Gambia and the Gold Coast may have experienced overcrowding of colored/printed/dyed cotton cloth in their respective marketplaces.

However, the possible consequences of crowding out due to higher foreign imports of certain varieties of cloth may have been mitigated by potential re-export activities in regions like the Gambia and the Gold Coast that imported extremely large amounts of cotton cloth per capita (especially colored/printed/dyed cloth), relative to Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

2.4.4 Cotton Cloth Re-Export Activity In British West Africa

A closer examination of possible re-export activities in British West Africa may provide a more nuanced view of trade, consumption and production dynamics throughout the region. For even though British West African colonies imported an increasingly large amount of cotton textiles in the twentieth century, this does not necessarily imply that these goods were all consumed within the colony to which they were originally exported. Rather, it is likely that, at least in some cases, much of this imported foreign product was destined for other, cotton textile-hungry regions of Africa.

Unreported Re-Export Activity?

According to Johnson (1974), British foreign cotton cloth exports into Africa went mainly to coastal regions that lacked strong textile traditions. However, this was certainly not the case for the Gambia, which historically engaged in advanced local textile production and trade, but also imported large amounts of textiles per capita. It seems likely that Gambia re-exported much of its foreign textile imports to other West African localities with more limited access to textiles. However, it seems that most of this intraregional textile trade activity was underreported (or simply unreported altogether) in colonial *Blue Books*. But British West African cloth re-export trade activity can still be surmised through careful examination of colonial records.

Beginning in the early 1880s, Gambian foreign cotton cloth imports began to increase and really took off in 1910, climbing high above the per capita import values for the rest of British West Africa. Referring back to **Table 2**, figures for total annual per capita cotton cloth imports (averaged for the years 1924-1938) vary markedly between colonies, with the Gambia far above the rest, followed distantly by the Gold Coast, then Sierra Leone, and finally, Nigeria.

⁶⁴ Based on data collected from Gambian *Blue Books*, various issues.

However, it seems rather unlikely that Gambians were consuming all of this imported cotton cloth, especially given the fact that Gambian wages were in line with the rest of British West Africa. Furthermore, during a particularly high cotton textile import spike in the 1920s, the Gambia also imported a great deal of cotton yarn, ⁶⁶ an important intermediate input for local textile production, which suggests that local producers were still in business (unless, of course, this too was re-exported). This is unsurprising given the Gambian region's very long pre-colonial textile production history that had continued until at least the first quarter of the nineteenth century and probably beyond, as related by first-hand sources like Park (1822).

Instead, much of this foreign product was probably re-exported to other, perhaps historically, textile-deficient parts of West Africa. After all, Johnson (1978) points out that the price of European cloth often declined closer to the coast, while domestic cloth tended to decline in inland regions (probably because of transportation costs).⁶⁷ As a result, in areas further from the coast, European cotton cloth that was ultimately purchased by peasant consumers may have been saddled with extra costs that drove up the price. Under these circumstances, it makes sense that coastal West African importers might choose to import large per capita quantities of European product (due to its low price on the coast) to sell to inland communities for a profit, as seems to have been the case for the Gambia.

However, if the Gambia *was* re-exporting much of its cotton cloth imports, most of this re-export trade activity has gone unreported (or been underreported) in British colonial *Blue Books*. This is unsurprising because colonial *Blue Books* typically only include *seaborne* trade (as opposed to regional overland trade), for the reports are derived from customs records, which typically only registered trade entering and leaving via harbors. Accordingly, a World Bank study on the Gambia's trade history reports that, "there is no reliable data on the re-export trade, [while] there is general recognition that re-export activities have long been one of the most important industries in the Gambia, [having] grown out of a long tradition of trading networks in West Africa dating to the precolonial era." In fact, according to the same study, by the 1920s, the Gambia had developed into a regional trading hub for textiles, along with other goods, like footwear and foodstuffs. This makes a good deal of sense, as Gambia's cotton cloth imports began their ascent right around this time.

Like the Gambia, the Gold Coast also imported a great deal more foreign cotton cloth per capita than both Nigeria and Sierra Leone, but it did so on a far lesser per capita scale than the Gambia. And as in the case of the Gambia, Gold Coast *Blue Book* records do not document re-exports that could account for high per capita imports of cotton cloth relative to the two other British West African colonies. However, foreign cotton cloth

⁶⁵ Demonstrated by nominal wage rates provided in Frankema and van Waijenburg (2011), p. 38-39.

⁶⁶ Based on data collected from Gambian *Blue Books*, various issues.

⁶⁷ Johnson, 1978, p. 265.

⁶⁸ English, 2007, p. 61.

imports into the Gold Coast increased in 1909, just as the economy shifted gears to export-oriented cocoa production. It might make sense, then, that Gold Coast inhabitants, who unlike Gambians did not possess a particularly strong tradition of local textile production, might have started to rely on the British cloth imports that flowed readily into the coastal trading hub as cocoa flowed out. However, what makes the Gold Coast an interesting case, in terms of possible re-exports, is the particular *composition* of these mounting cloth imports. They were comprised almost entirely of colored/printed/dyed cloth. While it could be that unbleached and bleached cotton cloth demand was met via local production and/or by West African cloth re-exports of foreign imports (perhaps even in part from the Gambia!), why was the Gold Coast importing such a large amount of specifically colored/printed/dyed cloth per capita, relative to Nigeria and Sierra Leone? This may be evidence of specialized re-export trade activity.

In the case of the Gold Coast, almost *all* of the colony's imports by quantity per capita during the period at hand were comprised of colored/printed/dyed cloth (refer to **Table 3**). The Gambia, on the other hand, imported slightly more colored/printed/dyed cloth per capita than the Gold Coast, but also imported significantly more bleached and unbleached cotton cloth per person. This could imply that the Gambia re-exported all three varieties of cloth, but especially colored/printed/dyed cloth and perhaps bleached textiles, while the Gold Coast likely re-exported *only* colored/printed/dyed cloth, since the colony imported so little per capita in terms of bleached and unbleached cloth.

Foreign Cloth Re-exports and Domestic Production

What exactly can an analysis of possible re-export activity tell us about production activity in the Gold Coast and the Gambia? As addressed above, heavy per capita imports of colored/printed/dyed cloth into the Gold Coast and the Gambia, relative to Nigeria and Sierra Leone, may signify re-exports of this type of cloth from these two colonies. And depending on the scale of these re-exports relative to imports, space may possibly have existed for local production of cotton cloth (especially in the Gambian region with its strong historical tradition of blue-dyed textile production⁶⁹) in spite of heavy per capita imports.

Conversely, it could be that these high per capita figures for colored/printed/dyed imports are *not* representative of re-export activity, but actually indicate the *disappearance* of a once-strong local industry (recall that the Gambia, for example, was praised for its vivid blue cloth). However, based on the discussion above, this seems unlikely in the case of Gambia. Furthermore, as the next section demonstrates, twentieth-century Gambian producers, among others, appear to have continued to produce and even export locally produced cotton cloth to locales both near and far.

However, the Gold Coast may present a different story. It may be that high per capita imports of foreign cloth into the area (relative to Nigeria and Sierra Leone) do not signify substantial re-export activities, but are merely indicative of the exceptional economic position enjoyed by the Gold Coast, which was historically more commercialized than

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⁶⁹ Park, 1822.

the rest of British West Africa due to its position as a major trading hub. This means that Gold Coast inhabitants were richer, enjoying significantly higher wages, ⁷⁰ which may imply that there was a higher demand for foreign cotton, simply because people could afford more of it. This makes further sense, given that the region did not historically engage heavily in domestic textile production and thus likely lacked enough local product to deter large-scale foreign cotton cloth imports.

As a final point of thought, while the current available data does not provide the necessary figures for an in-depth intra-African cloth export study, an interesting question for future analysis is, how exactly did British West African re-exports of foreign cotton cloth imports into regions that were historically deficient in local textile industries affect export flows of West-African cloth manufactures to regions that, without some form of import activity, would have been otherwise devoid of cotton cloth. Foreign cloth re-exports may have increased heavy exposure to and thus overall demand for cotton cloth (as Johnson implies with her theory that cotton consumption behaviors are plastic, rather than elastic), which may, in turn, have stimulated further exports of locally produced West African cloth. But conversely, could Gambian and possible Gold Coast re-exports of foreign cloth have overcrowded marketplaces that had once relied primarily on West African supplies?

As it turns out, if the Gold Coast *was*, in fact, re-exporting much of its imported foreign cotton cloth (which remains inconclusive), then this trade activity would have had a *much greater* overall impact on cloth production and trade in the regions to which it was exported, than if Gambia re-exported foreign cloth alone. This is because although the Gold Coast imported less cotton cloth *per capita* than the Gambia, it imported vastly more cotton cloth by *total value* (refer to **Graph 6**). Therefore, while the Gambia almost certainly re-exported a sizeable portion of its imported cotton cloth, these re-exports could not have *substantially* increased the overall supply of foreign cotton cloth throughout West Africa. Thus, while the Gambia's re-export trade history is critically important for understanding local *Gambian* textile production developments, it is not critically important for the history of cotton cloth production and trade in the rest of West Africa. The Gold Coast, on the other hand, may have had a more substantial impact on West African cloth production and trade, but again, only if these imports were, in fact, sent out to other parts of the region.

With the right data (and there may very well be untapped archival material), a more indepth study of this nature could provide a more detailed view into how foreign imports and re-exports of cotton cloth to West Africa affected regional trade, consumption, and production of cotton cloth.

2.4.5 Twentieth-Century Trade in Locally Produced Cotton Cloth

Just as Johnson (1978) has found evidence for eighteenth and nineteenth century exports of domestically produced African textiles to distant locales, British colonial records show

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⁷⁰ Frankema and van Waijenburg, 2011.

that similar export-focused production and trade continued in parts of British West Africa during the twentieth century, as regional trade in locally produced cotton cloth continued to develop.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Gambians were still engaged in domestic textile production, based not only on a strong history of local production, but also on documented Gambian importation of intermediate goods (e.g., cotton cards and prepared cotton yarn), much of which was noted as having been imported specifically "for home consumption" well into the 1940s. Johnson (1978) has found evidence of production and trade of local cotton cloth, which she argues, had become integral to the central groundnut trade as early as the nineteenth century, when "the local weaving industry flourished [as] cloth strip became the currency which mediated the export/import trade built up around groundnuts" (p. 264). And as it turns out, as late as the first quarter of the twentieth-century, Gambian merchants were exporting this cloth to far-reaching places. In 1923, for example, the Gambia exported domestic cotton textiles to the UK, Switzerland, and French and Portuguese West Africa, earning a modest £2,111.

Two-way Gambian cloth trade with French and Portuguese West Africa had been ongoing since at least the turn of the twentieth century. For example, in 1908, French West African colonies shipped 73 packages of cotton cloth to the Gambia. And since coastal West Africa was already beginning to receive large annual shipments of British cotton cloth from British suppliers, it seems highly unlikely that these West African-imported cloth goods into Gambia were British in origin. It is more likely that these shipments included local cloth varieties produced in French African colonial regions to be traded with the Gambia for local Gambian cloth products. Thus, in spite of large-scale foreign cotton cloth imports per capita, it appears that a cloth trading relationship persisted into at least the early twentieth century between the Gambia and other British, French and Portuguese West African colonies.

Similarly, Sierra Leone also seems to have engaged in trade of locally produced cotton textiles. According to the colonial *Blue Books* for Sierra Leone, cotton cloth imports into the colony included West African "Country Cloths" between 1891 and 1923. And while Sierra Leone still imported a relatively low amount of cotton textiles per person in the early twentieth century (on average, 5.4 yards per year, see **Table 2**), the colony had exported cotton goods to a diverse range of importers since at least the nineteenth century, but reports of these exports stopped in the twentieth century (although this does not necessarily mean that the export trade disappeared).

⁷¹ Gambia *Blue Book*s, various issues.

⁷² Gambia *Blue Book*, 1923

⁷³ Gambia *Blue Book*, 1908.

⁷⁴ This could, conversely, be evidence that the Gambia imported locally produced textiles from other parts of West Africa for export abroad. Regardless, this still provides evidence for ongoing cotton cloth production and subsequent export in the region, if not specifically in the Gambia.

Nigeria, which had long-produced domestic cloth, particularly in the northern region, ⁷⁵ successfully exported growing amounts of locally produced cotton textiles into at least the 1930s, as reported in Nigerian colonial *Blue Books* for the period. In 1914, as the First World War was beginning to constrict the world cotton cloth trade, Nigeria exported 37,906 pieces of "cotton goods – native" for a total value of £6,266. This value (quantity was not reported) decreased to £4,315 as the war came to an end in 1919. However, Nigerian exports of domestic cloth continued to grow in the inter-war period and by 1934, the value of exports of locally produced cotton cloth had increased to £38,689. Although values for exports dipped very low in some years (for example, to a mere £97 in 1931⁷⁹), periods of elevated exports of Nigerian cloth demonstrate that Nigerian cloth production was still thriving in the mid-twentieth century.

The Gold Coast also engaged in twentieth-century export of its locally produced cotton piece goods into the twentieth century, despite focusing on other, more profitable industries, like cocoa manufacturing. For example in 1923, the Gold Coast exported £530 worth of cotton piece goods identified as "native manufactures." 80

Although these export sums may seem low, especially relative to total imports of foreign cloth into British West Africa, it should be noted that if British ledgers failed to capture vast re-export activities in British West African colonies, they likely failed to accurately record exports of locally produced goods. Thus, in the absence of more detailed and complete records, any documented export of native cloth should be considered as possible evidence of what could be far more extensive native cloth trade activity.

2.4.6 Twentieth-Century Wartime Production And Export Opportunities

The preceding discussions have suggested that domestic cloth producers in much of British West Africa were, generally speaking, quite well-positioned to successfully thrive and compete with foreign cloth imports. If British West African cloth products easily competed with European manufactures during periods of normal trading, then it follows logically that possibilities for British West African domestic textile production could have been even greater when historical import disturbances (which arose several times during the tumultuous first half of the twentieth century) generated a wide-open consumer market at home.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Nigeria *Blue Book*, 1919.

⁷⁵ This is according to McPhee (1926), (along with reports from colonial officials related in Johnson, 1974), who bemoaned the great difficulty British merchants experienced in attempting to extract raw cotton from the region, which used almost all of its abundant supplies for local production.

⁷⁶ Nigeria *Blue Book*, 1914.

⁷⁸ Nigeria *Blue Book*, 1934.

⁷⁹ Nigeria *Blue Book*, 1931.

⁸⁰ Gold Coast Blue Book, 1921.

⁸¹ Interestingly, during the post-colonial era, numerous African nations engaged in import substitution industrial schemes as African-run governments gained control over economic policy, tactics that may be linked to earlier, positive experiences with such foreign trade constriction.

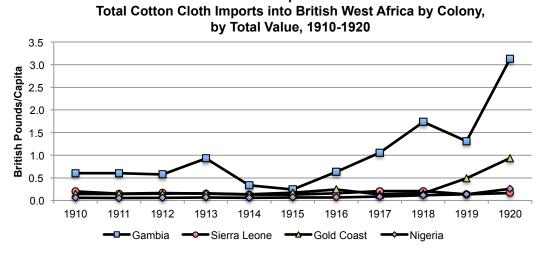
According to McPhee (1926), numerous periods of cloth import substitution occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whereby British West African producers were temporarily given an almost complete monopoly over local consumer markets due to short-term supply limitations in Britain, especially those caused by disruptions in the production supply chain as raw cotton resources temporarily dwindled. The famous nineteenth-century "cotton famine", which resulted from raw cotton supply disturbances caused by the American Civil War, was probably the first of these periods of global crisis-based import substitution activity in Africa, but this event was soon followed by two highly disruptive world wars.

Clarence-Smith (2010) describes how in East Africa, for example, factory production emerged during and after the First World War as a result of temporary constrictions of finished cotton textile supplies, and then, how during the Second World War, entrepreneurs took advantage of wartime industrial protection and cheap land to try to strengthen local factory-based textile production, providing cloth for local consumption. Did these global wars affect foreign cloth import levels in British West Africa, as well, leading to increases in local production?

The First World War

Imports into the Gambia had risen in 1913, only to drop again just as the First World War began. However, Gambian traders seem to have quickly realized the advantage in importing a great deal of cloth for re-export to other West African locales during wartime, as Gambian per capita imports (by both quantity and value) of cotton cloth became exceptionally high from 1916 onward (higher than at any other point prior to World War II, in fact), which becomes especially clear when compared with the rest of British West Africa. (See **Graph 9** below.)

Graph 9



Sources: Blue Books located at TNA: the Gambia: CO 90/84-94; Sierra Leone: CO 272/87-97; the Gold Coast: CO 100/60-70; Nigeria: CO 473/11-16; CO 660/1-10.

The per capita imports for the Gold Coast also ramped up from 1918 onward, perhaps in an effort to capitalize on wartime re-exports, just as the Gambia appears to have done, but this may also have been the result of increasing cloth textile import prices from 1918 to 1920. 82

Regarding Nigeria and Sierra Leone, imports of foreign cloth remained largely the same throughout the war, 83 implying that if there was a void created in the local market by decreased global cloth supplies and increased prices, it was likely filled by local cloth manufactures, rather than by imports of price-inflated foreign cloth.

While it is difficult to say whether or not local producers took advantage of lowered foreign cloth imports per capita and increased their output, it seems very likely that they did. This is especially true for areas like Nigeria, which *never* imported a great deal of foreign cloth per capita in the first place, ⁸⁴ but historically produced cloth, which could then be traded to regions with limited cloth production and thus constricted foreign cloth imports on account of the war. Accordingly, as noted above, there is evidence in *Blue Books* of domestic cotton cloth exports from Nigeria during the First World War.

Thus, in this scenario, both local producers and re-exporters seem to have been well positioned to take advantage of decreasing import levels during the First World War.

The Second World War

During the Second World War, foreign import prices for most everything increased substantially. As Rodney (1972) recounts, the price of imported goods doubled and, in some cases even tripled, causing "many necessities [to] pass beyond the reach of the ordinary man" (p. 173). For example, a piece of cotton print that was worth roughly 12 shillings in the Gold Coast before the war erupted, skyrocketed to about 90 shillings by 1945, while in Nigeria, a piece of khaki-colored cloth costing 3 shillings in pre-war days more than quintupled during the war years, climbing to 16 shillings.⁸⁵

However, while prices were rising, Gambian per capita cotton cloth imports (particularly of colored/printed/dyed cloth), which had plummeted in the late 1930s, actually *increased* as the Second World War intensified.⁸⁶ It appears that Gambian re-exporters were gearing up to once again intensify their re-exports of foreign textiles during the

⁸² This is bacd on Nigerian colonial data records, which include quantity of import data from 1912 onward (found in Nigeria *Blue Books*, various issues). While this is a handy estimation tool, it is important to note that cotton prices did not truly begin to converge across British West Africa until the 1930s (based on data derived from *Blue Books* for all four colonies, various issues).

⁸³ Per capita expenditures *did* increase very slightly in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, but by negligible amounts when compared with the Gambia and the Gold Coast.

Recall that while Nigeria imported the most cotton cloth (by total value) of all four colonies, the very large Nigerian population means that the per capita *scale* of these imports is remarkably low when compared with the other colonies, especially the Gambia and the Gold Coast (see Graph 5).

⁸⁵ Rodney, 1972, p. 173.

⁸⁶ Gambia *Blue Books*, various issues.

increasingly severe wartime chaos that ensued, even as total exports were declining, seemingly betting on the successful reapplication of re-export trading tactics learned during the First World War. However, the Gambia, always an outlier in terms of per capita cotton cloth imports, is obviously not representative of the whole of British West Africa.

Unfortunately, the available data for the other three regional British colonies does not extend beyond 1938, and thus no information can be gleaned about wartime trading activities in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the Gold Coast. However, if the First World War is any indication of a pattern of wartime behavior, Nigeria and Sierra Leone likely did not import a great deal of cloth per capita, but probably continued to produce and export locally.

Thus, British West African producers likely benefitted from temporary periods of import contraction caused, for instance, by wars and cotton shortages. Such temporary reductions in the availability of foreign cotton cloth imports may have provided industry-stimulating opportunities for local cotton cloth producers to fill supply voids left by momentary cloth import deficiencies (even with possible ramped-up foreign cloth reexport activities). However, this is more readily apparent during the First World War than during the second, for without the proper data, it is difficult to ascertain production and trade dynamics.

As the following chapter illustrates, beyond temporary global crisis-related opportunities for increased production, largely static circumstances also favored the success of domestic West African product in the local marketplace even in the face of growing foreign cotton cloth imports. These included a low marginal cost of production, local preference, and competitive pricing. Local raw cotton supplies may have also provided a boost for local producers, but conversely, may have proved a disadvantage, drawing the competitive attention of large-scale British textile producers, ever on the prowl for new sources of raw cotton. Finally, many British West African producers appear to have adapted to the globalizing marketplace, utilizing growing global trading networks to facilitate home production.

CHAPTER 3: HOW DID BRITISH WEST AFRICA COMPETE WITH BRITAIN?

The preceding chapter has demonstrated that British West African cotton cloth manufacturers retained sufficient space in local markets to successfully produce and even compete with foreign cloth imports for centuries, and appear to have continued to do so into the first half of the twentieth century (and perhaps beyond). But *how* exactly did British West African producers manage to persevere in spite of ever-increasing, large-scale foreign cloth imports from Britain, a growing industrial giant?

3.1 **Income Plasticity of Cotton Cloth Consumption**

As a first step to answering this question, consider Johnson's (1978) argument that cotton textile consumption in West Africa tended to be largely "income plastic," as opposed to income-elastic (p. 266). That is, West African consumers tended to increase their level of cotton cloth consumption as wages increased, 87 but did not decrease it if wages This income-plastic nature of cotton cloth consumption allowed for a seemingly ever-expanding market space for cotton cloth products. Since consumption of African-made product was a historical reality in most parts of British West Africa, it is interesting to consider that, in some respect, this income plasticity may not have so much allowed for continued production of British West African textiles (already firmly entrenched in local tradition), as provided for a space for the entrance of new varieties from abroad. Thus, at least up to the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, British West Africa's textile production and consumption history may very well have been a story of expanding inclusion, rather than crowding out or displacement of newer product within a market still held (if not necessarily cornered) by older, native textile options.

3.2 **Exceptional Quality of West African Cloth**

Although there was ever-growing market space available for both foreign and locallyproduced cotton textiles, local varieties seem to have enjoyed an edge in terms of quality (especially after the composition of imports had shifted to primarily British goods), which seems to have been an important factor in the continued success of local producers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

With the increase in slave trading activities in West Africa, Indian textiles rapidly became popular amongst West African consumers because they had added a new choice dimension to African garment fashions and trade. Accordingly, these foreign imports became a source of major competition for local manufacturers. Partly because "the natives of Africa were already used to cotton cloth of their own manufacture," they were readily attracted to high-quality Indian competitors, who according to Wadsworth and Mann (1931) made "cotton cloth, which was finer and more variously coloured than the native product [and was consequently] from a very early date an indispensable article in the stock of every African trader" (p. 118). Nineteenth-century and early twentiethcentury British cotton textiles, on the other hand, were merely cheap imitations of materials already familiar to exacting West African consumers. British cloth offered no novel elements of design or quality and thus, seems to have failed to attract consumers of native (or where available, Indian) product as dramatically as had Indian goods when they first entered the West African market in large amounts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

According to data from Frankema and van Waijenburg (2011), wages increased at a very impressive rate through the second half of the twentieth century.

Accordingly, high-quality local cloth was frequently preferred to cheaply made British imports. For example, in the early twentieth century, High Commissioner Sir William Wallace noted that the strength of the native textile industry in northern Nigeria (in spite of prejudicial tolls levied on other parts of the colony), was due to the exceptional quality of local manufactures:

The native cloth though less showy than English cloth, is much more durable and of better value to the native [West Africa] than the... 'grey baft' [English cotton]...and no native...will take the English material if he can possibly get the latter [my italics].88

Cloth weaving remained an important domestic industry in Nigeria, and Wallace further noted that, at least in 1906, it had "a great future before it if encouraged." It seems that Inikori (2009) was misguided in his assumption that British cotton producers faced no meaningful African competition, if we are to believe Wallace's first-hand account. It appears that high-quality British West African product, at least in Nigeria, posed a great competitive challenge for British textile producers.

3.3 **Long-Term British Price Exploitation**

Furthermore, relative pricing of local cloth to foreign cloth also played an important role in the continued market success of local cotton cloth product, even in the onslaught of mounting imports of British-made textiles. It has been argued that, at least during the nineteenth century, locally produced cotton cloth was almost always cheaper than foreign imports, not just during the temporary historical periods of trade constriction described by Rodney (1972) and McPhee (1926).89

Even though British cotton cloth production costs had continuously declined with the onset of the industrial revolution, these cost advantages may not have been passed on to African consumers. Rodney (1972) asserts that African peasants were regularly and systematically charged unfair freight rates for imported textiles, for they had no control over the rates charged by British shipping companies and actually paid more than other importing countries for the same goods (p. 176). Very poor peasants who faced price exploitation at the hands of greedy British traders were sometimes unable to clothe and feed themselves and their families by operating within the British trading system alone. At least in inland regions, where transport cost and thus the overall cost of foreign cloth was often elevated, they may have thus preferred locally (or at least regionally) produced options, which Johnson (1978) argues were relatively cheaper in inland West Africa compared to European cloth imports. For, according to Rodney (1972):

⁸⁸ Quoted from Johnson, 1974, p. 184; original source: *Northern Nigeria Report, 1906-7*.

⁸⁹ However, this was not always the case. According to Johnson (1974), local Gambian cloth was cheaper than foreign imports in the 1890s, with a pronounced four-fold difference in cost. At that time, Gambian local cloth was roughly 1 shilling per yard, while the cheapest imported cloth was about 3 d. (or one quarter of a shilling) per yard (p. 185). However, she argues that a low marginal cost of productivity for the West African producer still provided a competitive industrial edge (see discussion in the following section).

[The average farmer] never handled money in quantities sufficient to feed, clothe and shelter his family. Instead, subsistence farming...was how the peasant managed to eat, and the few shillings earned went to pay taxes and to buy the increasing number of things which could not be obtained without money in the middlemen's shops – salt, cloth, paraffin, etc. (p. 240).

With so little money available for food, peasants could scarcely afford to purchase expensive foreign cloth. According to Rodney (1972), in some cases imports of cloth into West Africa were so unfairly priced that "the price of the finished cotton shirt was so high that when re-imported...in the form of a shirt, [it] was beyond the purchasing power of the peasant who grew the cotton" (p. 174). In regions with secure supplies of raw cotton, it seems logical that local cotton textile producers would have provided a more fairly priced alternative to costly foreign products. Thus, poor peasants may have been inclined to purchase domestic textiles from nearby West African producers if they could not afford foreign-produced cloth. In some cases, they may have even opted to engage in cloth production at home if they had adequate raw cotton supplies required to weave cloth

3.4 Low Marginal Cost of West African Handicraft Production

In spite of the intensification of foreign textile trade competition in Africa and the inclusive, income-plastic nature of cotton textile consumption, it has become clear that local production posed a competitive challenge for British textile producers in at least some parts of British West Africa as late as the twentieth century. How is it possible that the small-scale, local producer could effectively contend with the emerging "workshop of the world"?

Johnson (1978) explains how African handicraft cloth products⁹⁰ competed with foreign textile imports by undercutting expensive foreign product:

It is true that he [the local handicraft producer] has a certain protection in the cost of transport...[but] the answer seems to lie in the economic organization of the industry (p. 267).

As Johnson sees it, most small-scale West African weavers tended to produce goods for their own basic needs, including food and even sometimes raw materials for production, which not only freed them from the extra cost of purchasing cotton from a professional grower, but also ensured a source of cotton during periods of global raw cotton supply constrictions. Thus, in case of import contractions resulting from global crises (especially raw material shortages), local producers who supplied their own raw cotton

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 $^{^{90}}$ However, this does not include the artisanal and early factory systems that Johnson (1978) claims were concurrently emerging across West Africa.

could continue to produce and sell their cotton cloth even as global production continued to contract.

Furthermore, weavers typically only produced textiles in the non-farming off-season. Under this type of system, "the marginal costs of production are virtually nil." Essentially, the weaver was never dependent upon his weaving to put food on his table and he paid no extra cost for his workspace, since he merely worked in his own home. Johnson (1978) further elucidates this concept, explaining that:

[The] part-time specialist working for pocket-money, as every trade unionist knows, can undercut the man who has to earn his living by the craft alone, and he can even, under favorable circumstances, undercut factory production (p. 267).

However, there may have been some severe long-term consequences for this marginal cost of productivity amongst West African farmer-weavers, for as Thornton (1992) theorizes, Africans *chose* not to adopt mechanized production methods because the high productivity of their own methods did not immediately necessitate a shift. Thus, while marginal costs of West African production may have enabled local producers to compete with foreign imports through the late colonial period, African industrial (and economic) development may have been stunted due to a lack of crucial mechanical innovation, especially during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century eras of global industrial progress.

3.5 Raw Cotton: Boon or Bane?

Based on Johnson's suggested theory of a low marginal cost of production for many West African manufacturers, the presence (or absence) of local supplies of raw cotton very likely played a key role in determining the level of production in different parts of British West Africa. However, the benefits of available regional cotton cloth supplies must be offset against the potential consequences of attractive raw material sources in a colonial setting.

According to Clarence-Smith (2010), supplies of local cotton in sub-Saharan Africa were "a mixed blessing, given poor quality and irregular deliveries" (p. 2). Yet, these "poor quality" raw cotton supplies attracted European traders, eager to transport the raw materials to Lancashire and Manchester producers. In his history of the "economic revolution" in British West Africa, McPhee (1926) explains how the export of African raw cotton to Britain began fairly late in the 1850s, when world market prices of cotton increased so much that Lancashire cotton producers were "feeling the pinch of short supplies" (p. 45). Rodney (1972) argues that by the colonial era, Africans retained very little control over local raw materials, cotton included, and were no longer able to set prices for these industrially-valuable exported goods. According to Rodney (1972), this situation translated to dismal terms of trade for sub-Saharan Africa:

⁹¹ Johnson, 1978, p. 267.

Africa was not a large market for European products, compared to other continents, but both buying-prices and selling-prices were set by European capitalists. That certainly allowed their manufacturers and traders more easy access to the surplus of wealth produced in Africa than they would have had if Africans were in a position to raise the price of their own exports...There was no objective economic law which determined that primary produce should be worth so little...The explanation is that the unequal exchange was forced upon Africa by the political and military supremacy of the colonisers (p. 175).

Thus, ready supplies of local raw cotton may have proved a boon for domestic producers, but also a bane, as they attracted British traders (with the metropolis on their side), hungry for raw cotton to transport to Britain, where the cotton was prepared for shipment *back* to West African cotton-producing regions in the form of finished cloth. The discussion that follows attempts to shed light on the complex interplay between British West African raw cotton supplies, local production, and metropolitan industrial interests.

3.5.1 Raw Cotton Cultivation in Nigeria and the Gambia

In West Africa, geography seems to have played a role in determining where British agendas could and could not be pursued with ease. As McPhee explained in 1926, of the four British West African colonies, "Nigeria alone was found satisfactory [for raw cotton production and export to the British metropolis], and there the task was to develop and improve a culture already in existence" (p. 44). However, in the case of Nigeria, geographic *region* may have made a tremendous difference in the overall export of raw cotton and consequently, the continuation of production.

By the 1920s, McPhee (1926) noted the pronounced disparity between northern and southern Nigeria in terms of raw cotton exports, which he explains was not a result of differences in agricultural output, but rather a difference in export transportation challenges and regional textile activity (p. 44). Differentiating between the geographically protected northern region and the coastal southern region of Nigeria, McPhee (1926) explains:

The cotton region of the South is much nearer the Coast and accordingly the transport charges are much less, and also...the cotton field in the North was much later in being tapped by the railway... [However,] the production of cotton in the North is greater than the output of the South, but in the North the bulk of the crop is retained for the local manufacture of native Kano cloths (p. 49).

Accordingly, coastal Lagos produced and exported modest amounts of raw cotton between 1865 and 1878 during the infamous cotton famine. At the same time, most of northern Nigeria's raw cotton remained protected from foreign export and was consequently readily available for the use of local manufacturers (many of whom were likely engaged in small-scale raw cotton production). Unsurprisingly, Nigeria as a whole

imported very low per capita quantities of foreign cotton cloth throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Gambia presents a different story. First, conflicting accounts have emerged regarding the Gambia's capacity to produce raw cotton. And secondly, the Gambia was an historical producer of textiles, yet by far the greatest single per capita importer of cotton cloth during the first half of the twentieth century.

McPhee (1926) claims that the soil in the Gambia was too wet for cotton production. However, according to Curtin (1975), at least six different species of cotton existed in West Africa up to the colonial era, each variant suitable to different environmental conditions (p. 211). Thus, some form of cotton could be grown nearly everywhere in British West Africa. Accordingly, in spite of McPhee's negative assessment, Park (1822) specifically praised the high quality of the soil in the Mandingo territory along the Gambia, which he distinguished as being so exceptionally fertile that "besides many kinds of esculent plants, cotton and tobacco are cultivated" (p. 27). 92

Park (1822) goes on to describe the traditional manufacturing system of the region, in which locals "cultivate cotton, which they manufacture into cloth, and indigo, with which they dye it a blue colour" (p. 11). In fact, he portrays local Yallof manufacturers as having exceptional skill as growers, weavers and dyers who "excel all their neighbours, making it [cotton cloth] more fine, and giving it a better colour" (p. 14). Thus, it seems that local Gambian raw cotton and cloth production continued to flourish as late as the 1820s, notably past the rise in Indian textile imports, a storm that Gambian producers apparently weathered tolerably well.

Yet, by the early twentieth century, the colony of the Gambia imported far more cotton cloth per capita than any of the other three British West African colonies. Thus, even though the Gambia traditionally produced raw cotton, as did Nigeria, the region still became a heavy importer of foreign textiles, while Nigeria did not (especially in the cotton-abundant north).

Based on these two cases, it appears that no immediately obvious correlation exists between raw cotton supplies and cotton cloth imports. Instead, it is more likely that location played a more important role, for most of the Gambia is largely accessible, since it is a river region, while much of Nigeria lays inland and was thus protected from foreign importers of cloth and exporters of raw cotton. Therefore, it may not be the *supply* of raw cotton that matters, so much as the level of *geographic protection* of local markets. Where markets are largely unprotected (as in the Gambia), sources of raw cotton may have proved a bane for local producers. However, where markets were largely protected

often found it more profitable to export than gold" (Curtin, 1975, p. 213).

⁹² Interestingly, Curtin (1975) explains that regional raw cotton and cloth production was not always dependent upon resource endowment, especially when cloth was exchanged with neighboring locales for other desirable products. For the Malinke people of the Senegambian region, "production that may have begun as a necessity became in time a virtue," eventually making Malinke cloth, which was produced in a region supposedly "too wet" for cotton cultivation, "so low in price and high in quality that the Europeans

from foreign penetration (as in Nigeria), raw cotton supplies almost certainly proved a boon, stimulating local cotton cloth production well into the colonial twentieth century.

3.5.2 Cloth Production & Cotton Cultivation Levels in the Gold Coast & Sierra Leone

In the colonies of the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone, which were both fairly moderate in terms of the scale of foreign cloth imports, local raw cotton production levels appear to have been in line with foreign cloth import levels. This is especially clear in the case of the Gold Coast, where raw cotton production was comparatively less common and foreign imports per capita were comparatively high. The Gold Coast, an historic trading hub, had little incentive to produce cotton cloth, since specialized merchants could more easily trade imported goods for cotton cloth, especially since the region was ill-equipped to grow raw cotton, which led it to instead intensively focus on cocoa cultivation, as argued by McPhee (1926).

Sierra Leone, on the other hand, had been a slave trade hub, but was less engaged in the West African commodity trade (and thus the import of foreign textiles) than the Gold Coast and therefore, likely grew relatively more raw cotton for local production. However, as with the Gold Coast and the Gambia, McPhee (1926) states that Sierra Leone's climate was too wet for successful raw cotton cultivation. But while it is possible that raw cotton supplies were imported into Sierra Leone for local production, it seems more likely that Sierra Leone grew at least part of its own raw cotton supplies, especially given the history of textile production in the region and Curtin's (1975) assertion that different varieties of the cotton plant existed across West Africa.

For the comparative case of Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, both of which are primarily coastal, the factor of geographic protection does not play a role in the cultivation and possible export of raw cotton and subsequent cotton cloth production levels, as it did in the comparative case of the Gambia and Nigeria. Nor did climate-based raw cotton cultivation possibilities determine cotton cloth production output (as implied by McPhee, 1926), since it seems that all regions of West Africa could, in fact, produce some form of industry-appropriate raw cotton. Rather, it was established patterns of foreign commodity trading that helped determine the level of cotton cloth produced, and in turn, the amount of raw cotton to be cultivated locally (probably by small-scale farmer-weavers who did not attract the attention of British traders) to supply domestic cloth production with the necessary inputs.

Thus, raw cotton cultivation and cotton cloth production dynamics appear to have differed across British West Africa. In the case of Nigeria, it may very well have been the strong local tradition of textile production that had initially led the region to produce large supplies of raw cotton, which enabled a great deal of local cloth production.

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⁹³ Rodney (1972) states that Ghana (the modern-day Gold Coast) did, in fact, produce raw cotton to supply local production. However, other scholars argue that the Gold Coast became a trading hub for cotton textiles and not a producer, even if early centuries had seen local product on the market (McPhee, 1926; Inikori, 2009; Northrup, 1978).

Ultimately, these supplies attracted British merchants, searching for sources of raw materials for Lancashire and Manchester looms, but only in the coastal south did Nigerian cotton cultivators succumb to the influence of these foreign cotton buyers. Therefore, locally cultivated raw cotton may have proved both a boon *and* a bane for British West African producers, depending on location. But while foreign accessibility to local raw cotton supplies was most certainly geographically determined, the *ability* to cultivate raw cotton was not. Accordingly, raw cotton cultivation levels may have largely been determined by commodity trade and cloth production patterns, as suggested by the cases of the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone.

A more in-depth study of the relationship between local raw cotton cultivation and export and domestic cotton cloth production may help to provide a greater understanding of geographic and political-economic colonial dynamics affecting textile production and trade in colonial British West Africa. A more thorough investigation is beyond the scope of this thesis, but this is something that would likely generate valuable information if pursued in the future using the appropriate archival sources.

3.6 Globalizing Trade and Resilient Industrial Adaptation

Concomitant with the rise of the global cotton textile trade, a new global trading system was developing. While in West Africa this led to increasing imports of foreign cloth and (in some places) export of local raw cotton supplies, the new global trading framework that emerged also brought with it some benefits that helped British West African producers adapt and more efficiently compete with foreign cloth imports. For just as some British West African traders had adaptively embraced foreign cloth imports and incorporated them into the West African trading system, resilient British West African cloth manufacturers seem to have also adjusted to the new global system, taking advantage of the novel opportunities that global trade and communication had to offer the small-scale producer, particularly in the form of new industrial technology and intermediate inputs.

West African cloth producers had long been borrowing techniques from foreign cloth importers. For example, Riello and Roy (2009) describe how imports of high-quality Indian cloth goods had affected local production, generating competition, but also providing example pieces for local producers: "Import encouraged import-substitution and simultaneously devitalized and revived segments of indigenous manufacturing traditions" (p. 12). However, according to Rodney (1972), trade with Europe failed to produce any meaningful benefits for local industry, for "the very nature of Afro-European trade was highly unfavourable to the movement of positive ideas and techniques from the European capitalist system to the African pre-capitalist system of production" (p. 116). Contrary to this view, resourceful African producers seem to have benefited from trade with Europe – as suggested by Fage (1978) – by importing foreign goods that helped increase local manufacturing capacities. In fact, by the first decade of the twentieth century, the Gold Coast, a major British West African trading hub, was importing sewing machines from Europe!

If we examine import commodities into British West Africa, we can find evidence for the resilience of local industry, which was in many cases, revitalized and even restructured through the use of imported production inputs and new tools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

3.6.1 Cotton Cards and Copal Gum

An early example of the adoption of import items for use in local industry is cotton cards, which were first imported during the eighteenth century. According to Johnson (1984), the use of European cotton cards marked the beginning of a small technical revolution, as cotton producers adopted European methods:

Traditionally, cotton was 'bowed' rather than 'carded', and in remote areas this method survived until the beginning of the present century. But by then the usual method nearly everywhere was to use European woolcards, which are more efficient. The continuing import of these woolcards demonstrates the survival of the local industry in the face of European competition, as well as competition from the cheap Indian cottons imported in quantity (p. 10-11).

Cotton card imports were locally consumed and traded across West Africa well into the nineteenth century, implying that cotton thread production (which in turn, suggests cotton *cloth* production) continued throughout British West Africa into the nineteenth century. The Gambia, for example, imported cotton cards in the mid-nineteenth century. Although many of these import packages were re-exported to other parts of West Africa, a portion was always retained, presumably for local use. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the Gambia was importing cotton cards in more significant quantities (for example, 380 packages in 1908 alone) from France, none of which were reported as having been re-exported. Thus, unless these were re-exported but not reported, Gambian yarn production was ongoing in the twentieth century, in spite of pronounced per capita imports of cotton cloth during the first half of the twentieth century. Similarly, Sierra Leone imported cotton cards in the nineteenth century and although they had disappeared from import lists by the 1850s, ⁹⁵ cards may very well have been imported from a trading hub, like the Gambia, during the twentieth century.

3.6.2 Cotton Yarn

Yarn was yet another important industrial input, having been imported into British West Africa in large quantities, especially by way of the Gambia. By the 1840s, the Gambia was importing cotton thread, although not yet in large amounts. However, by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, Gambian cotton yarn imports soared, reaching over one million pounds by weight in 1919. While much of this was likely re-exported,

95 Sierra Leone *Blue Books*, various issues.

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⁹⁴ Gambia *Blue Book*, 1908.

⁹⁶ Gambia Blue Book, 1919.

along with cotton cloth imports, it is likely that local producers consumed some of this cotton yarn at home, especially given the Gambia's tradition of textile production.

Similarly, the Gold Coast imported cotton yarn in the early part of the twentieth century, although on a much smaller scale than the Gambia, implying that much of this product was intended for home consumption, rather than re-export. Nigeria also imported cotton yarn in the first quarter of the twentieth century, although like the Gold Coast, Nigerian consumption of imported cotton yarn was quite low (both about £ 0.005) when compared with what was imported into the Gambia (an average of £ 0.07 per person, with a high of £ 0.29 in 1920). Thus, just as scale imports of cotton cloth differed between British West African colonies, imports of cotton yarn differed in a similar pattern. And just as in the case of cotton cloth, the Gambia likely re-exported its large-scale imports of cotton yarn to other parts of West Africa, which helped spur on local cotton cloth production across the region.

However, while steady supplies of foreign-imported thread may have helped British West African textile manufacturers reach higher output levels, there may have been some hidden consequences for overall industrial development. For, where British thread deficiencies may have helped generate industrial innovations, West African deficiencies may have been largely filled via imported French and British yarn (especially if Gambian merchants were distributing thread throughout West Africa), preventing West Africans from generating the same industry-stimulating innovations. This is an interesting point, which demonstrates the complications surrounding the assertion of Fage (1978) that Africa's trade with Europeans was generally beneficial to the economic and industrial development of the continent. However, even if foreign input supplies had *not* been readily available for West African producers, it is probably unlikely that industrial input-based developments would have occurred in exactly the same (or even similar) manner in West Africa as they had in industrializing Britain.

3.6.3 Adaptive Industrial Focuses

Based on the evidence presented above, it is readily clear that domestic textile production activities continued in parts of British West Africa (especially Nigeria) well into the twentieth century. Interestingly, according to Clarence-Smith (2010), even in regions where traditional textile production had waned, other industrious activities may have emerged in the wake of increasing trade between Africa and Europe. As Clarence-Smith (2010) explains:

Weaving and finishing adapted quite successfully to the new conditions... Imports of cheap and reliable machine-made inputs, notably yarn, plain cloth, and chemical dyes, were a godsend [for] the growth of new artisanal sectors, notably the garments industry in the case of cotton textiles (p. 2).

⁹⁷ Interestingly, woolen yarn was also imported into the Gold Coast during the same period, but proved far less popular (by value) than cotton yarn, implying that West African domestic processing of cotton textiles was far more pronounced than for wool.

⁹⁸ Based on data collected from *Blue Books* for the Gambia, the Gold Coast and Nigeria, various issues.

It seems that shrewd local producers found new ways to "add value" to imported materials by dying bleached and unbleached fabric and producing garments from imported bolts of cloth. Johnson (1984) maintains that resourceful local weavers went as far as to cannibalize a variety of imports for use in cloth production to suit local tastes and customs:

Worsted caps may have been imported for wear (red knitted caps are still the insignia of certain cults in the Niger Delta), but they may also have been bought for unraveling, *as were* short lengths of coloured woolen and silk woven cloths. A later generation is said to have unraveled red hospital blankets to weave their characteristic cloths (p. 10).

According to colonial *Blue Books*, the Gambia, for example, imported increasing amounts of "hats and caps" by the thousands during the 1920s, just as imports of cotton cloth began to skyrocket. Much of the Gambia's imported cotton cloth, hats and caps were likely re-exported to other regions, where local producers may have processed (or re-processed) these goods to suit local tastes.

It seems that even with increasing imports of cotton cloth, local industries did not crumble away, but instead adapted to and even took advantage of globalizing trade and the opportunities it afforded adaptive local producers.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

4.1 Did British West African Producers Survive the Cotton Cloth Import Flood?

The simple answer is yes: British West African producers could and did continue to produce and successfully compete with foreign cotton cloth imports, at least up to the end of the first half of the twentieth century. However, the more complete (and complex) answer is that while foreign cotton cloth imports into the four British West African colonies tended to follow roughly similar historical patterns of increase and decrease, the per capita scale and compositional makeup of these imports and thus, the level of local competition with foreign imports, varied between colonies. Some colonies, like Nigeria and Sierra Leone, imported very few foreign cotton cloth goods per capita, presumably relying instead on local product, while the Gambia and the Gold Coast imported a great deal of foreign cotton cloth per inhabitant, although it is very likely that some of this was re-exported to textile-deficient regions (particularly in the case of the Gambia).

Thus, it can only be ascertained with a good deal of certainty that low per capita cloth importers, like Nigeria and Sierra Leone, likely continued to compete in local markets with great vigor, while heavier per capita cloth importers, like the Gambia and secondarily, the Gold Coast, may still have competed but only if these regions did, in fact, engage in re-export of imported cotton cloth, and this is not something that can be

stated with certainty using the currently available data sources. And even though it does appear that these regions re-exported much of this imported product, it is almost impossible to ascertain just how *much* was exported and how much was retained for home consumption, for as the World Bank Diagnostic Trade Integration Study notes, data for most of the Gambia's re-export activity, for example, are largely unavailable. However, based on primary source accounts, we *do* know that the Gambia enjoyed a rich textile production history that spanned into the first quarter of the nineteenth century, but beyond that, the picture becomes less clear.

Overall, based on the data presented in this thesis, it appears that Johnson (1974, 1978, 1984) was correct to argue that West African (in this case, *British* West African) textile production continued into the colonial period. And conversely, the evidence presented here contradicts the view of African dependency theories, like those put forth by Rodney (1972) and Inikori (2009), who both contend that West African cotton cloth production and trade had deteriorated (largely as a result of interaction with European forces) by the colonial era. Instead, it appears that many British West African cotton cloth manufacturers retained a great deal of agency, remaining resilient, adaptive, and quite competitive well into the late colonial period. Many continued to successfully produce and even export (globally, in some cases) domestic cotton cloth in the face of growing inflows of foreign textiles, first from India and later, from Lancashire and Manchester. In fact, as suggested by Fage (1978), some producers even benefited from trade with Europe, having actively imported intermediate inputs that may have helped increase the overall output of British West African cloth in the twentieth century. Ultimately, I have to agree with Johnson (1978): This does not sound like a dying industry.

4.2 Avoiding the Aggregation Problem

By studying the four British West African colonies separately, this thesis has highlighted and avoided the dangers inherent in aggregating African regions, since it is very clear that each colony reacted at least somewhat differently to the pressure of foreign cotton cloth imports, based on its own consumption preferences, trade dynamics, production histories, and perhaps even its geographic location.

Imprudent aggregation of African regional history often extends beyond British West Africa, with some quantitative studies encompassing the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (as in the case of Eltis and Jennings, 1988). Quantitative aggregation generates skewed perspectives of trade and consumption dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa and among its constituent regions. Thus, any study of trade and consumption dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa, as a whole, must look at cases on a regional and/or colony/country level.

Studying British West African colonies in relation to, say, British East African colonies would help to position British West Africa within a broader context. This type of comparative study should prove thought provoking, given that although East and West Africa are both part of sub-Saharan Africa, each region has enjoyed different general geographic endowments, population densities, and pre-colonial and colonial experiences,

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⁹⁹ English, 2007.

any and all of which may have contributed to differences in industrial and economic development. Furthermore, comparisons of French and British African colonies in West and/or East Africa should also provide insight into the various mechanisms affecting trade, consumption, and production in sub-Saharan Africa, because differing colonial agendas may have helped produced different industrial outcomes.

While comparative examinations of the experiences of colonies within different sub-Saharan regions and/or under different metropolitan umbrellas would provide further insight into questions addressed in this thesis, other important areas of inquiry remain to be investigated, for this has served as a *preliminary* study of pre-colonial and colonial-era cotton cloth consumption and production in British West Africa. Accordingly, there is still much to consider with regard to the development of cotton cloth production in sub-Saharan Africa with the rise of foreign cotton cloth imports. Although the answers to these questions lay beyond the scope of this thesis, I pose them here to help stimulate future research and introduce topics that I will consider in my upcoming PhD project.

4.3 Geographic Protection and the Transport Revolution

For one, a more extensive investigation into the role played by physical protection from cotton cloth imports would help to provide insight into the differences between inland and coastal experiences. Although the cases of the Gambia and Nigeria touched on this question, both of these colonies include coastal regions. Did fully landlocked colonies tend to import less foreign cotton cloth due to physical protection and increased transportation costs of foreign goods to the interior relative to the coast? After all, Europeans did not thoroughly explore and engage with the interior of Africa until the nineteenth century. As an example, Europeans only reached the famed trading city of Timbuktu in 1827. 100

Austen and Cordell (2002) argue that inland African economies *did* enjoy a certain measure of natural protection as a result of their geographic locations and relatively harsh environments, which deterred European settlement and/or direct engagement with the interior regions of the continent. This may have allowed for continued economic development in inland regions in spite of European and Asian trade contact with other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

However, by the second half of the nineteenth century, geographic location was becoming less of a determining factor of trade contact as shipping costs declined, making trade with the interior more possible than ever. This was especially true of river-based trade along the Gambia, the Niger and the Congo/Zaire Rivers in West Africa and the Nile River in North and East Africa. Technological developments were affecting trade, consumption, and production patterns around the world, so that by the end of the 1860s:

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 $^{^{100}}$ Réné Caillié (1830) recounts Alexander Gordon Laing's journey into the interior of West Africa in 1827.

¹⁰¹ Williamson, 2006.

[The] screw propeller, the compound engine, steel hulls, bigger ships, more efficient crews, increased fuel efficiency, more ships, more predictable schedules, and shorter turnaround time in port, all served to produce a spectacular fall in intercontinental transport costs. ¹⁰²

This "transport revolution" not only enabled European textile producers to access African consumer markets, but it also made possible the export of raw cotton supplies that had historically been reserved for local looms. The transport revolution resulted in global commodity price convergence and a sudden increase in demand for raw materials. In fact, Williamson (2006) argues that a consequential rapid improvement in terms of trade for "peripheral" primary producers (which includes sub-Saharan Africa) encouraged a general decline in nascent industrial activity in the periphery. And based on the *Report of the Empire Cotton-Growing Committee* for the year 1920, "the history of the development in [southern] Nigeria of cotton-growing for export is practically the history of the development of transport." According to McPhee (1926), in spite of improvements in river-way transportation, the transport of raw cotton by any other means than the railway was still so expensive during the first quarter of the twentieth century "as to confine the profitable growing of cotton for export to the areas tapped by the railway" (p. 47).

It follows that the transport of cotton cloth to the rest of the unconnected interior was similarly still very expensive and thus largely impractical until transportation improved by great leaps in the twentieth century. With the appropriate data, it would be an interesting exercise to quantitatively measure the per capita imports of foreign cotton cloth imports in inland regions with greater railroad density relative to those with less dense networks.

4.4 Price and Income Elasticity

Price and income elasticity patterns with regard to both local and foreign cotton textile products may also provide interesting insight into consumption and production dynamics in West Africa. That is, when the price of British textiles declined, were West African consumers more inclined to purchase British textiles? And did they likewise purchase African textile goods when British prices were higher? Manning (1982) has measured income elasticity from the 1890s to the beginning of the First World War for a range of imported cotton goods into the Dahomey region of West Africa. Manning (1982) has found that unbleached cotton cloth was the least income sensitive (with a measure of 0.44), while the income elasticity for bleached cotton cloth was significantly higher (at 1.65).¹⁰⁴

Similarly, the question should be asked, how did West Africans react to changing prices of British and Indian cotton goods (regardless of changes in income)? Reactions to price shifts will demonstrate the relative value of different cloth commodities and help show

McPhee (1926) quotes the *Report of the Empire Cotton-Growing Committee, 1920*, p. 40-41.

63

¹⁰² Williamson, 2006, p. 12-13.

¹⁰⁴ Manning, 1982, p. 125-126.

how dependent West Africans were on foreign sources for different varieties of cotton cloth. According to Manning (1982), while bleached and unbleached cotton cloth imports were income-elastic, these two varieties did not show significant price elasticity.

In the case of Dahomey, then, the low income elasticity for imported unbleached cotton cloth means that these goods were considered a *necessity item* in the region, which implies that local demand was not readily or fully met by another source (i.e., local production), which was not true in the case of more income-sensitive bleached goods. And in regard to the reported general lack of price elasticity for cotton cloth, Dahomey inhabitants would have likely purchased the unbleached cotton that they *needed* or the bleached cotton they *wanted*, regardless of changes in price. Thus, in Dahomey, income changes had a greater effect than price changes on cotton cloth import composition. It would be interesting to discover whether or not Manning's results hold true for different parts of West Africa, especially since the Dahomey region was colonized by French, rather than British forces, which may have affected trade dynamics.

4.5 Connection to Post-Colonial Developments

The preceding discussion of textile trade and production development in British West Africa includes only the pre-colonial and colonial eras, and does not go into the complexities of lasting effects and/or changing dynamics of cotton cloth trade, production and consumption during the post-colonial era. However, this study has provided some preliminary insights into the vast question of how foreign cloth imports affected West African textile manufacturing through the pre-colonial and colonial periods, and it does seem that local production remained adaptive, resilient, and competitive into the twentieth century.

But while African cloth and clothing production still continues today, it has failed to reach the same industrial zeniths achieved by European and Asian textile industries, in spite of post-colonial-era attempts made by industrialists to develop large-scale, factory-based cloth production in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Why did these efforts fail to materialize a textile-fueled industrial boom in Africa, like those that had occurred elsewhere in several developing Asian countries during the twentieth century? If the process of industrial stagnation did not occur during the pre-colonial or colonial eras, did textile industries in West Africa falter during the early post-colonial era of the second half of the twentieth century? If so, when, where, and to what degree? And does this seem to have caused a permanent reversal in industrial fortune?

These are all crucial questions, especially given that Africa has once again become a hot trading spot for foreign textiles. Most of the textile products entering Africa have been exported from rapidly developing countries that (like Britain in the nineteenth century) successfully built their burgeoning industrial bases on export-oriented textile production. This is a feat that West African countries have yet failed to accomplish for themselves, in spite of a long regional history of cotton cloth production. Why?

The questions introduced here merit deeper consideration and will be addressed in my upcoming PhD project, *Unraveling the African Textile Mystery*.

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