

The State of Pottery Production among the Ughievwen Traditional Potters

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Abstract

Pottery production has been a high source of income to traditional potters in the times past in Nigeria. Almost every family enjoys the monetary relief this craft offers. In some cultures, the art of pot-making is done by both men and women. However, in others, the craft is left in the hands of women alone. The women single handedly under take all the processes involve from the point of digging of clay, preparation, production and firing of the production of pots. Although in some few cultures men do the digging of the clay but ask the women to pay for their labour. But today, it seems women are drifting from this art of pot production that was very supportive, through which they were able in the direction of sending their children into studying skillful trades such as mechanic, carpentry, auxiliary nursing, hair dressing and tailoring. The women are now taking to production of the crafts such as weaving of fish traps, baskets, and raffia sheets for roofing that were reserved for men and in time past were seen as taboo for women to try their hands on. This paper therefore sorted out the reasons for these recent happenings to the production of pots in the area of study. The points considered include: (a) background of the study, (b) presentation of the methods use to elicit answers from respondents, (c) discussion of the findings, conclusion and recommendations were made on how this imported self-sourcing skill can be resuscitated, and maintained. The method was survey which involved the use of twenty Questionnaire containing ten (10) items that were administered to respondents (women who produce and sell pots) in five (5) of villages where pots are produced. The responses elicited were interpreted to explain the reasons for this change of interest concerning pottery production.

Introduction

Art means self-expression. But for this expression to be artistic, it must create pleasing forms which satisfy our sense of beauty. This is to say that

it is a human conceptions made manifest by skillful use of a medium. It signifies a doing, a making, a fashioning or putting together, and most importantly it implies that a thought is accomplished by human skill (Uzoagba: 1973:12). The greatest contribution Africa has made to world civilization is perhaps is in the area of the arts which include pot-making. According to Kym (n, 25) a group of traditional potters in South Africa commented that pottery has been a long held tradition in tribal society that pottery is the domain of women. Added that how this traditional role became and was assigned to women was because of the connection between the Mother Goddess and the traditional standing of being seen as the vessel of life.

This could be the reason most likely why women from ancient time have been delineated for certain activities because of the obscure position society have placed on such activities like pot-making or the women. But, today women have broken away from shifting blames and have continued to carve out a niche for themselves. The deserved ovation has been loud, but not loud enough when compared to the standing ovation accorded men. Many women have simply observed, quite a few have taken the initiative to do something about it. In showing this, some have striven to make improvement, not only in the home front and business, but also in the act of pottery of production. Although, there is claim by scientists that medically, male and female differ in a portion of the base of the brain that is stimulated by an aspect of the brain referred to as hypothalamus that releases hormone which scientists believed, that biases the female's attention, perception, aggression level, social styles and parental tendencies which makes them consider only things that are of important to them (Keeton, 1985:2).

Woman by nature cannot be separated from household utensils because they take responsibility of cooking and serving of food for their families. Because of the kitchen activities they are privy to handle utensils a lot and this could be what informed their interest right from ancient time. Though, Oyelola (1981: 24) claimed that some cultures among the Hausas in northern part of Nigeria, men are told to practically model very big and high pot for the reception of their wives. In buttressing this Ojie (2014:21) reported that some of the determinant factors for

production of traditional pottery are the values, norm and beliefs of the potters and the purpose the pots are being produced for.

Many women either in groups or individuals have proven themselves to be outstanding in different areas of the crafts: pot-making, mat weaving, tie – dye, sewing and batik. Among the lot of women who proved themselves is Ladi Kwali of Kwale village who later became a giant pots producer and contributed immensely to the production of pot-making in Nigeria. In fact, Ladi made women potters to become proud in act of pot making. She trained under Michael Cardew at the Abuja Pottery Center. She continued the tradition at the Centre until her death in August 1984. After her death, the Abuja Pottery Centre was renamed as Ladi Kwali Pottery Centre, Suleija. Agberia, (2005:69) reported further that Ladi Kwali was not only good at the use of the throwing wheel as a gadget for the production of pots but, her dexterity with the fingers and fine sense of judgment has earned her international reputation. She has travelled widely round the world and example, Germany, Britain and the United States. In recognition of her high level of craftsmanship, technical and creative accomplishment she was conferred with an honorary doctorate degree of the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and also with a national honour known as Officer of Order of the Niger (OON).

Also, Egonwa (2005:125) added that Ladi Kwali was referred to as a wizard when it comes to the use of the throwing wheel. There is another woman who is also working hard to contribute her quota to the growth of traditional pottery in her locality and the country at large. She is no other than Mrs Raliat Saka, the President of the Dada Pottery Center located at Dada Quarter in Ilorin Town at Kwara State-Nigeria. She has trained quite a number of women and girls on the act of pot-making as a career and earning a living from it. The center is usually busy because Mrs Raliat Saka is very receptive and gives attention to visitors, including Industrial Training Students. Her attitude towards the center has helped to make the center conducive for learning hence, the influx of Industrial Training students at the center yearly, (Abamwa, 2016:94).

The People of Ughievwen and their Pottery Locations

The people of *Ughievwen* are made up thirty – two villages and towns. The headquarters is *Otughievwe*. The people refer to themselves as *the Otughievwen* although they are represented in government records as Jeremi and other Urhobo people as simply Ujevwe. The clan share boundaries with *Olomu* to the East, Udu to the West, to the North by Agbarho and to South is the Forcados. The clan is specifically located in Ughelli South Local Government Area in Delta State – Nigeria, (Otite, 2011:285). The towns and villages where pots are currently being produced include: *Ekrejegbe, Ughewwughe, Ighwrekreko, Ekrokpe, and Otor-Edo*.

Taxonomy of Ughievwen Pots

According to my respondents, (O. E., and E. U., personal communication, November 13, (2018) pot meant for storing drinking water is called *Oche*, the small one that can be used to fetch the water is referred to as *Omo r' Oche*, the pot for cooking soup is known *Evwere r' Ode*, small type which soup can served for consumption is called *Evwe r' Otete*, pot for frying grains is called *Oghorie* and for grounding items such as pepper, cray – fish, and tomatoes is known as *Olelolor* and a flower vase is called as *Oyore r' Idodo*. These pots are modeled with prepared clay, exposed to air so as to enable the pots dry enough for firing in an open-air kiln to their maturity temperature. Pots are produced to satisfy particularly domestic, ceremonial and other social functions. The use of pots are almost the same in every culture in Nigeria but styles of production and decoration differs because of beliefs, norms and values of the people whose culture is being represented. Hence, *on July 7, 2011 Amin the Artso(2011) at 12:00*, commented that the pots produced in Nigeria include: drinking cups, frying pots, drying pots, flower pots, and decorative pots, etcetera as being commonly found in other traditions outside Nigeria.

The responses provided to the questionnaire that were administered, collated and analyzed then presented in percentages below:

S/N	QUESTIONS	AGREED	STRONGLY AGREED	DISAGREED	STRONGLY DISAGREED	SUM TOTAL
1.	Do you prefer the crafts reserved for men than the ones women have been working on?	27	36	14	23	100
2.	Does crafts reserved for men yield more money than the ones the women do?	34	28	18	20	100
3.	Do you feel that the production processes for pots is, harder than the crafts men do?	31	17	23	29	100
4.	Do the men also participate in the production pots or mat weaving like the women?	2	0	47	51	100
5.	Do women also produce crafts that are made for men such as weaving of fish traps, baskets and roofing sheets?	47	49	4	0	100

6.	Has the production of pots facilitated the growth of your family in any way?	37	44	9	10	100
7.	Have you ever been appreciated by your husband or children because of the assistance you gave to them through the money you gained from your pots?	39	45	10	6	100
8.	In the time past, were you able to send any of your children to acquire skillful trade or any higher institution that he or she does relied on to earn a living today?	28	47	18	7	100
9.	Has the price of pots dropped than the prices of woven basket and roofing sheets?	34	38	8	10	100
10.	Has your pot over stayed more than when they are supposed to be sold?	52	32	4	12	100

Discussion of Findings

The descriptive approach was used to discuss the analyzed responses. Inferences were drawn from the research instrument consisting of 10 items in a questionnaire administered to a population of twenty respondents made up of women who produce and sell pots in each of the five (5) villages where pots are produced in *Ughieren* clan and therefore, brought the total population to a hundred (100) respondents. The items in the questionnaire are targeted at the objectives and goals this study and these include:

- Determining the neglect of pots production for other crafts
- Determining the level income of potters in the recent time
- Determining the level of benefit from the production of pots
- Determining the level of sales of pots achieved in the recent times
- Determining the interest of men for women's craft

The Findings reveal that 63 out 100 (62% of 100) respondents accepted pots production does yield less money when compared to crafts reserved for men. Whereas, the level of labour exert on the production of the men's craft cannot be compared to that of pot production as noted by O. A., J.I., O. O., B. O., I. J. (personal communication, September 18, 2018). Also, the crafts of the men seem to yield more income than the crafts for women. In addition, the women exert more energy in putting suitable intricate decorations that meaningful and also connote forms and motifs within their immediate environment with improvised tools. According Manza (2012:36), the earliest potters used mostly only their fingers, fingernails, sticks, fish and animal bones and other objects to scratch, impress or carve textures onto the surfaces of their pots. As the wind of modernization is blowing across every part of this country, the traditional potters are also caught in the process and have now devised a technology of using eating and serving spoons, forks and knives to create decorations on surfaces of their pots. The essence is aimed at the production of ceramic pieces their standard of creativity can to meet the requirement of the users. In this same view, Eze and Ugochukwu (2014:58) stated that "the creation of art for pure aesthetic appreciation demonstrates practical reason for the modernist society to elevate the validity of art to be seen

as embodying reason and meaning. The aesthetics quality attached to modernist's appreciation of art objects created unforeseen problems which led to dissatisfaction in some artists' art pieces. As matter of fact, the world is not static as such every traditional as well as formal potters needed to be involved and run along as the changes are occurring so that they can be relevant in the pottery profession.

Crafts originally produced by women in Ughievwen clan



Fig. 1: Woven mat for different purposes. Fig. 2: Pots of different types.

From the findings, it was deduced that 84% out 100 confirmed that in the time past, potters benefitted so much from the production and sales of pots. These sales helped to elevate the standard of their living. The profits made necessitated the acquisition of degrees and skills - training like mechanic, tailoring, wood-working, hair- dressing and secretariat study by potters children. But, in the recent time, it became noticeable that the sales of pots have dropped drastically. The findings also proved that 81% out 100 confirmed that the rate of sales for pots has also gone down. In same vein, Ojie (2014:23) opined that the Nigeria market has been flooded with China ceramic wares and plastic products which are now challenging the traditional pottery products. Abamwa,(2016: 96) also supported the statement by saying that the inflow of foreign ceramics products into the Nigerian market, especially, household utensils which may even be substandard to the ones being produced in Nigeria. However, the traditional potters are locally trained and they are not exposed to higher rigours of capacity training that will help the potters on how to understand the development of skill. As well as how to access

information, knowledge and training that will enables them to perform effectively. However, if the traditional potters are trained they will be to develop abilities that will enable them survive, adapt, and thrive in this fast – changing world” Okunna (2008:106). He also stressed that Nigeria as a country has craved for the practicality of this word “Capacity building” of the Nigerian society. However, the word deals with the creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal frameworks, institutional development including community participation (of women in particular), human resources development and strengthening of managerial system. But, this distribution has not been felt in the grass root.

Crafts originally produced by men in Ughievwen clan



Fig.3: A woman producing traditional roof. Fig. 4: Already produced roof.

The findings also established by 98% out 100 suggested that men are not interested in the crafts set aside for women. This therefore proved that men within the locality do not have the time and patience to take intricate decorations like women will do. Creativity is the process and ability to bring to life anything new and can be emanated from an existing form or objects. It involves imagination and innate emotion which could be used to create forms from existing objects. It is the construction of what is new and arrangement that is basically a contribution from the individual, Mamza, (2012:38). For capacity building to be achieved, it involves a lot of financial expenditure,

especially for the ceramist / potters to design for interior decoration, outdoors and household utensils. Although, the local potters are somehow restricted in their techniques and skills, the products created by them are limited to their immediate environment in which they can be appreciated. But, sometimes, they make attempts to model items like frying pans, flower vases, kettles, and cooking pots. Since, their tools and techniques are crude and their skills are limited because of the level of their awareness and fund at their disposal, and the potters cannot by any means produce pots which meet the civilized world standard and present trends even when the raw materials are available.

Apart from the utilities of clay products such as for functional and beautification, the clay and its products have medicinal values which are additional attributes why pottery products should be rated very high in the society. For instance, Knishinsky (2006) in Dokyoung, (2012:53) stated that clay is known to have many uses in promoting health in plants, animals and humans. Bentonite, Montmorillonite, Pascalite, as well as other types of clays have been in use by indigenous cultures before recorded history. He stresses further that when eating clay or from clay pot, one can expect well regulated bowels. Relief from constipation or diarrhea, indigestion, ulcers, a surge in physical energy, less “wandering pains, clear skin whiter and brighter eyes, more alertness and clear headedness, emotional uplift, and less tension. Clay also enhance grouch and tissue repair of gress and skirt, stimulated immune systems and higher resistance to infections agents.

Conclusion

Women have really made outstanding contributions to the growth of pots production both at the international, national and local levels. Considering questions 6, 7, and 8 proved that the *Ughievwen* women potters were aspiring to the level of women who have made it to great height before circumstances beyond their control forced them for change of interest. From the questionnaires administered it was obvious that the career was a great one. They testified of the assistance and the extent the earnings from pottery helped in the sustenance of their families. They were able to send children to acquire skillful trades and to higher institutions, including Universities to obtain degrees. But today, the story has changed; the pottery career which was a lucrative one had dropped

drastically. Some of the women potters such as T. E., O. E., C.J., E. M., J. I., (personal communication, August 23, 2018) said that they cannot sit back doing nothing at the detriment of many responsibilities. Hence the adventure to explore the crafts set aside for men from old, and since the sales for the men crafts are far better in terms of income. The women potters are not really efficient in this new exploit but for survival, although, they received a lot of intimidating jokes from the men.

Some other crafts that are originally produced by men



Fig. 5. Woman weaving fish-traps.



Fig.6. Already woven fish-traps.



Fig. 7. and Fig. 8 : woven baskets of different shapes and types.

It is glaring that significantly the dropping of sales in pottery market is allied with the influx of enamel, plastics, and aluminium and china plates in the Nigeria market. The Nigerian government should please provide equipment which facilitates mass production such as the use of jigger

jolly, plaster of Paris for casting of pots and other similar methods. By this, the stress of production can be reduced and the effect of crude processes may be prevented. This will help the potters to afford the standard of foreign production that makes traditional potters to sell at lower prices. Heads of communities should take responsibility to train young ones about advantages of the traditional pots have over the latter products that almost causing extinction for the locally produced pots.

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Interviewees:

- Papa Josiah IboyiEniwori, 72 years old.
- Mrs Onovosa Agnes Ihwanka, 67years old.
- Mrs Edirin Otitire Umukoro, 58 years old.
- Madam Obruche Oniovosa, 56 years old.
- Madam Tite Esther Ofiogo, 47 years old.
- Mrs Ediri Maria Iboyi 44 years old.
- Madam Odiri Enevweru Edawene, 47years old.
- Mrs Comfort Jane Ovie, 42 years old.
- MrIgbru Joseph Imonirho 57 years old.
- Mrs Belief Omote Peter, 39 years old.