

**International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)**

**Ethiopia**

Vol. 7 (2), S/No 25, APRIL, 2018: 16-22

ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ijah.v7i2.3>

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**Textile Industry in Nupeland**

**Salahu, Mohammed Lawal, Ph.D.**

Department of History and International Studies  
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai  
Niger State, Nigeria

E-mail: [Ismohammed@ibbu.edu.ng](mailto:Ismohammed@ibbu.edu.ng)

Phone: +2347030235252; +2348028796952

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**Ilyasu, Yakubu Ahmed**

Department of History and International Studies  
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai  
Niger State, Nigeria

E-mail: [yakubuiyasu1988@gmail.com](mailto:yakubuiyasu1988@gmail.com)

Tel: +2348136662733; +2347051974265

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**Abstract**

Man became conscious of whom he was when he took sedentary life. The consciousness led to the need to cover his body either from nakedness, to look beautiful or in response to the harsh weather; and to keep the body warm. This began with the use of leaves to animal skins then to the weaving and production of fabric for clothing. Though no one can said when clothing or textiles began in the world and in Nupeland in particular, no doubt it has a fair long history and has undergone changes overtime. It is in the light of this that using historical methodology of both primary and secondary sources, the paper investigate textile industry in Nupeland. Using content analysis, the paper concluded that the industry in Nupeland had benefitted from the technology and skills of neighbouring communities before it became synonymous with the Nupe. The industry has also declined due to modern production.

**Introduction**

The development of any human community depends so much on both human and material resources. Nigeria and indeed Nupeland in particular has been blessed with the twin resources long before now. The ingenuity and ability of the people to exploit the material resources in the environment made them to be engaged in production of varieties of goods and services to meet their needs. The production of these goods and services however depend on employment of appropriate technology and skills most especially in manufactured and industrial sector of the economy. In Nupeland the

abundance of resources for manufactured and industrial sector gave the people a sort of advantage in production of certain manufactures among which was textile and its auxiliary industry in the course of 19<sup>th</sup> century. This relative advantage and quality of their product made European travellers and merchants Henry Barthqueted in Mason (1981) reported on textile industry of Nupe that “the Nupe have excelled in industry from very remote time and rival the inhabitants of Kano in the area of weaving and dyeing”.

Textile industry developed and became famous among the people because of the availability of raw materials, employment of rightful technology and fusing of foreign skills with the indigenes in the course of nineteenth century in the production process. The availability of raw materials made textile industry to be widely practiced and opened to all, before it developed into a guide system with the growth of Bida into urban centre (Salahu 2016). The ready-made market within and beyond further encouraged the production process and its growth in Nupeland.

### **The Environment**

The term environment is not limited to the surface of the land but included the mineral resources, rivers, soil, vegetation and climatic elements of temperature, rainfall, air among others (Sule 2014). The aggregate of these and their friendly nature determines human settlements and economic activities. Considering the tract of land occupied by Nupe which was from the confluence of Niger-Benue rivers at Lokoja extending to the frontiers of Borgu along the Niger and lower basins of River Kaduna, (Udo 1970) is not only rich in mineral resources, fertile soil, good vegetation but has friendly climatic conditions that attracted the people. The area so described is part of the wider central Nigeria area that houses a number of ethnic groups that included Gbagyi, Igala, Igbira, Idoma, Tvi among others. Today, the area occupied by the Nupe cut across the states of Niger, Kwara, Kogi and parts of Federal Capital Territory.

The tract of land occupied by Nupe is generally characterized by a low relief of not more than 200ft above sea level with granite hills scattered across the area. These are rocky hills that rise above surrounding plains with the highest point not more than 600m above sea level. The land is well drained by a number of rivers anchored by Niger River. These rivers get flooded during rainy season that is fairly distributed across six to eight months with the southern fringes receiving more rainfall than interior. The soils are generally fertile and well drained as you moved away from the river course that is swampy during rainy season. The vegetal covers of the area, guinea savannah influenced by amount of rainfall and soil shared characteristics of forest and savannah vegetation could support both crops of the two divides. This according to Salahu (2014) influenced agricultural activities and its allied industries of hunting and craftworks.

The land area occupied by Nupe often refer to as Nupeland favoured the cultivation and growth of both consumable and industrial crops be it cereals, grains, tubers and tree crops or shrubs. Among the industrial crops which form the basic raw materials was cotton.

### **The Morphology and History of Cotton Production**

Cotton crop a small shrub plant that is theoretically perennial crop but cultivated annually is a native of tropical and sub-tropical regions of America, India and Africa (Paramschwan, 2011). It grows to a height of 6 – 8 inches with a supportive tap root that penetrate into the soil to a depth of 6 – 8 ft (Metcalf and Elkins, 1980). The plant has a vertical stem with lateral two branches of vegetables and fruiting. The vegetable branches produce flowers while the fruiting branches bear the fruits that transforms into bolls. Each of the bolls contained seeds and fibres which are the most essential parts for textile industry.

Cultivation at cotton crop requires large amount of labour engaged in production process of different stages from planting to harvesting and finally to industry. The crop required fairly moderately distributed rainfall/water of about 5-6 months or 60-120cm. The soil should be fertile sandy loamy type with enough sunshine that produces temperature of about 25 – 35°C to enhance maturity, drying and splitting of the bolls.(Metcalf and Elkins,1980)

Cotton scientifically known as *gossypium* is said to be indigenous to tropical areas of America, Asia and Africa. In Africa, cotton production and clothing dated back to antiquity and could not be said with certainty where and when it began. However, archaeological evidence indicated that by 200BC Egypt was into cloth industry. In the West Africa sub-region evidence of cloth product dated back to 9th century and by the 14th century a large cotton industry existed in Mali (Ajayi, 2009).

In Nigerian, area cotton was grown for centuries before the coming of Europeans. Such cottons were used in spinning and weaving industries of which according to Agbola (1979) Kano and Iseyin could probably be the earliest centres. The earliest varieties of cotton grown in Nigeria were *Gossypiumherbeceum* and *GossypionHarbereum* that were probably of Asian origin which might have gotten to Nigeria through the activities of migrant traders during the Sahara-trade.

With the discoveries of the New World and contact with Europeans, other varieties of cotton species were introduced into tropical Africa including Nigeria. Among the varieties introduced were *Gossypion Hirsutum*, *gossypiumvitifolium* and *gossypionHerbadaace* (Agebola, 1979). The success of cultivation of cotton in Nigeria and in response to the demand in tropical goods by the European industrial world saw the first cotton exported in 1850 (Agebola, 1979). Following the conquest and establishment of British colonial administration in Nigeria, other varieties most especially the Uganda stable was brought in to the Century 1916 and 1921. Since independence, improved varieties of cotton have been provided by research institutes most especially Institute for Agricultural Research, Samaru Zaria. Nigeria has remarkably three cultivation zones. They are Northern zone that extended from Kontagora to borderlines with Niger Republic encompassing Kaduna, Zaria, Funtua, Gusau, Zaria, etc. The Eastern zone that covers present day states of Bauchi, Adamawa, Gombe, Yobe, Jigawa, etc and the Southern belt that included such areas as Borgu, Bida, Ankpa, Keffi, Oyo, Ondo and parts of Benin (Agebola, 1979).

In Nupeland, cotton production dated back to the period before contact with Europeans. The most popular specie of cotton cultivated were the upland cotton called *Gossypiumherberceum* and *CossypionHerbereum*. Following the colonial conquest and establishment of colonial rule an extensive survey was undertaken in Nupeland most especially in Bida division with the intent of establishing cotton and cotton plantations (Alhaji Baba Shehu 2011). The result was not that favourable. Despite this, the colonial government in an effort to boost cotton production provided seeds and seedling to peasant farmers. Thus, in 1917, not fewer than 10 tons of cotton seed was distributed to famers. Prior to the provision of seeds in 1910 an experimental cotton plantation was established in Bida and yielded about 291bs per acre (NAK MIN PRO 4080/1918).

Cotton in Nupeland was considered as non-food crops; it came to be eaten indirectly considering its economic importance. No part of the plant is considered a waste. Apart from its major usage in cloth production, the seed was processed into oil and used in varieties of ways including as vegetable oil for feeds. The leaves were used for medicine in curing neonatal jaundice and related diseases.

### **Production Process in Textile Industry**

Utilization of raw materials in the production of goods and services is a gradual process that came into being in response to the basic needs of man. These needs centred on food, clothing and shelter. In response to these needs in Nupeland due to favourable climatic/environmental condition, the people became engaged in varieties of crafts and industrial productions. Some of these industrial activities

obtained their basic raw materials from within the environment, be it agricultural or mineral base. One of such craft work or industrial activity that emerged in response to mans needs was textile industry whose basic raw material, cotton, was cultivated as non – food crop. The abundance and in response to the needs textile industry became a leading industrial activity practiced in virtually all household must especially in major settlements. In the course of 19th century Bida that became the seat of the most populous and richest emirate not only became the major centre of production but commercial and industrial centre of Nupeland (NAK MIN PRO 225/1912). Prior to this period, other notable centres of commerce and industries were Gbara, Egan, Kulho and Raba (Laird and Old field, 1971).

The textile industry in Nupeland like in other parts of the world is made up of two basic components. These are the weaving and dyeing. Each of the components is labour intensive as people are engaged in every stage of production up to marketing and consumption of the products.

The weaving section began with the cultivation of cotton which start from the selection of quality seeds to be planted on already made ridges. The seeds normally about 4-6 were put into a hole and covered on the ridges using foot. In the planting process, gap of between 35 and 45cm are usually given between the planting holes. On germination, the seeds are prune or reduced to two (to allow for faster growth) in a process that required careful effort known as thinning (Kutamaetal, 2015). From then onward, the cotton plant is cared for through hoeing/weeding and application of necessary impute up to the maturity level or time of harvest. The period of harvest is when the bolls splitted exposing the seeds covered by fibres; the white hairy part (Kutamaetal, 2015).

The second stage of the process known as Luluzhi in Nupe is the picking and separation of the seeds from the lint. This is done by all members of the household, man, women and children who moved into the farm in operation that lasted several hours and could be repeated two or three times till when all the lints are picked. The process involves gradual but steady picking of the lint from the boll into a container, bucket or sack. The harvested lints are taken home for further processing. The seeds, on the other hand, are stored in a well-dried place. According to my informant, some people even cooked the seeds for food (Alhaji Abdullahi Baba Bisati, 2018).

The next stage is Lulupinzhi in Nupe to produce cotton wool. This is mostly men and children dominated activities. The lint is continuously robbed on ones lap to produce a long thin thread or yarn. The thread/yarn is coiled on a specially made wood instrument called manzari (Alhaji Baba Bisati, 2018). The completion of this stage made the raw material ready for use in weaving unit.

The stage of weaving is the most critical stage of the textile industry. It is critical because of its importance to Nupe people in which it employed men, women and children and practiced widely in virtually all Nupe villages. In the weaving of cloth, edelu the people's skills and technology came to be displayed as the participants showcase their expertise in the production process.

Men involved in the industry used horizontal loom Ekpa measuring between 30 and 50 meters long that drew near to the weaver as work progression. The weaving is done with the aid of pedals, epa and shuttle to strips of cloth of about 5 inches wide. A number of strips of cloth produced are sewn together to get the size of clothes needed. Materials and instrument used in the process were cotton, silk, shuttle, wooden post, iron rod pedals and bars upon which the final cloth are woored (Nadel, 1942).

The women according to Nadel (1942) hand-used the vertical Ekpa loom. The loom consist of two standing polls, two or three bamboo, gbongboro poles that are horizontally arranged across the horizontally polls and three Ebagi wooden poles where the woven cloth rest. Other tools used were Nifi shuttle and Kpasa hand pedal. The looms that form the major technology are normally fixed in a section of their room or a build room for the purpose within the house.

In the course of 19th century, Bida became the centre of commerce and industry; the textile industry witnessed an unprecedented growth in techniques and production. This was attributed to the emirate leadership most especially Etsu Masaba activities and foresight in setting slaves taken from Isanlu, Okene, Afenmai and Akokoin Nupeland (Mansson, 1973).

The second part of the textile industry was ecinda dyeing. The raw materials used for dyeing are locally sourced from the environment. The raw material, are from tsetse grass or baobab tree leaves.(Nadel,1942)In preparation, sizeable quantum of tsetse grass was collected, dried and grinded into powder. The tsetse grass powder then mixed with ashes and water in a sieve-like basket or perforated pot, put on top of a bigger pot to drip into it. For the baoba tree, the collected leaves were pounded and left to ferment which was then mixed with ashes and rolled into balls that were sold to dyiers (Nadel 1942).

The dyers arranged their pots in a specially dog pits to protect them from turning or breaking. The dyeing pots normally situated in a designated section of the house, or outside or under a tree shade. Major centres of dyeing in Nupe were Bida, Kutigi, Sakpe and Kulfo. The work according to Salahu, (2014) is labour intensive employing both men and women.

### **Western Influence on Textile Industry in Nupeland**

The abolishment of slave trade and shift to comedy trade of tropical product brought European most especially British into direct contact with Nupe. The contact that began with expeditions led to the establishment of commercial/trade relations and signing of treaty in 1885 which was of mutual benefits to the two parties (Salahu, 2013). However, before the end of the century the once mutual cooperation and understanding gradually turned sour and eventual conquest of Bida emirate,(the leading emirate in Nupe land) between 1897 and 1901.Subsequently other emirates fell to British colonial adventure.

The conquest and subjugation of Nupe land like other parts of Nigeria was precipitated on economic factor of the need for cheap raw materials for their industries, markets for their manufactured goods at profitable rate and possible areas of investment of capitals. In an effort to meet up with the economic factors of conquest, colonial economic policy of cash /export crop production was put in place. Among such crop was cotton meant to check increasing cost and fluctuating price from elsewhere. (Abdullahi, 2015)

Prior to the British conquest, Nupe land was recognized as major area of cotton production as reported by Clapperton (n.d.) that the country is well cultivated and planted with corn, and yams and cotton. Similarly, Nupe being a centre of cotton and texted industry, attained high quality in cloth production that made her compete favourably with other areas of production including the ones from Europe. Thus, the Lairds (1971) complained of his inability to sell Lancashiercottons in Nupe despite the lower price of his as compared to that of Nupe.

The above notwithstanding, with the conquest and the determination to have cheap raw cotton, effort was made by the British colonial government towards cotton production. This began with the survey of Nupe land most especially Bida division to determine the viability of establishing cotton plantation. The unfavourable result obtained made the government maintained the existing land tenure system and provision of seeds to increase peasant production. In addition to allowed for scientific dissemination of improved seeds on experimental cotton farm was established in Bida in 1910 but yielded about 39 bs per acre and by 1918 over 10tons of cotton seed was distributed.(NAK MIN PRO,324/1913). The distributed seeds were that of American, Egyptian and Ugandan allen cotton to encourage peasants farmers to cultivate imported cottons, better prices were offered against the local cotton which led to the decline in local cotton production.(NAK MIN PRO, 324/1918) and (Isah,2003).

As effort was made to increase production of raw cotton as raw materials for the metropolis, effort was also made to kill local production of textile in Nupe and other centres of production in Nigeria. To pave way for their acceptability and killed the locally produced textile, colonial government as early as 1903 imposed varieties of Taxes on locally manufactured goods. This was further enhanced after the second world war in 1945 when mass importation of cheap European textile materials increased. This period also witnessed the introduction of English broad looms to cloth weavers across Northern Nigeria (Bonat, 1988). This affected the ingenuity of local textile production and its market.

### Post-Colonial Era

With the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria like other African nations were eager to catch up with industrially developed nations. This led to industrial development based on transfer of technology and establishment of elephant projects towards that direction. There was also corresponding increase in importation and consumption of foreign goods including textile materials. This process in Nupe land finally saw to the decline of textile and allied craft if not completely ousted from most homes. Today what remains of the industry is symbolic production in some few houses across Nupe land. In Bida, the centre of craft production, dye pits and pots could hardly be seen.

### Conclusion

In the course of 18th and 19th century, Nupeland became a famous name in textile industry across the Niger. Her products were of high quality above the European materials imported from the second half of the 19th century. However, in the 20th century, with the advent of colonial administration, systematic efforts were made to kill the industry. This began with importation of foreign cotton seeds and under pricing of local products. Lastly, English broad looms were imported to replace the local looms. This cause disarticulation and dislocation of the industry in Nupeland.

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