



## Extant Traditional Art in Post-Colonial Presence: The Lineage Wood Carvers in Iseyin, Nigeria

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**Abstract.** According to the postcolonial theorist, Hamadi (2014), colonialism imposes a language and a culture whereby the cultures, histories, values and languages of the colonized are often ignored by the colonizers. At the end of such colonization, the colonized suffers oppression and suppression of identity, loss of culture, ethnic inferiority and a struggle for proper portrayal in global circles. The impact of colonialism has persisted in post-colonialism; however remnants of the colonized have also persisted in continuity of cultural practices, but not without changes. This paper is a study on the extant woodcarving lineages in Iseyin, in northern Yorubaland. In this technological 21st century, it is noteworthy and interesting that traditional woodcarving has continued to be practiced in the ancient town Iseyin, though dwindling. There had been other artistic practices that existed alongside woodcarving in the past, such as leatherwork, indigo dyeing, brass-casting, bronze-casting and beadwork, which are no longer continued in the town. The survival of traditional woodcarving in Iseyin therefore requires an art-historical investigation and documentation, as it is in the risk of extinction in the near future. This is the main aim of this paper. The study adopted a methodology comprising of field investigation and literature review. Nine woodcarvers purposively selected from the lineages of *Olumole*, *Ayelade*, *Pete* and *Atena* were interviewed and many others were observed at work. Oral historians and elders from the town were also interviewed. Several wooden artworks were photographed for analysis and visual documentation. The findings show that the artists still carve traditional themes such as Ifa paraphernalia, masks and utilitarian objects. In conclusion, there is a struggle by the lineage woodcarvers to remain relevant in postcolonial presence, which may succeed or perish.

**Keywords:** Art, Iseyin, Lineage, Postcolonial, Traditional, Woodcarving

### 1. Introduction

The town of Iseyin is historically noted for cloth-weaving and for which several early scholars such as Dodwell (1955, p.118); Bray (1968, pp.540-550), Eicher (1976) and Adepegba (1995, p.70) contributed significant scholarship. However, from the records of Aremu (2000, pp.65-67) and Aremu (2007, p.14), there was also woodcarving which flourished in Iseyin in the past, starting in the pre-colonial period, because of the high patronage from many traditional religious worshippers who demanded objects for worship, ritual, and cultural performances. Devotees of *egungun*, *sango*, *ifa*, *oro* and other traditional worshippers, compulsorily required carved objects for worship. There were also high demands for utilitarian objects and accessories. In his work on contemporary Yoruba woodcarving, Adepegba (2007, pp.18 -20, 22-23) identified and referred to the works of some scholars on the Iseyin woodcarving such as Kevin Carroll (1957), William Fagg (1963), Frank Willett (1971) and John Picton (1989). Their extensive field work on the subject rated the woodcarving of Iseyin to be of the same quality and status as with other renowned towns in Yorubaland. A specific woodcarver, Ogundeji Salawu of Olona lineage, was mentioned in history, whose woodcarving was rated to be in the same class with famous Yoruba carvers like Olowe of Ise-Ekiti, Areogun of Osi-Ilorin, Duga of Imeko, and Otoro of Ketu. Evidence that woodcarving tradition flourished in the past in that town was the documentation of Houlberg (1978, pp.56-60). His work was on “*Egunun* Masquerades among the Oyo Yoruba”. Houlberg recorded the headdress of one *egungun* in

Otu town in Itesiwaju local government which was carved in Iseyin by one woodcarver named Akano from Isalu quarter in Iseyin. The headdress of an *egungun* called *Eleru/Alate* was also documented as far back as 1961 in Iseyin. The headdress was said to represent the head of a palace slave of the Aseyin of Iseyin. This was collected by Phillip Hitchcock Collection. Other evidences on the long lasting woodcarving traditions in Iseyin are the existence of few ancient religious objects in the town. A one-time devotee of *egungun*, Alobaloke (oral communication, Iseyin, 2018) informed that the ancient *egungun* figure belonging to his family for many generations, is a wooden mask, that was carved in Iseyin. In his study *Ara: Creativity in Yoruba Art*, Adepegba (1983, pp.53-65) recorded some of the woodcarving traditions in Iseyin. In the records, one of the principal lineage woodcarvers of the town had participated in carving the posts of the present Oyo Palace which was done during the reign of Oba Siyanbola Ladigbolu between 1911 and 1944. Adepegba also affirmed that the Olona lineage in Iseyin carved the relief images on the posts in the present palace. Other information obtained from interviews from the field for this research, also confirmed Adepegba's records on the age-long presence of woodcarving which flourished in the town. One Baba Salawu Ogundeji Olona, presently of Olumole compound in Iserin quarters claimed that his lineage ancestors carved for Alaafin (the paramount king) in the old Oyo and also the present Oyo. Ogungbade Lamidi, who is also a notable member of Ayelade woodcarving lineage in Iseyin, informed that he worked for Alaafin Lamidi Adeyemi in the early 1970s. It was also gathered from the field that all woodcarvers in the town present to the Aseyin (king) of Iseyin sets of wooden plates and mortar during every annual *Oro* festival. Some of the carvers presently practicing in the town participated in the agricultural show and exhibition that the Oyo state government organized at Iseyin in 1989. Baba Salawu Olona informed that woodcarvers from neighboring towns of Saki, Okeho and Imala used to come to Iseyin to hold Woodcarvers Association meetings some years ago. The meetings held on every first Friday of each month at the Olumole compound Iserin, Iseyin. Aremu (2003, pp.14-17) mentioned that there had been notable woodcarving families in Iseyin before and after the fall of old Oyo kingdom in 1837. The types of objects being carved in recent times, such as mortars, ceremonial staffs, masks, drum frames of different sizes, figurines, game-boards and religious objects are similar to the recorded ones.

Several effects of postcolonialism on Iseyin have restructured the town socio-culturally so much that it is a surprise to still find a traditional woodcarving practice existing in the town, in this mid twenty-first century. Some of the woodcarvers have evolved with the times but many of the remnant carvers seem to keep faith with the traditions of the lineage vocation, including the flaws and obsolete practices. For example, despite the exposure of some of the woodcarvers to technology and the media arts, they still do not keep proper records of their works. This is a problem for art historical records and iconological preservation. With the dwindling number of woodcarvers by the day, the threat of extinction is real. It is therefore expedient to record the skills, rich artistic and cultural heritage, and activities of these artists before they all pass away unnoticed. The objectives of the study therefore were (i) to identify lineages and their artists who are still practicing woodcarving in the town (ii) to document visually and literarily, the activities and art of woodcarvers in each existing lineage, and (iii) to bring to limelight the works of the remnant woodcarvers in the town

## 2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The methodology employed for this study is an art-historical approach. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with purposively selected woodcarvers such as the lineage head-carvers, oldest carvers, and young contemporary carvers. Other oral accounts were obtained from the notable traditional historians as well as elders in the town. The primary source of information also included critical and analytical observation of the town, artists and woodcarvings. Photographs of the woodcarvers were taken while at work, including some of their materials and tools for the works and available samples of their past artworks. The secondary sources of information included the review of scholarly literature and archival materials on the woodcarving traditions in Iseyin and Yoruba land and the internet.

The theories of Post-Colonialism and Formalism are the frameworks for this study. The Post-Colonial Theory of cultural critic Edward Said (1935 -2003) is a suitable frame because the study is primarily an examination of the postcolonial socio-cultural state of a genre of art and artists. The postcolonial discourse is a literary theory that critically approaches the effects of colonization on the colonized. These are categorized in (i) the initial socio-cultural inferiority imposed on the colonized, (ii) the struggle for ethno –

cultural identity and function, and (iii) cultural hybridity and adoption. According to Safak (2014, pp. 355 -367), who examined the theory, post-colonialism as a discourse adopts a deconstructionist attitude which questions what had happened to the colonized. These issues centre mainly on loss of culture, identity, ethnicity, oppression, and their portrayal in contemporary times. This theory is relevant for this study because the lineage woodcarvers under discussion are in the post-colonial period chronologically and geographically, and are working under the persisting impact of colonization. The art theory of formalism was pioneered by Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky (1893 -1984), Roman Jakobson (1896 – 1982), and Boris Eichenbaum (1886 – 1959), and developed by Roger Fry (1866 – 1934) and Clive Bell (1881 -1964) in 1914. The theory was later advanced by Clement Greenberg (1909 -1994) in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The theory uses the analytical comparisons of art forms and styles to review the very nature of an artwork. This study finds this theory appropriate because of the aesthetic considerations of specific artworks in the study. The physical nature of the artworks in the study are described considering components such as colours, shapes, textures, lines and sizes. Meaning of the artworks in this context is remote.

### **3. Notable Lineage Woodcarvers in Iseyin: Preserving the Past in the Present**

The art of woodcarving among the Yoruba has been generally for men and preserved from generation to generation. It is a lineage art which every woodcarver will want his sons to inherit. Woodcarving art is practiced on full time and part time basis (Akande, 2015 p.192; Adepegba, 1995 p. 148). Some relevant scholarly publications on woodcarving lineages in Yorubaland are: (i) Aremu (2007, pp.5-19; 2011) traced the ancestry of Abogunde woodcarving lineages among the Oyo Yoruba. He used oral tradition as a source of art historical information to trace the history of the Abogunde lineages to Are Lagbayi of Ojowon in Oyo-Ile. (ii) Aremu and Akande (2008, pp.22-29) worked on the three lineages of woodcarvers of Ona Ibuke, Arinkende and Alaase where they used oral tradition to trace the origin of the carvers. (iii) Adesanya (1999) and later Adepegba (2007, pp.1-87) also wrote on contemporary Yoruba woodcarving with specific reference to Bisi Fakeye family who belonged to the sixth generation of Fakeye family of woodcarvers. (iv) Babalola (2002), and Babalola and Adelowo (2010, pp.68-77) used art historical research to study woodcarving traditions in Iseyin. They however, in their respective works, only mentioned lineages

involved in the art. Ademola and Olaniyi (2017) did significant works on the two principal religious woodcarvers in Oyo. They used two lineages Ebike and Odekunle to trace a new historical account on the history and origin of woodcarving in Oyo.

In Iseyin, there are thirteen lineages identified, who practiced the art of woodcarving some years ago. They are Olumole, Agbanija, Agbaale, Ayelade, Pete, Atena, Lajorin, Jagun Erin, Oluwo Oba, Ogbena, Latula, Agbalaogun and Obadirere. Six of them are still into wood arts and crafts, though not as tenacious as they did about three decades ago. The four most active lineages in the present are Olumole, Ayelade, Pete and Atena and were purposively selected for indepth study, though other individual carvers from other lineages were included for their peculiarities. The principals of some of the selected lineages and other outstanding members who have driven the survival of the lineage woodcarving practices are examined.

#### ***Salawu Ogundeji Olona (OlumoleLineage)***

Salawu Ogundeji Olona is a member of Olumole woodcarving lineage in Iserin quarter in Iseyin. The lineage is known for woodcarving not only within Iseyin but also beyond in many Yoruba towns and settlements. Salawu Ogundeji Olona is middle age, though he does not know his birth date, and has no formal training or education. He started to follow his father Ogundeji to the workshop at the backyard of the house when he was in his tender years. He informed that he started by carving spoons, gameboard, and wooden plates and such likes. As an adult, he took woodcarving as a full time job and continued to practice in that same Olumole compound. At that time, most of the children born to the family took woodcarving as the lineage profession until recently in the millennium when the art suffered low patronage and less attention was paid to it unlike before. Salawu Ogundeji (personal communication, 2018) said that the history of woodcarving in Olumole is as old as Iseyin and originated from Iseyin. There is no historical record, both oral and written, that shows that the woodcarving was brought from somewhere else. A stylistic evidence of Iseyin's originality is the fact that woodcarvers in Iseyin carve their figures and objects directly from one block of wood, unlike carvers from other towns who carve different parts of objects separately before they assemble them with nails. When there was high patronage of woodcarving several years ago, the Olumole compound hosted the meeting of all woodcarvers in Iseyin. He presently still carves utilitarian objects for the few patrons in the town. (Fig. 1)



**Figure 1:** Olumole Olona workshop at Olumole compound Iserin quarters, Iseyin. **Source:** Babalola, S.A. 2018

***Aderoju Lukumon ( Atena Lineage)***

Aderoju Lukumon (Fig. 2) was born to late Ogundiran Aderoju in Atena compound in Ita Yangi quarters, Iseyin. This quarter is close to the two rulers in the town namely the Aseyin of Iseyin and Basorun of Iseyin. Historically, the art in the family was inherited from their forefathers; therefore it is accepted as a lineage profession. Aderoju started his career as a woodcarver when he was very young, before he started his primary school education. Aderoju started his education at Saint Paul’s Anglican school II Idi, Iroko, Okutapemeo in Iseyin between 1981 and 1987. He attended Ekunle High school, Ekunle Iseyin between 1987 and 1993. In between 1993 and 2000, he stayed much with his father and practised woodcarving. Due to his interest in education, even though his parents could not afford to finance him, he struggled and went to Local Authority Training College (LATC) Iseyin between 2000 and 2002. There he graduated as a trained teacher. He proceeded further to Oyo State College of Education, Oyo between 2002 and 2005, where he studied Primary Education and Yoruba Language.



**Figure 2:** Aderoju Lukuman, Ita Yangi Iseyin, **Source:** Babalola, S .A. 2017

Despite his formal education, Aderoju has continued to carve in the family tradition. This vocation, he combines with his employment as a teacher. The need to also earn multiple incomes has motivated this continuity apart from the primary drive to sustain the lineage woodcarving culture. He carves utilitarian objects such as Drums (Fig. 3) which he claims are readily patronized.



**Figure 3:** Set of drum frames carved by Aderoju Ogundiran, Ita Yangi Iseyin. **Source:** Babalola, S .A. 2017

***Ogunsola Rasaki Pete ( Pete/Atena Lineage)***

Ogunsola Rasaki (Fig. 4) one of the prominent woodcarvers in Pete/Atena lineage was born about 1970 to the family of Ogunsola Amao of the same compound in Iseyin. In his formative years, he had the opportunity to go to school. He attended Saint Paul’s Anglican School I Alapata, Iseyin between 1976 and 1981 and went to Ekunle High school where he had his secondary school education between 1981 and 1986. Since he could not further his education, he took the family profession which is woodcarving as his own full time job. He informed that with him, the art of woodcarving is inbred. Nevertheless, he started the carving when he was about eight years when he started practising with wood and tried to copy his parents. Many of his works were sold out and no record of the works has been kept. He is the only woodcarver that is presently committed to figural sculpture among others in the town. Other woodcarvers do not carve traditional religious and figural sculptures because of their adopted religions of Christianity and Islam.



**Figure 4:** Rasaki Ogunsola of Pete compound Ita Yangi Iseyin, Photograph by Babalola, S .A. 2016

Figure 5 is *ose sango* and is an example of carved wood by Rasaki. The form of *ose sango* is cylindrical and like letter Y. The Y shape resembles horns of an antelope. There is a depiction of human facial features on the upper part of the shape. The work is roughly finished. The second *sango Dance Wand* (Fig. 6) has a representation of axe head with handle. *Sigidi* is the title of the work in Figure 7. The work is cylindrical and was divided into two. The upper part has some geometrical design which the carver achieved with the aid of his manual carving tools. The lower part is an embossed figure of a man in a linear form.



**Figure 5:** *Ose Sango* carved by Rasak Ogunsola Iseyin. **Source:** Babalola,S. A. 2017



**Figure 6:** *Sango Dance Wand* carved by Rasak Ogunsola Iseyin. **Source:** Babalola,S. A. 2017



**Figure 7:** *Sigidi* carved by Rasak Ogunsola Iseyin. **Source:** Babalola, S. A. 2017

### ***Lamidi Ogungbade (Ayelade Lineage)***

Lamidi Ogungbade (Figure 8) was born to Ojo Odesise who is a native of Iseyin in Iseyin Local Government Area of Oyo state. He appears to be an octogenarian, even though he does not know his birth date. According to him (Personal Communication, 2017), the history of the woodcarving tradition was handed down to him from the forefathers of his lineage and that the tradition is a family profession. He asserts that when he was ten years old, he was sent to Olumole lineage to have his initial training for about ten years. Later, he went to Imeko in Ogun state to learn woodcarving from Oguntolu Sekoni of Gbenagbena compound for about seven years. He said that at the time he went to Imeko, the Aseyin of Iseyin (the King of Iseyin) was *His Royal Highness* Folarin Alobalowo I, who reigned 1948-1958. When he came back to Iseyin, he continued the art, and he practiced woodcarving and worked for Fijakola of Iseyin, he then practised woodcarving at Ado-Awaye for about thirteen years. He had carved for the Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi in the early 1970s. He claimed to have spent about five years at Oyo while carving for Alaafin Lamidi Adeyemi during his early reign. When he advanced in age, he retired to a village located eleven kilometres away from Iseyin to practise carving. There, he carves figures and utilitarian objects. To him figural objects are less difficult to carve unlike that of drum frames. He took great interest to carve *ere ibeji* figures, *opon ifa*, and *esu* figures and other traditional religious objects. At present (2017), Lamidi Ogungbade is at Ayelade compound, Ebu quarters in Iseyin there he resides and due to old age cannot practise again but have some young apprentices who took after him. There is no record that this artist had formal training but his carvings reflect high proficiency of the Yoruba style.



**Figure 8:** Lamidi Ogungbade Ayelade, Iseyin. **Source:** Babalola, S.A. 2017

### ***Tiamiyu Salawu Babatunde (Ayelade Lineage)***

Tiamiyu Salawu (Fig. 9) is another full time woodcarver in Ayelade lineage. He is a native of Iseyin as well. His father was a woodcarver, Salawu Adegbilere. He learnt the art of woodcarving while he was staying with his father during the early years of his life. He confessed that he started practicing woodcarving when he was about fifteen years old, but he did not practice independently until the demise of his father. It was after his father's death that he became more committed and fully engaged as a woodcarver. He has no formal training nor did he go to any formal school other than traditional education from his parents. He is committed to carving drum frames, game board and

rarely figures. Salawu has trained two of his sons and they are now woodcarvers. The workshop of Tiamiyu Salawu is located at Ekunle High School, Ekunle Iseyin, about three kilometers away from the family house in Ayelade compound.



**Figure 9:** Tiamiyu Salawu Babatunde at his workshop Ekunle quarter. **Source:** Babalola S.A. 2017.

***Ogungbade Kamilu Omobolaji (Ayelade Lineage)***

Ogungbade Kamilu Omobolaji (Fig. 10) is son to Lamidi Ogungbade, Ayelade compound, Ekunle, Iseyin in Oyo state. Kamilu was born on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1989 in Ayelade compound, Ekunle Iseyin. He attended Saint Paul’s Anglican School I Okutapemo, Iseyin from 1992 to 1999. He also attended Baptist Secondary Grammar School Koso, Iseyin from 1999 to 2005, for his secondary school education. While waiting for admission into a higher institution of learning, he was fully engaged in woodcarving. He eventually got admission to Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, to study Public Administration between 2007 and 2010. There he acquired Ordinary National Diploma (OND) in Public Administration. He obtained Higher National Diploma (HND) from the same institution between 2011 and 2013. He did his youth service at Muslim Model College, Igangan in Ibarapa north local government area in Oyo state between 2014 and 2015. Kamilu cannot specifically say when he started carving. All he knew was that he used to follow his father to the workshop and observed how he did the work. He recalls that when he started primary school, on returning from school daily, he still met his father in the workshop. He was trained to carve various objects, both utilitarian and religious ones. Due to his inclination towards his Islamic faith in his religion, he only carved utilitarian objects such as drum frames. So his area of specialisation in drum frames.



**Figure 10:** Ogungbade Kamilu at the workshop Ekunle quarter, Iseyin. **Source:** Babalola S.A. 2016.

***Oguniyi Olukokun (Oluwo Oba Lineage)***

Oguniyi Olukokun, the woodcarver at Oluwo Oba Ekunle quarters Iseyin is presently the only carver practicing in his lineage. He was born in Iseyin, about 1950. He grew up under the tutelage of his father who was also a woodcarver before his death. Oguniyi initially took commercial driving as his major occupation and was committed to it. He had been a driver plying Agenpe - Iseyin road and he was the chairman of the drivers in that section. He informed that he had been driving for about sixteen years. According to him, he did not practice woodcarving until

the death of his father, some years ago. He then took to woodcarving as a full time practice and opted out of driving. He has since been connected with other woodcarvers in the town. He said that every year at the new yam festival for Aseyin, the paramount ruler and the king of Iseyin land, the woodcarvers association in Iseyin usually presented to the Aseyin of Iseyin gifts such as sets of wooden plates, spoons, bowls, mortar and pestles. The tradition stopped during the reign of Aseyin of Iseyin, Oba Moshood Osuolale Adeyeri II who reigned between 1978 and 1997. When these wooden gifts were offered, the king in return gave *oti ebo* (alcoholic drink for the deities) and five naira (N5). There is no record of past works by this artist because all his works were sold to the patrons from various towns outside Iseyin. In the works of Ogunniyi there is a stylistic convergence from various artistic cultures that are notable. A critical observation of his *Gambari* mask (Fig. 11) indicates that the work is characterized with a long nose like what is observable in Nok terracotta heads. The lips of the mask are protruding and its shape is cylindrical, and has bulging eyes which characterized most Yoruba carvings. The work is roughly finished, but much attention is paid to the nose. *opon ifa* (Fig. 12) carved by Ogunniyi is circular with a linear design of a human head on it with a representation of human face. Attention is not paid to the details of the face but all facial features are present.



**Figure 11:** Gambari mask carved by Ogunniyi Oluokun  
**Source:** Babalola, S. A. 2017



**Figure 12:** *Opon ifa* carved by Ogunniyi Oluokun  
**Source:** Babalola, S. A. 2017

### ***Suleimon Adisa (Obadirere Lineage)***

Suleimon Adisa (Fig. 13) was born about fifty four years ago to the family of Obadirere compound, Ekunle quarters, Iseyin. As a child, he started watching his father when carving; this he did when he was about eight years old. He did not learn the art anywhere he inherited it from his family. Therefore, he claimed that it is a lineage occupation. Suleimon had other means of livelihood as he did other works apart from woodcarving such as hunting, commercial driving and others. He admits that in his lineage, no matter how much work is done by anyone, if woodcarving is not practiced, such a one will not prosper; therefore because he knew this, he faced woodcarving as a full time job. As he started the carving when he was young, all that he could do then was to chisel out logs of wood into shapes or objects and the elders then put finishing touches to them. He had no opportunity to go to school, when he grew up to stand on his own, so he worked as a driver and as a hunter. However all these was to no avail until he finally returned to lineage work which he is committed to now as a full time professional carver. His workshop is located at Oja Agbe along Badagry – Sokoto express in Iseyin as at the time of field work. (Fig. 13)



**Figure 13** Suleimon Adisa at work. **Source:** Babalola, S. A. 2017

The works of Suleimon Obadirere selected for this study are, *opon ifa* (divination tray or board) (Fig. 14) which is circular in shape and designed with the motif of a reptile, most likely alligator, and a human head. The representation of a head is idealized. *Odo sango* (a wooden mortar) (Fig. 15) by the same woodcarver is a representation of *sango*, the Yoruba deity in control of thunder. On the side of the mortar, *sango* was depicted holding *seere* on his hand. The head of the figure depicted is oval in shape with indication of nose, eyes, and mouth. The treatment of these features was not detailed. *Agere ifa* which belongs to Babalawo Adewuyi Iseweje was also the work of Suleimon Obadirere (Fig. 16). Instead of the common motifs used for the surface decoration of this type of work, (either a man or woman figure is used), found all over Yorubaland this carver used a bird motif, which is likely to be Pigeon, on which *the agere ifa* was placed. The beak of the bird is short and pointed. The trunk of the bird is robust and smoothly finished; the bird motif was an idealized form not naturalistic.



**Figure 14:** *Opon Ifa* carved by Suleimon Obadirere  
**Source:** Babalola, S. A. 2016



**Figure 15:** *Odo Sango* carved by Suleimon Obadirere  
**Source:** Babalola, S. A. 2016



**Figure 16:** *Agere Ifa* carved by Suleimon Obadirere **Source:** Babalola, S. A. 2016

### ***Onaleke Ajadi (Jagun Erin Lineage)***

Onaleke Ajadi (Fig. 17) was born about six decades ago. His father was a native of Iseyin in Jagun Erin compound, Isalu quarters. The compound is noted for woodcarving in the town. Onaleke Ajayi inherited the art from his father and he started by carving some utilitarian tools such as spoons, plates and bowls. He also confirmed that their families in collaboration with other woodcarvers in the town usually carve bowls, plates and mortars to give to the Aseyin for the celebration of new yam festivals. Onaleke Ajadi has trained some practitioners of which two of them are practicing woodcarving up till now. Among those trained are Taofeek Adio, Onabisi Alao, Alowonle Ajasa and Lukumon Onabisi. The carver specialises in game board, mortar and other utilitarian utensils. Onaleke affirmed that it is their own lineage that is entrusted the title of Bada among the woodcarvers in the town. Some recent works in the carver's studio are in plates (Fig. 18).



**Figure 17:** Onaleke Ajadi at work in Jagun Erin Isalu, Iseyin **Source:** Babalola, S .A. 2017



**Figure 18:** Mortars carved by:Onaleke Ajadi **Source:** Babalola, S .A. 2017

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper's discussion of the remnants of woodcarvers in Iseyin, one of the prominent and historical woodcarving towns in southwestern Nigeria, is not only a narration of the activities of carvers but also an interrogation of the impact of the post-colonial presence. The first noticeable presence is the drastically dwindled number of artists and patrons. Many of the objects that were previously carved have become functionally obsolete. Colonial imposition of western religion and education on Nigeria had massively influenced the culture and traditions of the people. In the bids to resist the change brought by post-colonialism, these remnant carvers have consciously used tools and techniques that have been used for generations past. They have also maintained the traditional themes and functions of the art. Despite the influence of modern technology and the internet, the carvers do not employ photography, videos, or modern computer applications to develop the recording of their works, advertise or market their works. It is noteworthy to document however that several millennial youth from these woodcarving lineages have turned to modern power tools and methods in their practice, but their works cannot sustain certain cultural fabrics of their society. Who is the carver that will give the *Aseyin* his yearly gifts at the new yam festival if all the carvers are assimilated into modern society? Many previously colonized people are syncretic and return to ritual and worship of deities periodically. They have these resist-carvers to fall back to for the supply of their traditional objects. In Iseyin presently the woodcarving lineages still active are Olumole, Ayelade, Pete and Atena. There were thirteen lineages that fully flourished before colonial times. The risk of extinction is high. There is need for concerted effort by government and non-government

organizations to aid these remnant woodcarvers in Iseyin and other traditional artists to have continuity. These lineages can be given funding, administrative support and training so that they can sustain the generational transfer of the woodcarving they have inherit and develop for the future.

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