

Patronage and the Development of Pottery in Ibibio Land in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

The Ibibio land is an area occupied by the Ibibio, the largest ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State, one of the oil-producing states in the South-South zone of Nigeria. Apart from fishing, farming and trading, pottery is another occupation of the people which had been in practice before the advent of the Europeans to the area in about 1887 AD. The wares produced were just for the family or exchanged with some other person for a needed commodity in what is known as trade-by-barter. With the arrival of the Europeans, money was introduced as legal tender, modernity set in and there were varieties of wares such as beautifully finished plastic, enamel and imported ceramic wares in the market, thus things began to be difficult for the indigenous potters of Ibibio land. It thus appears that despite the advancement in technology, which brought about the introduction of modern equipment, tools, techniques and materials into the profession, and the current electronic media, patronage has remained a serious problem militating against the growth of the industry, hence this paper. With available data from both primary and secondary sources, this paper takes a look at patronage, how it affects the growth of the industry in the twenty-first century and possible remedies.

Keywords:

Ibibio land, Trade-by-barter, Patronage, Militating, Remedies

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Background to the Study

Pottery, the art and science of fired clay was discovered when there was an increased need for vessels. As farmers, fishermen, hunters, traders and followers of African Traditional Religion (ATR), different forms of pottery ware were produced for different functions. Pots were produced for fetching and storing liquids, food processing, storage of grains, drying of food, cooking, washing, eating, drinking, entertaining and traditional worship. Since pottery wares were primarily produced to solve domestic problems, the traditional potters only exchanged pots for whatever they needed, a system of trade known as trade-by-barter, which does not involve money as legal tender. With the advent of modernity and money as legal tender, there has been a change in the living standard and therefore many people and modern homes require modern designs that will not only add beauty to the environment but make living more comfortable.

The traditional potters of Ibibio land have been in the business of producing and selling pots though it appears that the rate of patronage has been very poor. There is high demand for a variety of pottery wares, and there is money to be made but the design and quality of the wares do not seem to meet the taste of modern society, hence, The problem of patronage. This calls for innovation which involves marrying tradition with modernity, to investigate, rediscover, redesign, recreate and implement useful ideas for new production techniques, equipment, materials, tools, products (tangible and nontangible), services, and management practices. Knight, (1997), defined innovation as "the pursuit of creative or novel solutions to challenges confronting the industries including the development or improvement of goods and services" This will go a long way to improving production capacity, quality of wares and the level of patronage.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to identify the reasons for low patronage which hinders the development of pottery practice in Ibibio land in the twenty-first century, and the objectives will be to explore the place of patronage in pottery development, to identify the reasons for low patronage, to explore the possibility of attracting high patronage and to explore the possibility of improving the production capacity and quality of wares.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on the design theory by Anthony Bertram in 1938 which according to Fiell, and Fiell, (2003), posited that "Good design is not a matter of wealth, much less of the chic, the latest thing. It is not a matter of novelty for novelty's sake, but of the production of cities, houses and goods which will best satisfy the needs of the people: their need for practical, honest, cheap, lasting and beautiful things to see and use in their everyday lives" Anthony Bertram, a British art critic was a passionate advocate of modernism whose theory on the design provided a set of core principles for good design which dwell on firmness (*firmitas*), utility (*utilitas*) and beauty (*venutas*). This theory suits this study because high patronage can only be attracted by quality works of art produced on the core principles of design which are firmness, utility and beauty. It has

always been the position of potters to marry tradition with modernity for improved quality wares. It is to identify problems, revisit and build on existing structures with modern ideas, equipment, materials and techniques to arrive at new forms to meet the taste and demands of the twenty-first century. In his contribution, Apostolos-Cappadona, (1967), said "I am a potter, a maker of things, for my work to be good today and better in future, requires doing". Potters are creative people whose conversations always centre on new ideas, equipment, tools, materials, techniques, recalcitrant kiln problems and let us be frank, sales. The point made here is that no matter the work a creative person produces, sales is what motivates the artist and develops the practice and the society.

The Discovery of Pottery in Ibibio land

The Ibibio, the largest ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State, South-South zone of Nigeria has a long-standing pottery tradition. Glenn, (1960), opined that "since the material, clay was found in most of the earth's surface, the discovery of pottery had probably occurred independently in many areas of the world". He further said that "many different societies were likely to possess the basic knowledge and techniques needed to use the material". In his contribution, Igwilo, (1983), said that "pottery as one of the universal means of communication was not confined to certain races or countries, rather it was something that was bound to occur through man's unavoidable contact with the materials, clay and fire". Harvey (1976), asserted, "in the Neolithic period, when a more settled form of existence evolved as a result of the development of farming methods, circumstances such as the need for vessels and containers favoured the discovery and development of pottery as a domestic craft". He added that "there is no single origin of the craft, but as early civilized communities developed in different parts of the world over a wide period, so the discovery and development of pottery flourished". This is true because some of the most reliable information comes from pottery remains. After all, it is durable and therefore carried information that reflected the life and culture of the people who made them. It must be noted that pottery or ceramics is one art that makes use of all the natural elements such as earth, water, air, sun and fire. The presence of these natural elements in every society and man's daily interaction with them must have led different societies to discover pottery at different times. However, the recorded account of the accidentally burnt coated basket remains the universally accepted historical record of the discovery of pottery.

Rado, (1988), said that "there is practically no information about the firing of ancient pottery, but there is the thought that man's involvement with fire and its maintenance probably led to the accidental discovery of fired pottery". Igwilo, (1983), supported this fact when he said that "the documentation of pottery became possible in those parts of the world where civilization started such as Egypt, China, India and the Middle-East which are regarded today as places where the earliest pottery came from. Ekpo and Willet (1982), said that evidence from the Nok Culture shows that pottery existed in Nigeria as early as 300 BC and 200AD. According to Leith-Ross (1970), "the variety of pottery wares collected from all over Nigeria and catalogued in 1970 included representations from the

Ibibio-speaking race of southern Nigeria". She said further that "the fine and elaborately decorated and successfully fired pottery wares are for export as their good qualities are widely recognized. Baker (1961) and Udoh (1996), held that contrary to European history, pottery had its origin also in Ibibio land just as in other societies.

Baker (1961) and Udoh (1996), recorded that the origin of pottery in Ibibio land is traced to the ancient art of meat roasting and preservation. As hunters, pieces of meat were put in clay balls and placed on a shelf called, "Ubiom or Utang" over fireplaces to dry. This must have been to protect the meat from flies, carbon dioxide and soot. Accidentally, one of the huts got completely burnt, but after the accident, it was discovered that though the meat was gone, the clay became hard and rock-like, enough to hold liquid without slaking. That gave rise to the use of clay to produce larger objects, dried and set on fire to harden enough as vessels and containers for various purposes.

Patronage

The word patronage simply means the act of providing approval and support or vigorous backing up. It can be said to be regular support or sponsorship from a customer or client to keep an art studio going for a long time. Fass, P. S. (2009), asserts that "patronage is regular purchasing from the store, studio or gallery by government, business organizations or private individuals". Patronage from its meaning does not only mean the purchase of works of art but also the support is given towards the development of art. This support includes grants, loans, training, appreciation and the provision of space, structure, equipment, materials and enabling laws to promote the practice and protect the potters and the pots.

Factors Hindering Patronage of Ibibio Pottery

Many factors are hindering the development of pottery practice in Ibibio land, South-south, Nigeria. One such problem is patronage. Lack of patronage has in turn hindered the development of pottery in the area for a long time now and this does not position the profession for the challenges of the twenty-first century. These factors include; Lack of space, high cost of production equipment, high cost, poor quality and scarcity of materials, lack of skills acquisition, high poverty level, religious influence, the functionality of wares, poor quality of wares, lack of awareness, lack of appreciation, the influence of allied products, inadequate energy for firing, lack of innovation and creativity, corruption and government policies.

Lack of Space

Onuoha, B. C. and Amah, E. (2016), opined that "entrepreneurs are seen to be visionary in nature. This means that they have dreams and visions which they often translate into action". The first step to actualizing these dreams and visions is to acquire a space or land which remains the first factor of production. Longe, O. A. (2016), stated that "though the land is defined as a gift of nature, it does not only include the surface of the earth but other gifts of nature or natural resources like water, forest, mineral resources and the atmosphere. Acquiring land or space therefore for pottery practice in Ibibio land is one

factor that hinders the development of pottery in the area. This is because the land is expensive for a traditional potter. Every that practices pottery does so just beside the residential building which does not give room for the expansion of the practice. The space thus affects the production scale which in turn makes the potter unable to acquire a space to exhibit their wares to attract the public to visit, appreciate, and make critique and purchase.

High Cost of Production Equipment

Ceramic/pottery equipment is a capital-intensive and critical factor of production. It is a man-made asset used to produce other goods and services. With the high cost of pottery equipment, especially the imported ones, and the poverty level of the indigenous potter, it, therefore, becomes almost impossible to acquire this equipment which includes a pug mill, clay extruder, potters wheel and kiln, to mention but a few. This makes the potter who desires to remain in the practice to resort to self-made equipment. Onu, (2006), observed that the main aim of this is to stop dependency on foreign-made equipment which costs a fortune to import. This has deterred a lot of people from venturing into ceramic practice while those already in it are left in despair. The high cost of equipment, therefore, requires sponsors to boost production which will further attract high patronage and growth of the industry

High Cost, Poor Quality and Scarcity of Materials

The quality of the works of art will depend on the cost, the quality and the availability of the materials. These problems will lead to poor quality works of art and an increase in the cost of production. These problems do not allow the indigenous potter to produce good quality wares that will attract patronage. Potters should mine and process their materials by reasoning which allows them to explore new materials for an interesting character that will attract high patronage.

Lack of Skills Acquisition

A potter who has received the proper education and has acquired the necessary skills in the area of pottery will be in a better position to produce wares that will meet the taste of the consumers. The traditional potter finds it difficult to explore and exploit modern equipment, techniques and materials which in other words is to marry tradition with modernity. The traditional potters have not deemed it necessary to identify problems and to revisit and build on existing structures by embracing the use of the potters' wheel and other modern equipment, materials and techniques for better results. This makes them continue to produce wares that are not sought in twenty-first-century homes.

High Poverty Level

This has contributed in no small measure to low patronage and underdevelopment of the industry in Ibibio land. Since the majority of them are peasant farmers, fishermen and traders who are toiling to feed their families, they are financially not capable of patronizing art. The high poverty level of the potters will cause them to use cheap and inferior materials to produce their works and this will discourage patronage.

Religious Influence

Religion has been another factor that has made the indigenous potters not enjoy high patronage. The advent of the Christian religion to the area and the conversion of the people to the Christian faith have presented the works of art as fetish objects that should not be seen in homes. This has made the people not appreciate pottery forms to the point of purchasing them yet, they embrace the imported wares with both arms. The adornment of African Traditional Religious shrines with pottery wares and other works of art, especially as shown in Nollywood films, stage plays and sacrificial items at some road junctions in our communities has continued to create the impression that pottery wares are fetish objects.

Functionality of Wares

Functionality as a reason for art matters a lot when it comes to patronage. No one wants to acquire whatever does not solve the current problem either aesthetic or utilitarian function. The fact is that the form that was useful in the twentieth century may not be needed in the twenty-first century. At this point, innovation and creativity are needed to attract patronage. Existing structures must be visited to marry tradition with modernity through the use of new or borrowed ideas, equipment, tools, materials and techniques to create wares that will attract high patronage.

Poor Quality of Wares

This will certainly not attract high patronage. There may be creativity and innovation but where the works are not of good quality, they will not attract buyers. The potters still produce the old traditional unglazed pots with the conical foot which are almost not relevant in the twenty-first century. The world is changing, design is dynamic, therefore each time an artist exhibits his works, people want to see new works of better quality that will solve trending problems.

Lack of Awareness

A lack of necessary awareness among the end users does not encourage patronage. The people need to know of the wares produced and how they fit into the challenges of the twenty-first century as bricks, tiles, bathing tubs, electrical insulators, table wares, wares for the textile and fashion industry, bone transplant, complimentary wares, gift items and so on. To this end, the necessary awareness must be created to attract sponsors and patronage through television, radio, newspaper, posters, handbills, and the current social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, tweeter, website, Instagram and so on. Awareness should also be created among the potters about current issues and how to improve upon the quality of their products, the marketing outlets and how to cost their wares if they must remain relevant. The potential buyers must be made to know that the imported wares are also products of clay which had undergone the same process and firing temperature to become hard, dense, vitreous and impermeable just as the indigenous wares.

Lack of Appreciation

Lack of appreciation comes as a result of some already mentioned factors such as poverty level, religious influence, lack of necessary awareness, outdated design, poor quality products and so on. When the wares do not meet twenty-first-century taste and demand, people will certainly not patronize them.

Influence of Allied Products

The introduction of allied products such as beautifully designed enamel and plastic wares and imported high-quality pottery wares has remained a major threat to indigenous potters, pots and the industry. To attract high patronage over these allied products that have dominated the market, the indigenous potter must endeavour to revisit the existing structures with new or borrowed ideas, equipment, materials and techniques to produce wares of better quality in firmness, utility and beauty.

Inadequate Energy for Firing Wares

The inadequate supply of electricity and other fuels such as coal, firewood, kerosene, diesel, engine oil and gas will affect production. The firing may end up consuming much time, materials, funds and energy and giving a different result than expected or even ending up in total disaster. This will either result in the suspension of production or a drastic increase in the prices of wares which will result in low or zero patronage.

Lack of Innovation and Creativity

A potter who wants to attract patronage must be creative and innovative. De Jong and Wenekers, (2008), said that innovation is the "creation and implementation of useful ideas for new products, services, production methods and management practices". Knight (1997), defined innovation as "the pursuit of creative or novel solutions to challenges confronting the firm including the development or improvement of goods and services" It thus follows that for the potter to be able to attract patronage and the desired support, he must study the market and be able to produce new wares for the twenty-first-century functions. To be innovative and creative is to be a risk taker, which involves going into a venture whose outcome can result in failure or a loss. It is to marry tradition with modernity by revisiting existing structures with new or borrowed ideas, equipment, tools, materials and techniques to achieve firmness, utility and beauty as the core principles of design. This follows that the indigenous potters of Ibibio land have the responsibility of developing the pottery practice of the area by putting everything in place to create wares that will attract high patronage and sponsorship that will develop the industry and position it to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Corruption

Corruption is another reason for low patronage. It can be embezzlement or misappropriation of funds meant for the development of a studio, centre, industry, museum or gallery. This will result in low production capacity or total collapse of the industry as a result of low or zero patronage from private art collectors, museums and galleries. A typical example is the Quality Ceramics Industry in the Itu Local Government

Area of Akwa Ibom State. The company on its establishment in the early 1980s was producing high-quality floor and wall tiles which was highly patronized within and beyond the state until the middle of 1990, just when it was set to step up production to include other products. Its total collapse marked the setting up of pottery centres by some of the frustrated workers who were unable to sustain them due to financial constraints, lack of creativity, professionalism and patronage.

Government Policies

Some policies of the government, for example on the mining of solid minerals such as clay and other essential minerals and the importation of modern equipment, tools and materials can also reduce the production capacity, quality of wares and patronage thereby hindering the growth or development of the potter and the practice in Ibibio land in particular and the nation in general.

Conclusion

Pottery practice as discovered in Ibibio land had been in practice before the advent of the Europeans to the area, though the development has been very slow. This, as identified is due to very poor patronage and support for the industry. To attract patronage and support, indigenous potters must endeavour to do all they can to produce quality wares to meet the ever-increasing demand for pottery wares. Finally, creativity and innovation must be put in place to position the pottery tradition for the twenty-first century.

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