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Original Research

Gendered Social Marginalization of Female Potters in Hadiya Zone, Central Ethiopia

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Abstract	Article Information
<i>Scholars have written profusely about the gendered marginalization of women in societies where patriarchy is a dominant system. Research, however, is scant on the gendered marginalization experiences of women who are members of artisan communities such as those in Ethiopia. The present paper attempts to address this gap by reporting on the varied ways women from potters community (a social marginalized artisan group in Hadiya zone), Ethiopia, experienced gendered marginalization. Twenty participants from potters and ten participants from Hadiya community were interviewed. Individual interviews, focus group discussion and participant observation were used to collect data. Data was tape recorded and transcribed and thematic analysis followed to identify meaningful patterns in the data. Participants disclosed that they faced discrimination in the form of performing extremely harsh, exploitative and exhausting domestic work, restrictions on educational opportunities by the dominant society and their own community, physical violence by their own spouses and discriminatory violence by the mainstream Hadiya community. This paper argues that sociocultural marginalization of artisan communities in Ethiopia should not only be framed and conceptualized at a group-level but also should be investigated as a disaggregated experience where factors such as gender need to be accounted for.</i>	Article History: Received: 08-09-2025 Revised : 09-07-2026 Accepted : 09-09-2026 Keywords: Artisans, craft workers, gender, marginalization, Gafat Beta Israel, Hadiya, Wolaba, Hossana *Corresponding Author: Dr. Tewolde, Amanuel Isak: amanisak@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

The field of gender oppression or marginalization of women is a well-established research terrain and many scholars in the field have argued that the gendered dimensions of women's oppressed or marginalized status emanates from their perceived subordinated

status in patriarchal societies around the world (Hoskin 2020; O'Mullan, Sinai and Kaphle 2024). In patriarchal socio-cultural systems, men are socially, culturally, politically and symbolically positioned at the top of the gender hierarchy where they control much of

the resources, opportunities and powers (Hoskin 2020; O'Mullan, Sinai and Kaphle 2024); while women in patriarchal socio-cultural systems are subordinated to the bottom of the gendered hierarchy or stratification where they play the social and cultural roles of subservience and servility to the male-dominated social world (Hoskin 2020; O'Mullan, Sinai and Kaphle 2024). Women also face violence in patriarchal social systems in that they become victims of various forms of abuses such as physical domestic violence, humiliation, and other types of oppressive practices and systems (Hoskin 2020; O'Mullan, Sinai and Kaphle 2024). In this paper, we use the term 'gendered marginalization' as interchangeable with other related terms such as 'gender oppression' which refer to any form of exclusion, discrimination, prejudice or physical violence due to their gendered identity and socio-cultural status as minorities (Hoskin 2020; O'Mullan, Sinai and Kaphle 2024).

Scholars have written profusely on the experiences of marginalization of artisan/occupation groups by their respective mainstream societies and a few have also written about the experiences of minority/artisan women with multiple forms of marginalization in Ethiopia. In regards to the literature on the societal marginalization of artisan/occupation groups in Ethiopia, many scholars have disclosed that artisan/occupation communities such as tanners, potters, smiths etc. face various forms of societal prejudice, discrimination and exclusion by non-artisan ethnic groups or surrounding non-artisan communities (Akalework 2014; Bosha 2018; Braukmann 2012; Epple 2018; Freeman 2003; Pankhurst 1999; Retta 2021; Sisay 2009; Tiruye 2019; Yoshida 2013). And scholars have long documented the inextricable nexus

between a social group's occupational type and experiences of societal marginalization in many parts of the Ethiopian society (Shack 1964; Hallpike 1968; Hoben 1970; Todd 1978; Haberland 1984). Some of the works on the marginalization experiences of artisan/occupational minority groups in many parts of Ethiopia include, a study by Hailu (2016), Gawo and Tefesse (2024), Tadesse (2020) on the Manja and Yimer (2020) on artisans among the Yem communities in southern Ethiopia, Wolde-Selassie (2001) on an artisan group in Kambaata zone, Bosha (20018), Braukmann, and Epple (2018) on the Haro artisan community in southern Ethiopia, Mohammed (2024) on the Negede Wyto in Amhara region, Ferede and Aklilu (2020) on artisan groups in Tigray region and other scholarly works.

Within the field of gender based marginalization of minorities, scholars have argued that women who are members of historically excluded and marginalized communities often face multiple forms of oppression and marginalization (e.g., Mena et, al. 2022). They dubbed this 'double marginalization' (Abdellatif 2021; Mena, Guja and Paulos 2022). This is because, as scholars of marginalization would argue, women face marginalization due to their minority or dominated social identity status such as race, ethnicity, class, etc. and they also face oppression and marginalization due to their gender identity by both members of their own community and by members of the dominant majority (Abdellatif 2021; Mena et, al. 2022). Many studies have used the analytical concept of intersectionality to make sense of the various forms or dimensions of marginalization, violence and oppression women face. For example, *inter alia*, Holvino (2010) argued that women in racist societies face mostly three

forms of oppression and marginalization, namely racial, classed and gendered. Racial because they are Black, classed because they are poor and gendered because they are women. Other scholars and researchers have also used intersectionality to reveal the multiple ways women in many parts of the world experience marginalization in oppressive societies (e.g., Etherington 2015; Evans-Winters 2021; Harris and Leonardo 2018; Robinson 2018).

In the Ethiopian case, we have come across a study on gender and occupation-based marginalization and prejudice. For example, Mena et al.'s (2022) research work on the marginalization of women in Cinasha minority group in Wolaita, Ethiopia found that the women encountered double discrimination by the majority society and by members of their own group. So, the Cinasha minority women faced discrimination by the mainstream Wolaita society as women and members of a minority community and faced oppression as women by their own group (Mena et al. 2022). Research seems to be only emerging on the intersections of gender and occupation-based marginalization in Ethiopia. The present study contributes to the little studied phenomenon of gender and occupation-based marginalization in Ethiopia by exploring the multiple modes women belonging to the potters community in Hadiya Zone, Ethiopia, experienced both gendered and occupation-based marginalization.

According to the stories of the participant women, they faced discrimination in the form of performing extremely harsh, exploitative and exhaustive domestic work, restrictions on educational opportunities by the dominant society and their own community and physical violence by their own spouses and discriminatory violence by the majority social

group. The central research question that guides this paper is: How do women belonging to potters, a marginalized artisan group in Hadiya Zone, experience multiple forms of marginalization in their lived experience? This paper argues that scholars who study societal marginalization in Ethiopia should also look closely at the gendered dimensions of societal marginalization against artisan/occupation minorities in Ethiopia rather than framing their research at a group level.

The term “Gafat Beta-Israel” is a designation preferred and adopted by the research participants and the research participants eschewed or rejected other pejorative designations which the mainstream society ascribe to them. Potters, an occupational minority in Hadiya Zone, are a socially, spatially, culturally and economically excluded group by the mainstream Hadiya society. Other artisan groups are also found elsewhere in Southern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPR) such as in Kambata (Woldesillassie2001), Gurage (Retta 2021) and Yem zones (Gebresillassie 2003). Many scholars have used various designations to describe artisans found in many parts of the country. For example, in Gurage, they are referred to as "wood workers" (Retta 2021), as "hands craft men" in Kambata Zone (Woldesillassie2001), and as "potters" or “pot workers” in Yem Zone (Berafe 2017). All the above artisan groups belong to underprivileged social groupings regardless of their different names. In Hadiya, as elsewhere in Ethiopia, potters have endured centuries of societal exploitation and marginalization in various areas of the lives (Woldesillassie2001). Many forms of societal exclusion, discrimination and marginalization continue despite a few improvements in potters – Hadiya interactions.

This paper is organized as follows, first the guiding theoretical perspective for the paper which is intersectionality theory will be briefly discussed followed by a description of the method for the study. The next section presents the results of the study with quotations from the participants' stories. The following Discussion section will analyze and interpret the results of the study in relation to the theoretical framework and related literature on the topic. The last section concludes the paper by stating the main scholarly contributions of the study, the limitations of the study and directions for future scholarly investigation.

Intersectionality theory

Developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), this theoretical framework suggests that a combination of multiple forms of marginalization, exclusion or oppression come together to create a unique complex of oppression for the oppressed (Crenshaw 1991). Some of the different intersecting forms of oppression that create hyper-oppressive conditions for the oppressed include, *inter alia*, race, class and gender (Crenshaw 1991). For the purpose of the present paper, we employ intersectionality theory to make sense of the ways in which women who are members of the marginalized potter community in Hadiya Zone experienced multiple layers of marginalization due to their gender and due to their membership in a socially marginalized occupational group.

METHODS

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the multiple ways women potters encountered marginalization and oppression in their everyday lives. To better understand the gendered marginalization experiences from the oppressed themselves, a qualitative research method was deemed relevant. The present study's findings form part of a larger research

project. Research participants were selected from Hosanna town, central Ethiopia, using purposive and snowball sampling extraction techniques. Research participants were selected from three administrative units in Hosanna namely Bobicho, Naramo and Betel. Access to the study participants was gained through the potter community's self-help organization called Harotessa. Twenty participants from potters and ten participants from the Hadiya (the dominant community) were selected for the interview. Both women and men participated in the study and the age range of the men and women participants was between 25 and 50 years. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect qualitative data in order to obtain a deeper and nuanced exploration of the multiple marginalization experiences of the women. Observation method was also applied to strengthen the findings. Thematic analysis was used to code and identify relevant themes and categories from the experiential data regarding the gendered marginalization experiences of the participants. Data was tape recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. Codes were noted across the interview data and relevant themes or categories were identified to answer the research question posed.

In order to adhere to standards of ethical principles in qualitative research, care was taken in that participants were briefed in detail about the purpose of the study which was to give voice to their daily experiences with gendered marginalization; participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage of the interview or focus group sessions if they felt discomfort or emotional distress. Participants' real names were hidden and instead pseudonyms were used when reporting their experiences. Due to the sensitive nature of the

research topic, no detailed identifying information about the participants is provided. Complete anonymity of the informants is adopted in that when quoting participants no reference to demographic information is provided.

The study was conducted at both the community and the household levels in that first the artisan community was identified as a marginalized social group in relation to the mainstream Hadiya community and the households were interviewed within the larger potter community in Hossana.

RESULTS

Participants of the present research study disclosed that they faced discrimination in the form of performing extremely harsh, exploitative and exhaustive domestic work, restrictions on educational opportunities by the dominant society and their own community and physical violence by their own spouses and discriminatory violence by the majority social group. The larger research project was focused on the different dimensions of marginalization potters in Hossana faced such as economic, social, cultural, and spatial, among other, but this article only focuses on the gendered aspects of marginalization of potters in Hossana.

Exploitative Domestic Work

As the research participants revealed, according to the cultural tradition of potters, women are involved in pottery production processes such as digging clay soil, forming pots (producing pot equipment of various kinds), firing pots and selling it at the local market. But women are also exclusively involved in doing domestic household chores such as taking care for children, cooking, washing clothes and other domestic activities. On the other hand men are engaged in other

tasks away from the home such as tannery, artisanship, blacksmiths and carpentry. On the contrary, gender-based division of labour condemns women potters into the domestic sphere and under harsh conditions.. Since women are assigned exhausting domestic work, they are unable to participate in other activities. This gender-based division of labour puts a double responsibility on women and limited the social interaction of potter women. One of the research participants revealed that the experience of gendered oppression was more prevalent among members of potter women in Hosanna:

In my home, I am the busiest person. I work as pottery producer and also household maid. The majority of my days in a week are spent in production process, specifically this involves fetching clay soil, putting it through a process of preparation, shaping, firing, transporting and selling it at markets. Additionally, I am responsible for various household chores including cooking, and child care. As a result, I don't have time to maintain my hygiene or even to eat properly. But my husband works when he finds a job, therefore, he is idle most of the days in a week; he has time to enjoy with his friends and keep personal hygiene. As a result the Wolaba

(Hadiya) people look down on me based on my poor hygiene and dressing.

The above quote illustrates that, in addition to experiencing occupation-based marginalization due to their minority status by the dominant majority, potter women also experienced oppression and exploitation in the domestic sphere where they are condemned to domestic and arduous life and marginalized from the everyday routines of their male counterparts which they described as relatively better. Excessive and unrelenting domestic work can indeed make the women to have little time to buy cosmetics to look after themselves. Marginalization of potters as a group may also have resulted in potter women excluded from participating in the social, economic and cultural life and left with very limited life choices.

Marginalization from educational opportunities

In terms of access to education, male potters have relatively better access to education than their women counterparts. In addition to being marginalized in the domestic sphere, women potters also confront another predicament such as the difficulty of having access to educational opportunities. Participants revealed that they faced exclusion in their own community due to some cultural beliefs that subordinate women and also marginalization by the mainstream community in schools. Cultural practices of potters such as forced marriage of young girls, early marriage and violence by male spouses discourage women potters from pursuing their education. Additionally, information gained from focus group discussions with women potters revealed that incessant verbal demoralization by their family members in particular posed a serious obstacle to their

ambition to go to school. A study participant disclosed the ways in which women are marginalized in the education sector in varied ways:

In our culture, young girls are expected to take on the duties of wives and mothers in early ages. As a major income generators in the household, Gafat Beta-Israel girls socialize to assume the role of wives from childhood and spend many hours conducting household activities and pottery production. As a result, girls don't have time for school. The Gafat Beta-Israel parents are frequently eager to get their girls to marry early because they believe that their married girls can be a source of income; and parents encourage young girls to marry early in order to reduce the possibility that they might become pregnant outside of marriage and embarrass the family.

The above quote suggests that women potters from marginalized/ minority community experienced an oppressive system from their own community in that they are societally coerced to marry and take on roles of motherhood rather than educate themselves by attending schools.

Additionally, informants also narrated that marginalization in schools posed

additional challenge for very few women who joined school after overcoming obstacles from their families. For instance, other students (from Wolaba) would not want to sit together with them, perform class activities together or play together outside class. Participants also disclosed that even Wolaba teachers insulted and demoralized them. A female student quit her education at grade five due to repeated abusive insults by her Hadiya classmates; she reported that her teacher advised her to quit learning and instead start doing craftwork like her mother. Observational data during the field work of the present study suggests that the majority of potters particularly women cannot read and/or write. Relatively, males appear to be able to write and read; even some males have joined higher educational institutions and have attained diplomas and degrees. This reflects that the opportunity for education is not fairly distributed between males and females within members of potters.

Gender Based Domestic Violence

According to informants, women potters face dual marginalization in that they faced sexual and physical violence within their households and marginalization by the mainstream community. Most female potters reported that they were abused either physically or verbally by their spouses. This resulted in a double-edged sword for women potters who already experience marginalization from the mainstream community and additionally faced violence from their spouses. This form of dual abuse of women potters does not appear to have been reported previously and abuse of women potters appear to be normalized within the community. The research participants stated that most men potters are addicted to drugs, particularly their excessive use of traditional alcoholic beverages is the cause for physical aggression against women. Additionally,

participants revealed that the majority of their male spouses spend their income on alcohol drinking, which creates another burden on women because of financial stress. One of the female research participants made the following observation:

My spouse is an alcohol abuser. Most of the time after work, he returns to our home intoxicated and then he beats, insults, and threatens me and our children. This is prevalent among Gafat Beta-Israel households. The entire burden of the house is placed on my shoulders. In addition to looking after my kids and my household, I also make and sell pot equipment.

The above quote suggests that women potters face multiple forms of oppression in the domestic sphere because they not only endure sustained physical, emotional and mental abuse by their male partners but also have to look after their families financially. Gender based violence or abuse can be a form of marginalization for women potters because they are excluded from social or legal support services to attenuate their abusive conditions at home.

DISCUSSION

Participants disclosed that they faced discrimination in the form of performing extremely harsh, exploitative and exhausting domestic work, restrictions on educational opportunities by the dominant society and their own community and physical violence by their own spouses and discriminatory violence by the majority social group. In other words they encountered multiple forms of marginalization

that intersected to result in layered oppressive conditions for the women and their experiences speak to the theoretical literature that conceptualizes women oppression as layered, multiple and compounded (Abdellatif 2021; Crenshaw 1991; Etherington 2015; Evans-Winters 2021; Harris and Leonardo 2018; Mena et, al. 2022; Robinson 2018).

The women's experiences with multiple marginalization or oppression can particularly be explained by intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1991) in that both the occupational minority status and their gendered identities intersected to create double marginalization or double oppression for the women concerned (Etherington 2015). The intersectionality theoretical perspective suggests that oppression or marginalization of minorities or socially excluded groups such as the disable, women, the old, racial minorities, ethnic minorities and other excluded identity groups should be seen from multiple dimensions of their oppression experiences than through a one-dimensional factor (Crenshaw 1991; Etherington 2015). The experiences of the women discussed within this paper reflect the multifarious dimensions of oppression and marginalization as intersectionality theory suggests.

The ways in which participants of this study experienced gendered marginalization and oppression occurred within an institutionalized/structural societal marginalization affecting artisan/occupation group minorities in Ethiopia (e.g., Ferede and Aklilu 2020; Hailu 2016; Kute et, al. 2021; Mohammed 2024; Retta 2021; Tadesse 2020; Tiruye 2009). Indeed much has been written about the marginalization of occupational or artisan minorities in different parts of Ethiopia and by different scholars who contend that societal exclusion or marginalization of craft

workers minorities in Ethiopia affect their economic, social and cultural lived experiences in negative and dehumanizing ways (Epple 2018; Mohammed 2024; Retta 2021; Tadesse 2020). The women in this study are part of a marginalized community, excluded because of, *inter alia*, their occupational activities as potters and their gendered identity. Scholars have also noted that women who belong to minority artisan communities in Ethiopia face extreme poverty and perform exhausting and arduous work such as pottery work at home to survive (e.g., Belachew 2001; Epple 2018; Freeman 2003; Lyons and Freeman 2009; Pankhurst 2012).

Though women's pottery work at home has been widely documented by scholars (e.g., Belachew 2001; Epple 2018; Freeman 2003; Lyons and Freeman 2009; Pankhurst 2012), women's multiple forms of oppression and marginalization both by males from the marginalized artisan group and men from the dominant/majority group appear to be not much debated among such scholars. The findings of this paper will hopefully suggest to scholars to look deeply into the double marginalization of women from artisan/occupational minorities in Ethiopia so that we can have a complex picture of nuanced and complex dimensions of their exclusion and marginalization. Scholars may also explore different demographic groups within the craft workers communities such as the disabled, the old, children, women etc. and appreciate how a disaggregated analyses of artisan communities in Ethiopia can give us a nuanced and complex picture of layered marginalization.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the ways in which potter women in hosanna experienced multiple forms of oppression and marginalization. On the one hand they experienced

oppression/marginalization in the domestic sphere by their male spouses and on the other hand they experienced various forms of marginalization by the members of the Hadiya majority because of their excluded social status as members of potters. The manner in which the women experienced marginalization by members of the Hadiya majority society broadly reflects the experiences of artisan women belonging to artisan minority communities found in many parts of Ethiopia; however, their oppressive experiences of alienation and marginalization in the domestic domain is little understood by scholars studying minorities in the context of Ethiopia. The results of this paper will hopefully motivate scholars of minority studies to pay closer scholarly attention to the multiple ways women and other oppressed demographic groups within artisan minorities experience double or multiple forms of marginalization in Ethiopia. The study has limitations in that it was based on findings from members of one artisan social group in Hadiya zone and hence it cannot be generalizable to other contexts. More research needs to be conducted on the multiple ways artisan/minority women belonging to other minority groups experience varied ways of marginalization so that some clear patterns may emerge to enable us theorize their condition in Ethiopia. Further, since the research was conducted in the Hossana town, researchers should investigate what patterns of marginalization or prejudice are experienced by artisans in rural areas in Hadiya Zone so that we can have a fairly exhaustive picture of forms and nuances of marginalization within the Zone.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Dr. Tewolde, Amanuel Isak: Conceptualization, methodology, Investigation and writing

Awlachew Getachew: Validation. Supervision, review and editing

Semere Beyene: Visualization, validation and supervision, review and editing

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request

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