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From Pottery to Politics: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of Political Factionalism, Ethnicity, and Domestic Pottery Style in the Ecuadorian Amazon

Brenda J. Bowser[1]

A long-standing assumption in archaeological theory is that pottery in the domestic context represents a form of "passive style" that does not enter into symbolic communication in the political domain. This paper presents ethnoarchaeological data to establish a link between women's active political behavior and pottery style in the domestic context in a small-scale, segmental society in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Analysis of individual variables of style shows that Achuar and Quichua women signify their political alliances in the painted decoration of their domestic pottery more strongly than they signify so-called "passive" processes of learning associated with early enculturation and ethnicity. Furthermore, analysis of women's judgments of pottery as Achuar or Quichua indicates that they decode cues to political alliances in the pottery of other women, including cues to political differences within and between groups. The theoretical implications of these findings are discussed in terms of the principles underlying women's stylistic behavior as part of the political processes involved in the construction and maintenance of social identity and social boundaries.

KEY WORDS: pottery; ceramics; style; ethnicity; factionalism; social boundaries; social identity.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, archaeologists have focused considerable theoretical attention on political factionalism, relations of gender and power, issues of agency, and symbolism. In practice, archaeologists routinely rely upon analysis of domestic pottery to identify political boundaries and to gauge sociopolitical change. However, a fundamental gap exists between theory and practice: whereas domestic pottery production is the realm of women in most societies (see Skibo and

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Schiffer, 1995), politics and political factionalism often have been approached exclusively as male domains (e.g., Brumfiel and Fox, 1994; Clark and Blake, 1994), and no major theory or model associates domestic pottery with women's political behavior (see also Graves, 1994, p. 159). How, then, can we interpret domestic pottery as a marker of political affiliation and an index of broad-scale sociopolitical change, without an explicit link in archaeological theory between women's domestic pottery and their motivated political behavior?

In part, Graves (1994, p. 159) raised this issue when he asked, "Are males relevant to ceramic design boundaries?" and argued that it is time to reexamine the assumption that the social dynamics that underlie pottery distributions apply to both males and females. My research focuses on this issue in an ethnoarchaeological case study of women's domestic pottery in the context of political factionalism and ethnic difference in a small-scale society in the Ecuadorian Amazon. This research has been based in Conambo, a community of about 200 Achuar and Quichua people, where elaborately painted polychrome pottery is made by every woman for use in her home. In this paper, I seek to establish a link between women's domestic pottery style and motivated political behavior in Conambo. The fieldwork that forms the basis for this research was conducted during a 9-month period in Conambo from December 1992 through August 1993, supplemented by 2-week visits to Conambo in May 1992 and June 1998.

The goal of this paper is to explore the idea that women are political players and to present data suggesting that women's domestic pottery style can provide useful information in the reconstruction of active political structures. Ethnoarchaeological data are presented to make two points: (1) women in Conambo signify their active political alliances in the painted designs of their domestic pottery more strongly than they signify their ethnicity; and (2) women perceive cues to political alliances in the pottery of other women, accurately distinguishing the pottery bowls of the two main political factions and, more subtly, discerning cues to the strength or ambiguity of alliances within their own factions. The theoretical implications of these findings are discussed in terms of the principles underlying women's domestic pottery style as motivated political behavior. In addition, this paper seeks to emphasize the importance of considering the domestic context as a place where politics are conducted, the visibility and active use of domestic pottery in this context, the complementarity of male and female politics, and the political agency of women in this small-scale society.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: STYLE IN THE DOMESTIC CONTEXT

Theories that address style in the domestic context have focused on the symbolism of women's opposition to male domination (e.g., Braithwaite, 1982;

Hodder, 1984, 1986), the role of style in processes of enculturation or socialization (e.g., David *et al.*, 1988; Dietler and Herbich, 1998; Hegmon, 1995, pp. 13, 191), the importance of women as technological innovators (Skibo and Schiffer, 1995), or the assertion that style in the domestic context represents "passive interaction" or "passive processes" (e.g., Carr, 1995, pp. 195, 196; Carr and Neitzel, 1995, p. 471) and is unlikely to communicate "active" information (e.g., Kintigh, 1985; Rice, 1987, p. 268; Wobst, 1977, pp. 323, 328, 329). A perspective yet to be explored is the association between style in the domestic context and women's active participation within the arena of public politics.

The theoretical disjuncture between domestic pottery and politics is rooted deeply in archaeological theories of style, beginning with the trend of dichotomizing style into oppositional types in the 1970s and 1980s (see Conkey, 1990). Primarily, this disjuncture can be traced back to the seminal article of Wobst in 1977 and subsequent efforts to reconcile Wobst's theoretical expectations with Sackett's (1985, 1986, 1990) distinction between "active" and "passive" style. Wobst was concerned with style as a form of communication of social roles and group membership, leading archaeologists to develop this very important notion. Significantly, he brought focus to issues of context and visibility, suggesting where and how style should be used to communicate social identity. The fundamental expectations that he set forth prompted much productive research and discussion, and his substantial influence is unquestionable, pervasive, and well documented (see Conkey, 1990; Hegmon, 1992, 1995). In his article, Wobst formulated an argument about style in the domestic context.

Wobst's propositions were based on considerations of energy efficiency that were derived from communication theory at the time (cf. Dawkins and Krebs, 1977). On this basis, he argued specifically that stylistic communication of social group membership should not be found among close kin and friends, in small-scale societies, or in the domestic context. Rather, he assumed that such relations would be well known and that the use of style to communicate such relationships would be wastefully inefficient. He writes, for example, "There are few messages that would not be known already . . . in the context of the household" (Wobst, 1977, p. 323), and "classes of artifacts that never leave the contexts of individual households and which are not usually visible to members of other households (such as ordinary kitchen utensils . . .) are unlikely to carry messages of social group affiliation," because "the number of individuals which potentially could receive this message is so small, and the number of these items that are seen by a given individual through his lifetime is so insignificant" (Wobst, 1977, pp. 328, 329). Further, he argued that symbols of political objectification should be found in public, not private, places (Wobst, 1977, pp. 323, 324).

Subsequently, Sackett (1985, 1986, 1990) challenged the concept of style as symbolic communication of social identity. However, he offered a compromise

by defining two types of style: passive, which he presents as unconscious, automatic, and traditional, and active, or conscious, deliberate, and identity signaling. These two terms had been used in symbolic anthropology to denote the different levels of consciousness at which multiple meanings of a symbol could be understood in a single context (e.g., Firth, 1973, p. 19). Basically, Sackett argued that most stylistic behavior is undertaken passively, without conscious awareness of its symbolic meaning and without conscious intent to convey symbolic information about social group affiliation or social boundaries. Today, anthropologists tend toward a middle ground, taking the position that many identity-signifying behaviors and motivations are learned unconsciously during socialization (see Cohen, 1994), or may be indicative of an innate coalitional psychology (e.g., see Levine and Campbell, 1972; Wiessner, 1997), but do enter the consciousness of both actor and receiver at some level, in keeping with Giddens' (1979) concept of "practical consciousness." From these perspectives, a strict dichotomy between active and passive, or conscious and unconscious, oversimplifies the very complex processes through which people learn to perceive, imitate, and manipulate symbolic cues to social identity.

In an effort to synthesize Sackett's terminology with the theoretical expectations of Wobst, archaeologists categorized style as "passive" in the domestic context and "active" in the public or political context (e.g., see Carr, 1995, pp. 195, 196; Rice, 1987, p. 286). Subtly, this categorization of active/passive fit well with the dichotomous parallels of male/female, public/private, and political/domestic. By the early 1990s, Wobst's basic theoretical premise that stylistic behavior should be driven by considerations of energy efficiency had been rejected (see Hegmon, 1992, 1995, pp. 10–13); anthropologists had accepted and developed more sophisticated approaches to signification of social identity and consciousness (e.g., see Cohen, 1994); and the simplicity of the public/domestic distinction had been questioned in both archaeology and general anthropology (e.g., Conkey and Spector, 1984, pp. 8, 9; Ortner, 1974; Rosaldo, 1980; Wylie, 1991). However, the influence of Wobst's argument about style in the domestic context has persisted, implicitly or explicitly, in the archaeological literature. With few exceptions (cf. DeBoer and Moore, 1982; Graves, 1994; Jones and Hegmon, 1991; Sterner, 1989; Wycoff, 1990), many of the underlying assumptions applied to domestic pottery tenaciously endure unquestioned: it has "low visibility," "no one sees it," its manufacture is learned through "passive" processes, it reflects "passive interaction," and it is unlikely to enter into symbolic communication, particularly in the political domain.

So where does that leave us in terms of our expectations for stylistic behavior in a small-scale society like Conambo, where pottery is made and used almost exclusively in the domestic context, everyone is well known to one another, yet political boundaries are fluid and fuzzy, and political factions are unstable, with constantly shifting membership?

THE CASE STUDY: POTTERY AND POLITICS IN CONAMBO

Ethnographic Background

Conambo is located in the lowland tropical rainforest of the Ecuadorian Amazon. It is situated on the Conambo River, which joins the Rio Pindo at the Peruvian border to become the Rio Tigre, flowing to the Marañon and eventually to the Amazon River proper (Fig. 1). Conambo is a community of approximately 200 Achuar- and Quichua-speaking people living in some 25 households dispersed along the river floodplain and adjoining hilltops. Additionally, one Zaparo woman lives in Conambo, one of few Zaparo people remaining after decimation by disease and warfare in the early-to-mid 1900s. Large-scale raids and headhunting were endemic in the region into the 1960s (Harner, 1973), and low-level, potentially lethal feuds continue today.

Fig. 1. Conambo, located on a tributary of the Amazon River, is a community of about 200 Achuar- and Quichua-speaking people. It is one of the largest indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon region that did not develop around a Christian mission station, military base, or road. No roads enter this area, and Conambo is relatively remote. Pottery is produced by all adult women for use in their own households.

Regionally, the Achuar and Quichua distinguish themselves primarily on the basis of their spoken languages, although the Achuar have a greater reputation among themselves and others for fierceness, and the Quichua for acculturation. Quichua has become a *lingua franca* throughout the Ecuadorian Amazon, spoken by many indigenous people in addition to their own native language(s), facilitating intermarriage and other interactions. Lowland Quichua dialects, rooted in the Quechua language of the Inka, probably began to spread from the highlands into the Ecuadorian lowlands in the early 1500s (Mannheim, 1991); historically, Quichua has been adopted as a language and social identity by individuals raised by parents of different ethnicity, when the common language spoken between the parents was Quichua, particularly in interethnic marriages involving Achuar, Quichua, or Zaparo (see especially Whitten, 1976). As a result, the Quichua ceramic tradition in Conambo shares common heritage with the Achuar and Zaparo ceramic traditions. This historical process is documented in people's genealogies in Conambo and is continuing today.

The community of Conambo was established about 25 years ago, centered around an airstrip abandoned by the Unocal Corporation when it concluded oil exploration there. Today, the community remains remote, accessible to outsiders only by small plane. Travel within and between communities is accomplished along an extensive system of trails by foot, and along the relatively narrow stretches of river by canoe. In 1992, the Ecuadorian government granted land titles to many indigenous peoples, approving a petition from Conambo and a number of smaller, related communities for legal recognition of their traditional land-use rights. In keeping with their indigenous concepts of land ownership, the people of Conambo and seven other communities now hold in common the 250,000 hectares that form their territory. Accordingly, rights of access to community lands and other resources are governed by the fundamental tenets of kinship and usufruct.

People in Conambo obtain their subsistence primarily through swidden horticulture, fishing, hunting, and gathering. According to their gender-based division of labor, men have primary responsibility for hunting, and women have primary responsibility for gardening, although both tasks are often undertaken cooperatively by husband and wife. The majority of calories are obtained from sweet manioc, a cultivated tuber consumed daily in the form of *chicha*, a lightly fermented beer. Every adult woman cultivates her own gardens and makes chicha, deriving status and respect for her ability to sustain her family from her gardens independently. Chicha is served in decorated pottery bowls made by every adult woman in Conambo for the exclusive purpose of serving chicha on a daily basis to her family and guests.

In Conambo, political organization is egalitarian, and institutionalized positions of authority are absent. Political leadership is informal, although certain adults are acknowledged to have more influence over decisions than others. Political decisions are reached through the painstaking process of consensus (cf. Boehm, 1996),

involving extensive visiting and discussions among adults in different households to define and resolve issues, sometimes culminating in a large group meeting in which an influential person sanctions a decision reached by consensus. Both men and women participate in this process, which is a daily occupation and responsibility. However, men play the key roles in group discussions when decisions are reached and endorsed, and men are the key players in conflict resolution between communities.

Conambo is divided politically into two opposing factions described locally in ethnic terms: the Achuar, living upriver of the community center, and the Quichua, living downriver. Figure 2 shows the main political division within the community, a division established early in the history of Conambo (see also Patton, 1996, pp. 84–89). Although the two factions are described in Conambo emphatically in terms of ethnicity, both factions are in fact ethnically mixed as a result of intermarriage and political realignments following conflicts. People in Conambo draw a clear distinction between their ethnicity and political affiliation, even though the terms "Achuar" and "Quichua" are used for both. One woman explains her own situation: "*I* am Quichua, but I am *with* the Achuar." She identifies herself as a Quichua woman; her mother and father were Quichua, and her first spoken language was Quichua. However, her husband is Achuar, her closest political allies are Achuar women, and she lives with her husband on the Achuar side.

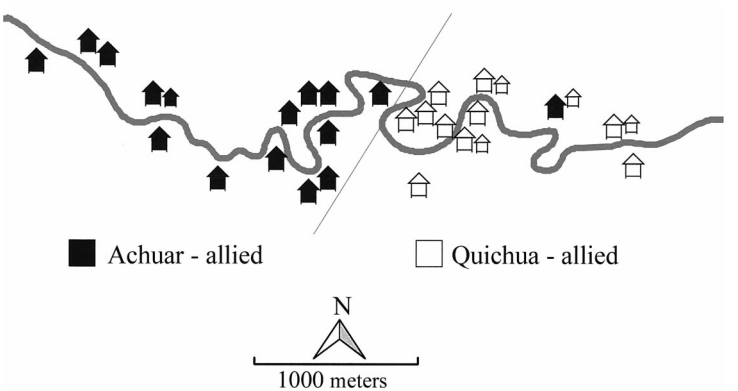

Fig. 2. Conambo is divided into two main political factions, depicted here. The Achuar-allied households are located upriver of the community center, and Quichua-allied households are downriver, except for one Achuar-allied couple living on the Quichua side. In this figure, the political boundary is represented by the slanted line: a large house symbol represents a household, and a small house symbol represents a young married couple or a widow who are dependent on another household. People in Conambo discuss the two factions as "the Achuar above" and "the Quichua below," even though both factions are ethnically mixed as a result of intermarriage and political realignments.

Table I. Ethnic and Political Identity of Pottery Makers ($N = 35$) in Conambo in 1992 and 1993

	Ethnicity	
Political affiliation	Achuar	Quichua
Achuar	18	3
Quichua	4	10

She refers to "We Quichua" when describing her values, linguistic terms, and standards of behavior, all products of her early enculturation, but she refers to "We Achuar" when discussing political consensus and her position on divisive issues within the community. Thus, the use of ethnic labels is situational, and many individuals can choose, within certain constraints, between identities (cf. Royce, 1983, p. 26). Both men and women have realigned themselves through interethnic marriages, and married couples and widowed women have defected to the opposite political faction in times of "problems" varying from mild ostracization to homicide. In 1992 and 1993, 33% of households in the Achuar faction included Quichua adults (5 of 15 households), and 70% of Quichua-allied households included Achuar adults (7 of 10 households). Concomitantly, 14% of potters on the Achuar side were Quichua women (3 of 21 potters), and 29% of potters in Quichua-allied households were Achuar women (4 of 14 potters) (see Table I).

The Meanings of Pottery in Conambo

Making pottery in Conambo is a long-established, indigenous, and noncommercial tradition of domestic production for household use. Pottery production is small-scale and unspecialized (after Costin, 1991). Elsewhere, Achuar and Quichua pottery is sold on the tourist market and exchanged to missionaries for medicines or to pay hospital bills. Women in Conambo have no access to such venues for their pottery, primarily due to their remote location. Consequently, Conambo provides an ideal setting, one of the few remaining, to study pottery production and the principles underlying stylistic behavior in the absence of market influences.

Although aluminum wares, tin plates, and plastics have replaced most blackwares for cooking and serving food, two types of pottery vessels have stubbornly resisted replacement: a large fermentation pot for brewing and storing manioc beer and polychrome chicha bowls for drinking manioc beer. Techniques of manufacture are similar to those documented among Achuar, Quichua, and Shuar groups throughout the Ecuadorian Amazon (Harner, 1973; Karsten, 1935; Kelekna, 1981; Kelley and Orr, 1976; Villacres *et al.*, 1988; Stirling, 1938; Whitten, 1976; Zeidler,

1983), among the Shipibo–Conibo in the Peruvian Amazon (e.g., DeBoer and Lathrap, 1979), and among indigenous peoples elsewhere in Amazonia (Tessman, 1930). Fermentation pots are large vessels that require special expertise to make, and most women in Conambo learn to do so only after they have been married for several years. However, every adult woman in Conambo makes chicha bowls, including all married women, married and unmarried adult daughters living at home and coresident daughters-in-law, and widows.

Girls play with clay and begin learning to make chicha bowls at a very young age. Generally, mothers teach their daughters to make pottery, although many women report learning from someone else, such as a grandmother or close friend, or simply by "watching others." Ordinarily, women make their own vessels from start to finish, but a young woman who is still learning to make pottery may work together with her instructor, producing bowls that represent their joint efforts. Typically, a novice is given the opportunity to paint the designs on a chicha bowl, after the body is constructed by her more adept and knowledgeable teacher. Sometimes, a very young girl simply adds a few minor painted design elements to the completed designs of her mother or grandmother. In practice, a young woman may learn multiple techniques of constructing and painting pottery by observing and studying with multiple women as she becomes a competent potter. Additionally, women report adopting new techniques of manufacture and decoration after they moved as adults to new communities and established relationships with different women.

Women are respected for their excellence in making and painting chicha bowls in Achuar and Quichua cultures, where both men and women say that making chicha bowls is one of the most important aspects of a woman's role. Chicha and chicha bowls are integral to life in Conambo. "We would die without chicha," people explain. "It is our food. What would we drink?" During interviews, men and women defined a "good wife" or "good woman" as one who maintains her own gardens, makes her own chicha, makes chicha bowls, serves chicha to her husband and guests in beautifully painted chicha bowls, and cares for her children. Competence in painting pottery bowls is a marker of a girl's transition to marriageable age. Parents who are unwilling to allow their daughter to marry will deny that she is competent in making pottery, even if she already has made bowls and has begun to serve chicha to guests from those bowls. Until she is close to the age of her death, a woman maintains her gardens, makes and serves chicha, and makes pottery beer bowls.

Previously, ethnographic studies of pottery in the Ecuadorian Amazon have focused on its relationship to worldview and cosmology (Whitten and Whitten, 1988, 1993; Whitten, 1976). Painted pottery design is important as a symbolic expression of a woman's dream visions and spirit knowledge, a reflection of her strength as a person in this society. Abstract representational designs connect a woman to her dream visions and the spirit world as she paints. The designs represent

features of mythology, including spirits, animals, plants, and stellar constellations. Parallel lines in contrasting colors are identified as husband and wife, or brother and sister, representing the integration of male and female relationships (Kelley and Orr, 1976, p. 22; Whitten, 1976, pp. 90, 91). The key symbols of female identity in Achuar and Quichua belief systems—manioc, pottery clay, garden soil, and the garden spirit—are linked through language, myth, and song (Descola, 1996, pp. 192–210; Harner, 1973, pp. 70–76; Karsten, 1935; Kelekna, 1981; Stirling, 1938; Sullivan, 1988, p. 373; Whitten and Whitten, 1988). On a daily basis, a woman's act of serving chicha in a pottery bowl to her husband or brother makes reference to this cluster of key symbols, reinforcing the Amazonian worldview of male and female binary opposition and complementarity.

There are many reasons to expect individuality in the pottery of women in Conambo. Originality is highly valued (see also Kelley and Orr, 1976, pp. 17, 19; Villacres *et al*., 1988, p. 60; Whitten and Whitten, 1988), as it is elsewhere in Amazonia (DeBoer, 1990, p. 103; Roe, 1980, p. 61), and women expressly do not want others to imitate their designs. The allegorical interpretation of the painted designs is deeply personal, intellectual property of each potter; like the meanings of dream visions, the meanings of the designs relate to communications with the spirit world. These meanings are subject to interpretation foremost by the potter herself, perhaps in consultation with another woman who is more knowledgeable of dream interpretation, or following long conversation with her husband about their nightly dreams. Innovation and difference in design, form, and technique are topics for discussion by both men and women, and men returning from visits to other villages describe the different pottery to their wives upon return. Although someone may hesitate to comment on the aesthetic qualities of a woman's pottery in public—within hearing distance of someone from another household—this is not the case in private. "Their pottery is different, thicker." "She never learned to paint well, and neither did her mother." "What do you think about all those dots that she is using?" "That bowl must not be made by a woman of our group, it is ugly."

Here, as elsewhere (e.g., DeBoer, 1990; Lathrap, 1983), individuality in pottery style also may be an expression of discontent with one's personal relationships. A young woman, living patrilocally in this typically matrilocal society, desperate to leave a bad marriage and put an end to ill relations with her in-laws, paints noticeably different pottery. A respected Achuar woman, who realigned herself politically with the Quichua after her husband was killed by members of their own Achuar coalition some 20 years ago, uses a symmetry pattern, design elements, and technique of surface finish that distinguish her style from both Quichua and Achuar. Clearly, the cultural significance of this domestic pottery extends beyond the symbolic representation of gender roles and relations.

Importantly, chicha bowls are highly visible during the daily negotiation of political relations in Conambo, where the majority of community politics are transacted in the domestic context. During daily visits to other households, men

and women pass information, vent dissatisfactions, discuss problems, and agree to take action through the slow process of consensus building required in the absence of formal political authority. In this context, people view the chicha bowls made by women in other households.

During informal visits, women sit in each other's kitchens, drink chicha from pottery beer bowls, and share information and opinions about daily events and current issues. At these times, men are usually away from the house, and a woman visitor is likely to be socially or politically close to her hostess. Often, a woman simply visits another woman's house to rest briefly as she returns home from working in her garden, washing clothes, or bathing in the river. Occasions for such visits occur daily, because all women's established trails intersect other women's paths to their houses. More strategically, a woman may go out of her way to discuss a particular issue with someone whom she does not normally visit during her daily rounds. Ostensibly, she may go to borrow a pair of scissors or to ask to take a calabash from a tree planted by her hostess. If she is glimpsed by others as she walks down the trail, her visit may raise attention and cause speculation that a political issue is afoot.

During more formal visits, chicha bowls primarily are used by a woman to serve her husband and important male guests, while others usually are served from undecorated calabash bowls. Serving and drinking chicha is required by social etiquette, is highly stylized (see also Descola, 1996, pp. 36, 37; Whitten, 1976, pp. 85–88), and constitutes a form of ritual that is effective in communicating the visitor's current political standing in the household and community. Based on the order, timing, and type of bowl (calabash or pottery) with which she chooses to serve chicha, a woman signals the visitor's social distance, status, and, at times, political disfavor during a controversy, typically in full view of other guests and attendant family members. Even a subtle delay in offering chicha to a guest suggests an unresolved conflict and precarious political relationships. If no chicha is offered, a direct affront is intended; this action is rude, confrontational, and rare. Minor disputes are resolved, and life or death decisions are made, while drinking bowls of chicha. In Conambo, the public/private and political/domestic contexts are inseparable, and each woman uses her chicha bowls on a daily basis to bridge those domains.

Men's and Women's Politics in Conambo

Political factions in Conambo reflect many of the principles described classically among small-scale societies in terms of political segmentation and balanced opposition (e.g., Bohannon, 1954, 1963; Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Sahlins, 1961), factionalism (Lee, 1977), and fissioning (Chagnon, 1975). Minor conflicts may lead to social dramas in which factional divisions become salient. A father denies another man's request to marry a daughter, or a fist fight erupts between two young

men in a moment of jealousy. A new family is invited to move into the community, but a few community members dispute their right to do so and want them to move away. A young unmarried woman becomes pregnant; the man she names as the father charges that she met in the night with other men as well, the child is "of mixed seed," and he has no responsibility. In such cases, the principal actors call upon their allies to support their respective positions, and competition ensues. Individuals on both sides compete by using their political influence to sway opinion and determine whose position will be validated, whose proposed resolution will be enacted, and, ultimately, whose interests will or will not be furthered.

Politics in Conambo are serious business. Homicide rates are historically high (Descola, 1996; Kelekna, 1981; Patton, 1996, 2000; Ross, 1976; Ross, 1984, 1988), accusations of witchcraft are serious, long-term feuding and witchcraft obligate kinsmen to avenge deaths, and even minor conflicts can escalate to dangerous levels. Residential mobility is important, largely as a form of conflict avoidance and conflict resolution. However, residential moves are costly. For example, relocation to a new community requires abandonment of gardens, houses, and hunting trails; an extended period of dependency on one's hosts for food until new gardens are established; negotiation of new social relations; and, as newcomers, minimal political influence, tenuous usufruct rights, and a position near the bottom of the status hierarchy. Consequently, failure to resolve disputes may lead to serious consequences, and women have vested interests to participate in conflict management.

In Conambo, many of the personal qualities associated with leadership are related to conflict management. In this respect, a leader solves conflicts between people, knows how to organize people, directs the actions of others, and is persuasive (see also Patton, 1996, pp. 173–177). These qualities of leadership are ascribed to both men and women. In particular, an important woman is described in terms of her role in political activities: she may "fix problems, but she must be a senior woman," or she may "go around asking what people think to help organize an agreement." Although leadership is informal and situational, an individual whose leadership abilities emerge more frequently and clearly than others is recognized as an *amu* (Quichua [Q]) or *juunt*, *juuntri*, or *juuntach* (Achuar [A]). The terms amu and juuntach are applied to women as well as men. Thus, the people of Conambo clearly recognize men's and women's roles in the political process.

Men's and women's political spheres are said to be distinct. According to people in Conambo, "men lead among men, and women lead among women," and "a man who is a leader knows how to organize men; a woman who is a leader knows how to organize women." As they work or visit in gender-segregated settings, women engage in lively discussions of political issues among themselves, and men debate issues among men. A persuasive, well-respected man may exercise his influence over other men, but if he tried to direct the behavior of another man's wife, "this would cause problems." Likewise, important women do not "give orders" to men outside of their own households, but they may instruct other women to follow the morally proper course of action.

On a daily basis, the two spheres of men's and women's politics articulate and become integrated in the domestic context. A woman listens to the conversations of visiting men as she serves chicha (see also Harner, 1973, p. 53). Visiting women, sitting apart from the men, may listen to the men's conversations, too. The women sit in more intimate spaces, sharing their own views and discussing men's views more discreetly amongst themselves. Their conversations cannot be overheard. However, women's opinions and information are passed to men during the private moments of conversation between husband and wife, particularly in the home. In these ways, the comments of men and women circulate between the two spheres and throughout networks of alliances, and the advice, criticisms, and consensus of both men and women may be influential in prompting action.

Thus, in Conambo, the domestic context is a place where politics are conducted on a daily basis. The political interests of husband and wife are mutual, both men and women participate actively in political life, and women's domestic pottery is highly visible in this context. Contrary to prevailing theoretical assumptions that domestic pottery should have low visibility, people in Conambo have daily opportunities to see the domestic pottery made and used in other households.

ANALYSIS OF POTTERY AND POLITICS

Pottery Style, Political Factions, and Ethnic Identity in Conambo

Conambo represents an interesting opportunity to examine pottery style where there is a social boundary constituted by both ethnic and political differences. Do potters on opposite sides of the factional boundary make chicha bowls that differ significantly, despite historical and social processes of interethnic marriages, political realignments, and residential mobility? If so, does pottery style in Conambo seem to be a relatively stable reflection of a woman's ethnic identity, or does it appear that style is manipulated, consciously or unconsciously, to signify a woman's political alliances and the political boundary in the community?

The analysis of pottery style shows that women's political affiliation and the factional division in Conambo are indicated strongly in the painted designs on chicha bowls. By comparison, a potter's ethnicity is less strongly indicated in the painted designs. In this section, I briefly define the variables and present the statistical results that are significant ($p \leq .050$) in terms of distinguishing the pottery style of political factions and ethnic identity in Conambo.

In this analysis, I use the term "political identity" to refer to a woman's political affiliation as Quichua or Achuar with respect to the two main political factions in Conambo in 1992 and 1993 (Fig. 2; see also Patton, 1996, 2000). Conambo is well known regionally for its split into Achuar and Quichua factions,

upriver and downriver of the small airstrip in the community's center. This split has characterized the community since it was founded, despite movement in and out of Conambo and back and forth across the factional boundary. In regular social contexts, including communal labor activities, cooperative fishing events, and competitive soccer games, people in Conambo divide themselves into the Achuar side and the Quichua side. During interviews and informal conversations in 1992 and 1993, they readily identified the political alliances of individuals and individual households, particularly when discussing conflicts and controversies: "*They* are *with* the Achuar," or "*We* are *with* the Quichua."

I use the term "ethnic identity" to refer to a woman's identification of herself as Quichua or Achuar in the context of detailed interviews about her personal life history. During such interviews, every adult in Conambo was asked, "Are you Quichua, Achuar, Zaparo, or mixed?" With only one exception, each person characterized himself or herself as Quichua or Achuar, based on the first language that he or she learned to speak as a child in the home. The one exception is the Zaparo woman, who refers to herself both as Zaparo and as a Quichua person, or *runa*. Using the term "ethnic identity" in this way, I wish to emphasize that a woman's autodenomination in Conambo refers to her early enculturation, that people in Conambo emphatically identify themselves by stating "*I* am Quichua" or "*I* am Achuar" in daily social contexts, and I am referring to that particular aspect of a woman's ethnicity, although the concept of ethnicity has more dimensions.

Forty chicha bowls made and used in the households of Conambo comprise the analyzed sample of pottery. Bowls made to sell to me were excluded from the analysis. The sample represents 60% of the total inventory of chicha bowls in Conambo during the 1992–93 field season; 21 of the 25 households; and 30 of the 35 potters. These bowls were made by potters who were Achuar politically and ethnically ($N = 17$), Quichua politically and ethnically ($N = 12$), Achuar politically but Quichua ethnically ($N = 4$), and Quichua politically but Achuar ethnically ($N = 7$). The fact that a portion of the sample represents "mixed" potters allowed me to evaluate the importance of a potter's ethnicity and political affiliation as separate variables of social identity in association with pottery style.

The analysis of pottery style focused on variables that are commonly studied by archaeologists to identify and evaluate differences between groups: form, symmetry, framing lines, line width, color, and certain design elements (e.g., see Graves, 1982; Hegmon, 1995; Rice, 1987; Washburn, 1983; Wycoff, 1990). For each nominal variable of style, its significance of association with political affiliation and ethnic identity was evaluated on the basis of the likelihood ratio chi-square. For scalar variables, a t-test was used to determine the significance of difference between the measurements, comparing Achuar and Quichua bowls in terms of the political affiliation and ethnic identity of the pottery makers.

Form

All 40 beer bowls in the sample represent the same functional class and the same size class, the standard *pining* (A) or *mucahua* (Q) made for daily use. Three forms are represented: common (35 of 40), footed (3 of 40), and calabash shape (2 of 40) (Fig. 3). In Conambo, all potters make the common form, any potter may make a footed bowl, but only Achuar women produce the calabash shape, according to both interview and pottery data. In this sample, however, the noncommon forms are few in number, and there is no significant statistical difference between the Achuar and the Quichua bowls in the frequency of the three forms, based on political affiliation or ethnic identity. Likewise, there are no significant differences between Achuar and Quichua bowls in standard measurements of rim diameter and vessel height, based on the *t*-test, despite variation in form.

Symmetry

In this analysis, design symmetry refers to the arrangements of the primary design elements along horizontal and vertical axes, following the standardized system of description and notation used by Washburn and Crowe (1988). Symmetry was analyzed in the main design field on bowl interiors and exteriors. The sample of 40 chicha bowls exhibits five classes of symmetry on bowl interiors (pm11, pmm2, pma2, irregular, and two-dimensional) and six classes of symmetry on bowl exteriors (pm11, pmm2, pma2, irregular, p1m1, and p111). The correlations between ethnicity and symmetry are not significant. Political affiliation correlates significantly with interior symmetry ($\chi^2 = 10.682$, df $= 4$, $p = .030$). Quichua-allied women tend to use pmm2, pma2, and irregular symmetry patterns on bowl interiors more frequently than Achuar-allied women, whereas Achuar-allied women distinguish their bowls by their preferences for pm11 and two-dimensional symmetry patterns on bowl interiors.

Framing Lines

Framing lines delineate the boundaries of the area to be decorated on a vessel. Four framing lines were analyzed in terms of their presence or absence: the upper and lower lines delineating the main design field on the interior and exterior of the chicha bowls. The lower framing line on bowl interiors correlates significantly with political affiliation ($\chi^2 = 5.240$, df $= 1$, $p = .022$) as well as ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 4.455$, df $= 1$, $p = .035$), but more strongly with the former. The presence of a lower framing line on bowl interiors is associated with Quichua political affiliation and ethnicity, whereas the absence is associated with Achuar political affiliation and ethnicity. Additionally, the lower framing line on bowl exteriors correlates significantly with political affiliation ($\chi^2 = 3.966$, df $= 1$, $p = .046$), but not

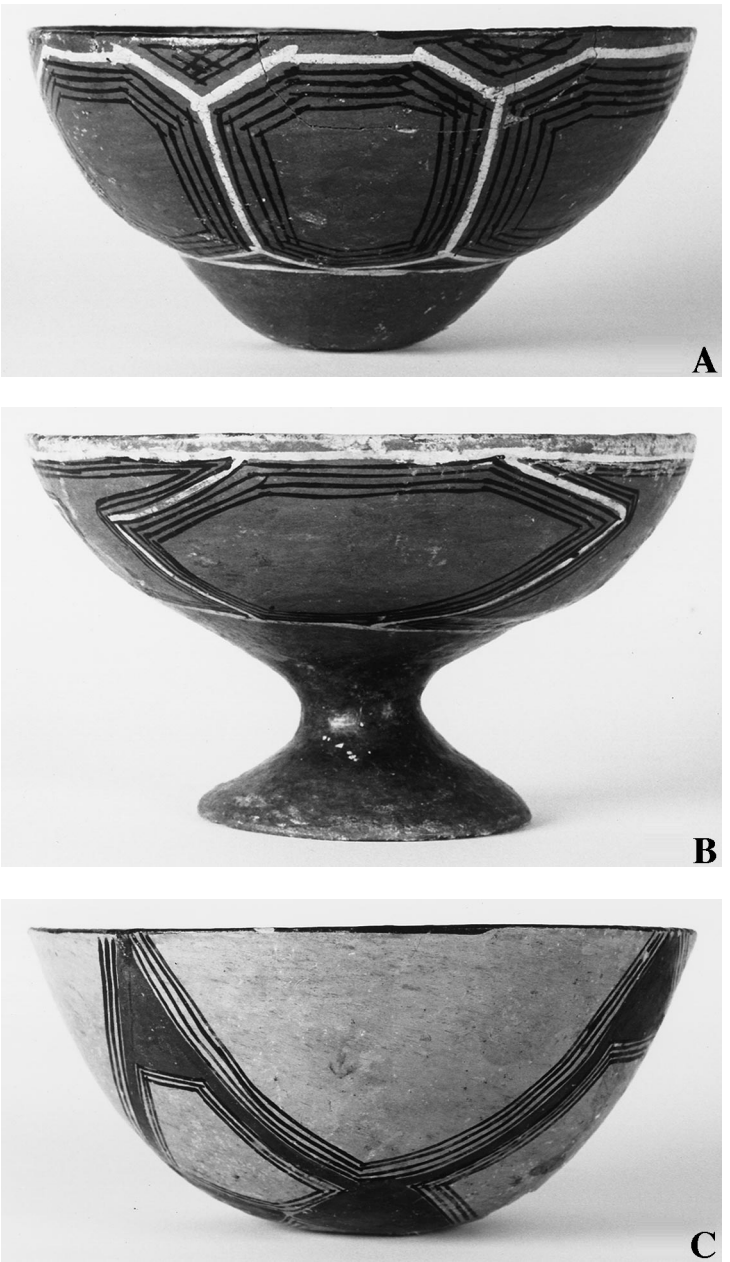

Fig. 3. All 40 beer bowls in the stylistic analysis represent the same functional class and the same size class, the standard *pining* or *mucahua* made for daily use. Three forms are represented: common (a), footed (b), and calabash shape (c).

ethnicity. The presence of a lower framing line on bowl exteriors is associated more frequently with Quichua political affiliation, and the absence is associated more with Achuar political affiliation.

Line Width

Line width was measured in the main design field on bowl interiors and exteriors in terms of the modal width of the lines comprising the primary design elements, which are rectilinear. There are no significant differences between Achuar and Quichua bowls in the modal line width of the primary design elements, based on the *t*-test, in political or ethnic terms.

Color

Six variables of color were analyzed in the main design field: the color of the slip, primary design elements, and secondary design elements on the interior and exterior surfaces. Indigenous categories of pigment color were used: red, white, and black. None of the correlations with ethnicity is significant. Political affiliation correlates significantly with the color of the primary design elements on the interior of chicha bowls ($\chi^2 = 7.811$, df $= 2$, $p = .020$). Quichua-allied women tend to paint white primary design elements on bowl interiors more frequently than Achuar-allied women do; Achuar-allied women use black pigment, whereas Quichua-allied potters do not; and both sides use red in relatively equal proportions.

Design Elements

In the sample of 40 chicha bowls, I have recorded more than 80 design elements, and no motif appears on more than one bowl in the sample. One design element occurs with sufficient frequency to analyze comparably with the other nominal variables: a dot, usually made with the finger. Dots were considered in four ways, depending on their placement in the design structure. The presence or absence of dots was analyzed in the upper (main) and lower design fields on bowl interiors. (Dots were not analyzed on bowl exteriors, because only one bowl exterior had dots.) None of the correlations with ethnicity is significant. Political affiliation correlates significantly with the use of dots in the upper design field on the interior of chicha bowls ($\chi^2 = 5.914$, df $= 1$, $p = .015$). Quichua-allied women incorporate dots into the upper design field more often than Achuar-allied women.

These data consistently indicate that women modify the style of their chicha bowls to correspond to their active political affiliation. Five variables of style are

Table II. Summary of p Scores[a] for Significant Correlations Between Variables of Style and Social Identity

Variable	Ethnic identity	Political identity
Form	—	—
Symmetry	—	0.030
Interior framing lines	0.035	0.022
Exterior framing lines	—	0.046
Line width	—	—
Color	—	0.020
Design elements (dots)	—	0.015

[a] A dash indicates that no significant correlation was found ($p > .050$).

correlated significantly with the political identity of the pottery-maker (symmetry, interior framing line, exterior framing line, color, and presence/absence of dots). Only one variable of style is associated significantly with the ethnic identity of the pottery-maker (interior framing line), and this variable is more strongly associated with political identity. The results are summarized in Table II, and Figs. 4 and 5 depict examples of bowls that typify Achuar and Quichua characteristics of style.

Fig. 4. This bowl was made by a woman who is Achuar ethnically and a member of the Achuar faction. Her bowl embodies five stylistic attributes associated with Achuar-allied potters and none of the stylistic attributes associated with Quichua-allied potters. On the interior of the bowl, the primary design elements (footed triangles) are painted black, the symmetry is pm11, and dots are absent from the main design field; lower framing lines are absent on the interior and exterior of the bowl. Additionally, the absence of an interior lower framing line is characteristic of potters who are ethnically Achuar. Most of the women in Conambo who were shown this bowl agreed that it probably was made by an Achuar potter (75%). This bowl illustrates how a potter's political and ethnic identity may both be signified in her pottery style.

Fig. 5. This bowl was made by a woman who is Achuar ethnically, although she is allied with the Quichua faction. It illustrates how a potter's political identity rather than her ethnic identity may be signified. The bowl embodies five stylistic attributes associated with Quichua-allied potters and none of the stylistic attributes associated with Achuar-allied potters. On the interior of the bowl, the primary design elements (hexagons) are painted white, the symmetry is pmm2, and dots are present in the main design field; lower framing lines are present on the interior and exterior of the bowl. (The bowl's exterior is shown in Fig. 3(a)). Additionally, the presence of an interior lower framing line is characteristic of ethnically Quichua potters. Most of the women in Conambo who were shown this bowl agreed that it probably was made by a Quichua potter (81%).

Tests of Pottery Recognition: Decoding Cues to Political Identity

The foregoing section shows that variables of pottery style in Conambo are correlated statistically with women's political affiliation in two different factions, and these correlations are stronger than the association between ethnicity and style. Here, I present data to establish that women in Conambo accurately perceive cues to political differences in other women's pottery. First, the data provide evidence that women in Conambo decode the style of chicha bowls according to a potter's political faction. By contrast, women perceive cues to ethnic identity less strongly. Furthermore, women make finer distinctions within their own faction, discriminating against members whose political alliances are ambiguous, often perceiving their bowls to be made by women in the "other" faction. These politically ambiguous women have established strong alliances with members of the opposite faction. Therefore, women in Conambo detect stylistic cues to political differences between the two factions and within their own factions. These findings are based on a test of the ability to distinguish chicha bowls as

Quichua or Achuar and on measurements of the similarities of alliances among women.

Decoding Cues to Political Factions

In a test, I asked 28 women in Conambo to individually judge 33 chicha bowls as Quichua or Achuar. The 33 chicha bowls are a subset of the 40 household bowls obtained for stylistic analysis, constituting the subset available to me at the time of the test. No instructions were given as to whether the identification should be based on ethnicity or political affiliation. This gave me a database of approximately 900 judgments, representing a 50% sample of the total inventory of chicha bowls in Conambo, obtained from 21 of the 25 households and 26 of 35 potters. The 33 bowls were made by potters who were Achuar politically and ethnically ($N = 14$), Quichua politically and ethnically ($N = 9$), Achuar politically and Quichua ethnically ($N = 3$), and Quichua politically and Achuar ethnically ($N = 7$). The data were analyzed to determine the degree to which each woman was accurate in her judgments that the bowls were likely made by a Quichua or Achuar woman, and whether women were detecting cues to political or ethnic identity more strongly.

The test of the ability to distinguish chicha bowls as Quichua or Achuar indicates that women accurately perceive cues to political group membership in other women's pottery in Conambo. Overall, women accurately identified the bowls in terms of the potter's political faction. Each bowl was coded according to the political faction of the potter, and a judgment was considered correct or incorrect accordingly. Scores for individual women range from 50 to 85% correct. On average, women were correct in 68% of their judgments, and their accuracy is significantly greater than that predicted by chance (50%), as measured by a t-test ($t = 9.801$, $p = .000$, $N = 28$ informants).

By contrast, women less accurately identified the bowls in terms of the potter's ethnic identity. If each bowl is coded according to the ethnicity of the potter, then the average accuracy of judgments drops to 62%. Scores for individual women range from 44 to 81% correct. On average, these scores are significantly greater than that predicted by chance ($t = 5.480$, $p = .000$, $N = 28$ informants), but they are significantly lower than women's accuracy in terms of the potter's political identity ($t = 2.604$, $p = .015$). The difference in accuracy favoring political identity over ethnicity is based on the strong tendency for informants to judge as Achuar the bowls made by potters who were Achuar-allied but ethnically Quichua, and to judge as Quichua the bowls made by Quichua-allied, ethnically Achuar potters (see also Figs. 4 and 5). Thus, women do perceive cues to ethnic identity in the bowls of other women in Conambo, but the cues to political faction are stronger.

The fact that women can identify chicha bowls accurately as Quichua or Achuar cannot be attributed simply to the consultants' familiarity with the pottery of socially close women. Overall, women were *less* accurate in identifying

the bowls of their own political in-group members (mean = 61.24% correct), compared to the bowls of political out-group members (mean = 71.52% correct). The difference is statistically significant, as measured by a t-test ($t = -2.240$, $p = 0.034$, $N = 26$ potters).

Decoding Cues to Political Ambiguity

What factors distinguish the potters whose bowls are clearly recognized by other women, compared with potters whose bowls are more ambiguous? In general, women were more likely to categorize correctly a bowl made by a woman of the "other" faction. This suggests that women accurately detect signs of "otherness." By comparison, informants made more errors in categorizing the bowls made by women in their own faction as Quichua or Achuar. In these judgments, some women's chicha bowls are consistently and accurately identified in terms of the political faction of the potter, whereas the judgments regarding other women's bowls are no better than chance. Here, I examine that variability to identify potential explanations for variation in pottery style within groups, from a political perspective. The analysis indicates that potters who have established strong cross-coalitional ties tend to produce pottery bowls that are often categorized as "other" by women in their own faction. By comparison, a potter who shares political networks primarily with women in her own faction produces pottery that is identified accurately. These fine distinctions are made by women in each faction, who detect signs of political ambiguity, or mixed loyalties, among their own factional members, when viewing their pottery beer bowls.

Quantitative ethnographic data were collected in 1992–1993 to measure alliance similarities in Conambo, to represent the degree to which a woman had established cross-coalitional ties or shared political networks primarily with other women in her own faction. A triadic comparison task (Weller and Romney, 1988, pp. 31–36) was used to calculate alliance similarities (cf. Patton, 1996, 2000) among women. In Conambo, all adults have slightly different sets of alliances that, to a greater or lesser degree, overlap the alliances of other adults and cross-cut the factional divide. These political networks underlie and integrate the main structure of the two political factions, shown in Fig. 2. Two measurements of alliance similarity were calculated for each woman in terms of how closely her alliances correspond to the alliances of other women in her faction (in-group alliance similarity) and how closely her alliances correspond to the alliances of women in the opposite faction (out-group alliance similarity). Fifteen women were asked to judge the relative strengths of the alliances among 27 of the 30 married and widowed women in Conambo. Informants were shown photographs of each woman, presented randomly in sets of three. The three women excluded from the task were omitted because their photographs were not available at the time of the study. Informants were asked to judge which of the three dyadic relationships represented

in each triad was the strongest. Each informant was shown photographs of three women at a time and asked "if there were a conflict involving these three women, which two women would be most likely to form an alliance against the third?" In a triad of individuals A, B, and C, if the alliance AB is chosen, it represents the informant's judgment that the alliance AB is stronger than the alliances AC or BC. Each informant made judgments of the relative strengths of 54 dyads for a total of 810 judgments for all informants. The alliance strength between each pair of women were calculated by dividing the number of times the pair was judged to have the strongest alliance, divided by the number of pairing opportunities, which is equivalent to the number of times the pair appeared in a triad. Alliance similarity scores were calculated for each pair of women by means of a Pearson's correlation coefficient to compare the strength of each woman's relationship with every other woman in the study. In-group alliance similarity scores were calculated for each woman by averaging the alliance similarity scores that represent that woman's alliances with other women of her faction. Out-group alliance similarity scores were calculated for each woman by averaging the alliance similarity scores that represent that woman's alliances with women of the opposite faction.

For this analysis, women's judgments of chicha bowls as Quichua or Achuar were analyzed to determine the degree to which the each potter's bowl was identified accurately in political terms. If a potter was represented by multiple bowls in the test, the accuracy measurements for those bowls were averaged.

In general, a woman's clear alliance with other members of her coalition is signified clearly in her pottery bowls. A woman whose political networks differ least from the majority of women in her faction produces pottery that is categorized most accurately by other women in her faction. There is a significant positive correlation between the measurements of each woman's in-group alliance similarity and the percentage of women in her faction who accurately identified her pottery as Quichua or Achuar in the tests, or in-group accuracy (Pearson's $r = 0.512$, $p = .018$, $N = 21$ potters for whom bowls and political data were available). Such women share few alliances with the opposing group. In fact, the inverse relationship between each woman's in-group alliance similarities and out-group alliance similarities is significant (Pearson's $r = -0.704$, $p = .000$, $N = 27$ women).

Similarly, a woman's political ambiguity is signified in her pottery. In each faction, there are women whose alliances with other women in their group are somewhat tenuous. Compared with other women in their faction, they have established political networks that overlap more extensively with women in the opposite group. The data show that the bowls of these politically ambiguous women are less accurately identified by members of their own group. There is a significant negative correlation between the measurements of each woman's out-group alliance similarity and the percentage of women in her faction who accurately identified her pottery as Quichua or Achuar in the tests, or in-group accuracy (Pearson's $r = -0.650$, $p = .0001$, $N = 21$ potters).

In-group political variation is perceived primarily by in-group members. There is no significant correlation between out-group accuracy scores for each potter and the potter's in-group alliance similarity scores or out-group alliance similarity scores. Therefore, in-group political variation does not significantly affect the decisions of out-group members when they judge bowls made by potters in the opposing faction. This means that a woman who has established stronger ties with the opposite group does not tend to produce bowls that are more likely to be "claimed" by the opposite group. Therefore, she is signifying "otherness" to members of her own coalition, but she is still signifying "otherness" to members of the opposite coalition. In other words, her bowls differ perceptibly from the bowls made by potters in both factions.

Importantly, such stylistic idiosyncrasy, sometimes labeled "assertive style" (Wiessner, 1983) or "panache" (MacDonald, 1990), has a distinct referent in Conambo: it refers to the prevailing style of in-group members vis a vis differentiation from that style, and it refers to the ambiguity of the individual's relationships within the group. As Wiessner (1997, p. 160) has argued, "personal identity has not been constructed in a vacuum, but in relation to surrounding others," and "personal stylistic expression can be used as a measure of affiliative interaction." Thus, stylistic variation can convey important information in close social relations (Hegmon, 1995, p. 13).

The fact that certain women produce pottery that is ambiguous cannot be attributed to their lack of knowledge of the cues to signification of political identity. There is no significant correlation between a woman's accuracy in the tests and the clarity of her pottery style, as measured by the percentage of women who identified her pottery accurately. Therefore, in general, women whose pottery bowls are ambiguous understand the differences between Achuar and Quichua pottery as well as other women do. This suggests that, at the level of practical consciousness (cf. Giddens, 1979), the differences they express are intentional.

DISCUSSION: POTTERY STYLE AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES

Generally, style has been defined as a "way of doing things" (see Hegmon, 1992, p. 518, 1998, p. 265), a set of conceptual rules (Friedrich, 1970; Hardin, 1977, 1983; Muller, 1979; Washburn and Crowe, 1988), a choice among functionally equivalent alternatives (Sackett, 1990) that is culturally constrained (Hosler, 1996; Lechtman, 1977; Stark, 1998) and guided by "learned dispositions" (Dietler and Herbich, 1998), and a means by which individuals communicate social identity (Wiessner, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1997; Wobst, 1977). Arguably, none of these approaches is mutually exclusive. In Conambo, pottery style is multivocal, and its meanings may be understood from different vantages. In this study, I have approached pottery style mainly as symbolic communication of women's social identity, particularly their political identity. The data indicate that women in

Conambo signify their active political alliances in their pottery style and that other women accurately perceive those cues to political affiliation.

From even disparate perspectives, it has been argued that the purpose of communication by an actor is to persuade, influence, and manipulate the receiver, who develops strategies to resist manipulation (e.g., Cronk, 1999, pp. 91–94; Dawkins and Krebs, 1977; Foucault, 1977; Hodder, 1982). Considerable attention has been drawn to the need to understand the intentions, strategies, and meanings of social actors engaged in the manipulation of symbolic forms in archaeology (e.g., Clark, 1996, p. 53; Hodder, 1982, 1986; Schiffer, 1999, p. 6) and general social theory (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979; Godelier, 1986; Moore, 1986; Ortner, 1984). Thus, stylistic behavior, like other forms of symbolic behavior, may be seen as part of a motivated social strategy. From this perspective, style is more than a way of doing, a set of rules, a simple choice among culturally constrained alternatives, or a means of communicating social identity. It is a set of rules to be manipulated, and a set of choices to be made, in the negotiation of social identity. The question then becomes, what are the motives and strategies of the actors?

According to theoretical approaches in archaeology, an individual's group identity is established partly through conformity with established rules or conventions of style. Thus, an individual may create a positive self-image by expressing a sense of belonging in a group (Wiessner, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1997), communicate oppositional identity as a silent symbol of resistance to dominant groups (e.g., Hodder, 1986), or communicate group identity to socially distant others to establish a basis for interaction (Wobst, 1977). Each of these approaches to conformity considers the individual as a member of a social category, such as gender, class, or ethnic group, and therefore focuses mainly on explaining differences *between* groups, rather than *within* groups (cf. Cohen, 1994, pp. 118–132; Wiessner, 1989, 1997). In this sense, stylistic similarity within groups results primarily from signifying social differences between groups. Signification of difference is considered most important at social boundaries and in situations of intergroup conflict, where "it will be maintained *in contrast* to similar signals of surrounding social groups" (Wobst, 1977, p. 329). This likely provides a partial explanation for the differences between Achuar and Quichua pottery in Conambo. However, I argue here that it may be productive to think carefully about conformity and difference in terms of the need to signify political alliance to socially *close* people *within* groups, particularly in a shifting political landscape.

The importance of providing strong, clear cues to political alliance is fairly straightforward. In Conambo, a woman's clear alliance with other members of her faction is signified in her pottery bowls to insiders as well as outsiders. By communicating in-group membership to insiders, a person asserts herself as an ally, a person willing to enter into cooperative and reciprocal relationships and interested in deriving the benefits and bearing the potential costs of being a member of the group (see also Dunbar *et al.*, 1999; Levine and Campbell, 1972; Wiessner, 1997). Thus, within groups, individuals may conform with other members' style to

reinforce the perception that they are insiders—in-group members—specifically, to signify alliance. This strategy should be important in small-scale, segmental societies, where alliances may be questioned and where fissioning, conflict avoidance, and recruitment result in frequent defections and realignments.

The importance of ambiguity requires further consideration. The profile of women in Conambo who produce ambiguous pottery includes a certain set of behaviors. These women have established strong cross-coalitional political alliances with other women. Often, they work to build political consensus and mediate between factions in times of conflict. Their households benefit from the ability to exchange meat, draw labor, arrange marriages, and establish fictive kin relations across the political divide. Several have established exceptionally rich gardens through cross-coalitional networks of propagule exchange. All of these factors may contribute to the status of a woman and her husband in the community and may enhance the well-being of her family. However, it appears that strong cross-coalitional alliances may be maintained by women only at a cost. In fact, they may *need* to maintain strong cross-coalitional alliances, *because* of their political differences with women in their own factions. Minimally, the dubiousness of their political ties may weaken their in-group alliances. In any case, in a conflict, these women may not be supported strongly by their own factional members because of their political differences, and the need for them to ensure a future set of alliances across the factional divide may be very real in the event of political problems. In Conambo, where the signs of political ambiguity are understood primarily by in-group members, the potential advantage of communicating political ambiguity may lie in the subtle messages, "I am unsure of your alliance," "My alliance can not be taken for granted," and "I am willing to stand without you," cueing others to reconfirm their alliances. Studies of political factionalism suggest that factional leaders need to constantly renegotiate the support of such peripheral members, often by engaging in transactions of goods and services, to dissuade their defection or political support of the opposing group (Attwood, 1974; Bailey, 1968; Salisbury, 1977, pp. 114–117; Salisbury and Silverman, 1977, pp. 7–10; Silverman, 1977). In fact, between 1993 and 1998, the households of two such women in Conambo defected to the opposite faction in a period of political volatility, and another left Conambo to establish a new community downriver. Thus, in Conambo, ambiguity in pottery style may be understood as part of a motivated political strategy that signifies the household's pursuit of cross-coalitional alliances and political ambiguity. This strategy may be risky, and it involves both costs and benefits.

It has been suggested that "In hierarchical societies, where social and political success are based on skill in manipulating social relationships, direct, unambiguous messages may be a liability" (Jones and Hegmon, 1991, p. 3). This may be more true in small-scale, egalitarian societies, in the absence of institutionalized positions of authority, where social and political success are dependent almost solely on skill in manipulating relationships. In these societies, for some individuals, it may be advantageous and strategic to maintain a degree of ambiguity in

signification of one's relationships, given the fluidity of political boundaries. For other people, however, a more reliable strategy may be clear signification of group membership. These strategies of signification represent active political processes through which social identity is constructed and negotiated and social boundaries are maintained, despite the passing of people across those boundaries (cf. Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1994). I argue that it is precisely in small-scale societies, where politics are consensus-driven, pottery is made in the domestic context for domestic use, and there is relatively little separation between public and domestic contexts, that we should expect to find evidence of signification of political identity in domestic pottery style.

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