

## **Impact of Colonialism and Western Education on Esan Art and Craft Industry, 1900-1960**

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### ***Abstract***

*Esans from the indigenous society have their distinct culture that is highly evidenced in their ways of life. Their systems as elements of their culture clearly depicts in their socio-economic, educational and indigenous industrial activities that made them self-independence in spite of their cordial relationships with their neighbours. The people had viable economic frameworks that made the society practically functional with arrays of societal peace and industrial harmony. On their arrival, the colonial government easily recognized the economic potential of Esan in areas of art and craft industry, which was why it did not hesitate, particularly for mostly exploitative reasons, to provide the infrastructure to achieve British economic interests. Colonialism came, and accompanied with its attendant Western education and values, engendered socio-industrial change and development, which had great advantage to the people and society. However, in spite of the affirmative contributions colonialism implanted in areas of art and craft industry, Esan people were still exploited and her local industries found itself under the firm control of the European officials whose presence was for their own economic and other benefits. Their activities in the period created industrial exploitation thereby leading to the distortion of the people's once indigenous and economic institutions decades after independence. The research has made it clear that Esan was an economic force behind the development of Western Region in the colonial period.*

*The paper attempts to give a historical narrative of the nature and state of the Esan economic activities people in the period and to address the fact that if Esan people were been allowed to relive their indigenous lifestyles, probably the present state of socio-cultural and economic destabilization and mental confusion would have been averted. The main sources for this study will be primary and secondary sources. The primary sources constitute documents, oral traditions, and field notes. The secondary source is a work of historical reconstruction based on the interpretation of primary sources. Examples of secondary sources include scholarly journal article, encyclopedia, dictionaries, interpretation of a diary, biographies, newspapers, published dissertations etc.*

**Key words:** *Impact, Western education, Colonialism, Education, Art and Craft, Industry*

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## **Introduction**

Esan people are in Edo State of Nigeria. Esan 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. The area is coterminous with the present-day Central Senatorial District of Edo State (Oseghale “Issues in Esan History” 1). 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 (Omokhodion 11). Okoduwa asserts that 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 ((“Archaeology and Esan Origin” 15).

In terms of population, Esan apparently witnessed a steady growth since the colonial period. In 1931, the population of the area was put at one hundred forty-three thousands and sixty nine (143,069) (Unnumen “Pre-colonial Status” 65; Census of Nigeria, 1931). By 1952, the population of the area rose to one hundred and ninety-four thousand, eight hundred and ninety-one (194, 891). Of this latter figure, ninety-two thousand, five hundred and seventy 92, (570) were said to be males and one hundred and two thousand, three hundred and twenty-one (102, 321) were females (Population Census of the Western Region of Nigeria 12).The 1991 Nigerian Population Census put the population of Esan people at three hundred and seventy-two thousand, one hundred and twenty-two (372,122) (Ukhun and Inegbedion 134). By 2006, the population of the area had increased to 591, 334, out of which two hundred and ninety-one thousand, eight hundred and thirty-nine (291, 839) were females (Population Census of Nigeria 5).

In terms of location, Esan is located in the tropical zone of the northern part of the Nigerian forest region. Esan has boundaries on the North-West with Owan and on the Northeast with Etsako, on the South with Orhiomwon and Ika, while on the South and Southeast with Aniocha and Oshimili areas respectively. Akinbode in Okoduwa described Esan to be divided into two broad categories, which are the lowland and the plateau. The lowland is rich in water with several springs and streams (A Geography of Esan” 6). It marks the end of the plateau (7). Okojie describes the

plateau of Esan as waterless in contrast to the lowlands (25). The streams are few and there is insufficient water for the general needs of the people because most villages do not have natural sources of water. The water table appears to be low. Imperative to know is that part of the Esan live on the plateau and part on the lowlands. The chiefdoms of Irrua, Ekpoma, Ubiaja, Ugboha and Uromi were on the plateau while Ewohimi, Ewu and Ohordua were on the lowlands. According to Okojie, the established chiefdoms in early Esan included Irrua, Uromi, Ekpoma, Ubiaja, Ugboha, Ewohimi, Ewu, Uzea, Emu, Ohordua, Ebelle, Amahor, Okalo, Ezen, Udo and Ugbeun (22).

In terms of climate, Esan according to Akinbode in Okoduwa is influenced by two yearly seasonal winds. These are the South-west and the Northeast winds. The former blew from the Atlantic Oceans from April to October, and it is warm and humid (5). The wind prevails over the land and brings in its wake heavy rains causing the rainy or wet season. This was the period of heavy rainfall. It was also a period of much human activity when the planting of various crops by the farmers and their families was done. When rainfall stops by mid-October a period of dry season sets in to bring, the Northeast winds (“A Geography of Esan” 11). This usually lasted from November to March when there is virtually no rain in Esan. The Esan climate at this time is very hot with a temperature of about 23<sup>0</sup> – 25<sup>0</sup> centigrade at mid-day (Akinbode 8; Okoduwa “A Geography of Esan” 12). From December to January, the weather becomes so harsh that Esan people refer to it as the harmattan (Okhuakua).

The paper looks at the economic activities of the Esan people in the colonial period under the aspects of art and craft industry. It clearly depicts that Esan people in the period were not economically stagnant neither were they retrogressive in knowledge and ideas, rather, they were economically dynamic, well known and respected for their various types of art and craft industry during the colonial period. Therefore, when the colonial administrators effectively occupied Esan society in 1901, rather than putting a halt to Esan local art and craft industry, they capitalized on this in a way that helped boost the economy of the people to their own selfish advantage.

### **Esan Society and Economy before 1900**

The Esan prior colonial era was creatively powerful for its strong tradition of woodcarving. Nearly every district in a town had wood carvers who were revered not only for their ability to create images of the gods but also more importantly for their closeness not only to the powerful chiefs but also to the *Enijie* (kings) who were their major patrons. Culture was the life of the people, and religion was the soul of their life. All the daily activities of the people were attached to religious practices, which were totally controlled by the worship of their gods. Hundreds of religious activities were constantly equipped with art images or carved figures and other objects. All over Esan land, the *Ekhaemons* (chiefs’) houses and the *Onojie’s* (kings’) palaces or courts had thousands of religious and secular art images and objects, all of which served the spiritual and material objectives of these powerful elite in the society.

The individuals also commissioned various art images for protective, therapeutic, economic and other social reasons. The wood carvers carved several and different musical instruments, domestic objects and other occupational objects. In addition, many of the carvers were also traditional doctors or priests, and these positions brought considerable patronage to them.

Woodcarvers were generally very wealthy, bringing “this very popular saying that carvers never lack” (Chief Akhimien, Personal Communication). In fact, what made the carvers’ position more financially lucrative than those of many professionals was the belief that any commissioned religious or cultic object are paid in cash; not instalmentally. There was also no room for credit buying. The belief was that any art image not paid for in cash might not be spiritually efficacious or potent.

Many wood carvers did not specialize in carving images and objects but focused on wood ornamentation or design (Odiagbe, Personal Communication). The influence of wood carvers on the Esan society before 1900 was great. It was so great that both the Christian missionaries and the colonial administrators descended heavily on the “carvers who were accused of making idols in Ubiaja, Iruokpen, Ukpenu, Emaro, Uromi, Ewohinmi, Ewatto and Ewossa. The carvers were locked up, though without any physical harm, in the D.O’s Quarters (Ubiaja) for two weeks” (N.A.I. Ishan Division). This was because it was discovered that “many of those gigantic carved human figures, some about seven feet high, holding carved swords and carved human heads with fearful big eyes and soaked with human blood were produced by them” (Odiagbe, Personal Communication). Like many other idols, animal sacrifices were made to purify and energize the powers of these images. This was why the traditional wood carvers in the period were respected and highly revered.

However, there were other forms of art, which, in fact, formed the backbone of Esan local industries. These were blacksmithing, weaving, dyeing, pottery, beading, cap – making and mat weaving. The Esan people were adept blacksmiths who, before colonization, produced a variety of cultic, hunting and domestic objects for the community. Like in other Yoruba ethnic groups, iron ore was available and obtained from the mountains that abound in Ekiti. This was smelted in furnaces before being sold to blacksmiths who used them to produce a variety of implements and instruments. According to Father Clement Barnwarth:

Before our arrival as narrated by some experienced artisans, every town in Esan has its complement of blacksmith shops (workshops) that may be known by their circular tops where the sound of the hammer and anvil may from day to day be heard. The implements used are a rock for anvil, a small oblong piece of iron tapering to a handle for a hammer, one or two pairs of tongs similar to those in common use, a pair of bellows made out of raw hide in a circular shape – with handles of wood inserted so as to be raised perpendicularly – (for firing). Coal made from wood is generally used though shells of the palm nut are used in case of necessity (N.A.I. Ishan Div).

Blacksmithing was an important and indispensable industry before colonization, because without their products, there would be no implements for agriculture and no instruments to fight in wars, among other experiences.

Weaving was another industry of Esan before colonization. With the use of vertical and horizontal looms, Esan women were able to produce enough cloths for people to wear. The process of weaving began by obtaining thread for weaving from cotton wool from which cottonseeds had already been removed. A thin iron rod called obibo that served as a roller removed these seeds. After all the cotton seeds had been removed, the cotton was beaten into a light and thin form, before being spun into threads with a spindle that had a round, heavy object at its bottom end. The

heavy object could be circular in shape. The threads could be dyed in different colours, while others were used in their white colour. There were women whose occupation was to produce threads for weaving. Weaving with vertical looms was the exclusive occupation of the Esan women.

They were very dexterous on their looms and very fast in turning out yards of cloth in one day. This was why weaving of cloths was already a part of Esan culture long before the 19th century (N.A.I. Ishan Div 31). Monsignor Carlo Zappa first Vicar Apostolic for the Niger Delta and Benin Areas in 1899 knew this when he said that the “Esan sense of pride is clearly noticeable in their fashion --- with special clothes for farming and different ones for recreation, paying visits --- and for special ceremonies”.(N.A.I. Ishan Div). He observed further, “apart from children who occasionally troop out, particularly when it rains, you cannot see anybody nude on the street. But in individual homes or indoor one occasionally sees aged women pounding yam bare breasted only” (Irenosen, Personal Communication).

Dyeing was another industry that went had in hand with weaving. In nearly every district were found dyeing cottage industries, which were usually carried out by women only. With indigo leaves, usually obtained from the farm or bought in the market, dye was prepared. It was easy to locate the dye establishments with many big pots and heaps of ashes that had been used during processing (Due to time and space the figure cannot be illustrated). Dyeing produced shades of blue because of the natural indigo colour. Other common colours were purple and green.

Pottery was another popular Esan industry. Unlike other industries, which were commonly found around every town, pottery industries were found only in towns where clay was available. These towns were Ubiaja, Ekpon, Illusi, Ujorgba, Ugbegun, Abudu, among others. Despite the fact that only few Esan towns produced pottery, the few pottery industries were able to even produce surplus pottery wares with locally made instruments and traditional techniques. Again, like many other industries, pottery was an exclusively female occupation (Due to time and space the figure cannot be illustrated).

Another home industry, monopolised by women, was cap making and beading. Many Esan towns, before 1900, were known for the production of elite caps, used mainly by the chiefs, kings and very wealthy people in the society. With strong threads or horsehair, these caps were dexterously sewn with needles produced by blacksmiths. In fact, during the pre-colonial era, the type of cap he wore could easily measure the status of a man. These caps produced by women definitely could not be bought or worn by ordinary people, and the people were aware of this. There were also royal caps, or crowns, which were exclusively for kings (Due to time and space the figure cannot be illustrated). These were expensive and prestigious. The kings’ crowns were usually heavily beaded with various ornamental, pictorial or sculptural designs. This type was known as “*Ukperu Nosi Onojie*” (The hat of the King). However, caps were also produced for the ordinary people in the society.

Mat weaving, like pottery, was an industry that strongly affected the lives of the Esan people generally. In the pre-colonial period, when there were no modern beds, mats were the major materials for sleeping; followed by animal skins. Even when raised mud beds were in use by some wealthy Esan, mats were still needed to spread on them before sleeping. During ceremonies like marriage, masquerade rituals, child naming, death rites and special thanksgiving to the gods for success in some endeavours, mats were usually spread on the ground for children, boys, and girls



to sit on. Grown up people or adults were given wooden or palm frond stools to sit on. On occasions, when these stools or benches were not enough, mats were also used by the adults for sitting. Like pottery, mat weaving was practised in only a few Esan towns. However, the volume of production by these industries was enough to meet the consumption demand of the people. What made the products of these mat industries unique and acceptable were their attractive geometric designs and colours.

### **ART AND CRAFT INDUSTRY, 1900-1960**

The Esan people in the period were culturally and economically productive in art and craft industry and in other aspects of economic activities, making them economically self-sufficient and reliant in meeting the needs of global market. The colonial administration in Esan also utilized the already existing opportunity to help boost the economy of the people. The art types can be grouped into carving, body and wall decorations while the industrial ones, which are also, and in fact, applied arts and craft industry, are pottery, textiles, embroidery, mat making, beading, cane and wood works, basketry, calabash carving and blacksmithing.

#### **Wood Carving**

The wood carving tradition of Esan, which was very dynamic during the pre-colonial period, acquired more professional vigour and economic viability in the colonial period. This was in spite of the initial culturally suppressive attitude of the Christian missionaries to the traditional art culture of Esan (Oseghale “A History and Culture” 18-19). According to William Fagg, “of all the African tribes (ethnic groups) which have produced sculpture, the Esan are by far the most numerous ... they are also the most prolific in art of all the (African) tribes (groups)” (33). In addition, to him, the Esan “have produced more sculptures (carvings)... than any other” African ethnic groups (34). This clearly shows that Esan, being a typically Edo society, was also very fertile in the production of various forms of art in the colonial period.

The aspects or types of carving that made a significant contribution to Esan economy, particularly between 1900 and 1940, included those art works used for religious, social, political, domestic or utilitarian purposes. Being the period that the Esan people were still greatly involved in their traditional indigenous religious practices, various images were purchased for religious or ritual purposes. There were religious images produced for, or bought by, either the communities, heads of family or individuals for their gods, deities, various bush, water, mountain and rock spirits as well as spirits of the dead. According to Odiagbe Samuel, from Irukepken-Ekpoma, these sacred images were neither sold openly in the market nor just produced by artists at will, since they had to be commissioned privately by patrons and at a very high cost (Personal Communication).

The above images were produced mainly for the cult of Ibiekumah Nojie, the deity / goddess of fertility and prosperity; Ekpen the foundational deity protecting the Irukepken people; Ogun the god of iron called Idigun in Ishan language; Osun the goddess of divination, protection; and wealth and Ibhiavhua, the spirit of the dead twins. However, unlike some religious images, the carvings of Ibhiavhua were sold openly, in various Esan markets in their hundreds, since they also performed social functions. According to Odion Enekhwo (head of women), Odedenoghua Airidu in Eguare Ekpoma, also popularly known as *Nene Nonsheimin -Eki* (Mother who sells market goods), a set of two Ibhiavhua carving cost five pence in 1945, the year she had her twin

babies while one cost three pence. This according to her depended on the popularity of the carvers (Personal Communication).

Unlike the woodcarvings produced for secular purposes, the woodcarvings for cultic or religious functions could be very expensive for some reasons. Such art images when in use were not quickly disposed of, because they could serve generations of devotees, therefore becoming once in a lifetime commission. Many propitiatory sacrifices were usually made by the carvers to ward off what the artists regarded as possible attack from the spirits, which the images were to depict. Many of these religious images were produced secretly or in isolation since, according to Odiagbe Samuel, who is the first Irukep to be a born again Christian, “It was a desecration of worship to let the uninitiated eyes see an idol (a carved wood figure) that represented gods or deities” (Personal Communication). In addition, the artists who were far away, from where these figures would be used produced many religious images. All the above reasons made the traditional carvers charge very exorbitantly for their labour. According to Chief Omohan of Eguare-Irrua, also corroborating what Reverend Father John McCarthy said in 1958, in Eguare-Uromi, “artists were a group of the richest people in this Division (Uromi) before the cocoa boom” (Personal Communication). Many of these traditional carvers “built very big houses known as *petesi* (storey building) because of the money made from art” (Chief Omohan, Personal Communication).

According to Chief Omohan, “What made the economic conditions of many artists, and their families and other dependents, very promising was, among other things, the prevailing taboo or “spiritual or ritual code and belief that the prices of some commissioned religious art images. The images must not be negotiated in order not to decrease the spiritual energy or life force which such images possessed” (Personal Communication). Even today, this belief still exists among many traditional priests, chiefs, kings and shrine devotees all over Esan. What this meant was that a person commissioning a piece of art would not and never attempt to negotiate the first price demanded by an artist in his own spiritual or ritual interest. However, to Chief Omohan, the traditional carvers were also aware of the danger of offending the gods, and were always very careful not to cheat their patrons (Personal Communication).

However, between 1920 and 1940, especially, in Esan, serious and punitive Christian evangelization was experienced by the people, particularly from the Baptist and Roman Catholic Churches (RCM). The Esan kingship tradition was so strong that it was very difficult for Christianity to eliminate or even seriously weaken all the cultural practices that required the use of art images and related ritual objects produced by the traditional artists. This cultural resilience ensured the economic sustenance of the carvers and the artisans generally. In the early 1930s, Reverend Father Lodgel of the RCM in Ewu, was one of the two-man delegation to Ubiaja to help assess how the Esan people were responding to Roman Catholic liturgical doctrines. The report of this delegation, while lauding the efforts of the local catechists and the Reverend Fathers in charge, stressed how the situation would have been more promising if “these (traditional religious) adherents who heavily patronize the daily production of idols and other profane images are carefully induced for conversion... and alternative careers found for these native carvers, particularly, those who produce pagan images” (N.A.I., Ishan Division, 12).

It was very clear that the Christian missionaries were fighting a lost cultural/religious battle, considering the economic importance of wood carving tradition. However, as already stated, the pre-colonial Esan had professional wood carvers who depended largely on their art careers.

However, it was not until 1906 when Fr. Clement Barnwarth and Joseph Corbeau (The pioneer Apostles of the Catholic Church in Esan) these two French Fathers were sent to propagate the Catholic faith and introduced Western form of education. At their arrival in Esan, they clearly saw or realized how profitable carving could be in the society (N.A.I. Ishan Div. A letter from Monsignor Carlo Zappa first Vicar Apostolic to Father Clement Barnwarth). What happened was that when Father Clement Barnwarth and his aides came to the palace of the Onojie of Ubiaja, the *Onojie* (King) of Ubiaja, they were amazed and even shocked by the great number of highly aesthetic images, especially carved house posts, doors and free standing carved images that profusely decorated the palace.

However, like a wild fire, the report sent to Britain about the palace art embellishment as well as the wood images seen in the palaces later visited by Father Clement Barnwarth and his group attracted many European anthropologists, ethnographers or scholars to Esan. And by 1910, many areas of Esan, particularly Uromi, Irrua, Ekpoma, Ewohimi, Ewu, Emuhi, Uhiele, Iruokpen, Ewotta and Emaudo had been opened not only to the European administrators and missionaries but also to other tourists looking for what they considered “fine pieces of pagan images. Images they collected freely (or) at prices that were very attractive to many devotees and carvers” (N.A.I., Ishan Division, 14).

Christian evangelization, which condemned the production and use of images, encouraged traditional religious devotees to do away with their age-old images that were regarded as idols by the missionaries. Uromi and Ewu were good examples of their experiences. There in 1911, the Church Missionaries Society (CMS) tried very vigorously to eliminate all the traditional religious practices that accommodated the use of images. The *Enijie* (kings) of the towns, while allowing his people to embrace the new religion, refused to destroy the wood sculptures in their palaces. This was a bold action since Uromi and Ewu had already been seen as the centers of the Church Missionaries Society (CMS) in Ishan Division (N.A.I., Ishan Division, 14). The implication of the above missionary activities or attitude to art images was that they naturally opened the woodcarvings of Esan to the European and American art lovers or collectors. This had the unintended effect of boosting rather than diminish the carving tradition as expected by the Christian missionaries (Newman, 44).

Between 1910 and 1920, the Esan people had overwhelmingly accepted Christianity, though many refused to accept the new faith and rigidly clung to their religious tradition. Again, the vast majority of the Christian converts refused to totally abandon their tradition, and so became worshippers of two religions. By 1925, the Esan traditional wood carvers and other artisans had become the economic beneficiaries of this position. The more traditional art images were condemned, the more these were advertised by default, thus making the images more popularly attractive to foreign “art hunters”. Before 1930, some Esan traditional carvers became internationally recognized for their artistic efforts and were financially well rewarded for these. In addition, the economic benefit of this situation led to the increase in art apprenticeship all over Esan.

In fact, these carvers were not only rich, they were also well known far beyond the old Esan Division. Some of the very popular artists who undoubtedly contributed to Esan economy were Enijie of Ubiaja, Urom, Irrua, Ewu, Ekpoma who all left legacies to be remembered in the area of wood carving. The excerpt of a letter from Father Clement Barnwarth to Monsignor Carlo Zappa,



the first Vicar Apostolic of the Prefecture Apostolic of the Upper Niger with headquarters at Asaba (1886-1918), an Italian missionary affirms the economic importance of the artists/carvers in the Esan economy during the colonial period. It says:

... our experiences in this land (Esan) have shown that the Catholic Church must re-examine its position about its attitude to what we have regarded as pagan idols ...which we have, for long, rebuked the people for. Not all the images produced in Esan have pagan intentions... Aspects of Esan art should be embraced. Father Joseph Corbeau and I have also discovered that the wood carving profession plays a very vital and noticeable role in the economic life of the Esan people, since, it has obviously become very powerfully attractive to foreign collectors and, naturally, the kings and powerful chiefs who see a highly artistically decorative court (palace) as symbol of power and prestige. ... The Superior Father, it has also been discovered in Ubiaja, Uromi, Ekpoma, Irrua. Ewu ad Ewohimi, plus other areas, that major church and Sunday contributors are from the families of wood carvers. The attached with asterics is a proof.... It is our belief that the idea presented here will receive the Superior understands consideration in the interest of our provincial evangelism (N.A.I. Ishan Div. A letter Father Clement Barnwath to Monsignor Carlo Zappa).

The above letter as well as other “consultative actions” confirmed the necessity to accept traditional artistic practices without pagan liturgy. This gave new and greater economic importance to art. Father Clement Barnwath eventually “decided to establish a Centre to study, among other things, the adaptation of African Crafts to Christian uses” (N.A.I. Ishan Division, Administrative Report, 18). Not only that, he “chose a site of this centre” in 1924 and placed this in Ubiaja and Uromi under Father Kelly Greene (N.A.I. Ishan Division, Administrative Report). Father Kelly Greene was able to recruit or employ many carvers for the Ubiaja and Uromi Centres, which was later popularly known as Ishan Artistic School (N.A.I. Ishan Division, Administrative Report). Many of them were popular Esan carvers as well as other Esan neighbours.

Those from Ubiaja, already mentioned above, were Idemudia who was born around 1880; Oamen, the son of Idemudia, and Itua Osemen, the apprentice of Oamen who was born in 1925 and died in December 2009. Two of Oamen’s children expectedly became part of the school. Though Idemudia, because of his age, was not directly employed by the School, he was given heavy contracts to produce Christian works for Ubiaja School (N.A.I. Ishan Division, Annual Report). In addition, four of Oamen’s apprentices, Ehimen, Ighodalo, Eromosele, and Odiagbe also indirectly became part of the Ubiaja School, and they made good money through contracts from Ubiaja School. Other Esan carvers, whose services were employed to boost the political and economic objectives of the Catholic Church in Esan in particular and in other Yoruba area in general, included Idahose, Oselumen and Akhimien (Osadolor, Personal Communication). One of the few carvers employed from outside Esan by the Ubiaja School was Alarape of Oye-Ekiti who worked for a short period for the school (N.A.I., Ekiti Division). According to Alarape, he could not completely abandon his equally lucrative farming for the Ubiaja School. He just wanted to make extra money through the school to invest in his farm (Osaretin, Personal Communication).

However, with the institution of the Ubiaja Artistic School of Art Centre, which was also popularly referred to as Ubiaja Experiment, the economy of Esan took a more productive turn. For

example, many of the earlier rebuked, denounced or rejected traditional artists were immediately recognized, employed and paid for by the same people who had earlier rejected them. The carvers were also allowed to buy wood for the centre in addition to the ones commissioned out to people in different towns (Osarienmen, Personal Communication). These were experts in locating good wood for carving. Many of those given these contracts also employed the paid services of others in villages and towns. At times, these villagers also secured the help of others who were equally paid for carrying wood from the interior or forests to the road. From these forests; many were also paid for carrying wood to various locations where they would be transported finally to Ubiaja and Uromi (Osarodion, Personal Communication).

This was how the Ubiaja Art Centre generated businesses, and therefore money, for the carvers, wood fetchers, escorts who were usually hunters, woodcutters, wood head carriers, local truckers and professional motor drivers who had to transport many heavy woods to Ubiaja and Uromi from very distant places. Of course, many farmers were usually paid heavy compensations for the occasional destruction which woodcutting had caused to their farms (Osemudiamen, Personal Communication). All these revenue sources were in addition to the salaries, and stipends in some cases, which those employed by the Ubiaja Centre were receiving. This is not forgetting, however, that the employed carvers, apart from working for the Catholic Mission, were also allowed to work for and sell works to many kings, chiefs, rich individuals and European art collectors (Osenugbeme, Personal communication). Many Esan traditional religious devotees also privately or secretly commissioned ritual or shrine wood images to some Ubiaja, Uromi, Ewu carvers who were to also keep some of their patrons' secret. Such works were used for various mystic and spiritual purposes. Moreover, this was why, according to Kelly Greene, "there are many thousands of Esan carvings in villages, not usually seen by the causal resident or visitor" (N.A.I. Ishan Division, Administrative Report).

By 1949, the Ubiaja wood carving centre in collaboration with Oye-Ekiti center had acquired fame far beyond its Roman Catholic denomination and had acquired such national image and production that it was almost difficult for the Centre to meet up with various official commissions, not to talk of the private ones (N.A.I., Ekiti Division). 1949 to 1957, thus, marked the beginning of new and greater economic attraction to the Ubiaja, and Uromi centers, and Esan benefitted enormously with her Yoruba counterparts, for example, the Oye-Ekiti from this economic development, particularly through greater flow of cash among various art stakeholders and their relations. According to Kevin Carroll, in 1949, the Bishop of Ondo Province, "Bishop T. Hughes asked us (the Oye centre) to make examples of our work to be sent to Rome for the 1950 Holy Year Exhibition of Mission Art" (N.A.I., Ekiti Division). With the financial support of the Western Catholic Church, the Oye wood images were sent to Rome where, accordingly, they were exhibited. This was after they had been first exhibited locally in Ibadan and Lagos with the assistance of the British Council (N.A.I., Administrative Report, Ondo Prof).

People, particularly those who strongly rejected any form of Esan carved images, were surprised and even disturbed about the way biblical themes had been interpreted with the traditional Yoruba features. For example, Christ, Mary, Joseph and other Biblical figures were represented as people; with traditional Esan dresses and postures. What is more, these images were carved stylistically with body proportions usually given to the carved Esan gods. Imagine Mary carrying little Jesus on her back with girde or Mary with well plaited hair? Nevertheless,

these people had no alternative than to accept their new Christian imageries, which within a short period became part of Roman Catholic liturgy not only in Esan or in Nigeria but also all over the world. According to Father Osuide, through Father McLoughlin of Annunciation School, Irrua, the *Onojie* (king) of Irrua and many of his chiefs saw the exhibition of the images with amazement and high regard. The exhibition was overwhelmingly viewed by “thousands of Christians from other denominations, Muslims and numerous school children; some mainly for curiosity reasons” (Enato “Esan Agriculture and Craftsmanship Systems”, 20- 21). These exhibitions became an economic triumph not only to the Esan carvers, the Roman Catholics, particularly in Uromi and Ubiaja, but also to the Esan people generally.

For example, the exhibitions had so much advertised the products of the Uromi Centre that, various unprecedented commissions began to flow in the centre. Besides, many traditional Esan carvers who had taken carving as occasional occupation came back strongly to be a part of this economy-generating venture. In addition, many parents who had been dissuaded by the Christians missionaries from allowing their children to engage in art and design work began to change their minds, because of the career opportunities this held out.

1951 to 1956 can be considered a golden era of wood carving tradition in Esan, especially for the carvers of the Uromi School. The Uromi School found it difficult to cope with the flood of commissions from Catholic Secondary Schools, Catholic Teachers’ Colleges, tertiary institutions, government agencies, town unions, Catholic churches, foreign collectors, powerful kings and chiefs. For example, works were produced for Annunciation Secondary School, Irrua, among others. These works were usually found in the chapels, libraries and open spaces regarded as holy in these institutions. Nearly all the big Catholic Churches in the major Esan towns patronized the Uromi, Ubiaja and other Esan carvers.

These included St. John’s Church, Iruekpen, Catholic Cathedral, Irrua, St. Mary’s Church, Ekpoma, St. Paul’s Church, Yaba, Lagos and the Major Seminary in Ibadan. In addition, through Father O’Brien and father Kelly Greene, carved doors and other wood works were produced by the Uromi and Ubiaja Art Centers “for the Catholic Chapel at Ibadan University (and) Ibadan Cathedral” (Osadolor, Personal Communication), between 1954 and 1956. Many works produced by Uromi and Ubiaja carvers were also bought by the Catholic Mission and taken to Rome for liturgical purposes. However, the Ubiaja and Uromi informal art schools continued to be inundated with commissions, particularly between 1953 and 1956. Since the Ubiaja Centre was also already noted for its very gigantic carved house posts, which were generally figurative, the government became attracted by their architectural grandeur.

However, by 1960, the wood carvers of not only Ubiaja and Uromi but also of Esan generally had made significant contributions to the economy of Esan, and this as acknowledged by Father Kelly Greene:

Wood carving profession has changed to a large extent over the years from a strict devotion to pagan worship to the service of Christianity, and in the modern courts (palaces), foreign clients and the government agencies, etc., the value of art has appreciated dramatically and has helped create some new Esan modern elite. Timber and rubber is no doubt the main and most valuable economic product of Esan. I am saying that if it is possible for the traditional carvers to equal the number, of, or outnumber present timber and rubber farmers, wood carving would have

definitely been the main economic product of Esan, particularly because of foreign patronage. Succinctly, with no official statistics at our disposal, our direct knowledge or involvement shows clearly that every carver around us makes not less than £2,000 (two thousand pounds) a year... more than a salary of 4 university graduates... remember that timber and rubber are seasonal... everyday is the season of a wood carver in today's Nigeria (N.A.I., Administrative Report).

This is not an overstatement because even as late as the middle 1960s, the salary of a University graduate was not up to £800 (eight hundred pounds) a year. Nevertheless, woodcarving was just one aspect of art and craft industry that played a great role in Esan economy in the period of study.

### **Textile Production**

Textile, particularly weaving, dyeing, was another economic venture of Esan during the colonial period. In spite of European influences, "the Esan division had a great variety of old crafts...still carried on (in the 1950s) by men and women." (Carroll 1). In fact, "a visitor to the division would notice the ...upright looms of the women standing against the walls of their cottages" (1). Without doubt, textile products were more widely patronized by the people than carved images. Some reasons were responsible for this. For example, the cost of producing image, no matter how small, was so productive that only the elite or cult devotees could afford this. However, textile materials were generally cheap and affordable to the rich and the poor. They were used for various daily activities; day and night as well as indoor and outdoor. These materials were indispensable to people's daily living. Because of this heavy patronage, textile products were integral to the economy of the Esan people.

In Esan, like in the Yoruba societies, textile production was an essentially women's profession, while an insignificant number of men indulged in weaving and traditional form of dry cleaning which will be explained later. This is saying that in Esan, textile production was almost entirely women's preoccupation. As already explained, textile was already part of Esan's industry before colonization. However, in the colonial period, some aspects of textile acquired additional techniques, particularly weaving with narrow loom which was, however, not very popular among the people. There were three main specialized areas, of textile production in Esan as in the Yoruba parts of Nigeria during the colonial period; weaving, which was the most popular, tie, dye, and dyeing. There were also two types of weaving: weaving on vertical or up-right broadloom and weaving on a narrow loom (Ighodalo 16).

Weaving takes place when threads are passed across, over and under other threads by hand or hand aided object to produce a fabric. Tie and dye defines the knotting of all areas of white or plain fabric in small units with threads before dyeing in, usually, indigo colour (Jumoke 209). Dyeing is the immersion of fabric in a dye-stuff, substance, or liquid that gives the fabric dark blue or indigo colouration. Broadloom, used only by women, is a wide upright or vertical wooden support placed against a wall with two vertical wooden supports, which allow wide strips of fabric to be woven. Narrow loom, foot powered wooden equipment, used only by men, is used outdoor to weave only narrow strips of fabric by extending the warps or threads several meters away in front of the weaver (Ajidahun 12).

The narrow loom was used to produce stripes of wooden cloth that would be joined together to make a complete cloth. This type of loom is a double handle with about 4 to 6 inches narrow-band and with a horizontal treadle. When asked why this type of weaving was not popular among Esan men, in spite of its highly marketable products, the son of a popular weaver of the 1930s in Uromi, Chief Osadolor Ehime, responded vividly. His father, who learnt the trade in Ilorin, in the present Kwara State, in the 1920s, introduced the weaving technique “to our people when cocoa plantation was just becoming a new lucrative preoccupation, therefore making weaving unattractive to men” (Personal Communication). He said people used to come to his father to commission “Esan indigenous dress (elite traditional cloth) for marriage and various cultural reasons (purposes)” (Chief Osadolor, Personal Communication). His father had many apprentices from within and outside his town, but within a few years after cocoa had appreciated, “these young men abandoned their trade for cocoa farming” (Chief Osadolor, Personal Communication). Other informants from Ekpoma, Ubiaja, Ewu and Irrua also narrated similar stories about the Esan men and low weaving interest in the colonial period (See Newman 61).

However, it is important to know that the rich tradition of textile products, brought about by weaving, made cotton production a very notable part of Esan agriculture. Particularly “between 1910 and 1950 the new colonial educational and administrative experiences made formal uniform, dressing in schools, police force, medical centers and sections of the P.W.D. (Public Works Department) very compulsory” (Odiagbe, Personal Communication; Idialu, Personal Communication; Omole, Personal Communication). Aibanegbe and Odiagbe assert that, “Because of the people’s inability to afford buying imported clothes which were very expensive, cotton planting which thrived very well in Esan was encouraged by the DOs to provide the essential raw materials for the women weavers to meet the great demand for local woven clothes. This is particularly since the government also approved the use of local designs” (Personal Communications). Cotton was not difficult to harvest, and it was not heavy to carry; it was very lucrative for its economic importance. However, it must be harvested in time to avoid cotton destruction by fierce winds “which in those days could blow off a whole cotton plantation within a short time” (Odiagbe, Personal Communication; Chief Ogidigbe; Personal Communication). The abundant availability of sources of local materials like cotton, raffia plants, vegetable ropes, and ashes encouraged more women to engage in weaving in Esan in the colonial period. In addition, this was why Sebastine Lukas, a British missionary in the Salvation Army Church, Irukep in 1936 asserts that, “the Church employed women who were skilled in weaving to produce ornamental clothes for Church fabrics on their upright broad looms, using African cum Esan techniques and patterns” (Odiagbe “The Salvation Army Corp Members” 37).

Weaving, according to Aibanegbe was the most popular aspect of traditional arts and industry in the colonial period (Personal Communication). For this reason in all Esan towns and villages, nearly every household had a (female) weaver whose duty was to “produce the local woven clothes called *pokiti* (clothes made from local materials) for the general domestic, social and educational needs” (Imafidon, Personal Communication; Imasuen, Personal Communication). According to Justice Eromosele of Ugboha, though the prices of woven fabrics were generally affordable or low, some reasons could make prices of these fabrics very high (Imafidon, Personal Communication; Imasuen, Personal Communication). For example, the commissions received for urgent delivery, particularly to meet the resumption dates for school children used to cost more



than those commissions without deadline. In addition, requests from the Christian missions and government agencies were also charged more than those from the local people, neighbours and other town mates, because it was the belief that these institutions had the financial resources to buy fabrics at the given price.

Woven clothes were not only used as uniforms for primary school pupils and some government workers, they were also made for farmers, construction workers, hunters, among others. In fact, weaving was one of the most popular professions that greatly improved many people's economic condition in the colonial period, because like food, it was indispensable to daily needs. What further accelerated the demand for woven products were the introduction of Western education, which made the demand for this craft very high; particularly between 1910 and 1950. The Esan weavers, who also had their own guild or associations, contributed immensely to the economic development of Esan, particularly before the middle 1950s. This was when the colonial influences had not seriously saturated the people's ways of life (Ehichioya 22-25).

The cost of producing woven cloths differed from one town to another and from one weaver to another. During this research, it was difficult to know the exact cost of a *pokiti* uniform for one pupil, but it was easy to know the cost of a woven (*pokiti*) cover cloth. For example in 1934, the cost of a woven cover cloth of 4 to six yards ranged from two shillings, six pence (2/6<sup>a</sup>), to three shillings, as reflected in the 1934 document of Justice Eromosele 1934 (Osenugbeme, Personal Communication). As should be expected, all woven cloths with particularly decorative or intricate designs were more expensive than those without designs. However, in this category, Imafidon asserts that; "those with just horizontal line decorations were less expensive than those with some geometric and vegetable or organic motifs which were usually or specifically commissioned by the Esan elite like the kings, chiefs, big-time farmers and traders. The above mentioned classes uses these cloths to sew very big, expensive and flamboyant garments called *agbada*, which clearly separated them socially from those of the commoners or even middle class (Personal Communication).

Traditionally, woven garments were, during the colonial period, very popular with, and even indispensable to, all social and cultural activities of the Esan people. They were the status symbols during marriage, funeral and several ceremonial activities of the people. One can now see how weavers contributed in no small measure to the economic life of the Esan people during the colonial period. However, there was another economically generating aspect of woven textiles. This was the art of embroidery.

### **Pottery**

Just like the textile craft already discussed, pottery was a very lucrative profession of, mainly, the Esan women, and it was in the forefront of Esan commerce in the colonial period (Enato 28: 2006). There were potters as well as pot sellers who were not potters but pot marketers, buying products from the potters and taking the pottery products from town to town for sale. Esan, like her Yoruba neighbours was popular for pottery making in the colonial period, and the land was very fertile for clay prospecting. Some of the Esan towns that were very notable for pottery making before Nigeria's independence included Ugboha, Urohi, Ujiogba, Uromi, Ekpoma, Ubiaja, Ekpon, Emu, Ewohimi and Opoji (Aibanegbe 42). The economic significance of pottery in Esan

is easily seen in the variety of pottery wares produced or the variety of functions that pottery performed in the daily life of the people.

The Esan pottery in the colonial period could be classified into various names. In the colonial era, there were water pots for kings, medicinal concoction pot, wedding pot, special medicine pot for a master herbalist, and water pot. *Agbada* was a big bowl-shaped vessel with a very wide mouth. It was used for frying *garri*, *akara*, and some other foodstuffs. *Ikoko* was usually large with or without big mouths. They were used for water storage (Ehichioya 16).

Imperative to note is that during the colonial period, potters and pot sellers used to hire head carriers to carry different types of pottery wares from various pottery centers to market. In Western Nigeria, like in Esan society, every town had its market days, which, usually, would not clash with the market days of other towns. In these markets, different types of pottery wares were sold for various utilitarian and other purposes. The fact that pottery wares were fragile and easily perishable made the trade very lucrative to the potters. It is not surprising therefore, that Gabriel Ojo has featured pottery, as well as other local industries discussed, as forming the backbone of “rural economies” in Yoruba and (Ojo 80-103).

### **Mat Weaving**

Mat weaving was another source of income in Esan during the colonial period. Like the other local industries already discussed, mat making was so integral to the people’s daily needs in Esan that the mat makers “used to hire labour to make them meet the demands of traders or businessmen. And women who used to buy mats in bundles for sales in areas even beyond Esan Division in those days prospered and expanded in their businesses” (Aibanegbe, Personal Communication; Omole, Personal Communication). During the colonial period, the Esan people were well known for their dynamic tradition of mat making and the towns known for this craft were well known even to the primary school pupils in the colonial era. The most famous producers were Ewu, Ewossa, Ewotta, Irrua, Ekpoma, Ubiaj, Emu among others (N.A.I. CSO 43).

Generally, the mats were made from the phrynium, sarcophynium and cyperus articulate plants (Ojo 88). The durability and beauty of the mats depended on the materials used. Depending on function, some types of grass like sedge were also used for mat making in addition to some parts of palm trees. Mats were also graded according to design, material, and function. Esan people also displayed their artisanship and artistry with a high level of decorative patterns, which were meant to attract the elite consumers (Aibanegbe 29). “Interlacing warps and wefts which are dyed in different colours” made these patterns (Ojo 88). The mat weavers were greatly patronized mainly because of the various functions, which mats generally performed in the society, and many people “for export to neighbouring territories” patronized them. (Ojo 88).

In Esan towns and villages, mats served several purposes and this made them indispensable to the people. From the pre-colonial to the colonial periods, mats were used in every home as bedspread. The size of the family determined the number of mats needed, and this was about four or five by a family for sleeping and relaxation. The mats for sitting by a family also could not be less than four. Mats, especially those woven with the pitch material, were also used for drying various agricultural products like cocoa, beans, maize, and melon and for preserving various types of vegetables. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Christian missionaries began their evangelization, “mats were bought in large numbers and used as seats under thatched sheds which in those days

served as churches” (Odiagbe; Personal Communication; Akwete, Personal Communication). The same mats were also used as seats even as late as the 1920s in primary schools all over Esan (Irenosen, Personal Communication).

In Kings’ (*Enijies*’) palaces, specially woven mats were used as a symbol of nobility or for elitist purposes. In the middle 1930s, the palaces of the *Onojie* of Uromi, the *Onojie* of Ekpoma, the *Onojie* of Ubiaja, the *Onojie* of Irrua, among others, had several decorative mats on the walls where palace drums and other musical instruments were kept or stored. And also, in some palace like those of Ugboha, Ewu, Ewohimi, and Emu, special mats were used as “red carpets” for *Enijies* walking from their courtyards to their thrones (Chief Osarierie, Personal Communication). Mats were readily and easily available for sale in the open markets, while many, especially the expensive decorative ones, could also be purchased from the itinerant traders. These itinerant traders went from house to house and from town to town to market and sell the mat products. Mat weaving was a lucrative industry that greatly contributes to the economy of Esan in the colonial period.

### **Basketry**

It is not easy to know how basket making began among the Esan. Basketry, like the other craft preoccupation of the Esan people, was a very common and fascinating industry that serviced nearly all the people’s needs. Basketry, which is the art of weaving un-spurn fibers, usually from palm trees, into baskets by the basket makers, was a male occupation among the Esan, like her Yoruba neighbours (Itolor, Personal Communication). In fact, the young and the old practiced basket making. Children learned it at an early age by either association or family heritage. Basketry was, thus, one of the easiest crafts to learn during the colonial period. In addition, it also required cheap tools like knife and cutlass to produce, and the materials needed were equally easily available. However, a creative physical activity was transferred from one generation to the other. Nevertheless, universally, it is believed that the oldest baskets, through radiocarbon dating, are about 10,000 to 12,000 years old, according to Catherine Erdy (Hellen 42; Jumoke 222). However generally, the art of basketry was learnt in one’s family by association, which was why, unlike other local industries in Esan, there was no guild for basket makers.

Western education, especially between 1930 and 1960, which made the interest in agriculture mandatory, also made the use of basket mandatory or essential. According to Chief Ofeimun of Ewohimi; “after closing from school, about 12: 30 to 1 p.m. children used to go and meet their parents in their farms and returned from the farms, at about 4 p.m. or 5 p.m. to settle down for the production of baskets till 7 p.m.” (Personal Communication). This situation has made it very clear that basket production was a part-time pre-occupation among the young and the old in Esan (Isidahomen, Personal Communication). Prior 1960 and up to the last decade of the 80s, when there were three terms in a calendar year, each primary pupil was made to submit for assessment at least one craft work, which was usually a decorative basket. This practice encouraged craftsmanship and creativity, since each pupil always tried to out-do the other by producing particularly well designed or, at times, coloured baskets which could impress the Handiwork teachers (Enato “Arts and Crafts Production” 22). At the end of every year, before Christmas, these baskets and other items like decorative brooms were sold in the market to generate fund for schools. A lot of pupils helped to improve the financial condition of their parents through basket weaving in the colonial period (Aibanegbe 26).

Basket making was very lucrative before independence, because baskets were used for various purposes. For example, as regards agriculture, baskets were used to carry farm produce like cassava, beans, cocoa, plantain, and maize among others. Baskets were also used to store shrine and medicinal objects in various homes, or on behalf of community or town. They were used to store personal valuables or precious properties like clothes, jewelries and other domestic functions. Those baskets that were aesthetically embellished with decorations, including dyes, were used for some social activities such as carrying gifts during coronation and marriage ceremonies. Such baskets varied in size and structure and were very portable. Some baskets served as handbags, and musical rattles. Baskets were used as dryers, pot or soup support and as protector for kegs of palm wine. They were also used as cages for fowls and as sieves during *garri*, maize, and cassava preparation.

Baskets of particular shape or design were used to trap fish. Generally, baskets were used in the colonial Esan for social, religious, ritual, domestic, and agricultural purposes. All these made basketry a very important source of revenue. It is against this backdrop that, H. Chukwunyerere stresses that, “Baskets serve as a source of revenue. Basketry in any form is the kind of product every family makes use of. Therefore, they are a source of revenue. As patronage increases, so are more hands needed to make the baskets which create employment for people” (42). The economic contribution of basketry to the colonial Esan cannot be undervalued, for this industry helped to improve the economic conditions of the people.

### **Blacksmithing (*Agbede*)**

Prior external influences (Colonialism and Western education), the Esan had been known for the tradition of blacksmithing which made it possible for the people to have basic tools for farming and other activities. Thus, the people were able to produce locally smelted iron as raw material for smithing works (Idailu, Personal Communication). Part of the raw materials used, among others, were palm-kernel shells, charcoal and coconut shells for fuel. Others included “huge blocks of stone used as anvils, smooth-surfaced smaller stones employed as whetstones; bellows constructed with wooden pipes, goat or sheep skin and bamboo sticks, pincers and such other tools made formerly from locally smelted iron” (Ojo 99).

Since farmers and hunters relied heavily on the products of the forge, blacksmiths were well patronized for their product. They produced all the basic and major tools of farming like hoes and cutlasses, all of a variety of designs and sizes. The tools used by the adults were different in size from those used by the young boys. Traps (*akobe*) of different designs and sizes were also produced for farmers for trapping rats, big animals like lion, leopards, deers, antelopes and dragon snakes (Ojo 36). Perhaps the most popular trap was the flat and light trap called *alupe* which nearly every home had in rooms or food stores to trap and kill the rats that used to eat foodstuffs and damage properties.

In the colonial era, Esan society was not left out in the pursuit of iron workings as various communities participated in blacksmithing. In Irukepken community of Esan chieftdom, blacksmithing (*Agbede*) which had been a major occupation of the people in the pre-colonial period witnessed a slight growth before been weighed down under the powerful influence of European imported iron implements. To buttress further, Ogbomoide succinctly opines that:

In Iruokpen community, the arts and crafts manufacturing centers clearly defined their pattern of settlements. For example, Idumegbede was a quarter made up of specialized blacksmiths, who undertook the teaching and manufacturing of necessary farming implement like knives (*Agha/Ukpogha*), cutlass (*Opia*), Axe (*Uhanma*), spears (*Ogan*), native gun (*Ossisi*), sword (*Ada*), and many more (Personal Communication; Enato “Arts and Crafts Production” 23).

A very important product of the Esan blacksmiths was what was called dane-gun. By 1905, many hunters had already been known for the high number of big and dangerous animals they had killed, particularly for commercial purposes. One of these was Odekhian Odianoson, the Fierce, and Fearless Hunter, who, according to the story, never returned home from his last hunting expedition after years of hunting artistry. There was also Orianofoimun (a fellow who is never afraid or scared) of Ihunmudumu who was regarded as having an extraordinary medicinal power (Eboigbe, Personal Communication; Imasuen, Personal Communication). However, apart from the above products of Esan blacksmiths of the colonial period, many other works were produced, particularly for religious and domestic use. Some of these were *eben* rods, iron figurines produced mainly for the *Osun* worship. Various iron anklets and rings were also ritual or sacred objects which were often commissioned from the blacksmiths. Of course, nearly every house had an axe or axes for slashing wood. One can now imagine the number of axes that were used for domestic works in the colonial period (Imasuen, Personal Communication).

The tradition of blacksmithing seemed to witness a change in the late 1930s when a group of blacksmiths from Awka, Eastern Nigeria, came to Esan to professionalize. One of these, Emeka Odinga was based in Iruokpen where he eventually made his permanent home. Emeka who later became known as Awka (many people did not even know his real name) brought innovation and richness to the blacksmith tradition of Iruokpen, the same way his fellow “Awka” changed the face of the profession in other Esan towns (Odiagbe, Personal Communication). According to Chief Akhimien Samuel:

These *Eleria* (name given to anybody from Eastern region) came and began to make heavy-duty guns that could kill 2 or 3 animals at once. They were the first to seriously start producing knife, cutlasses, hoes and others in large quantity for sale. Look at Awka (Emeka), he is small in stature but stronger than many around us. He was the person who first started producing short, rather than the usual long guns here. Not only that, these Awka people (Emeka has his brothers and sons with him) performed their smithing artistry by producing, for the first time, double barrel guns...that could kill a whole district if there is war... (Personal Communication).



With the presence of the Awka blacksmiths in Esan, many Esan people were encouraged to take to this trade, particularly for its economic benefits. Throughout the colonial period, the Esan people relied heavily and mainly on the tools and instruments produced by the blacksmiths for their various trades and activities. Many other minor craft industries helped boost the economy of Esan in the colonial period. Some of these were fiber furnishing, beading, cane works, and body decoration. Each of these had its fruitful economic effect on the Esan society, since the craft industries were also heavily patronized by the people. No doubt, the role of art and craft industries cannot be forgotten in the economy of Esan, particularly from 1900-1960.

In conclusion, the British economic interest in Esan society in the period of study was not a balanced one. The skeletal provisions of both social and physical infrastructure established was to help boost the Esan art and craft industry as well as other sector of the society. Their primary aim was to advance imperialist trade and transfer of economic surplus from the colonies to the metropole.

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