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ARTICLE



# Home grown; home inspired: the resilience of traditional hand built pottery production in Ijàyè, Abéòkúta, Southwest Nigeria

Dauda Busari and Oluwatobiloba Odetoyinbo

Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

## ABSTRACT

Despite foreign influence and westernisation, the art of traditional hand built pottery persists in some communities across Nigeria. This study conducted in Ijàyè, Abéòkúta, South-West Nigeria examined the factors responsible for the resilience of simple hand built pottery production. In-depth interviews of potters and residents of Ijàyè were used to collect data on the relevance of traditional pottery in terms of production and usage. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using content analysis. Findings indicated that in contemporary times, the pottery wares were used both for traditional and religious practices. Also, the low cost of the wares encouraged its use. The paper concluded that pottery made in Ijàyè served as rich cultural portrayals, had economic provisioning, performed religious functions and aesthetic purposes for a wide range of people across all levels of the society.

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## Introduction

Indigenous hand built pottery can be said to have developed from man's interaction with the physical and social environment in a quest for survival (Areo, 2014). In ancient traditional Sub-Saharan African societies, clay wares were used for traditional religious rituals, worship, cooking, eating, and storing and preserving food items, clothes and other household effects (Umoru-Oke, 2017b). According to Areo (2014) traditional pottery in Nigeria, but for few exceptions, is mainly women's occupation and handcraft and it has been sustained through the mother-to-daughter transfer of skills (Umoru-Oke, 2017a). One of the exceptions is among the Muslim Hausa of Northern Nigeria where pottery activities are done by men. This can be attributed to the practice of women in seclusion. Invariably, many other crafts and trades undertaken by women in other ethnic groups are performed by the Hausa/Fulani Muslim men.

Traditional African pottery is hand built (Smith, 2010) using simple techniques and materials found in the immediate environment. In Nigeria, the hand built technique was the sole method of producing indigenous pottery wares in Yoruba land as well as in other ethnic groups and communities. Wahlman (1972) classified the Yoruba pottery making techniques into the direct and indirect methods. The indirect method included the use of moulders (in concrete or clay form) to prepare the base of the pots while sausages of clay were subsequently added to the top of the unfinished pot to form the neck and rim. The direct method

involved forming the clay pots from the base to the rim with the hands. It was observed that potters in communities such as Mòro, Ipetumodù, Iséyìn, Ògbómòsò, Òyó, Òkèehò, Ilorin and **Abéòkúta** adopted both methods. However, the direct building technique was specifically recorded of Èkítì potters.

However, pottery has transcended the hand built techniques. Modern techniques of production involving the use of sophisticated materials and technology in clay and ceramics works have been devised with end products having more aesthetic appeal. Generally, traditional hand built pottery has declined in usage, relevance and production (Areo, 2014; Elebute & Odokuma, 2016) challenging the social, religious and economic importance. More attractive and diverse objects such as eating utensils, floor and wall tiles, building bricks, water closets, wash-hand sinks, bathtubs, flower vases, beads and figurines that are more durable and come in unique designs and shapes dominate markets and lived spaces. Studies such as Peters (2016), Osarumwense (2014), and Areo (2014) established that the acceptance of and affinity for modern pottery and ceramic wares along with other available alternatives such as plastics, aluminium, and stainless steel have led to increased production and the resulting decrease in the production of hand built earthen wares. Gukas (2011), added that foreign influences of western education, religion and industrialisation have discouraged the younger generation in developing interest in traditional pottery production. This has also relegated the usage and relevance to the background, restricting their functions to traditional and religious engagements. Consequently, many indigenous industrial resources such as hand built pottery, blacksmithing, farming, wood carving, basket making, and textile weaving which according to Areo (2014) and Umoru-Oke (2017a) hitherto served social, cultural and economic functions have been performing at their lowest capacity due to modern methods of production and foreign alternatives.

Despite the challenges of sustainability highlighted above, pottery production has relatively retained relevance in some communities across Nigeria. This may be attributed to the symbolic importance of the wares in such communities given that pottery, like other cultural elements, is a product of the people and their interactions; it is central to the contextual realities of societies where it exists. One of such communities is **Ijàyè Abéòkúta** where the people still practise hand built pottery with simple tools and local materials. According to Anthony-Euba and Towobola (2014) pottery is an integral part of the **Ijàyè** culture and is ingrained in the origin of the people.

While social change is inevitable due to the dynamic nature of cultures and societies, preserving the knowledge of some aspects of indigenous culture such as pottery is important to learn and appreciate their role in their socio-economic development prior to colonial incursion. Moreover, hand built pottery in traditional communities is culturally defined and indispensable in the performance of salient cultural beliefs and traditional functions that cannot be replaced with modern wares. This study examined the method of production of pottery wares in **Ijàyè**, the types of pot wares produced, the use of the pottery wares in contemporary times, and the factors driving the sales and patronage of the products.

### Indigenous pottery and social change

Change and innovation have occurred in pottery production techniques and materials arising from cultural contact and foreign interference. Over the last 60 years, the influence of foreign pottery and the institutionalisation of pottery in Nigerian tertiary institutions

which started toward the late 1950s have had direct consequence on the modernisation of pottery (Kashim & Adelabu, 2013). The Ceramic Pot Filter (CPF) for instance, is an improvement on the indigenous handmade clay pot used for water storage (Ikoko omi/Amu). The CPF even has a faucet that works like that of a water dispenser. Oladepo et al. (2017) have shown that clay and combustible materials sourced locally could be used for the production of CPFs which helps to purify water for drinking. Rayner et al. (2013) have reported the adoption and use of this technology in developing nations like Benin Republic, Cambodia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Tanzania, and Sri Lanka. The use of CPFs has also been explored in Ghana, Kenya and Honduras (Van Halem et al., 2009). Consequently, many studies have also been carried out about CPFs in Nigeria (Adeleke et al., 2018; Erhuanga et al., 2014; Isikwue & Emmanuel, 2011; National Academy of Sciences, 2007). The discovery of CPFs has in the same manner, influenced the production of clay pots used for drinking water in order to meet modern trends. Oladepo et al. (2017) established CPF as an ingenious approach to the problem of water hygiene and sanitation. However, there is still much to be done to encourage local production of CPFs. In essence, the above-mentioned studies, genuine and ground breaking as they are, have not translated to the availability of the filters in the Nigerian market. Also, in spite of the challenges of potable drinking water for the generality of Nigerians, widespread use of the CPFs has not been recorded.

Nevertheless, according to Peters (2016) there should be a change in approach to the practice of pottery to meet up with other social changes in the society. Modern technology should not erase the indigenous traditional elements but the adoption of foreign methods and materials should be for the improvement of traditional technology. According to Okunna (2012) the famous female potter, Ladi Kwali (1925–1984) aligned herself to the current trend in pottery in her days and this afforded her the opportunity of being at the cutting edge of the craft. She thrived among her male counterparts and her achievements were unprecedented. The place of Ladi Kwali in the history and development of ceramic art practice in Nigeria is thus commendable. Through her embrace and integration of foreign technology and techniques with indigenous forms, she was able to invest in and improve pottery practice in Nigeria. Peters (2016) averred that numerous women potters from Akwa Ibom State and other parts of Nigeria never had such glorious opportunity. Their inability to adapt and adjust to trends in the craft made them abandon the craft which hitherto brought them fortune.

In spite of these, pottery production still has potentials to boost the economy. In this era of entrepreneurship, pottery has a tremendous role to play. Social change as it relates to pottery production and use is also inevitable because of the dynamic nature of culture. Akpomovie (2011) suggested that there is the need to enhance and utilise local traditional technologies for industries. Relevant policies and programmes sustaining indigenous technologies should consolidate the true Nigerian home grown technologies relative to the social context. Nigeria and Africa at large must therefore, see indigenous technologies as capable of sustaining economic development. Diverse traditional skills and technologies, popular in Nigeria are in dire need of promotion and upgrade. To contribute to world civilisation, the continent at large must infuse into their socialisation process, conscious ways of appreciating and preserving local traditional elements (Akpomovie, 2011).

## The economic prospects of pottery craft

Brown (1980) observed that potters were women in their middle years without formal education or literacy. For them, pottery making was a way of life as well as a means of earning a living. Peters (2016) noted that social relationship and monetary benefits were often associated with every activity of pottery practice. The indigenous pottery industry is of particular importance to women who usually own and manage these industries themselves. The activities involved in the production processes of pots take place just within the house (family compound) or within the vicinity of the family compound (very close to the house). The location afforded the women the opportunity to be close to their homes and enabled them take care of the home fronts while engaging in some entrepreneurial activities which helped sustain the family's economic needs. Due to proximity to the raw materials, there was less expense coupled with the fact that the industry is carried out with simple inexpensive tools and simple technology. For the women, these activities must be compatible with the household duties and needs, childcare and other responsibilities, which the women bear. The women are also able to combine pot making with other income generating activities such as farming and trading. Studies such as Elebute and Odokuma (2016), Areo (2014), and Ibeanu (2006) have established the economic viability of pottery in traditional times and also the economic prospects in pottery production in contemporary times. However, the possible ways of harnessing modern technologies and aesthetics demands to make the craft more profitable have not been attended to.

## Setting and methods

**Ijaye, Abeokuta**, Ogun state was purposively selected as the study area due to the continued practice of hand built pottery. It tops the list of places where hand built pottery wares can be purchased in Nigeria. This reliability over time has encouraged production and continuity by way of sustained demand. This sustained demand has also created a specialisation that has influenced the perpetuation of the craft in the community. This paper sought to examine the relevance and usage of pottery wares that has informed its continued production in **Ijaye Abeokuta**.

The research design was exploratory and qualitative tool of data collection was designed to elicit information from the resident potters in the community. Twenty five (25) respondents were involved in the study. They were selected by snowballing technique and were engaged on the functionality and indispensability of their earthen wares. In-depth interviews (IDIs) and observations were used to gather primary data. This engaged the respondents on the dynamics of demand, the nature of interest of consumers and the usage of pots produced. This was to ascertain the relevance and benefits pottery production served both the producers and the consumers against the demands of social change and the working of westernisation. The interviews were conducted using face-to-face informal conversation in the language the respondents desired. Also, relevant observations pertaining to the behaviour and interactions initiated and shared regarding each potter were also made in the course of the study. The observed data were recorded by taking notes, pictures, videos and seeking clarifications and details. They were further sorted and organised into meaningful narratives as applying to the research objectives.

The data collected were then transcribed, sorted, analysed and reported using ethnographic summaries and content analysis. This was presented and organised in such a way that the data gathered addressed the research objectives.

## Data presentation and discussion of findings

### Types of pot made in Ijaye

From observation, pots produced in Ijaye were generally called 'Ape'. They varied in forms and functions. In relation to function, there are some pots designed for domestic use but these were rarely produced because they were no longer in demand. Umoru-Oke (2017b) stated that indigenous Yoruba potters produced utilitarian pots for the consumers who appreciated the fundamental nature of indigenous pottery vessels. Hence, pots made for traditional and religious functions thrived. Such pots were used in preparing concoction and herbs for pregnant women and other people who utilised traditional herbal medicine. Similarly, Ibigbami (1982) as cited in Umoru-Oke (2017b), noted that religious and ceremonial pots were also produced in Ijaye to meet the needs of consumers who used them for traditional rituals and sacrifices, and also in traditional religious events and ceremonies such as the worship of gods and deities such as Òsun, (water goddess) and Sàngó (god of thunder). Also, pots produced in Ijaye were used for cultural portrayals and promotion. Restaurants, tourist centres, movie theatres, and art galleries make use of clay pots to exhibit and promote pottery as an element of indigenous culture. According to a potter, the types and uses of pots are:

We have ikòkò *omi*, ikòkò *Agbo*, ikòkò *lwe* used by some church people to take spiritual bath. There is *Kóló*, *Ishásùn obè*, *Agbèbí*, *Aseje*, *Ajere* for incense, *Òtun* for anyone having spirit husband. **IDI/Female/ Ijaye/2019**

From observation, not all potters made all the types of pots. Some chose the ones they knew how to make best especially the ones they were introduced to by their mothers. While others chose the ones they had a steady market for. By implication, the potters have over the years organised their production in line with demand and the network they have established. Another potter indicated her own area of specialisation thus:

We have ikòkò *Aseje*, *Agbèbí*, *Kerebenlo*, *Adémófilà*, *Tòpolá*, *Ishásùn Obè*, *Kólóbó* also called *Orú* used for cooking herbs and *Àwo Ifá* and they all come in different sizes and patterns. I cannot make them all, but I make *Agbèbí*, I make *Aseje* used for pregnant women by herbalists, then *Awosóbi* used to offer sacrifices, I also make the ones called *Adémófilà* used to prepare spiritual protection that is buried underground when constructing a new house or building. **IDI/Female/ Ijaye /2019**

The types of pots made in Ijaye and their uses are as shown in Table 1 and Plates 1 to 7

**Historical uses of Pots in Ijaye**, it was gathered that clay pots were historically used for cooking, eating and storing food items and personal effects. Clay containers were not considered diabolical in this wise and they were largely accepted for use within and outside the home. In fact, at the dawn of the nineteenth century when the Islamic and Christian religions were just gaining ground, clay wares were still used to serve food in mosques and outdoor gatherings. This was due to the fact that alternatives such as plastics, stainless steel and ceramic wares were not readily available.

**Table 1.** Types of pots made in **Ijàyè** and their uses.

S/N	TYPES OF POTS	USES
1.	<i>Agbèbí</i> : (Plate 1)	This was also called <i>Agbere</i> . It was used as a container for disposing a new born child's placenta.
2.	<i>Ajere</i> : (Plate 2)	This pot was used to burn incense. According to the potters, it was usually used to ward off evil spirit.
3.	<i>Alánti</i> : (Plate 3)	This pot was used for cooking in the home. It had a lid and it came in different sizes.
4.	<i>Àseje</i> : (plate 4)	This was used to prepare concoctions and was usually used for pregnant women.
5.	<i>Ishásùn Obè</i> and <i>Àwosóbí</i> (Plate 5)	These two were slightly alike. They were initially used to cook soup and also to serve food. The potters explained that they were no longer used for these functions. In recent times, they were used to offer sacrifices and they also came in different sizes.
6.	<i>Orù</i> : (Plate 6 a and b)	This was made by joining two moulded pots together. It was also called <i>Kólóbó</i> and it was used for preparing herbs. It was also used to store water. It came in different sizes depending on the need.
7.	<i>Òtun</i> : (Plate 7)	It was also moulded by joining two pots together. However, unlike <i>Orù</i> , several designs and figures could be engraved or incised on the outer wall. It was used in the worship of deities like <i>Òsun</i> and <i>Oya</i> to store water and bath. It was not to be placed on fire for boiling or cooking anything after the initial firing.

A potter disclosed that:

We were told that they used this *Àwosóbí* to eat in the house; they equally used it to serve food in the mosques even before the white people came. For burial, naming and wedding ceremonies back then, they served people food with these clay pots because they were the only containers we had. Unlike now that they use stainless and plastics, they made use of *Àwosóbi*. **IDI/Female// Ijàyè 2019**

Similarly, local industries like those making black soap, palm oil, coconut oil, dye (*Aró*), and corn meal (*Èko*) depended on large clay vessels usually called *Àmù nílá oniró* for their commercial and production activities. Hence, apart from the domestic functions clay wares served, they were equally indispensable to other industrial activities. They were the earliest containers traditional societies had to meet their various socio-economic needs. As stated by Udeme (2006), pottery art reflected the technological trend and development in production of a particular traditional society.

Another potter described the commercial use of clay pots:

My mother said they used to make very big pots: *Ìkòkò nílá* for storing water, the big *Ape* for frying *gaàrí* and *Ìkòkò Aró* for making dye back in the days of our fathers and grandfathers **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè 2019.**

Yet another potter indicated that:

In the olden days, there is *Àmù nílá Oniró*. It was the one used for dyeing cloths. They called it *Ìkòkò Aró* and it was our great grandmothers that made them. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

According to Anthony-Euba and Towobola (2014), these big pots were in high demand due to the industrial functions they served. However, this study gathered that these big vessels were considered too stressful and risky to make due to the high probability of them not coming out well after a reasonable amount of time, energy and resource invested into their production. Also, it was discovered in **Ijàyè**, just as Peters (2016), Areo (2014), Gukas (2011), and Ibeanu (2006) had indicated in their studies in other traditional societies across Nigeria, that the demands of western capitalism and

industrialisation forced local industries out of operation or modified their operations to meet the modern demands of production. This in turn made the production of the big clay pots unnecessary in **Ijàyè**. Over time, the women made the smaller vessels which still retained their historical functionality of religious and medicinal purposes. As at the time of this study, these big pots were no longer produced.

To this, a respondent gave her own opinion as follows:

They are no longer in existence these days, because they are too stressful to make. They could mould those big pots for two weeks and it will still not be successful. It took much time and energy. But when they started making small pots, the stress reduced and money came in on time. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

### *The use of clay pots in contemporary times*

Kashim and Shado (2017) and Peters (2016) indicated that the introduction of foreign religion and western education coupled with a general loss of interest in the indigenous craft have resulted in the decline of pottery usage and production. The study inquired into the usage and relevance of the contemporary pottery wares produced in **Ijàyè**. It was observed that the types of pots made in **Ijàyè** had been modified from the industrial and domestic cooking and storage vessels to the medicinal and religious vessels due to changes in demand and relevance, modernisation and convenience.

On this, a potter said:

Well, in the olden days we used them to store water at home, cook meals and eat before we had plastics and stainless steel. They also used them for traditional religious purposes like concoction and sacrifices and rituals. But now, lot of younger people do not like to eat with it. So, the domestic uses have reduced. **IDI/Male/ Ijàyè /2019**

These changes and trends in production have in turn revealed that the traditional use of clay wares both for herbal medicine, religious ceremonies and even in aesthetics and cultural portrayals is what upholds their relevance in contemporary times. Thus, contemporary uses of clay pots produced in **Ijàyè** have arisen out of their indispensability in traditional/herbal medicine and religious activities.

According to another respondent:

Our pots are still relevant because there are things they need clay pots for that they cannot use plastics and stainless steel. For instance, they can never bear sacrifices or have spiritual bath with plastics. Then, there are people that come from far places that their involvement and purchase have brought advancement and innovation to what our pots are now designed and used for. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

Commenting on the relevance of clay pots in cultural appreciation and showcase, another potter explained that:

Due to civilisation, people abandoned clay pots and were using foreign products. But since five years ago people have come back to them. Take for example, Awosobi, is now used in serving food and soups in parties and in some restaurants. I have someone I send 10 dozen to every month in a restaurant in Lagos. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

Hence there are trends and dimensions to the functions and usage of pots made in **Ijàyè** as gathered from the findings. Contrary to the findings of Kashim and Shado (2017) and

Peters (2016), it was discovered in **Ijàyè** that regardless of people's level of education and participation in foreign religion, they still purchased and made use of clay pots. Civilisation according to the potters had in a way helped the acceptance and usage of pots. Although, most people used the clay pots for traditional religious activities, their usage in contemporary times helped promote indigenous culture. People used them to serve and eat local delicacies like Òfadà rice, Àbùlà, Isí-ewu and pepper soup in parties and restaurants. Some organisations and corporate outfits who occasionally organise cultural exhibitions and activities made use of indigenous and cultural heritages like clothing, (Aso-òkè) dance, music and clay pots to showcase Nigeria's rich traditions and cultures. Therefore, pottery served cultural, economic, religious and aesthetic purposes in contemporary times.

According to the respondents, civilisation is an eye opener; it makes people open minded and appreciative of their cultural foundations instead of embracing foreign culture at the expense of their own indigenous values. As clay pots continue to be relevant in showcasing culture and in economic provisioning, the idea of associating indigenous cultural elements with diabolism and evil is discouraged in this wise, even while embracing western religions.

In the words of a respondent:

Well, civilisation has come to stay. There was a time some people used to say they cannot eat with clay pots because it is used to bear sacrifices. But some people now use them to eat in their homes with style. Only those that cherish culture understand. The one I told you we use in bearing sacrifice is now used to eat *Àbùlà* in restaurants and parties. Some schools and people that do celebrate cultural day always come here to ask us to make them those clay bowls, to serve people and they even use *Aso-òkè* and traditional beads. This is part of what civilisation does. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

### **Changes in the production and sales of pottery**

Gukas (2011) observed that changes associated with the production and usage of pottery wares consisted of the recurrent contemporary, economic, social, and political, educational, and religious factors which had led to the decline of traditional pottery had also discouraged youths in developing interest in the craft. Pottery wares were relatively hand built in **Ijàyè**. The potters agreed that there were no real changes in the techniques and methods of production. They however submitted that men independently engaged in full time pottery production unlike in the time past when only women were involved in production.

To this effect, a potter submitted that:

We have heard that in some places, they now make use of machines for this work, but it is the same methods that our mothers taught us that we still use. We also heard that they now put tap in the *Ikòkò Amù* but we do not make that because there is no need for that. The only changes I can point to is that in the olden days, men do not really engage in pot making. But now, we have more men involved. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

On the general lack of interest in pottery production by youths, Peters (2016) and Kashim and Shado (2017) say it is as a result of a general shift in values and also the recurrent social, economic, educational and religious factors that discourage youth involvement. This was however not the case in **Ijàyè Abéòkúta** where pottery is a long established

communal craft. There is hardly a home or compound where there is no potter, so the children in the household are socialised from birth into the knowledge and production of the craft. It is generally valued and credited for economic sustenance, therefore, the youths in **ljàyè**, recognise the capacity of pottery production for financial independence and in meeting daily needs. Youths and children who help their mothers out in production, in no time set up their own production unit where they make and sell pots while attending school or learning another vocation outside the community. In other words, the youths have a deep appreciation for the craft as do their parents.

A respondent observed that:

You know if you show children a culture or tradition, they will not depart from it when they grow up especially when they derive some benefits from it. It is our native work and these children were born into it. So, no matter their level of education and religion they already have that knowledge. Young girls and boys now make pots on their own, because they realise there is good money in it. Besides, we their parents are proud to be potters, why will they be ashamed of it? Never. **IDI/Female/ ljàyè /2019**

A young potter observed as follows,

This work for me is easy, I learnt from birth and I have started making money from it. So we the youths value it not just because it is our native work here in **ljàyè** but because it also serves a need. Children who have no help focus on the work to sustain themselves since they know there is no other way. So they send themselves to school with that money, so when they have holidays they still come back and work some more. You know if you are doing a job and you make money out of it, it will be difficult for you to leave the job. We even introduce our friends. **IDI/Male/ ljàyè /2019**

It was further revealed that the youths, with their exposure and formal education, actually help promote pottery production in the community unlike when it was just the old women that were involved in pottery production.

According to a potter:

In those days, there were no middle-aged women not to talk of young ladies or girls among the potters. The old women were the ones who made pots. But now, young women and girls outnumber the old women and they are the ones enabling pottery work to continue because they are more creative and they have clients from far places. **IDI/Female/ ljàyè / 2019**

### **Improvement in pottery sales**

The potters indicated that profits from sale of pottery wares had improved due to the improvement in the present prices of pottery wares as against their prices in time past. Also, the present rate of sales had increased. Potters submitted that they sold many pots within the shortest period of time compared to what obtained in the past. Therefore, this improvement in sales (rate and price) was an indication of increased usage.

This respondent says:

As regards the production, there are no differences. The thing is that it was not this expensive in the olden days. In the days of our grandmothers, the prices were not much, but now the prices have risen up. Back then, our grandmothers sold *Àseje* for #80, #120, now it goes for

#600, *Agbèbí* which was sold for #120 then is now sold for #1000 or #1200. Also the rate at which we sell has increased, we don't just sell for higher prices, we also sell plenty too and this was not the way it was before. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

From the above, it was gathered that changes had occurred in the form of increased sales. By implication, this increased sale comprising of improved rates of sales and prices of wares indicates the commensurate changes and improvement that had occurred in the patronage and usage of pottery wares. Invariably, it can be established that pottery wares were still much in use and in demand due to the rate at which the potters sold their wares which according to them is very efficient compared to what obtained in time past.

A potter supplied that:

What I have observed is that the rate at which they demand and buy these pots is higher than that of the olden days. I remember that my grandma used to pack them on her head herself to the market to sell but now, people come from far places all the time to buy them. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

A possible rationale behind the increased rate of sales as indicated by the potters is that the increase in traditional medicine men and herbalists and their various activities in modern times are responsible the increased rate of sales.

In this regard, a potter stated that:

Back in my mother's time, they were not worth much. I totally abandoned the work for like 10 years because the work was not moving. Look at this big pot, during our mother's time, they would have sold it for #500 but now, it cost #7000. It is just that usage has increased due to the fact that we have many herbalists and medicine men unlike before and they are the ones that make use of these pots more. These days, people hardly use the pots to cook or eat like before so it is all those traditional usage that thrive more. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

### **Perceived factors driving sales and patronage**

Bearing on the increased patronage and sales, one could submit that the clay pots were mainly used for traditional and religious purposes much more than the domestic use. Potters experienced patronage from nearby and long distance clients. They made pots for different categories of people and groups who had diverse traditional obligations to perform. In the same vein, potters expressed that their patronage came from foreigners like the Indians, local merchants, middlemen who exported the pots, and hospitals which buy in bulk especially the baby placenta pots (*Agbèbí*). They however, attributed the widespread and increased activities of traditionalists and herbalists as the major force driving demand and usage, and in turn, sales and production. These increased activities of medicine men are therefore an attestation to the relevance of hand built pottery even in modern times.

This finding negates those established by Udeme (2006), Areo (2014), and Peters (2016) who credited the decline of hand built pottery as well as other crafts to the negative effects of foreign religion and western interference. The study further explored the rationale behind the increased existence and operations of traditional medicine men and herbalists. It has been established that buyers and users of pottery wares produced in **Ijàyè** come from both near and distant places and that traditional medicine men and herbalists constituted the bulk of the clientele. These traditional religious worshippers

and medicine men were more numerous and widespread than in the olden days when priesthood was restricted to a family or lineage, and few operated in a village or town. It was discovered that people often combined traditional religious worship with Christianity and Islam. As was observed, apart from traditional religious worshippers who were in charge of family deities and their shrines, some individuals who practised Christianity or Islam still observed traditional beliefs, they participated in traditional religious functions, performed rituals and bore sacrifices to ward off evils or appease gods.

A potter who shared her own perception as regards the rationale behind traditional religious worship and how it enhances pottery sales and patronage stated that:

In the olden days, traditional worshippers, Ifá priests, ritualists and herbalists were usually restricted to a household or a lineage but now, they are very many. Some attend church and some also pray the Muslim way at times, but they are still traditional worshippers and this is not happening in **Ijàyè** alone, it is everywhere. In fact, most of our customers come all the way from Lagos and Ògbómòsò to buy from us here that is why the pots sell fast, because people do more of traditional worship and rituals these days. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

According to another respondent:

Traditional worship and ritual is now widespread than before. Those boys that engage in "yahoo-yahoo" have increased their work. You see them running here and there in need of pots. Sometimes they make use of five at once because they are told to break them after usage, so the more they break the more they come back. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

Naturally, the increase in the demand of pottery wares causes more production and supply. Therefore, the potters continued to make pots in **Ijàyè** due to these attributed changes in sales (rate and prices), which were an indication of improvement in usage and patronage.

A potter asserted that:

You know if we make them and we don't get people to come and buy, we will not make more. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

From the above, it can be established that westernisation had not successfully halted the practice of traditional culture and customs. Therefore, going by the claims of Hopkins (1973) and Majuk et al. (2010) some indigenous crafts not only survived but also, thrived in the era of colonialism and beyond, despite the subsequent social changes that ensued. In essence, civilisation and modernisation in the narratives of the **Ijàyè** people had not halted the sale and usage of pottery wares. As against popular beliefs and opinions, civilisation was attributed as the leading factor causing the changes in sales, demand and usage of pottery wares which had promoted pottery production in **Ijàyè**. Potters claimed that despite formal education and modernisation, they had continued to make and sell pots more than they used to do in the olden days. To them, people's level of education and exposure did not hinder their use of clay pots for aesthetic purposes, like arts and craft exhibition and appreciation, decoration and beautification, entertainment and cultural display and also for traditional medicine. In fact, there was the widespread increase in the number and operations of traditional herbal medicine men. While, they agreed that the domestic use of pots for eating and cooking had drastically reduced, they claimed that clay pots could not be substituted in traditional and cultural dealings.

Crediting such changes to modernisation and civilisation in this wise, a potter explained that:

Well, it can only be exposure and civilisation. Before, it used to be the older women who made pots. Now we meet clients and we are able to keep in touch with those from far places who buy with just a phone call. They can send a cab to come and pick the goods and transfer money without having to show up physically. So this is through the help of civilisation. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

Another respondent supported that:

Civilisation is promoting pottery. There is nothing like there is no sale or business is slow. Different people come to us here. Those into theatre arts and movie production come to us to make special designs for them, they show us pictures of designs on their phone and we bring it out just the way they want it. Then, traditional herbalists come here all the time they do not feel the need to hide what they are doing and what they want to use it for, this can only be as a result of civilisation and exposure. **IDI/Female/ Ijàyè /2019**

In all, modernisation is the major factor causing the improvements and dynamics in the organisation, patronage, sales and usage of pottery wares. It also aid rather than inhibit the continuity of pottery production in **Ijàyè Abéòkúta**. Potters however attested to the fact that they had other changes in form of challenges in sourcing for clay, getting government support, and in the general cost of production.

### Limitations

There is no research endeavour that is devoid of shortcomings. This study equally had some limitations. Time constraints and lack of funds were major limitations encountered in the course of the study. The study could not afford a considerable amount of time for the benefit of both the researcher and the respondents. Also, running cost for the research was limited as the research was self-funded. Also, the participants took the research for a government activity and the researcher, a government representative. They were generally apathetic, bearing from their past experiences with visitors from the government and some private bodies disclosing that a number of government and private bodies had dashed their hopes in time past. Furthermore, the study was conducted during the rainy season which generally affected production operations. Potters were reluctant in sparing their time to participate as they were trying to beat the weather.

### Conclusion

Pottery production has largely been preserved in **Ijàyè Abéòkúta**, this study explored the relevance and usage of hand built pottery wares produced in **Ijàyè**. The study discovered that, the types of pots made in **Ijàyè** had been modified from the industrial and domestic cooking and storage vessels to the medicinal and religious vessels due to changes in demand and relevance, modernisation and convenience. Essentially, domestic pots had largely been transformed to suit medicinal and religious and even aesthetic functions in contemporary times. Hence, there were trends and dimensions to functions and usage of pots made in **Ijàyè**. On the trends in pottery usage, as against the claims of Kashim and Shado (2017), Peters (2016), and Aro (2014) people's exposure to western education and religion had not discouraged their use

of clay pots. In fact, civilisation and modernity according to the potters had in a way helped the acceptance and usage of pots. The clay pots produced in **Ijaye** served indispensable functions in traditional herbal medicine and religion. They were also used in contemporary times to promote culture; they were used in serving and eating local delicacies in parties and restaurants. Pottery production in **Ijaye Abéokúta**, therefore served diverse purposes for the producers and also the users and consumers in the chain of production. Pottery was thus for rich cultural portrayals and aesthetics, economic provisioning, traditional medicine and religious functions. Religious agencies, traditional medicine men and herbalists, foreign and local sales and middle men, corporate bodies and schools and also, hospitals and restaurants constituted the bulk of the consumers.

By implication, there were changes in the rate and prices of the wares. Potters made good profits from the sale of pots and the rate at which the pots were demanded and purchased had tremendously increased. This study has thus extended the knowledge established in previous studies like that of Elebute and Odokuma (2016), Ibeanu (2006), and Umoru-Oke (2017a) on the profitability and increased usage of traditional hand built pottery in contemporary times. The improvement in sales was an indication of increased usage and modernity was the major factor potters perceived as causing the changes in the organisation, patronage, sales and usage of pottery wares. This according to the respondents had also aided rather than inhibited the continuity of pottery production in **Ijaye Abéokúta**. While Kashim and Shado (2017) and Abiodun et al. (2013) have recommended the modernisation of traditional pottery techniques and products in a bid to foster the development and indigenous industrial resources, this study has established the indispensability of hand built pottery wares to cultural and traditional religious dealings and in cultural portrayals. Pottery had been sustained in **Ijaye** in its traditional form suggesting that the craft might not have survived if it had been altered or modernised. Therefore, there is the need to exercise caution when encouraging integration with western techniques and methods of production. However, investing in and equipping local potters in traditional communities like **Ijaye** and communities where hand built pottery still exists would improve the scale of production for development prospects.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Notes on contributors

**Dauda Aderemi Busari** is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of The Social Sciences, University of Ibadan. A development expert with interest in indigenous knowledge and practices.

**Oluwatobiloba Odetoyinbo** is an enthusiastic development expert with personal and career interests in Social Research. She's currently scouting for Ph.D openings.

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## Appendix



Plate 1. Agbèbì



Plate 2. Ajere



Plate 3. Alanti



Plate 4. Asèje

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Plate 5. Ishásùn obè/Àwosóbí



Plate 6. Making Orù pots: A potter joining two pots together & Opening up the Orù pots.



Plate 7. Òtun