Philip Kwesiga: Transformation in Arts Education: The production and use of pottery in Nkore, Southwestern Uganda

Abstract:

The central issues addressed by this study is the transformation of the definition and negotiation of pottery skills transfer, power and or social relations, identities and practices among the Banyankore people, where arts educational change has shaped and restructured pottery production and use. The kinds of pottery forms, distribution patterns, designs, categories, and the interaction of potters, retailers and users in pottery practice is historically dependent on cultural, social and political-economic structures, which have shaped Nkore, south-western Uganda; a context which pottery has continually symbolized.

The historical construction of pottery production and use in Nkore presents a multiple definition contingent on the traditional existence of two social domains; Bakama (rich Bahima), a high social class which was the preserve of the well-to-do pastoralists; and Bakopi (poor Bairu), the low social class domain for the agricultural-subalterns. Traditionally, then, pottery has been associated with food processes and consumption. While the old pre-colonial Nkore social setup of the two domains was structured by the economic activities of cattle herding and agriculture, which were mostly determined by one's birth, new patterns have gradually emerged that have been substantially influenced by formal schooling throughout the twentieth century.

In Nkore, as in most African cultures, roles or practices in the production and use of pottery have long been controlled either by men or women form the separate social classes. In Nkore, most women controlled production among the majority of Bairu serfs, while a few men worked under the patronage of the minority Bahima ruling class. However, by the mid-twentieth century, with the increased interaction with Christianity, colonialism, trade and formal schooling, men lost their patronage among the high class domain. Meanwhile, from the 1960s, women began to lose control of the production and use of pottery in family households. Since the 1970s, most Nkore men have not benefited greatly from the external contact and so claimed control of the use and the production of 'pottery'. However, the women, who did benefit from new contacts, could no longer control the making or use of pottery.

This thesis questions why women have historically been the producers and men the users of traditional pottery in Nkore. What accounts for this shift in pottery practices and how are they connected to social identity among the Banyankore people? This study reveals that arts education

especially in pottery production has provided an arena for struggles over power control, and gender and social inequalities. The Banyankore believe that power is inherent in food and therefore, that men should control it. Pottery is associated with food and gender (as well as social class) as a relegated feminine (also Bairu) object. However, men produce and use pottery for either monetary reasons or as a way of negotiating their control over particular foods. Thus, pottery is an arena where social relations, identities, and roles are exhibited.