

Continuity and transformation in Nkole material culture: The Case of Marriage Pots

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Abstract

The study investigated continuity and transformation in Ankole material culture of western Uganda with a focusing on marriage pots. The main objective was to investigate how material culture using the case of marriage pots have been relevant to the Ankole community through forces of transformation. The investigation exercise involved qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Investigation commenced with administering questionnaires to 130 respondents. In way of obtaining a broader view of the transitional experience about marriage pots from a traditional to a contemporary paradigm, interviews were carried out in an exercise that involved 30 potters, 20 married couples and 20 elders. Findings indicated that there is a profound changed between the traditional and the contemporary Nkole marriage pots, ideally in terms that include; One, design (form), and finish as some young couples require them painted instead of smoking, secondly improved production in terms numbers because of the improved technology. Findings however highlighted threat factors to the continuity and transformation of Nkole marriage pots which included; decreased Nkole marriage Traditional inductions, and an influx of imported substitutes.

Key words: *Material culture, continuity and transformation, marriage pots*

INTRODUCTION

This paper investigated continuity and transformation in Nkole material culture; a case of marriage pots. In this regard it looked at the evolution, the growth or advancement of marriage posts from its inception to the present day. Pottery is an art of creating objects from clay and recorded as one of the earliest hand craft. Its genesis is believed to be in the Paleolithic period a point in time when clay was discovered. Through the archeological findings pottery presented unique features that profoundly exhibited transformation. From the Paleolithic era through the bronze age to the 21st Century evidence of human growth and development can be traced, (See Podium School article, 202)

In a Global spectrum, historical records clearly indicate that transformation and continuity have been major characters of pottery and this commensurate well with the larger dimension of cultural growth and development (Bostoen, 2007). Pottery narratives as reflected in the civilization spectrum provide a wide scope change and transformation through the attached function in a given period of civilization which included; cooking, serving, and storing food in addition to being items used in functions ceremonies and cultural rituals. (Bostoen, 2007). In a supporting statement, Davis (2021) notes that the invention of pottery came along with improved life style that covered domestic, community governance and ceremonial needs. In Asia, particularly India and China pottery happens to be one of the practices that are deeply rooted their culture. The Harappan people of India and the provide a good example of Transformation and continuity in the domain of pottery. They exclusively show how pottery was used in the Identification of political strata, beliefs and in the general social realm civilsdaily (2021)

As the rest of the world largely experienced an uninterrupted transformation and continuity of its material culture; pottery in particular, Africa has a different story to tell more especially after its partitioning and reign by the foreign cultures. Archeological reports focused on Africa indicate that Africa like other parts of the world was experiencing a holistic culturally lead, steady and purposeful Material culture transformation and continuity was a constitute of elements which - good example is cited by an Iron age archeologist Phillipson who mentioned the pottery discovered along the Zimbabwean plateau (Anders L., & Innocent P., 2010)

Nyamushoso et al (2021) express a similar concern in their study that aimed at unearthing facts about the African pottery with a statement;

“We know little about the social context in which the pottery was made, distributed, used, and discarded in everyday life. This mostly comes from the fact that the majority of the ceramic studies undertaken were rooted in Eurocentric typological approaches to material culture hence these processes were elided by most researchers.”

In spite of the prevalence of the foreign intervention in the material culture transformation and continuity. Many parts of Africa are still witnessing transformation and continuity of their material culture; particularly pottery. In so many cases the post-colonial transformation and continuity carries a foreign gene thus generating a hybridized product which in so many parts of

Africa have been embraced; taught and practiced. It's also notably clear that in some extreme cases the indigenous methodology in the pottery practice and production consumption is neglected and substituted with foreign substitutes (See Giulia D., 2021 pp 345–372)

In contrast with the notion that a change in preferences of pottery consumption and production from indigenous to what the new world order provided is not transformation and continuity, GH Sánchez. (2012) views it in a different perspective on the account of change as a fact of life and that through pottery change can happens naturally² In comparative analysis of Giulia and Sánchez's submissions the understanding pottery transformation and continuity expands from the totally indigenous parameters to the contemporary context which empresse's new scientific knowledge in the clay material, the technology, human expertise and design in terms surface decoration and form. However, one qualifying element remains as cultural values for which the product is supposed to stand for.

Uganda like other African nations is not exempted from the experience noted above. Gifted with a diverse cultural terrain. Uganda presents numerous and divergent pottery products, reach in cultural content³. (See Daily Monitor Friday, February 13, 2015 — updated on January 05, 2021)

Pottery as a material culture in Uganda has a farfetched history that dates back to pre-historic iron age at identified at Bigo [Biggo] situated at along Katonga river subsequently spreading as cultures diversified; agriculture being one of the main attributes to its popularity. Important to note here is that as the indigenous man advanced in time, perception of the world around him changed as it become more complex, characterized by innovations, discoveries and creations among others driven by accepted traditions, values and practices at a given point in time. In this context pottery with the indigenous cultural settings in Uganda transformed thus supporting continuity. However, the distinctive difference between the pre-colonial and the post-colonial

²Sánchez. (2012) In this paper; Ceramics, Cultural Continuity and Social Change mentions that ceramics is part of a technological process – a process that defines and nurtures the way people interact, move across regions or landscapes, and shapes daily human patterns of behavior (see Arnold 1988). In this regard, ceramics not only change culture, but also markedly influences the way people relate to these items. Ceramics thus also influenced the spatial processes of cultural convergence and divergence.

³ Daily Monitor Friday, February 13, 2015 notes in an article that; 'Uganda is a country with rich cultural heritage as recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

pottery products is highly very significant; a subject that broadens the scope of transformation and continuity as mention above in the African perspective discussion.



Figure 1. Pottery in Uganda, Marriage pots Left; pots of the pre-colonial period and Right pots made in the post-colonial period. Source: Biharwe; Igongo.

Pottery in Nkole like in any community tends to provide a medium of engagement as well as different cultural setups in Uganda that adopted the practice of pottery. The *rukomyo* is one of the most iconic pot in Nkole traditional marriage. Its use it to help provide and preserve warmth and a good scent inside a woman. As part of preparation for the "night", a woman places pieces of burning charcoal inside *rukomyo* and then covers herbs/leaves on top of the burning charcoal. The most praised and trusted herbs/leaves used in this procedure are some oily-like leaves of a plant commonly known as ‘*omunywamaizi*’ whose stem is known more for being a good whipping stick for the cows.

The southwestern Uganda which harbors the Nkole people had outstandingly practiced and used pottery. Nkole pottery plays significant roles in the lives and culture of the natives of Nkole region. Which include; preparing and serving meals, storage of water and other types of drinks and the most notable ones are serving as carriers of milk and its byproducts⁴ (Kayamba and Kwesiga 2016)

⁴ Kayamba and Kwesiga (2016) highlight the importance pots in Nkole; they state; “For centuries, the pot has been a major utensil in Ugandan homes, and Nkole in particular, used for various functions, including cooking, storage, administering medicine, and used in ritual ceremonies among others.



Figure 2. Some of the indigenous pots of the Nkole people. Left; Milk pot, Middle; Food pot, preparing millet and Right; drinking pot

Continuity and transformation of the Nkole material culture, particularly pottery has evolved through tides and waves of environmental changes, influence of migrations, population increment, but above all the post-colonial paralysis and all its associated elements which includes the doctrine of demonizing African indigenous material culture including pottery. One of the seemingly saving conduit of change ‘Education’ unknowingly diluted value of the Indigenous material culture which consequently pulled down enrollment of the youth in pottery practice and leaving the old in the technical field of making pottery in this regard Kayamba and Kwesiga (2016) noted that;

“the turning point of Nkole pottery production came “in the 1950s with the establishment of Kahaya Memorial School (the present day Uganda Technical College, Bushenyi), when men realized the commercial prospects of pots, especially as demand for thrown pots increased with the rising costs of the imported Chinese ceramic table ware.”

Much as this transformation presented what appears a positive end to the Nkole people in terms of technology, it on the other hand resulted the loss of some elements design specification in the pottery products for example the Marriage pots.

The Nkole marriage pots: A highlight of the attached Traditional Practices and value
African marriage constitutes of large knowledge that hold practices approved, accepted and followed overtime hence falling suit in the generally established theories of marriage since marriage is a universal phenomenon but not confined to a particular continent.

Marriage as an event, as that marks the begging of a family in the African tradition, its preparation compounds defined components that make the two parties live as one and hence forth yield new life. As such, the family theory as presented by George Murdock applies. Murdock advances the theory of functionalism noting that; that 'there are four universal residual functions of the family: sexual, reproductive, educational, and economic'. Well as his established theory points out the four functions of a family, it largely falls short of the reflection on how the two parties are inducted into marriage. It is certainly clear that in the course of marriage preparation and on the marriage ceremony its self the four residual functions mentioned by Murdock are catered for following a pre-determined practice in different forms which include a set of instructions supported by Art forms such pots, baskets and mats. Sex as pivotal function in in African marriage particular attention was accorded. For the Banyankole people of western Uganda dedicated this function to special pots that carried herbs used to spice up sex in marriage. Similar to Murdock's theory, Edward Waring's theory which outlines intimacy as a drive to a couple's relationship and family functioning is as well centered on the marriage experience, Murdock and Waring's theories reveal that family theories largely apply to the marriage experience and little or no mention of the induction package and more so details of what compounds conjugal activities. Should the neglect of this component be regarded not necessary? But considering the vitality of the conjugal obligation in African marriage, extending this theory of knowledge to hold this component would be of profound importance as far as understanding the totality of African marriage.

The Nkole marriage pots through the continuity and transformation sieve.

Marriage as one of the encounters that are highly valued in the Nkole peoples' lives; like it is elsewhere in different cultural set-ups in, is a constitution of practices, values and traditions that are intended to prepare one into a vocation or a calling that yields into procreation. Marriage pots for this matter are attached to the conjugal practice which is ideally the central element of marriage. Wells the Nkole marriage pot through its traditional theory presents uncountable and unmeasurable benefits to the marriage life, it stands evidently clear that its continuity as gauged from its intended purpose is highly threatened by the rapidly changing life styles of the Nkole people in all dimensions including the way Nkole marriages are conducted.

Well as the Nkole marriage pots present uncountable and unmeasurable benefits to the marriage life, it stands evidently clear that its continuity and Transformation is highly threatened. On several marriage occasions attended in the recent past (2013 to date) the researcher noted with concern that marriage pots where; either missing, substituted with other pots, substituted with other containers (Plastic, metallic), and available but not traditionally respected as required. Questions raised here are; Is it because there is lack of information (narratives) about Nkole marriage pots? Is it because of the formal education that has replaced traditional education? Is it because of imported substitutes for example perfumes and medicines, is it because of the decreased number of traditional potters, is it because of the environmental changes e.g. degradation of swamp areas hence affecting the availability of clay?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a cross-sectional design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data using a semi-structured questionnaire.

This design was used to obtain a broader view of the transitional experience about marriage pots from a traditional to a contemporary life style.

The research covered Nkole region but focused in the Districts of Mbarara and Kiruhura. This is the region where pottery is highly practiced and the place known to have high respect to culture.

The study population was 130 of which 30 were ceramics students, 30 Traditional cultural leaders, 20 potters, 20 married couples, 10 marriage counselors and 20 elders. Purposeful Stratified sampling technique was used to arrive at stated population.

Tools used to collect data were; Interview guides, questionnaires, voice recorders, and cameras. Interviews were conducted in a manner that suited the required ethical standards and by this respondent were compelled to freely share their experience as some of the information constituted matters related to the conjugal subject which is regarded as secretive.

As way of getting an in-depth understanding of the subject, groups of a particular category with in the general population were created with an aim of initiating Focused group discussions (FGD) (Amin, 2005:187).

In this regard four (4) groups were created and the exercise was guided by structured and semi-structured questions. Through these questions respondents were able to freely express their

experiences and understanding about aspects regarding continuity and transformation of the Nkole marriage pots.

A descriptive analysis method was used to interpret the data collected. Because the researcher had to look at the past and present especially on matters regarding marriage pots

Responses were tabulated into percentages which were used to get interpretations

Table 1. Questionnaire investigating continuity and transformation of Nkole Marriage pots

Oues.	Response item	Response	Count	Percentage	Total
1	I Know what a marriage pot is	Agree	41	31.5	130
		Dis agree	88	67.6	
2.	I was introduced to a marriage pot on our Traditional Marriage	Agree	50	38.5	130
		Dis Agree	80	61.5	
3	I know all the traditions norms and values of a marriage pot	Agree	30	23	130
		Dis Agree	100	76.9	
4	Marriage pots are easily accessible in and around the Nkole region	Agree	20	15.4	130
		Dis Agree	110	84.6	
5	As a youth I learnt about marriage pot	Agree	10	7.6	130
		Dis Agree	120	92/3	
6	Have your parents or guardians ever told you about marriage pots?	Agree	37	28.4	130
		Dis Agree	93	71.5	

7	I was born in Ankole but spent most of my life in school away from Ankole region	Agree	88	67.6	130
		Dis Agree	42	32.3	
8	Family elders usually organize cultural meetings	Agree	20	15.4	130
		Dis Agree	110	84.6	
9	Schools in Ankole region have a curriculum that includes the BanyAnkole cultural content	Agree	20	15.3	130
		Dis Agree	110	84.6	
10	There is no serious need for the marriage pots as other substitutes are now available,	Agree	40	30.7	130
		Dis Agree	90	69.2	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types and nature of the Nkole marriage Pots. There are three types of Nkole marriage pots

Three holed pot“ *Rukomyo*, *egyemeko* or *Ensumbi*, and *eigoroko*. While the production was in question, their sustainability can be improved and supported.

Attributes of the Nkole marriage pots to the vocation of marriage are; *Rukomyo* is used for burning local herbs using hot charcoal to perfume the bedroom and sex arousal and the *egyemeko* or *Ensumbi* is used for boiling water used before and after sex. The *egyemeko* or *Ensumbi* is meant to keep and protect the perfumed oil made out of Nkole cow ghee.

Factors that affect continuity and Transformation of Nkole marriage pots include; modern life-styles, imported products such as perfume, soaps, plastic, containers and artificial sex arousal products, ways of prompting continuity and transformation of the Nkole marriage pots without compromising the attached cultural values Sensitize the youth on the Nkole marriage pots and

their functions, use public exhibition spaces such as museums and galleries with proper documentation on marriage pots, use the modern mass media avenues to disseminate values of marriage pots to the Nkole people especially the youth.



Figure 3. *New pottery that the schools encourage to produce, Photo P Kwesiga*



Figure 4. *The survival of rukomyo was still unquestioned by May, photo by P Kwesiga*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Nkole people have a rich marriage practice with pots that spice-up conjugal matters. These pots are; “ *Rukomyo, egyemeko or Ensumbi, and eigoroko*. A long as these and many other pot forms are on demand and in production, their existence shall continue to inform Nkole traditional culture to it full benefits. Yet the kind of thinking among largely the use could counter the above thinking. The young generation has not had a grasp of the need for traditional functions and artifacts - that include pottery. The large rural to urban migration in Nkole has left a few families with attachments to the local tradition.

The Nkole marriage pots play an important role in sustaining and maintaining the vocation of marriage. Marriage in Nkole has continued to thrive regardless of the different factors and developments. The flexibility in intermarriages and social structure continue to impact in the production and use of pottery generally. The likelihood to abandon the very pots that were presented to the couple during the marriage ceremony was higher today than ever before.

Continuity and transformation material culture is affected by modernity, environmental changes and laxity in disseminating cultural values to the young generation. The limited sources of clay materials for production are too a great hindrance. Swampy valleys in traditional Nkole provided clay sources for potters. Currently, the expansion of new farming systems and land ownership continue to limit the access to clay. Individual owners have largely fenced off land for personal use only. Special permission may be required to harvest clay from someone's farm.

There are applicable ways through which continuity and transformation material culture (marriage pots inclusive) can be supported. The involvement of culture conversations at all levels especially family level can go a long way to salvage the situation. Inclusion of aspects of traditional craft making in our lower school curricula can also strengthen the application of the pottery practices in each of the communities in Uganda in general and Nkole in particular.

Recommendations

Nkole people have a rich marriage practice with pots that spice-up conjugal matters. These pots are; “ *Rukomyo, egyemeko* or *Ensumbi, Eikorogo*. It was highly likely to interest young learners as early as primary education rather than wait for the pots to be introduced during the marriage functions.

The Nkole marriage pots play an important role in sustaining and maintaining the vocation of marriage. There are reports of more failed marriages in Nkole as compared to the earlier generations. One of the most talked about cause was the issue of young wives not being articulate during the first days of their marriage. The work of aunties to instruct them on issues of bed time are still wanting.

Continuity and transformation material culture is affected by modernity, environmental changes and laxity in disseminating cultural values to the young generation. The young people are always

ready to learn and some of these ideas can be incorporated in the current media hype that can develop materials that can be shared on social media.

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