Influence of British Pottery on Pottery Practice in Nigeria

Edem E. Peters and Ruth M. Gadzama

Abstract—The pottery narratives of Nigeria majorly linked with the activities of a great British potter Michael Cardew who established pottery centres in Nigeria, and trained many Nigerians in Pottery. Cardew studied under Bernard Leach (1887 – 1979) who travels extensively and taught pottery around the world. Leach studied pottery under Master Kenzan VI in Japan and returned to England in 1920 to establish his own pottery at St. Ives with Shoji Hamada. The impact in pottery created by Cardew in Nigeria from 1950 is a direct British Pottery influence imparted to him by Leach at St. Ives. A British potter and artist, Kenneth C. Murray studied pottery under Bernard Leach at St. Ives in 1929 and returned back to Uyo in Nigeria to produce and teach students pottery. Murray produced pottery wares from the Kiln he built at Uyo and took his students to exhibit the ware along with other art works at Zwember gallery (Britain) in 1937. Chief Adam Joshua Udo Ema also studied pottery in 1949 in Britain and later returned to work as a pottery officer at Okigwe Pottery centre as well as established three pottery centres in Nigeria Namely; Ikot Abasi Pottery centre at Etinan, Pottery centre at Mbiafun Ikono, and pottery centre at Ikot Ntot in Abak. Many other Nigerian studied pottery in Nigeria. Lady Kwali pottery experience was influenced by Michael Cardew. Her pottery influence seen pottery products exhibited in various parts of the world depicted a coordination of Niger and British Pottery influences. A case study design is considered for methodological approach. Data were taken from primary and secondary sources and analyzed respectively. British influence on Nigeria is indeed outstanding.

Index Terms—Pottery, Impact, Influence, Exhibition, Narratives, Establish.

I. INTRODUCTION

In considering the British Pottery influence on Nigeria, it would be pertinent to reflect on the components of Great Britain.

The British Isles has two sovereign states namely; the Republic Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Countries of the British Isles had a British Monarch as the head of state from the union of the crowns in 1603 till when the republic of Ireland Act was in 1949.

Each country in United Kingdom namely; England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and whales has its unique history except Northern Ireland which at one point welcome an independent state.

Britain was colonizing Nigeria until her independence in 1960 when the British flag called Union Jack was brought down for Nigerian flag to fly.

British pottery influence impacted on Nigeria pottery practice beyond the colonial years. According to [2] Cardew though after obtaining his degrees from Oxford went to study Pottery under Bernard Leach (English) and Hamada a Japanese expand at St. Ives. He spent greater part of active years of his pottery practice in Nigeria from about 1950. His twenty-three years Pottery experience at Abuja in Nigeria as Pottery Officer brought about training numerous men and women on the British Pottery. Indigenous potters especially the women were encouraged and protected from exploitation. Pottery training centres were established and Potters’ raw materials were identified and sourced for local use during Cardew stay in Nigeria. Nigeria had and still has very rich pottery tradition before Cardew came to start the pottery training centres. According to [1], Ladi Kwali was trained by her aunt in 1930s as apprentice potter even though her mother was also a potter. This tradition of pot making was found in places clays were found in Nigeria was practiced mainly by women, probably because the women are the immediate users of pots. Indeed, traditional pottery in Nigeria which boasted the economy of the people thrived well before the coming of British trained potters.

The British pottery practice and its influence through Kenneth C. Maura, Michael Cardew and Adam Joshua, Udo Ema among others were outstandingly notable in Nigerian Pottery practice generally. Despite the external influence the shapes of Nigeria pots did not experience unnecessary changes. The named potters studied pottery in the United Kingdom before 1950 and practice pottery in Nigeria. It is likely that they brought British pottery influence to enhance pottery practice in Nigeria. They introduced Kiln building and firing of wares, throwing of wares on potter’s kicked wheel and glazing of pottery wares published in March.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research considered using a case study design for investigation. The use of primary and secondary sources of data collection was engaged to boost the study. Interview and observation approaches were also involved in the research. The uniqueness and beauty of various shapes, forms and sizes of pots from different pots of Nigeria never lost their taste or value even with the introduction of British pottery making. The British Pottery technique of production with beautiful finishing and slimy glaze effects. Indeed enhance the pottery practice in Nigeria. It brought about the establishment of pottery or ceramics industries and the introduction of various types of ceramic wares, such as tiles, sanitary wares, dinner wares, electrical insulators among others. Many ceramics industries have been established such as Richway ceramics in Lagos, Eleganza ceramics in Lagos, Iva valley pottery centre in Enugu, Modern ceramics limited, Umuahia, Quality Ceramics Ltd., in Itu, Royal ceramics and others.

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The coming of the British colonial masters to Nigeria brought significant influence which cut across economy, socialization, science and technology, politics, education, religion, art and culture, but the researcher is focusing on the British influence on the pottery or ceramics produce in Nigeria. [4] observes that the pottery wares of Ladi Kwali who was outside traditional potter, but later trained by Michael Cardew, were noted for expressive surface embellishment notably used among the Gwari people. She continued to maintain the motifs of the embellishment on her pots even after her training with the well-known English potter, Michael Cardew. The motifs from cultural environment where she derived her motif, focus, symbols were hardly separated from her pots as equally used by other artists who use other media to express themselves. Various Nigerian arts have their expressions backed up with motifs, symbols and forms from cultural environment such as Igbo, Ibibio, Edo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Nupe, Hausa-Fulani and others.

Traditional pottery in Nigeria a part from the utilitarian functions have been playing aesthetics and communication functions like in other cultures of the world before the advent of the British pottery influence on Nigerian pottery. Okunna and Umuna further claim that the unique concentric circles embellishment on Igbo-Ukwu pottery pieces excavated by show in 1970, represent the moon which in 1960 symbolizes continuity. [7] noted that on example of Egyptian Red and Blue Pottery ware dating back to about 4000-3500BC represent human figures through to symbolizes the souls on a journey across the River Nile. The researcher looks at the indigenous pottery of Nigeria and the contemporary Nigerian pottery which receive from British pottery influence.

Indigenous pottery forms serve effectively as medium for expressing oneself. The indigenous pottery forms further serve as record for historical events, expressed ideas and observations from the Nigerian cultural environment.

The primary source of data collection in this study include interviewing of selected appropriate persons and direct observation of the pottery activities and the products. The use of secondary sources involves collecting data from unpublished and published works.

In check mating any form of short coming from a particular source of data collection for a balance, the interdisciplinary approach was given consideration. This approach assists where demerit or merit of an information could make up for balancing appropriate and relevant information required.

III. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The researcher conducted interview on relevant resourced persons and also conducted observation at different sites. Photograph of pots and related pottery activities were utilized in this study. Among such photograph include Igbo-Ukwu pot, Ladi Kwali pots of Gwari, Ibibio pots and the wares which have British pottery influence on them. The study looks at the indigenous pottery practice and pottery wares in Nigeria and the enhanced pottery wares or ceramics which are produced to reflect the British pottery influence. Even though the new glazed pottery wares are very enticing and adding more valuable to the products, the role of indigenous pottery products which duely served their purposes at appropriate periods are still very relevant. The Nok pottery products Igbo-ukwu pottery, Ibibio pots and others till communicated the history of the various cultures in Nigeria even after over two thousand years existence. Indigenous pottery has given Nigeria its right of place and as a nation who engaged in art and technology before the advent of industrial revolution of the eighteen century. This research is limited to indigenous pottery practice in Nigeria and the influence of British pottery on it. The written materials and other relevant information went through document analysis techniques to ascertain their authenticity.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Early Pottery making in Nigeria

Pottery practice in Nigeria is an aged-long art and technology which existed over two thousand years ago. Pottery making in Nigeria is embedded in the cultural practice of the people due to its relevance and functions before the invasion of the colonial masters. It is a known fact that not all human activities or actions that are acted generally for continuity and preservation due to their appropriateness and relevance. [6] observes that it usually strongly felt that many things foster taste, value and perceptions without appearing as covery laws, as long as it is connected with past histories. In the same way these seemingly latent or subliminal aspects of culture and how they shape perception lay at root in the origin of art work. Nok terracotta or pottery wares are located in the culture of Nok people in the Jos plateau area of Nigeria which existed since about 500BC. The pottery wares from Nok, Igbo-Ukwu were other ancient cultures in Nigeria express the uniqueness of the early people’s way of life. although, the wares were highly fired to boost the high level of pottery technology then, but none of the pottery wares had glaze on them until the full contact of British pottery influence probably about 1929 to date.

B. British Pottery Practice Influence in Nigeria

Pottery practice in Nigeria was given a boost when the impact of British Pottery influences it. One of the foremost British Potter known as Bernard Leach (1887-1979) returned from Japan to establish pottery venture in England in 1920 at St. Ives with Shoji Hamada from Japan (David and Tomlow 2008). Leach trained Kenneth C. Murray in 1929 as well as Michael Cardew, a great potter who arrived Nigeria to start new Pottery techniques of using kicked wheel in about 1950 at Abuja. According to [10], the pottery/ceramist experiments of Murray which ended in firing unglazed works despite his brief six (6) weeks training under Bernard Leach at St. Ives Pottery in 1929 brought great influence to pottery practice in Uyo art school. When Murray made his pottery experiments in 1935 at Uyo, he constructed kilns to fire the wares the students made and exhibited them at Zwember gallery (Britain) in 1937. This was a showcasing of the pottery products made at Uyo Art School along with other art products and the impact was greatly felt.
C. Role of Craft Pottery Association of Nigeria (CPAN) in Nigeria Pottery producers

Reference [11] in his assertion states:

It is noteworthy to always reflect the great effect of Michael Cardew who was trained by Bernard Leach in Britain and he later came to Nigeria in 1950 to establish pottery practice, pottery centres and potters. This good effort of Cardew with the help of Nigerian government brought the establishment of Abuja Pottery centre in the North, also Ado Ekiti Pottery centre in the West and Okigwe Pottery centre in the East. Chief A. J. U. Udo Emma got the Federal Government Scholarship which made him leave for Britain in July 1946. He was in the University of London Institute of Education up to 1948, while in 1949 he studied in the London Country Council Central School of Art and Crafts. He studied in the two institutions to obtain certificate in education and diploma in arts (pottery) respectively. He returned from Britain in August 1949. He was the first trained potter as well as the first Nigerian to be trained as in art teacher by the Federal Government. He had once been in the management of Okigwe Pottery centre between 1954 and 1955, even though he was not the one who established it. He also established other pottery centres which are: Mbiafun Pottery centre in Eastern Ibibo Ikono, Ikot Ubo-Ndot in Abak and Ikot Abasi I Pottery centre in Etinan all in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Other pottery centres in Nigeria such as Suleja in Abuja, Iva valley in Enugu, Calabar pottery centre, Ikot Ebom Iam Pottery centre, Okigwe pottery training centre in Imo State and others experienced such pottery influence from Britain. The establishment of Modern ceramics in Unsauhia, Abia State. Quality ceramics in 1984 at Ikot Ebom in Akwa Ibom State and many others are outstanding expression of the British Pottery influence in Nigeria, even though some of the industries were not brought from Britain.

Craft Pottery Association of Nigeria is a direct influence from British Pottery Association. Joy Voisey and Ben Dew who are outstanding British Potters, were instrumental to the establishment of craft pottery Association of Nigeria. They produced pottery in Nigeria like Cardew and Murray and left great foot print by establishing the Association and still remain as members of the Advisory Board. This is an indication of their great desire to sustain Ceramics or Pottery practice in Nigeria. According to [9] “Craft Pottery Association of Nigeria (CPAN) is our umbrella body for Nigerian potters, ceramists, scholars, and industrialists in related fields working together for the advancement and promotion of the art and science of clay work. The coming together of potters to share experiences in writing, practice and discussion has great impact on Nigerian Pottery practice and this is one of the vital role of Craft Pottery Association in Nigeria. The impact of Pottery practice through the influence from Britain was observed by [8] as follows:

In 1952 when, at the instance of the colonial government, which Cardew established the Abuja Pottery centre, pottery in Nigeria came face-to-face with a higher technology that was to change its temper and direction much more decisively. It was at Abuja, under Cardew, that the rich pottery tradition for which Nigeria is well known began to be more vigorously harnessed along the idea of retaining the best of indigenous techniques and practice while borrowing the best from outside. Such notable traditional potters, such as Ladi Kwali (1924-1984), were re-trained at the Abuja potter and encouraged to retain the basic globular form and incised decoration of Gwari traditional pottery. While learning to use modern potters wheels, they were also introduced to the procedures of glazing wares in highly efficient wood burning kilns.

This is the influence of British pottery on Nigeria Pottery which has indeed elevated the pottery practice in Nigeria. According to [12] “Mr. Cardew stated that its purpose (was) that of helping potters to achieve mastery in new skill and so qualify themselves to make their own special contributions to the future of Nigerian”. The desire of the British potter (Cardew), has today brought pottery in Nigeria to higher level of international recognition where statements about the peoples culture are expressed through Pottery products.

The efforts of Craft Potters Association of Nigeria (CPAN) in the growth of modern ceramics in Nigeria is enormous. Joy Voisy and Ben Dew who worked as volunteer of Voluntary service overseas (VSO) programme in Nigeria and later own ceramic studies in United Kingdom established in Nigeria. Voisy taught in 1983 at tertiary Technical Education in Borno, Maiduguri in Nigeria. She encountered challenges in the development of modern ceramics in Nigeria which made her to express her own feelings as follows:

I became aware of lack of up-to-date technical knowledge available to the students, as well as the scarcity of equipment, materials and boards, which empowered progress. I also become aware that I could only buy imported ceramic items I could find no Nigerian produced plates, cups, sources, bowls, etc. How could this be? Nigeria is famous throughout the world for its traditional pottery much in museums all over the world, but why is there such lack of modern ceramics produced by and for Nigerians? where are the richness of Nigerian decorative art? Nigeria is a land abundant in clay and national resources used in ceramics. why is this industry still in its infancy here?[14].

The researcher views Voisy’s documentation over the state of modern ceramic practice in Nigeria and being timely and appropriate enough to spark up interest and determination among the young potters. Voisy in 1989 edited and produced the first issue of ceramics voice together with Ben Dew.

The ceramic voice today has brought account the CPAN Journal of ceramics to the modern practice of ceramics in Nigeria.

D. Impact of British Pottery Influence in Nigeria

An indigenous potter, Adam Joshua Udo Ema from Etinan in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria also studied pottery in Britain in 1949 and later returned to work as Pottery Officer at Okigwe pottery training centre. Udo Ema who acquired enormous pottery skills from Britain later established pottery centres at Ikot Abasi I in Etinan, Mbiafun in Ikono, and Ikot Ubo Ndot in Abak. The centres produced wares beyond the indigenous pottery wares shapes, forms and designs. They produced glazed dinner wares, gift items, mugs, ash trays, palm wine jars and other articles. Each time the kilns were opened after firing and shiny glazed wares were successfully removed from the kiln, the people made

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great shouts of joy. This was indeed a positive influence on the Nigerian pottery practice.

Fig. 1 Early Nok (Nigeria) pottery wares (about 2000 years ago)

Fig. 2 Ceramics Products of Ruth M. Gadzama

Fig. 3 Ceramics Products of Ruth M. Gadzama

Fig. 4 Ceramics Product of Edem E. Peters

Fig. 5 Ceramics Product of Edem E. Peters

Fig. 6 Ceramics Product of Edem E. Peters

V. OBSERVATION

The influence of British pottery on Nigerian ceramics is overwhelming and a good thing to behold in this generation. The rich natural resources for ceramics and the creative potentials of the people have now been usefully tapped. Many ceramic outfits are established to produce plates, mugs, electrical insulators, sanitary wares among others. The ceramic sector has created employment and business opportunities to the people. The rich traditional ceramic art has been enhanced, realizing pottery as one of the surest index of a people’s culture.

The revival of modern ceramics practice in Nigeria has made many Nigeria ceramics to engage in sourcing glaze materials as well as compounding glazers for themselves. The potters also build kilns, construct throwing wheels and other equipment to boosts the production of ceramics wares. Today, ceramics wares, produced by Nigerians in Nigeria, using materials sourced locally in Nigeria are found in shops, galleries and other places.
VI. CONCLUSION

Pottery practice in Nigeria is now walking and also getting ready to run along with others in other parts of the world in view of the emerging interest among the young people. The different communication network for all interest in ceramics namely; ceramics voice, CPAN journal of ceramics, Ashakwu Journal of Ceramics, Design Reviewed Journal of industries design. and journal of ceramics and environmental design among others, disseminate proper information and enlighten to boost modern ceramics practice and products in Nigeria. The progress of ceramics practice has been realized partly through support from the British government as indicated by Joy Voisey as follows:

The British Council in Kaduna offered us their hall and $80 towards costs. This gratefully received, and we tried to attract more funding from British businesses, but to no avail encountered and convinced of the need for the exhibition, we printed posters and bought our air tickets. We raised $300 to offset printing costs and provide some prize money, then set off to Nigeria with a low bank balance and high hopes. We were amazed at the number of pottery’s wishing to exhibit. It seemed that our newsletters had been photocopied many times over and circulated to areas beyond our mailing list. One University head of department said that he had made it compulsory reading for his students. In all, four potteries and 35 individual potters (students not counted) took part from all over Nigeria, some travelling over 600 kilometers to get to Kaduna. [13]

The traditional pottery practice of over two thousand years ago has brought Nigeria to international recognition. The revival of modern pottery or ceramics practice which has now taken a given stride with the influence of British Pottery will make Nigeria much more prominent.

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I specially appreciate the Almighty God for His grace, provision and knowledge for this study. I would like to appreciate all the agents of light from Britain who brought about the establishment of modern pottery and the later revival of such in Nigeria today. the experts and the sources of information are cordially acknowledged. Those who typed the work or contribute in one way or the other to the success of this work are appreciated. Finally, sincere appreciation goes to Mrs. Eno E. Peters and our children for their support and constant encouragement.

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Edem E. Peters

He is a senior lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts and Design, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt. He is a member of Ceramics Research Association of Nigeria (CerAN), Craft Potters’ Association of Nigeria (CPAN), Society of Nigeria Artist (SNA), University of Lagos - Nsukka Alumni Association, and others etc. He has participated in several joint and solo exhibitions as well as trade fairs. He has received many honours/sawards and has visited great pottery Centres/Potters like Svend Bayer ( Beaworthy; Devon), Douglas Fitch (Crediton, Devon), Nic Collins (Morternhampstead), Leach Pottery (St. Ives, Cornwall) and numerous others in the United Kingdom and Wales. Dr. Peters is well published in Arts/Ceramics journals and other publications, and has also carried out many researches. Among his publications include: A book titled - Entrepreneurship Development: Management and Practice in Visual Arts, Design and Technology, Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press 2016;

A chapter in a book titled - History of Kiln Construction for Ceramics Practice in Nigeria. Design History in Nigeria Essays in Honour of Demas Nwoko. Department of Creative Art, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt. First Published in Nigeria by: National Gallery of Art, Abuja - Nsukka Alumni Association, and others etc. He has participated in several joint and solo exhibitions as well as trade fairs. He has received many honours/sawards and has visited great pottery Centres/Potters like Svend Bayer ( Beaworthy; Devon), Douglas Fitch (Crediton, Devon), Nic Collins (Morternhampstead), Leach Pottery (St. Ives, Cornwall) and numerous others in the United Kingdom and Wales.

Ruth Mataba Gadzama


After a one year programme in Industrial Design at ABU, with a touch in ceramics, she felt a strong pull to get more involved. Since 1978, she seems not to rest but continued to add one certificate to another. In the year 2000, she had Management Business Administration (MBA) Mgt. from University of Maiduguri. In 2005, she obtained a Master Degree in ceramics from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, University of Maiduguri. In 2005, she obtained a Master Degree in Ceramics from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, University (ATBU), Bauchi. Furthermore she has Certificate in Computer from Iya Abubakar Computer Centre, ABU, Zaria, 2012. Essentially, one will say Ruth finds direction at each level she gets to in

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ceramics, learning enough to move on to crown it at the moment she is a PhD holder of industrial design ABU Zaria.

According to Ruth, “going through the various programmes have opened my eyes. Before my studies I thought ceramics was ‘antique’. When I get involved with my clay I saw broader range of expression in it in Nigeria for one to make a living”. Going through her experiences in clay work has been quite interesting. Between 1982-1985, she worked in the Ministry of Information, Cultural section, Niger state as principal cultural officer where she had contact with late Dr. Ladi Kwali, the renowned Nigerian Woman potter.

1986-1987, Ruth taught in Women Teachers’ College, Maiduguri under Ministry of Education before she was transferred in 1988 to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Maiduguri.