Net Journal of Social Sciences
Vol. 5(3), pp. 42-54, August 2017
ISSN: 2315-9774
Full Length Research Paper

Gender and traditional pottery practice in Ankole region, western Uganda

William K. Kayamba[1]* and Philip Kwesiga[2]

[1]Department of Education and Arts, Uganda Christian University, P.O Box 4, Mukono, Uganda
[2]Department of Industrial Art and Design, School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Makerere University, P. O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda.

Accepted 2 August, 2017

ABSTRACT

The study investigated traditional pottery practices in the Ankole region of Western Uganda, focusing on indigenous technological knowledge, socio-economic and environmental issues. The main objective was to investigate how the traditional pottery is produced, pottery use, and impact on the environment. Most of the fieldwork component of the study involved interviews with potters, observation and documentation of pottery activities in the region. Findings indicate that traditional pottery is primarily in the hands of women, apart from the Batwa where pottery is done by both gender. Pottery is carried out during the dry season apart from the Batwa tribe who practice pottery throughout the year.

Keywords: Traditional pottery production, forming methods, decorations, firing, marketing, socio-cultural, gender and ecological issues.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: kayambaw@yahoo.com, wkayamba@ucu.ac.ug.

INTRODUCTION

The study examined gender and traditional pottery production activities in the Ankole region of Western Uganda, focusing on indigenous technical knowledge, socio-economic and ecological issues. The area under study historically known as Ankole stands astride the equator in south western Uganda. The study focused on Ankole as a single entity from a larger area (Uganda), because of its rich clay deposits for pottery production. Pottery, a well-known global practice traditionally, stands as one of the most widespread practices of indigenous people around the world. Although highly mechanical elsewhere, traditional practices of pottery production have survived in Ankole, and in some other communities in Africa, and in a number of less developed countries. It has always had a special place in the Ankole society since time immemorial, starting from the unbaked clay pots, the unglazed terracotta pottery to the glazed pottery used in modern homes. A large percentage of this pottery has been produced by the informal sector, at family level, employing very rudimental technology. Several aspects of pottery production have particularly stayed at a very traditional level, including prospecting for clay, forming and decorating methods, and the firing technology. However, the rich theoretical and cultural components of this art have not been fully documented, and are not known to many scholars.

For centuries, the pot has been a major utensil in Ugandan homes, and Ankole in particular, it has been used for various functions, like cooking, storage, administering medicine, and ritual ceremonies among others. The introduction of Christianity in Uganda in the second half of the 19th Century, which ushered in Western education, which made traditional practices like, the pottery craft and the use of pottery in homes, other than for cooking, despised practices and associated them with paganism. When Uganda acquired independence from the British in 1962, many Ugandans acquired western education which had been reserved for the privileged class, mainly sons and daughters of chiefs; the education inherited from the colonial masters retained western orientation and hence, most of the educated were influenced by the western cultural values. Trowell (1940:76) asserts that although this type of education claimed to have come with a higher civilisation, the result

of the contact was to lower the traditional standards of order and beauty in many of the material possessions of African life, especially crafts.

The people of Ankole are called Banyankore, and are identified by two main groups, the Bairu (cultivators), who mostly live in hilly lands of the west and south; and their main economic occupation is farming. The second group is the Bahima, who live in the eastern grassland plateaus of Ankole are pastoralists who, herd the famed Ankole long-horned cattle. The distinction between the two groups still exists. However, although the Bairu and Bahima presently dominate in agriculture and pastoralism respectively, their occupations are no longer as exclusive as they used to be during the pre-colonial days, although the Bairu have maintained their pottery craft, (Mwambutsya, 1991:1). Beyond the main agricultural and cattle herding activities pottery making is predominantly done by Bairu. Trowell (1952:19) further argues that pottery is, throughout Africa, associated with cultivation. Therefore, it is safe to say that in the Inter-lacustrine area, it is attributable to the agricultural stratum, the Bairu, although the Bahima made fumigators (*ebicunga*) to fumigate milk pots and guards (*ebishabo n'ebirere*).

According to Viollati (2014:1) pottery is the first synthetic material ever created by humans. The term refers to objects made of clay that have been fashioned into a desired shape, dried, and either fired or baked to fix their form. Freestone and Gaimster (1997:9) argues that ever since human beings began to move from a nomadic to a fully sedentary way of life, the pottery vessel has been a basic utensil. Mainly confined to the home, ceramics have always played a pivotal role within both family and community. Kayamba and Kwesiga (2016:81) argue that pottery, the making of earthenware or baked vessels, is a well-known global practice and the most widespread practice of the indigenous people around the world. It is the oldest art of representation and is still an unbroken tradition among the people of Africa, in general, and Uganda, in particular. With regard to pots development, Hopper (2000:15) argues that pottery developed as a response to the needs of humankind. Pots became containers and dispensers – pots of purpose. Once the basic needs became evident, forms were developed to serve them. African pots are central to daily life, produced to store and serve beverage and food, for cooking and brewing beer; and storing grain and valuables. Kayamba (2012:1) further argues that pottery has always had a special place in the Ankole society since time immemorial, starting from the unbaked clay pots, the unglazed terracotta pottery to the glazed pottery used in modern homes.

Barley (1994:7) believes that pottery is part of everyday experience in Africa. Speight and Toki (1995:83) observe that, in Africa, pottery making is mainly the work of women, which is supported by Freestone and Gaimster (1997:18) who argue that potting, the creation of objects from clay, is associated with childbirth and is restricted to women. In relation to the above, Thompson (2001:93) advances the claim that in the Usambara Mountains of northeast Tanzania, the Shamba people once believed that Sheuta, the supreme being, formed people from earth as a potter creates vessels. In Africa today, pottery is often likened to creation of life in a woman's womb. As decreed by the ancient Shamba religious, social and cultural tenets - called *milla* - the potter's profession in the Usambara Mountains traditionally belonged to the domain of women.

In Nkore, specific social class domains and roles were assigned to both genders (Kwesiga 2005:23-24). Pottery directly complemented the domestic sphere, especially because cooking was a female role in an agricultural community. Associating creative abilities in Nkore pottery with gender (women) and indigenous pottery technologies at the beginning of the twentieth century may have contributed to cultural marginalisation of the pottery industry and a low uptake of technical development. Traditionally, Nkore women potters casually passed on traditional pottery skills to their daughters, as they helped in the preparation of materials, and in forming the wares (Byabazaire, 1979). Valued for its utilitarian role, pottery in Nkore relied entirely on locally available materials. Unlike most other crafts, pottery trade and exchange was for the demands of family and immediate neighbours. Owing to pottery's presumed low value and fragility as conceived in Nkore before the 1940s, it was difficult to market pottery over long distances.

In Ankole, pottery had largely been designated as a female activity that required a lot of space, patience and time. In addition, the kind of attention required in the manufacture of pots, usually extending for days or weeks had a direct implication on how fast one could learn the skills and also on the number of people willing to engage in the craft. Learning pottery skills required motivation and extended contact with an experienced potter, usually a mother or any other close relation, which is a lifelong process of learning whereby a person progressed through predetermined stages of life of graduation from cradle to grave (Figure 1). Pottery production has been informal at family level employing rudimentary technology starting from prospecting for clay, forming and decorating methods, and the firing which has resulted in low quality products, which has resulted in low sales thus low incomes to the potters' families (Kayamba, 2012:1).

In Ankole, like in many parts of Africa, pottery is carried out in the dry season because the weather is conducive to dry the products. The pots need to be dry enough before firing to avoid cracking during the process. This is the period when the process can be controlled in time and space to avoid supernatural problems, such as, rainfall that can lead to the destruction of the pots although the rainy season is ideal for working in the fields for food production (Mack, 2000:1).

With regard to pottery development, Hopper (2000:15)

Figure 1. Learning pottery skills from her mother.

argues that pottery developed as a response to the needs of humankind. Pots became containers and dispensers – pots of purpose. Once the basic needs became evident, forms were developed to serve them. For Barley (1994:69) and Zeleza (1993:211), pots are naturally used for storage and cooking of liquids; but have a much wider role. The African usage is only superficially different from the western; appropriate pottery is assigned according to the qualities of the food, uses and events, as well as transmitting messages about participants and their relationship.

According to Barley (1994:17-21), suitable clay is widely distributed all over Africa. Often, other materials are mixed with the clay to provide the correct quality for potting. A number of different techniques may be used in the shaping of the pot itself. However, the most important element in the whole process is the potter's indulgence with the material.

On the subject of pottery decorations, Barley (1994:115) emphasizes that decorated pots are considered more beautiful than the un-decorated. According to Gosselain (1999:14) and Tite (1999:187), pottery vessels were subjected to a range of surface treatment which served as decoration and, in many instances, to reduce permeability of the vessel to liquids. The surface treatment used include incised patterns, roulette impressions, and burnishing, application of slip and mineral pigments and post firing treatment with soot or with an organic coating. However, David et al., (1988:370) believe that decoration on ceramic wares is an essential attribute to almost all pots worldwide. It is carried out as part of the craft rather than an art. Decorations on a pot is symbolic and serves to transmit culture; it encodes, meditates and reinforces the pattern of social relationships. David et al. *(*1988:379). further emphasize that design on pottery, far from being "mere decoration", art for art's sake, or messages consciously emblematic of ethnicity, are low technology channels through which society implants its values in the individual – everyday at meals.

METHODOLOGY

Study population

The study sample population included 25 participants from the districts of Bushenyi, Ntungamo and Mbarara, whom we considered to have similar characteristics (Castillo, 2009). We considered their knowledge and experience in the field of traditional pottery production. We also considered their knowledge about clays, firing process, fuel for firing and environment issues, although some of these potters were far apart from each other (Kayamba and Kwesiga, 2017:11).

Methods

The study involved conducting interviews with traditional potters in Ankole region using an interview guide. In designing questions, cognisance was taken on the type of information the researchers required. To test experience or behavioural responses and opinions or values, follow up questions were necessary for greater depth of inquiry (Mayan, 2001:11-21).These individual respondents were later grouped according to their experiences and interests to form 4 focus group discussions (FGD). By using these groups the researchers hoped to get more in-depth understanding of the issues that had been raised during individual interviews (Amin, 2005:187). During the discussions, we used a discussion guide which had structured and semi-structured questions. This created an opportunity to get a deeper understanding of the participants' views and free expression about pottery practices described in their own words. The target group for the FGDs shared similar backgrounds and levels of understanding, which enhanced and generated debate on the issues under study. However, there were some limitations during the course of data collection, especially during interviews. Some potters were not willing to give accurate information because the idea of sharing information is not common among them. Traditionally, some techniques are guarded carefully.

The researchers also made site visits in order to observe and document pottery production processes at different sites. Sarantakos (1998:207) argues that observation is one of the oldest methods of data collection. It is a method that employs vision as its main means of data collection and is open to all observable social phenomena. During the course of the study, cameras were used to document pottery activities in the field to provide documentary evidence, depicting material reality (Shank, 2006:33). Peterson et al. (2003) recommend the blending of live observation to enhance both observational techniques. On the other hand, ethical issues had to be observed during the course of the study. Cohen (2000:292) argues that interviews have an ethical dimension; they are concerned about interpersonal interactions which need informed consent and confidentiality; this interaction, they say, is designed to protect the privacy of an individual and also to protect the individual from harm (Shank, 2006:118-20).

During the course of the study researchers met some resistance when penetrating some communities. However, because we were born and had lived in Ankole for most of our lives and we could speak the local language, Runyankore. Also, one of us had worked in this region and interacted with fellow potters on several occasions. Therefore, we felt more of insiders than outsiders, and this helped us to penetrate most communities during investigations. Besides, we could speak the local language Runyankore. However, this did not earn us a free passport into the potters' communities. On many occasions we always had to negotiate for entry because we did not fully belong to these communities. We however received some reception when the targeted interviewees noticed that we too were potters.

While conducting this research, the importance and

understanding of ethical considerations was quite vital and some fundamental considerations had to be acknowledged. These were mainly the right to privacy, the right to anonymity and confidentiality and the consequences of the interviews are all problematic. This is because the conduct of ethically informed research should be a goal to all social science researchers. These agreements were covered with the parties involved (Goddard and Melville, 2001:109; Blaxter et al., 2003:158).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Pottery production begins with prospecting the raw material. According to Wikipedia (2017), clay is defined as a fine-grained natural rock or soil material that combines one or more clay minerals with traces of metal oxides and organic matter. Geologic clay deposits are mostly composed of phyllosilicate minerals containing variable amounts of water trapped in the mineral structure. Clays are naturally plastic due to that water content and become hard, brittle and non–plastic upon drying or firing. Potters struggle to improve the characteristics of natural clay, such as its plasticity, texture, colour absorption capacity, density and firing temperature; potters blend materials to create clay bodies (Peterson, 2003:12). Our discussion will therefore begin with the prospecting of clay and its preparation, forming methods, surface treatment and firing technologies which are very important stages in pottery production. During the course of the study, the authors documented extraction of clay for making pots at Rushoga in Bushenyi district. At this site, we documented potters extracting clay from the swamp. They worked in small groups, mainly at household level. As the potters extracted the clay, they kept checking it removing vegetable matter and sandy clay, leaving what they considered to be quality clay, with enough plasticity for forming, but ensuring that its drying shrinkage was not so great as to result in cracking.

We noted that as one of the potters extracted the clay, her colleagues pounded it using sticks and hoes, and would put it in small bundles to be carried home (Figure 2). The potters who were extracting clay at this site informed the researchers that its colour changes with the season. During dark nights, this clay became dark-grey, during moonlight it turned light-grey. She further informed us that during full moon, when a red colour is visible at moon rise, they usually got clay with red strips. This would also affect the colour of pots after firing. Red strips would be evident on the pots' surfaces. According to Gosselain (1999:209) these accidental changes in colour relate to external factors, such as, pedology or meteorological fluctuations, factors that potters can hardly master regardless of their knowledge in pottery production. Similarly, she said that it was strongly believed that when a woman under menstruation extracts clay, her pots would also fire with red strips.

According to Appau et al. (2013:64), in Ghana women in their menstrual periods were not allowed to engage in clay winning process. Women who broke this rule would suffer premature menopause, which implied a break in fertility. In addition, men were forbidden in participation of winning clay. Failure to abide by this would render the men impotent. Gosselain (1999:209) further explains that from a technical point of view, breaching a taboo may affect three stages of the manufacturing process: at clay extraction (clay suddenly disappears, loses its workability or becomes un-exploitable); drying (pots crack even when sheltered from the sun); firing (pots explode during the process). In every area of the African continent, the most frequent prohibitions concern sexual intercourse, menstruation and pregnancy. Menstruating or pregnant women are, often, not allowed to extract or manipulate clay, and sometimes, even to touch unfired vessels.

Figure 2. Pounding clay with hoes after extraction.

After extracting clay, all pits were covered, using the unwanted material, like mud and grass that had been thrown away, to stop stagnant water from collecting and creating breeding sites for mosquitoes. It is also a general belief among potters that clay regenerates. If they covered the pits they would get more clay in a few years to come. This could be true, because most potters seemed to have been getting clay from the same place where pottery families have extracted clay for generations. Clay bundles were carried home by a group of women, kept in a banana plantation, and was covered with decayed banana stems *(emborera*) to keep it moist and cure over time (Figure 3).

Whereas clay is a major raw material for pottery, temper is another basic raw material potters consider to improve the quality of clay. Lizee et al. (1995) argue that it is added to clay in the formation of vessels or other objects in order to reduce rapid shrinkage and/or expansion during the firing process. Temper allows for a more even distribution of heat energy through the ceramic paste during firing. Uneven heat distribution can result in cracking and failure during the manufacturing process. Blandino (2003:25) argues that there are practical reasons for adding temper in the clay. First of all, it makes highly plastic clay easier to work and less sticky to handle. Secondly, it allows the pot to dry more

Figure 3. Covering clay with *emborera* to keep it moist.

Figure 4. Searching for temper from an igneous rock.

evenly, and reduces shrinkage during firing reducing the risk of cracking. Thirdly, it helps to prevent breakage and bursting during firing and it increases durability.

The choice of temper used in pottery was determined by what was available to the potter. During course of the study, we documented a potter extracting temper from an igneous rock. She dug around the rock, with a hoe, for some pieces of rock which she crushed and ground into fine powder (Figure 4). However, many potters in this region use grog as the major source of temper, mainly obtained from old potsherds that were no longer of any use. They are crashed, ground up and sieved to get powder ranging from fine to coarse grog depending on the type of pottery one wants to make.

In Bushenyi, like many areas we visited, potters mixed different proportions of temper from crashed rocks with clay, before pounding it. They spread a mat on the ground, sprinkled temper on it and spread the clay over the temper and pounded with big sticks. They turned it several times as they added water, until it was properly crashed. The potters trod on it with their heels to ensure that it was homogeneously mixed. The clay was later covered with fresh banana leaves to keep it moist. However, when potters have big orders, the prepare the clay in bulk and covered it with "*emborera"* for a few days.

During our field study, we documented a wide range of forming methods for pottery vessels. Sometimes, different methods were used for different parts of the vessel. The potters in Bushenyi, like other parts we visited, they made their pots using the coiling method. The potter at Rushoga got a mat and an old woven disc *(orugari*), with the assistance of other potters, who made coils; she covered her coils with banana leaves to keep them moist. She then started making her pot with a single coil in her hands, which she placed on a clay mould to keep it firm during the forming stage. Those moulds were mainly platters (e*ngutsyo*) from old broken pots, or were specially made to serve the purpose. However, potters without enough moulds would always improvise by using metallic basins (*karaya*) especially when making large pots. She had sprinkled grog on the mould to ensure that the new pot did not stick to it (Figure 5).

The potter used her hands to turn the pot, and in front of her, she placed the coils which she used to build the walls higher. When coiling, the clay was rolled into long, thin strands which were coiled upon each other to build out a unique shape. The potter also blended the coils up together until there was no trace of the ropes of clay entwined, to form the pot, no deviation in the thickness of the walls, and therefore no weaknesses. The potter used different sizes of moulds depending on what she wanted to make. In addition, she used her fingers to scrape and join the coils together as the pot enlarged. She also used a piece of a gourd, shaped like a kidney to model the inside as the pot enlarged. The gourds have an advantage because of their convex shape which can make them ideal to finish the bulb-shape of the pot. The potter added coils until she gained the preferred height and shape. She carved the inside by narrowing the circumference of the coils, when she embarked on making the neck of the pot. The shaping of the pot was done simultaneously with the forming, using a kidney shaped piece of gourd and fingers as the major tools (Figure 6).

The potter at this site (Rushoga) made different shapes of pots; ranging from cooking pots for beans, potatoes, millet, meat, and porridge, to beer pots, and pots for carrying water and for harvesting rain-water. The pots made to carry water, made with a large spherical shape joined with a small slider to form a neck with a small opening. This structure makes it difficult for the one carrying it to spill the water. The gourd shaped vessels are for beer or drinking water. The pots for cooking beans and potatoes had similar shapes like those for carrying water to retain the heat during cooking, except that they varied in size depending on the function. This type of vessel is obviously copied from the gourd; its characteristic features are a round body surmounted by a tall thin neck. The pots for cooking meat were global in shape with a medium opening in the mouth, and would be covered with a small pot, like a soup bowel during the

Figure 5. Initial stages of making a pot using coils.

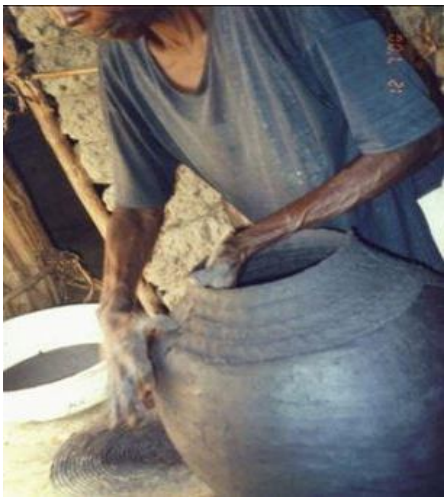

Figure 6. A potter joining coils using her fingers.

cooking. However, the pot for cooking millet was made like a bucket with a wide a round bottom and open mouth, to allow a free movement of the mingling stick when preparing the millet bread.

The potter at Rushoga kept the pots indoors to dry slowly to avoid cracking during drying and firing. However, the following day, she took her pots out, removed them from the platter *(orugusyo),* inverted them and shaped the exterior, using simple tools like, a dry papyrus reed *(ekikorogoto*), because it is light and cannot distort the shape of the pot. Excess clay was scrapped off using a kitchen knife and the pot was set upside down for its bottom to dry. Later, she took the pots back into the house and placed them on rings made of banana fibres to minimise deformation. The pots remained indoors for a period of about two weeks, until they were completely dry and ready for firing.

The researchers indeed observed potters at Kitwe in Ntungamo and Biharwe in Mbarara districts, who were mainly using the drawing method to make pots from lumps of clay. The potters at these sites were Batwa of Rwandan origin, whose descendants had lived in Uganda since 1960. They were born to the task of making pots, which has been their tradition, inherited from their grandparents. The pots were formed by creating single holes in the mid-sections of lumps of clay. The potters placed the lumps on different platters, taken from broken pots. They turned the platters round as they pressed and pulled the clay upwards to increase height. They added coils of clay to reach the required height. All the forming processes were by hand, apart from a broken piece of a calabash used for smoothing the inside of the pot, to give it a bulge at the stomach, and a small piece of cloth which was used to smooth the neck and rim (Figure 7).

Most of the pots made by the potters at Kitwe in Ntungamo and Biharwe in Mbarara were of different sizes, mainly for domestic use including harvesting rain water. The men, also, made perfume pots *(rukomyo)* and fumigators *(ebicunga)* although they are used by women to perfume their bodies and to fumigate milk pots and milk guards. Unlike cooking pots, perfume pots and fumigators were burnished using a pebble *(enkurungu)* or a handle of a spoon, because they had to give a glossy surface. The complete surface was burnished three times, each at an angle different from the previous one. The polishing stone was moistened with saliva or some sweat from the potter's face, to enable it slide smoothly over the surface. If a hard particle tore the surface, it was removed, and the tear was repaired by application of slip of the same body. However, cooking pots were not burnished because clay body prepared for making them needed coarse temper and their surfaces are always matt, to allow easy transmission of heat and prevent thermal shock during cooking.

Whereas smoking pipes have been overtaken by cigarettes in most age groups, the elderly people, particularly those in rural areas, and cattle keepers still do smoke pipes. Some types of pipes are smoked by "high class" people, especially those with many cows, thereby making the pipes prestigious among the Bahima. During the course of the study, we documented a potter making smoking pipes. He modeled his clay, making a shape of a smoking pipe. When the shape had become leather-hard, he scooped out some clay to create space for tobacco and fire. He also scooped out clay from the handle, where a wooden stem would be fixed. He worked on a number of smoking pipes at the same time depending on the stage of forming. He covered them with a plastic sheet of paper to deliberately slow the drying process. He later burnished them using a pebble to give them a smooth surface (Figure 8).

Potters who make smoking pipes do not experience many problems. They use little clay to make a smoking pipe which can sell at the same price as a cooking pot. On top of that, firing is simple. The potter fires his pipes from traditional cooking place, in the course of cooking food. However, the business of making smoking pipes is done exclusively by the elderly. There are no young people involved in making them, because they associate

Figure 7. Batwa women making pots by drawing.

Figure 8. Modeling smoking pipes and fired pipes ready for sale.

the craft with the elderly.

Gender and decorating techniques

During the course of the study, the respondents informed the research that potters in Ankole region were using different methods of decoration to improve the quality of their pots. The surface treatments of pottery vessels served both as decoration and as a means of reducing their permeability to liquids, include burnishing and the application of mineral pigments, in order to attract customers. Different materials, extracted from the ground, were used to decorate pottery wares and different tools and techniques were employed during decoration. A number of potters used red pigment from iron ore (*oburimbi*), which fired red; other potters outsourced for some clay which contain high iron oxide to colour their pots, while other potters applied kaolin *(inoni)* which could give a white, grey or buff colour when fired. In most cases colour depends on the impurities which are in the form of minerals. Some coloured earth may give different colours during oxidation firing. Some of the designs applied on the pots were similar to those on baskets, like zebras, bands, and palms. A simple brush made out of glass (*egunga*) or a finger were used to decorate the pots.

Most of the sites we visited, both men and women potters still used traditional methods of decoration. A roulette woven from weathered sheath of a papyrus steam (*enfunjo*), commonly used for weaving baskets, was applied on the surface of the pot was the main decorating tool. When potters had finished making pots, they smoothed the neck, and a roulette was rubbed around to create some textured pattern both as a decoration and to improve heat dispersion in cooking pots. However, at Kitwe in Ntungamo, the potters burnished their pots while holding them on their laps at a leather hard stage. One hand was used to burnish, while the other supported the pot. The potters made some openings on these pots to make the pots serve the intended purpose, fumigation, especially *rukomyo*. Some decorations were added by impression, using simple tools like a bicycle axial (Figure 9). David et al. (1988:370) argue that decoration on ceramic wares is considered an essential attribute to almost all pots. It is

Figure 9. A male potter decorating a perfume pot using a bicycle axle.

Figure 10. Fired and reduced water pot.

carried out as part of the craft rather that an art. Decoration on pots is symbolic and serves to transmit culture; it encodes, meditates and reinforces the pattern of social relationship.

A potter at Bwera in Bushenyi cut some designs on her water pots and decorated them using a roulette; she burnished some parts which were not decorated with a roulette, forming matt and smooth surfaces. She fired her pots in a bonfire, and later reduced them using agricultural waste, mainly millet husks (Figure 10). Burnishing makes pots waterproof by sealing pores on the pot's surface, and the areas which were decorated with a roulette keeps the pores of the pot open. The rouletted parts make the pot slip resistant while in use, because the pot contains water for drinking. In addition, the pot looks beautiful when decorated and it is always displayed in a corner in a dining room, where it can be reached by every member of the family, when in need.

Another factor is that water kept in pots is cool and has a desirable flavour when boiled with herbs, which attracts many people to take it. According to Emaya (2017), using a clay pot for water is not just a traditional alternative to the steel, glass and plastic containers, but it is a healthy alternative as well. Scientists claim that storing water in a clay water pot is the best compared to many options. Clay pots not only cool the water down, they also provide healing with the elements of earth. Most significantly, clay pots transfer the chill to the water based on the climate. He further states that clay pots are porous and when one stores water in a clay pot, the evaporation happens. This process causes cooling as water particles gain energy in the form of heat, then change to gas and get mixed with air.

Her counterpart at Rushoga decorated her pots with red pigment extracted from stones. The potter crushed the stones and mixed the powder with syrup from a male banana finger (*embire*), which worked as a binder; and used her finger to paint the pot when it was still leather-hard. She burnished it with a pebble (*enkurungu*) to give it a glossy surface. In a way, burnishing is the pre-wheel, pre-kiln equivalent of glaze. The leather-hard clay is rubbed with a hard object, such as, a pebble to make it lustrous. The quality of the clay is particularly important; it must be even and smooth to give an all-over lustre. She later fired them under oxidation, and this gave the pots bright red colours (Figure 11).

Firing technology

The production of pottery is incomplete until the pot has been fired. Potters in this region use different fuel for firing their pots, depending on the surrounding environment. We had an opportunity to document a man gathering dry papyrus reeds in Bushenyi. At this stage, other members of the family had to get involved in the pottery activities, because there were some duties which needed males, like gathering fuel for firing pots. He cut both dry and wet papyrus reeds; sorted out the dry ones; tied them in a bundle and carried them home (Figure 12). When we asked him whether he was going to collect the wet reeds after they had dried, he explained that potters prefer papyrus reeds which have dried naturally. We were informed that papyrus reeds which dry after cutting break pots during firing. The man dug a shallow pit and the potter arranged the papyrus reeds. She stacked her pots according to sizes, beginning with the big ones, and covered them with a layer of papyrus reeds. She repeated the arrangement of pots, but this time, arranging medium size pots. She stacked the small ones last. Later, she covered the pots with a blanket of lemon grass and fired the kiln. The purpose of covering pots with lemon grass was to control the temperature and retain heat for a reasonable time during firing. Potters in other places use other types of grass available within their environment (Figure 13). At this stage, it is exclusively a woman potter's duty to fire the pots, the final stage of production, which is assumed to be the time for

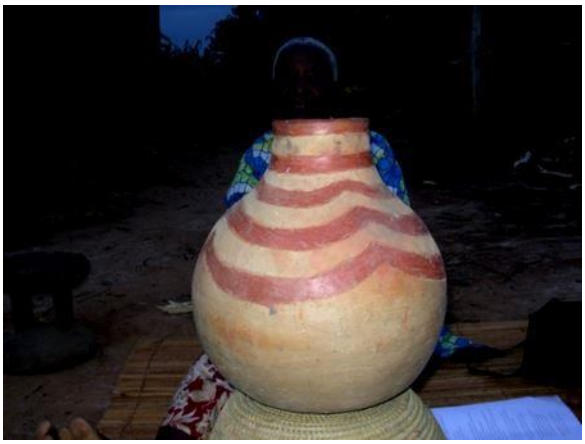

Figure 11. Water pot fired under oxidation.

Figure 12. Gathering papyrus reeds for fuel to fire pots.

Figure 13. Covering green ware with lemon grass.

the woman to give birth, after a long period of labour pains.

During the firing process, the potter monitored the pots using a long stick. Whenever she noticed that the ash was black, she used a long stick to create an opening for some air to blow in, until the ash turned white. This was an indication that the pots were ready. When the ash was removed, the pots were completely fired with a brick red colour. She used the stick to off-load the kiln when the pots were still hot because, according to her, if they stayed overnight, they would break.

The use of papyrus reeds to fire pots has been practiced for many years in the Ankole region, because it was readily available at no cost, in many parts of the region. In addition, using dry papyrus reeds does not affect the vegetation because after cutting, they grow again. However, some potters who depend on this type of fuel have to travel long distances to look for it. First of all, the papyrus reeds can be obtained freely, because all papyrus swamps are gazetted government land. Secondly, they take a short time to fire, for the pots to mature. Lastly, they can easily be gathered from the swamp, with minimum strength, unlike firewood which needs strong men to split. In addition, firing can be arranged close to the courtyard; no special kiln is needed.

At Biharwe in Mbarara, potters use dry shrubs for fuel. They live in semi-arid area and do not have access to papyrus reeds. They usually gather shrubs and twigs instead. The shrubs are gathered from nearby farms and roadsides, which makes them affordable. Potters only need time to gather them. The heat from shrubs can rise very fast and the fire can last slightly longer than that of papyrus reeds. It is assumed that shrubs can raise fire to a temperature of about 600°C. Firing is simple, it can be done from a courtyard, and it does not need any special kiln.

In a continued struggle to find solution for fuel for firing pottery, due to increasing population and shortage of land for agricultural fields and grazing animals, some potters have had to make some critical decisions and innovative solutions to overcome the fuel shortages (Arthur, 2013:19). At Biharwe, we documented potters firing using animal waste. The potters collected dry cow-dung from the field and carried it home in sacks. They spread it in the courtyard to dry for about two days. Meanwhile, the potters dried the green wares, which were to be fired, especially fumigators and perfume pots. When the cow-dung and the green wares were completely dry, the potters prepared fire in the kitchen, and later, spread the dry cow-dung over it. They arranged their pots for firing, which they covered with more cow-dung. The fire started burning from underneath, and gradually moved upwards until all the wares became red-hot (Figure 14). The potters brought more cow-dung in powder form and covered the red-hot wares. Immediately, all pots turned black with a glossy surface. They removed the black wares using a long stick and they were left to cool; cleaned them with cloth, and later, taken to a room for storage (Figure 15). The potters use cow dung for both oxidation and reduction firing. The material is quite abundant in the surrounding areas at no cost.

After firing, some pots are given a post firing treatment,

Figure 14. Stacking and firing fumigators using cow dung.

Figure 15. Reduced fumigators after firing.

especially those which are meant to handle local liquids. The researchers were informed that after firing, the pots are filled with banana peelings and water; and are placed on a fire place cooked when the pot is covered with a banana leaves. This will ensure that the pores are properly sealed and the pot is ready to handle either water or beer without leaking. In addition, pots for handling beer are given another touch by weaving rings both at the bottom and the neck, which are connected by strings from the neck to bottom and sideways, using either *enshuri* (thorny creepers) or banana fibres (*ekifunga*). This will aid handling the pot when filled with the beer brew.

Social dimension

During the course of the study, the authors tried to investigate why pottery has survived for so long in spite of stiff competition from cheap industrial products like plastic containers. Some respondents said that some items used in the Ankole culture cannot be imported because of their unique nature. Some shapes or types of pots cannot be produced by foreigners because they do not have those cultural attachments. These had to be made locally. Other respondents believed that food cooked in a pot has a good flavour. Some potters told us that they will keep working, as long as people continue using their pots alongside saucepans, given the food value accorded to pots. They believed that the mineral value that is in clay goes into the food cooked in a pot. That is why, according to some respondents, women who cook in saucepans usually look for clay or herbs mixed with clay (*emumbwa*) when they are pregnant. According to the Bible (2003), there is a strong relationship between man and clay because God made man out of clay (Genesis 2:27).

In addition, the researchers were informed that there are special pots used in the various communities within the Ankole region. These included special pots used at functions like “give-away” ceremonies (*Okuhingira*). Such pots are used to burn some special herbs to create an aroma, or for appeasing the supernatural, which is a historical function. In the Ankore society, some small pots (the three-eyed pots) are used for burning herbs. Other pots are used for keeping warm water, while some are for providing fragrance to a room and the woman’s body (Figure 16). Sentance (2004:188) argues that the inhalation of perfumes and incense has a powerful effect on the human psyche, and over millennia, many different aromas have been used to invoke the gods, avert the evil eyes, raise the spirits and heal the sick. He further states that with a few exceptions, such as ambergris, and musk, the most aromatic materials are obtained from plants. In addition, the researchers were informed that there are some soup bowls which are used to serve guest because they symbolize hospitality, honour, and respect as well as the social relationship one has with the guest (Figure 17).

The researchers were informed that pots are still used for fetching and keeping water, storing food grains, and handling beer. During the fieldwork, we documented a pot at Nyaburiza in Ntungamo district, used for storing local beer. The researchers were informed that they keep the local beer cool, even on hot days, by evaporation

Figure 16. Special pots used by married couples.

Figure 18. A pot used for storing local beer.

Figure 17. Special pots used during giveaway ceremonies.

Figure 19. Pots used to handle and store local brew.

through the porous clay, especially in grass thatched houses. Moreover, there is no electricity in villages to cool the drinks in refrigerators (Figure 18). Similarly, at Rushoga, pots were used to handle local beer during its production (Figure 19). Some of the pots are exclusively used for storage of local beer while others are still used as beer containers during the drinking party. It is still a practice, among the Banyankole, for members of the family to drink together from a pot as a sign of unity, especially when there is communal work, or when they are settling disputes. However, the culture of drinking communally is on the verge of decline because of the vigilance of the Health sector in the recent past, they have warned that communicable diseases, like tuberculosis are on the rise and so, such communal sharing should be avoided. Instead, during such functions, beer is brought in a pot and served from gourds to prevent the spread of diseases. Although the beer is served from gourds, the pot still serves as a symbol of unity among the Banyankore.

In Uganda and Ankole in particular, the local beer (*amarwa*) was and is still used as a medium of settling payment of bride price in many traditional homes. Whenever a man seeks to marry someone's daughter, he has to take some pots of beer (*enjoga z'amarwa*) to express his interest in the girl. He is then told to pay a given number of cows and pots of beer, as part of bride price. However, with modernity, many urban and middle class families give a certain number of crates of beer (bottled) and soft drinks. For Christian families of the Anglican faith, particularly the born-again, crates of soft drinks, a bag of sugar, and tea leaves, are requested instead of pots of beer, on top of settling the payment for bride price. Bride price is considered to unite the two families of the bride and groom. From then on, the two families can eat and drink together since they have been united by sharing the drink. Serving beer to guests from a pot is a cultural practice among the Banyankore, and it symbolises hospitality and cultural identity. However, there are special pots, drinking vases, (*orunywero*) meant for the head of the family or special guests.

Marketing pottery products

From the investigations carried, most potters sell their

pots locally. They are consumed by neighbours or special orders by people who have wedding or giveaway ceremonies, to serve special guests. In a new development, some proprietors of craft shops have started buying special pots from potters. In addition, some potters have to look for markets in distant market places among cattle keepers, especially those making fumigators. On the whole, potters still use traditional methods of selling their pots from weekly markets, although at times, potters get orders from direct consumers for particular items, or vend them on a daily basis. The authors documented potters taking their pots to the weekly market. The transport system is still rudimental, where the common mode of transport is by head carriage, and on some occasions, potters get help from family members to push the wares on bicycles (Figure 20). On reaching the market, the wares are spread on the ground waiting for the buyers.

Figure 20. Potters transporting their products to the weekly market.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research found out that traditional methods of pottery production in Ankole still dominate the pottery industry. Local methods of clay extraction, using a hoe, are still employed. Hand forming methods, especially coiling and drawing techniques aided by simple tools made from curved objects, still dominate. Bonfire firing techniques, using dry papyrus reeds and shrubs from the surrounding environment are widely applied in the region. Traditional Ankole methods of decorations used mostly by women still dominate, where decorations are for aesthetic purposes. The roulette and a finger or a brush made locally made from woven grass are the major tools in decorating; while red coloured earth or red iron oxide from stones dominate as decorating materials. Burnishing and reduction firing techniques, using animal or agricultural waste are used as decorative methods on special pots. The environment plays a big role in pottery production by providing the clay and fuel for firing. Pottery products are marketed locally in weekly markets, and direct consumers who buy from potters. Although pottery products are not used on a daily basis, there are special pots which are still valued highly because of the cultural meaning attached to them. However, one of the pressing issues faced by the potters in Ankole is the scarcity of fuel for firing pottery products. Some potters travel long distances to look for fuel. Most of the papyrus swamps have been reclaimed for farming activities, those which have remained are in distant places far from pottery communities.

REFERENCES

Amin, E. A. (**2005**). Social science research: Conception, methodology and analysis. Makerere University Kampala, Uganda. And University of Yaounde, Cameroon. Makerere Printing Press.

Appau, E. A., Kofi, A., and Opoku-Asare, A. (**2013**). The theoretical and socio–cultural dimensions of Kpando womens' pottery. Journal of Research on Humanities and Social Science, 3(1): 60-72.

Arthur, J. W. (**2013**) Transforming clay: Gamo caste, gender, and pottery of southwestern Ethiopia. African Study Monographs, 46: 5–25.

Barley, N. (**1994**). Smashed pots: feats of clay from Africa. London: British Museum press.

Bible (**2003**). The Holy Bible: New International Version – Eighteenth

impression. The Bible Society of South Africa.
Blandino, B. (**2003**). Coiled pottery: Traditional and contemporary ways. London. A&C Black.
Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (**2003**). How to research. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Open University press.
Byabazaire, D. M. (**1979**). The contribution of the Christian Churches to the Development of Western Uganda 1894-1974. Frankfurt & Las Vagas . Peter Lang.
Cohen, L., Monion, L., and Morris, K. (**2000**). Research methods in education 5th ed. London UK and New York, USA. Routeledge Falmer.
David, N., Sterner, J., and Gavua, K. (**1988**). Why are pots decorated? Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research for Current Anthropology. University of Chicago Press. Vol. 29 (3).
Emaya, C. (**2017**). Amazing Health Benefits Of Using Clay Water Pot. [On line] Available at: http://www.stylecraze.com/articles/health-benefits-of-using-clay-water-pot// Accessed: 06/07/2017.
Freestone, I., and **Gaimster**, D. (**1997**): Pottery in the Making; World Ceramic Traditions. London UK, British Museum Press.
Goddard, W., and **Melville**, S. (**2001**). Research methods: an introduction. Lansdowne: Juta.
Gosselain, P.O. (**1999**). In pots we trust. The processing of clay and symbols in Sub-Saharan Africa. Journal of Material Culture, 4(2): 207-212.
Hopper, R. (**2000**). Functional pottery: forms and aesthetic in pots of function. 2nd ed. London: A&C Black.
Kayamba, W. K. (**2012**). Trends in Ugandan Ceramic Technologies with special reference to the Ankole region. Vaal University of Technology, SA. (Unpublished PhD. thesis).
Kayamba, W. K., and **Kwesiga**, P. (**2016**). The role of pottery production in development: A case study of the Ankole region in Western Uganda. Net Journal of Social Sciences, 4(4): 81-90,
Kayamba, W. K., and **Kwesiga**, P. (**2017**). Breaking through traditions: The brick and tile industry in Ankole region, Uganda. Net Journal of Social Sciences, 5(2): 9-20.
Kwesiga, P.K. (**2005**).Transformation in pottery education, production and use in Nkore south-western Uganda. Middlesex University, UK. (Unpublished PhD. thesis).
Lizee, J. M., Prindle, T., and Plunkett, T. (**1995**). Glossary of Ceramic Attributes. University of Connecticut.
Mack, J. (**2000**). Burnished pots. *Africa: arts and cultures.* London: British Museum Press. 2000:212-4 [On line]. Available at: <http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass>. Accessed: 16/04/2006.
Mayan, J. M. (**2001**). An introduction to qualitative methods: a training module for students and professionals. International institute for qualitative methodology. Edmonton, Canada. University of Alberta.
Mwambutsya, N. (**1991**). Pre-capitalist social formation: the case of Banyankole of Southwestern Uganda. [On line]. Available at: <http://www.ossrea.net/eassrr/jan91/mwambus.htm>. Accessed: 18/04/2006.
Peterson, B., Bottorff, J., and Hewat, R. (**2003**). Blending Observational Methods: Possibilities, Strategies, and Challenges. [Online]. Available at: https://sites.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_1/html/patersonetal.html. Accessed: 16/07/2017.
Peterson, S, (**2003**). A complete potter's handbook. The craft and Art of Clay. 4th ed. London. Laurence King Publishing Ltd.
Sarantakos, S. (**1998**). Social research. 2nd ed. London, UK. Macmillan press.
Sentance, B. (**2004**). Ceramics: a world guide to traditional techniques. London: Thames and Hudson.
Shank, D. G. (**2006**). Qualitative research. A personal skill approach. 2nd ed. New Jersey, USA. Person Prentice Hall.
Speight, N., and **Toki**, J., (1995). Hands in clay, an introduction to ceramics. 3rd ed. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
Thompson, B. (**2001**). A circle of fire; Pare pottery in the Usambara Mountains of Northeast Tanzania. *Ceramic technology.* (11): 30-4.
Tite, M. S. (**1999**). Pottery production, distribution and consumption-the contribution of physical sciences. Journal of archaeological methods and theory, 6(3): 184-192.
Trowell, M. (**1940**). The development of art and indigenous crafts in Uganda. In: Uganda Teachers Journal. Vol. 2. London: Cambridge University Press.
Trowell, M. (**1952**). Tribal crafts of Uganda. London: Cambridge University Press.
Viollati, C. (**2014**). Pottery in Antiquity. [On line] Available at: http://www.ancient.eu/pottery/ Accessed: 12/06/2017.
Wikipedia (**2017**). Clay. [On line]. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clay.
Zeleza, T. (**1993**). A modern economic history of Africa. Volume 1. Darker: Codesria book series.

Citation: Kayamba W. K., and Kwesig, P. (2017). Gender and traditional pottery practice in Ankole region, western Uganda. Net Journal of Social Sciences, 5(3): 42-54.