

## Variations in Pottery Making in Southwestern Ethiopia

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This paper examined the characteristics of Ari pottery making as a CBT by analyzing potters' techniques of body, such as their finger movement patterns. Based on my comparisons among the potters' processes, no common procedures of pottery making exist. The Potters modifying their techniques due to their relationships with other potters By identifying finger movement patterns, it is possible to describe the process of learning, practicing, and creating pottery making, and to compare pottery making throughout southwestern Ethiopia.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Background

Earthenware is often used by the Ari people of southwestern Ethiopia when they cook. Potters, who are predominantly women, make cooking vessels using locally available clay and then distribute the completed products throughout the area. They rarely use tools as advanced as a potter's wheel, and instead craft their pottery using their hands, fingers, and simple tools, such as a piece of gourd. Once the molded pots are dry, the potters fire them in an open field and then sell their pots at the local markets.

In the present study, I focused on the potters' community-based technology (CBT; Shigeta 1996), that is, the use of locally available raw materials to make a specific product (e.g., cooking containers) to be distributed in a certain area, and the creation of tools necessary for a community's daily needs. I theorized that potters use human-material and human-human relationships when crafting and selling their pottery.

During my fieldwork, I paid particular attention to the way potters used body language, more so than spoken language, to hand down their techniques to their daughters. Potters focused on conveying what made their pottery unique.

#### 1.2. Previous Studies

Previous research has examined two topics related to African pottery making. The first study examined craft workers, focusing on the cultural and social aspects of pottery makers (Freeman & Punkhurst 2001). The research in southern Ethiopia studied the marginalization of craft workers by examining the social relationships between craft workers and farmers. Using personal interviews and oral histories, Pankhurst (2001:5–6) investigated craft workers' lives in terms of social, cultural, and economic factors and noted that their marginalization was influenced by the Amhara's conquest in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The second study examined the techniques of craft workers, focusing on the causal relationship between uniqueness and social value (Herbert 1993). Gosslain (2000:202) insisted that a potter's world view influenced her techniques. He examined pottery-

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making techniques in 102 ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa, along with their social norms and cultural taboos. He pointed out that in addition to the natural environment and available resources (e.g., clay, climate, and fuel), social norms and cultural taboos influenced their techniques (Gosslain 1999).

Although the two studies focused on different subjects, they analyzed pottery makers and their methods as a homogenous group. While Gosslain's (1999) research concluded that pottery makers are influenced by their physical surroundings and cultural norms when creating their pottery, he ignored variations in techniques. He also noted how potters pass down their unique techniques to the next generation. Although Pankhurst's (2001) research analyzed craft workers using interviews and oral histories, he only considered common marginalization processes, and generalized the potters' social and cultural situation<sup>2</sup>.

These studies are insightful for examining the social and cultural characteristics that influence craft workers and their techniques, but do not address how potters change and create their techniques by communicating with other potters and those who buy their products.

### 1.3. Study Objectives

This paper views pottery making in the Ari as a CBT that is learned, practiced, and created via a combination of personal life experiences and one's social relationships with other potters and those who buy their products. This paper concerns Ari potters, who appear not to be influenced by their physical surroundings and cultural norms when making their pottery. This paper contends that these potters are influenced by their social relationships in making their pots. I examined the characteristics of Ari pottery making as a CBT by analyzing potters' techniques of body, such as their finger movement patterns.

I studied 19 potters for a period of 18 months between November 1998 and March 2002. The potters and their families lived in 20 villages, and I mainly stayed in two villages, Village S and Village G, while completing my field research.

## 2. General Background

### 2.1. Research Site

The research site was located in southwestern Ethiopia about 700 km southwest of the capital city of Addis Ababa. The population of Ari comprises approximately 110,000 people (Gebre 1995). The residents have settled in the highland zone, ranging in altitude from 1000 to 3000 m. They cultivate an Ethiopian variety of enset<sup>3</sup>, taro, yams, maize, barley, wheat, and other crops, and have two types of gardens, *tika haami* and *wooni haami*. *Tika haami* is a kitchen garden located near the home. In this garden, the Ari plant several varieties of root crops, coffee trees, and leafy vegetables. *Wooni haami* is a cereal field located near the *tika haami*, with several types of cereals and beans planted there. The Ari harvest cereal crops from *wooni haami* twice a year and root crops from

<sup>2</sup> Behailu and Data (2001:122) pointed out that the craft workers' group is regarded as one homogenous community by farmers. However, craft workers and their relatives can be divided into numerous communities, such as home village, kindred, and jobs of husbands. Behailu and Data (2001) did not suggest how these differences influence pottery making and the craft workers' livelihoods.

<sup>3</sup> Enset looks like a banana. Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*) belongs to the family Musaceae of the order Scitamineae. More than 20 percent of Ethiopia's population (over 10 million people) depend on enset for important nutrients (Brandt et al. 1997).

*tika haami* throughout the year. Harvested crops are cooked in pots made by local potters.

## 2.2. Pots

The Ari people use at least 50 different kinds of pots for cooking, which are classified into four categories: *tila*, *aksh*, *disti*, and *jebena*. *Tila* pots have a rounded bottom, a rectangular upper part, and a handle. They are used to steam root crops, hold water, and brew alcoholic beverages. *Aksh* pots are used to roast coffee beans and cereals, and bake *injera*. *Disti* pots are used to cook side dishes, and *jebena* are coffee pots.

A typical household owns an average of 12 pots (Kaneko 2006). *Tila* pots are the most common, of which about 20 different kinds are used by the Ari. Housewives identify each kind of *tila* pot by its size, and name each pot based on the ingredients they use in it to cook a particular type of food. For example, when they steam taro potato, *Gabija* in the Ari language, they call the *tila* pot *Gabija til*. Other *tila* pots found in an average kitchen include *agemi til* (enset), *ekena til* (kale), and *pateri til* (maize). *Aksh* and *disti* pots are also named after the ingredients cooked in them.

## 2.3. Potters

The Ari people belong to either a farmer's group, *kantsa*, or an artisan group, *mana*. People who belong to *mana* have been socially segregated from the *kantsa*, and it is taboo for *kantsa* to marry *mana*. *Kantsa* call pottery makers and their relatives *tila mana* to distinguish them from blacksmiths, *faka mana*. Although pottery makers and blacksmiths belong to the same *mana*, marriage between the two groups is also prohibited. Because most potters' husbands have small fields, they cannot make a living from their agricultural products. Married potters are expected to contribute to their family's livelihood by selling their pots in local markets.

Pottery making consists of four components: digging clay, forming pots, firing pots, and selling them in local markets. Potters are responsible for all four components, but their husbands assist them in each part, except in forming pots. Forming pots is considered women's work, and men believe that grim consequences could occur if they were to assist with that task. When a *tila mana* girl turns six years old, she starts learning how to make pottery, and by the time she is 15 is expected to know how to make every kind of pottery.

## 3. Stages and Techniques

### 3.1. Pottery-making Stages

A pottery-maker's posture, the way she holds the pot, and the position of the pot all contribute to her unique technique. They also follow the common stages of forming pots.

Forming *tila* consists of four stages: *bakushi*, *gidibul*, *gochi*, and *galtsi* (Fig. 1). They are derived from verbs in the Ari language that express action. In the first stage, *bakushi*, the pottery maker forms a shallow bowl. In the second stage, *gidibul*, she expands the bottom part into a ball-like shape that is more than double the size of the bowl in *bakushi*. In the third stage, *gochi*, she adds some clay to the surface to form the narrow-necked upper part. In the final stage, *galtsi*, she again adds clay to the surface of the upper part to form the handles. After all the stages have been completed, she dries the pot in the shade of a hut. All pottery makers in Village S followed these four stages.

### 3.2. *Finger-movement Patterns and Units of Process*

When I started learning pottery making, I began by observing Potter X and watching her hands and finger-movement patterns (FMPs). I then extended my observations from Potter X to 13 other potters in Village S. Each observation session lasted for more than an hour, and I scrutinized the subtle movements of the potter's hands and fingers while they performed each of the four stages for forming *tila*.

These observations revealed combinations of FMPs that were unique to each maker. I distinguished FMPs by the fingers used and the direction of the finger movements (Fig. 2). Using these guidelines, I classified 20 distinct FMPs applied repeatedly to form a *tila*. Potters describe pottery making as *mishikan*, which means "forming pots," a special term used only for pottery making. Although potters do not classify FMPs as I have, if their daughters use the common finger movements and follow the four stages of pot making, they are *mishikan*, which differentiates pottery making from simply playing with clay.

Based on the FMPs of pottery making and the action verbs the potters used to classify them, it is possible to further break down pottery making by using a unit of process (UP). A UP can be defined either as the period of time during which a potter continues to use one FMP or a set of continuous FMPs expressed as action verbs. After I had studied pottery making for three months, I asked a potter about this issue while she was making pots in front of me. I could not find definite expressions for the FMPs (2, 3, 4, 12, and 13). Potters used combinations of several FMPs as action verbs (FMPs 5+6, 5+8+9, 5+9, 6+14, and 6+16). Although they are the same FMPs, they have different names, which are based on the shapes of pots (5-6). Using these definitions, the pottery making process of Potter X consisted of 30 UPs, based on the repeated use of 18 FMPs (Fig. 3).

### 3.3. *Variations in Pottery Making*

A potter usually works alone, and does not work with neighbors or other family members. One exception is when a daughter is allowed to make pots in the same place as her mother to learn the pottery-making process. In Village S, 13 married potters were born and grew up in different places. When they came to Village S to marry their husbands, it was the first time most of them had used the clay in the village.

When I observed the 13 potters, they used 18 to 19 FMPs repeatedly to form *tila*, and their pottery-making processes consisted of 29 to 33 UPs. Although potters in Village S used the same clay and they all followed the same four stages, six different UPs were applied in their pottery making (Fig. 4). Potters from the same home village use different procedures, and some from the different home village use the same procedures<sup>4</sup>. For example, two potters always follow pattern 1 to make their pots. Four potters follow pattern 3, and four potters follow pattern 6. Pattern 2,4,5 were developed by one potter each.

All six patterns followed the same UP order for stages A and B, but at stages C and D there was considerable variation (Fig. 4). I examined the first half of stage D, which is the pot-making stage that shows one of the most prominent differences in UP order (Fig. 4; note UP orders in the black frame). The procedures of this stage can be explained by the process of forming *tila* and action verbs: potters scratch the surface of

<sup>4</sup> Although daughters learn how to make pottery from their mother, daughters' UPs for pottery making are different from their mother's UPs (Kaneko 2007).

the pot, put clay on both the surface and inside of the pot, and scratch again the surface and inside of the pot.

In figure 4, four potters in pattern 1,2,4 scratch the surface of the upper part of the pot with bean pods and then put clay on the surface of it. They scratch inside the upper part of the pot with bean pods, and then put clay on the inside. Then they scratch the surface of the upper part and inside the pot with bean pods. The UP order is HGMMH (Fig. 4). Four potters in pattern 3 skipped scratching inside the upper part of the pot with a bean pod (UP H) after they put clay on inside it. One of them is the grandmother's generation, and three of them are married women who have their children. The UP order is HGMH (Fig. 4). Four potters in pattern 6 put clay on the inside the upper part of the pot after they scratch the surface of it with a bean pod. Then they put clay on the surface of it. Following this, she scratches the surface of the upper part of the pot. They use the order HMHGH (Figure 4). A potter in pattern 5 scratches the surface of the upper part of the pot with bean pods and then put clay on the surface of it. She skipped putting clay on inside the upper part of the pot (UP M), and she scratches the surface of it with a bean pod in the end of this pottery making (UP H). She uses the order HM (Figure 4).

Although these variations may seem like small, incidental details, they are, in fact, examples of how pottery makers follow their own order of UP. Potters believe that their pots might crack if they do not follow their own UP order. The variations in stages C to D, as shown by 13 potters, suggest that they could make pots without cracks even if they did not follow their own particular order of UP. This was also the case for the nine other villages in which I made observations. Although potters did, on occasion, follow other potters' pottery-making procedures, they were unsuccessful at making pots in this manner, in most cases. Most potters create their own process by trial and error.<sup>5</sup>

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1. Summary

I came to three conclusions. First, Ari pottery makers exhibit 20 FMPs, and they follow four stages in making pots. While I have defined FMPs, potters also assess common FMPs in forming *tila*, but qualify it in different idioms. Second, because each potter develops a different UP to form pots, each UP constitutes the technological unit of forming a functional pot that does not crack. Comparisons of the pottery-making processes of 13 potters in Village S revealed that each UP is an independent unit for completing pots, and potters may exchange or omit a unit, especially in the transition from *gochi* to *galtsi*. Third, each potter follows her own order of UPs to make pots. Her UP procedures not only differ from those of her home village but also from those of her relatives.

Based on my comparisons among the potters' processes, no common procedures of pottery making exist. Each potter experienced several trials and errors while creating her pottery. Due to her life experience, each potter has developed a unique procedure for making pottery. Although a potter practices pottery-making procedures based on techniques unique to her experience, she creates her own variation of pottery making, which is influenced by her life history and social relationships. The Potters modifying their techniques due to their relationships with other potters

<sup>5</sup> Potters believe that each potter has their own technique. They use the expression *aani* to indicate this. They believe that each potter develops his or her own method because they have different *aani*.

#### 4.2. Comparative Pottery-making Studies

Previous studies have focused on common pottery-making techniques and have tried to relegate homogenous livelihood activities to them. This view overlooks the variation in each potter's process and ignores how that process can change from one generation to another. This study, instead, attempted to understand and identify potters' techniques and to describe the variations in pottery making.

FMPs have no vernacular name, and they may be regarded as arbitrary technological units. However, it is an overly simplistic view to classify FMPs as units defined by an observer and UPs as units defined by potters. Both units are important communication tools to learn, check, and improve pottery making. They are also important communication tools for improving pottery making in the future. FMPs and UPs are based on the "understanding through techniques of body," which is a central tenet of nonverbal communication.

By identifying FMPs and UPs, it is possible to describe the process of learning, practicing, and creating pottery making, and to compare pottery making throughout southwestern Ethiopia.

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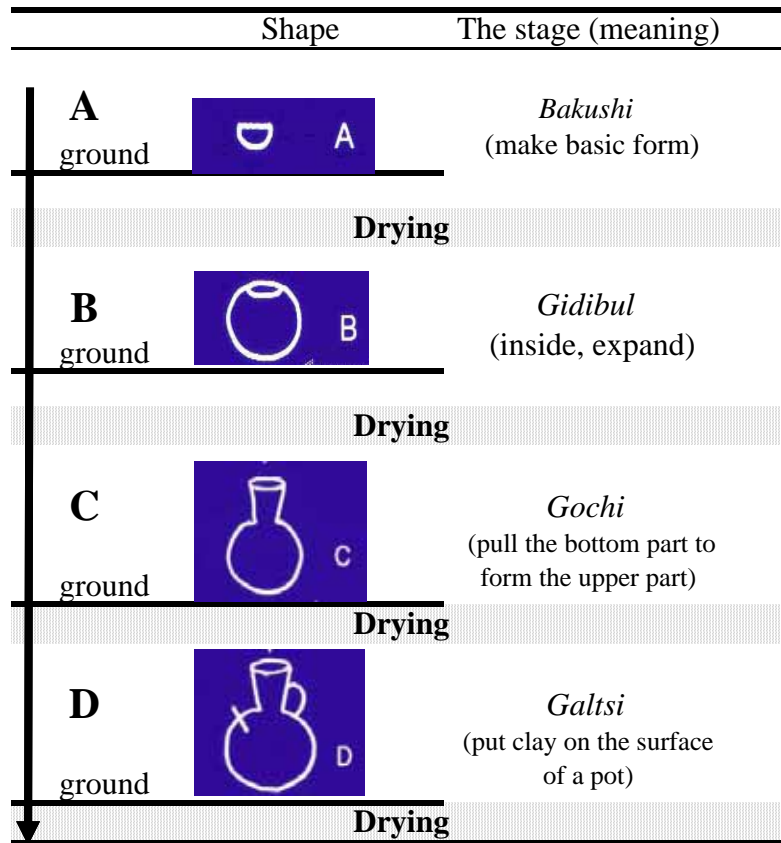


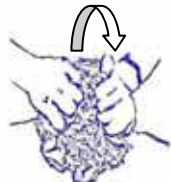

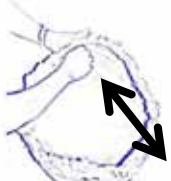





















Figure 1. Four stages of pottery making

No.	Fingers used	Direction of movement	Picture	Photo
1	five fingers, pad of each finger	From outside to inside (hand: up and down)		
2	Both hands and fingers, pad of each finger	From outside to inside (hands: up and down)		
3	Pad of the thumbs on both hands	Back and forward		
4	Pad of thumbs in both hands • first, second, and third knuckles of four fingers	From outside to inside (hands: clockwise)		
5	Side of the first and second knuckle of the forefingers	Vertical at an angle		
6	Pad of the thumb, side of the first knuckle of the forefingers	Back and forward		
7	Pad of the thumb, pad of the other fingers	From outside to inside (hand: forward and back)		







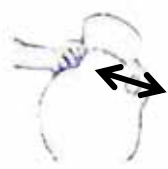



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Figure 2 Finger movement patterns



No.	Fingers used	Direction of movement	Picture	Photo
8	Pad of the forefinger and the middle finger	Vertical at an angle		
9	First knuckle of the thumb	Vertical at an angle		
10	Pad of five fingers	From outside to inside (hand: clockwise)		
11	Pad of all ten fingers	From outside to inside (hands: downward)		
12	Pad of the thumb	Up and down		
13	Side of the first and second knuckle of the forefinger and the middle finger	Clockwise		
14	Side of the first and second knuckle of the forefinger and the middle finger	Back and forward		

continue

No.	Fingers used	Direction of movement	Picture	Photo
15	Pad of the thumb, the forefinger, and the middle finger	Back and forward		
16	Pad of the thumb and the forefinger	Turning		
17	First knuckle of the forefinger (the back of one's hand)	Back and forward		
18	Palms of both hands	Back and forward		
19	Side of the first knuckle of the thumb and pad of the forefinger	Clockwise		
20	Pad of all fingers	Clockwise		




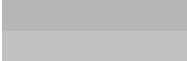
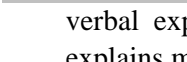
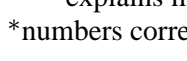

Making stage	Order of the FMPs in the pottery making process	Action verb(Ari)	Direct translation	The unit of process
 <i>bakushi</i>	1	<i>tei</i>	taking	A
	2			B
	3			C
	4			D
	5,6	<i>bakushi</i>	making basic form	E
<b>Drying</b>				
<i>gidibul</i>	5,6	<i>gidibul</i>	expand the inside	E
<b>Drying</b>				
 <i>gochi</i>	7	<i>guu</i>	scratching	F
	10	<i>guu</i>	scratching	H
	5,8,9	<i>galtsi</i>	putting clay on	G
	10	<i>guu</i>	scratching	H
	11			I
	12			J
	13			K
	5,9	<i>gochi</i>	pulling the bottom part	L
	5,6	<i>gochi</i>	pulling the bottom part	E
	10	<i>guu</i>	scratching	H
<b>Drying</b>				
 <i>galtsi</i>	10	<i>gu</i>	scratching	H
	5,8,9	<i>galtsi</i>	putting clay on	G
	10	<i>guu</i>	scratching	H
	5	<i>galtsi</i>	putting clay on	M
	10	<i>guu</i>	scratching	H
	11			I
	6,14	<i>odo/usu</i>	putting/smoothing	N
	9	<i>galtsi</i>	putting clay on	O
	15			P
	6,16	<i>odo/usu</i>	putting/smoothing	Q
	17	<i>daala</i>	drawing	R
	20	<i>usu</i>	smoothing	S
	6,14	<i>usu</i>	smoothing	N
10	<i>guu</i>	scratching	H	
<b>Drying</b>				

Figure 3 Pottery making process (potter X, 30UPs, 18FMPs)

-  one after the other
  -  gradual switch from one FMP to another FMP
  -  verbal expression not identifiable
  -  explains more than one sentence
- \*numbers correspond to the numbers in Figure 2




stage\pattern	1	2	3	4	5	6
A  <i>bakushi</i>	A	A	A	A	A	A
	B	B	B	B	B	B
	C	C	C	C	C	C
	D	D	D	D	D	D
	E	E	E	E	E	E
Drying						
B <i>gidibul</i>	E	E	E	E	E	E
Drying						
C  <i>gochi</i>	F	F	H	H	F	F
	H	G	G	G	G	G
	G	F	H	H	F	F
	H	H	F	F	H	H
	I	G	G	G	G	G
	J	H	F	F	H	H
	K	I	I	I	I	I
	L	J	J	J	J	J
	E	K	K	K	K	K
	H	L	L	L	L	L
		E	E	E	E	E
		H	H	H	H	H
	Drying					
The order of UP in the paper	H	H	H	H	H	H
	G	G	G	G	G	M
	H	H	M	H	I	H
	M	M	H	M	N	G
	H	H	I	H	R	H
	I	I	N	I	S	I
	N	N	H	N	O	N
	O	r	r	O	P	O
	P	r'	r'	P	Q	P
	Q	S	S	Q	N	Q
R	O	O	r	H	r	
S	P	P	r'		r'	
N	Q	Q	S		S	
H	N	N	N		N	
	H	H	H		H	
Drying						
FMPs	18	19	19	19	18	19
UPs	30	33	33	33	29	33
Numbers of potters who follow the procedure of pottery making	2	1	4	1	1	4

Figure 4 Pottery making process of 13 potter(00'Nov-01'Jun)

 attaching the handle to the pots      r: FMP No.18      r':FMP No.19