



IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND WESTERN EDUCATION ON ESAN TRADE AND MARKETS, 1900-1960

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Abstract: This paper is to examine the impact of trade and market activities in Colonial Esan society. It depicts how the encouragement of the British government created the economic condition for trade and market interaction. However, before the British government and economic associates got involved in Esan trade and market, it would be suffice to say that the Esan agricultural and industrial systems was already been operated far above the subsistence level as all sections of the economy were already generating surpluses. Already in the period Esan trading and markets was already integral parts of the people's indigenous economy. Though the British Commercial Policy turned Esan into a semi large market for sale of European products, Esan's involvement in commerce was however, limited to export. Internal marketing was not well encouraged, and the internal markets, which emerged, were usually supply and distribution centers of European goods. This why the paper is out to make it clear the economic and commercial policies of the colonial authorities in Esan were not aimed at promoting the well-being of the people. Whatever Esan made were just unavoidable. 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, colonialism, Western Education, Esan Trade and Market

Introduction

Esan people are in Edo State of Nigeria. Esan has a size of about 210km²(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) (Unumen "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). The latter figure of ninety-two thousand, five hundred and seventy 92, (570)

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were said to be males and one hundred. The 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 North-East with Etsako, on the South with Orhiomwon and Ika, while on the South and South-East 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 Ugbegun (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 North-East 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 23⁰ – 25⁰ centigrade at mid-day (Akinbode 8; Okoduwa “A Geography of Esan” 12). From December to January the weather becomes so harsh that it is referred to as the harmattan (*Okhuakua*) by Esan people.

Trade and Markets in Pre-colonial Esan Economy

According to Falola, “One remarkable feature of West African [Esan] agricultural and industrial systems was that they operated far above the subsistence level as all sections of the economy were capable of generating surpluses” (54). These had to be disposed of; and partly explain why trading and markets formed integral parts of the Esan indigenous economy. There were various reasons for the existence of markets in the period of review (Hodder “Some Comments on the Origins” 97-105), as no community in West Africa and Esan in particular that was self-sufficient in its economy (Falola 5). The people in the forest region needed the riverside products such as salt and fish. Even within the same region, locational and geographical differences led to market variations in the goods produced, thus encouraging and promoting trade. Within the same Esan society, be it a town, a village or a clan, division of labour and specialization in economic functions encouraged the need for markets and trading. The farmers, toolmakers and other professionals had to enter symbiotic relationship. The farmers need the tools and toolmakers needed the food. The indispensability of trading and markets encouraged the need to develop the institutions, which could facilitate commerce.



Esan society in the period cannot have a distribution system without efficient currency and transportation. According to Odiagbe, “Truekpen mode of transportation in line with her sisters communities were well developed and met the exigency of the time” (Personal Communication). In Esan the application of barter and the use of money (cowries) for transactions was the most common. The cowry According to Okojie, “Currencies actually facilitated exchange of goods and services thereby making transactions easier... (95-96).

Before 1900, E haand road infrastructures that connected the town people to their various farms that could be between five to twenty kilometers away. The roads which “branched out from each town to many geographical corners of the town were footpaths that were not only very narrow but also very curvy in many places, with side bushes that occasionally made some animals close on, on people” (Oare, Personal Communication). On the roads, agricultural and hunting (Oare, Personal Communication), activities were carried out. In fact, therefore, two types of road existed in each town. These were the farm and hunting roads. The farm roads were very narrow and long while the hunting roads were narrower, rough and short. However, “many of these hunting bush paths later developed into farm roads, particularly because of constant trailing of animals that occasionally escaped from traps or after being shot” (Obhokian, Personal Interview). But, the major Esan roads were those that connected towns to one another. Though the roads were also narrow and very tortuous, they were wider and cleaner than the farm roads. The communities always maintained these roads mainly because they were trade routes to different destinations. The roads met the needs of the people, because they were only for head portage or leg transportation. Through these roads, people carried their agricultural and industrial products to distant markets. Esan, before 1900, had many trade commodities like the industrial and agricultural products,

all of which made Esan, as will be seen later in this study, a commercial centre. There was both domestic and external trade this period. Esan operated a five-day market cycle or periodicity, and various farm products like yam, cocoyam, plantain, pepper, palm oil, among many others, as well as goats and fowls were sold in the markets. Trade was conducted either by barter or with cowries. Values of goods used to change from time to time, and this made the value of cowries change accordingly.

Slave Trade and Wars

Without doubt, slave trade and wars were the greatest humiliating and destructive experiences on the lives and economic activities of the Esan people. Slave had its most tragic effect on Esan from the beginning of the 19th century. However, during this period when hundreds of Esan men and women had been captured and taken as slaves, people were able to fashion their own methods of avoiding being captured, particularly by the Fulanis and some powerful Benin and Yoruba kings who became the agents of the slave dealers. Part of the means of escaping the slave raiders was shifting some settlements temporarily to far away into the interior forest where the raiders could not easily locate. Women, young boys and girls were made to reside in these settlements, while the men, armed with charms and weapons and who could resist capture would come to the town. According to Chief Ogidigbe, “slave raids were not carried out daily and were not focused on a particular area; because the raiders knew that they could be fought back and even captured themselves” (Personal Communication). The slave raiders used to strike unexpectedly at the areas least expected at a particular period. However, Esan was also engaged in local and external wars. Some of these were the Benin war, Ozolla war, and Agbede war. All these wars were fought between 1819 and 1889 (Esene’s Diary). The wars, no doubt, aided slave trade. But in spite of the destructive wars, which also brought the E into contact with other cultures or ethnic groups, the Esan people were able to build a well organized



society and with sound economic, social and political experiences. However, on the eve of colonial rule, slave trade had diminished considerably.

TRADE FROM 1900-1960

In 1851, Lagos was annexed as a British colony, and this made the British officials extend their political interests to the hinterland. The British invasion and occupation of Benin in 1897 also provided reasons for the British to penetrate the Esan territory, according to them, in order to put an end to the wars and skirmishes in that region (Intelligence Reports on Ishan Division of Benin Province xiv). In addition, the British, also in their struggle to stop slave trade, had an uninhibited opportunity to have total control over Benin Kingdom, including Esanland. Thus, by 1900, it was easy for the British to bring to an end the various wars, which did affect the socio-economic lives of the people. The First World War of 1914 to 1918, which was an embarrassment to the British interest in Esanland, particularly, at the time, seriously affected external trade. It did not really affect the domestic or internal trade activities. In fact, very unbelievably, the domestic trade flourished as usual, and helped the Esan to give moral and financial support for the War (Crowder 1-2: 1977).

It is imperative to know that during the First World War, the British successfully brought to end local wars in order to further promote local trade, particularly through local markets that were the backbone of local economy. It was through these markets that many Esan able-bodied men were able to pay the government levies for the war efforts. It is important, therefore to discuss Esan trade during the colonial period.

Market Systems

In colonial Esan, like in other Nigeria's ethnic groups, market was the engine of commerce and the soul of people's economic activities and growth. This role of market has not changed until today. However, in the context of this discussion, market is seen as a specially designated site where selling and buying, or exchange of

goods, take place between traders and consumers (Ogunremi and Faluyi 64). It can also be local where buying and selling regularly take place.

Market Functions

According to Ukwu, the Nigerian markets, Esan markets especially, like other markets in the region, are more than economic gatherings or establishment because they were "associated with several non-economic aspects of Esan culture" ("The Development of Trade" 647-649). That is, a market serves other functions. For example, it was an information center where people, particularly from neighbouring towns, gathered information, consciously or unconsciously, about various social, religious, and political events in Esan.

A market could also be an entertaining arena where local musicians, singers and jesters perform for gifts. It was generally believed that a market could be a therapeutic place for those who needed healing or spiritual ablution. For example, according to Chief Eromosele Moses, women looking for the fruits of the womb could be directed by traditional doctors to sweep any area of the market as part of spiritual cleansing (Personal Communication). The leaves that dropped from any market tree as well as market pebbles or sand were of medicinal significance to the traditional doctors (*Obos*) (Chief Eromosele, Personal Communication). This is Hodder and Ukwu believed that like the Yoruba markets "most Esan markets are associated with some fetish" (52), since spirits were "believed to meet and even to live in trees in or around the market places" (52-53). Sacrifices were also made to "these market spirits for the peace and tranquility of the town" (52).

A market in Esan was used for unusual town meetings that required large or community attendance; particularly meetings on child kidnapping, controversial death or incursion of another town on the community's land. In addition, "offenders were punished or executed" in the market (Aibanegbe, Personal Communication). It was "believed that a madman could be cured if he had not



wandered through the market” (Aibanegbe, Personal Communication). Christians and Muslims also used markets for preaching, while festivals or masquerades activities equally took place in the market areas.

Periodic Markets

All over Esan, in the colonial period, precisely from 1920 to 1932, periodic markets predominated. In fact, it was not until the early 1940s that the only daily market in Esan began. This was the *Onojie* market (Kings Market) (Odiagbe 31: 1964). The Esan, unlike the other language or ethnic groups, operated a 5-5 day market; making about six or seven market days a month. In every town, market days were rigidly fixed. That is, a market day that fell on a particular day, like Tuesday for example could not be changed to any other for any reason. Market periodicity was so structured that markets in the neighbouring areas would not clash with one another (Idialu, Personal Communication).

This was due to what Hodder and Ukwu describes as “a ring system...composed of a complete and integrated sequence of markets taking place over...periods” (66). Each Esan town had its periodic markets on the days that were different from those of other towns to avoid clashes, and in order to allow traders to participate fully in the neighbouring periodic markets. Occasionally, periodic markets or towns that was not close to, therefore distant from, each other. Depending on the commodities that the sellers and the consumers wanted to sell and buy, respectively, where there was this overlap, the alternative was to attend markets that were close to them and where their trade interests could be best satisfied. What the above discussion shows is that, like in some other Nigerian groups, “within a market ring, the markets nearest to each other would not hold on the same or consecutive days” (Njoku 84), so as to facilitate commerce.

Types of Market

In colonial Esan like in the Yorubaland, there were four types of market: open air, premises, shop, and roadside

markets. The open air market also had two types: the major and minor or support market (Obhokhian, Personal Communication). The major markets were usually big in size and found near kings’ palaces. Early in the colonial Esan, many churches and mosques were located near major markets to allow easier propagation of their doctrines. Major markets were those that attracted the neighbouring and distant towns to them because of their rich or greater varieties of consumer goods (Enato 9: 2005). Mainly made up of women, the population of major markets, depending also on the population of the towns, ranged from about two thousand to about ten thousand; and about one-third of each market population coming from other towns. The major markets, also known in many Esan towns as king’s markets, were the ones most attractive to both local and distant trade. They were the main areas for commerce (15). According to Chief Eromosele, “it was in the major market that unlimited varieties of local foodstuffs were sold. These were in addition to all products of local industries” (Personal Communication). Business women and traders, particularly, travelled to various Esan major weekly markets to purchase these products. For example, mat traders travelled to some of the mat weaving centers like Uromi, Ewu and Ugboha, with large quantity of mats which they sold in other Esan markets. Some mat weavers sometimes sold their products in other towns by themselves. Pottery wares which were very common trade commodities in the colonial Esan were sold the same way. Pottery wares produced mainly in Uromi, Ujogba and few other Esan towns, were also sold in Esan markets. These pottery products were brought at the production locations and then carried by head carriers to other locations for sale. Since the pottery products were very indispensable to domestic and other needs trade in them prospered greatly in the colonial Esan, particularly when foreign and competing products, like aluminum pots, plates, bowls and buckets were not yet common (Festus, Personal Communication ; Felix, Personal Communication).



Also, woven textiles, which were very easy to carry and transport which were commonly produced in every Esan town, were very important articles of internal trade in the colonial Esan. These were cloths produced with both narrow and broad looms. Those produced with narrow looms were usually sold by men, while those woven on the broad looms were sold by women. These woven textiles were carried on market days to various Esan towns for sale. Apart from major markets, there were also minor or support markets. Unlike the major markets, minor markets could be sited at any area but, usually on streets within a town. Another type of market was the premises market, a very popular form of market in colonial Esan. This type, found in some house premises on major streets, was in use from the evening till night, particularly by women who were occupied with other businesses from morning till noon or evening (Aibanegbe, Personal Communication). The items sold in the premises market were common food items like salty, matches, palm oil, pepper, dry fish or crayfish as well as soap and other domestic items. Another type of market emerged in the colonial period, namely the “shop market” where several goods, including stationaries, were sold. This innovation began around the 1920 when several imported European goods, and when educational materials, were becoming part of the people’s essential needs. With this type of shop market, particularly in big towns, many landlords converted some rooms in their buildings into shops, particularly for rent or commercial reasons (Odiannosen, Personal Communication).

However, the least popular type of market in colonial Esan was the roadside market which usually took place on the roads, also farm roads that linked one town to the other. On these roads, goods could be spread on the ground for sale. They could also be bought directly on the roads from the sellers who were yet to get to their designated market compartments. Such buyers used to resell in the main markets the products bought this way; since the products were generally cheaper in price when bought on the road.

However, in colonial Esan, a town could have up to ten markets, both major and minor (Jesunogie 26). The more strategically located a town was, the more commercially viable it was, and therefore, the more markets it was likely to have. Such towns included Ubiaja, Ekpoma, Uromi and Irrua. Each of these towns, including Opoji, Ewu, and Ewohimi, had not less than three neighbouring towns bordering it. Towards the end of colonization, and with increase in population, many weekly markets became daily, especially in the urban towns (Jesunogie 28).

Market Organization

The colonial Esan markets, as regards physical layout, were demarcated and allocated according to commercial commodities. Commodities had separate locations which allowed easy location by the consumers. These commodities could be sold on bare ground without shade, but traditionally, market goods were sold under shades of trees, thatched roofs, tents or stalls supported with stakes, bamboo trees or other wooden materials. Each stall or allotted space for a particular product was known as *Isito*. There were, therefore, different *Isito* for cassava, kolanut, palm oil, yam, vegetables, meat, goat, fowls, cloths and spices, for instance. In the early colonial period, the Esan markets had no tradition of modern stall system “apart from some thatched and easily collapsible or fragile sheds” (N.A.I. Esan Division, Administrative Report 7).

According to Odiagbe, the modern stall system was introduced to Esan in 1940, and in 1941, it had spread to other towns like Ewatto, Ekpon, Ujogba, Ewossa, Ebelle, Emu among others (1964: 17). The Esan D.O conceived the idea of building modern stalls in 1931, but after a prolonged debate, the idea was dropped for lack of fund. For this reason, stalls were not built in most Esan towns by the government until the late 1940s. This was when it was agreed, at a meeting chaired by the D.O, M. F. Smithson, in Uromi in 1947 that stalls should be built, particularly for economic reasons. It was agreed that if the suggested sum of £35,000 (#55,000) is for the erection of market-stalls,



then as far as possible this should be a revenue earning project, reasonable rent being charged for each stall (N.A.I. Esan Division, Administrative Report, 12).

From 1948, therefore, because government realized that a lot of money could be generated from all rentage, many stalls were built by government in many towns, particularly those with large population (Jesunogie 32). Though not all Esan towns enjoyed this modern market system, the stalls suddenly became a productive and well cherished market culture for domestic trade. For example, goods, particularly perishable ones, that were earlier spread on the ground were more appropriately shaded by or accommodated in stalls, thereby making the goods retain their freshness for a longer period. And traders who used to vacate the market early because of the blazing sun during the dry season and the soaking rain during the rains could stay longer in the market to sell their goods (Enato 31: 2013; Badejo, Personal Communication). This was very promising, because those who would not have been able to go to market, for one reason or the other to purchase their needs, could easily take advantage of the longer time made possible by the stall system. But, perhaps, more importantly, the stall system saved many Esan traders the burden of carrying their goods home at the close of each market, or, in the case of daily market. Such goods were left in the stalls guarded by market security guards or night watchmen. Since markets were predominantly populated by women, the leadership of every market was under a woman, probably the wife of head of a community (Chief Osariere, Personal Communication; Chief Odionwele, Personal Communication).

However, having examined the Esan markets in the colonial period, it is pertinent to discuss trade in Esan during the period. There were two types of trade during the colonial period: the domestic or internal and the external.

Domestic Trade

Domestic, also internal or local trade should be understood as trade within Esan and between Esan and its immediate

neighbours as well as other groups in Nigeria. Five types of traders were responsible for the domestic trade of Esan from 1900-1960 and each category contributed to the economic activities of this period. These were the petty or small-scale traders, market traders, shop keepers, off-market traders, and long distance traders.

Petty Traders

Petty traders carried out their businesses at home, usually in the premises of their houses where passers-by could easily notice their trade products. Goods sold by these traders needed no advertisement as such, because some people in the neighbourhood were already aware of them. There was no time restriction for sale, and even children could be sent, late at night, to purchase needed items from these traders (Enato 7: 2013). Petty trading needed very little capital to operate. Some kiosks could be constructed for the goods while many preferred displaying their products inside metal or basket trays on elevated objects like tables or unused kerosene tins. The common items sold by the petty traders were dry fish or meat, powder, needle and thread, mirror, comb, pencil, salt, sugar, pepper, palm oil and chewing stick. Others included melon, sweets, matches, sponge, soap and onion as well as body lotion (Ighodalo 6). Occasionally, petty traders made their products mobile by telling their children to hawk them at night on the nearby streets. Such advertised products were according to Jumoke “mainly kerosene and matches that were usually loudly advertised in beautiful, tonal sing-song version” (240-241). It is important to note that petty traders were mainly women.

Market Traders

Market traders were those who regularly brought their consumer goods for sale in the market. They had their permanent sheds, which were clearly compartmentalized to show individual allotted spaces and separate locations for different market commodities (Ighodalo 19). Market traders, particularly women, who also formed about two-third of a market population, were mostly housewives who



usually brought either product from their husbands' farms, or those bought by them, to the market for sale (Enato 4: 2013). Unlike the petty traders, market traders had more capital to engage in their trade businesses. Though the market traders were generally retailers, many were wholesalers or both (5). The Nigerian market women, according to Johnson Wald, the DO in Ekiti Division, were great psychologists who knew how to attract or lure customers to themselves (N.A.I. Ekiti Division 15). Johnson further said that even a well-known nagging woman changes her nature when it comes to market trade. With utmost facial expressiveness, she very politely attracts a customer with sharp and polite statement, with a smile... "ekaa bo o, ejoo, ebawa wobi" (welcome, please kindly take a look at my shed or products). Customers generally became victims... (N.A.I. Ekiti Division 15).

By the late 1930s, more men had become market traders, and many of these came from neighbouring towns to sell items like cutlasses, axes, guns, and hunting traps and carved or decorated calabashes (N.A.I. Ekiti Division 16). From distant areas were also Hausa and Fulani men who began to sell sugar cane, beads, Arabian perfumes, leather bags, goats, cattle, and various medicinal concoctions. In the late 1940s, the number of Igbo market traders increased and with bicycles, they sold their products in various weekly markets in Esan (Chief Ogidi, Personal Communication). By the early 1950s, more men had become market traders, though the population of market women also began to increase. Many of these market men came from distant areas like Benin, Ozalla, Auch, Uromi, Irrua, Ewu, Ora Ehor, and Ifon (Alhaji Kazeem, Personal Communication). They traded in woven cloths, embroidered caps, velvet cloths, salt and various craft works. However, there seemed to be no limit to the number of goods sold by market traders in colonial Esan. The goods for sale included a variety of cooked foods by the indigenous traders who also traded in almost all available farms, local and foreign industrial products (Ighodalo 21).

Traditionally and customarily, in the late 1930s, goods meant for sale were carried by family members from home or farm to the central or major markets on their heads. But with the introduction of motor and other forms of transportation systems in the 1940s, market traders had a faster and easier mode of transporting their goods. Very dominant in the trade were farm products as well as utilitarian domestic goods. Most notable among these were rice, vegetables, yam (*Dioscorea cayenensis*), kolanut, palm oil, cassava (*Manihot Utilissima*), groundnuts (*Arachis hypogea*), Okra (*Hibiscus esculentus*), maize (*Zea mays*) and melon (*cucumis melo*). Others were plantain (*Musearadiscaca*), banana (*Musa sapientum*), paw-paw (*Carica papaya*), tomato (*Lycopersicum esculentum*) and pineapple (*Ananas sativus*), among others (Jumoke 242). Other trade products were cloths as well as various textile materials, art and craft works, educational materials, farm tools, hunting tools, domestic utilitarian objects, decorative objects, assorted herbs, baskets, mats, pottery ware, calabashes, and gourds. These were in addition to numerous imported products which were sold in the market, particularly by the Igbo traders in the 1950s (Odiagbe, Personal Communication).

Shop Keepers

Unlike shop market, which began in Western Nigeria and her Edo neighbours in the 1920s, shop keeping became part of Esan domestic trade in the 1940s, particularly with the influence of big time shop keepers like the U.A.C. and John Holt companies. Shop market was different from shop keeping in that while shop market, like a stall, contained goods, which were ordinarily found in the open market and in small quantity, shop keeping had a great quantity of goods in stock (Chief Eromosele, Personal Communication). Unlike shop market traders, shop keepers needed a large capital which made them wholesale buyers. The shop keepers were usually middlemen who were also credits worthy. Many of these shop keepers, particularly in Ubiaja, Uromi, Ekpoma, Irrua, Opoji, Ewu,



Ewohimi, Iruekpen, Igueben, and Emu for example, acquired their stock of goods especially from the U.A.C. and John Holt.

The goods were mainly imported materials like cloths, building, cooking, educational, and farming materials and other manufactured goods. It must be stated that some shop markets transformed into shop keeping in the 1940s, when there was enough capital for the owners of the shop market to make this possible. By the 1950s, shop keeping had become a very popular part of Esan domestic trade (Enato 9-12: 2013). Rather than stocking and selling mainly industrial products, shop keeping extended its acquisition to cover provisions and foodstuffs like rice, beans, flour, which were being sold in bags. There were also provisional shops. Various shops also opened for cash crops like cocoa and palm kernels. The shopkeepers usually sold their goods to small scale traders, retailers and other consumers.

Long Distance Trade

Long distance trade (LDT) was the transaction of trade businesses far beyond the trader's local environment. Such trade took the trader several kilometers outside his home base (Njoku 84-87). It was, therefore, a commercial venture that made the distance, or itinerant, trader transact trade business in "diverse communities and territories with varying cultures and political systems" (85). LDT can also be seen as trade, which required long distances between towns (Hodder and Ukwu 27). According to O. Njoku, LDT has its unique characteristics. For example, LDT has to contend with problems of "transportation, security, living accommodation and storage facilities; it is a male dominated trade, unlike the local trade that is dominated by women; LDT is for a full-time professional trader and very essentially, it requires a lot of capital to embark on" (85).

In the 1930s, LDT was already a prominent aspect of Esan trade. Particularly with the emergence of bicycles, trade in woven cloths, particularly those woven on narrow loom, became more popular and lucrative, and trade in them

boomed between Esan, Oyo, Ekiti and Benin People. With bicycles, many male traders were also able to transport their materials, particularly "between 1932 and 1940, to other very far away communities in Benin and Akure for sale" (Isidahomen, Personal Communication; Eromosele 33-38). Because of the mobility the bicycles provided, these long distance cloth sellers started the tradition of selling on credit; since they had the easy means of going back to their customers to collect their money (Omole, Personal Communication).

There were other items, which were also indispensable to, and in fact an integral part of LDT in the colonial Esan in the 1950s that changed the entirety of the economy. These were items that were a must for sale and buying. For example, Esan rich traders usually bought salt. Other Esan products that attracted LDT was the traditional soap called *Ebhakho Esan* which was always produced by women. Many Esan towns were known for the production of this traditional soap, and each town could have not less than four or five producers. Important to know is that these few soap makers could produce enough soap for the needs of the neighbouring towns. This is to say that the few but highly professional Esan and Yoruba soap makers were able to mass produce sufficient soap to meet the needs of Esan and the neighbouring as well as distant peoples (Jumoke 249; Ighodalo 24). The soap was used for purposes other than bathing and laundry. It was used for spiritual or herbological purposes, which was why it was always bought in large quantities by the traditional doctors or herbalists, particularly Ekpoma, Ewu, Ewohimi and Ekpon. For this reason, both male and female Esan were transporting the soap to the above towns for sale (Odiagbe, Personal Communication). According to Aibanegbe Itolor (a soap maker) of Iruekpen, customers used to come periodically from Benin, Owo and Ifon (in the present Ondo State) and Asaba, Illah, Warri, Ughelli (in the present day Delta State) to collect large quantities of her soap (Personal Communication).



Perhaps plantain was the most popular agricultural product sought after by the long distance traders, and it appeared that the lorry transport favoured plantain trade more in colonial Esan or in the 1950s (Obhokhian, Personal Communication). This was because numerous plantain traders who were earlier employing the services of head carriers for long distance trade began to hire these vehicles, though by booking well in advance. Plantain traders who could not negotiate with farmers on farm locations would go from one market to the other within the week and buy plantain in heaps. The piles of plantain would be loaded in a lorry for transportation to, particularly Benin, Lagos, Ibadan, Akure, Onitsha, Asaba and other big cities in the old Western Region. Some of the Lorries usually used for plantain transportation carried inscriptions like “God dey”, “*Osenobulua ole yanme*”, “*Obilu Jesu*”, “No King as God” among others. These Lorries were popularly known and identified by the inscriptions written very boldly on them, usually with very attractive yellow, white, and red colours (Odiagbe, Personal Communication). The trade in plantain boomed because plantain was heavily bought in the cities by women who fried and roasted the ripe ones for sale on road sides. The fried ones were known as *dodo* while the roasted ones were called *boli*, same in Yoruba language. Various professionals and government workers saw these as cheap and quicker substitute for lunch.

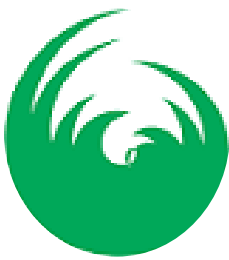
Kolanut was another important commodity for LDT in Esan as in the rest of the Western Region in the colonial period. Between 1920 and 1940 particularly Esan Division was filled with countless Hausa traders hungrily looking for kolanuts to buy. The researcher whose grand-father was a big-time kolanut farmer narrated how these Hausas usually had what can be called Area Mallams or Hausa Heads, whose house were made but not always the “depots” for these kolanuts that awaited evacuation to other centers. From these centers they were carried by head to where they would be transported to the North for sale. According to Esene Enato, the kolanuts bought in Esan

were packed either in baskets or bags and taken to Osogbo and transported to Ibadan from where they were taken to the North by train. However, by 1950s kolanut were being transported to Osogbo, Ibadan or Lagos by Lorries (Eromosele 51-53). At the same period, the kolanuts bought by the Hausa traders in Ubiaja, Ekpoma, Uromi, Irrua and other towns in the same geographical locations were transported to Lokoja by road through Kabba. From Lokoja the kolanuts were transported to Baro where they were transported by train to various locations in the North (Esene’s Personal Diary 10; Eromosele 54).

Funding

In the colonial Esan, traders were able to raise the capital to finance their various trade activities through many sources. The amount needed for business transactions also depended on the nature and type of trade the traders engaged in. Some men depended entirely on their farm products to finance other businesses without borrowing money from anybody (Chief Eromosele, Personal Communication; Aibanegbe, Personal Communication; Badejo, Personal Communication). These were usually big time farmers with many aids like their wives, children and relations working with them. By the 1930s, many of these farmers had had diversified businesses that elevated them to the position of financiers who were able to lend to young men, “particularly newly wedded graduated trade apprentices who needed money to begin own businesses” (Esene’s Personal Diary 21).

Many Esan women were also able to raise capitals for their trade through gains from the sales of their husbands’ farm products particularly in the market. It must be understood that these women who were naturally gifted in the art of commerce were not cheating their husbands. Rather they usually sold their market products more than the price dictated by their husbands, giving them the opportunity to make their own gains. According to Aibanegbe, many Irukepken and Esan women were able to build their own business ventures (Personal Communication). Another



medium of sourcing money for trading was through a professional money collector known as *orianokokigho*. *Orianokokigho* was somebody, man or woman who was already known in the community for very sound moral quality; loyal, trustworthy, honest, reliable and not greedy (Esene's Personal Diary 23). *Orianokokigho* was known for his or her punctuality and the ability to meet all appointments without any disappointment. People made daily contributions to *orianokokigho* (daily collector) for at least one month before any contributor could ask for his/her money. There was no fixed amount for this daily contribution but, "usually it was not less than one penny in the 1920s" (Esene's Personal Diary 27). The amount usually collected generally from contributors ranged from 1 penny to 3 pence in the 1920s. And by the 1930s and 1940s, according to Madam Blacky Ehizoya, a retired nurse whose mother was a professional money collector, contributions ranged from 3 pence to one shilling (Personal Communication). Throughout the colonial period, this money saving tradition was very popular and it helped a lot of people in their economic ventures.

In the colonial period, there was also the tradition of money lending from the professional money lenders. Though many Esan traders patronized this system to achieve their economic objectives, it was the least popular and most feared of all other means of funding commercial activities. There were some reasons for this. The interest demanded by moneylenders could be excessively high. A moneylender could be very uncompromising and uncooperative if there was a failed agreement (Eboigbe, Personal Communication). Borrowers could suffer materially and emotionally if they failed to pay the money lenders at the fixed time. Many borrowers, therefore debtors, were brought to the kings, or sued to court for failure to pay back debts (Odiagbe, Personal Communication). In spite of these negative effects of money lending, the system thrived in the colonial Esan and Yorubaland because it was patronized more especially by

many Long Distance Traders who "desperately needed additional fund to meet their needs" (Jumoke 263).

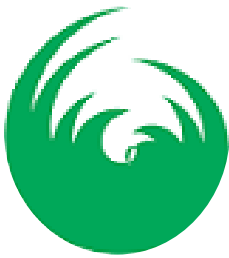
External Trade

In the colonial period, Esan contributed in no small measure to Nigeria's external trade through cash crops and timber. External trade as should be understood in this study connotes any trade transaction between the Nigerian and foreign traders; between the Esan people and those outside the Nigerian shores like the Europeans and the Americans. In fact, according to O. Njoku it is a trade that "flowed from Nigeria to the wider world and *vice versa*" (108). However, before examining the Esan external trade commodities, it is important to briefly discuss the imperialist nature of external trade in colonial Esan.

External Trade and European Imperialism

W. I. Ofonagoro's book, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria, 1881 to 1929*, has clearly exposed British hypocrisy about her infrastructural development in Southern Nigeria. It has sufficiently explained how the colonial occupation or administration, economic reorganization, demonetization of traditional currencies and prosecution of various infrastructural projects, among others, were to serve the exploitative interest of the colonial, and therefore the British government. The Esan colonial economy was an extension of this colonial imperialist exploitation (397-407).

Imperialism, according to Ofonagoro, and in the context of this study, is the colonial or British cultural and economic invasion of people's territory thereby exercising total economic control over the territory and the people in a way that makes the people play secondary and subservient role in economic and socio-political matters (400-101). In Esan, like in other areas of Nigeria or Africa, this imperialist exploitation, according to O. Njoku, brought "inequality of exchange between the imperial power Britain and her Nigerian colony", including Esan (Falola 124). Note that the colonial intention was exposed very early by Lord Lugard who according to Njoku,



emphatically stated that the primary motive of Britain in Africa was purely economic; that is, looking for territories where food and raw materials for industries could be made available for Europe (124). Ade Alade in “The Economic Basis of Imperialism” has equally unmasked Britain’s economic objective in Africa, also through Lord Lugard’s statement that the expansionist policy of Britain was the surest way of fostering the growth of British trade (124-127).

As regard external trade, all the above scholars, among others, have revealed how the colonial administration totally dominated or controlled all trade activities, giving the Nigerian producers no alternative than to be subservient to the British economic dictation. Not only that, according to O. Njoku in Jumoke, external trade seriously brought unequal exchange between the Nigerian producers and the European traders (266). For example, among other things, Esan traders and farmers were sidelined by foreign exporters who made sure that the economic intricacies of trade were not made open to local traders. While the expatriate traders had more than enough capital to operate big businesses, the Esan traders, like other local traders in Nigeria, could only operate small-scale businesses because of insufficient capital (267).

In fact, while in Britain there was more than enough capital for industrialization or development, there was no capital investment in Esan. This exploitative action of Britain is what O. Njoku in Jumoke has described as introduction of “industrial capitalism” instead of “mercantile capitalism” (267). Labour was very cheap and the salary or wages paid for this labour was scandalously low; thereby allowing the colonial government and its capitalist agents to build up their capital for the development of Britain. That is, there was too much profit, part of which the imperialist administration could not even use “to at least lay the foundation for the industrial development of Esan Division” (12: 2013).

In addition, in exchange for the enormity of exports to Britain, various manufactured products like building material, farm tools, gunpowder, guns, textiles, hot drinks and salt were imported to Esan like in the rest of the Western Region of the country. The implication of this unequal trade exchange was that the heavy importation of European goods not only made Esan a consumerist society but also systematically discouraged and eventually killed the industrial spirit of the people. That is, various local industries that were thriving before colonization became inactive instead of being developed by the colonial administration. As regards external trade in colonial Esan, it was the European affair all the way, particularly when the imperialist administration had the total power to fix prices of commodities and plan the economic strategies that eventually disadvantaged the Esan people. However, what were these Esan trade commodities that served as raw materials for British industries? An examination of these is necessary.

Trade Commodities

The colonial Esan was very rich in export products that, as above discussed, gave the colonial government the exclusive dominance over or the monopoly of external trade. These export products were rubber, cocoa, palm oil, palm kernel, timber, cotton, tobacco and kolanuts. As can be seen in an earlier discussion, rubber was, by the early 1940s a very lucrative part of Esan agriculture. According to Richard Bullues, whose grandfather adopted his surname from a John Holt’s rubber merchant in Benin in the 1920s, the Ishan Division was probably first to what one could call the Benin Province or later Midwestern Nigeria in the production of rubber (Jumoke 268). Cocoa, one of the most valuable and the main cash crop of Esan was also the main export and economy generating crop of the people in the colonial period. Palm oil was another external trade commodity of Esan. From 1900 to 1930, trade in palm oil was mostly local since palm oil was mostly used for local consumption. But from the 1930s the



rush to buy it for export made the Esan people focus more attention on this commodity. Palm oil production was not restricted to particular towns, nearly all the colonial Esan towns' specialized in its production. Palm oil production had no particular season, because it was produced throughout the year, depending on when palm fruit matured (Enato 20-21: 2013).

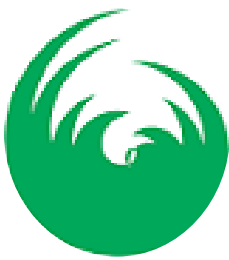
As discussed under agriculture, palm kernel production in Esan was already a very popular and important agricultural preoccupation before colonization. This was so because a large population of the people depended on it for various domestic, cosmetic, and therapeutic reasons as a result of being exposed by Western education (Aibanegbe, "Esan Economic and Social Institutions). Colonialism, therefore, came only to aid its popularity and incited more production of this crop with its aggressive demand as an exportable cash crop. In Jumoke's work referring to Madam Tinuola Ojo of Iyin-Ekiti whose mother was popularly known as Iya Elekuro (Kernel seller) in the 1930s; "People could not just understand why some "strangers" would be going from house to house, begging people for kernels to buy no matter how small these were. They said the white people needed these for many things and would pay four (4) pence per cup of kernels" (269).

Between 1900 and 1920, kernels were used mainly for domestic purposes. This was because the crop had not really attracted external buyers. Unlike palm oil which was very complex and laborious to produce, kernels were cheaper to produce though with some physical effort. Besides, as already explained under agriculture, it was an agricultural activity that involved or were opened to both young and the old. What the production needed were patience, painstaking search for kernel nuts in the bush underneath wild palm trees; in the case where kernel nuts were not obtained from palm oil local factories. The production also needed painstaking cracking of the nuts one by one to extract the kernels. These were the production activities which nearly all the Esan children

grew up with (Omonzele, Personal Communication). By 1938, however, it was clear that because of the continued high demand; kernels had become a steady source of economic satisfaction, particularly to the poor farmers.

Timber, without doubt was a very flourishing business and a major agricultural occupation of many Esan farmers. In fact, it was the one vital occupation that had for long been waiting for external trade; in that, timber heavily populated Esan. Prior colonialism and contact with the Europeans, timber which was usually felled with fire was used for producing mortar, pestle, bowls, and other domestic utensils. The only equipment for cutting timber was axe, cutlass, and knife. Because of this, the products of timber took a long time to produce. In the early 1940s, Esan Division was still very rich in timber despite "the incessant felling of different types of timber (N.A.I. Annual Reports Ishan Division 8). The decade marked the beginning of a golden age for external trade in timber in Esan Division; a situation that continued up to 1960 and beyond. Esan was seen as the richest in all types of timber, particularly those considered first class, like *Iroko*. The colonial government, having regarded timber as "a key industry in Ondo province and the Ishan Division", had earlier sent samples of what they considered secondary timbers "to England for analysis and test for use as veneers, furniture and other purposes" for the development of further export trade (N.A.I. Ondo Prof 32). The result showed that all grades of timber, from grade 1 to grade 4 were needed for export to Europe, particularly "to replace those (other timbers) imported from America and elsewhere" (32). The emergence of sawmills in Esan led to accelerated exportation of timber products. Sawmills could not easily stop the pit-saw method of cutting logs since this was also heavily patronized by local people who needed planks for building.

Prior the introduction of modern sawmills, according to Oare, a former head carriers of timber planks, "it was a laborious and hard job to transport the planks already



sawed by the pitsawyers from usually a distant location in the farm to the town for onward transportation to other locations outside the town (Personal Communication)". However, the modern sawmills made it very necessary for the timbers to be brought from the farm by timber vehicles to sawmills where they were sliced with electrically powered saws, completing within a few days what used to take the pitsawyers weeks (Chief Osadolor, Personal Communication; Jumoke 272). Cotton, which was another cash product for external trade, had been planted and traded locally by the Esan before the British rule. And like the cotton grown in other areas of Benin Province of Ishan Division, particularly Uromi, Esan cotton by 1920 "is extensively grown and the wearing of cloth is carried on all through the Division" (N.A.I. Ishan Division Annual Report 44). What is more, it was "undoubtedly the best" while the cloths produced with it were taken to areas as distant as Warri where there was "an increasing demand for them on account of their excellent weaving properties" (45). By 1923, it was very clear that the farmers always liked to sell their cotton to local weavers, both men and women, who were always ready to buy off their products for their weaving trade. This situation continued for over a decade until the colonial government, under pressure from the UK advised the European firms dealing in cotton trade to increase, "very generously the amount they were paying the cotton growers in order to attract patronage advantage to them" (N.A.I. Ishan Division Miscellaneous 4). This strategy worked in that many of the Esan farmers began to sell their cotton to the highest bidder; thus marking the beginning of realistic external trade in Esan cotton.

Kolanut was also an important cash crop exported from Esan. The Esan, like the Yorubas had two types of kolanut: the acuminate and *nitida* kola (Eboigbe, Personal Communication). Though kolanut trade in the colonial period was also domestic because of the trade between Esan and Northern Nigeria, the trade was also external because kolanuts were also exported to destinations

outside Nigeria. Kola *nitida* which the Yoruba themselves called *gbanja* or *goro* was produced mainly in Southwestern Nigeria with Esan Division "accounting for more than one quarter of the total production of this ever growing crop in the Western and Midwestern colonies" (N.A.I. Administrative Report7). By 1933, it was clear that both kola *nitida* and kola acuminate had become an important Esan export crop like Ekiti and the rest of Yorubalands (Alhaji Kazeem, Personal Communication). In conclusion, the British economic policies in the areas of infrastructural facilities, agriculture, arts, and craft industry enhanced the economic growth of the Esan people. It rather boosts their economic selfishness and political might. The economic changes introduced by colonialism in spite of its positive benefits nevertheless still had its shortcomings or negative sides. The transportation and communications infrastructure that was provided was not only inadequate but was also very unevenly distributed in nearly all the chieftdoms and communities. The roads were largely constructed to link areas with the potential for cash crops and with other commercial and economic benefits. In other words, the infrastructures were meant to facilitate the exploitation of the natural resources but not to promote the accessibility and development of the society. The outcome of this has been uneven economic development in Esan. In addition, the colonial system led to the delay of industrial and technological developments in Esan. Important to know is that one of the features of the colonial political economy was the total neglect of industrialization and of the processing of locally produced raw materials and agricultural products in Esan. Lastly, colonialism saddled Esan with mono-crop economies. It was during the colonial period, as may be recalled, that the society was made to produce a single cash crop or two, and no attempts were made to diversify the agricultural economy. This consequentially led to the neglect of the internal sector of the economy and, in particular, of the production of food



for internal consumption, so that rice, maize, fish and other foods had to be imported

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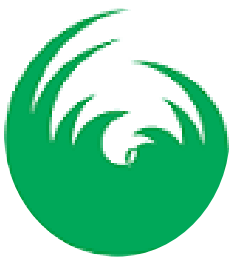
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