A Discursive Analyse of the Effects of Morphology and Textural Designs on Buan Pottery

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Abstract

There are many ways to decorate pottery. Potters shape the piece and add colours to make a pleasant pattern. Sometimes textures are added to a piece using different methods. There are tools specifically made to texture pottery. One of the oldest methods involves pressing natural items, such as leaves and sticks, into the piece when it is still pliable. This can make a pattern, or it can be just a highlight for the finished product. Pottery exist in different communities of Nigeria and with those in Buan situated in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria not an exception. The Buan people had a tradition of pottery making, although, this no longer exist. The Buan pottery centre has now been seen as a mere research area for artists and ceramics who find it pleasurable. Hence the crux of this works, on the discursive analysis of the effects of Morphology and Textural designs on Buan pottery.

Keywords: Morphology, texture, design, Pottery.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi–ethnic country with varied climate, vegetation and landscape where peoples of various ethnic groups with diverse cultures live. The ways of life of peoples of Nigeria are primarily determined by their

environment. For example, in the northern part of the country, the climate is conducive for grazing animals in its Sahelian plains and this makes the zone suitable for the rearing of herd of animals tended by the nomadic Fulani herdsmen. Thus, since they are always on the move with their herd of sheep and cattle, wandering in desperate search for water and pasture for them, the nomadic Fulani herdsmen, as in the olden days, utilize simple and light domestic utensils which are not only movable but resistant to shocks and breakages. Calabash vessels and leather works among others fall into this category of household or domestic products for nomadic life of the Fulani people (Maduka, 2009)

Farther south, where there is a change of climate and vegetation, are founded thick forest areas which are salutary for farming, hence the inhabitants are mostly farmers with more settled life than their nomadic Fulani counterparts in the North. The household vessels that are predominantly in use among this set of people with settled life include large and heavy domestic utensils such as mortar and pestle, for pounding cassava and yam, or big and deep clay pot with wide mouth that is as fat and round as a pregnant goat, for fermenting cassava to make "foo – foo" or storing water for drinking, bathing and washing.

Generally, pottery – making involves digging the clay at river banks or streams, carrying it home, pounding it, soaking it, sieving or separating it from foreign matters, kneading it, shaping it, decorating it, and firing the pot etc. The making of pottery includes the following basic methods namely: shaping (modelling), moulding, decorating and firing. The clay must first of all undergo some sort of purification before the pottery making commences (Ndubuisi, 2001). This is because raw clay contains a lot of impurities like sand, rocks and vegetable matter which need to be removed. After purification, the pure clay is then mixed with water to make it malleable, and then kneaded to remove all air bubbles.

Shaping can be accomplished by use of hand. The hand – process requires simply pinching a ball of clay into a desired shape. In the moulding method, a rigid mould like old pots or baskets are used. The soft clay is pressed into

the mould and allowed to dry or a liquid clay, called slip may be poured into a mould that absorbs moisture as the clay slowly dries. For the decorating method, the object formed can be decorated by merely scratching designs of the potter's choice into the surface of the pot. Decoration may entail cutting into the surface of the pot geometrical patterns with a sharp knife. A potter can also accomplish decoration by rubbing patterns of his or her choice on to the surface of the clay pot with smooth pebbles.

Decorative patterns of designs varies from one ethnic group to another or from one area to another or from one potter to the other, to show – case the culture of the area or tribe. Thus, the patterns of decoration of pottery at Afikpo in Ebonyi state are different from the patterns of pottery at Ilorin in Kwara State or Gwari in Niger State. Sometimes designs can consist of circles or loops. A potter may draw a pattern of leaves or animals or insects like lizards, scorpions and birds as we can see in Gwari water pots (Niger State). Decoration is not only limited to the surface body of pottery but inside of the lid may be decorated also (Nzegwu, 2000). Pottery production had existed in Buan, Khana Local Government of Rivers State, where these methods of pottery production were practiced by the potters.

Theoretical framework

Aesthetics is the philosophical study of beauty. It is related to the philosophy of art, which is concerned with the nature of art and the concepts in terms of which individual works of art are interpreted and evaluated. Aesthetics is broader in scope than the philosophy of art, which comprises one of its branches. It deals not only with the nature and value of the arts but also with those responses to natural objects that find expression in the language of the beautiful and the ugly. A problem is encountered at the outset, however, for terms such as *beautiful* and *ugly* seem too vague in their application and too subjective in their meaning to divide the world successfully into those things that do, and those that do not, exemplify them. Almost anything might be seen as beautiful by

someone or from some point of view, and different people apply the word to quite disparate objects for reasons that often seem to have little or nothing in common. It may be that there is some single underlying belief that motivates all of their judgments. It may also be, however, that the term *beautiful* has no sense except as the expression of an attitude, which is in turn attached by different people to quite different states of affairs (Aguzie, 2001).

Moreover, in spite of the emphasis laid by philosophers on the terms *beautiful* and *ugly*, it is far from evident that they are the most important or the most useful either in the discussion and criticism of art or in the description of that which appeals to us in nature. To convey what is significant in a poem, we might describe it as ironic, moving, expressive, balanced, and harmonious. Likewise, in characterizing a favourite stretch of countryside, we may prefer to describe it as peaceful, soft, atmospheric, harsh, and evocative, rather than beautiful. The least that should be said is that *beautiful* belongs to a class of terms from which it has been chosen as much for convenience' sake as for any sense that it captures what is distinctive of the class.

On this note, the theory of aesthetics supports this work. In studying the Buan pots, its functions as at when produced and its aesthetic appeal presently and comparing to the time of its production will be considered. This is so, because they have forms and eventually, some were somehow, decorated, even though those decorated were insignificant because of their numbers.

Buan Community

Khana Local Government Area is located in Rivers state, South-south Nigeria and has its headquarters in Bori. A number of towns and villages make up Khana LGA and these include, Nyokhana, Kenkhana, Babbe, Opuoko, **Buan,**Zaakpon, and Sogho. The estimated population of Khana

LGA is put at 239,874 inhabitants with the vast majority of the area's inhabitants being members of the Ogoni ethnic group. The Ogoni language is predominantly spoken in the LGA while the most practiced religion in the area is Christianity. A number of festivals such as the Ogoni cultural festival are held in Khana LGA. The Buan people are predominantly farmers (Barivure, 2011).

Discussing the Buan Pots

Analyses based on form and function focus on the shapes of ceramic vessels. The underlying assumption in this approach is that the shape of the vessel was determined by the way it was used. One weakness of this approach is that it ignores other factors that may have influenced the shape the object took, such as the material properties of the clay used, the manufacturing technologies available to the potter, and any cultural factors that might have constrained the form that the vessel eventually took. When employed properly, form and function analyses can provide valuable information about ancient economic patterns, units of measure, household food production and consumption, and household sizes.

Movements of people, ideas, and ways of life changes in pottery styles and forms of a pottery tradition of a people. It is important to study pottery in societies going through economic and social transitions. Functional attributes of vessels are somehow given definition based on the vessels morphology and direct evidence of its use. As such, pottery, which is used to process foods, should reflect this functional dichotomy. Therefore, pottery forms are expressly tied to function.

It is first necessary to examine Buan subsistence strategies and pottery forms. Buan people traditionally relied on resources readily available inthe environment including nuts, wild plants, large and small mammals, fish,birds, turtles, and shellfish to design their pottery wares.

Pottery morphology and function is particularly useful in the rise of Buan societies in the Ogoni Kingdom because it sheds light on issues of chronology, subsistence strategies and patterns of cultural diffusion. While

stylistic analyses of pottery aid in the development of site chronologies and provided insight into patterns of cultural influence and drift (Ford, 2009), functional analyses of pottery are indispensable for gaining insight into the technology used by people in everyday life (Brown 2003).

Buan cooking pots are especially useful in that they are "integrated into the largely unconscious business of daily living and tend to persist and are untouched by contact with neighbouring cultures or by changing fashions". Pots are household items, and as such, they were manufactured and utilized for specific functions (Brown, 2003). Determining those functions is especially critical when studying transitional societies, as they can indicate fundamental changes in technologies and cultural practices. It has been demonstrated that the morphological attributes of vessels may be used to identify functional performance characteristics (Brown, 2003). Such attributes can and do largely determine the ways in which pots, as stencils, can function (Mark, 2008).

Buan jars, having relatively large orifice diameters and slightly restricted necks, are ideal for boiling liquids for long periods of time. This is because the large orifice allows for easy access for stirring and the slightly restricted neck aids in heat retention, reduces spillage, and limits evaporation (Longjohn, 2004). Just as morphological characteristics can suggest function, fundamental shifts in morphology can indicate changes in dietary and subsistence practices. The Buan phase ceramic assemblage is dominated by what Binford (2002) would term technomic, or utilitarian pottery. It is largely undecorated and was manufactured in relatively few forms. There are no elaborate decorative modes or surface treatments, traits generally are thought to serve social or ideological functions. Therefore, variations in form are primarily the result not of stylistic preferences but of functional ones. Thus, the morphological vessel types present within this type of assemblage likely represent functionally distinct classes of vessels (Hally, 2003). It is for this reason that Buan pottery is particularly conducive to functional analysis. Considering that vessel morphology is inextricably

tied to function, one would expect to find that forms tend to remain relatively unchanged over time unless accompanied by shifts.

The basic anatomy of a pottery vessel must first be addressed. There are three primary components of a simple vessel: orifice, body, and base. The orifice consists of the opening at the top of the vessel, and the base consists of the bottom of the vessel. While the base is easily distinguishable for flat-based vessels, its boundaries are less clear in round-and conical-based vessels. The body is thatpart of the vessel between the orifice and base. When the vessel has a restricted orifice, that portion of the vessel above the maximum diameter is called the upper body, or shoulder, and the portion below the maximum diameter is called the lower body. Many vessels in Buan also have collars. Collars extend upward from the vessel body, beginning at the throat, which is a slight restriction in diameter near the upper shoulder. Collars do not significantly restrict the orifice diameter relative to the maximum vessel diameter (Rice, 2007).

The vessel orifice is often described in regard to the rim and lip. The lip is the edge of the vessel opening, or the location at which the interior of the vessel meets its exterior. As the names suggest, rounded lips exhibit rounded cross-sections, and flattened lips appear squared, or flattened in cross section. Folded/flattened lips are formed when the upper portion of a vessel is folded outward and onto itself, and then flattened. It results in a thickened lip that has a distinctive cross-section in which the fold in the clay can easily be seen. Rims include that part of the vessel nearest the orifice, and rim sherds are distinguishable from body sherds in that the vessel lip is present on the former. Rim height can only be measured when there is a distinct inflection separating it from the vessel body, such as that of the throat on collared vessels. Rim height is defined in this study as the vertical height between the vessel lip and the point of vertical tangency on the vessel throat (the most constricted portion of the vessel neck) (Rice, 2007).

To reduce error, three measurements were taken on each rim sherd, and the averaged values were then used to calculate diameter. However, because Buan vessels were handmade and are therefore rarely perfectly circular on

any horizontal plane, this type of measurement has the potential to include a great deal of error.

Vessel shape also plays a key role in ceramics, in that larger, thicker pots exhibiting less curvature and are more likely to break into larger portions, while smaller, thinner pots with higher degrees of curvature are more likely to break into smaller sherds. As regards the functional analysis, this study attempts only to broadly infer the functions that were intended at vessel manufacture based on vessel morphology. There is no doubt that Buan pots can function in many ways, and not all of them related to food preparation (Rice, 2007).

Morphological Variability and Use-Alteration within the Buan Vessel

Because function is closely related to form, morphological differences among the Buan vessel types and size classes were analyzed to assess functional variability. Use alteration of vessels, in this case consisting of soothing, was also examined to help determine Buan phase vessel function. Thick vessel walls provide a high degree of mechanical strength, but they do not conduct heat as efficiently as thin walls. Because thin walls are efficient heat conductors, they both decrease cooking time and save fuel. Most importantly, thin vessel walls increase a vessel's resistance to thermal shock(the strain caused by rapid heating and cooling and by long-term exposure to high temperatures). Resistance to thermal shock is especially important in pots used for sustained boiling.

Concept of texture on Buan Pots

The natural world is rich in texture: the surface of any visible object is textured at certain scale. Wealth of textures is observed on both artificial and natural objects such as those on wood, plants, materials and skin. In a general sense, the word texture refers to surface characteristics and appearance of an object given by the size, shape, density, arrangement, proportion of its elementary parts. A texture is usually described as smooth or rough, soft or hard, coarse or fine, matt or glossy, and etc.

Textures might be divided into two categories, namely, tactile and visual textures. Tactile textures refer to the immediate tangible feel of a surface. Visual textures refer to the visual impression that textures produce to human observers, which are related to local spatial variations of simple stimuli like colour, orientation and intensity in an image. This discuss focuses only on visual textures, so the term `texture' thereafter is exclusively referred to `visual texture' unless mentioned otherwise. This can be in terms of:

Size of the Buan pots – the pots are big enough to contain items for reservation and storage of liquid while some served as cooking utensils.

Shape of Buan pots – the pots majorly tapper at the base, making them have this look of being fragile (falling and breaking at the slightest touch).

Buan pots in proportion to its elementary parts – the base of a pot should be able to carry the whole body. Even without being told, the interpretation received at sight should give one that impression. Buan pots lack this proportions.

In all, one can deduce that there is no aesthetic appeal on the Buan pots. The pots are bare in decoration. At least, other cultures use the traditional totems and cultural identity of the people to decorate their pottery wares. In the case of Buan potters, the case is different. The pots are left undecorated and that makes it not having some sense of appeal.

Conclusion

The earliest pot sin Buan were produced by hand, either by being moulded or by being built up. Although small pots could be moulded, larger ones had to be built up by placing successive rings of clay on top of each other. Even though the earliest pots appear to have been decorated. These

decorations have ranged from simple geometric patterns to the elaborate illustrations characteristic of the Chinese vases. Some early examples appear to have been made in imitation of baskets, or to have been moulded inside a basket. The patterns on the pots were created with finger nails, pointed sticks, or bird bones. Each culture evolved its own unique form of pottery. These shapes typically developed into characteristic forms that changed little over time. Even with the rich natural environment of vegetation surrounding the Buan People, only but a few of their pottery wares were decorated and given texture. Interestingly, pottery has been a medium of history preservation. The case remained different with Buan the people. There are no traces of traditional motif on their pots.

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