

## THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS OF *ASO-OKE* OF SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

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This article offers a case-specific examination of the effects of colonialism on a local culture and economy – *Aso-oke* of South-Western Nigeria. In so doing, it provides more evidence to further the assertion that the economic dependency that resulted from colonialism was not an accident, but rather an intentional outcome. This article serves as an excellent example of how current economic and social circumstances cannot be fully understood without substantial knowledge of the past. Through examination of *Aso-oke* this article used primary data generated through qualitative techniques, archival records and other secondary data to engage research issues. The article concluded that the development and economic history of *Aso-oke*, hold the prospect for understanding the complications, complexities, contestations and contextualities of the contemporary development of Africa and beyond.

**Key words:** *Aso-oke*, Kente, Economic History, Yoruba, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Traditional industries and artefacts hold a very important prospect for sustainable development today. This is more so within the alternative development and indigenous knowledge framework. It is frequently argued that alternative development and indigenous/homegrown knowledge systems hold the key to developing countries' development, especially sustainable ones.<sup>1</sup> Adeniran also demonstrated that it is only within homegrown development frameworks that socioeconomic development can be achieved even sub-regionally.<sup>2</sup> While according to Briggs,<sup>2</sup> indigenous knowledge and alternative development have problems/challenges and may not be a magic wand cure for development. The failure and complications of popular Euro-American development policy frameworks suggest the need for more contextual and endogenous knowledge compliant alternative development frameworks.

It is only when the indigenous and original traditional knowledge, that is critical of the Euro-American model, is factored into development practices that development can be said to be a *fair deal*.<sup>3</sup> Williams and Muchena demonstrated the usefulness of indigenous practices and alternative development in the case of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and sustainable agricultural development. Olutayo<sup>4</sup> demonstrated this through the need for IKS and indigenous Afrocentric Sociology,<sup>5</sup> Adeniran alluded to this

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<sup>1</sup> WILLIAMS, D. L., MUCHENA, O. N. Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Agricultural Education to Promote Sustainable Agriculture. In *Journal of Agricultural Education*, Winter 1991, pp. 52–56; McMICHAEL, B. Peasants make their own history, but not just as they please. In *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8 February 2008, pp. 205–228; OLUTAYO, A. O. 'Vestehen', Everyday Sociology and Development: Incorporating African Indigenous Knowledge. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 229–238.

<sup>2</sup> ADENIRAN, A. I. Engendering an Endogenous Framework for Socio-Economic Development in the ECOWAS Sub-Region. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 285–294.

<sup>2</sup> BRIGGS, J. The Use of Indigenous Knowledge in Development: Problems and Challenges. In *Progress in Development Studies*, 5 February 2005, pp. 99–114.

<sup>3</sup> WILLIAMS, D. L., MUCHENA, O. N. Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Agricultural Education to Promote Sustainable Agriculture. In *Journal of Agricultural Education*, Winter 1991, pp. 52–56.

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<sup>5</sup> ADENIRAN, A. I. Engendering an Endogenous Framework for Socio-Economic Development in the ECOWAS Sub-Region. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 285–294.

through homegrown integration modalities in the ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States – a sub-regional Bloc in Africa, and McMichael<sup>6</sup> deployed the need for alternative development constructs in engaging peasant mobilisation for development. Olatokun and Ayanbode<sup>7</sup> engaged the case of indigenous knowledge, rural women and development in Ogun state, Nigeria, and Nwokoma,<sup>8</sup> for the interface, explored Nigerian indigenous knowledge system and Information Technology development. Martinez-Alier, Temper and Demaria<sup>9</sup> utilised peculiar knowledge of local issues in India to engage more global issue of environmental conflict and<sup>10</sup> also demonstrated the practical workability of political ecology and local knowledge through collected works on ecological economics and political alternative development analysis.<sup>11</sup>

Martinez-Alier et al attempt to account for the centrality of local knowledge and conceptualisations in driving change through activities researched sustainability across the world and supported the alternative development model from below and from the conceptualisation of indigenous organisations and people. Recognising the need for IKS and alternative development due to ineffectivities of contemporary Eurocentric development models as seen in the massive failure of *modern* and *imported* development policies in indigenous communities, the World Bank instituted the Indigenous Knowledge for Development Program which has been showcasing the positive roles and challenges of IKS in practical development across the world. Under the World Bank's IKS for Development Program, local communities are targeted and the sustainable pathways to development through alternative routes are documented as best practices. Many local communities have been profiled and documented through the program of the Bank. The program has covered communities in Mozambique, Uganda, Nepal, Senegal, India, Malawi, Eritrea, while Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana are on the radar. More, however, needed to be done among researchers on traditional industries, IKS and alternative development in Nigeria

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<sup>6</sup> McMICHAEL, B. Peasants Make Their Own History, But Not Just As They Please. In *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8 February 2008, pp. 205–228.

<sup>7</sup> OLATOKUN, W. M., AYANBODE, O. F. Use of Indigenous Knowledge by Rural Women in The Development of Ogun State. In *African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 7 January 2008, pp. 47–63.

<sup>8</sup> NWOKOMA, A. Nigeria Indigenous Knowledge Application in ICT Development. In *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 2 July 2012, pp. 62–65.

<sup>9</sup> MARTINEZ-ALIER, J., TEMPER, L., DEMARIA, F. Social Symbolism and Environmental Conflicts in India. In *Indialogs. Spanish Journal of India Studies*, 2014, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 51–83.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

and West Africa against the ascendancy of *culturenomics* – cultural resources' positive capabilities to drive growth and development.<sup>12</sup>

What is becoming apparent is that IKS and alternative development approaches are needed to drive sustainable development in contemporary societies of the third world. Academics, civil societies and think tanks are appreciating alternative development. Noteworthy however is that there is yet to be a unanimous agreement on the express adoption of alternative development, especially as some run in practical conflict with the western model. IKS thus still subsists at the margins, and the inclusivity of the local populations in development planning and development are still weak. Western development models, experts and think tanks are still privileged over local ones. Western policies are still privileged over indigenous ones and alternative development models are still viewed with scepticism. This thus necessitates the continuous engagement of cases and demonstrative local practices existences that can further illuminate alternative development pathways for developing nations especially in Africa.

It is important for studies on alternative development to be trans-epochal in manners that resonate history and present for sufficient understanding. This is the objective of this article and *Aso-oke* has been selected for this purpose. This article examined the experiences and economic history of the Yoruba people of Nigeria by investigating the patterns, mechanisms and alterations in the *Aso-oke* traditional industry within the broader alternative development framework. The consideration of *Aso-oke* is particularly important because of its historical, social, cultural and economic potentialities and capabilities to drive development from below in Nigeria and Africa.<sup>13</sup>

## The Research Method

Due to the nature of the problematic, this article used secondary data, archival records and emic/folk perspectives of in-depth ethnographic/qualitative primary research conducted at Iseyin, a rural community in Oyo state, southwestern Nigeria. Iseyin is historically known to be the epicentre of *Aso-oke* production

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<sup>12</sup> AKANLE, O. The Ligaments of Culture and Development in Nigeria. In *International Journal of Applied Sociology*, 2012, pp. 16–21.

<sup>13</sup> OLUTAYO, A. O., AKANLE, O., FADINA, O. A. *Aso-Oke* (Hand Woven Textiles) of Southwestern Nigeria: A Compact Examination of a Resilient Artifact. In *American Journal of Sociological Research*, pp. 9–17; OLUTAYO, A. O., AKANLE, O. *Aso-oke* (Yoruba's hand woven textiles) Usage among The Youths in Lagos, Southwestern Nigeria. In *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 062–069.

among the Yoruba people. Hence, according to Olutayo and Akanale and Olutayo, Akanale and Fadina<sup>14</sup> *Aso-oke* is also sometimes known as *Aso-ofi*. It is made principally by the Yoruba people of Oke ogun area, an area that included Iseyin, of the present Oyo State. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, people from that area were referred to by people of Lagos as *Ara Oke* (people from Oke Ogun or from the hinterland of Yoruba land). This nomenclature is attached to the cloth they make and brought to Lagos for commercial purpose. *Aso oke* can literally be translated as *Aso awon ara oke* (cloth of the people from the hinterland).

It is called *Aso ofi* because of the process through which it is made, particularly the implements. 'Aso' in Yoruba means 'cloth' while 'ofi' means 'loom' with which this type of cloth is woven. Yoruba people have a tendency of relating the name of an object to its origin, the process that produces it and/or what it is used for. In this case, the Yoruba people adopt the instrument that produces the cloth, *ofi*. In this article, we have decided to adopt the other and common name, *Aso-oke*, because it is a more popular name, the cloth is currently called in the research setting. The name *Aso-Ofi* is certainly a rare one for the cloth today. *Aso-oke* is worn by Yoruba men and women throughout Southwestern Nigeria. Southwestern Nigeria includes contemporary Ekiti, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Lagos states. Yoruba stocks in parts of Kwara, Kogi and Edo States wear this type of cloth too. The issues researched in this article are also applicable and relevance to contemporary Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo and Ekiti states due to their similarities, identicalities and contiguities on economic, political, ancestral, historical and social terms. The study sourced data from master weavers/entrepreneurs, producers of local raw materials in the pre-colonial and colonial eras, spinners, dyers, makers and fabricators of traditional instruments used in the *Aso-oke* weaving process. The study covered at least eleven communities renowned for expertise and history in the making and usage of *Aso-oke*. In-depth interviews (IDI), Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and extended Participant Observation (PO) – undertaken in *Aso-oke* producing communities – were adopted in the data collection process. Data analysis was through content analysis and presented as ethnographic summaries.

Ethical practices were observed during this research. Local communities were allowed to play the role of the knowledgeable and resource people. The research team only facilitated and moderated sessions and systematically assumed the role of the uninformed relative to the research issue. This was to enable reliable data gathering and prevent partial data collection that usually bedevils researches on IKS and alternative development. Local people were assured of anonymity and security. The purely academic purpose of the research

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

was explained to the community and their participation was outrightly voluntary. There was no compulsion and no inducement to compel participation. Best practices in community entry behavior were observed throughout the research. Informed consent was secured from participants before commencement of the research.

### ***Aso-oke and Indigenous knowledge***

The interface of indigenous knowledge and technology were examined to get an insight into these important elements over time. Indigenous knowledge and technology are important as they utilise available resources, exploit existing diversities and affect the environment and livelihood.<sup>15</sup> Against this background, the sustenance of the productive resource base is particularly critical for sustainable development within the framework of alternative development paradigm.

This is why this article engaged the problematic in this section. Indigenous knowledge provides alternative methods of solving problems in cases where exogenous solutions to local problems do not fit the local systems thus making an adequate application of indigenous technology vital resource for development.<sup>16</sup> Indigenous technology and, to an appreciable degree, 'local contents' and raw materials therefore become the only sustainable engine of development since they are often acquired across generations with deep understanding of the affected socio-cultural, economic, and ecological environments. It is thus important to understand the ramifications of indigenous technology in *Aso-oke* from the local population's perspective. This will enable

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<sup>15</sup> WARREN, D. M., CASHMAN, K. *Indigenous Knowledge for Agriculture and Rural Development: Some Practical Applications*; KAMBHAMPATI, U. S. *Development and the Developing World*; GRINT, K. *The Sociology of Work*; WATKINS, A., OSIFO-DAWODU, E., EHST, M., CISSE, B. *Building Science, Technology, and Innovation Capacity: Turning Ideas into Actions. Special Report on Science and Technology for Development. Guest editorial*, pp. 2–5; SOBOYEJO, W. Science and Technology Education in African Development: Its key role. In *Development Outreach*, 9 January 2007, pp. 14–16; JUMA, C. Engineering in International Development: Linking with Infrastructure Investments in Africa. In *Development Outreach*, 9 January 2007, pp. 6–9; SONU, J. Imitation to Internalization to Generation: The Case of Korea. In *Development Outreach*, 9 January 2007, pp. 10–13; MURENZI, R. Poverty Alleviation and Economic Growth in Rwanda through S&T. In *Development Outreach*, 9 January 2007, pp. 17–19.

<sup>16</sup> WOLF, C. E. *Beyond the Green Revolution: New Approaches for The Third World Agriculture*; OLUTAYO, A. O. 'Vestehen', Everyday Sociology and Development: Incorporating African Indigenous Knowledge. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 229–238.

a more original understanding of alternative development in the context of study for global environments. This issue was explored directly through primary data collection. When the issue of knowledge acquisition of cotton spinning and thread making – cotton spinning and thread making are a critically important aspect of *Aso-oke* production – was posed to a respondent for instance, he revealed that:

I got to know about thread making when I was very young... my grandmother taught us because she performed this task before her death and we, all the children, had to learn how thread was made because it was our trade...

Dying is another very important part of *Aso-oke* production process. It is at this point in the process colours are added to *Aso-oke* which comes in different colours. These various colours make *Aso-oke* very colourful and fashionable. Dying needs a lot of experience and indigenous knowledge as simple traditional technology is used making the process more affordable and sustainable as raw materials are mostly sourced in the lived environment. A dyer puts his experience (as local community resonance) as follows:

In those days (pre-colonial) we used to produce red colour from leaves of guinea corn (ewe oka baba) bark and roots of African rosewood (aga tree)... black from physic nut tree (opo owon), beige from bark of mango tree (epo igi mangoro)...

According to another master dyer:

...during the colonial times, we were able to prepare khaki colour dye to provide uniforms for court messengers and the ingredients are as follows...egbo idi (root of idi tree), egbo ayin (root of ayin tree), ewe egun, ehin ire lasangba, locus bean tree, idaro (bits which fell when heated and hammered by blacksmiths, yanko (palm kernel oil).

This shows the potential of environmental and ecological dependence of the *Aso-oke* textile industry. An understanding of indigenous knowledge and practice reveals a greater need to consider particular problems and potentials at an indigenous community level. The contemporary unraveling of local technology and knowledge in development can be traced to the early works of anthropologists and geographers<sup>17</sup> because of their concern for the

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<sup>17</sup> BARLETT, P. F. (ed.). *Agricultural Decision Making: Anthropological Contributions for Rural Development*.

environmental and sustainability issues. Relevance of indigenous knowledge and technology can be demonstrated through the agriculture related weaving industry which presents a good case due to its unique position in Nigerian traditional industries.

Low risk and low input preferences in industrial processes prevalent in most third world nations are neither adequately appreciated nor integrated into the search for appropriate technologies for development. Taking agriculture as an instance, early attention to introduce large scale agricultural schemes, as against the indigenous preferences, has resulted in limited success, and above all, in the neglect of the role of traditional or local agriculture in production processes. The use of local technology and knowledge in development pays attention to and understands local dynamics that determine the whole performance of technology in traditional industries in the short and long run.

Observation and experience suggest that Nigeria as a nation has not fared well in the development of its indigenous knowledge and technology. Over time, successive governments have not sufficiently annexed local knowledge and technological capabilities for industrial and overall national development. Instead, indigenous knowledge and technology are seen *outdated*, *old school* and *ineffective* in modern times. Rather than finding a unique blend, indigenous knowledge and technology are jettisoned for many unsustainable western ones making development more elusive in the local communities.

Although Okejiri<sup>18</sup> argued that Nigeria, particularly in its manufacturing sector, has utilised foreign technology to develop its indigenous technological capabilities performance to boost economic performance, available statistics do not support the claim. The Nigeria's Average Manufacturing Capacity Utilisation Rates, for instance, consistently fell by almost 55 percent between 1975 and 2000.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the general pattern of productivity was a declining trend with a national average growth rate of 0.8, share of manufacturing in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) persistently falling with an annual average of 6.8 percent as against 23.7 percent in Brazil, 22.3 in South Africa and 23.7 in Indonesia<sup>20</sup> while employment rates, labour turnover and general quality of life in the country remain one of the most worrisome in the world with an average

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<sup>18</sup> OKEJIRI, E. Foreign Technology and Development of Indigenous Technological Capabilities in the Nigerian Manufacturing Industry. In *Technology in Society*, 2000, pp. 189–199.

<sup>19</sup> CENTRAL BANK OF NIGERIA (CBN). *Statistical Bulletin*. 16.

<sup>20</sup> JAMES, K. A., OLEKAH, A. J., ODENIARAN, O., ANGELA, A., SERE-EJEMBI, B. O. N., OKAFOR, D. N., BADA, A. S., FAGGE, A. A. Productivity in The Manufacturing Sub-Sector: Issues of Structure and Cost of Production. In NNANNA, O. O., ALADE, S. O., ODOKO, F. O. (eds.). *Contemporary Economic Policy Issues in Nigeria*, pp. 131–184.



youth unemployment of over 30 percent according to the 2013 World Bank figure. In line with the above critical observation, Akpomuvie<sup>21</sup> has concluded that *technological dependence*; the inability to generate, adapt and use technological systems to meet needs constitutes a major element of Nigeria's distorted economic and social development as it does for many other African countries.

Local knowledge and traditional industries are therefore, in the final analysis, important for development activities to be successful.<sup>22</sup> Solutions offered by foreign policy development project experts often fail because such solutions do not fit well into the local knowledge systems, lack autonomy and are inappropriately incorporated into development plans.<sup>23</sup> Indigenous knowledge is capable of providing alternative development methods and reshape political ecology of development in a sustainable manner as can be the case in *Aso-oke* case. This is particularly so in understanding and solving development problems since the success of development efforts often depends on local participation.<sup>24</sup>

### **Alterations in *Aso-oke* Environments: Historical Consideration**

Historical experiences of African countries are laden with accounts of alterations of cultural ethos which manifested, often times, as consequences of contacts with other cultures. The effects of these contacts not only orchestrate changes in the world view of African societies, but also equally engineer modifications in the socioeconomic and cultural practices and relationships.<sup>25</sup> It was almost a cliché to say contacts with the Europeans was a significant event and it has been regarded as a major plague that distorted African personality with origin in trade in gold, copper, spices, cam wood and leather before the transformation to the slave trade by 1500 AD. In Nigeria, among other reasons, the contact with the European colonialists affected the production of domestic food, indigenous iron works, weaving, pottery, leather works and other hitherto

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<sup>21</sup> AKPOMUVIE, O. B. Indigenous Technology and Sustainable Development in Nigeria. In *South Journal of Culture and Development*, 8 December 2006.

<sup>22</sup> BARLETT, P. F. (ed.). *Agricultural Decision Making: Anthropological Contributions for Rural Development*.

<sup>23</sup> AKPOMUVIE, O. B. Indigenous Technology and Sustainable Development in Nigeria. In *South Journal of Culture and Development*, 8 December 2006.

<sup>24</sup> NIGERIA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH (NISER). Indigenous Textile Weaving in Western Nigeria. In ADEDOTUN, O. P., TUNJI, T. (eds.). *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices: Case Studies from Nigeria*. pp. 42–85.

<sup>25</sup> MABOGUNJE, A. I. *On Developing and Development*.

well established economic activities that were in place by 1300 AD. Many of the kingdoms which rose at this period, particularly in West Africa, were no less than slave trading enterprises eagerly supported and assisted with guns and powder by external business concerns mainly from Europe.<sup>26</sup> For instance, the Benin Kingdom under King Ovoramwen Nogbaisi, Opobo Kingdom under King Jaja and Itsekiri Kingdom under King Jaja.

The abolition of the slave trade movement of 1850 shared in the division of Africa into various fragmentary colonies and it ushered in a new form of slavery; where trans-Atlantic slave trade was expanded and regularised into the colonial economic project.<sup>27</sup> The subordination of African economies to the needs of other parts of the world which took a new turn towards the end of the eighteenth century was predicated on raw materials required for the emerging industries of Europe due to the development of machines which not only cost less to put into operation than slaves but also faster in terms of production<sup>28</sup>. The change which was in actual fact based on the interest in raw materials of Africa was based on the newly found faith and belief among Europeans that the tropics of West Africa were capable of providing the metropolis with the tropical staples needed for industries. The belief in tropical exuberance gave rise to numerous declarations of faith in West Africa's potentials.

The external incursion precipitated the capture of not merely valuable markets, but more critically, the seizure of Southwest resources, described as enormous in the accounts of early explorers. In the region, palm nuts were taken for the manufacture of soap and candles and for lubricating machines. The woods were taken for ship building and, cotton for textile industries – the list is endless. The interests in West Africa's raw materials were based on and expressed through three distinct, but related, forces of economic and extra-economic ends.<sup>29</sup> The first was the humanitarian which stressed the power of cash crops, particularly cotton, as a way of spreading Christianity and eliminating the slave trade that was stubbornly refusing to be abolished out of

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<sup>26</sup> OLUTAYO, A. O. *The Development of Underdevelopment: Rural Economy of Colonial Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 10; RODNEY, W. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

<sup>27</sup> MABOGUNJE, A. I. *On Developing and Development*; OLUTAYO, A. O. *The Development of Underdevelopment: Rural Economy of Colonial Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 10; RODNEY, W. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

<sup>28</sup> OLUTAYO, A. O. *The Development of Underdevelopment: Rural Economy of Colonial Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 10; RODNEY, W. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

<sup>29</sup> RATCLIFFE, B. M. Cotton Imperialism: Manchester Merchants and Cotton Cultivation in West Africa in The Mid-Nineteenth Century. In *African Economic History*, Vol. 11, 1982, pp. 85–113.

some parts of the coast of West Africa. The second was the myth of West Africa's potential for propaganda by philanthropists who wanted to bring civilisation to the people. The third was the British government which collaborated on, and even initiated, the exploitation of raw materials and cash produce by making colonial Southwest Nigeria sign treaties that made them lose control over how and what to supply<sup>30</sup> – that was the beginning of enforced historical trade bilateralism.

The declaration of faith<sup>31</sup> not only formed the basis of disorganisation of patterns of development in traditional Yoruba societies but also the interdependent elasticity of *Aso-oke* production processes, of which some allied industries like cotton growing, wood/loom making and indigenous supply chains were tampered with. The British interference led to induced retrogression for foreign economic interests rather than initial/original/indigenous stable progression. Hence, for instance, the establishment of British colonial rule in Yoruba societies led to changes in some aspects of the Yoruba socio-cultural and economic life<sup>32</sup> like pattern of social relations, marriage system, religion, types of crops cultivated, political system and money. The emergence of British colonial administration in Nigeria, as well as the introduction of Indirect Rule by Britain in 1918, laid the foundation for the conquest of Nigerian societies. The domination of Yoruba communities by the British was not only in spatial terms but also domination in economic, political, and psychological terms as indicated above.

In spite of the recognition of Yoruba *Aso-oke* as a product of considerable skill,<sup>33</sup> the imperial power considered the Yoruba weaving method crude. This is why the possibility of improvement was advanced by the colonialists. The

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<sup>30</sup> OLUTAYO, A. O. *The Development of Underdevelopment: Rural Economy of Colonial Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 10; RODNEY, W. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

<sup>31</sup> Including Buxton Plan of 1840

<sup>32</sup> OJO, G. J. A. *Yoruba Culture*; FADIPE, N. A. *The Sociology of the Yoruba*.

<sup>33</sup> WILLIAMS, D. L., MUCHENA, O. N. Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Agricultural Education to Promote Sustainable Agriculture. In *Journal of Agricutlured Education*, Winter 1991, pp. 52–56; McMICHAEL, B. Peasants Make their Own History, But Not Just As they Please. In *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8 February 2008, pp. 205–228; OLUTAYO, A. O. 'Vestehen', Everyday Sociology and Development: Incorporating African Indigenous Knowledge. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 229–238; OLUTAYO, A. O., AKANLE, O., FADINA, O. A. *Aso-Oke (Hand Woven Textiles) of Southwestern Nigeria: A Compact Examination of a Resilient Artifact*. In *American Journal of Sociological Research*, pp. 9–17; OLUTAYO, A. O., AKANLE, O. *Aso-oke (Yoruba's Hand Woven Textiles) Usage among The Youths in Lagos, Southwestern Nigeria*. In *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 062–069.

possibility was rather seen from the perspective of replacement of crude methods of production with advanced foreign methods. Considerable efforts were made to assist the local population to improve/modernise the method of production of *Aso-oke* through the introduction of European yarn and European broad loom.<sup>34</sup> The change that took place provided the basis for an instructive pattern of behaviour that no longer has a direct bearing with established codes of cultural relations. Through the transformation in the *Aso-oke* industry, the functional pattern of the rural economy was fundamentally altered as production technology, organisation, indigenous cotton cultivation, processing and communal consciousness were fractured. For instance, the family that was the epicentre of social relations in pre-colonial production systems was separated from the production process as 'necessitated' by the new production order.

Parts of the principal agents of change in Yoruba society consequent upon the introduction of British colonial administration were religion and education which became regarded as viable instruments of colonisation and transmission of western civilisation upon which others hinged. This was particularly observable in the practice of extended family structure which formed the basis of traditional industrial systems. The earliest converts to Christianity were eager to break away from the custom as a high sense of individualism was embraced<sup>35</sup> as the new value ideal.

The result was the setting up of personal convictions against traditional conceptions. The Yoruba people are essentially patrilineal. Even though the *Baale*<sup>36</sup> run the affairs of his family comprising his wife or wives and children, he is concerned about the welfare of his brothers, uncles, cousins, and others. When the siblings get married, the *Baale* still regards himself concerned with the upbringing and general moulding of characters. The interest in stable pre-colonial extended family system waned over time with the effects of modernisation and internationalisation<sup>37</sup> and associated patterns of behaviour as members isolated the extended family networks. This had negative implications for *Aso-oke* because the sustaining structure of *Aso-Oke production* process was the extended family system. Once the extended family system was tampered with, it became difficult for the social and economic structure of *Aso-Oke* to subsist. This historical point is to, largely, explain the deleterious effects of colonialism, and not to romanticise the past.

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<sup>34</sup> NAI/OYO/PROF 175111 – file/document number of the archival material sourced/used at the national archive, Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria.

<sup>35</sup> ATANDA, J. A. *The new Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Changes in Western Nigeria 1894 – 1934*; AYISI, E. O. *The Study of African Culture*.

<sup>36</sup> Head of the family.

<sup>37</sup> Of religion, education, wage employment and liberal democracy for instance.

### **Episodic Consideration of *Aso-oke* in the Colonial Context.**

*Aso-oke* in pre-colonial time represented people in their entirety. Raw materials, organization, relations, production processes and consumption were sourced and determined by the internal and inherent dynamics in society with little or no external control and relations. By 1943, three types of *Aso-oke* cloths emerged on the Yoruba weaving scene; *Aso-oke* made of wholly imported yarns, those made of imported yarns and local weft and those made wholly with local yarns.<sup>38</sup> Four years later, the production of each type of cloth was as follows: of all imported yarns – 81 percent, of all imported and local mixture – 10 percent and of local yarn – 3 percent.<sup>39</sup> It is quite important to note that this distribution has been greatly altered today in favour of the imported, sheen materials,<sup>40</sup> which are often referred to by the indigenous population as *shine shine*, and which have taken over as the basic yarn used in the weaving of *Aso-oke*.

The present changed and underdeveloped state of traditional *Aso-oke* industry of Southwestern Nigeria is predicated upon the past – colonial – experience of the region's political economy of cotton exploration. As observed:<sup>41</sup>

...not only was primitive accumulation hindered in colonial economies, existing traditional industries were brought to a neglect... the imported cotton goods were replacing indigenous weaving and cotton industry... All these products did not involve the exploration of the immediate environment but that of foreign economy. The productive system of the indigenous economies could no longer stand on their own.

Although European raw material needs cannot be put forward as a subsidiary explanation for the colonial incursion, the search for British manufactured market goods gave greater prominence in what is being experienced in the *Aso-oke* industry today as regards to the source of yarn. The colonial incursion dilated the primordial system of raw materials sourcing within the productive

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<sup>38</sup> DODWELL, C. B. *Iseyin: The Town of Weavers*, pp. 118–145.

<sup>39</sup> RATCLIFFE, B. M. Cotton Imperialism: Manchester Merchants and Cotton Cultivation in West Africa in The Mid-Nineteenth Century. In *African Economic History*, Vol. 11, pp. 85–113.

<sup>40</sup> Metalized plastic threads.

<sup>41</sup> WILLIAMS, D. L., MUCHENA, O. N. Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Agricultural Education to Promote Sustainable Agriculture. In *Journal of Agricultural Education*, Winter 1991, pp. 52–56; McMICHAEL, B. Peasants Make their Own History, But Not Just As they Please. In *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8 February 2008, pp. 205–228; OLUTAYO, A. O. 'Vestehen', Everyday Sociology and Development: Incorporating African Indigenous Knowledge. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 229–238.

groups in the industry. The colonial entrance into textile industry served as the bedrock of dependency on external economies due to the dislocation of the spinners, dyers and the farmers that grow cotton. These experiences caused technology lax of the indigenous cotton conversion process<sup>42</sup> as a result of the subjugation and dislodgement of auxiliary but important allied industries, like cotton farming, traditional supply chains and management, of the *Aso-oke* weaving industry to the extent that traditional weaving implements and organisation were altered and substituted. Processing of cotton production and conversion into thread was taken over by the British and how such a takeover affected the industry can only be appreciated by looking at the colonial experience of the industry during contact with the British (Britain colonised Nigeria).

*Aso-oke* today no longer occupies the esteemed place it occupied during the pre-colonial era as a viable cultural pride and vibrant identity/economic force. This relegation and industrial underdevelopment, to a large extent, is traceable to the activities of the colonial system. The approach adopted in this article presents this experience of exploitation of basic raw material of the textile industry (cotton) and then the repression and underdevelopment of the indigenous technology of thread and textile production. Indigenous varieties of cotton have been cultivated in southwestern Nigeria for many centuries.<sup>43</sup> As documented in Webster,<sup>44</sup> cotton was probably the first of the traditional crops to attract the attention of the missionaries to Abeokuta area after 1850 – Abeokuta area has a long history in south-western Nigeria occupied by the Yoruba people. Full contact with the Europeans by the entire southwest from the 19th century dragged the region into the colonial enclaves of a British colony and brought the southwest into the cash crop export economy of the British. As a result of changing raw material needs of the metropolis/Europe and the attendant dependence on imported raw cotton from the periphery/colony meant that a staple British export/textile, southwestern Nigeria was included in the colonial cotton export policy.

This remarkable reversal was tied to the technological advancement in Europe and to stagnation of technology in Africa owing to the very trade with

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<sup>42</sup> Spinning and ginning.

<sup>43</sup> OLUTAYO, A. O. *The Development of Underdevelopment: Rural Economy of Colonial Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 10; RODNEY, W. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

<sup>44</sup> WEBSTER, J. B. The Bible and the Plough. In *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* Vol. 3, pp. 418–434.

Europe.<sup>45</sup> This serves as a corrective to<sup>46</sup> argument that colonial incursion was not motivated by the quest for raw materials as well as markets for European manufactures. The preceding developments led to various declarations of faith in the tropical exuberance and potential of southwest in cotton production as the importance of economic myths that both market and raw material awaited European exploitation. As the Cotton Supply Reporter/CSR of 15th January, 1861 put it:

The sun never sets upon the cotton soils of British territory! During every hour of the day, the sun is shining upon vast cotton field within our own dominions which lie neglected awaiting only fostering hand of British capital and labour to team with plentiful and permanent supplies.

The above cannot be divorced from the earlier humanitarian role involved in reviving the belief in tropical exuberance and stemmed largely from Buxton's influential plan of 1840 to suppress the slave trade and spread Christianity. This factor warranted the Niger expedition in 1841. The best known and best documented result of the Buxton plan were efforts to 'promote' African cash crop made by Henry Venn, secretary of the Church Mission Society.<sup>47</sup> Though he (Buxton) looked at other possible products, he selected cotton, declaring in 1852 that *cotton must be to Africa its gold-diggings*.<sup>48</sup> It was therefore not surprising that in December 1859, the CSR saw collaboration with missionaries as the most promising method for achieving its end in West Africa and particularly southwestern Nigeria. In order to make this a reality, a facilitating process of cotton exploitation in the southwest was carried out in Abeokuta in 1851 when a consignment of 570 lbs of raw cotton, collected by Abeokuta Churchmen under the direction of Bishop Crowther, was sent to London.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> NZEMEKE, A. D. The Significance of British Raw Cotton Enterprises in Nineteenth Century for Post-Colonial Economy in Nigeria. In *Zamani*, Nos10/11, pp. 63–82; HOPKINS, A. G. *An Economic History of West Africa*.

<sup>46</sup> ONYIEWU, S. Deceived by African Cotton: The British Cotton Growing Association and the Demise of Lancashire Textile Industry. In *African Economic History*, Vol. 28, pp. 89–201.

<sup>47</sup> RATCLIFFE, B. M. Cotton Imperialism: Manchester Merchants and Cotton Cultivation in West Africa in The Mid-Nineteenth Century. In *African Economic History*, Vol. 11. pp. 85–113.

<sup>48</sup> NZEMEKE, A. D. The Significance of British Raw Cotton Enterprises in Nineteenth Century for Post-Colonial Economy in Nigeria. In *Zamani*, Nos10/11, pp. 63–82; HOPKINS, A. G. *An Economic History of West Africa*.

<sup>49</sup> RATCLIFFE, B. M. Cotton Imperialism: Manchester Merchants and Cotton Cultivation in West Africa in The Mid-Nineteenth Century. In *African Economic History*, Vol. 11. pp. 85–113.

A steady but slow expansion of cotton cultivation followed and by 1856, twelve Abeokuta farmers were trading in cotton with Thomas Clegg of Manchester.<sup>50</sup> In 1857, the amount of cotton produced in Yorubaland equalled 7,200,000lbs.<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that by 1962, cotton export from southwest Nigeria rose to 650,000,000lbs.<sup>52</sup> It was in the light of this that cotton production in the southwestern Nigeria started expanding on a commercial scale, but furnishing the raw material needs of the Manchester and Lancashire textile sector. Suffice then to say that colonial expansion from the Lagos colony to other parts of Yorubaland was to secure privileged access to cotton. The enthusiasm for expansion manifested as a result of the success recorded at the Abeokuta scheme and because Benjamin Campbell – consul at Lagos – advocated for a symbiosis between Yoruba cotton and Lancashire piece goods. This symbiosis proposal led to the importation of British manufactures which started replacing native fabrics in Abeokuta.<sup>53</sup> In order to further exploit cotton, the British Cotton Growing Association was formed in 1902 to become a noticeable and influential association through which the procurement of cotton could be facilitated in the British colonies. The BCGA composed of spinners, manufacturers, merchants, shippers, and representatives of various industries connected with cotton trade.

The association was saddled with the responsibility of buying and promoting the cultivation of preferred varieties of cotton used many strategies like giving special incentives to farmers to grow the preferred varieties of cotton. In 1920, to make modernisation by style a reality in cotton growing, the BCGA paid farmers in southwestern Nigeria 3.5d per pound for the indigenous variety and 4.5d per pound for the improved variety.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, to make cotton production an occidental dictate, the BCGA discouraged the planting of native

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<sup>50</sup> UNITED AFRICAN COMPANY (UAC), 1951.

<sup>51</sup> WILLIAMS, D. L., MUCHENA, O. N. Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Agricultural Education to Promote Sustainable Agriculture. In *Journal of Agricultured Education*, Winter 1991, pp. 52–56; McMICHAEL, B. Peasants Make their Own History, But Not Just As they Please. In *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8 February 2008, pp. 205–228; OLUTAYO, A. O. ‘Vestehen’, Everyday Sociology and Development: Incorporating African Indigenous Knowledge. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 229–238.

<sup>52</sup> UNITED AFRICAN COMPANY (UAC), 1951.

<sup>53</sup> WILLIAMS, D. L., MUCHENA, O. N. Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Agricultural Education to Promote Sustainable Agriculture. In *Journal of Agricultured Education*, Winter 1991, pp. 52–56; McMICHAEL, B. Peasants Make their Own History, But Not Just As they Please. In *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8 February 2008, pp. 205–228; OLUTAYO, A. O. ‘Vestehen’, Everyday Sociology and Development: Incorporating African Indigenous Knowledge. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 229–238.

<sup>54</sup> NAI/OYO/PROF 175111–file/document number of the archival material sourced/used at the national archive, Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria.



seeds cotton by asking them to destroy/burn native seeds and started distributing the preferred seeds free of charge.<sup>55</sup> The price awards were to stimulate good farming. The adoptable plantation strategies rather than the African way were encouraged giving 39,898lbs of cotton seed and were distributed as follows: 6,380lbs/Imeko Multiplication Area, 11,026lbs/Abeokuta Province, 19,057lbs/Ede-Oshogbo Area of Oyo Province, and Ilorin 3,3451lbs.<sup>56</sup>

The act of destroying the native varieties of cotton yielded a positive dividend for the British and the BCGA in relation to the production of long-staple as against native short-staple cotton in Nigeria between 1913 and 1925. This is captured in Table 1 below.

The main reason why this fluctuates so wildly is the mix of policy inconsistencies and diplomacy of the colonialists as well as systematic innovative resistance and responses by the indigenous populations. Hence, the colonialists adopted painstaking, yet careful, introduction of the exotic long staple so as not to aggravate local resistance. When the indigenous populations appear unsuspecting, the introduction policies are implemented and when they resist the policies are watered down. Moreover, the BCGA which maintained buying and ginning stations all over the southwest withheld the seed cotton that came to it and thus controlled seed cotton ownership in the region. This established the need for ginning and spinning of all cotton produced in colonial southwestern Nigeria for export interests. Through the BCGA, the ginning activities were taken over from the local population in the traditional *Aso-oke* industry. The industrial take over was through control of cotton seeds for planting; seed cotton for ginning, cotton lint for spinning and for export. The act of controlling the means of production of *Aso-oke* industry was evident in this scenario. More importantly, ginning cotton on behalf of the local people was ultimately aimed at withholding cotton seed. Seed cotton was collected from the growers, but only cotton lint was returned which consequently atrophied actors in the traditional textile industry and destroyed primordial social structure of the industry.

Besides, the ginning returns to the growing areas were extensively unbalanced despite the report on cotton produced in the areas. In the case of Osogbo, in 1948/49, 243 bales of seed cotton were taken to the BCGA ginneries but 0% lint was returned. In 1949/50, 31% lint of the 240 bales of seed cotton taken to the BCGA was returned.<sup>57</sup> The half annual cotton reports on western province in 1950 recorded that 1,177,71lbs of seed cotton was gotten from

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<sup>55</sup> NATIONAL ARCHIVE IBADAN RECORD – NAI SUBSEQUENTLY – OYO PRO 4566.

<sup>56</sup> NAI, DC 1989.

<sup>57</sup> NAI, DCI 985.

**Table 1: Production of Long and Short Staple/cotton in Nigeria/1913-1925/Thousand pounds.** We were only able to find credible records/data for this period as at the time of our fieldwork. This table is however to give an empirical indication of the dynamics of the issues.

Year	Exotic Long Staple	Native Short Staple	Total of Lint
1913–1914	4	5896	5900
1914–1915	10	2990	3000
1915–1916	60	8020	8080
1916–1917	200	4520	4720
1917–1918	360	2080	2440
1918–1919	920	6078	7000
1919–1920	1464	5016	6480
1920–1921	2162	10438	12600
1921–1922	4110	1928	6036
1922–1923	4517	2214	6731
1923–1924	6262	3932	10214
1924–1925	10154	4413	14567

Source: The International Institute of Agriculture, Rome. *The Cotton Growing Countries-Present and Potential*. London, 1926, p. 201.

Osogbo and likewise in all growing areas. A ‘low purchase’ of 57,545lbs was sourced from the Meko area due to the price offered for the crop by the British. On this, J. D. Tallantire, on behalf of Director of Agriculture, wrote:

... the season has been favourable but the price paid had not stimulated planting in the Meko area but in the Oyo province where cotton forms an established part of the rotation, some interest is being shown. The whole position with regards to cotton in the western province is under review and hinged mainly on stimulating production in the Meko area.<sup>58</sup>

Competition from the local textile industry of *Aso-oke* due to the thriving nature of the industry was a major obstacle that made adequate export/supply of cotton difficult for the BCGA and this singular factor led to a systematic alteration of the indigenous ginning and spinning technology of the traditional *Aso-oke* industry. The tampering with the indigenous ginning technology started around 1859 in Abeokuta, according to<sup>59</sup> who maintained that 200 gins and half

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> BIOBAKU, S. O. *The Egba and Their Neighbours 1842 – 1872*.

dozen presses were at work in Abeokuta as at this period. Expressing concern over the prosperity of the traditional *Aso-oke* industry was a letter from the British Crown to the Director of Commerce and Industry in Nigeria, which was also copied to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Lagos:

A measure of the expansion of the local textile industry is in the reduction in the quantities of seed cotton offered in recent years to the British Cotton Growing Association for exports ...have fallen from an average of 44,435 bales/400lbs for the years 1944 – 1947... The diversion of cotton from the export market was due not only to the disparity between prices offered in the export and domestic markets but also to the general shortage of imported textiles...There is no reliable means of assessing the proportion of cotton so retained for local industry, but it is probable that it now constitutes not less than two-third of the total crop or 20,000,000lbs of lint/50,000lbs.<sup>60</sup>

In 1948, a project proposal was sent to the colonial government to redress the trend in favour of the export interests. The substance of the project was described as quoted below:

It is proposed to introduce a machine spinning industry for the processing of locally produced ginned cotton. Increased supply of sterling area is required in the United Kingdom and Nigeria can assist to a material degree if a number of local obstacles are overcome. A suitable type of cotton is now cultivated on a considerable scale, but...the quantity reaching the export market is further reduced by the demands of the local hand spinning and weaving industry...especially in Yorubaland... which have expanded as a result of shortage of imported yarn and textiles. It is not desired to compete with the hand weaving industry but... to encourage by making available increased supply of better quality yarn so as to supersede the hand spun product. The demise of hand spinning will, it is hoped, result in the bulk of crop reaching the ginneries of the BCGA... the eventual result should be an increased production, the mechanical ginning of the entire crop, the mechanical spinning of a sufficient proportion to satisfy in full the local market for yarn, increased export of cotton yarn from the United States... thereby saving dollars and enabling a greater production of the United Kingdom to be sold to hard currency destinations.<sup>61</sup>

The introduction of mechanical ginning and spinning mills had a great effect on the traditional structure in many ways. In this case, elements in the traditional productive systems which existed prior to the recent period of

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<sup>60</sup> NAI/ PROF/ 1/ 14566.

<sup>61</sup> NAI/ PROF/ 1/ 14566.

modernisation and development were totally subverted. The traditional structures which embraced the spatial production system from the farmers to weavers, together with technology that were developed by the local people themselves; the institution that existed, organisations and value system that supported and had been developed by it were not spared with the effect of foreign technology.

With the taking over of cotton production and processing, social relations that had been developed in the traditional *Aso-oke* industry which started from the farmers to the weavers and marketers were hampered and ultimately led to the underdevelopment and dependency status now being experienced in the textile industry. Punctuating this milieu was the expatriation of surplus as the BCGA argued that the financial cost of promoting the production of cotton in the colony would directly be borne by the local people themselves, particularly through their purchase of manufactured goods/cotton products from Britain. For instance, in a memo from the association to the British government in 1927, the BCGA stated that:

The cotton grown in our colonies is paid for almost entirely by imports of goods/cotton goods/threads and textiles manufactured in Britain, and it is evident that if the growth can be extended in all parts of the tropical possessions, there will be an enormous increase in the demand for our manufactures.

In this instance, the colonial government of the western province got a letter from the Director of Commerce and industries which reads:

...the cost of plant equipment including building at existing rates is estimated... To this amount should be added a sum to include working capital. The present selling price for cotton lint locally produced for export is rather over 1d per pound of f.o.b. Owing to the present shortage of yarn, a large proportion of cotton is absorbed in the local market which is able to offer higher prices than the BCGA. It is likely that a substantial increase, say to 6d or over per pound f.o.b., would be required to cover the increased price which it will be seed cotton for the BCGA ginneries in competition with the hand spinning industry.<sup>62</sup>

This unequal exchange, perhaps transfer of surplus, was accepted by the colonial governor of the western province as he showed much interest in substituting cooperation with competition. As a mark of this, the indigenous weavers were coerced into the competitive strategies by making them to

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<sup>62</sup> NAI/ PROF/ 1/ 14566.

indirectly pay for handling and freight charges of imported yarn, thus leading the BCGA to decide the seed cotton that could be purchased from growers and the price at which processed imported yarn will be made available to weavers. This embrace of competition by the colonial governor of western province led to the era of the importation of cheap Duala yarn from 1951. One of the mechanisms of transfer of surplus was seen in the Duala case, as the Duala spinning mills handled Grade III cotton which the BCGA could not buy for export and did not want to leave behind so as to finally edge out hand spinners. The involvement of the Duala yarn also had a technological backlash on the allied industries of the *Aso-oke* as it reduced their level of involvement and engagement in the production process.

The gamut of colonial intricacies was suggestive of the politico-economic dangers that may be inherent in international dealings, finished products, and technology transfers even when they are packaged, tainted, and garnished to be for imitation and internalisation to ultimately meet and develop local needs and beyond. Taking a cue from the historical realities of *Aso-oke*, the background archival data suggest deliberate efforts to stifle indigenous cotton processing/spinners of raw material/cotton and make processing of cotton technologically distressed especially with the establishment of weaving centres/mills through collaborations with Multinational Companies through foreign technologies thus spelling and reaffirming the present status of the *Aso-oke* industry's survival at the margins. This technical inference can be predicated on the document sent from the Director of Commerce and Industries of colonial Nigeria to the western province authority:

The Nigeria 1951 crop may reach 80,000 bales, that is 32,000,000lbs and of this, up to 3% may be grade III. This means that Grade III is being purchased for the first time. There will be less for the indigenous hand spinners of the Yorubaland... Actual arrangement for weavers will however be sharpened by the drying up of imported yarn...In other words, efforts in hand weaving are already being felt and we will receive urgent request in the area of the Oyo province, Ado, Ilorin where imported yarn is required by indigenous weavers.<sup>63</sup>

From the foregoing, it is observable that the background intricacies left indelible marks on the surface of history and present of *Aso-oke* industry. Responses from the focus group discussion on raw materials in contemporary *Aso-oke* industry were summarised by a respondent:

The input materials/yarn, dye are no more sourced locally...

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<sup>63</sup> NAI, DCI 451/S.5.

The view of a master weaver was that:

...today, the bulk of our yarns are machine spun. Apart from replacing hand spun yarns, weavers have been much attracted to a variety of synthetic fibres including shiny yarns of the silk type (siliki) and this has brought a 'great change' to the general appearance of Aso-oke.

Focus group discussions' participant also agreed that:

The threads now in use in the weaving industry are mostly silk, nylon and 'shine shine'/sheen materials and a little of real cotton.

It was generally gathered that the allied industries of *Aso-oke* weaving process (spinning and dyeing), which are important auxiliary crafts to weaving in Yorubaland, has been atrophied. As a result, cotton/yarn used in the industry is no longer locally sourced or produced by the local population of southwestern Nigeria. The view of an interviewee/master weaver explains this:

...our forefathers used to grow cotton they used in weaving Aso-oke on farm grounds, and it was a very common thing to find cotton plants even in homesteads farms because it was largely useful for our textiles... but such is no more existing like before... perhaps taken away by the colonial masters.

While some participants were of the opinion that the changes in the industry were as a result of innovations over time, others argued that the changes were as a result of attempts at changing the production technology of traditional *Aso-oke* industry by the colonial administration and western culture. A balanced view was however expressed by a large category:

The reed (asa – one of the implements used in the industry) for example, made with strings, unlike the wooden type, is an adaptation to the thread (imported) now used in the industry... though we did not accept all they/ (importers) introduced.

## **Theoretical and Concluding Reflections**

This article has engaged issues relative to the trans-epochal existences of *Aso-Oke* within the framework of local and international development. It is noteworthy that *Aso-Oke* has experienced transformations in terms of processes

and nature and this has impacted production, adoption, and usage.<sup>64</sup> Original *Aso-Oke* certainly only exists at the margins today even though it has huge potential to drive growth and development in sustainable manner relative to culture, identity, economy, and critical development from below. *Aso-oke* is now mostly used on special occasions, not popular among the youth and often seen to belong to the past. If anyone, especially youth, wears *Aso-oke* on an ordinary day not on special events, s/he will certainly be asked if s/he is celebrating a special anniversary. This demonstrates the timelessness and traditional value of the cloth and the critical symbolisation of identity. It however also demonstrates its dwindling popularity and weak adoption among the people especially among the youth-critical cohort in Africa's youth bulge. Among many *modern* people and the youth, *Aso-oke* is sometimes seen as popular museum material and the near discontinuity can be seen in the alterations that existed through time, values, tastes and fashion, production, and material processes.

*Aso-oke* processes and usage have been altered and this has negatively affected the traditional industrial growth and development of the indigenous population. This is the common trend in Africa's indigenous knowledge and traditional industry sectors occasioned and driven by colonialism. This is the case of infiltrated and jaundiced knowledge and industrial base caught in the web of unequal international power relations and political economy of aggressive capitalist expansion. This particular case of *Aso Oke* relates to Marxist theory of capitalist expansion. The political ecology of products and productive base of development is tilted against Global South and the equation remains unbalanced. Southern traditional industries and indigenous knowledge are relegated to the dungeon while aggressive Northern Capitalist appropriation agenda dominates. The altering of *Aso Oke* processes is a result of increasing incursion of capitalist industrialisation of the South for Northern benefits.

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<sup>64</sup> WILLIAMS, D. L., MUCHENA, O. N. Utilizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Agricultural Education to Promote Sustainable Agriculture. In *Journal of Agricultural Education*, Winter 1991, pp. 52–56; McMICHAEL, B. Peasants Make their Own History, But Not Just As they Please. In *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8 February 2008, pp. 205–228; OLUTAYO, A. O. 'Vestehen', Everyday Sociology and Development: Incorporating African Indigenous Knowledge. In *Critical Sociology*, pp. 229–238; OLUTAYO, A. O., AKANLE, O., FADINA, O. A. *Aso-Oke* (Hand Woven Textiles) of Southwestern Nigeria: A Compact Examination of a Resilient Artifact. In *American Journal of Sociological Research*, pp. 9–17; OLUTAYO, A. O., AKANLE, O. *Aso-oke* (Yoruba's hand woven textiles) Usage among The Youths in Lagos, Southwestern Nigeria. In *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 062–069.

People were forced to cultivate and produce under conditions only suitable for product and capital expropriation from the indigenous communities.

The social and economic effects of this aggressive industrialisation of the South for the West can largely be seen in the underdevelopment of the local industrial base of the host communities. *Aso Oke* and its raw materials became cheap products for Britain which consequently destroyed the, hitherto, efficient local manufacturing sector. Even though the locals attempted to innovate resistance as can be seen in outcomes in Table 1 above, the introduced Western capitalism in the previously stable pre-colonial Yoruba society resulted in truncated industrial development, poverty, dislocation, alienation, and imposed rapidity of change.<sup>65</sup> Like most consequences of capitalism, colonial implications for *Aso Oke* were not only economic, but multi-sectoral evident also in social, political, psychological, and even religious processes for instance.

In the order of Marx's analysis, indigenous populations were not only alienated from themselves, they were alienated from the product of their labour as their products were primarily exported at uncompetitive prices for western factories whose products they have no control over. Alienation within the remit of this article and *Aso Oke* is thus not a mere philosophical issue, but a practical and real in manifestation and consequence. Through *Aso Oke*, capitalists of the West exploited the pool of labour and products in Yoruba society for the profit of small capitalists who determine nature and outcomes of labour, means of producing products, labour time and wages which capitalists' stage-managed to increase their profits (surplus value in Marxist tradition). The cycle of capitalists' appropriation of surplus value continued throughout the colonial era in Nigeria and lingered to the contemporary era as manifesting in the survival of *Aso Oke* at the margins.

From the experience of *Aso Oke*, capitalism expressed its demonstrative coercive power. *Aso Oke* became the symbolic avenue through which capitalism revealed its most dominant secret of transforming political powers to economic ones for development gains of the West. While capitalism was able to propel western development into positive motions through expropriation of products and capital from *Aso-Oke* it propelled Nigerian/African development to a negative motion. As the structures of capitalist societies were transposed into indigenous societies of Nigeria, it reduced the potential of the commodity *Aso Oke* and allied products to drive development positively as exchange of labour and products became one-sided for the benefits of Western Capitalists within the commodity materialist's theoretical orientation.

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<sup>65</sup> RITZER, G., STEPNIISKY, J. *Sociological Theory*.



Rather than indigenous people producing by themselves and immediate others to survive within their environment with *use value*, as was the case during pre-colonial era, they were made to produce for *the unknown markets, someone else, the capitalist* with lopsided *exchange values* thereby driving the development of the local community/indigenous communities further afield for the benefit of the global market and international development. *Aso-oke* therefore presents a unique and pragmatic case study, in a way, for development experts particularly within indigenous knowledge, alternative and critical development school. If the issues raised in this article are well considered, within Marxist Capitalist traditions, they will certainly illuminate the path out of the current development quagmire of most African nations especially in the sub-Saharan Africa.

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