

Dancing in Clay: Pottery-making as a Safe Space Activity for Girls in Southwestern Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores elements of traditional art education embedded in pottery-making activities of a specific community among the Luo people of southwest Kenya. In a society where sociocultural norms tend to favor the education of boys over girls, conversations with Mama Nyungu—a pottery-making group in Homabay County in southwest Kenya reveal some sophisticated and organized tradition-related strategies for preparing young girls for adult life. In building upon Dietler and Herbich's assertion that pottery making is "a social labor that involves women in an important network of shared activity, knowledge, and personal relationships" (1989 p. 149), this paper demonstrates that this network provides a haven for girls in a community with a tradition and history of underage marriages. Through engagement in and learning about the customs and norms expected of girls, pottery making activities provide a sanctuary, which enables young girls to complete their formal education.

KEYWORDS: Pottery making, traditional art, education, girl child education, gender equality

In southwest Kenya, emanating from the mountains of Kisii county and undulating gently westwards toward the shores of Lake Victoria, is a landscape of hills and dales—a remarkable artwork of nature that forms part of Homabay County. Homabay is one of the four counties in Kenya that the Luo people occupy. The Luo people of Kenya linguistically belong to the Nilotic group, whose early migration into Kenya dates to around 500 BCE (Ehret, 1971). According to Ehret, the movement of the Nilotes was mostly southward from Sudan and eventually settled in geographic regions of Kenya suitable to their subsistence practices. Thus, the Luo settled down around Lake Victoria, where they practiced and continue to practice fishing and farming (Ogot, 1989).

The neighboring Kisii County is the homeland of my ethnic community, the Kisii (or Gusii) people, who Bower (1971) describes as "the Gusii tribe - a Bantu-speaking group in a sea of non-Bantu peoples" (p. 2) because of their Nilotic neighbors—the Luo, the Kipsigis, and the Maasai. The migration of Bantu people into present-day Kenya probably began around 1000 CE (Were & Wilson, 1968). With several centuries of coexistence and notwithstanding their

ethnic and linguistic differences, the Luo and Kisii people share some traditional practices such as pottery-making (Herbich & Dietler, 1991), which I set out to investigate beginning in the summer of 2016. At one of my research sites near Oyugis town in Homabay County, I met a women's group called *Mama Nyungu* (literally meaning "pot lady"). These women lived in various traditional homesteads arranged and built according to the Luo customary arrangements for family houses. A homestead or *dala*, several of which make up a village or *gweng*, consists of monogamous or polygamous domestic groups in which each married woman has her own separate house, granary, and a field to cultivate (Herbich & Dietler 1991; Hebinck & Mango, 2001). The Luo build their traditional houses from straw, wood, and mud or clay. When mixed with water, clay creates a mud puddle where children enjoy dancing as adults put up the house. However, to the women of *Mama Nyungu*, clay is for a different kind of dance, which plays a significant role in a girl's upbringing.

Mama Nyungu operated pottery-making sites in various homesteads of the nearby villages. As described by Herbich and Dietler (1991) about potter communities, members of this group lived in "homesteads clustered in close proximity to one another in the neighborhood of a clay source" (p. 108). My primary research goal at this site—a topic for separate research in progress was to study the stylistic differences between the Luo and Kisii pottery. However, during the study, a new perspective emerged, one that motivated the women to produce much pottery even when they acknowledged that there was no market readily available for their wares. A further inquiry uncovered a historical background, one informed by the drive to wrestle with existing cultural patterns to empower women through educational opportunities in post-colonial Kenya.

European influence in Kenya dates to 1846 when the Church Missionary Society (CMS) established the first Christian mission school at Rabai Kenya in East Africa with a curriculum covering the general rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic (Otiende, 1992). According to Bogonko (1990), spreading Christianity, the main goal of missionary education at the time, conflicted with the local traditional lifestyle for two main reasons. First, going to school meant that children would not be available at home to perform their daily chores. Second, missionaries asked Kenyans to discard all their traditional ways, such as making animal sacrifices to ancestral gods, which were inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible about the new way of Christian living. Nevertheless, missionary work continued and eventually paved the way to the colonial period, which effectively began towards the end of the nineteenth century after the Berlin Africa Conference. The conference, which put forth proposals to partition Africa into different colonies of European nations, was held in 1884, and its recommendations ratified in 1885, making

Kenya a British colony (Were & Wilson, 1968). The type of education provided to Africans during the colonial period largely depended on the racial attitudes of the Europeans toward Africans, as was evident in the writings of Sir Charles Eliot. He wrote, "it facilitates a better and more civilized life if natives [Kenyans] can engage in some form of trade or occupation which causes them more or less to break their old associations" (1905, p. 241). In the early days of colonization, there was no distinction made between evangelization, education, and modernization (Omwami, 2011). Instead, the British legacy looked to Christian missionary work to further the colonial agenda (Sheffield, 1973). Consequently, as the Church of England set up mission stations along the coast, more Christian missionaries spread to inland Kenya.

During colonial rule in Kenya, most ethnic groups were initially reluctant to embrace formal education in favor of the traditional system. Like most of these ethnicities, the Luo people tried to maintain the purity of their culture, which at times was at odds with the teachings of Christianity and the formal education promoted by the Christian church and the British colonial government (Evans-Pritchard, 1950; Ominde, 1952). In traditional Luo societies, according to Ominde, girls were born into a cultural pattern of life or traditional lifestyle. This lifestyle, acquired through an informal process, was moral, progressive, gradual, and practical (Otiende, 1992), and despite variations from one community to another, the goals of traditional education were similar across the cultures (Bogonko, 1990; Sifuna, 1994). For girls, Ominde wrote, activities associated with traditional education continued to be practical and aimed at preparing girls as future wives.

Ominde noted that "young girls [became] increasingly occupied with domestic work, such as fetching water and firewood, tending babies and watching the fire" (1952, p. 26). According to Otiende (1992), these activities took place locally to integrate individuals into their social group, community, and society as a means of achieving the goals of traditional education. However, formal education required children, mostly boys, to spend time at school and away from their parents. The separation of children from their parents diminished the traditional roles of education, such as socialization and cultural transmission. Instead, the colonizers delegated these roles to schools, which, according to Bogonko, served the interests of colonial education policies structured to prepare Kenyan Africans for skilled and semi-skilled labor to fill the colony's employment needs.

In the years leading to Kenya's independence, Africans embraced formal education because it promised careers in the sprawling urban centers. These centers were the places of modern living, which reflected the ideals of the Western lifestyle. The attraction to a modern lifestyle, among other factors, led Kenyans to demand

that the colonial government expand teacher training programs for African teachers in response to the growing number of African students (Bogonko, 1990). In response, the Beecher Report published in 1950 recommended that the colonial government continue with the existing system of recognizing the churches as official government agents for secular education (Sheffield, 1973). Despite this recommendation, according to Omwami (2011), the patrilineal tendencies common in most Kenyan ethnicities continued to influence women's access to education, as was evident in the colonial structure of education. For the women who accessed educational opportunities, their training was designed to complement their gender-defined roles as caregivers for their households and role model housewives (Ominde, 1952; Omwami, 2011).

The curriculum created uncertainty as to whether the education was for a homemaker or a career mother. In the context of this conflict, the Luo girl child in a rural village is burdened with household chores, which, among other factors, diminish her opportunity for schooling. Given this reduced prospect for the girl child's access to education and from the standpoint of social justice and gender equality, this paper discusses steps that a specific Luo community, the Mama Nyungu group, has taken to address the challenges of fostering and safeguarding the girl child education. Specifically, this paper demonstrates how, in a male-controlled society, a group of determined women juxtaposes formal education values with traditional teachings. These teachings are embedded in pottery-making activities to encourage young girls in a rural community to remain in school against the challenges of prevailing sociocultural norms.

Access to Education: The Role of Sociocultural Expectations

Gender disparity in access to formal education is a chief concern among educational stakeholders in Kenya, and scholars acknowledge that girls are exceedingly disadvantaged in part by the persistent and prevailing sociocultural factors, which tend to favor the education of boys (Gitonga, 2009; Kipkulei et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, during the mid-twentieth century among the Luo people, parents provided utilitarian traditional education that prepared girls as future wives and mothers. According to Ominde (1952), the goals of this education were accomplished by the girls accompanying their mothers or other older women to fetch water, till the garden, grind millet or sorghum, nurse siblings, prepare food, and other chores expected of girls. Yet, any boy who showed interest in these chores was discouraged by the mother. Ominde further noted the limitations to girls' freedoms despite daughters having higher economic value than sons. Parents were unwilling to spend much money educating a girl who would not remain in the family to help parents in their old age.

While there is nothing inherently feminine about domestic chores like cooking or laundry (Kipkulei, 2008), among the Luo and most other cultural groups of Kenya, gender roles continue to be socially defined. The notion of associating domestic chores with feminism fits into the patriarchal nature of most ethnicities and contributes to widening the gap between boys' and girls' access to education. In 2003, the Government of Kenya implemented an education for all (EFA) policy to provide free primary education (FPE) to all eligible children and illiterate adults (Chege & Sifuna, 2006; UNESCO,¹ 2015). This policy was an effort to reduce the gender gap and increase access to education in the twenty-first century.

By 2012, Kenya had made significant progress towards achieving gender parity in primary education enrollment and near parity in secondary education enrollment. Yet, according to a UNESCO (2012) factsheet, this parity did not mean achievement in universal access to primary education. Based on the data available at the time, UNESCO expressed concerns that over half of secondary school-age girls were not enrolled in secondary school because girls were more disadvantaged than boys. The gender gap in access to education is widest in rural Kenya, where extreme poverty accounts for the low enrollment of girls in secondary and tertiary education (Kipkulei, 2008; Komora, 2014). Two other factors contributing to this low enrollment are, first, traditional tendencies of a culture in which families with limited resources prefer to educate boys over girls. This preference stemmed from a cultural practice, which entitled only male children to inherit family or ancestral land because female children would be married off to live with their husbands (Hebinck & Mango, 2001).

For this reason and as previously discussed, Ominde (1952) noted that some families found no need to waste educational resources on girls, an experience through which my mother lived. My mother, who dropped out of school in the third grade, and most of my aunts of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s generations were married off because their parents could not afford to educate girls. This preference continues to be commonplace in rural areas where traditional norms are still prevalent. Mama Nyungu women were aware of and acknowledged that some aspects of traditional and modern lifestyles were at odds. Rather than being tied down to traditions, these women desired their daughters to complete school, find jobs, become career mothers, and raise families. Second, modest government involvement in rural development places an economic burden on people who are already overburdened. In the rural areas where infrastructure is poor, schools are so far apart that some students often walk for up to a mile or more to get to school. In addition to the already inadequate infrastructure, equipment in some rural schools is so minimal that classrooms lack

1 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

necessities such as enough desks and chairs (Wambua et al., 2018). According to Alexander et al. (2014), the maintenance of existing facilities is a challenge, and the Kenya government does not provide enough resources for constructing water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. With the limited government assistance and rather than giving up to the societal forces to choose between educating their sons over their daughters, Mama Nyungu women used their knowledge and experience to boost the morale of their daughters. The women selected and combined appropriate lessons from traditional and modern lifestyles to increase the girls' chances of staying in school and end up in careers that promised economic independence.

Research Activities

Studies on pottery-making traditions in Kenya tend to focus on historical contexts through ethnoarchaeology, which uses available information on present-day societies to recreate patterns of ancient lifestyles (Sutton, 1964; Collett, & Robertshaw, 1983; Grillo, 2014). Such studies do not necessarily account for the learning process involved in the production of the material culture. Instead, since archeological interpretations depend critically on a theoretical understanding of the nature of learning and its role in the production of material culture, Herbich and Dietler (2008) argue that this learning process cannot be studied directly in archeological contexts. In their exquisite and extensive ethnography on Luo pottery systems, Herbich and Dietler contend that "theoretical understanding must be developed in ethnographic contexts where such complex practices and processes actually can be observed by cultural anthropologists and ethnoarchaeologists" (p. 224). Thus, to understand their motivations for pottery-making, I spent eight weeks in the summer of 2016 and six weeks in summer 2017 with the Mama Nyungu group observing, participating, and talking about their activities.

In my research activities, I utilized ethnographic approaches articulated by Spradley (1979). Spradley contends that "one of the great challenges in doing ethnography is to initiate, develop, and maintain productive informant relationships" (p. 45). To create and maintain rapport with informants, I asked my research assistant to introduce me to the Mama Nyungu group as an art teacher interested in learning about traditional pottery. I was familiar with some of the Luo traditions because, in the early 1990s, I taught art at a high school in one of the Luo counties. The introduction was specific to this site because of the additional inquiry on motivations for pottery-making. Spradley identifies the essential qualities of a good informant as one with thorough enculturation and current involvement. Spradley suggests that one way to know thoroughly enculturated informants is to determine the length of time they have been on the scene. In this regard, most of Mama Nyungu women

had a pottery-making experience of at least five years, which by far exceeded Spradley's suggestion of a one-year minimum. According to Spradley, informants currently involved in a cultural setting use their knowledge to guide their actions. Such informants, Spradley writes, "review what they know; they make interpretations of new events; they apply their knowledge to solving everyday problems" (1979, p. 48-49). I interviewed Mama Nyungu women for their expert knowledge, firsthand information, and ongoing involvement in the art of pottery-making.

As previously mentioned, for fourteen weeks spread across the summers of 2016 and 2017, I spent time with the Mama Nyungu women group investigating the motivations for their pottery-making activities. Even though the group was composed of women, some men helped in supporting roles such as mining and transporting the clay to the various work sites. During such instances, I participated as one of the male assistants who helped the group with the heavy lifting. The women carried out their pottery-making activities every day from Monday to Friday. However, I spent two days a week with the group for two aspects of data collection that depended on the site I visited. The first site was at the clay source, and the second was at any of the homesteads scheduled for pottery-making activities. At the clay source, the women spent time in the mornings preparing the clay for transportation to various houses. On days I visited this site, I left home by 6 am because the ride took between one hour and one hour thirty minutes.

At the clay source, I arrived by 7:30 am to find the men, who had come by 6 am, excavating the clay using hand-held hoes. After excavation, the men shoveled and placed the clay on a dry earth surface. After children left for school, the women arrived by 8 am to knead the clay body after removing stones and foreign objects. In lumps of about 20 - 25 pounds, the women wrapped the clay with banana leaves and tied it with dried banana barks. During the preparation and packaging session, my conversations with the women involved questions about their life stories such as education, marriage, family, social life, rural life, relatives in urban areas, and about the girls. Since the girls were away at school, I had the chance to learn what the women knew and thought about the girls. For example, they would say that so, and so was a little naughty and therefore needed more guidance on life matters. Alternatively, the women would say, so and so is destined to be a teacher, doctor, or other profession deemed appropriate.

At the homestead, conversations continued as I participated in the pottery-making activities with the group. For visits to this site, I left home by 2 pm to be in time for the girls' arrival time of 4 pm. I observed the manner of interaction and communication with the girls

as I listened to content in teachings and talks between the women and the girls. I took note of responses from the girls. I paid attention to how the girls (learners) performed rudimentary actions of the pottery-making process, such as identifying and deciding the type of vessel to make, cutting the clay, identifying sherds to use, preparing the working surface. I observed the girls' demeanor and reactions to instructions and the girls' attention to details of tasks. I participated in all pottery-making stages throughout the study, from mining the clay to the firing process.

Luo Pottery: Conversations with Potters

At the time of this study, the Mama Nyungu group consisted of 18 women and 29 girls from 10 homesteads of the surrounding villages. The Luo cultural distinction between "girl" and "woman" as described by Ominde (1952) is that a girl or *nyako* refers to an unmarried child (from infant through school-going age) and a woman or *dhako* is a married adult. This characterization is generally accurate across most other ethnicities in Kenya. Members of Mama Nyungu group were predominantly from nearby Luo communities, and through marriage, a few of the women were from different ethnicities. All members were fluent in Dholuo, the language of the Luo people. To achieve a comprehensive insight into the group's activities, I sought interpreters' help because some of the older women did not speak English or Kiswahili—the two national languages in Kenya. Interpreters helped me understand the content of the discussion, particularly between the older women and the young girls. I was also fortunate to find from Kisii, my ethnic group, a few women who offered clear and detailed explanations of some of the discussion topics.

The Mama Nyungu group, like other traditional Luo potters, carried out pottery activities in their homesteads throughout the year, even though there was a slow down during peak seasons for agricultural activities (Herbich & Dietler, 1991). As outlined by Ominde (1952), the women of this group acknowledged that boys, who usually slept in dormitories separated from their mothers' houses, had a lot of free time since they did not perform domestic chores. In this part of the world where days and nights each consist of 12 hours, a girl's day during the school week begins at about 5:30 am (the time of a rooster's anticipatory predawn crowing). On a typical day, the girls, most of whom sleep in the same house² as the mother, get up to begin household chores, including fetching water from a nearby river and preparing family breakfast.

2 In a polygamous family, girls sleep in their mother's house, but in a monogamous family, girls sleep in their parent's house.

Between 6:30 am and 7:30 am, girls prepare for school, which usually begins around 8 am. After school at about 4 pm, the girls go home to continue with domestic chores, which they typically completed at around 9 pm. One may not easily understand and appreciate these girls' predicament unless one sees and experiences the gravity of chores and responsibilities expected of them. Despite those responsibilities and the understanding that it was expected of them³, these girls were committed to participating in the pottery-making activities performed between 4 pm and 6 pm daily during weekdays. During this two-hour window, each participating girl was supposed to spend at least one hour working with a mentor. As I observed and learned about the content of conversations between the girls and their mentors, I sensed that the activities were part of a lifelong learning pottery-making process and a means of shielding the young girls from the risks of dropping out of school.

This mentor-learner interaction provided an ideal working and learning environment for all members, where each participant made an equal contribution to the teaching and learning process to achieve an end goal or product. The content of the conversations was repetitive of similar topics touching on relationships with boys and the value of education. Besides, each learner was encouraged to develop her unique style called a hand or *ma en luet* to distinguish their work from other potters (Dietler & Herbich, 1989). Achieving excellence was through cooperation and collaboration, but more important than reaching perfection was the expectation that the girls would learn the importance of education and keep away from temptations into early marriages.

Teach Her: Your Daughter is Also my Daughter

Given the enormous amounts of time spent on pottery-making activities and advice to the girls, it was evident that the older women were primarily concerned about the future of the young girls who participated in the group's activities. It was clear to me that pottery-making was not an activity for meeting an economic need or other profitable enterprises, but rather an opportunity for school-age girls to keep busy and distracted from events that could derail their educational and career opportunities. Even though Luo potters "are not full-time specialists able to live wholly or even in large part off the earnings from their trade" (p. 107), the little earnings belong to the potter for personal use. Any little money the Mama Nyungu group made from the pottery sales helped meet some of the expenses

3 The girls' cultural setting is complex because there is not room to debate about what is expected or not expected. If adults told these girls to perform chores, the girls understood - whether they liked it - that those chores were to be completed.

associated with the young girls' education, such as books and supplies. Every mother gives valuable teaching to her daughter; after all, that is what mothers do. However, what I found unique about this group's approach was the women's emphasis on education, which they considered a path to a woman's economic empowerment.

The women were aware that girls had less time available for schoolwork than boys because of the enormous domestic responsibilities in the rural setting. To push the girls across the academic line of success, the women taught and encouraged the girls as future pillars of homes, never to give up because more domestic responsibilities awaited the girls. Instead, if the girls worked hard and succeeded in school as encouraged, they would find a job and afford house help. In supporting the girls, the women were fully aware that not every girl would make it to the university and acknowledged that even getting into vocational careers indicated a victory for the girls. The women's actions were part of a collective effort in which everyone was happy to see every girl succeed—a sign of communal effort toward a common good and a sense of shared responsibility that gave the girls a worthwhile cause for which to fight. In their endeavors, the women developed an elaborate and sophisticated approach to educating and mentoring young girls. The education was twofold; first, learning about and expectations of the Luo people's traditions and customs, and second, understanding the importance of formal schooling in liberating one from poverty, which was prevalent in the village.

Knowledge was passed from older women to young girls through two main ways. First, through the actual participation and making the girls understand that the tradition and culture required the girls to know how to use the pottery utensils. The older women taught the young girls about the functions of the various pottery. The teachings included understanding the real and ideal functions of traditional pottery, as described by Herbich and Dietler (1991), where a pot stereotypically meant for water may be used for some other ideal purpose, such as beer-drinking. Even though household products made from modern industrial processes had largely replaced traditional pottery, the women expected the young girls to apply traditional pottery knowledge to the functions of modern vessels.

Second, through conversations of real-life situations and how to handle those situations. Most of these conversations' recurring themes included the value of education and staying away from men, who might lure them into early marriage and subsequently dropping out of school. From the numerous teachings, there was a real-life example provided by one elderly lady about a local girl named Anyango⁴, who worked hard through elementary school and earned

4 Not the real name of the subject

good grades, which qualified her to join a prestigious boarding high school in Kenya. Unfortunately, Anyango did not go to her preferred high school because her family could not afford the tuition required for boarding school. Notwithstanding the disappointment of not attending boarding school, Anyango settled for a local day school to pursue her secondary education. Even with her daily commute to the school of about half a mile, Anyango found time to participate in the activities of Mama Nyungu. Anyango was quite attentive and took seriously all the advice she got from the group's older women. While a rural village girl's life can be challenging as previously described, Anyango worked hard in school and scored excellent grades, which earned her a place at a government university.

At the university, Anyango studied law, was admitted to the bar, and eventually became a magistrate. The elderly lady paused, turned to a young girl in front of her, and then continued to speak. The elderly lady then said that had Anyango decided to get married before completing school, she would still be struggling in the village. Instead, said the elderly lady, Anyango made the excellent choice to listen to advice and work hard in school, ending with a promising career. The women told such stories repeatedly to remind the girls about the importance of formal education with an expectation that such repetition would help the girls remember the most important lessons—staying in school and staying away from men while in school.

Even with the Mama Nyungu teachings, it is essential to note that Luo customary practices strictly prohibited engagement in premarital sex among the youth even when boys invited girls to visit or sleep in the *simba*, or bachelor's dormitory (Evans-Pritchard, 1950). Nevertheless, the women of Mama Nyungu group understood that "the anatomical evidence a woman is required to show on her day of marriage to prove her chastity" (Ominde, 1952, p. 37) was no longer a cultural practice. Modern Luo society seemed to have ignored this commitment, and unlike in the olden days, the youth of nowadays no longer adhered to such strict norms or expectations. Nevertheless, girls in rural Luo communities continue to learn to be wary of men's tricks of luring them into marriage through real-time warnings from the women. In cautioning the girls, the women used coded language instead of a direct mention of a specific alert.

The use of such coded language was one of the few instances that I, as a participant-observer familiar with cross-cultural patterns, related to an aspect of communication, which carried implied inferences beyond the spoken word. For example, whenever the women sent the girls, say, to fetch water from a nearby river, such errands would include a warning like, "go straight to the river and come back with water and ignore any whistling sounds." Girls understood such a statement

to mean that on their way to and from the river, there would be no paying attention to distractions from any boy out there producing sounds from puckered lips. It was also apparent the women knew much about the girls, more so about those likely to play mischief. One statement I heard that reminded me of youth days was when one woman said, "I am spitting at the ground, please make sure you get back before the saliva disappears⁵." As a reminder to hurry up, such a statement would accompany a child known to be slow going or otherwise easily distracted from an assigned errand. In their situations, the girls understood that they should keep away from boys and men. In all their endeavors, the women made efforts to shield the young girls from risks of dropping out of school to see them succeed in becoming economically independent through careers such as law, medicine, teaching, or vocational trade.

Whereas I did not get much data on their success, a valuable lesson learned was that every child belonged to the society, and most of the women advocating for the girls' sociocultural liberation were those who never had formal education. Sifuna and Chege (2006) observed that Kenya was not serious about gender issues, and the absence of evidence-based interventions in rural communities continued to reproduce uneducated women, who, in turn, brought forth generations of uneducated girls, who also replicated the roles of their mothers. However, contrary to this vicious cycle, most of the Mama Nyungu women were denied access to schooling because of the very discriminatory social practices that existed in their time but now felt the obligation to call out on the tradition to put girls on equal footing with boys.

In West Africa, Callaway (1984) found that one of the primary impacts of education for girls among the Hausa people of Nigeria was the increased contact outside the confines of their households and the opportunity to find social reinforcement for the positive creation of a self with enhanced aspirations. In uplifting their daughters' ambitions and familiarizing them with the importance of female economic empowerment, Mama Nyungu women seemed to understand, as in the words of Callaway, that "through education, women themselves may change in their perception of their own rights and role" (1984, p. 442). Mama Nyungu women believed that it did not have to take the genius of an educated person to figure out the girls' schooling needs in the village. Instead, the women believed that it was their duty to help the girls because the alternative of leaving the role entirely to the school was bound to failure.

5 Metaphor for asking someone to hurry up, do it quickly, or otherwise waste no time. The metaphor makes sense in a home environment where spit saliva rapidly dissolves into the ground dust within a short time because the yard is of earth without grass.

Final Thoughts and Considerations

Since there was no apparent or significant economic benefit from the vessels' large scale production, my conversations with Mama Nyungu led to the conclusion that this endeavor was primarily for the teaching, mentoring, and protecting the girls in the local villages. In the example of Anyango, the village girl who became a magistrate, the women understood, as Nampushi and Welsh (2012) put it, that the failure of these young girls to obtain an education would be a failure to break out of poverty, which often prevented them from getting an education. The spirit of dedication evident among the Mama Nyungu members and the intentions and knowledge imparted into the young girls is a useful component of learning that could part of the mainstream school curriculum as a shared cultural value. In an earlier publication, I suggested the concept of cultural hybridity as an approach to combat the challenges of bringing together traditional cultures to coexist in national unity (Nyaberi, 2009). Similar issues also emerge from the writings of other post-colonial theorists, who support the concept of cultural hybridity as a path to cultural democracy (Giroux, 1992; Lunga, 2004; Maeda, 2009).

From the standpoint of colonization, Lunga (2004) describes hybridity as a survival strategy for cultures "caught between the languages of their colonization and their indigenous languages [in which these cultures] use colonial languages without privileging colonial languages" (p. 291). Lunga characterizes cultural hybridity as an outcome of contact between and integration of cultures in post-colonial nations. However, in a global context, one must also consider how factors such as power, market, and space bring about hybridity (Ackermann, 2012). As a dynamic basis for the politics of identity, community, and pedagogy, Giroux argues that "culture is not viewed as monolithic or unchanging, but as a shifting sphere of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle amid diverse relations of power and privilege" (1992, p. 24).

In this regard, I view hybridity as a global synthesis where all facets of human activity converge. To participate in this synthesis, and in the context of education in Kenya, Maeda (2009) wrote that schools should adopt the virtues of a hybrid culture to help the country achieve a realization of a democratic society in the post-colonial era. While I recognize the potential challenges of educational policy enactment, it is entirely plausible to implement a meaningful arts-based curriculum that brings cultures together. A good starting point would be with this Luo community, in which dancing in clay and making pottery provides refuge to girls who otherwise would suffer the cultural conditions that deny them educational and career opportunities equal to those of boys.

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