

## POTTERY FORMS HAVE VOLUMES

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### Abstract

Pottery plays very vital roles in the lives of people up to this present time. It is a cultural manifestation, expressing, reflecting and reinforcing the parent culture that gave birth to it.

### 1.0. Introduction

Irrespective of their sizes, weight or structure and are produced by any or a contribution of the known production techniques of pottery. These may be hand-building techniques of coiling, pinching and slab construction. They may also be produced by throwing on the potter's wheel or cast in the mould. These production methods are basic to pottery making and therefore account for the universal similarities in pottery forms. Structural differences may be accounted for by ethnic and cultural differential.

Pottery plays very vital roles in the lives of people up to this present time. It is a cultural manifestation, expressing, reflecting and reinforcing the parent culture that gave birth to it. Culture as "a people's total way of life which manifests in behaviours that has certain factors in common. This pointed out that such factors "represent the normal anticipated responses of the society's members to a particular situation" culture is central to the life of every society and gives identity to them. It varies from society to society distinguishing each society from the other. Culture is all the knowledge, beliefs, customs, values, ideas and beliefs available in a society by which the society can be compared and differentiated from others.

Elements of culture includes, the materials outfits of man, his artifacts, building, tools, implements ideas, beliefs, morals, ethics, laws, religion, norms, weapons, folklore, music, festivals, symbols, medicine, etc. Culture cannot be separated from human society. There had been traditional system of formation, decoration and distribution of pottery wares prior to the establishment of Ceramics/pottery industries, pottery studies, workshops, and Ceramics Research Institutions.

### 1.1. Igbo Pottery

It is claimed by writers that pottery are on the decline in every part of Igbo land. This evident by the fact that only a handful of womenfolk are engaged, especially the elderly ones, who by virtue of their age cannot effectively be involved in other trades. Pot making which used to be people's main work/occupation, has been abandoned by young women. Scholars have drawn attention to this, and have even expressed worry over its gradual extinction in parts of Igbo land and other parts of Africa.

There is an agreement among scholars that the problem of African traditional pottery emanated from the emergence of modern pottery products and other related products. Igbo pottery assumed its stability and sophistication in the production and marketing of pots. Ethnographic studies conducted attest to the flourishing state of pottery in Afikpo/Ishiagu within the period. The Biafran war brought untold hardship to the Igbo people. Having lost virtually all, it was like life started afresh. While men went into extensive farming and fishing, the women resorted to their old profession of pottery making which was the most ready means of survival, because it requires little or no capital to start. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons the 1970s could be regarded as the most intensive period of the local pottery industry. They became among the renowned pottery centres in Igboland, "talked about by people far and near some ceramic centres became (and remain) quite famous among Igbo and their neighbours. For instance, Ishiagu pottery was "known among Igbo some miles to the west and across the Niger. It was common to hear people refer to them as Ishiagu and AfikpookpuIte, meaning the "pot makers." In afikpo, the saying *Ibundi Egunaakpubitenaerinamgbeju*, which means, "are you Egupeople who make pots and eat with pot sherd, attest to the place of pottery in the socio-economic well-being of Afikpo people. *Egu*were one of the first inhabitants of Afikpo credited to the introduction and practice of pottery in the area. Among the women, pottery making

became a viable means of livelihood; their major economic activity, traded on by both men and women. Trading links were established with neighbouring and distant towns and villages, such as Itu, Ogada, Oroni, Ikorofon, Ntani, Akataka, Iguude, Calabar, Ugbem, Ihuogo, Ikom, etc, all situated along the Cross River. Others include Abriba, Akpoha, Ohafia, Edda, Enoha and Arochukwu. Distribution of pots was done by traders from Afikpo and those from the above towns and villages who used to buy in large quantities for retail in distant markets located in these towns and villages. *OgbaNjam* market in Ndibe village, on the coast of the Cross River, the first to be opened in Afikpo in pre-historic times, was opened primarily for the sales of pots. Itu followed by *Eke Ukwu* market, *AforAmizu* market and *AhiaNkwom* market at Ozziza village group. Traders used to buy pots in large quantities from these markets and transported them through canoes paddled along the Cross River coast and creeks to distant markets in the above towns. In an interview, Oyeoku had with one of the traders from Ozizza, Mr. Okoro Omiko Omeregbe, it was gathered that a trip to these towns used to take about three weeks, and a canoe could carry about 150 pots of *adu* (water pots). With the establishment of railway station in Ishiagu, it became easier to establish trading link between Ishiagu potters and towns along the railways up to towns in the riverine areas of River state and Cross River state, such as Port Harcourt, Obigbo (a town between Port Harcourt and Imo River), Aba, Mbawsi, Umuahia, Umuoha, Imo River, Elelenwa and Di obi. According to Ekeledo, before, after the war, the Nigerian Railway Corporation Authorities operated sub-urban train services to and from Umuahia to Enugu and between Umuahia and Port Harcourt. "With the services of these trains, traders actually enjoyed easy mobility of their wares." Apart from their railway transport system on which the big pot dealers depended, there were several outlets in East Central State through roads and foot where several petty-traders marketed their wares. Among these were Okigwe, Isuoch, Enugu, Awgu, Ihube, Akaeze, Edda, Uturu etc. Some of the pottery traders had to "trek as far as ten miles carrying the pots on their heads in long narrow baskets (*abo*), especially tied with long ropes". For instance, reported that "Ihube and Isuochi women would travel a distance of 20-25km;

to *EkeIshiagu* to buy pots. However, the economic, social, religious and ritual functions of pottery in traditional society have been generally identified to be responsible for its survival in some parts of Igbo land, despite the impact of modern technology.

### 1.2. Ecology of the Study Areas.

Afikpo and Ishiagu are among the major towns in Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria. The two were formally in Imo state and later moved to Abia State and finally to Ebonyi State. Incidentally, before the creation of Imo State (i.e. during the then East Central State) the two were under the former Afikpo Division with their administrative headquarters at Afikpo. However, apart from the style of decoration and the function of tools found in these areas. The indigenous raw materials used in the decoration of their pottery works were analyzed and interpreted in the laboratory to prove they are materials for pottery decoration.

### 1.3. Afikpo

Afikpo is the Headquarters and centre of administrative activities of Afikpo North Local Government Area. Between 1930-1931, it had a population of about 19,786 people which rose to 26,309 in 1953 and 42,179 including Uwana in 1963 (Eastern Region census report 1955). Now the population has grown exceedingly, but because of unreliable nature of subsequent census in Nigeria, it has become quite misleading to quote the figure of what maybe describe as unreliable. They have striking feature of social unity in Afikpo among the five major village group, Afikpo village group. These villages are Ohaisu, Ugwuegu, Mkpogoro, Itim and ozizza and these villages are further divided into, what is called sub-villages, consisting of Ohaisu 7 sub-villages, Ugwueku 3, Mkpogoro 6, itim 5, while ozizza has 6, bringing the total number of villages in Afikpo to 27 villages. It is located or circumscribed between latitude 5:54 North and Longitude 70 degrees 56 east and is defined in the eastern zone by the Cross River, which serves as a Boundary between the Ebonyi State and the Cross River State. The boundary between the neighbors of Afikpo are; the Cross River towns of Ebom, Ediba, and Itighi in the South-east, Erei in the South-west, Igbo on the East; Amasiri and Okpoha in the north and the large Edda clan in the West. Afikpo as a "hilly region, which lie in the trough of syncline of

undulating sandstone ridges in an elevation of between 76.2 – 91.5 metres above sea level.” This hilly and undulating Plateau show a gradual fall from the smaller hills that extend from the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta and which eventually flatten out into largely undulating expanse on high which Afikpo is located. These rocky hills of sedimentary rocks are largely composed of sandstone, shales and clay of cretaceous and tertiary ages. According to Afikpo sandstone” is exposed from the McGregor College eastwards covering the Government College, Ukpa, Ngodo and Amachara villages to the Government Primary School and the New Layout; and then southwards covering the Amangbala and Ndibe beach. These sedimentary deposits were thrown into folds of syncline and anticline by earth movement exposing other deposits. The undulating feature of the area which gave rise to many streams flowing from the North-west to the Cross River with its tributaries forms the main drainage system in Afikpo. This drainage system must have helped to expose the underlying clay deposits that formed the resources for early pottery making and which has continued to encourage the pottery tradition in the area. Much of the clay formations lie neatly exposed in many parts of Afikpo.

Afikpo, like other communities in Igboland falls within the forest belt of south-eastern Nigeria. Part of the vegetation cut into the savannah or grassland “to the northwest from Ozizza down to Amasiri, and through the Ngodo-Ukpa area to Ameta.” While “the forest zone is; from the south west, especially Enochia, Kpogrikpo” down to Unwana. It lies within the rain forest zones with an evergreen vegetation, but extensive human activities has transformed its rain forest features into what may be termed “an oil palm bush”. These natural endowments (rivers, streams, clays, forest and grasslands) resulted in an economic system predominated by farming, pottery-making, fishing and trading usually of agricultural surplus, fishes and pots. In the eastern Nigeria potsherds excavated at Igbo-ukwu and Afikpo represent what could be regarded as Igbo wares, though there are no striking difference in forms between them and those excavated in other part of Nigeria. The ninth century at Igbo-ukwu revealed some of the most beautiful items in the whole corpus of Nigeria pottery.

Ugwuagu and ukpa Rock shelters in Afikpo, yielded pottery belonging to late stone-age, about 3,000 B.C. Two characteristics type of pottery from the excavations were identified, the first, he refers to as near-modern pottery which is dark, usually black or dark brown or red, hard fired and sandy or griet tempered, it is similar enough to modern Afikpo material so as to leave little doubt that it is the same type. The second is of high brown colour, thick, very poorly fired and has temper material of sand and in many cases, seeds.

Two basic types, highlighting the two broad uses of pottery in a traditional society utilization and ritual but observed that the later belongs to the hard fired, sometimes well-burnished and elaborately decorated. More detailed classification of the finds with particular references to forms were made. He grouped them into three broad categories; pots, bowls and vessels on pedestals

#### **1.4. Ishiagu**

Ishiagu, the present administrative headquarters of Ivo Local government Area of Ebonyi state with Akaeze as the second main town. It was Afikpo Division formally with its administrative headquarters at Afikpo and later moved to Ohaozara local government. Thus right from the colonial era, Ishiagu and Afikpo had always shared a common local administrative authority not until recently when the creation of Ohaozara and Ivo local government area made it to move out of Afikpo as its administrative headquarters. However now, Ishiagu is made up of eleven villages, Namely:-Ngwogwo, Amaonye, Amata, Amaeze, Ihietutu, Okue, Ogor, Amagu, Amaokwe, the later five sub-villages sprang up, are consisting of Nzerem, NdiUgbugbo, Obinagu, NdiOkoroukwu and Mile two (2) which the people of Ishiagu regards as strangers. It is located in the Western part of Ivo Local Government Area and lies approximately between longitude 7° 32 and 50 East and latitude 5° 15 and 6° 30 North (Ministry of Land and Survey 1976). The physical feature of Ishiagu from the North-East to the South-East “as a plain, rising to a plateau of no great elevation towards the central Eke Market and the surrounding villages”. While “the Northern and North-western regions appear to form part of the plateau region known as Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta”. Chukwu further explained that this plateau starts from Nsukka, runs behind Enugu

through Udi to Okigwe down to Isuikwuato and finally ended at Arochukwu. But “to the East, South-east and South, the hills grow smaller and smaller and eventually flattened out into a large undulating expanse which” form part of the Afikpo plain.

Ishiagu area is rich in mineral resources on which the people depended and still depend for survival. Such minerals include clay, rocks (montmorillonite and kaolinite), galena (lead) and zinc which gave rise to their traditional technology made up of iron working (smithing) and pottery making. Others include weaving and woodcarving. Pottery is perhaps the only one that has survived. For instance, Blacksmithing is no longer in practice and the people have even lost memory about its origin. In addition to these are granite rocks which exist in form of outcrops in different locations In Ishiagu whose exploitation attracted many companies. According to Chukwu, these “rocks are now quarried for ferro-concrete materials vital for road tarring and heavy construction projects by various companies such as the Crushed Rock Company. Monier Construction Company (M.C.C). Okwuosa and C.C. Daniels companies which mined and exported galena to overseas countries in the 1940s and 1950s.” Today, the Crushed Rock Company is still mining the outcrop located at an expanse of land belonging to Amaokwe, Okue and Ngwogwo villages of Ishiagu. Thus, mining is a twentieth century industry in Ishiagu, which created and still creates employment opportunities for the indigenes particularly those from the host communities and others from neighbouring towns and beyond. Another natural endowment in Ishiagu is the presence of rich vegetation made up of thick forest and savannah or grassland distributed around the area. Around Obinagu, Amagu, Amaisisi, Ndi-Okorukwu and towards Okue and Ogor are several stretches of thick forest, while the rest of the area are covered by low forest (grassland) which probably resulted from long habitation and exploitation. Also, there are several economic trees most of which are as old as the communities. Apart from hunting, the vegetation favoured and still favours agricultural activities especially towards the fertile plains to the East. South-east and South, where the land proves very fertile.

### 1.5. Theoretical Orientation

Most of the theories of social change can be adequately employed in the study of continuity and change in

pottery. But for the sake of convenience and easy application, they are grouped under the four basic concepts, namely: invention, diffusion, acculturation and functions- which are sometimes referred to as theories. Social theories have always used terms like “diffusion theory.” diffusionist, functionalism, functionalist etc. to simplify and categorize theories of social change.

Invention or innovation theory is relevant in this study because it is useful for the critical analysis of the possible innovative experiments embarked upon by the potters in an attempt to deal with the prevailing circumstances inspired by change in culture. Innovation is a “process by which a culture sustains a living standard by maximizing control over the physical environment. Innovation constitutes one of the primary survival strategies needed for adaptation to a new environment. It involves “how to use the material resources of the environment to satisfy human needs and desires”. As a survival strategy, it is “of much significance in understanding the means by which people develop new aspects of culture”. Since pottery provides the utilization and religious needs of a society that enable it to adapt to the new environment, and since change in environment could lead to change in technology; this could not have been achieved without engaging in certain levels of innovative activities. Pottery forms and styles are likely to change over time as the potters struggle with the demands of the new uses pottery is put. The most obvious thing that happens inside societies is that people have new ideas and change how they do something.” The propensity to innovate (create) new forms and styles is the characteristics of the potter in order to survive in a competitive environment. Thus, observable change informal, stylistic and functional attributes of pottery of the study areas are likely the results of the potters’ innovative responses in an effort to survive in their changing world. For some of the potters in the study areas to have survived in the competitive market inspired by the European merchandized activities they must have engaged in some kind of innovations. Diffusion and acculturation theories are approaches essential for identification of the exogenous factors responsible for change in a given society. Innovation, the major source of social change, “whether in the form of new weapons, new customs or new religions are more often imported from other

societies than developed independently within a society". Since pottery forms, especially decorations are sometimes tied to the people's traditional belief system, the observable changes that developed overtime are in most cases the consequences of external influences. Thus, it is the exchange of ideas that existed among societies that lead to most of the observable changes in cultural traits.

In the two areas of study, evidence abound of culturally transmitted trait in their pottery tradition. The appearance of pottery vases, characteristics of modern pottery products sometimes on sale along Afikpo road (within the railway station) is a clear evidence of external influence created by the European missionary activities in some parts of Igboland. Evidently, the pottery tradition would not have survived if not because of the role it plays in the traditional society. Functionalist approach provides clues on the relationship of pottery to the social system. As stated earlier, pottery provides the utilitarian and religious needs of the society which enables it to make to the new environment. However, the society adapts to its environment not only through its technology, but also through its organizational and ideational sub systems. Functionalists argue that the survival of society through time can be better understood only through these components and their relationships. They believe that each of the components contributes to the stability of the system. As a matter of fact, pottery generates certain attributes that make it treasured in society and it is perhaps these attributes that are responsible for its survival in Ishiagu, Afikpo, EkpeneUkim and in other parts. Thus, the analysis of their pottery forms, functions and decoration are of great significance in determining how these attributes contribute to the survival of the traditional society.

### 1.6. Conclusion

There is an agreement among scholars that the problem of African traditional pottery emanated from the emergence of modern pottery products and other related products. Igbo pottery assumed its stability and sophistication in the production and marketing of pots.

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