



Pottery activity in Katiola (Côte D'Ivoire): Operating chain and marketing system of A lever for empowering rural mangoro women

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Abstract

Pottery is an ancestral technique known in all regions of Côte d'Ivoire. An indispensable auxiliary to the domestic life of sedentary people, it is a cultural marker in most Ivorian societies. It occupies a certain fringe of the female population in the different regions of the country. Although practised by women in the north of Côte d'Ivoire, it is the Katiola pottery made by Mangoro women that remains the most renowned in the country. Pottery has gone from being a sideline to household chores to becoming a full-time occupation. Today, the socio-economic life of these women is punctuated by this activity. Given the key role played by pottery in the lives of rural Manogoro women, the main objective of this study is to understand the operating chain and marketing system of the Katiola pottery business. To achieve this objective, the methodology adopted is based on documentary research and fieldwork carried out in five (5) villages through direct observation, interviews and questionnaires. The results of the surveys and analyses show that the chain of operations or manufacturing process for pottery objects consists of three main stages: preparation, shaping and decoration. The marketing system observed in this katiola pottery activity encompasses the actors, the marketing channels in which means of transport play a decisive role.

Keywords: Pottery, operating chain, mangoro, Katiola

Introduction

Pottery or the art of terracotta is an ancestral technique known in all regions of Côte d'Ivoire. It has been practised here since prehistoric times, as evidenced by archaeological excavations and surveys carried out in Côte d'Ivoire. Although it has been around since prehistoric times, specifically the Neolithic period, this activity has long been a means of cooking and preserving food and drink for man (G. A. Touré and K. S. Kouassi, 2021, p.281) [7]. An indispensable auxiliary to the domestic life of sedentary people, pottery is a cultural marker in most Ivorian societies. It occupies a certain fringe of the female population in the different regions of the country. Practised by women in the north of Côte d'Ivoire, pottery is also very present among the Malinkés. However, it is the pottery made by Mangoro women in Katiola that remains the most renowned in the country. In the department of Katiola, located in north-central Côte d'Ivoire, the reality for rural Mangoro women is pottery. Initially a sideline to household chores, pottery is now their full-time occupation. Today, the socio-economic life of these women is punctuated by this activity. Known for their dexterity in the manufacture of ceramic objects, the potters of Katiola have made this department a popular destination for enthusiasts of these ceramic objects, whose renown extends beyond the borders of the Hambo region.

Given the key role played by pottery in the lives of rural Manogoro women, we need to gain a better understanding of the design and sales process. Based on these observations, what is the operating chain and marketing system for pottery in Katiola? The main objective of this work is to understand the operating chain and marketing system of the Katiola pottery business.

Materials and methods

1. Study area

With a surface area of 2,730 Km², the department of Katiola is located in north-central Côte d'Ivoire, between latitudes 8° and 9° north and longitudes 5° and 6° west. Some 434 km from Abidjan (the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire), 140 km from Yamoussoukro (the political capital) and 55 km from Bouaké, it is part of the Hambol administrative region and comprises three (03) sub-prefectures: Katiola, Timbé and Fronan. In the department of Katiola, which constitutes the study area, potters are located in the 3 (three) sub-prefectures. These are the sub-prefecture of Katiola, the sub-prefecture of Timbé located 18km east of the town of Katiola, and the sub-prefecture of Fronan located 7km north of the town of Katiola. They are found in the villages of Darakokaha, Mangôrôso, Nangbôtôkaha, Offiakaha and Ourougbankaha (Figure 1).

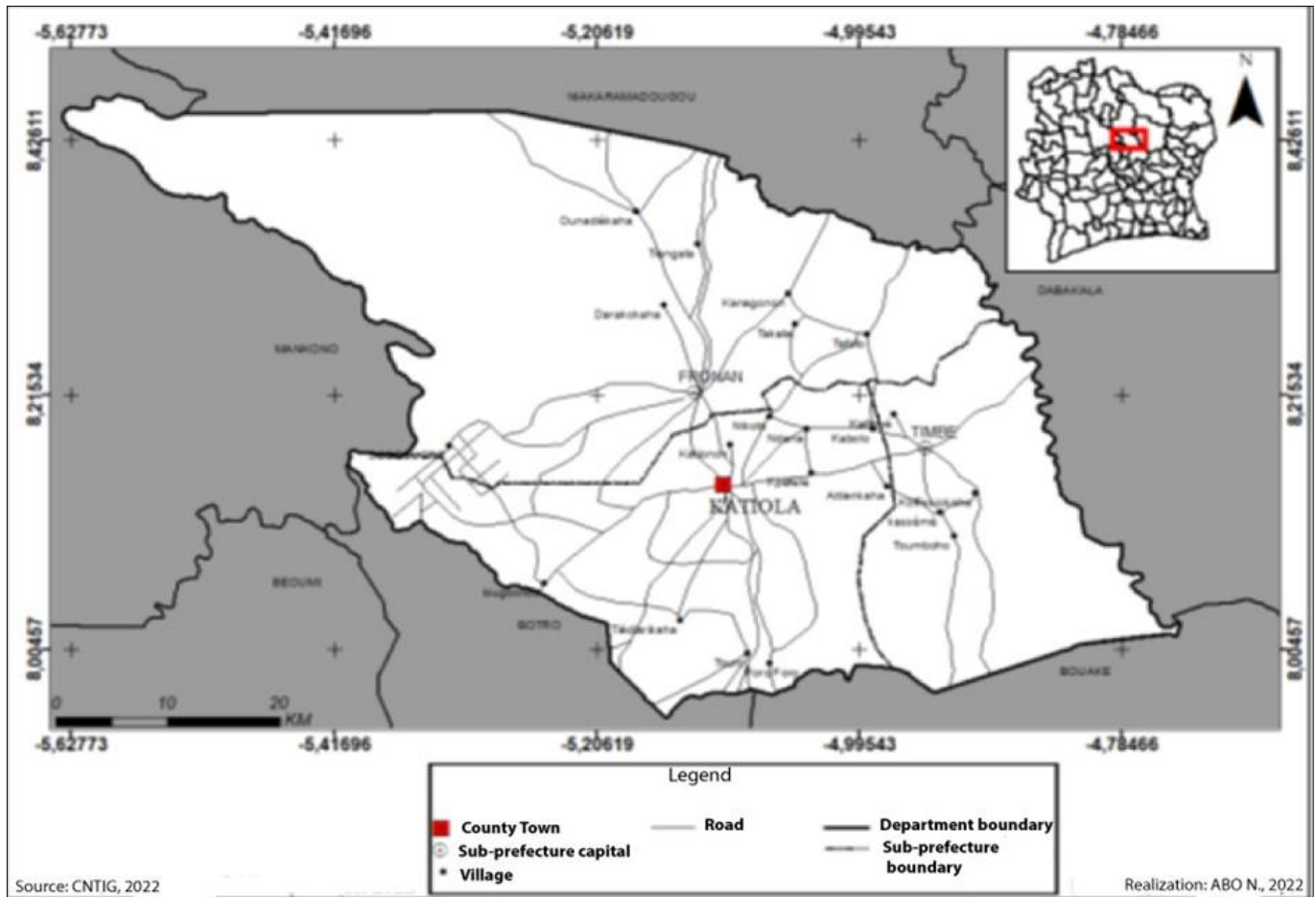


Fig 1: Presentation of the study area

2. Data collection method

The methodology adopted was based on documentary research, fieldwork through direct observation, interviews and questionnaires. Pottery production areas were chosen as the observation unit for collecting information in the field. These were 5 villages: Mangôrôso, Ourougbankaha (Djénanhan), Offiakaha (Offièdouhou), Nanbgôtôkaha (Kpôhòdouhou) and Darakokaha (Dahakohndouhou), i.e. 17% of the 28 localities in the department (RGPH, 2014). The choice of these localities obeys a single criterion, which is that these 5 villages are the only localities in the department of Katiola where pottery activity is practiced. As these 5 villages are spread throughout the department, we chose the three sub-prefectures of Fronan, Katiola and Timbé. Data were collected using the Participatory Action Research Method (MARP).

Results

1. Pottery operating chain in Katiola

In the Katiola region, there are several phases in the pottery production chain. However, they can be grouped into three main stages: preparation, shaping and decoration.

1.1. Preparation

There are two stages in the preparation process: clay extraction and paste preparation. Called Bangosoho in the local language, clay extraction is the first stage in the production of traditional Mangoro ceramics in Katiola. According to field surveys, it begins with selection by identifying clay quarries or Bangodinga and the location of springs. Once the section has been selected, the ceramists

set up the conditions for clay extraction, which take the form of rites, prohibitions and periods. As far as rituals are concerned, the players state that these are preparatory rituals, while the prohibitions concern, for example, the ban on taking away gold and diamonds discovered on the extraction site. Mining in the Mangoro country of Katiola takes place during the dry season or Tehmanhan. The extraction stage is also conditioned by the type of mine and clay extracted. The mines most suitable for clay are underground or gallery mines and open-cast mines. The types of clay involved are those used for making and those used for decorating ceramics. Mangoro women use several qualities of clay to make their ceramics. These include colored clays: whitish, greenish, blackish or grayish, ochre, yellowish, reddish, pinkish and beige. Decorative clays are bright red, known locally as tohojn. Whatever the type of clay, the extraction tools are the same: daba, axe, machete, shovel and pickaxe.

1.2. Shaping

Ceramic vessels at Katiola are shaped in a support, the Tinhin, which is used to make the rotational movements in the manufacturing process. This is generally done in several chronological stages: mounting, drying, scraping, smoothing, plastering and polishing. To assemble, the mangoro potter, seated on a stool, takes a proportion of clay paste of a size deemed suitable for the type of pot she wishes to obtain. She begins by shaping the base of the body, which is the mother shape common to all types of pottery in the Katiola department. After shaping the body (upper and lower parts), the neck and/or the lip, the potter

puts the resulting vessel to dry or Dja. The pottery, placed in the support, is put in the shade for the first drying, which lasts from two (02) to three (03) days, depending on the size of the vessel and the season. For scraping, the shaping process continues with the removal of the base from the support, the pottery is turned upside down, and the opening placed on the craftswoman's lap. In addition, the bottom and outer surface of the pottery are then scraped with a wide Woyaha metal ring, placed against the wall in a frontal fashion. This is the Wôhô stage. Smoothing consists of levelling the pottery walls in a semi-dry state. Half-dry smoothing of the inner and outer walls is carried out first with a damp cloth, then with a harder polished object, the Kouodéhé or chélakoho. The smoothed surface remains as is, or is used as a background for a decoration. At the end of this stage, the potter can create printed patterns by rolling the Makè on the outer surface of the vessel. After all these operations, the pottery is left to dry in the shade for two (02) or three (03) days.

1.3. Decoration

Containers are decorated both before and after firing. In fact, surveys reveal that pre-firing decorations are essentially of two types: applied decorations and coatings. Applied decorations are made up of hollows and reliefs. Post-firing decoration is achieved using two techniques: dipping and smoking. In the first technique, new ceramics have a shiny black surface with a metallic sheen. This distinctive appearance is achieved by soaking the pottery in a vegetable solution while it is still glowing. This operation, which we describe here, is carried out at the end of the firing process. After extraction, the still-red pottery is soaked in a special liquid called Bassidjé (planche 1). Smoking or Dâhâ Finh, as practised by the Mangoro potters of Katiola, consists in covering unglazed pottery with damp straw or wood shavings recovered from the carpenters after planing the flamed wood, in order to introduce smoke black into the surface layer of the clay (Figure 2).



Source: Our surveys, July 2021, Katiola-Mangôrôso

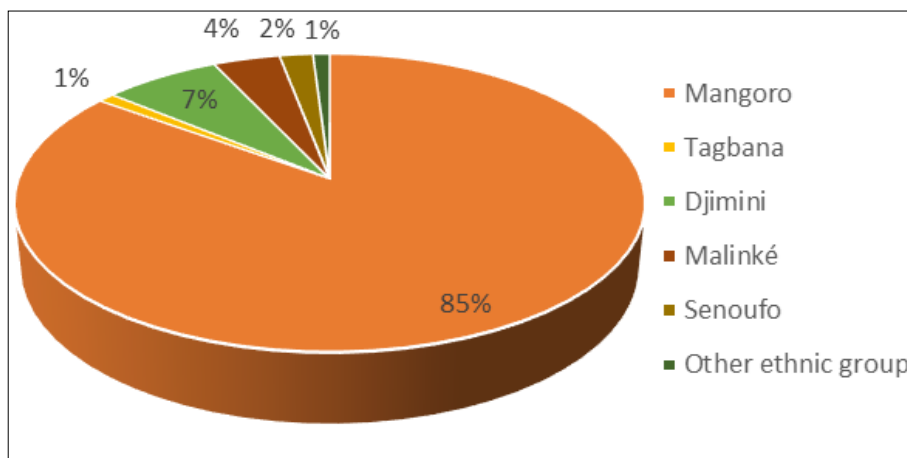
Fig 2: Forms of decoration applied to ceramic vessels after firing

2. Pottery marketing system

In Katiola, the marketing system encompasses actors, trade channels and means of transport.

2.1. Marketing players

In this sector, women hold the monopoly on marketing activities. No men have been identified. In addition, there are women from several ethnic communities, although Mangoro women remain in the majority (Figure 3).



Source: Personal surveys, 2021

Fig 3: Structuring of Katiola pottery operators by ethnic group

According to figure 3, Mangoro women are the main players in pottery marketing. The Djimini and Malinké traders, whose proportions are less than 8%, gravitate

around them. In addition to local traders, there are other players in this system, namely customers. This category includes groups such as wholesaler-sellers, urban customers,

cooperatives, retailers and occasional tourists. According to the field surveys, wholesaler-resellers and urban customers are traders who come to the ceramic production sites several times a month, especially during the dry season. These customers sometimes place orders in advance, but more often buy large stocks. As far as cooperatives are concerned, the pottery business in Katiola has two: the Société Coopérative Simplifiée des Potières de Katiola (So-Coop-S-Po-KA) and "Binguéléman". Their purpose is coordination, capacity-building and economic empowerment of member potters. Retailers are regular, loyal local customers who live

in and around Katiola. Occasional customers are tourists passing through the locality, who decide to return home with souvenirs made from Mangoro ceramics.

2.2. Marketing channels

The pottery business in Katiola involves two channels for the marketing of ceramic objects. These are direct and indirect circuits, whose points of departure remain the manufacturing and distribution center, serving the whole of Côte d'Ivoire (Figure 4).

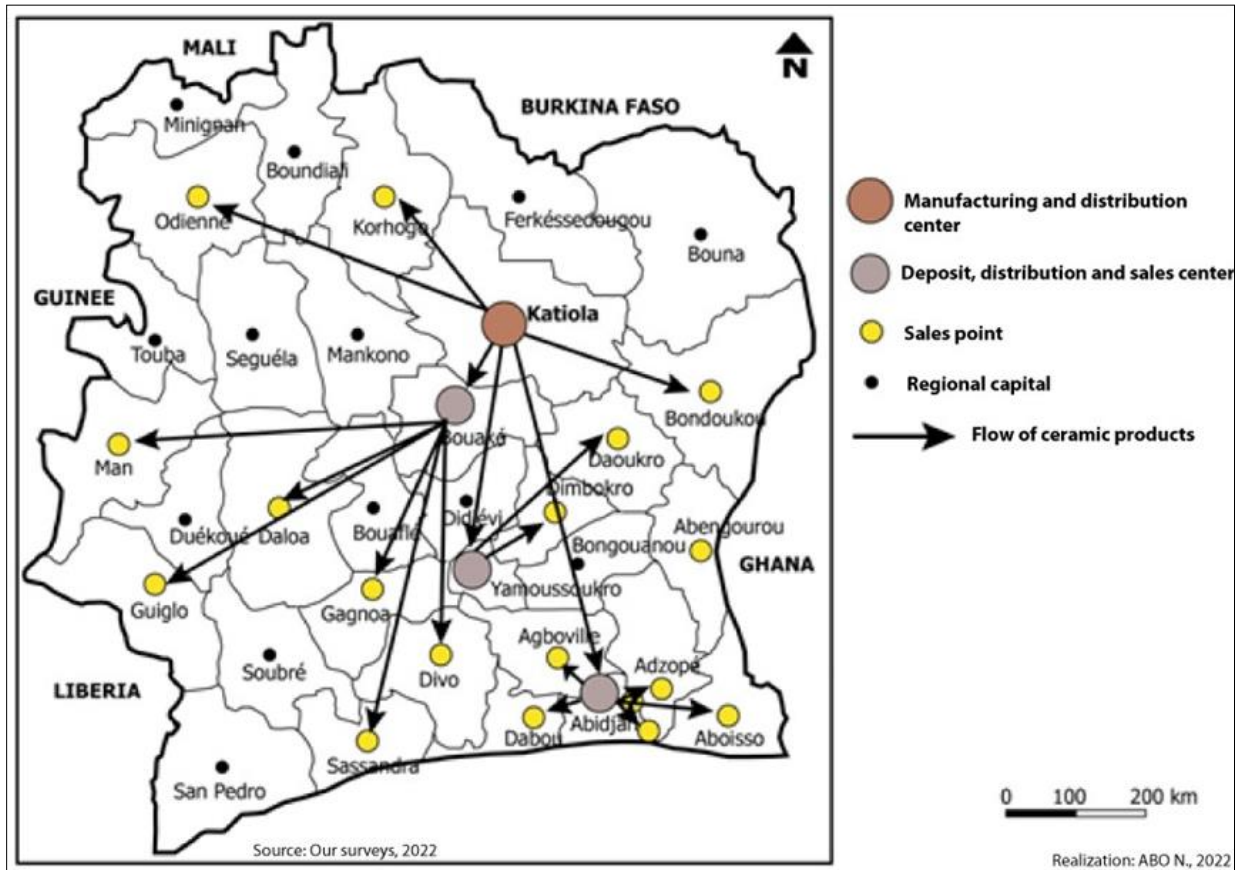


Fig 4: Marketing channels for ceramic objects produced in Katiola

According to figure 4, the direct marketing circuit for the pottery business is the one that indicates that ceramic articles, after being made in the manufacturing and distribution center, end up directly in the points of sale. The indirect circuit, on the other hand, involves three levels: the manufacturing center located in the Katiola region, the depot centers located in major cities such as Bouaké, Yamoussoukro and Abidjan, and the sales outlets present in almost every urban center in Côte d'Ivoire. So, when ceramic objects leave their manufacturing sites, they pass through depot centers before arriving at their final destination, the sales outlets where retailers and consumers come to stock up. These two circuits are supported by means of transport.

2.3. Transportation

In Katiola, to transport their wares, potters use public transport, which regularly passes through the villages and drops them off in town at the points of sale, which are generally large public markets. Traders and resellers, on the other hand, hire trucks and bring them from urban centers.

For short distances, ceramic vases are transported on foot, by wheelbarrow, cart, bicycle or motorcycle.

Discussion

The results of our investigations into pottery activity in the Katiola region reveal the existence of an operating chain. This chain is nothing other than the process by which ceramic objects are obtained. In this process, several stages can be identified, revolving around three major facts. These are preparation, shaping and decoration. These three stages are shared by A. L. Smith (2010, p. 9-12) [5], who, in reconstructing the pottery production chain in sub-Saharan Africa, mentions several phases, the most decisive of which are paste preparation, shaping and decorative techniques. These methods of object manufacture are also part of the general context of ceramic production in the northern regions of Côte d'Ivoire. To this end, G. A. Touré and K. S. Kouassi (2017, p. 16-18) [6] mention in their research that ceramics appears to be a specific craft, but one that takes on a technical character highlighted through a well-defined chain of operations. For these authors, it begins with clay

extraction, paste preparation, shaping and decoration. In this process, shaping is very important, insofar as it encompasses all the ceramic operations to which the clay paste is subjected in order to obtain a product that conforms to the desired formal and functional characteristics (E.B. Kouamé, 1990, p. 107-108). In addition, the shaping carried out by the Katiola potters, through mounting, drying, scraping, smoothing, plastering and polishing, is consistent with that revealed by G. A. Touré and K. S. Kouassi (2021, p. 285-287) ^[7] in the Tolman locality, where shaping is carried out on a large tree trunk through the stages of molding, modeling, smoothing, polishing or buffing. The chain of pottery-making operations described in the analysis results in ceramic objects that are not only used in the home, but are also marketed. In the Katiola region, the results of the surveys identified a system comprising three main components: actors, circuits and means of transport. The system identified for pottery is similar to that for commercial products, where, according to A. E. K. Fefah (2011, p.12) ^[2], the "vocanga africana" seed marketing system in Benin can be identified through actors and market characteristics. Speaking of actors, field surveys clearly indicate that the marketing of pottery objects in Katiola is in the hands of women. This hegemony of women at this level is typical of the pottery business. In this regard, G. A. Touré (2022, p. 93) ^[8] states that the sale and distribution of pottery from the Komborodougou sub-prefecture is a permanent activity of Sénoufo women. This situation observed in Komborodougou can be transposed to Katiola insofar as the majority of those involved in the ceramics trade are Mangoro women. This pottery sales and distribution system, in addition to the actors involved, can be identified through direct and indirect marketing channels. These two types of distribution observed in the pottery trade in Katiola are similar to the classic sales systems for many products in Côte d'Ivoire. In this respect, D. Louppe (1994, p.7-8) ^[4] points out the existence of two modes of shea trade in the north of the country. These are local sales for self-consumption and industrial sales, which are aimed more at the big cities. The presence of two types of marketing is also observed in the attiéké sector, where G.A.T. Adou *et al* (2022, p.102-103) ^[1] reveal the existence of a short-distance circuit and a long-distance circuit in the distribution of this product in the town of Grand-Bassam in southeastern Côte d'Ivoire. These circuits observed in non-ceramic products are similar to those for Katiola pottery, in that the objects sold follow a direct path from producer to consumer. There is also an indirect route, where the objects arrive at the consumer's premises via the depot. The dynamics of these marketing circuits are efficient thanks to the multiple means of transport involved in the sale of ceramic objects in the Katiola region. Surveys have revealed that products are transported by foot, wheelbarrow, bicycle, motorcycle or truck. This diversity in modes of transport is shared by G. A. Touré (2022, p 93-94), who highlights several types, with a strong emphasis on travelling to market with pottery goods on one's head. The author also points out that ceramic products are transported with great care to avoid accidents caused by clumsiness, thus limiting the number of containers.

Conclusion

Katiola pottery is an ancestral activity that has been better preserved despite the socio-cultural changes associated with

modern life. Like any activity, it has a well-defined container-making method known as the chaîne opératoire. The Katiola pottery process comprises several stages, the most important of which revolve around clay preparation, shaping and decoration. These different phases result in ceramic objects of the highest quality, which are highly prized for marketing. Marketing is a system in which several subsystems interact. The pottery marketing system involves mainly female players, in this case Mangoro women. It's a system with two marketing circuits, the smooth running of which is closely linked to modes and means of transport. These aspects of the operating chain and the marketing system were corroborated by analyses of previous studies, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of such a strategic activity for the Katiola region.

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