# Conceptualizing Female Folks as Predominates in Traditional Pottery Production: The Buan Experience

**By**

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## Abstract

This paper focuses upon conceptualizing female folks as predominant in traditional pottery production: the Buan experience. Traditionally, women potters in this area have been limited to domestic production, producing for the household relatively than for sale. Lots of opinions are made to account for this, mostly given the diversity of pottery-making in the area and the existence of female potters in commercial industries somewhere else around Rivers State. Whilst no final conclusions are made, it is noted that women in Buan do not participate in commercial pottery-making involving preparing clay, firing and selling activities which are integral to the production process as forming, which can be practiced more agreeably around the domestic responsibilities for which the women in the locality are bound to be known.

**Key words: Ethnography, Buan, Pottery, Female**

## Introduction

Pottery is one of the crafts of ancient Nigeria that is still being practised in most parts of the country today. It is the art of forming objects of clay in a

moist plastic condition and then drying them by either exposure to sun and air, fire, baking in kilns or ovens. A decorative pot in the process of production are formed in various types like cooking vessels, food bowls, storage red pots, drinking cups, funerary urns, flower pots, decorative pots and frying or drying pots etc (Adams, 2008). It is Nigeria's most cultural material that has caught the attention and interest of early British archaeologists in Nigeria like Professor Thurstan – Shaw, whose work of excavation of these precious baked – clay objects has been outstanding, but humongous and elephantine. Pottery has been described as one of the cheapest arts being practised in Nigeria and heavily dominated by women. This statement not far – fetched. The raw materials used in making pottery are clay and water which are common as well as found throughout the length and breadth of the country. They are not scarce commodity, and machines are not used in its production (Berns, 2009).

Asin the case of the Buan people, the women majorly practice pottery, weaving, body decoration, cooking, farming and others. Indigenous pottery making in Buan community is seen as an interesting area for the women that requires high level of devotion to acquire technical skills for a successful practice. The needed knowledge of identifying good quality pottery wares mostly the domestic types are done by the women. In Buan, women produce indigenous pottery wares for household use and commercial purposes despite the fragility and stress of transportation of such wares (Teilhet, 2008).

**Geography**

Buan is a community in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State which covers a total area of 560 square kilometres and has an average temperature of 25 degrees centigrade. The area has several rivers and tributaries flowing within its territory. The total precipitation in Khana LGA is estimated at 2900 mm of rainfall per annum (www.wikipedia.org)

**Economy**

Trade is an important feature of the economy of Buan with the area hosting markets where a variety of commodities are bought and sold. Fishing is also an important economic activity undertaken by members of the Buan community with the area's rivers and tributaries being rich in sea food. Farming is another critical aspect of the economy of Buan people with the area known for the cultivation of crops such as cassava, maize, oil palm, and plantain. The pottery craft is practiced amongst the women in Buan community. They are noted for this craft and have a pottery centre that is well known around the Rivers State. This pottery centre in Buan seems to be a centre of attraction in the locality (Eyo, 2000).

**Theoretical Framework**

This discourse derives its background based on the "Feminist theory". The Feminist theory is a major branch of theory within sociology that shifts its assumptions, analytic lens, and topical focus away from the male viewpoint and experience and toward that of women. In doing so, feminist theory shines a light on social problems, trends, and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified by the historically dominant male perspective within the social theory

Many people incorrectly believe that the feminist theory focuses exclusively on girls and women and that it has an inherent goal of promoting the superiority of women over men. In reality, the feminist theory has always been about viewing the social world in a way that illuminates the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice, and in doing so, promotes the pursuit of equality and justice (Hodder, 2006).

By shifting the focus of social theory away from the perspectives and experiences of men, feminist theorists have created social theories that are more inclusive and creative than those which assume the social actor to always be a man. Part of what makes the feminist theory creative and

inclusive is that it often considers how systems of power and oppression interact, which is to say it does not just focus on gendered power and oppression, but on how it might intersect with systemic racism, a hierarchical class system, sexuality, nationality, and (dis)ability, among other things.

Some feminist theory provides an analytic framework for understanding how women's location in, and experience of, social situations differ from men. For example, cultural feminists look at the different values associated with womanhood and femininity as a reason why men and women experience the social world differently. Other feminist theorists believe that the different roles assigned to women and men within institutions better explain gender difference, including the sexual division of labour in the household. Existential and phenomenological feminists focus on how women have been marginalized and defined as "other" in patriarchal societies. Some feminist theorists focus specifically on how masculinity is developed through socialization, and how its development interacts with the process of developing feminity in girls (McGaw, 2009).

This is the theory that best suits this discourse n that, the Buan men see pottery production as mainly for women. Who knows, if men were to be part of the production process, the centre would have still been in operation till date. The entire process of production were left for the female folks alone to handle because, pottery was not considered as important as farming and other craft works engaged by the men. It is in this view that inequality sets in and the feminist theory deemed fit for this work.

**The Buan Potters**

Their rich artistic work of the Buan potters can be seen from their colourful and beautiful decorated pots. The pottery industry is dominated by women and is one of the oldest industries in Ogoniland, dating back to the 9$^{th}$ century (Kpobari, 2001). Women produced pots with clay using their palms

and fingers as tools and units of measurement. These pots which are produced with bare hands usually come out with near perfect shapes and forms, measuring up to the standards of the ones produced with modern-day tools and equipment. A close study of the pottery of the Buan women reflects the art, culture, and nature of the society (though not portrayed in the decorations but only in forms). The pottery industry constitutes a great source of information for those who are interested in knowing the history and culture of this ancient Ogoni community in Nigeria (Kpobari, 2001). Narratives of the society are represented by means of artistic craft of building the pots fused with an understanding and focus on the interaction between the potter and the pottery. This makes pottery artistically valuable. The pots of the Buan women though produced for immediate use and for economic reasons serve as a custodian of culture and tradition of the Ogoni community. In addition to the artistic and practical value, the pottery must be recognized as a repository of a people's culture and history.

Buan pottery tradition from beginning considers women as the carrier of the unique tradition of pottery (Harry, 2012). This is exemplified through the women who carry these pots about to fetch water as well as the children carrying the small ones made for them. The beauty of women carrying the round pots on their heads from the stream especially the pregnant ones makes the pots create sense of feminity (Peter, 2013). Virtually, the traditional Buan pottery shapes are round irrespective of the usage. The sizes and opening of the rims differentiate the wares for their diverse uses. Majority of the pots from Buan indigenous pottery products are water pots, cooking pots and bowels. Strong cultural relationship exists between Nigerian women and pottery practice. Peter (2013) noted that "pottery involved intricate processes and was usually produced by women. Different sizes and shapes of pottery were made by Nigerian women for different uses. There were the small mouthed pots for fetching water from streams, the wide mouthed ones for storage and cooking, and those that

were used as plates and bowls. Certain pots were also used for ritual purpose.

Traditional pottery practice by the Buan women suffered extinction which brought about abandonment of pottery centres in the community. Any environment or society that gives very little or no encouragement to pottery products, the potters experiences gross discouragement. The practice of pottery by women which brought fortunes to them and their families before its hitting the wall due to lack of conformity still has great potentials to revive their economic endeavours in pottery.

In this era of entrepreneurial ventures, pottery practice has a tremendous role to play (Peter, 2015). Furthermore, Peter posits that "Interesting potters in these areas have actually displayed different skills in pottery making, used for different purposes from cultural, religious to social and decorative". All that women and others require involve sourcing for funds and updating their knowledge on modern pottery to boost production of glazed wares which are highly cherished by all. Women have very high concentration and intimacy for clay work production as found in different parts of the world.

**Conclusion**

Several investigative studies have revealed that, all the indigenous activities that deals with the use of clay are basically practiced traditionally by women. The close relationship between women and indigenous pottery cannot be overemphasized. Women activities with clay products create attraction between them, especially in the production of pottery domestic wares, its usage and commercial value. The various indigenous Buan pots produced by the women have their designs using local motifs as testimonies to their expertise in traditional pottery practice. Pots were produced for the youths and women respectively for fetching water. Women produced pots and also admired them, while the round shape of

the indigenous pots resemble some feminine features. Pottery making was a dignified occupation of women in Nigeria about a hundred years ago, but the advent of new containers with plaster as metal has replace some pottery products.

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