
Contemporary Process of Pottery Making in Yala Local Government of Cross River State

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Abstract: This paper x-ray pottery production processes starting from the extraction of the clay, transportation of the clay, preparation of the clay fashioning, decoration and designing, firing and marketing of the finished product (pottery). Pottery is one of the oldest technologies of the people of yala. Although traditional pottery made by fashioning plastic clay into object of desirable shapes and then fired under a particular temperature in an open fire which resulted to permanent changes. Though yala potters still engage in traditional method, patronage of this pots are not quite encouraging. In the past majority of house wife engage in pots making for survival, they are no rules regardless of who made pots but *yala* traditional pottery making is associated with feminine (women). The *wogada* people settle at the bank of the river where clay materials are sourced from, this means that clay the major raw materials is still abundant in *wogada* the land of *yeje*. In *Ebo Yala* pottery is considered as women work is mostly done at their (extension) spare time on this day. In the olden days, it was a full time work that when the potters is going for extraction she go along with the children to help her get their clay and transport it back home. Who argue that pottery is the creation of objects from clay is associated with child birth and has been restricted to women alone, there are few communities where potting is carried out by both men and women. Although traditionally (indigenous) pottery production have survive in *Yala (Ebo)*. The clay for pottery making is mostly found within the river line area, pots making are specially for some family lineage, they are varieties of pots such as for cooking, ritual, drying of fish/meat, herbs, storing of drinking and also fetching of water.

Keywords: Yala, Traditional Pottery, Clay, Water, Pot formation

1. Introduction

Pottery represents one of the earliest complex technologies which are the changing of clay into ceramic which is known as pottery. Pottery is usually one of the most common artifacts in the early stone age. Several works or papers have been written concerning the fashioning, decorating and functioning of pottery from different perspectives including archaeological, ethnographical, historical etc [20]. Gosselain noted that women are frequently involved in the production of pottery in traditional pottery making. In some communities in West Africa pottery activities are mainly done by women [12].

Yala (province in southern Nigeria) pottery tradition from onset considered women as an ancestor and holder of unique tradition of pottery before the introduction of modern pottery. The practice of pottery production in *Yala* is ascribed to

women alone. Kayamba stated that pottery has play a fundamental part in the rural subsistence economy and social relation of the countryside communities, he further argue that the turning point in *Ankole* pottery came in the 1950s, with the establishment of kayamba memorial school went men realize the commercial prospect of pots, especially as demand for thrown pots increase with the rising cost of their imported Chinese ceramic tableware [13-17]. Indeed men started training as a spin of potter's wheel and an updraught kiln to fire pots were introduced in the Ankole region. Confirmed the assertion by noting that out of the numerous pottery communities in Igbo land only *Afigbo*, *inyi*, *Ishiagu* and few others still practice traditional potteries and the craft is left in the hand of elderly women [2]. see *Ishibori* women pottery practice and their pottery wears as reflecting the items and values of their culture in which they are made and linking them to those of *Nok*, *calabar*, *Igbo-ukwu* of *Ife* and

others [7]. The Ibibio pottery tradition from inception considers women as the forbearers and custodians of the unique traditional pottery before the advent of modern pottery. The product and practice of traditional pottery in Ibibio land are adjudged as feminine [17, 21]. The water pot for fetching water from the stream is hard carried on the heads by men to fetch water or carried about by men in anyway, in *yala* like other part of the Nigeria pottery making is carried out during dry season, *yala* custom and culture diversity are threaten by modernity were the people in rural area are largely taken to urban centre such influent affect pottery production in the rural area. [18] noted that pot has been the major utensil in Uganda home and Ankole particular, used for administering medicine and in ritual ceremonies among others. With the introduction of Christianity in Uganda in the second halve of 19th century which ushered the western education, the pottery craft and the uses of pottery in homes other than for cooking was dispised and associated with paganism.

2. Materials and Methods

Mixed methods of both qualitative and quantitative data were used. Data was collected from primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources are the previous work by some scholar on pottery. The primary sources include qualitative (in-depth interview, ethnography) and quantitative observation and survey. Qualitative method involves the use of in-depth interview. The aim was to elicit ethnographic information from the community that was study. Ethnography is firsthand personal study of local settings aim at understanding the whole culture of a particular culture. Ethnography can either be emic or etic. Emic looks at how the community members perceive the world around them, what has meaning to them, how they imagine and explain things from their local view point. In depth interviews were held with three knowledgeable women who served as key informant. [9] Explain the varieties of pottery vessels in a community suggest, diversity in the food and in their storage and cusine. [23] noted that beer drinking was and still is, and important aspect of social life, where especially large drink vessel and finely plaited drinking strew with fifteen end are used.

2.1. Results and Discussion

Arnold opined that “the resources necessary to make pottery are clay, water and fuel for firing [4]”. Nicolas P. In his journal titled “pottery production opines that the raw materials for producing pottery are clay. *Yala* have distinguished two main types of clay for indigenous *Yalapottery* (Sticky clay) black in colour, brownish in colour and reddish in colour. And the materials use for pots making are clay (*aje*), water (*yinyeni*), old clay (*utuyehi*) [19, 20].

2.1.1. Clay Collection

The clay are collected from the river line area, alluvial clay which is reach in iron and when is fired change to the red

colour in an oxidizing atmosphere. The red or brownish clay can be collected around our river bank. On the other hand the sticky clay which is blackish in colour when is mined is as hard as rock and after taken home is as solid as block that must be soaked and break into pieces.

The clay is collected at the brink of the river bank. At the process of collecting the clay the potter dig to some level either 20cm or 40cm pit with shovel, hoe, knife or spade until she get a required clay, the collection of the clay is very difficult and hard. After removing the clay is then taken to the home with either basket or bowl it could be the potter herself or the children.



Figure 1. Potter collecting clay.

2.1.2. Storage System

Clay is stored either outside the house or inside the house depending on individual or group, the clay could be bag or put in a bowl and cover it to avoid hardening for ease preparation or mixing.



Figure 2. Storage after sieving.



Figure 3. Storing after the extraction.

2.1.3. Preparation of Clay

Clay preparation process starts after it has been brought home from the source area. Nicolas P. Remark that

preparation depends upon their final use. The method of preparation depends or different from region to region depending on the nature of clay available [21]. Sarusioati and Behura (1966) as cited [21] opined that “there are certain standardized processes which are adopted by potters all over the country. They are as follows; cleaning, mixing and extracting (Ansari, 1964 as cited in [21]) reported that in some parts of Poona the potters use different methods of clay preparation [21]. They are; viz-levigation, treading and extracting.

2.1.4. Cleaning

Cleaning clay is done at home, it involves several processes. After extracting the clay, the potters slice the clay with slicer either bamboo or shell to remove the unwanted particles from the clay, unwanted particles can be stone, water, dirt or decomposed materials etc.

Cleaning is frequently necessary to make additions to their mixture in order to enhance their working properties. This addition is referred to as temper by archaeologist, when the mixture is too sticky to handle another materials is added to them, thereby reducing the plasticity of it as well as opening the clay fabric so that air can penetrate it and help in drying more quickly.

2.1.5. Pulverization

The clay is pulverized with wooden pestle after which the clay is been sieve.



Figure 4. Storage after Pulverization.

2.1.6. Mixing

In order to make the clay pliable and lessen the stickiness the potter mixed one of plastic martial and tempering, material sand. Mixing of tempering material depend on the stickiness of the clay. Usually mixing is done on flat wooden materials.

2.1.7. Kneading

Kneading is the final stage of the clay preparation. Kneading depend on the choice of the potters. Kneading is done either by hand, wood or by bamboo at the process of kneading dried husk is been sprinkling on it. It is a continuous process until the potters get the desirable texture and preserve it softness and wetness by covering the clay by wet gumming bags. After kneading the clay is divided or sheared into section and are separately place on a wooden platform for the formation of pot.



Figure 5. Kneading process.



Figure 6. Soaking in container before kneading.



Figure 7. Final stage of kneading.



Figure 8. Moldings elongated before fashioning of vessels.

2.2. Fashioning of Vessels

After preparation of clay the next process or stage is fashioning of vessels. Though there are two methods of which fashioning can be achieved; hand- finger forming and wheel forming [5] have established a threefold scheme for the development of pottery forming in Egypt using “non radial, free radial, and central radial technique”.

The *Iyala* produces varieties of pottery in response to the demand of their clients. For making vessel they primarily use different types of implements. The beater and the anvil at the process of fashioning of vessels involved beating and pressing technique. *Yala* potters are women who fashion or produce pottery by their skill hands and fingers. However,

the gestures employed also differ because of their relative specialized character like working while standing bent over seated with legs spread or with one leg folded in front [12].

2.2.1. Forming of the Base (Utu)

The potter take a sizeable quantity of clay from the heap of clay kept for use, the quality of clay to be detached is determine by the size and shape of the base to be prepared. It is now transformed into some rolls. The roll is again transformed into elongated flat mass by beating with anvil. Circle outline is given to this mass out of its elongated shape by slicing the corners with the slicer. In a similar way circular clay plate can be done the same depending on the need of potters and after this she start making some thick and round clay plates or pot with her hand by using the beater.



Figure 9. Elongated mold and old clay for base.



Figure 10. Base formation.

2.2.2. Second Stage Mainly Include the Formation of the Belly or Body (ibeyi)

When the pot attains leather hand condition, at this time it is again socked with water to make the surface soft. The thick portion of the lower body is gently beaten with beater, while the anvil is held from inside with the right hand and is rotated on the old clay place under the concave base. By doing this the wall is pitches is enlarged and is left for some hour (2-4).

2.2.3. Third Stage

It includes the formation of neck (*okor*). At this stage both the shorten end of the circular plates are drawn together and are roundly pressed to fix with each other and transform into undifferentiated mass by pressing with the finger tips. The diameter of a clay plate or pot which is equal or slightly bigger than that of the neck is annexed with any end of the neck by pressing with the finger. At this point the pot has a rough shape that can be corrected. Then the potters start giving shape to the rim rotating on the clay base called (*utulyehi*). The rim is produce by the fingers and wet piece of cloth. The edge is place on a little and small roll of clay is joined on the edge and the rim is formed. Rims are designed

base on the size and shape of the pot.



Figure 11. Forming of the rim.



Figure 12. Neck formation.

2.2.4. Smoothing

This is when the potters used an old local sponge made from sack bag soaked inside water use in smoothing the surface and then leaves them to dry under sun.



Figure 13. Old sack use for smoothing.

3. Decoration of Pottery

Yala have been decorating their pots with different motifs. The decorations are done mostly in drinking, storing, cooking, serving and washing or competition cup. Potters used both the traditional and modern designs copies from European motif which are popular to their customers. Traditional pottery decoration can be trace to early Iron Age. Presently, *Yala* pottery decoration is done before drying stage. Decoration is done using impression, roulettes, maize cob; the most popular one is roulette (glazed) hand painting, slip painting, engraving and patterns.



Figure 14. Bamboos use for designing.



Figure 15. Designing stage.



Figure 16. Rope for roulette design.



Figure 17. Shell use for decorating the rim.

3.1. Drying

After the fashioning of the vessel or pots they are expose to sun light during the dry season (December-April) is dry within 2-3 days but at that period the pots are place under the shade to avoid direct heat so as not to cause damage from the over heat. While during the rainy season is place under the sun at this period is belief that sunlight is not as high as that of the previous month.



Figure 18. Sun drying.



Figure 19. Sun drying.

3.2. Firing Materials/Firing

The firing materials are firewood, dry banana leaf, paddy, thatch, husk, bamboo, stubble ashes, cow dung and grasses, or false grain. Firewood are obtained from the bush, other materials are obtained from the respective areas.



Figure 20. Grass for firing.



Figure 21. Firewood.

3.3. Firing

This is the means by which the transformation from the plastic clay to a plastic ceramic is achieved? There are varieties of ways by which the process can achieve [21]. The simplest method is called “bonfire firing” *Yala* fired their pots using bonfire which according to [12] is the simplest and the most widespread techniques in Africa. However, despite the simplicity, open air firing required a high level of skill and observation to control the temperature range from the atmosphere. *Yala* potters use small twigs of stick known as (*ochi*) in *Yala (Ebo)*. This is because the stick (*ochi*) is less harmful to pots as there are likely to hit the pots unknowingly and cause damage to the pots. There are also levels of heat required by the potters to prevalence by particular firewood; this preferable firewood is locally known as *iginibe* which is believed to give a heat or charcoal required. The actual firing begin by lining firewood systematically on the ground, pots are then place or arranged starting with one pot place at the middle facing downward then the others outwards and upwards until all is arranged properly; then grasses or banana

leaves are placed on top and side of the pots the potters ensure that the pots are well cover and the fire is hit. The fire is always set or arrange depending on the size and types of pots to be fire.



Figure 22. Arrangement for firing.



Sources [21]

Figure 23. Firing process.

3.4. Colouring and Dying

Another kind of decoration involves the use of sign and symbol such as dots, flower drawing, slashes. It is done by dipping the potters fingers into the prepare colour or dye and draw a curve lines. According her *Yala* potters paint or dye the whole of the pots with pigment extracted from *Yede*. After being colour the pots are allow to dry.



Figure 24. Colouring Before mixing.



Figure 25. After mixing (final stage).



Figure 26. Setting pots for coulouring.



Figure 27. Painting pots.

4. Marketing

It arising from their numerous uses *Yala* people had five market days and each clan had one major market which held on a particular day of the week the neighboring communities or clan also hold their market some time the same day of the week. *Yala* market days are *Ina*, *OgbadaOgbor (Akpakpa)*, *Ogidi (Igray) andIkor. Ebo* market is every *Ogidi (Ebo)*, *Ina (yahe)*, *Ikor (Okpoma)*, *Akpakpa (Okuku)*, every *yala* market pots are normally taken to market for sales. According to the respondent (AgboEkpo) she say that, she always supply one women at *Ogoja* market day known as *Ogbor (Akpakpa)* on every 10 dayshe produce all the size, types, and qualities with a particular motif she needed. The *Ukelle* in *Yala* held their market every *Ikor*which*Yala* women usually go and trade their pots as well.

Yala women produce a variety of pots ranging from cooking and storage pots to competition pots and other decorative pots. This morphology of pots depends on the recognition of its uses by potters and user. The pots are conveyed from potters home or industry to market or customer residence. The pottery trade or take the pots from their home to market in nearby town of *Mfom, Yahe, Okpoma* etc. the price of the pots depend on the size and types and the place where the pots is been sold. Pot bought in source area is cheaper than one taken to market or outside village. From my finding pots are sold at a price of 300, 400 700-1000 depending on the size, types and qualities.



Figure 28. Displaying of pots at weekly market.

She had only one customer who she supplies to every ten (10) days except on any demand she can as well produce for the person. According to the marketer (informant) she said she only goes and buys from the maker and sells on market day, out of the three persons selling the pot in the market their response was that there are just the sellers of the pots [1].

5. Conclusion

The practice of pottery by *Yala* women have made them self employed and is giving them food on their table. The women who are engaged in pottery production are able to earn themselves daily income. Three of my informants who engaged in pottery production according to them are widows who produce pot to train their children to school, medical bills, feeding etc. Opined that interesting potters in those areas have actually displayed different skills in pottery production used for different purposes from cultural, religious to social and decorative [22]”.

Although *Yala* women need source for funds and go for more training to update their knowledge on modern pottery production such as coiling and rotating methods, free radial method, and different coloring method to improved and boost their sale.

Traditional pottery products are wistful for introducing new idea that would sustain the people’s culture. Finally, the production of pottery has attracted the attention of archaeologist, anthropologist and historian working in West Africa, South Africa and East Africa. The field has attracted little attention in Nigeria scholars has also for year place their finding on potsherd as well.

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