

■ CAMEROON

Ethno-Marketing of Pottery: Fieldwork in the Faro Department, Northern Cameroon

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Introduction

Ethno-marketing is neither a new discipline nor a brand new conceptual tool; its main purpose is to examine, from an ethnographic point of view, as any manager reading the Wall Street Journal would, what components are modelling the local economy and, in this particular case, the production and consumption of pottery. Ethno-archaeological enquiries provide an excellent opportunity for studying the life of an object from its production to final abandonment and of evaluating the impact of such factors as production, selling, exchange and distribution modalities on the overall patterns of consumption. Keeping that in mind, and following other scholars (e.g. Dietler and Herbich 1994, Gelbert 1995, Gueye 1995, Peacock 1982, Stark 1992), we started systematic data collection in the Faro Department, Northern Cameroon during the first quarter of 1996. These enquiries were part of a larger fieldwork program conducted by the Ceramics and Society Project in the area (Gosselain et al., this issue).

Study Area

The study area (Figure 1 in Gosselain et al., this volume) is midsected by the Faro River and delimited to the west by the Alantika mountains, the border with Nigeria, and to the east by the road linking Garoua to Ngaoundere. On the western bank of the Faro river, observations were made among Bata, Vere, Fulani, Samba and Koma peoples, and on the eastern bank, among three other groups: Longmo, Dowayo and Dupa.

Data collection

Data collected in the field are of three types: (1) extensive interviews of potters combined with an observation of the different stages in the chaîne opératoire and of the way pots are locally distributed; (2) occasional enquiries at marketplaces, with a recording of potters' and customers' identity (this permitted us to identify 42 individuals living in different places and frequenting 7 potters during 4 market sessions); (3) compound inventories, in which the name, type, function and provenance of each vessel were carefully recorded. More than 150 compounds were visited, the majority of which were occupied by Dupa and Dowayo families. As previously advocated by Gallay (1991), we tried to compare compounds inhabited by potters and non-potters in the different villages where we worked.

Production context

A preliminary understanding of the social and economic contexts in which the craft is practised are indispensable as they influence the way products are distributed. In the study area, pottery activity constitutes a speciality, insofar as the production is restricted to an endogamous sub-group whose products are consumed on a village and/or regional scale (Roux and Corbetta 1990:22).

Selling modalities

Two different ways of selling the products have been observed in the field, residential selling and market selling. In the first instance, customers directly come to the potter's compound either to buy the vessels she keeps in stock or to collect a previous order. At the time when I made my enquiries, this mode of selling largely prevailed throughout the study area. In the heart of the dry season, however, when pottery making becomes a daily activity, products are said to be more generally distributed at market places. In this case, potters either attend their local market or one of the numerous other weekly markets in the region (in a radius that rarely exceed 20 km). But this is an idealized situation and one rarely encounters potters at market places. Usually, they fire their pots on the local market day (before the place reaches its maximum activity) and sell them directly to women who jostle each other around the firing place. In doing so, they avoid the tedious

task of carrying the vessels, they take advantage of the influx of potential customers and, in selling their stock, obtain money to spend in the market. It must be noted that this situation has essentially been observed on the western bank of the Faro river.

Exchange systems

Two types of exchange systems are recorded: bartering, in which potters exchange vessels for different kinds of goods (millet in most instances, but also peanuts, cotton strips, or even funeral dress among the Dowayo); and monetary exchange, a situation whose increasing importance in the local economy seems to parallel that of the market system. In this case, potters use their income to acquire imported goods such as clothes, soap, kerosene, tobacco, etc.

Patterns of distribution

In villages where one or more potters reside, people tend to buy their pots locally, although it is not a hard and fast rule. Depending on the compound visited, 60 to 100% of the vessels in use were said to be produced by local artisans (see David and Hennig 1972 for a similar example in northern Cameroon). In other villages from the western bank of the Faro river, vessels are generally acquired from potters living in a 15 km radius. Given the small size of the territory occupied by linguistic groups in this area, products tend to be distributed in an inter-ethnic manner. As far as ceramic styles are concerned, the relationship between social contexts of production and consumption appear to be rather poor in this area (as seen in Kenya by Dietler and Herbich 1994; and by Gosselain 1995 in southern Cameroon).

East of the Faro river, pottery is diffused in a 20 km radius. Here, however, ethnolinguistic territories are generally larger, so that pottery is mainly consumed in an intra-ethnic manner (with possible overlaps of product originating from different centers). Also, pottery distribution can abruptly stop at the border between two neighbouring groups, as is the case for Dowayo and Dupa peoples. If such a phenomenon reinforces the correlation between social contexts of production and consumption, its *raison d'être* is far from being clear. Indeed, we are not facing a situation of economic stress (see Hodder

1979) and nothing indicates that other commodities do not circulate across the linguistic border. Moreover, pottery styles related to both groups are practically identical (see Gosselain et al., this issue).

Conclusion

When reading the *Wall Street Journal*, the manager is confronted with the Dow Jones Index, which constitutes a mere indication of the market; only a more thorough analysis helps him to understand it. The problem is quite similar for archaeologists working on the distribution and consumption of artifacts; the exclusive use of spatial curves tends to simplify information (Feblot-Augustins and Perles 1992; Stark 1992) and hardly allows them to take other important factors into consideration.

If the inherent nature of available archaeological data imposes severe restrictions on the reconstruction and interpretation of economical contexts, the ethno-marketing approach could provide, if not transcultural rules and models, at least some useful examples of the way people engage daily in exchanging items.

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