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## **African Value System and the Impact of Westernization: A Critical Evaluation of Esan Society in Edo State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Africans from the pre-colonial era have their unique and distinct culture which is evidenced in their entire ways of life – socially, politically, religiously, economically and technologically. Their value systems as elements of their culture are depicted in marriage and family institutions, religious practices, social and economic systems, cultural values and legal system and so on. However, the eventual contact with Western culture through colonialism and, with the subsequent upsurge of globalization and modernity, these values are not only being challenged but also eroded. Consequent upon this onslaught on the Esan value systems by western values, which has been tagged “cultural imperialism”, with its affirmative, debilitating and disruptive impact, what would be the response of Esans to salvage their pristine values that shaped their society morally, economically, politically and religiously in the past. This paper is an attempt to make a critical evaluation of the western values viz-a-viz Esan value system, stressing that Esans have some valuable and enriching cultures that are worthy of preservation in the face of western cultural onslaught. The methodology adopted in this work is both primary and secondary sources.*

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**Keywords:** Value System, Impact, Westernization, Critical Evaluation, Africa, Esan Society

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### **Introduction**

Esan people are in Edo State of Nigeria. Esanland has a size of about 210km<sup>2</sup> (540 square miles). The land is situated eighty (80) kilometers north of Benin City, capital of Edo State (Office of the Local Government). The area is coterminous with the present-day Central Senatorial District of Edo State. Esan is currently made up of five local government council areas, namely, Esan-West, Esan-Central, Esan-North East, Esan-North West and Igueben. Esan is an Edo sub-group that is believed to manifest the closest cultural and linguistic affinity to the Benin people (Oseghale 1). The name ‘Esan’ meaning ‘jump’ etymologically came from the Bini word ‘*Esan fia*’ (which was the response earlier given by the messenger to the Oba) that implies to ‘jump’ or to ‘flee’ (presumably away) (Okojie 30; Egharevba 54; Ihensekhien 162). According to Okoduwa, names such as *Isa*, *Esa* and *Ishan* were at various times in the colonial period used for the people and are due to the inability of colonial officials to pronounce the original name correctly (15a).

With regard to population, Esan apparently witnessed a steady growth since the colonial period. As at 1931, the population of the area was put at 143, 069 (Unumen 142: 2015b). By 1952, the population of the area rose to 194, 891. Of this latter figure, 92, 570 were said to be males and 102, 321 were females. (Unumen: 217:2015a) The 1991 Nigerian Population Census put the population of Esan at 372, 122 (Ukhun and Inegbedion 134). By 2006, the population of the area had increased to 591, 334, out of which 291, 839 were females (Unumen 242:

2015a). Geographically, Esan is on a plateau surrounded by slopes down to the lower Niger River, the valley and wetland towards Etsako, the Kukuruku Hills and the plain around Benin City the state capital (Okoduwa 15:1997a).

Esan people have a lot in common in terms of historical experience as epitomized by the administrative arrangement of the Nigerian Colonial State whereby Esan was administered as a single constituency – Ishan division. (National Archives of Ibadan xiv) The affinity in the historical and socio-cultural realities of the people to a considerable extent shaped their educational experiences (National Archives of Ibadan; Oseghale 13-16a: 2003). The culture and civilization of a people, including its political and socio-economic institutions, are often times reflections or manifestations of the realities of the environment in which they lived and operated (Oseghale 23b: no date). In the example of the Esan people, the political institution and administrative structures, which emerged and developed through history are not only to be understood and appreciated in the light of their environmental experiences, but also in the circumstances of their said migrations and settlements, as well as their eventual interactions with other peoples, especially larger groups such as the Benin, Yoruba and Igala peoples to name a few (24).

### **Definition and Explanation of Terms**

At this juncture, it is important to define the key terms such as westernization, values, and culture for vivid comprehension of this work. Westernization also Europeanization or occidentalization (from the Occident, meaning the Western world; see ‘occident’ in the dictionary), is a process whereby societies come under or adopt Western culture in areas such as industry, technology, law, politics, economics, lifestyle, diet, clothing, language, alphabet, religion, philosophy, and values (Thong 894). Westernization has been an accelerating influence across the world in the last few centuries, with some thinkers assuming westernization to be equivalent of modernization (Hayford 116).

Westernization can also be compared to acculturation and enculturation. Acculturation is “the process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between cultural groups and their individual members (Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology 142). After contact, changes in cultural patterns are evident within one or both cultures. Specific to Westernization and the non-western culture, foreign societies tend to adopt changes in their own social systems relative to Western ideology, lifestyle, and physical appearance, along with numerous other aspects, and shifts in culture patterns can be seen to take root as a community becomes acculturated to Western customs and characteristics – in other words, Westernized. Westernization can include Americanization and Europeanization, with historical versions including Romanization, Francization, and Germanization (Wikipedia). Westernization cannot be divorced from globalization. Western thought gave birth to globalization which in turn propagates Western culture (Wikipedia). Globalization is from the word ‘globe’ meaning the world. Thus, globalization is a process by which economies, societies, and cultures are being integrated into a globe-spanning network of communication and trade (Wikipedia).

Value according to Egbeke connotes moral standards, principles, or quality which underlies the code of conduct of the members of any given society (182). Hornby dictionary defines values as “something in terms of money or other goods it can be exchanged” (1319). Values are meant to be spiritual parts of culture, and these values perform the role of piloting,

monitoring, humanizing and harmonizing culture as a whole (Chuta 24). The worth of a thing is determined by a given society. Values are the chart by which the people and society consumes for the peace, progress and development of all. Therefore, value is a thing highly priced by a given society. It does not exist in isolation but in relation to culture. This is why it is widely accepted that values of a given society are a function of its culture. Thus, it is necessary to look into the concept of culture.

The concept of culture as this term is used commonly in the social sciences refers to a totality of people's ways of life. It is the "distinctive ways of life of a people, their complete design for living" (Clyde 86). In another sense, culture refers to the gamut of the knowledge, beliefs, customs, traditions and skills that are available to the members of a society. Cultures are man-made rather than God-given. They are designs, prescriptions and responses, which are deliberately fashioned to guide all aspects of a people's life (Nwosu and Kalu 3). Consequently, as a distinctive group of people endeavor to tame and subordinate a given physical environment, as it attempts to provide for its economic and security needs, as it devises norms, values and principles that govern patterns of its social relations and interactions, as it finds solutions to the problems of order and authority relations, as it rationalizes on the "why" of its existence and problems of life and death, and as it institutionalizes the notions of good and bad, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, truth and falsehood, and patterns of stable and shared expectations, it brings a new culture into being (3).

Culture is, therefore, a distinctive and transmissible network of symbols which characterizes a designated aggregate of people. Obviously, this term embraces a great deal: man-made artifacts, activities that people perform, and ideas and feelings. Some of a culture's trait may be universally shared and others restricted to one's age or sex. Some traits emanated from other cultures, arriving perhaps in trade to become elements of the culture in question. Every culture is a unique constellation of traits even though some of the traits are widespread in human society (4).

Culture is not synonymous with civilization, let alone Western civilization (Edward 45-48). According to Ogbu, "There are no universally accepted criteria for evaluating the different kinds of world cultures. The utility of prescriptions of a given culture is assessed within the circumstances of the culture" (4). Ruth Benedict asserts that "each ingredient of a culture makes sense only within the total context of that culture (207). This analysis implies that one culture is as good as another. The culture of pre-colonial Lozi in Zambia served the same purpose as the Athenian culture served the people of ancient Athens (Ogbu 4). This is why it is pertinent to adduce that culture covers all aspects of life: technological, economic, social system and structure, political education, language and religion (4). In the study of culture it is germane to analyze the symbols, customs and conventions, values and norms which distinguish a particular culture from another.

Africa is made up of several nation-states as a consequence of colonialism. These nation-states are also made up of diverse tribes with differences based on divergent languages, religions, traditional occupations, attitudes, beliefs, values and a host of others. Nevertheless, despite these differences, there is a meeting point as regards what they hold to be of great value (Egbeke 184). It is a common knowledge that Africans are resilient and over the years, have developed their value systems. This is more reason why it is generally accepted that Africans have peculiar and interesting value systems in the pre-colonial period before it was been

bastardized by western influences and ideologies. However, in this work only the salient ones under Esan as a case study shall be discussed and in other to appreciate the impact of westernization on these values, those things that were obtainable in pre-colonial Esan society such as marriage institution, the family structure, indigenous religion, legal system and administration and traditional economy shall be examined below.

### **Pre-colonial Esan Marriage Institutions**

Myths of the creation of man, according to Mbiti “agree that human life started with husband and wife. It must also continue in the same way, and that marriage is the meeting-point for the three layers of human life according to African Religion, which to him are the departed, the living and those to be born” (104: 1975). This is why Esan traditional marriage system was aimed at serving two principal purposes. These were to establish cordial inter or intra-group relations and to procreate (Olumese 52). The contraction of marriages in Esan society was an exclusive affair of the elders or parents of the bride and groom. Families had used marriages to strengthen diplomatic relations with each other or with groups and villages. To this end, infant betrothal which became widespread in Esanland was used by parents to build up intra or inter-group cohesion and brotherhood among families and village groups. For instance, a parent (*Enebiomon*) or a King (*Onojie*) of one town who needed the friendship of an *Onojie* in another could affect his desire by arranging to betroth his daughter to the son of that *Onojie*. Once betrothal had been successfully formalized, the characteristic cordial in-law relationship would commence. This cordiality would be further strengthened once a child emerged in the union (52).

Although the Esan people had maintained a patrilineal system, no man was ever absolutely free from his mother’s people. On the death of his mother, he would traditionally bury the remains of the mother in her ancestral homeland. A man who had problems and difficulties in his father’s homeland could migrate to his mother’s land, where usually he would be subjected to less competition in life. This type of relationship which existed between villages and communities through marital arrangement added a fillip to trade and co-operation in Esan. Traders in one village group would become inviolate in some other villages where their sisters or daughters were married. The in-law inter-locking connection was a guarantee for these traders’ security of life and property (Olumese 53; Abumere 23)

Esan traditional marriage system allowed for the continuity of the wedded group. Once the family of the bride-groom had paid the traditional bride wealth and services to the family of the bride, the marriage would then be regarded as conclusive. The children from such union would belong to the bridegroom’s family. But when a man was unable to have a male child, the eldest surviving daughter was allowed to choose a respected man for the purpose of protection (Abumere 33; Odiagbe, Personal Interview; Eboigbe, Personal Interview). The children from such union belonged to the woman’s family. As no bride wealth was paid, no marriage was contracted (Olumese 53). This type of procreation was certainly not prostitution as N.W. Thomas misunderstood the system (7). The society that had profound respect for traditions would never allow their custom to be abused (Olumese 54).

The cementing relationship which traditional marriages fostered in Esan was sustained by its stability and characteristic indissolubility. In Igbafe’s study of the ancient Benin Kingdom, in which were the Esan people, he asserts that “Once an indigenous marriage was contracted under native laws and customs, it had a recognized stamp of permanency” (19). The

bride wealth which was paid in the Esan traditional marriage to the family of the bride was shared by all members of the family. Indeed, the bride wealth was an accumulation of the contribution of an individual's role to the bridegroom (Olumese 53). To all intents and purpose, all relations helped to encourage the creation of an enduring good and harmonious relationship between the two families.

In Esan traditional setting, provision was not made for divorce, since prostitution, was against the traditional norms of the society. The settlement pattern provided for all members of the family to be accommodated in one house. In such residential arrangement women who were house wives and daughters had their living rooms in houses built behind the main house (*Odugha*) where the males were accommodated. The living arrangement in pre-colonial Esan did not provide the privacy that prostitution required. In order to strengthen permanency of marriages in Esan, women whose husbands had died would be inherited by the dead man's next of kin after a not too expensive and elaborate ritual performance. Esan traditions abhorred any reference to a woman as a dead man's wife (Olumese 3:1985). This was why a woman was inherited by her late husband's next of kin. All women married into an Esan family were expected to comply with the order of that home (Abumere 15). Peace, order and the communal living which were permanent features of Esan prevented divorce (Olumese 54; Aibanegbe Personal Interview; Odiagbe, Personal Interview and Eboigbe, Personal Interview). Whenever dissension arose, it was quickly settled through the intermediary role of the senior members or elders (*Edions*) of the houses (Olumese 55; Odiagbe, Personal Interview). An Esan house wife in spite of her previous social status or age would realize at marriage that she had become the most junior member of her husband's patrilineage. There was no dispute about the community of wives organization in the village by her mother-in-law and other female relatives of the family. In the house, she would imbibe the norms of married life and the etiquette of the lineage (Olumese 55:1997).

The issue that would have been problematic and capable of causing divorce was that of the wife's sterility or husband's impotence, but such developments were contained internally in the family. If after reasonable laps of time, a legitimately contracted marriage had not been blessed with children, the man with full consent of the wife could marry a second wife without any divorce (Olumese 55). Also the parents of a husband, or in their absence, elders of the patrilineage could provide a wife with a respectful man outside the patrilineage as the husband if a husband's impotence was discovered. This arrangement was usually conducted with a high sense of responsibility and secrecy in order to avoid denting the woman's real husband's image in the society. Before this arrangement was finalized, the parents could perform some sacrifices which constituted a symbol of dispensation against adultery. The children from such secret union belonged to the family of the woman's husband. Such children were not susceptible to any social or legal disabilities neither are they referred to as bastards or fatherless (Olumese 54; Enato 6: 2015).

Seen above, Esan marriage system in the traditional setting was that which suit the exigency and dispensation of the time. The marriage institution was meant to ensure that nobody was left out of marriage, and that children were produced for each family concerned. These customs worked in their own way within the traditional Esan life.

### **The Family Structure in the Esan Traditional Society**

The smallest socio-political unit in Esan is the family (*uelen*). The *uelen* could be single or an extended family unit (Olumese 45). In the traditional families in Esan, most especially in



the rural areas, the extended family system is still the norm. The extended family comprised of more than one nuclear family. Male children (*Imin-Ikpia*) in a nuclear family especially grew to become adults (*Enewian*). They too expectedly married and eventually established their own respective families. The emergent families maintained and sustained patrilineal ties with their original parent family to form an extended family system. In the pre-colonial Esan, the grandfather (*Abanoghua*) or the existing oldest male (*Odafen*) in the extended structure, assumed the headship; except of course in instances where a given family was built around a hereditary chieftaincy stool, in which, leadership was perpetually held by the occupant of such stools. The *Odafen* was not only a secular head, but also a religious leader. He was and still is the family priest, who offered sacrifices to the gods and ancestral spirits. He made expropriation to the gods on the ancestral shrine for and on behalf of the members of the family. He took charge of the sacred symbols notably the *ukhure* of the patrilineage (Olumese 46). The *ukhure* signified authority and sanction held by the heads of Esan families (Ifemesia 69). With this authority the *Odafen* assumed the role of the living representative of all the deceased members of the family unit. The family role of the *Odafen* was not singularly aimed at creating internal solidarity but done with full regard and cognizance of the needs and aspirations of the society at large (Olumese 47, Enato 9-10: 2005). The family formed only an integral part of the society. Consequently, the *Odafen* maintained law and order within and outside the family circle. If a member of his family had any misunderstanding with a member of another family, it was his duty to liaise with the Head of the other family with a view to effecting an amicable solution (Olumese 47). In like manner, he arranged and influenced the choices of spouse for the young male and female member of his family.

In Esan for example, the families into which the female children (*Imin-manme*) of a particular family was married, were often considered not just as in-laws, but also as family, in a liberal sense. The majors reason being that the families of in-laws, often times, owed strong allegiance to their wives' families and regularly discharged mandatory customary roles and functions to such families (Odiagbe, Personal Interview). In return, the benefiting family (the one that gave out their daughter in marriage), shared and continually demonstrate interests and concern in the well-being of their in-law. The head of the extended family performed the same roles and functions as the head of a nuclear family except that his control spanned over more than one family. He provided leadership, spiritual guidance but usually in consultation with the respective heads of the member families (Aibanegbe, Personal Interview). Eventually, the extended family system developed to be visible and formidable social institution in pre-colonial Esan. It shaped community administration and social order over the ages.

### **Religion and Belief Systems in Traditional of Pre-colonial Esan**

An interesting aspect of the pre-colonial Esan history is that in spite of the different geographical location of the various chiefdoms, the people had similar religious beliefs and customs which are peculiar to them (Eboigbe, Personal Interview). These beliefs and traditions helped in regulating and establishing lives in various communities. In addition, these beliefs had great reverence attached to them and they bequeathed certain beliefs, practices and the people perception of them that order and stability was maintained and promoted in the society.

It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that in the pre-colonial traditional Esan, "religion is life and life is religion" (Odiagbe, Personal Interview). The people were engaged in religion in whatever they did be it farming, fishing, hunting, drinking, love-making or traveling. Religion gave meaning and significance to their lives both in this world and world beyond (Mbiti 10: 1975).

The Esan indigenous religion and belief systems, like all African societies was not brought in from outside. It is also called Esan Traditional Religion and African Traditional Religion, to distinguish it from any other type of religion, since there were other religions in Africa (Mbiti 29-30: 1975).

Beliefs and customs go hand in hand and quite often they are difficult to separate. They cover nearly all areas of life. Belief, in a general sense, deals with religious ideas, while customs are concerned with what people generally approved or disapproved of and do. When we come across Esan beliefs, we are in fact dealing with Esan religion, although religion is much more than its beliefs. The beliefs are handed down from generation to generation, sometimes with modifications. Without them no religion can inspire its followers. Even when people are converted from African [Esan] religion to another religion, they retained many of their former beliefs since it is hard to destroy beliefs (Mbiti 31: 1975).

The religion of Esan people included beliefs in God (*Osenobulua*), spirits, life, death, ancestors, magic, witchcraft, divination, the hereafter etc. Customs are not always religious, but may contain religious ideas. Customs deals with what people normally approve of and do. And by the time one marries these two conceptions together, one is already at home in African [Esan] religion. These beliefs and customs are, as a matter of fact, interwoven into religious concept of the people. It must be pointed out that the mind of the people were not empty when Christianity and its attendant Western influence came into the land. There were beliefs and customs the people were used to already. They were part of their everyday life (Odiagbe, Personal Interview). The Esan people's belief in the Supreme Being is very strong and unshakable. They believed that God is all powerful, perfect and just. And that without his approval and blessings all requests to any of the divinities (*Ebo*) cannot be granted. This Almighty Being they call by various names which include, *Osenobulua*, *Osenoghodua*, *Osenudozi*, *Oghehan* etc. (Okojie 148; Odiagbe, Personal Interview).

It was said that until the establishment of Christianity, there was scarcely any heavenly connection and contact between God and Man among the Esan people, except, for instance in respect to juju and witchcraft worship and practices. No doubt, from the very early times a great deal of religious and spiritual activities and communications went on between the Esan people and the Supreme Being known to them as *Osenobulua*. The Esan are fond of saying *Abu Osenobua*, meaning, 'by God's grace, or let us leave very thing in God's hands, God will take care and make sure things work out as one wants: such an expression correspond with what St. Paul teaching that God has revealed Himself and His will to all Human Beings ever since the creation of the whole world (Romans 1:19). And so, the later advent of Christianity into Esan land was never strange nor novel to the people, as they, like others were constantly involved in religious affairs due to any individual, and the society depended largely on the good will of the supernatural being; and consequently felt secured when faced with the uncertainties of life (Aibanegbe, Personal Interview).

To a large extent Esan people could be regarded as both polytheist and monotheist. Polytheist in that they believed in the existence of many lesser gods and goddess with such examples as, *Ebo* and Juju. Monotheist in that they also believed in the existence of God, the Supreme Being, known as *Osenobulua* (Okojie 146-147). *Ebo*, which is also called idol, juju, gods and goddesses by various or different people were intermediary between the people and God. And, just as the Bishops, Pastors and other clergy and priests are the intermediary between

the Christian worshippers and believers, so also the juju priests and other gods and goddesses in the Esan Traditional Religion were the vehicles through which spiritual and heavenly communication could be made between them and the Supreme Being (God) (148).

Mbiti further opine that activities in religious forms were never static in African societies as various functions and duties were being performed. He stated that:

These religious officials or leaders are the people who conduct religious matters such as ceremonies, sacrifices, formal prayers and divination. And that they are trained men and women. They know more about religious affairs than other people, and are respected by their community (153:1975).

*Osenobulua* as earlier said is the name to the Esan God- the Supreme Being. He is regarded as omnipotent, invisible, invincible, unstoppable, unconquerable etc. *Osenobulua* is able to perform everything. Things are possible when they are ordered by Him. Whatever He says come to pass. He is given the attribute ‘God of all gods’, ‘shaper of mankind’, and ‘the all-powerful’. It is He who controls and sustains the universe. He is Supreme above all things. He is regarded as king. *Osenobulua* has full prerogative and His will is absolute (Enato 19: 2005). He is all wise, all knowing and all seeing. He is silent but active judge, the owner of the day, the immovable rock that never dies. This means He is very prominent and immortal. The idea of immortality is an attribute which is very prominent in the Esan conception of the deity. His eternity is expressed in myths, songs, epigrams and during worship. He is invisible as earlier said. The Esans know Him as *Osenobula-Naimie* – “the invisible king” (Odiagbe, Personal Interview).

The Esan according to Osemudiamen, think of the Supreme Being as Holy. They think of Him as both ritually and ethically holy. He is absolutely clean and pure. *Osenobulua* does not involve Himself with anything immoral. He is therefore known as “*Ose no wan gbitan*”. He is regarded as remote, distant and has to be approached through “sons” of God – the lesser gods (Eboigbe, Personal Interview). There is no regular worship, however, for the Supreme Being *Osenobula*. There are no temples of *Osenobulua* in Esan society and no priests were dedicated to His service. The Esans passed through the lesser gods to reach the Supreme Being. Sacrifices are offered to the Supreme Being through the lesser gods who acted as intermediaries. White chalk (*Ere*) and kolanuts (*Ebhie*) may be broken and put on the ground in the early morning by family head and offer prayers to God to protect him and his family. But in time of need the Esan people, like other African people has by passed all lesser gods and offered sacrifices to the Supreme Being (Odiagbe, Personal Interview).

Every Esan people recognized God as one. According to some cosmologies, however, there are, besides Him, other divinities and spiritual beings some of whom were closely associated with Him. These beings are generally the personification of God’s activities, natural phenomenon and objects, or deified national heroes, or spiritual beings created by God as such. In a few cases, such as among the Irukep and Orhua, dual aspects of the One God are recognized, as an explanation of the transcendence and immanence of God, and the problem of good and evil. A form of trinitarian concepts of God was reported also among the Ihumundumu and Egoro peoples, according to which He is described as ‘Father, Mother and Son (Enato 12: 2005). This is probably a logical convenience, rather than a theological reflection, to fit God into the African conception of the family. Hence, for the totality of African people and Esan in particular, there is no separation between religious beliefs and practices, and his economic and socio-cultural life (Falola and Babalola 155).



### **Legal and Administrative Systems in Pre-colonial Esan**

However, before the advent of the Christian Missionaries and the establishment of colonial rule, Esan society was purely a traditional one. It was a society devoid of foreign influence of ideas in relations to legal politics and administration. The system of governance in the entire Esan society before colonial rule was monarchical. Generally, each chiefdom or community constituted a separate and autonomous political entity subject only to one peripheral influence of the Oba of Benin (Egharevba 26). At the head of government was the king (*Onojie*) whose authority was virtually supreme. He was the 'Head of State' - succession to the throne was based on the principle of primogeniture, that is, the deceased *Onojie* being succeeded by his eldest surviving son (Okojie 50).

The king (*Onojie*) was assisted by subordinate rulers just as could be found in modern system of governance. These subordinate rulers were the titled chiefs (*Ekhaemon*) the elders (*Edion*) and the *Egbonughele* and *Igene* (adult youths). These persons were feared and respected by their subjects. This mode of administration, however, dramatically and drastically changed, consequently upon the coming of Christianity and its new policy of political and administrative systems in Esan society (Enato 21:2014). In that society, the importance of social order and peace cannot be overemphasized. In the traditional Esan under the auspices of the Kings (*Enijie*), there were laws, customs, regulations, rules, taboos and others which constituted the moral code and ethics that they established that regulated and coordinated the affairs of their communities (Isokun 126). These moral codes and ethics were meant to regulate the conduct of the members for the maintenance of community solidarity. They are either human laws or divine laws. While human laws are punished with human sanctions under the power and control of the Kings (*Enijie*), divine laws, when breached, attract divine sanctions and punishment from the gods. In administering justice, the Kings (*Enijie*) and elders (*Edions*) through the deputation of selected members of the age grade set (*Otu*) played prominent roles in settling of disputes arising from breach of the laws of the land, whether they are divine laws that may require sacrifices or not (Isokun 128; Eboigbe, Personal Interview; Odiagbe, Personal Interview).

### **Esan Economy in the Traditional Society**

Esan economy before the advent of colonization with its concomitant western culture was distributive in nature. This implied that those who laboured were to reap the fruit of their endeavor thereby ensuring social security while the indolent ones were adjudged the irresponsible members of the family (Egbeke 186). The economy at this period was simple and mostly subsistence in nature. There was virtually no competition, and transactions were carried out through exchange of goods and services. There was no monetary value attached to such goods and services. Communal labour was used to boost agriculture through the age grade system (*Otu*). In other words, there was no monetized economy. Important to know is that the structure of the economy in the pre-colonial period comprised in the main agricultural and non-agricultural productions and distributions of various commodities (Ogunremi 14). As earlier said it consisted of services. It is also noteworthy that although the indigenous technology involved in the production was simple, it was effective, so also were the skill and organization involved in the running of the economic system. These economic systems should not be underrated (28).

Having examined the pre-colonial state of Esan and the operation of its institutional frameworks in the period prior colonial rule, it is pertinent to adduce that the society had its own level of growth and development. The society was evolving in relation to its own immediate environment at its own pace and time, and same time, embracing transformation from within and outside, that is, from her Nigerian and other neighbours. However, the arrival of Christianity, colonialism and its attendant Western education engendered a turning point that brought with it affirmative and debilitating socio-cultural and economic changes. This paper, therefore, is meant to examine Christianity, colonial activities and Western education and to determine the extent or degree these forces impacted on Esan socio-cultural and economic systems.

### **Impact of Westernization on Esan Value System**

Westernization, as noted above, through the influence of colonialism introduced clash of cultures and unprecedented changes in Esan society and these was about largely by the imposition of Western education, Western Christianity, Western economic forces and Western political structures and ideas (Afigbo 129-130). The next phase of discussion will be to examine how modern Esan embrace the effect of westernization on its cherished value systems.

Firstly, one aspect of Esan traditional marriage, which was socially affected and influenced by Westernization, was in the area where Esan marriages were arranged by the families instead of individuals. The approach to marriage was very practical. What was looked for in a woman was a good health and strength, a good disposition (would she fit in well with the husband's family), and would she likely to produce good, healthy children? (Enato 170: 2015) In choosing a husband for their daughter, the family was concerned about the reputation and wealth of the man and of his family. Were they likely to treat her well and provide for her and her children? In most Esan chiefdoms, the search and arrangements of a husband would begin only after a girl had reached puberty and been initiated. However, this social practice was greatly affected as at the time the Christian Missionaries arrived with their own socio-cultural ideas and Western values concerning courtship and marriage. Deduce here, marriage contracts have increasingly become individual affairs and the concern of two persons, rather than the concern of families and communities as in tribal solidarity. The change might be for the better, but this transition is painful especially to the parents and other members of the kinship group who cannot bear to see their son or daughter contract marriage without consulting them or even telling them about it (Mbiti 214: 1969; Udo 86-87).

In addition, marriage and family instability have increased considerably under modern strain, giving rise to a higher rate of divorce and separation than in the traditional life. Polygamy (or polygyny, which is the right term) is dying out though not very fast. But concubinage is rapidly increasing in the cities. One reason for this increase is that often married men have to leave their wives at home in the country and go to work in the towns where they remain for several months or even years without going back to their families. Prostitution became rampant which is to be found in every city and town, this being particularly an economic necessity or convenience for women since it helps them to earn more money, find somewhere to live and meet some of the demands of city life.

All in all, Westernization, with its attendant socio-cultural institutions greatly affected the fabric of Esan traditional marriage systems. It is a total change and one which affects all spheres of life, especially the marriage institution which is the focus of existence and the point where all the members of a given community meet, be it the departed, the living and those yet

to be born (Mbiti 218: 1969). While some of the changes were positive, progressive and transformative, others were destabilizing, debilitating and destructive which gave birth to so many abnormalities, such as divorce, prostitution, adultery, broken homes and individualism in the society. Christianity, through its westernized socio-cultural values introduced inter-tribal marriages in Esan society which today has ushered in positive development in diverse ways. For example, late Stella Abebe, former Nigerian First Lady, who married to former President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba man from Ogun State, hailed from Iruokpen- Ekpoma. While alive she channeled diverse changes in Iruokpen community and Esan society at large in the areas of communication, health care, education and good roads as her position as the First Lady.

Secondly, the family in present Esan experiences great strain in this changing situation. The size of the family is shrinking from the traditional 'extended' family concept to one in which the parents and their children constitute the family in the modern sense of the word (Mbiti 220: 1969). The authority and respect which parents enjoyed under traditional morality and customs are being challenged by the younger generations, and in many homes there is rebellion from children against their parents. According to Mbiti, "the fact of children and young people having to live away from home in order to attend schools or universities tends to weaken family solidarity" (220). The education of children is increasingly being passed on from parents and the community to teachers and schools where it becomes more of book learning as an end in itself than an education which prepares the young for mature life and future careers (220).

Thirdly, the African Christianity which Esan society is a part of was able to Africanize European Christianity through enthusiastic Christian worship. African religious consciousness, unlike the European, is characterized with much emotionalism. Attempts by the Mission Churches to make "frozen people of God" out of the religiously emotional Esan led to the establishment of Esan indigenous churches where Esan elements like drumming, dancing, vision, trance, sporadic interjection and prophecies are imported into Christian worship (Richard, Gray and Godwin ).

One other distinguishing marks of African Christianity which still prevails is the phenomenon of "Warfare" or "Radical prayers" whereby much time is devoted to allegedly combating enemies in "Spiritual battle" (Ayegboyin and Ishola 69-76; Odiagbe, Personal Interview). In Esan society as at the period under study, Esan Christians devote more time to praying all sorts of valedictory prayers than spending quality time praying in the manner advocated in the New Testament standard. This practice has been found to be nothing short of a revival and Christianization of Esan traditional religious ritual of cursing enemies rather than a predilection for the Old Testament.

Also, the practice and celebration of harvest thanksgiving service in the Mission established churches and in African Independent Churches is a good reflection of the influence of African cultural practice of harvest festivals on Christianity. In the matter of public worship, Esan music and traditional chants are sung with Biblical events as lyric, the history of the Church, like that of some African societies, is recited in song by a leading cantor and responded to by the congregation. Esan musical instruments predominate in worship services, and the prominence which the Church attaches to Esan languages is reflected in the instructions for public worship, the first of which states explicitly, "vernacular shall be used in all Church

services wherever possible” (Eromosele, Personal Interview; Odiagbe, Personal Interview and Eboigbe, Personal Interview).

Fourthly, the Christian Missionaries as widely known contributed to the colonization of West Africa and other parts of Nigeria, Esan society inclusive. They inadvertently created conditions which generated and promoted the British Administrative policies in Esan and when the indirect rule was established, traditional political authority declined in the face of changes brought about by Colonial rule. Esans were brought increasingly into day-to-day contact with the white-man, and in the interaction of those two groups it can best be seen that the colonial situation was essentially one of crisis (Immanuel 31) behind the placid exterior of the colonial system lay the seeds of its own destruction, seeds it had itself planted. Colonial rule created a new geo-political framework within which Esans had to orientate their lives. So, with the advent of Christianity, some of the Esan ruling elders such as titled men (*Ekhaemon*) and the elders (*Edion*) who were previously respected and feared were gradually relegated to the background. This was as a result of Christian Missionaries education, foreign or western culture and colonial rule which came along with Christianity. In addition, the colonial rulers emphasized on their new mode of administration in which some of the chiefs were appointed from the clerks, court messengers and policemen. They usually worked under the British District Office (D.O) (Odiagbe, Personal Interview; Samuel, Personal Interview).

For the Colonial Administrators to maintain law and order, they set up new systems of justice over the traditional systems of justice. Various systems or forms of combinations of European-type courts and native or customary courts were established. To this end, the traditional rulers were least consulted to determine the choice of native courts and members. Gradually, the traditional right of the chiefs to rule and administer justice to the people on matters requiring jurisprudence began to be eroded (Odiagbe, Personal Interview; Samuel, Personal Interview).

The means employed by the new set of Colonial administrators for dispensing justice and keeping public peace did not often satisfy the traditional worshippers. This was particularly so when it came to the detention and punishment of witches and wizards. The traditional administration had hitherto performed the task of witch detention by subjecting people accused of possessing the evil mystical powers of witchcraft and wizardry to the process of trial by ordeal before some of the divinities (Enato 12: 2015). Those found with the possession of the evil powers were normally subjected to certain punishment like flogging with plantain leaves, palm frond leaves, etc. At times, some of them were banished from the communities, sympathy was shown to those offences were light. Others were flogged to death since it was the law. Some of these rules were, however, not to be tolerated by the missionaries who with the political and administrative backup of the colonial administrators condemned them as pagan, fetish, barbaric and retrogressive. To the missionaries, and colonial government, every person is innocent until proved guilty and they also were to be given opportunity of taking an appeal from one area of conviction to the other (Aibanegbe, Personal Interview).

The new administrative and commercial centers of the colonial powers presented Esans with the opportunity of escaping from situations that they did not wish to tolerate at home. A slave could liberate himself from his obligations to his master, and even hope to forget his inferior status. The authority of the chief (*Ekhaemons*) and elders (*Edions*) could be avoided. A young man with even a rudimentary education could escape the long hours of dull labour on

the land and hope to obtain a job as a messenger or clerk in a colonial administrative centers (Enato 23: 2013). And, increasingly, as wealth and education became rivals to traditional position as indicators of status, the motives to leave the village for the towns to seek a fortune became stronger. And this exodus from the countryside to the towns was one of the most striking of social changes under colonial rule.

Moreover, the missionaries and colonial administrators loathed the idea of instant death by the unclean hands of the natives. If the people were to be subjected to such capital punishment, it should be within the authority of established government (Samuel, Personal Interview). Thus, such a person who traditionally has been proved guilty could in the eye of the missionaries and colonial officials become innocent due to culture differences. Thus, Christianity and Western civilization gave witches freedom to perpetrate their evil acts and practices. In fact many traditional worshippers believed that the Christian Churches served as a refuge to people that would otherwise have incurred the wrath of the society (Enato 11-13: 2013).

This belief have, however, been proved wrong by the activities of independent churches, examples which was the Iyayi Church Movement, that later evolved in the 1930s (National Archives of Ibadan xvi; Eromosele, Personal Interview). The independent Churches are one which has been founded in Ubiaja and other Esan areas by Esan Christians and primarily for the Esan Christians. In this Church, Christianity has been indigenized (National Archives of Ibadan xvii). Many witches and wizards have been reported to have confessed voluntarily in the newly emergent Esan Independent Churches. If these practices were earlier on tolerated by the missionaries and colonial government, there would have been no need to react to the way they did. One other area that was affected by social change was in the interpretation and enforcement of native laws and customs. In Esan indigenous society, the interpretation and enforcement of justice system was the prerogative of the elders (*Edions*). Even in the present day, these *Edions* still holds formidable power in the legal and administrative affairs of the society as social change could not completely disrupt this system; it only modified it (Aibanegbe, Personal Interview).

And lastly, without question, Christian Missionaries were the important factors in promoting economic change. They introduced and encouraged the use of foreign products – clothing, tea, cutleries, fruit meal etc. which undermined the former self-sufficiency of the subsistence economy. To pay for these goods, Esans would have to produce surpluses of agricultural products to sell or find other ways to get money; for many it meant going to work for wages – what some call ‘proletarianisation ([www.studymode](http://www.studymode)). Esan indigenous society in the pre-colonial times was only known for its subsistence economic system and trade by barter. A dynamic and radical social change, however, swept across the entire society at the arrival of the Christian Missionaries with its attendant economic policies of the colonial government. Very few people realized that the missionaries also had economic motives in their evangelical work in Esan society. By their preaching, they created a peaceful atmosphere that promoted the new trade, the legitimate trade, in cash crops. They encouraged the growth of cash crops like cotton, cocoa, rubber, palm kernel and palm oil, coffee, timber exploration among others required for manufacturing by European industries at the expense of food crops. That was why Fowell Buxton advocated the policy of “The Bible and the Plough” (Crowder 115). The bible symbolized the actual work of preaching the gospel while the plough enabled the cultivation of the fields for the production of cash crops required by European industries (115).



Missionaries adopted a theory that linked Christianity and trade. The person most commonly linked with this theory of 'Commerce and Christianity' was David Livingstone, but he was by no means alone. It was argued that Commerce and Christianity reinforced each other; that participation in one predisposed people to become involved with the other. As a result, they could advocate trade as a means of furthering the spread and success of the gospel and vice versa. This has led some scholars; especially Marxist to argue that this was the crux and purpose of missionary activity, another evidence of how crafty capitalism really is: firstly, either the missionaries were eager, willing and conscious henchmen for the capitalist classes, or secondly, the missionaries were manipulated and used. Religion as 'the opiate of the masses' sucks the masses into allowing themselves to be used and exploited. The missionaries were perhaps more gullible than ordinary as they were manipulated into going abroad to preach the gospel and thus suck the 'native' people into the same net (i.e., a kind of Judas goat) ([www.studymode](http://www.studymode)).

Although the introduction of cash crops into Esan economy boosted the economic state of the people, it however, brought about neglect to the production of food crops. The missionaries with the colonial officials paid less attention to food production in the society, which for ages has been the subsistence economic system adopted by the people. As at the end of the 19th century, Esan society was agriculturally rich and most of the major crops found in the region at the time of the Missionaries arrival could be produced. It was in this vein that Okojie stressed that Ishan is an agricultural country, everybody, man or woman being simple farmers whose main food crops are yams, corn or maize, cocoyam, cassava, and beans of various types, pepper, ground nuts melons, banana with plantains (are subsidiary crops) usually planted by the women in the husband's farm (Okoduwa 88: 1997b ).

With such a range of crops, agriculture emerged as the 'Staff of life' for the pre-colonial Esan people. At this time, the purpose of agricultural work in the indigenous Esan society was to provide food for the family and for the many social feasts which customs demand from all the inhabitants. Added to these were live-stocks in nature of goats, fowls, pigs, dogs, etc. All these were abandoned for the production of cash crop agriculture and exploitation of minerals introduced later by colonial administrators. The introduction of the cash crop economy did not, however, connote that the people abandoned the subsistence farming system, starve or lack food to eat at the time the Europeans arrived with its commercialization policy, rather the commercialization policy introduced in Esan society the money economy with this giving birth to economic advancement.

The new economic changes brought about by the Christian Missionaries and colonial situation precipitated to the mass exodus of Esan people from their various communities to towns and cities. Much of the movement of peoples in Esan was stimulated by considerations that were as much social as economic. The exodus from the Esan communities and chiefdoms to the towns and cities was one of the most striking of social changes under the Christian Missionaries and Colonial rule.

### **Conclusion**

As deduced, the impact of Westernization brought about by the European Christian Missionaries with its concomitant Western education and social values are the bastion of Western civilization and culture in Esan society. This is correct to the extent that Christianity serves as a vehicle of implantation of socio-cultural and religious changes cum cultural imperialism. Christianity has had undulating influence on Esan culture, that is, the positive and

negative effects of the Christian values, especially on the marriage institution, family structure, and indigenous religious, legal and administration and traditional economy. Some of the havoc is of a permanent nature while some are beneficial to the people and entire Esan society.

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