

The Socio-Economic Status of Pottery Making Women among Hararge Oromo

Mohammed Hassen* and Desta Roba

Haramaya University, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, School of History and Heritage Management

Article History: Received: March 9, 2020; Revised: June 28, 2020; Accepted: August 9, 2020

Abstract: Pottery making is one of the oldest traditional technologies among the rural communities of Hararge. Pottery has many functions among which utilitarian and symbolic value are paramount. While it is common to observe the making of pottery and its utility at homesteads, arguably our knowledge of the status of pottery making women in rural Hararge is very limited. This paper is basically a survey work and adopted historical and ethnographic methods. By collecting qualitative data through interview, Focus Group Discussion, non-participant observation and document analysis, the paper aims at investigating the socio-economic status of Hararge potters. The finding shows that potters and other occupational groups such as smiths and tanners are treated by the agriculturalists not as equal partners but are marginalized social groups. This was partly due to the underlying deleterious socially constructed origin of the occupational groups. Although they are considered as Oromo and Islam in the social construction of their identity, when it comes to real life situation, they are not accorded with that identity. As a result, the social hierarchy places them below the agricultural communities and views them as alien and remnants of ancient autochthonous population. The paper concludes that, although there is no direct relation with their marginalization, pottery making women generate very low income so that their family have to subsidize their living by engaging in other activities like agriculture through tenancy arrangement. The study implies this tentative discussion of the voiceless and marginalized peoples in Hararge in general demands further empirical research.

Keywords: Marginalized groups; Pottery; Smiths; Social groups; Status

Licensed under a Creative Commons. Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.



1. Introduction

Pottery making is the process of producing different objects with clay after fire is being applied at higher temperature resulting in hard and durable materials. Pottery making is one of the oldest material cultures in Africa (David and Kramer, 2001; Shrotriya, 2007). However, there is no clear evidence as to when the technology begun and it does not mean that pottery is the first tool that has been used as storage/container in the history of mankind. Instead, there could be tools that preceded the innovation of clay vessels. Renfrew and Bahn (2008) explicated that during early prehistoric time, probably people used containers made of light organic materials. As discovered by Kosambi (1977), cited in Manibabu (2005), baskets and leather bags were used initially as storage equipment long before the appearance of pottery. In prehistoric man's history of technological development, stone, bone and wooden tools were made and used for hundreds of thousands of years before the advent of ablaze clay vessels (Manibabu, 2005).

Pottery making is widely accepted as the technological achievement of the Neolithic communities (Baker, 1961; Fagan, 1975; Ashmore and Sharer, 1996; Garcea, 2004; Finneran, 2007, Renfrew and Bahn, 2008; Gibbon, 2015). Regardless of the exact time when pottery making was begun, pottery has been playing a role to ensure survival besides agriculture, in processing, transporting, cooking and storing (Arnold, 1985; Rice, 1987; Arthur, 2000; Shrotriya, 2007). Others classified the function of pottery into two broad categories: direct function includes the function of pottery in storage, transportation and processing, and indirect function such as symbolic function of pots and rituals (Barnett, 1999; cited in Abawa, 2005).

In Ethiopia in general and in Hararge in particular, the production of pottery is still widespread. Studying the technical and social aspects of traditional pottery making helps to reconstruct the antiquity of the use of pottery vessels. However, there are very few studies conducted on the social aspects of pottery making in Southern Ethiopia. Some of these are Getachew Fulle among the Yem, Dena Freeman among the Gamo, Birhanu Bubiso among the Walayta, Haileyesus Seba among the Sidama, Elizabeth Watson and Lakew Regassa among the Konso, all cited in Freeman and Pankhurst (2003). In Oromia, Woyesa (2010; 2011) gives us a glimpse of pottery making women in Jima and Wollega.

However, the eastern part, specifically Hararge is almost neglected and apparently there is no academic work directly dedicated to this subject. The only attempts were passing references by travelers, missionaries and some scholars such as the French traveler De Salviac, (1901) and Caulk (1977) who gave an insight to occupational groups. Caulk (1977: 374) said that "Oromo informants always mention outcast, but tolerated, groups of blacksmiths living in the countryside before the coming of the Egyptians". Besides, the American Geographer Brooke (1956) made a passing reference to occupational groups in Hararge.

Apparently, today in Hararge, the number of traditional pottery making occupational groups is declining in an accelerating rate. This is partly due to the accessibility of the region to the coast where foreign made plastic materials make their ways to the local markets and hence demands are diverted to imported goods. In addition, the price set to the traditionally made pottery materials is discouraging. This indicates, throughout Hararge the traditional potter might disappear altogether in a few generations. In many regions of Ethiopia, traditional pottery making is being replaced by modern pottery techniques as Woyesa (2010, 2011) did his work in Wollega and Jima zones of Oromia regional state. It is, therefore, critically important to engage in and study the subject from technical, social and commercial aspects before it vanishes.

This article contributes towards bridging the patchy nature of such research in Ethiopia focusing on the social aspects of traditional pottery making in Hararge. It focuses on the socio-economic position of pottery making women among the Hararge Oromo, eastern Ethiopia. It attempts to discuss issues related with the identity and social origin of potters within the larger Hararge Oromo social milieu, the economy of pottery making, the artistic and utilitarian aspects of pottery and the resource utilization in relation to the natural environment. It also attempts to address the major types of pottery vessels

and underlying factors for the continuity of pottery technology in Hararge irrespective of the decline of traditional pottery making in the country and the study area in particular. Attempt is also made to show the dynamics of the social status of pottery makers in Hararge vis-à-vis the dominant agricultural community and the major challenges potters are facing today.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Description of the Study Area

This study covers east and west Hararge zones of Oromia National Regional State (ONRS). The present east and west Hararge zones were the results of series of administrative reshufflings which, during the imperial and the *Derg* regimes, were identified as Hararge province. Hararge as a whole is located to the East of the Great Rift Valley which dissects Ethiopia roughly into two halves. It is characterized by diverse physical features including rugged terrain, steep hills and mountainous landscapes. Hararge plateau as a geographical region extends from Chercher Mountains (southeast of the Awash valley) to the planes of Hargeisa in Northern Somalia. The highland of Hararge forms the middle and eastern section of the Ethiopian southeastern highlands. It consists of three major geographic regions: The Chercher or western highlands, the Garamulata or the central highlands, and the Harar or Eastern highlands (Brooke, 1956).

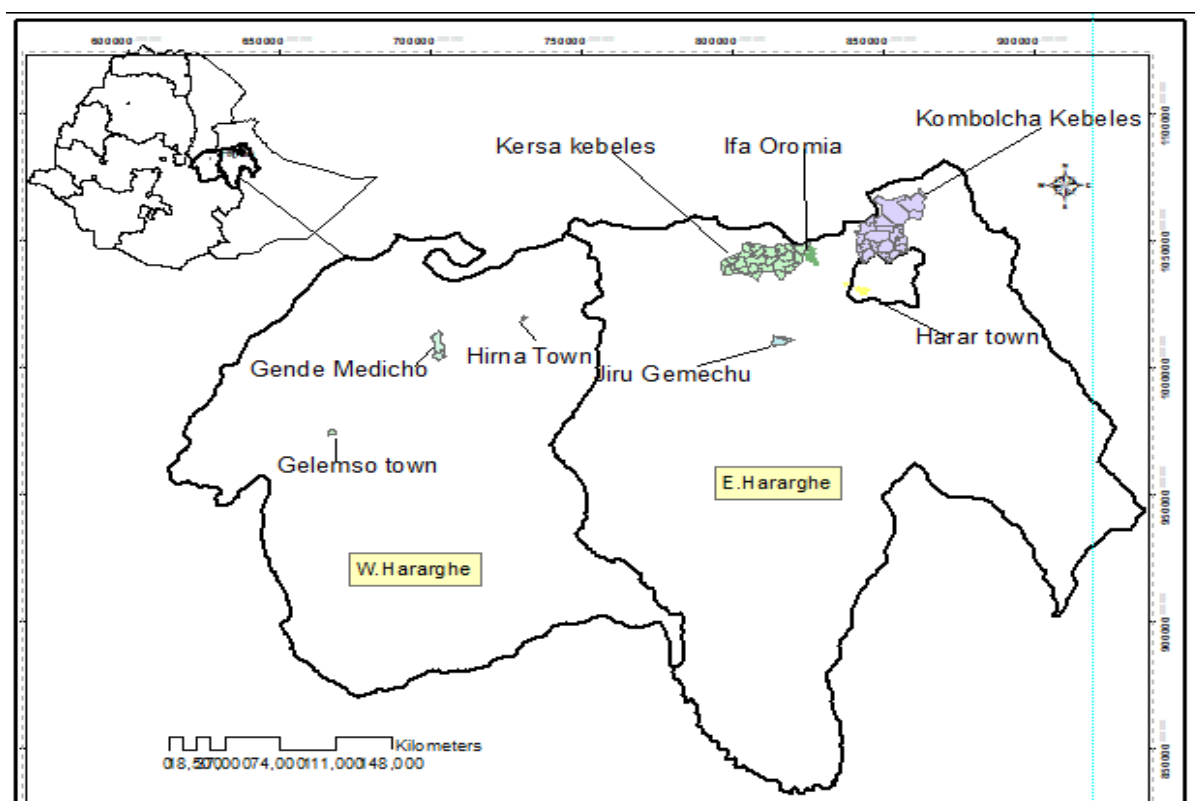


Figure 1: The study area

Source: Developed from Google earth by GIS Staff, School of Geography and Environmental Studies, Haramaya University, 2020

The agro climatic range comprises lowland (*kolla*, 30-40%), midland (*weyna dega*, 35-45%) and highland areas (*dega*, 15-20%), with the highest elevations culminating at 3,405 m, at the top of Gara Muleta mountain. There are two rainy seasons: the small *belg* (*spring*) and the main *meher* (*autumn*). *Belg* production is limited within the *dega* zone and part of the wetter *weyna dega*, but *belg* rains are widely used for land preparation and seeding of long cycle *meher* crops (sorghum & maize). Annual rainfall averages range from below 700 mm for the lower *kolla* to nearly 1,200 mm for the higher elevations of *weyna dega* & *dega* zones (Klinge, 1998:2).

2.2. Research Design

This research is a survey of pottery makers living in west and east Hararge villages. By applying survey method, qualitative data is systematically collected by conducting interview with key informants. Survey is adopted because it is a method through which desired information can be obtained more easily and less expensively from a large population and study area like the two Zones of Hararge. This study basically adopted historical and ethnographic methods. Historical, because we tried to study pottery makers in historical sequence and hence facilitates our understanding of comparisons of pottery in intergroup and intra group across time. We also tried to study the origin, development and gradual evolution of cultures and social institutions of occupational groups. It is Ethnographic because it entails examining the behavior of the participants in a certain specific social situation and understanding their interpretation of such behavior. It tries to interpret and describe the symbolic and contextual meaning of the everyday practices of potters in their natural setting. Therefore, this study is both synchronic and dichronic in approach.

2.3. Data Sources

Data for the study is generated from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through techniques like Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (to countercheck and balance information from potters and non-potters) and non-participant observation (to elicit on raw materials used in the making of pottery, where they bring these raw materials, how they make the different vessels, and the labor division between the mother and the daughter). Also, an in-depth interview with seven pottery making women is conducted. These seven women were selected based on availability sampling focusing on pottery making women and their children. This interview is deliberately made to privilege and emphasize the position potters themselves. In addition, nine key informant interviews were conducted by using availability sampling. For this purpose, members of other occupational groups, neighbors and informants from non-pottery making members of the surrounding community were made part of the study to balance the data. The non-pottery making informants were selected based on prior information from interlocutors who suggested having rich information. Supporting the advantages of using key informant interviews and the techniques to be applied, Bernard (2006) indicates that key-informant interview are used because they are found to be easy to communicate and they understand the information we needed and were glad to give us the same

A total of sixteen informants were used for key-informant interview and in-depth interview. They were selected by using availability sampling techniques. Interview was conducted between December 2018 and January 2020. To supplement the oral data, video was also taken while potters were working.

Non-participant observation is applied by the researchers through observing the potters while they were doing their job. The major activities observed are digging the clay soil and transporting to the actual production site, the process of shaping the products and burning of *qibaaba* (a circular and flat plate pancake baking clay product).

Prior to the actual engagement into the research sites and conducting interview, researchers prepared and revised the proposed interview protocol by the researchers for the issues to be discussed.

In addition, three Focus Group Discussions comprising five to seven individuals were made. Secondary sources were gathered through review of related published and unpublished materials from different libraries. Since it is difficult to cover the whole west and east Hararge zones in this research work, survey is best suited to this study to address the spatial difficulty of covering the whole Hararge. Accordingly, we selected seven districts: four from east and three from west Hararge zones. The three districts in west Hararge are Chiro, Gelemso, and Hirna while Haramaya, Kombolcha, Kersa and Garamulata are selected from east Hararge as our study sites (For details see the map attached above. These study sites were selected based on the prior survey for the presence of widespread pottery making in which women are playing a key role. From these districts, we selected Isaqo village from Qarsa; Sali village from Kombolcha; Medhicho 02 village from Chiro and Jiru

Gemechu village from Gurawa villages where pottery is predominantly made by women for economic and cultural reasons. The data were carefully decoded, thematically analyzed, cross-checked, interpreted and presented qualitatively.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Social Origin of Potters in Hararge

Hararge is predominantly occupied by three Oromo groups: Ittu, Anniya and Afran Qallo. The people are predominantly followers of Islam. Traditionally, the Oromo of Hararge practiced agriculture and animal husbandry as their dominant means of livelihood. But, there are also occupational groups, artisans who are skillful in handicraft works (*ogummaa*) and are collectively known as *Ogeeyyii* which means experts. These groups of handicraft workers are potters, iron smiths, weavers, tanners, and so many others (Informants: Legesse Bekansa, Mohammed Yusuf, Fetiya Ahmed, Abiyot Adugna). The extant literature on occupational groups in Ethiopia tries to analyze marginalized communities in three paradigms: the ethnic paradigm, the caste paradigm and class paradigm (Freeman and Pankhurst, 2003). In this study, the caste paradigm that considers occupational groups as submerged remnants of the 'negroid' groups from the waves of conquest by the Cushitic groups is applied. According to the caste paradigm, the remnant groups became caste among the dominant groups that made the conquest in this case the Cushitic group. This argument was advocated from among others by Lewis (1962) who argued in favor of the use of the caste concept specifically in the context of the horn of Africa. In the Ethiopian context, especially in the south, the three most prominent supporters of this paradigm for specific societies were Shack (1964), Haberland (1964, 1984) and Todd (1977). Although prominent scholars in the field stated that it is inappropriate to use the word 'caste' in non-Hindu contexts, a number of scholars have applied the concept in Southwest Ethiopia. For example, Todd among the Dime, while, Shack has applied the concept among the Gurage; Haberland has applied it among the Dizi of Southwest Ethiopia; Hallpike (1968) among the Konso and many more scholars have used it to explain the position of occupational groups in Ethiopia.

Lewis (1962) claims that in virtually every Cushitic group, there are endogamous castes based on occupational specialization. He further claims that such caste groups are found, to some extent, among the Ethiopian Semites. The names of these groups differ; their physical characteristics vary greatly, and they speak only the languages of their 'hosts' or of other nearby Cushitic or Semitic peoples. Lewis and other scholars based on the above thesis argue that the caste groups do not belong to the ethnic group they live with. Rather, they were despised and marginalized in different social, economic and political livelihood by the dominant groups whom they are living with.

Woyesa (2010, 2011), in his study in Jimma and Wallaga, identifies that occupational groups, of which potters are part and parcel, are not caste or pariah. They rather belong to different Oromo groups and further argues the origin of handicraft works among the Oromo could be traced back to the period before the Oromo population movement. Further, he argues that the Oromo have already possessed iron tools during their expansion which was the key to their success in their population movement. But, he attributes the marginalization and the low social position of the occupational groups vis-a-vis the pastoral and agricultural Oromo to the aftermath population movement and the resultant formation of social hierarchy among the Oromo.

Taking these lines of argument, we can evaluate the social origin of occupational groups including potters in Hararge. The majority of potters in the study area claim that they belong to the Oromo (Informants: Momina Beker, Halima Ibro, Safiya Aliyi). On the one hand, the potters in Chiro, specifically in Medhicho site, claim they belong to the Alla sub clan of Afran Qallo while the potters in Kombolcha claim that they belong to the Nole sub branch of Daga¹ group. Similarly, the potter we interviewed in Kersa claims that she belongs to the Nole.

¹ According to Eastern Oromo genealogical tradition, Hararge Oromo belongs to Barentuma moiety. Itu, Humbena and Afran

On the other hand, the potters in Hirna, specifically in Doba *Kebele*, are mixed in which there were Shawan Oromo and the Ittu. One thing is striking in all these areas where the potters have established a separate settlement from the rest of the dominant agricultural community. Moreover, the potters in *ganda* Medhicho in Chiro district claim they belong to the Alla but they do not explain the details of how and when they or their ancestors came to settle in an area where the Ittu Oromo are predominant while the dominant settlement site of the Alla was in Eastern Hararge especially in Garamulata area.

It is apparent that the Oromo have a high social prestige for the pastoral and agrarian practices and disdain other practices like artisanship. Among the Hararge Oromo, there are two sets of occupational groups - the hunters and the smiths, both engage in other craft work. For example, Brooke (1956) argues that among the Hararge Oromo, the hunters, which he generally called as *Watta*, are tanners and potters.

These occupational groups are disfranchised from the normal political and judicial processes of their own host groups. Among the Oromo, the smiths, tanners, potters etc may not have voices at *Gadaa* council meeting and are under the protection and rule of the elected leader of the council. Moreover, Jalata (2005, 2012) argues that though the *Gadaa* government was based on democratic principles, the Oromo excluded the caste groups such as smiths and tanners.

From this, it can be argued that the dichotomy between the 'pure' Oromo and the assimilated once can be established through different cultural traits. One of these mechanisms is through occupation. Among the Oromo, pastoralism and, later on, agriculture are the most prestigious occupations that can delineate social categories. The fact that occupational groups were marginalized and their occupations are not respected and therefore were not formally represented in the Oromo social institutions gives an inkling that they are remnants of the ancient surviving communities. Had they been socially accepted as 'pure' Oromo, the Oromo could not have excluded and given them a lowly social position.

One indication of their being remnants or caste is the fact that they took their identity from the Oromo group among whom they settled. The assimilated occupational groups became part and parcel of the Oromo social organization to the extent of considering them as part of clan members where they resided. For instance, among the Arsi, the *Watta* (occupational group who have engaged in tannery) claim they belong to Arsi. When they were asked the specific Arsi clan they belonged, they listed down the name of the dominant Arsi clan in the area they are residing. Thus, the *Watta* claim to belong to different Arsi clans (Abdiyo, 2010). Through time, it became impossible to differentiate the assimilated Oromo from the 'pure' Oromo. De-Salviac (1901: 178) supports the above thesis when he states that "the conquering Oromo absorbed far from exterminating the aboriginal population who wanted to accept their law. These remnants of the ancient inhabitants are called *Dhalata* (aborigine) and are inadmissible to the supreme charges as well as to the pilgrimage."

In addition, Woyesa's (2010) assertion that indicates the use of artisans have helped the Oromo to succeed in their phenomenal population movement might have been true, but we cannot conclusively prove that these war instruments were made by Oromo artisans considering the assimilated Oromo were also legally considered as Oromo given there is no mechanism of identifying the assimilated Oromo from the proper Oromo.

In Hararge villages, the common parlance used to designate potters is *Shagni*, a word whose meaning is not properly identified but is considered by the potters as derogatory and hence is one source of marginalization. They were accorded with a lowly social position. They were not given an equal status with women from the agricultural background as such their socio-political role is associated with this positioning (Informants: *Abbaa Gadaa* Ahmed Mumed, Sheik Mohammed Jawar, Abdi Yusuf, Legese Bekansa). Though their number is insignificant as compared to the dominant

Qallo belong to Barentuma. Afran Qallo, as the name indicates, is comprised of the four sons of Qallo. These are Obora, Alla, Daga and Babile. Daga in turn has three sons: Nole, Jarso and Hume. Nole has four sons: Mucha, Oromo, Halele and Abu. These are Ilma Gudedda. There are also clans identified as sons of Nole but are considered as Ilma mixii, Ilma Berchuma, etc. One of our informants in Kombolcha, practicing blacksmithing, claims that his father was an adopted son under the Hume clan of Daga.

agriculturalists, they are found in different parts of Hararge. In our study, the potters found in Hirna (in Doba *kebele*), Chiro (in Medhicho *Kebele*), Kersa (*ganda Shagni* or Isaqo village) in the outskirts of the towns and in Kombolcha (just on the outskirts of the town) are closely studied.

For the surrounding agricultural and pastoral Oromo, pottery objects are used for utilitarian purposes like for transportation, storage, cooking, feeding etc. They might also serve for non-utilitarian purposes like rituals. Some of the vessels indicated in pictures four, five and six have these functions especially during *Ateetee* ceremony, *Buna Qalaa* and during *Wadaajaa* ceremonies.

3.2. The Labor and Economics of Pottery Making

Pottery making is entirely dominated by women. It is the preoccupation of women. They mold and fire clay pottery baking utensils, water and milk jugs, water jars, utensils like *girggira* (larger and smaller), *akinbalo* (*ankalabaa* in Afaan Oromo), etc. which are sold to the agricultural Oromo households. The most common is called *qibaba*. It is a circular material used for baking pancake (*biddeena* in Afaan Oromo) (Informants: Zeytuna Abdurahim, Safiya Aliye, Momina Beker).



Picture 1: A circular pancake (*biddeena*) baking *Qibaba*

Source: Photo taken from Medhicho village, Chiro

Women totally dominated pottery making in different phases starting from identification of clay mining sites, mining the clay soil, transporting clay to manufacturing sites (usually at homesteads), preparing clay minerals, shaping vessels, drying, burning, post blazing treatments and marketing. When asked how they acquired the knowledge of pottery making, almost all informants claim that their mothers have been doing and they have learnt from them (Informants: Fatuma Ibro, Halima Ibro, Zeytuna Abdurahim). A few informants purport that they have acquired the knowledge from Shawan settlers who have been living as neighbors.



Picture 2: A woman making *qibaba* (*biddeena* producing flat plate)

Source: Photo taken from Medhicho village

Since pottery making is a time taking and phase-based activity, it demands the support of children. Hence, most mothers are assisted by their daughters or other little girls at home. Mothers train their daughters the skills of pottery and during our field work we observed several daughters working along with their mothers. Thus, skill in the technology is transferred from mother to daughter. The husbands are agriculturalists and work on their field. The only assistance they provide for their wives is bringing firewood, fetching straw and grass by which the materials are burned for strength (Informants: Fatuma Ibro, Halima Ibro, Zeytuna Abdurahim).



Picture 3: Burning *qibaba* using straw and stalks in Kombolcha

Source: Photo taken from Kombolcha

The raw material for pottery production is clay soil. Red and black types of clay soil are mixed to make *qibaba*. These soils are located in different places where the potters are found. For example,

during our field work, we observed women traveling 2kms to dig red soil (with hoes) free of charge in Medhicho *kebele* around Chiro town; and they brought the clay to their working grounds carrying it in some kind of container. Likewise, they brought black soil from another site where it perfectly fits the desired purpose. On the other hand, potters in Kombolcha dig the red soil from the field which was given recently for an agriculturalist and hence they frequently face harassment from the owner.

A red clay soil is pulverized in a wooden mortar and pestle and mixed with water. The wet clay is worked by hand into a long roll which, in the case of open-mouthed container, is placed one over the other from mouth to base and smoothed into the desired shape. It is then placed outside to dry for several days. When thoroughly dry, it is covered with fresh dung and is placed in wood and dried-dung fire. The dung burns at a high temperature which gives a glaze to the pottery. After it is removed from the fire, the pot is tempered by boiling milk in the container (Informants: Fatuma Ibro, Halima Ibro, Zeytuna Abdurahim). The other raw materials used by potters are water, wood and straw for burning and gum is extracted from a radio battery which is spread over the products to decorate them by making them black and shiny.

The items produced are sold either in local markets or in some distant weekly markets. For example, Medhicho potters travel some 60kms carrying *qibaba* to Hirna Saturday market (Informants: Momina Beker, Fatuma Ibro, Halima Amade). There were also cases, as reported by our informant, in Qersa that she received orders to craft some products in mass and her customers shown up on appointed time to her residence and collected her products in mass. This informant crafts the most diverse forms of pottery products from among the pottery makers we interviewed and is famous in crafting quality products. Her customers and business partners come from the surrounding urban areas including Dire Dawa and Harar (Informant: Zeytuna Abdurahim).



Picture 4: Pot used for roasting coffee bean
Source: Photo taken from Kersa



Picture 5: Container to eat roasted coffee bean
Source: Photo taken from Kersa



Picture 6: Pot used for cooking, Kersa town
Source: Photo taken from Kersa



Picture 7: Girgira (big size) used for ceremonial activities like smoking incense
Source: Photo taken from Kersa



Picture 8: Small pot used for cooking

Source: Photo taken from Kersa



Picture 9: Big pot used for storing grain

Source: Photo taken from Kersa

The function of each pottery product and symbolism are explained by informants. The pictures on the first plate (pictures 4 and 5) indicate they are pottery vessels used for cooking and eating respectively especially during rituals like *Ateetee* and *Buna Qalaa* (Informant: Zeytuna Abdurahim). Coffee beans are roasted in the first jar and then transferred to the second vessel for ultimate consumption and it is given only for males implying their dominance. In the second plate (pictures 6 and 7), the picture with four-finger like vessel is called the big *girgira* and is used for smoking incense as part of rituals and during *chat* (*Cata edulis*) chewing ceremony. Informants assert that the four-finger like structure represent milking cows' breast implying fertility. The third plate (pictures 8 and 9) is composed of containers differing in size and they serve as flasks to store different items like cereals (Informants: Momina Beker, Fatuma Ibro, Halima Amade).

Informants are of the opinion that they generate some income by selling products and support their family. They claim that they have a better economic position than those who do not engage in any income generating activities and therefore remained at the mercy of their husbands (Informants: Momina Beker, Fatuma Ibro, Halima Amade). The experience and economic advantage of pottery making is described by one of our informants as follows:

I have learnt pottery making from my mother. In this village (Medhicho 02), women make some kind of pottery products. We generate income by selling these products. For example, the price of one qibaaba, if it is big, is 50 birr and if it is smaller it fetches 25 birr. By using the income from pottery selling, we support our family and we do not ask our husbands for money to cover some household expenditures. On the other hand, those women who do not produce pottery materials have no source of alternative income except waiting for their husbands. In fact, when we evaluate the benefits we secure from our products, it does not commensurate our labour. Merchants take our products to big markets like Hirna, Dire Dawa and Metehara where they sell a single qibaaba 100 to 150 birr depending on its size. We have attempted to have access to these markets and maximize our benefits by establishing cooperatives through the support of local government officials. The latter promised to support us financially by availing credits. Yet, no support is given for us (Informant: Fatuma Ibro, 09-12-2018).

Thus, it can be safely argued that the economic status of artisan women was much better than those who solely rely on their husbands' income. Informants narrate that it is by producing and selling pottery products that they earn additional income and support the family by purchasing some valuables and covering the costs for children in schools.

It is apparent that in Ethiopia occupational groups' access to farmland was not reliable and therefore the artisans were dependent mainly on their crafts and not on farming as such. Under such circumstance, artisans were forced to engage in any form of tenancy arrangements so that they can secure some plot of land for farming. It was through such mechanisms that artisan men engaged in farming. Under such conditions, they supplement their living through various mechanisms like pottery where the wives of artisan women engage. It was only after 1975 land proclamation that occupational

groups got the right to have farmland *Negarit Gazetha* Proclamation No. 31/1975). But, still they supplement their living through pottery making.

During the *Derg* regime, the socio-economic position of occupational minorities was somehow better than the preceding and the succeeding regimes. Primarily, the 1975 land reform made these groups owners of the land and enabled them to cultivate their own land. Secondly, the *Derg* considered the occupational groups as potential groups who can be mobilized for industrial development. One of the extracts by the Ethiopian Workers Party indicates the role occupational groups could play along with farmers and other social groups. It reads:

የገበሬዎችና የእጅ ጥበብ አምራቾች ኅብረት ሥራ ማኅበራት እንዲሁም የሽማቾች የኅብረት ሥራ ማኅበራት በጠንካራ መሠረት ላይ በቅለዉና አብበዉ አጥጋቢ ፍሬ እንዲያፈሩ፤ በወዛደሩ መሪነትና በገበሬዉ አጋርነት ላይ የተመሠረተ የሠርቶ አደሮች ተደጋጋፊነት በርትቶ መደባዊ የተግባርና የዓላማ አንድነታቸዉ እንዲጠናከር ... (የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ፓርቲ፣ የአብዮታዊያን (ኮሚኒስቶች) ቃል ኪዳን፣ ቅጽ 60-01-04/77፣ ገጽ፡6).

Translation:

In order to have a strong and fruitful collaboration among Peasant Association, the association of occupational minorities and other cooperatives, there need to have a strong party under the vanguard of the proletariat that will ultimately create class solidarity among these workers, peasants and occupational minorities.

3.3. Social Interaction and Trends of Social Change

Historically, there is rigid social stratification and marginalization of occupational groups. Available literature discusses marginalization and segregation in economic, political, social and cultural, and spatial dimensions among occupational groups in south and southwestern parts of Ethiopia (Freeman and Pankhurst, 2003). These types of marginalization are also clearly observed in Hararge. Economically, at least up to the 1975 land reform, pottery making women informants narrate that they did not have access to land and the only way to engage in agriculture was to make some tenancy arrangements with landlords or with families having excess lands. Socially too, in the previous years, especially during the imperial period, there was no intermarriage between pottery making families and agriculturalists. There is also a limited social interaction in social events like death and birth. But, as compared to the tanners, the potters face milder discriminations (Informants: Safiya Aliye, Zeytuna Abdurahim).

Politically too, the potters' participation in local administration was severely limited. According to informants, potters were not elected at lower administrative levels like kebeles. Even during the much better acclaimed *Derg* regime, pottery making families did not hold the position of Peasant Association leadership even though they were allowed to become members of the association. People who are engaged in this activity are generally undermined and looked down by the agricultural community.

The other manifestation of the segregation of the potters, including of course other occupational groups, was related with their settlement pattern. The potters have settled on the outskirts of the towns. They are found in some rocky areas outside the nearby towns. They are given lands that are unproductive and unsuitable for agricultural activities, on steep slopes, on the peripheries of villages, adjacent to jungles or in valleys. This spatial marginalization is also observed in segregations of potters in market places. The market areas where the potters, along with the *tumtu* (blacksmiths), sale their products are located outside urban centers. These are clearly observed during our field work in the research sites.

This marginalization and segregation could be scrutinized in three regimes. During the Imperial period, these various forms of segregations were observed in daily life and were so serious and rampant in Hararge villages, while during the *Derg* regime, it became somehow lessened. Informants argue that during the *Derg* regime marginalizing these different occupational groups were reduced. Perhaps the biggest achievement of the occupational groups was the 1975 land reform as stated above in this paper. The *Derg* also attempted to integrate occupational groups with the dominant groups through different mechanisms such as villagization and literacy campaign (Informants: Legese

Bekansa, Mohammed Abdela, Beyan Mohammed, Abbaa Gadaa Ahmed Mumed). Besides, whatever its ideological underpinning, it is claimed that the *Derg* tried to create associations, unions and alliances (see the Amharic excerpt above) for occupational groups through which they could get some support such as raw materials and access to markets. Since 1991, the early years of the EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front) regime has not impacted the occupational groups. Gradually, when the government started to give attention, there were some improvements in tackling segregation of occupational groups. Overall, segregation and marginalization have been declining, and people are interacting, i.e., implying social stratification based on occupation is declining. It is also observable that some potters marry from agriculturalists although it is not a preferred option.

3.4. Challenges of Potters in Hararge

It is indicated above that the low social position of potters in Hararge villages has its analogous effects on the economic position of the pottery making families. Leaving aside the inferior social position placed, the current and most acute challenge potters are facing is the low economic positioning associated with their occupation (Informants: Abbaa Gadaa Ahmed Mumed, Legesse Bekansa). Of course, pottery is not a fulltime occupation for potters and the income from pottery making is meant to supplement the income from other economic activities like agriculture. However, the current situation of traditional pottery making is challenged by the global market trend. The mass production of goods supported by sophisticated marketing and advertising are destroying the livelihood of many, as there is no capacity to absorb them into modern industries. Similar development is observed in Hararge. Here, though there is no single modern manufacturing industry, modern industrial products (whether domestic or foreign made) are making their in-roads overflowing remotest rural markets. Although it is true that the introduction of modern technology's products has advantage, it should not be at the expense of indigenous technologies and their owners' livelihood.

The introduction of products of modern technologies such as ceramics, plastics and metallic utensils are steadily replacing the utility of indigenous products in both urban and rural areas. The durability of these imported commodities coupled with their reasonable low price has attracted rural communities for these imported commodities. Under such circumstances, potters have lost and are losing their traditional rural markets which, in turn is affecting their income (Informants: Legesse Bekansa, Fatuma Ibro, Halima Ibro, Zeytuna Abdurahim). In these rural areas, it is not the industries which have been introduced but their products. There should be an opportunity for technology transfer but under such circumstances, the products are affecting the growth of indigenous technology and more importantly it is creating new unemployment labour to the market as the potters are losing hope and their livelihood is being threatened.

The other major challenge pottery making women and the traditional pottery making industry facing is the inadequate attention the sector received from the governmental and non-governmental agencies. During interview in Medhicho *kebele*, the women claimed that they were frequently visited by local government agencies and provided information on their livelihood, their working condition, market possibility and other details (Informants: Fatuma Ibro, Halima Ibro, Zeytuna Abdurahim). However, no single practical action was taken. Similarly, in Kombolcha, the potters made the same claim and reported the challenges they faced in terms of securing the clay soil. They have been mining the clay from the outskirts of the town, which was unoccupied. After some years, however, individual claimants prohibited them from mining the clay claiming that it was their land. They reported this several times to local governors but in vain (Informant: Safiya Aliye).

From the discussion above (under section three), it can be established that the socio-economic position of occupational groups, especially in Hararge is not yet well studied and appreciated by foreign and Ethiopian scholars. This implies that the theme is a fertile area of research for scholars in the area of social sciences and humanities. A study of these marginalized social groups from their own perspective gives a fresh insight into our understanding of Ethiopian history from the point of view of

the periphery. This is one of the potential areas to decenter mainstream Ethiopian history as well as liberating and shifting the politically suffocated narrative to social and economic history of Ethiopian peoples.

4. Conclusions

Pottery making is one of the oldest occupations in Hararge. Potters, who are entirely women, make different products by using clay soil as their main input. Pottery has a number of utilitarian and symbolic functions among the community where the product is used. The meager income generated through pottery making is used to support the family and helped women to have some degree of economic independence from their husbands. But as compared to the labour invested, the benefit women secured is not yet commensurate.

In addition, while the product has lots of utilitarian values, women have not received the commensurate social prestige and value among the dominant agricultural Oromo communities. Perhaps one of the reasons is the social origin of the potters in which, though they claimed as Oromo, they were not accorded with that identity. The dominant agricultural community also believes that they were Oromo but failed to give them equal status. It is more probable that these occupational groups have an ancient origin with the autochthonous population who, through time, were assimilated to the dominant agricultural Oromo and took their identity from the Oromo in terms of language and other cultural practices.

This indigenous technology has also faced a number of internal and external challenges which hampered its natural growth. Pottery making women repeatedly claim that they were not supported by local government officials who sometimes visited them and promised some material and non-material support. Coupled with this lack of support and external challenges, pottery making is at the brink of extinction. The occupational challenges being faced by traditional pottery making women in Hararge are multi-faceted and the trend foreshadows even greater danger in terms of 'intergenerational deskilling', whereby the age old indigenous pottery making technology does not metamorphose into better technologies but is rather lost completely.

Lastly, approaching the history of Ethiopian peoples from the vantage point of the voiceless by focusing on themes like social and economic events is timely and relevant to redress critical gaps in the mainstream Ethiopian historiography. In this regard, the history of occupational groups, especially pottery makers in Hararge is decentering the state and giving attention to the marginalized. Therefore, this tentative discussion of the identity, the economic position, the causes of marginalization and other details of the potters in particular and the occupational groups in general demands further study.

5. Recommendations

Based on the discussions and findings indicated, this paper takes the position that conscious and deliberate effort must be made to revive and resuscitate this endangered occupation by all stakeholders involved. Based on this general position, the following recommendations are forwarded:

The government at lower levels should organize the potters and arrange every kind of facilities like credit and market opportunities.

Higher learning institutions should provide training on some kinds of soft skills like on saving, making modification on the existing indigenous technologies and adoption of modern technology.

Awareness creation on the hitherto negative perception of the community on occupational groups should be aggressively made by higher learning institutions and different government bodies.

A concerted effort should be made by all government bodies at all levels, non-government organizations and the community at large to educate the mass on the values of traditional craft technology and its advantage to preserve and pass the knowledge over to the coming generation.

As a result of withdrawal by potters from their pottery making activities due to the influence of modern technology, unemployment is increasing in the study area. Therefore, the government should

invest capital so that the huge labor force among the youth could be mobilized into the sector so that unemployment could be reduced.

6. References

- Abawa, Gedef. 2005. An ethno-archaeological investigation of pottery making among traditional potters of Gondar. Unpublished MA thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- Abdiyo, Ketebo. 2010. The political economy of land and agrarian development in Arssi: 1941-1991.' PhD dissertation, AAU, Department of History.
- Arnold, D. 1985. *Ceramic theory and cultural process*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arthur, J. W. 2000. Ceramic ethno-archaeology among the Gamo of southern Ethiopia. PhD dissertation, Florida University.
- Ashmore, W. and Sharer, J. 1996. *Discovering our past: A brief introduction to archaeology* (3rd ed.). California: Mayfield publishing company.
- Baker, D. 1961. *Pottery today*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Bernard, H. Russell. 2006. *Research methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. (4th ed.). New York: Rowman and Little Field Publishers, Inco.
- Brooke, Harding Clark. 1956. Settlements of the eastern [Oromo], Hararge province, Ethiopia. PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Caulk, R. A. 1977. Harär town and its neighbors in the nineteenth century. *Journal of African History*, 18 (3): 369-386.
- David, Nicolas and Kramer, Carol. 2001. *Ethnoarchaeology in action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Salviac, Martial. 1901. *An ancient people in the state of Menelik: The Oromo, great African nation* (Trans. Ayalew Keno).
- Fagan, M. 1975. *In the beginning: An introduction to Archeology* (2nd ed.). Boston, New York: Little Brown Company.
- Finneran, N. 2007. *The archaeology of Ethiopia*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Freeman, D. and Pankhurst, A. 2003. *Peripheral people: The excluded minorities of Ethiopia*. Asmara: The Red Sea Press.
- Garcea, E. 2004. An alternative way towards food production: The perspective from the Libyan Sahara. *Journal of World Prehistory*, 18 (2): 107-154.
- Gibbon, E. 2015. A localized approach to the origins of pottery in upper Mesopotamia. *Laurier Undergraduate Journal of the Arts*, 2: 29-46.
- Haberland. 1964. [Oromo] *Sud-Athiopeins*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag.
- _____. 1984. Caste and hierarchy among the Dizi (southwest Ethiopia). In Rubenson, S. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the seventh international conference of Ethiopian studies*. Addis Ababa, Uppsala, East Lansing; *Institute of Ethiopian Studies*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, African Studies Center, Michigan State University, pp. 447-50.
- Hallpike, Christopher R. 1968. The status of craftsmen among the Konso of south-west Ethiopia. *Africa*, 38 (3): 258-269.
- Jalata, Assefa. 2005. *Oromia & Ethiopia: State formation and ethnonational conflict, 1868- 2004* (2nd edition). Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press.
- _____. 2012. Gada (Oromo democracy): An example of classical African civilization. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5 (1): 126-152.
- Klingele, Ralph. 1998. Hararge farmers on the cross-roads between subsistence and cash economy. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) emergency unit for Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Lewis, Herbert. 1962. Historical problems in Ethiopia and the horn of Africa. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 96 (2): 504-11.

- Manibabu, M. 2005. Pottery of the Andros of Manipur: A case study on ethnoarchaeology. PhD dissertation. Manipur University.
- Negarit Gazetha. 1975. Public ownership of rural lands, Proclamation No. 31/1975 Year 34, No. 26.
- Renfrew, Colin and Bahn, G. Paul. 2008. *Archeology: Theories, method and practices* (3rd ed.). London. Thomas and Hudson Press.
- Rice, M. 1987. *Pottery analysis: A source book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shack, W. 1964. Notes on occupational caste among the Gurage of south-west Ethiopia. *Man*, 64 (54): 50-2.
- Shrotriya, Alok. 2007. Ceramic ethno-archaeology and its applications. *Anistoriton Journal, ArtHistory*, 10 (3): 1-10.
- Todd, D. M. 1977. Caste in Africa? *Africa*, 47 (4): 398-412.
- Woyesa, S. Bula. 2010. Socialization, symbolism, and social structure: Aspects of traditional pottery making among the Jimma Oromo, western Oromia. *Journal of Oromo Studies*, 17 (2): 75-100.
- _____. 2011. The technical style of Wallaga pottery making: An ethno-archaeological study of Oromo potters in southwest highland Ethiopia. *African Archaeological Review*, 28 (4): 301-326.
- የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ፓርቲ፣ የአብዮታዊያን (ኮሚኒስቶች) ቃል ኪዳን፣ ቅጽ 60-01-04/77::

List of informants

No.	Name of the informants	Sex	Age	Place & date of interview	Remarks
1.	Legesse Bekansa	M	60	Chiro town, Kebele 01 Date: 09-12-2018	Former teacher in the town and now retired from government job and running his elementary school. He is a knowledgeable person about the profession of occupational minority and their contribution to the surrounding community.
2.	Fatuma Ibro	F	38	Medhicho Number 2 Date: 09-12-2018	She is a potter in Medhicho number 2, in Alla village. She has an experience of more than fifteen years in pottery making, mainly <i>qibaabaa</i> . She learnt pottery making from her mother.
3.	Momina Beker	F	75	Medhicho Number 2 Date:09-12-2018	She is a potter in Medhicho number 2, in the Alla village. She has an experience of more than forty years. She learnt pottery making, mainly <i>qibaabaa</i> from the surrounding women after she was married to someone belonging to the Alla
4.	Halima Amade	F	41	Medhicho Number 2 Date: 09-12-2018	She started pottery making in her early age at Medhicho Number 2 village. Learned pottery making from her family.
5.	Abiyot Adugna	M	38	Gurawa town, Ketena 6 Date: 04-05-2019	He is a former <i>Shemane</i> (weaver), came from North Shewa, Degam District. He learned this occupation from his family mainly from his brother. Now, changed his occupation and became merchant.
6.	Halima Ibro	F	38	Gurawa district, Jiru Gemechu village Date: 04-05-2019	She learnt pottery making from her family. She has an experience of more than 10 years in pottery making. She belongs to Gelan clan. The specific village where pottery is made is known by the local people as Bookoo village
7.	Mohammed Abdela	M	44	Gurewa town, Kollegna Sefer. Date: 04-05-2019	He has engaged in smith work, in the outskirts of Gurawa town, in a village named Kollegna sefer. He belongs to Nunu Clan. He learnt smith work from the people who came from Shewa.
8.	Mohammed Yusuf	M	60	Gurawa town,	Engaged in smith work and learnt

					<i>Addis Ketema</i>	this occupation from Debu in Haramaya town. Belongs to Gelan clan. His family has no knowledge of smith work. He was born in Worqe village in Gurawa
					<i>Sefer</i>	
					Date: 04-05-2019	
9.	Sheik Jawar	Mohammed	M	60	Gurawa district, Burqa Gudina village	He is a merchant of the products of smiths like knife, Mencha (machete) etc. Belongs to Gelan clan.
					Date:04-05-2019	
10.	Abdi Yusuf Debu		M	35	Haramaya town,02 Kebele,	He got skills of metal work from his father Yusuf Debu, Yusuf in return learned from his father Debu. Debu was a famous smith worker in Haramaya town. He was the one who introduced blacksmithing to Haramaya town. He was from Kombolcha area but in the later period moved to Dire Dawa and learned smith work. He belongs to Mana Jarte clan.
					Date: 26-02-2019	
11.	Aliyi Mohammed		M	30	Haramaya town, 02 Kebele,	He came from Melka Belo district and learnt smith work in Haramaya town. He belongs to Sharifa clan
					Date: 26-02-2019	
12.	Fetiya Ahmed		F	37	Haramaya District, Ifa Oromia village (Ganda Gurbota)	She belongs to Tulama clan. Her husband makes <i>gurbota</i> (a local leather product used for transporting different goods on the back of donkey) and she sells Gurbota to the local market. According to her, a <i>Shemane</i> (weaver) named Haile, who came from Shewa, introduced tannery to the village by making Gurbota.
					Date: 26-02-2019	
13.	Beyan Mohammed		M	22	Haramaya district, Ifa Oromia village (Ganda Gurbota)	He makes gurbota and learned this occupation of tannery from his family.
					Date: 26-02-2019	
14.	Abbaa Gadaa Ahmed Mumed		M	65	Hirna town, 01 Kebele	Abbaa Gadaa in Xullo district. Has a good memory about the occupational minorities in the town. According to him, the majority of the occupational minorities in Hirna town, mainly the smiths, came from the desert parts of
					Date: 08-12-2018	

					the district. Smiths in the district belong to Nole, Jarso, Alla and Ittu but some of them came from Shawa. The earliest smiths in the town of Hirna were Worra Shide. He has also a good memory about pottery making in the district.
15.	Zeytuna Abdurahim	F	45	Kersa district, Isaqo village Date: 04-01-2020	Experienced potter in the outskirt of Kersa town and she learnt pottery making from her family. She made different items of pottery products. She belongs to Nole clan (Worra Mucha).
16.	Safiya Aliye	F	35	Kombolcha district, Sali village Date: 25-02-2019	Famous in pottery making (qibaabaa) in the outskirt of Kombolcha town. Belongs to Halele clan. Learnt pottery making after she was married to someone in Sali village.
