

Tadesse Jaleta Jirata

Children and Oral Tradition Among the Guji-Oromo in Southern Ethiopia

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, June 2013

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management
Norwegian Centre for Child Research



NTNU – Trondheim
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Preface

Initially, the title of the thesis was ‘Children and storytelling: A local conceptualization of childhood through children’s oral narratives in south Ethiopia’. However, after the first round of fieldwork, this title was changed to ‘Children¹ and oral tradition among the Guji-Oromo in southern Ethiopia’. The reason for the change was twofold. Firstly, during the first round of fieldwork, I discovered that not only storytelling but also riddling was popular among the Guji children, and both are closely connected to children’s everyday life. As a result, I decided to include riddling as part of the study. Further, I realized that the term ‘storytelling’, as it was presented in the title, does not clearly show that the thesis is about oral storytelling and that it deals with the process of telling and listening to folktales. With the aim of achieving clarity in this regard and handling oral storytelling and riddling under one concept, I preferred the term oral tradition. Following Ben Amos (1982), Finnegan (1970), Finnegan (1992), Ilutsik (2002) and Harvilahti (2003), I sometimes use ‘oral tradition’ interchangeably with folklore and oral literature.

In the title of the thesis I use the term ‘Guji-Oromo’, but in all chapters and articles (except article four), I use the term ‘Guji people’. The term ‘Guji-Oromo’ is used specifically to follow the tradition in literature, the tradition that authors apply to denote that the Guji are members of the Oromo society, although these days this tradition is becoming obsolete because it is an obvious fact that the Guji people are Oromo and speak the Oromo language. Thus, in the body of the thesis, I have described how the Guji are part of the Oromo society, and use the term ‘Guji people’ just for the sake of orthographic simplicity. I would like to underline here that the term ‘Guji people’ denotes the same concept as ‘Guji-Oromo’.

The thesis explores oral tradition as part of children’s (girls’ and boys’) everyday life, which encompasses children’s work, play, school and social interactions and is based on six articles. Four of these articles were peer reviewed and published (three articles in international peer reviewed journals and one article as a book chapter) and two articles were peer reviewed and accepted for publication international journals. The following are the titles of the articles along with the sources they are published in or to be published in. Article One ‘Changes of

¹ The term ‘children’ in this thesis refers to both boys and girls .

position cause changes of relation: Insights for reflexive ethnographic research with children², was published in the online journal known as *Childhoods Today*, the biannual peer reviewed journal published by the Centre of Child Research at the University of Sheffield. Article Two 'The place of children among the Guji people in Southern Ethiopia: school, work, play' was presented at the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD) Congress, Lusaka, 18-22 July 2010 and is accepted for publication in *Children's Geography*, a peer reviewed journal (published by Taylor & Francis). Article Three 'The roles of Oromo-speaking children in storytelling tradition in Ethiopia', has been peer reviewed and accepted for publication in a journal known *Research in African Literature*, a quarterly peer reviewed journal edited at the Centre of African Studies at Indiana University (published by Indiana University Press). Article Four 'Children as interpreters of culture: Producing meanings from folktales in southern Ethiopia' was published in the *Journal of Folklore Research*, a quarterly, peer reviewed journal edited at the Institute of Folklore at Indiana University (published by Indiana University Press). Article Five 'Learning through play: An ethnographic study of children's riddling in Ethiopia' was published in *Africa*, a quarterly peer reviewed journal of the International African Institute (published by Cambridge University Press). Article Six 'Storytelling, local knowledge, and formal education: Bridging the gap between everyday life and school' was peer reviewed and published as a chapter in a book titled *Childhood and Local Knowledge in Ethiopia: Rights, Livelihoods and Generations*, edited by Tatek Abebe and Anne Trine Kjørholt. I am the sole author in the three of the articles (Article One, Article Three and Article Four) and authored the other three articles jointly with colleagues: Article Two was co-authored with Professor Anne Trine Kjørholt, Article Three with Associate Professor Jan Ketil Simonsen and Article Six with Dessalegn Benti, a lecturer at Dilla University and a researcher in the NUFU project, the project to which my thesis was affiliated. I am the first author in the three of the co-authored articles.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to a number of people and institutions for their help and support during the fieldwork and writing of the thesis. First of all, it is my pleasure to owe genuine appreciation to the efforts of my supervisors, Professor Anne Trine Kjørholt and

² This article was the winner of the best article award of the Center of the Child Research at University of Sheffield in 2012.

Associate Professor Jan Ketil Simonsen. Anne Trine's unreserved support across all paths of my study and insightful critique of my articles and chapters pushed me to read more and benefit from the body of knowledge in the social studies of childhood, which in turn contributed to development of this thesis. Anne Trine, I have deep thanks to you for guiding me into the ethics, methods and theories of interdisciplinary child research. Jan Ketil's insightful and comprehensive comments opened my eyes to the role of anthropology in interdisciplinary social studies of childhood. In the process of authoring the joint article, he put me in touch not only with different research approaches but also with analytical and writing systems in social science.

I would, also, like to extend my gratitude to the Guji children and parents, elderly persons, school teachers and development workers whose genuine participation in the fieldwork activities made my time in the field enjoyable and successful. I had a genuine family affection from Udde Netere and his family, Shumbullo Arbore and his family, Mormma Galalcha and his family and Nugusse Tullu and his family. Abbebe Dama, Alemayehu Galato and Tesfaye Jarso helped me a lot and without their assistance in the field it would have been very difficult for me to learn the details of the rural Guji people's ways of life. I have also deep gratitude for Geremew and Worku (both are social workers in the Lutheran World Federation at Abaya District) for their support in providing me with a vehicle for travelling to the remote villages of the Guji people during my wider field observation. Without their assistance, my visits to those far villages of the Guji people would not have been possible. All of them deserve my sincere gratitude.

My deepest gratitude also goes to my wife, Tsega and my mother, Ebbisee, who had been the forces behind my efforts and success in completing this thesis. Had it not been for the encouragement and care I received from my wife, I could not have gone through the challenges of my PhD studies. Besides caring for our little baby-girl, Debora, she filled me with motivation to finish my study on time. The other members of my family also deserve my recognition. Particularly, I would like to extend my appreciation to my parents and in-laws as they were the engine behind my achievements. My friends (both abroad and at home) deserve my gratitude for their consistent encouragement throughout my studies. I owe especial gratitude for Ashe & Emuti, Ase & Chaltu, and all my friends in Trondheim. All colleagues at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research are also indirect contributors to the development

of this thesis. They gave me unforgettable love and friendship during my four years' stay at the Centre and I am very grateful to all of them. Above all, Professor Vebjørng Tingstad, Barbara Jean Rogers, Line Hellem, Associate Professor Tatek Abebe and Professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen deserve my sincere gratitude for their unreserved help in managing my academic and administrative challenges. I have deep gratitude for Anette Moen at International office. Her genuine assistance with things related to my scholarship was important for my successful progress during my study. I would also like to thank the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management at NTNU, the SIU, the Lånekassen and Dilla University for providing me with material and financial support for my stays in Norway, and during the fieldwork in Ethiopia.

Tadesse Jaleta Jirata

Norwegian Centre for Child Research, NTNU

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Summary of the Thesis

This thesis, titled *Children and Oral Tradition among the Guji-Oromo in Southern Ethiopia*, explores the oral play culture and everyday life of children in a rural context in Ethiopia. With its focus on Guji people in southern Ethiopia, it presents how children (girls and boys in the age range of 7-14 years) participate in performance; interpretation and transmission of oral tradition and through this process learn about their social world. The thesis is part of the research and capacity building project known as *Children, Young People and Local Knowledge in Ethiopia and Zambia*. Data were obtained through one year of fieldwork that involved ethnographic methods such as participant observation, ethnographic interviews, in-depth-interviews and focus group discussions.

The thesis is based on the perspectives of the interdisciplinary social study of childhood and social construction of oral tradition, and the findings were presented through six articles, four of which have been published and two accepted for publication as articles in journals and a chapter in a book. Through a synthesis of the findings from each article, the thesis presents four central results. First it is seen that children play active roles in the practices of oral tradition. They produce, interpret and transmit oral tradition and through such practices they play, compete and share knowledge with each other as well as with adults. Second, it was seen that the everyday life of rural children (which refers to children among the Guji people) encompasses diverse places of children`s social interaction (play interaction) –cattle herding fields, home and school, the dynamic social positions and practices of children and multigenerational interactions of children–children interacting with each other and with adults. Third, the thesis demonstrates oral tradition provides children with contexts through which they can enhance their formal and informal learning. Fourth, it is argued that in order to understand children across these dynamic social contexts, the more effective research approach is that of reflexive ethnography. Based on these findings, the thesis concludes that oral tradition is the means through which children participate in the process of knowledge production and transmission and that children link oral tradition to their everyday life and make sense of their social world through it.

Acronyms

AIDS: Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome

HIV: Human Immuno Virus

FDRE: The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

SIU: Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education

NTNU: Norwegian University of Science and Technology

NUFU: The Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

USA: United States of America

US: United States

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Article Three: The roles of Oromo-speaking children in storytelling tradition in Ethiopia, *Research in African Literatures* (forthcoming)

Article Four: Children as Interpreters of Culture: Producing Meanings from Folktales in Southern Ethiopia, *Journal of Folklore Research*, 48(3), 2011

Article Five: Learning through Play: An Ethnographic Study of Children`s Riddling in Ethiopia, *Africa*: 82(2), 2012

Article Six: Storytelling, Local Knowledge, and Formal Education: Bridging the Gap between Everyday Life and School. In Abebe and Kjørholt (eds) *Childhood and Local Knowledge in Ethiopia: Rights, Livelihoods and Generations*, 2013

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- Appendix 1: Sample pictures from the fieldwork
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I explore how children perform oral tradition as part of their everyday life. I present oral tradition as a dynamic cultural practice that the children perform as part of their work, play, education and social interactions (interaction with adults as well as with each other). Positioning my research in the interdisciplinary social study of childhood, I emphasize how the Guji boys and girls in Ethiopia perform the two forms of oral tradition—storytelling¹ and riddling²—as interactive play and interpret it as the means of both learning about and organizing their social worlds. In other words, I analyse these forms of oral tradition as interactive events among children and between children and adults; which means children's culture is embedded in the children's web of social practices and their relationships with adults in everyday life. Through such analyses, I demonstrate children's competence in interpretive reproduction and interpretation of folktales and riddles as well as their use of these forms of oral tradition to learn about their social world and negotiate with adults' understanding of it. The reasons for my focus on storytelling and riddling are twofold: first, these forms of oral tradition are parts of children's everyday play and peer interaction; thus, are more popular with children than adults and, second, both forms involve interactive and interpretive processes in which I can explore how children perform and interpret oral tradition and through such processes make sense of their social world.

My motivation for studying children through oral tradition was rooted in my previous research experiences among Oromo-speaking communities in southern Ethiopia. My first engagement with the subject was during my Master's thesis on Guji people's oral tradition in which I analysed how Guji adults creatively use their proverbs to unfold their ideas, values and beliefs in intra-adult oral communications (Jirata, 2004). The study involved participant observation in adults' everyday conversations and recording of the context of the conversations, point of the conversations and proverbs used in the conversations. In-depth interviews were used to elicit the user's interpretation of the proverbs. It was in the course of

this study that I first conducted ethnographic fieldwork among rural communities in Ethiopia. The second experience was my study in the same setting but with its focus on the social changes that endangered the performance and transmission of Guji folksongs (Jirata, 2005). Through in-depth interviews with three generations (grandparents, parents and children) I observed how expansion of Christianity compelled the Guji people to undervalue the performance of folksongs. In my next research on the oral tradition of the Guji and Borana peoples (both are Oromo speaking communities) I observed oral tradition as means of resolving interpersonal as well as intercultural conflicts (Jirata, 2008). Through participant observation in the ritual of conflict resolution, which is known as *Gondoro*, I documented how the Guji and Borana peoples use oral narratives—narratives of blessing, prayer and cursing—to mitigate their inter-ethnic conflicts. All of these studies were parts of the research projects sponsored by Dilla University where I had been working as a lecturer and researcher since 2000. The fourth study focused on the issues of children in Oromo proverbs; in this study I investigated how childhood was represented as a phase of immaturity, through proverbial expressions (Jirata, 2007). It was a research that involved collection of proverbs from conversations among adults and connected me to the body of literature in childhood studies. It initiated me into thinking about the place of children in oral tradition. In this study, I discussed how the Guji people employ their oral tradition to regulate hierarchical intergenerational relationships through placing children in subordinate social positions. The following are the English versions of some of the proverbs discussed in the study:

A child and a dog instigate a clash in a parish
A contented child scoffs at his father
A child doesn't dread God but dreads being reprimanded
If you eat with children, they declare sameness with you
If you talk equally with children, they feel that they are equal to you
Propinquity with children breeds contempt

In the process of reading the existing literature to substantiate my arguments in the stated studies, I came to realize that in Ethiopia, childhood and children's participation in the practices of oral tradition has been neglected as an area of research. My identity as an Oromo-speaking person also enthused me to research about the Oromo oral tradition which I lived with and participated in since my early childhood. As a rural child, I grew up hearing folktales

and riddles from my grandmother at home during night times and sharing these forms of oral tradition with my siblings and friends during day times spent in cattle herding. Such childhood practices were common for all children in the rural areas, particularly among the Oromo-speaking children whom I knew as an insider. However, after reading studies on African oral tradition, I found out that there is discrepancy between my childhood experiences and research information on children's participation in the performance of Oromo oral tradition. This discrepancy has revealed to me that children's place in the production and reproduction of oral tradition has not been adequately observed and documented. This gave me the idea for the thesis, which became part of the larger research and capacity building project, 'Children, Young People and Local knowledge in Ethiopia and Zambia (2007-2011)'.³ This project was based on collaboration between researchers in three universities (the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Norway, Dilla University in Ethiopia and the University of Zambia in Zambia). It aimed at placing local knowledge for producing cross-cultural information about children and young people in the context of development, as is indicated in the following quotation:

This project aims to generate knowledge about children and young people's role in economic, social and cultural (re-)production in different contexts: within households, networks of relatives, local communities, schools as well as in the wider society. Children's perspectives and experiences will be a main focus of our multi-disciplinary collaboration. A particular emphasis is on the various ways in which children and young people might contribute to poverty reduction strategies.⁴

By focusing on children's roles in oral tradition, which pertains to their participation in production and reproduction of local knowledge, my thesis contributes to attainment of the aim of this project, which is the documentation of children's local knowledge, perspectives and experiences.

³ This project was led by Professor Anne Trine, the director of the Norwegian Centre for Child Research at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (2007-2012), Dr. Fikre Dessalegne from Dilla University (2007-2011) and Mr. Berihanu Belayneh from Dilla University (in 2012). The project was funded by the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation for Education (SIU), and ran from 2007 to 2012.

⁴ This text is quoted from NUFU project document, 'Children, young people and local knowledge in Ethiopia and Zambia (2007-2011)'.

As elaborated by scholars such as Cohen (1989), Sackey (1991), Nogueira (2003), Rosenberg (1987), Thom (2003) and Vansina (1971), oral tradition is an integral part of culture and everyday life of people. Finnegan (1992), Mhando (2008) and Simiyu (1994) built on this notion by asserting that oral tradition has a cultural and social base and thus constitutes a duality of both oral practices and processes. The concept of ‘oral practice’ signifies oral tradition as comprising cultural genres that include myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, blessing, curses, insults, folk songs and folk beliefs. The concept of ‘oral process’ denotes oral tradition as events of social interaction and entails performances such as storytelling, riddling, singing, dancing, joking, and chanting. Thus, oral tradition can be understood as cultural practices produced and reproduced through oral interactions. In line with this argument storytelling refers to oral presentation of folktales through direct communication between a teller (telling) and audience (listening and responding through gestures, smiling, laughter and feelings) (Argenti, 2010; Finnegan, 2007; Mello, 2001)⁵ and riddling stands for practice of telling and interpreting riddles in which the teller states a riddle and a listener interprets it (Njoroge, 1994; Noss, 2006; Roberts and Forman (1971)).⁶ I obtained the data presented and discussed in the thesis through ethnographic fieldwork that involved children and adults (parents, grandparents, teachers and elderly persons) of the Guji people and analysed it based on the social constructionism (centring on perspectives in the interdisciplinary social study of childhood and the social construction of oral tradition).

In this introductory chapter, I first review research on folklore/ oral tradition and Ethiopian childhood. Following this, I explain the problem on which the study is based with my emphasis on problematizing the inadequacy of the existing research. Third, I present the questions and objectives that direct the study. Finally, I describe the way contents of the thesis have been structured.

1.1. Children and Oral Tradition: Reviewing Existing Research

Literature on children’s folklore/oral tradition is rich, though it is more concentrated in USA and Europe. In this subsection, I explore the major studies on children’s folklore/oral tradition in USA and Europe as well as in Africa, with an emphasis on illuminating how my project

⁵ See Article Three, Article Four and Article Six for details

⁶ See Article Five for details

will contribute to the area of knowledge and understanding that is not well addressed by these studies. In my presentation of children and oral tradition in Africa, I focus on discussing the major studies on African oral tradition and through such discussion show how studies on African oral tradition neglect and underestimate the role of children in the production and transmission of this form of African culture. Through discussion of the major studies in Ethiopian childhood, I explore the extent to which research with children have addressed issues relating to children`s oral tradition.

1.1.1. The Study of Children`s Oral Tradition in USA and Europe

In USA and Europe, children`s oral tradition is commonly termed as children`s folklore.⁷ What was called folklore is similar to what has been discussed by Cohen (1989), Harvilahti (2003), Okafor (2004), Nogueira (2003), Rosenberg (1987), Thom (2003), Vansina (1971), Finnegan (1992), Mhando (2008) and Simiyu (1994) as oral tradition in Africa and other parts of the world. For instance, Lauri Harvilahti, in his article `Folklore and oral tradition` used the terms `folklore` and `oral tradition` to refer to orally transmitted, shared and tradition-based creations of a cultural community (Harvilahti, 2003: 1). He presents oral tradition and folklore as similar concepts and uses the terms interchangeably. Following this trend, in this thesis, I use both terms synonymously to express oral knowledge that children share with each other and with adults. In the context of this thesis both oral tradition and folklore include the folktales, riddles, legends, games, songs and rhymes that children perform with each other as well as share with adults.

Mouritsen (2002) states that the study of children`s folklore as children`s culture flourished in the US and Europe at the end of the 19th century, underlying the recognition of children as not only knowledge receivers but also knowledge producers. It was parallel to the emergence of a new paradigm in child research where children were constructed as social actors with their own peer culture as well as in a social world they share with adults (Corsaro, 1985; James et al., 1998). The concept of children`s folklore thus pertains to the notion of children as social actors, which has been a key perspective in the social studies of childhood. In emphasizing this concept Tucker (2008: 1-2) states that `children`s folklore is created and shared by children`. In the study of children`s folklore, as also observed by Mechling (1986), children are understood as having their own oral tradition that they create out of their

⁷ Harvilahti (2003) and Okafor (2004)

immediate social environments and recreate through their interactions with adults and each other.

The pillar in the study of children's folklore which was the research work of Opie and Opie (1959) documents the lore of school children in England and demonstrates that children are experts in production and reproduction of their folklore. Opie and Opie (1959) discuss aggregates of lore collected from school boys and girls in Britain with the aim of introducing genres under rubrics such as *just for fun*, *wit and repartee*, *guile*, *riddles*, *parody and impropriety*, *topical rhymes*, *code of oral legislation*, *nicknames and epithets*, *jeers and torments*, *half-belief*, *children's calendar*, *occasional customs* and *pranks*. Under these rubrics, Opie and Opie describe the various forms of children's rhymes (satirical rhymes, nonsense rhythms, puns, tongue twisters, tales, hymns and nursery rhymes); jokes, tricky expressions and riddles (true riddles, rhyming riddles, punning riddles and catch riddles), songs (victory songs, heroic songs, scout and guide songs and popular songs); and naming (nicknames, other people's names, school dinners, ice creams), among others. Based on the material collected from children, Opie and Opie argue that these forms of folklore are distinct for children and assert that there is a realm of children's culture that is different from adult culture. This argument was shared and continued by the later studies in children's folklore, some of which are *American Children's Folklore* (1988) by Simon J. Bronner, *Children's Folklore: A Source Book* (1995) edited by McMahon Sutton-Smith, Jay Mechling, Thomas W. Johnson and Felicia R. McMahon, *Children's Folklore* (1986) by Jay Mechling and *Children's Folklore: A Handbook* (2008) by Elizabeth Tucker. The work by Sutton-Smith et al. (1995), for instance, comprises 13 independent chapters in which the meaning, history, complexities and the various forms of children's folklore are discussed. The central point in this study is that children's folklore is primarily about children and that it is produced and shared among children. The more recent publication, by Tucker (2008), presents children's folklore in a similar way, but with an emphasis on classification of children's folklore into genres such as tales, riddles, rhymes, songs and chants. It provides definitions of these genres as well as discussion of the scholarship and approaches in children's folklore studies.

These studies generally show that children are active participants in creation and transmission of their oral tradition, thus, they are complex, fully developed and self-directed. However, they present children's folklore as a child-centred tradition detached from adults' involvement. This notion is debatable in the light of current anthropological and sociological

studies of children's lore and play because it overestimates the difference between children's culture and adults' culture while underestimating the interaction between children and adults as the context for production and reproduction of children's folklore. Again, the discussed studies have not adequately illuminated the nature of childhood and everyday life of the children they refer to as they focused on analyses of textual materials without giving much attention to how children perform and interpret their folklore in different social circumstances. Hughes (1995: 93) clarifies this shortcoming; he says: 'Most studies of children's folk culture are based on collecting and analysing items of folklore... and few analyse the way children use their folklore or how its form and functions vary across social contexts.' As the studies focus on analyses of the structure and meanings of folkloric texts, the everyday life of children as well as their voices and roles in the performance and transmission of folklore is neglected.

1.1.2. Children in the Studies on African Oral Tradition: the Overlooked Subject

Compared to the US and Europe, fewer studies have been done on children's participation in oral tradition in Africa (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005; Mtonga, 2012). In this subsection, I first discuss why studies on African oral tradition have given less attention to the role of children in performance, interpretation and transmission of oral tradition and then present some of the emerging studies on the oral play and games of African children.

Even though children's interest in oral tradition is obvious, as stated by Vincent Muli Wa Kituku in the preface to his collection of folktales in east Africa, the attention given to researching why they are interested in it and how they participate in it is insufficient. To show children's great interest in oral tradition, Kituku explained that his children were the reasons for his motivation to write the book.

The interest my children have had in folksongs and folktales has reconnected my past with present. For more than twenty years, folklore was not an integral part of my life. In short my daughters have been my teachers. They rekindled rich heritage in me that has been silent for a long time. [Kituku, 1977, p.13]

This role and interest of children in oral tradition has not received the research attention it deserves. The problem is presumably rooted in the fact that studies on African oral tradition⁸ have generally been informed by the functionalist perspective and have viewed oral tradition as an institution that keeps a society stable and resistant to change. Based on this perspective, scholars such as Azeze (2001), Chesaiyan (1997), Cohen (1989), Damme (2000), Finnegan (1967, 1970, 1992 and 2007) and Namayanja (2008) observed oral tradition as an institution that connects the past to the present and ensures value transmissions, in which adults are assumed to be competent actors. In other words, the studies argue that oral tradition functions as a channel through which the elderly look back to the past and hand over ancestral knowledge to the present generation (Okpewho, 1992; Kalu, 2000). This perspective is related to UNESCO's presentation of the importance of African oral tradition as 'a depository of the cultural past'; drawing on this notion Finnegan (1970), in her path breaking study of oral literature in Africa, discusses how African oral tradition is a form of African art that depicts African history, ancestral culture and wisdom and, what is more, also sustains them across generations. In her earlier work, Ruth Finnegan (see Finnegan, 1967), focused on Limba storytelling in northern Sierra Leone as a form of oral tradition that functions as a depository of traditional wisdom and values as well as a means of handing over these wisdoms and values to the next generation. In her recent account, Finnegan (2007) discusses this stabilizing and perpetuating function of storytelling:

Across the various cultures in Africa, storytelling traditions have many things in common. One of the significant communality is that performance of storytelling is perceived as a vital element of customary practices and admired means of socialization across different African cultures. [Finnegan, 2007: 44]

As shown in the quotation, Ruth Finnegan describes storytelling as adults' knowledge, in the contexts of Limba culture. Her study underlines that across various African cultures, storytelling is a shared cultural practice through which adults socialize children. She presents adults as skilled storytellers who transmit local knowledge and values embedded in it for children and youth through oral performance, which is a vital part of African social and cultural life. Similarly, Patric (1992) and Sierra and Kaminski (1991), present that adults are knowledgeable in oral tradition as they are the ones who give poetic quality to its performance

⁸ Africa is characterized by rich oral traditions of which folktales, songs, dance, proverbs and other expressions and rhetoric are the recurrent ones.

and, through such performance, transmit ancestral values to the young generation. What we can learn from these works is that studies on African oral tradition emphasize that oral tradition is the prerogative of adults and their means of socialization. The studies tend to view oral tradition as a social institution that serves a fixed purpose which is maintaining and sustaining ancestral culture and values. With this perspective, the studies seem to present socialization through oral tradition as a unidirectional, linear process in which children are always recipients of knowledge from adults.

Similarly, the body of literature on Oromo oral tradition and oral tradition in the other Ethiopian languages draw on a functionalist perspective and discusses oral tradition as an institution that maintains the cultural status quo⁹. One of such studies is Kidane (2002), which is a notable contribution to Oromo folk narratives as it presents the various genres, performances and contexts of Borana folktales and discusses how storytelling is a central part of the culture of rhetoric that elderly persons transfer from ancestors to the young generation, which in turn shows that it functions as a medium of skill, knowledge and value sustainment across generations. As a result of such trend, children were not included as subjects in the research and their roles in production and transmission of the storytelling tradition have not been documented.

Likewise, Hussein (2004) argues that Oromo folk narratives are lenses through which one can observe how women are positioned in the Oromo culture and how such ways of positioning affects their activities in their everyday life. This argument is continued by Alemu (2007), who discusses how oral tradition puts women in subordinate positions through the gendered discourses it contains. Alemu emphasizes that Oromo folk narratives reflect women as inefficient persons, incapable of shouldering public responsibilities. Both studies (Hussein, 2004 and Alemu, 2007) thus show how oral tradition embodies ancestral knowledge and perpetuates the subordinate position of women (Levine, 2007). What has not been considered in these studies is that the various forms of oral tradition are social constructions and the meaning they constitute varies across different social contexts.

The functionalist perspective characterized not only the study of oral narratives but also that of oral poetry. A good example of this position is the work of Hussein (2005), which maps out

⁹ In this thesis, i do not discuss studies on oral tradition in the other Ethiopian languages but review major researches on Oromo oral tradition as it is the focus of my study.

Arsi Oromo oral poetry as knowledge that connects the past to the present. Hussein argues that Oromo oral poetry embodies past experience and serves as a window that mirrors indigenous patterns of life in Oromo society. This study further presents the use of oral arts to reinforce the religious institutions of the Oromo society. An earlier study, by Van de Loo (1991), discusses the link between oral poetry (folksongs) and Oromo religion in the context of the Guji culture. Joseph Van de Loo collected Guji folksongs from adults and analysed their function of mirroring of Guji culture and religious practices. The deep and comprehensive analysis of the Guji folk songs incorporated in this study reflects how religion and oral tradition are interwoven in the cultures of African people. These studies, too, discuss oral tradition as practice that maintains the values and beliefs of Oromo society, and adults as knowledgeable subjects in ensuring its existence and transmission. They contributed a lot to the development of knowledge on the Oromo oral tradition even though there is a danger of being essentialist. However, considering oral tradition as knowledge of adults, the studies do not discuss the roles of children in its production and transmission. In other words, the studies give limited information on how children participate in the process of production and transmission of oral tradition.

In general, the studies on African oral tradition documented the various forms, contents and functions of oral tradition, centring on oral tradition as mechanisms through which adults reflect on and perpetuate cultural values and practices and transmit them to their children and young people. As a result, children's own participation in production, application and transmission of oral tradition became the overlooked agenda. Researchers' view of oral tradition as adult based knowledge seems to originate from their focus on the contribution of oral tradition to the stable functioning of a society, which is the functionalist perspective on which the 19th and 20th century folkloristic studies were based. Grounded in this perspective, African studies present oral tradition as knowledge from the past and argue that it serves as an institution of cultural stability and continuity. Considering oral tradition as ancestral knowledge, on the other hand, implies that the production and transmission of it is essentially the responsibility of adults. This epistemological tradition enabled the researchers to document oral tradition as constituent of cultural practices that mirror a society and its ways of life. What is given less attention in the study of African oral tradition is whether oral tradition and its contexts are dynamic social processes in which both adults and children are competent participants. As a result, children did not participate in the process of research on

oral tradition, nor was their everyday life illuminated through ethnographic research on oral tradition.

It is only recently that the study of oral tradition, with influence from the social constructionist perspective, began to consider the roles of children in the production and reproduction of oral tradition. Thus there is now an emerging interest in children's experiences, skills and knowledge in the performance of oral tradition. For example, Argenti's (2010) ethnographic study in Cameroon focuses on children's folktales as a child-focused realm. Such child-centeredness of oral play is interpreted by Argenti as children's expressions of their lived experience.

Folktales are most often told by children amongst each other, with no adult involvement and they are consequently learned by younger children from older ones. Storytelling in the Grassfields is, therefore, a child structured form of play...; it is an activity mediated by children without adult input. [Argenti, 2010: 224-225]

Argenti explained that children appropriate folktales to fit their contexts and express their perspectives through them. The work of McMahon (2007), Mushengyezi (2008) and Nyota and Mapara (2008) are also recent contributions to this field. These studies construct African children as active reproducers of African children's songs although they do not document how children receive these forms of knowledge and transmit them among each other. Mtonga's (2012) path breaking study of children's oral play and games in Africa provides a comprehensive documentation and analysis of children's songs and games. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Zambia, the study presents several forms of children's songs such as lullabies and nursery songs, work songs, songs of the heart, songs of ridicule and mockery, praise songs and bird-songs. It also discusses various forms of games of which the following are analysed: toys and nursery games, ball games, chasing games, catching games, slapping and beating games, duelling and exerting games, throwing and hitting games, seeking games, guessing games daring games, acting and pretending games, singing and dancing games and language games. The study argues that children learn moral and value judgements through their active participation in the mentioned songs and games (see in chapter two as well).

Apart from these studies, the ethnographic study of oral tradition as part of children's everyday life has received little attention in Africa. Studies that involve methodologies through which a researcher lives in local villages, participates in children's social practices

and observes how oral tradition is part of their everyday life are still inadequately represented in the body of literature on African oral tradition. This thesis aims at filling this gap by drawing on a social constructionist perspective and exploring oral tradition as a component of children's everyday life and local knowledge through ethnographic fieldwork among Guji people.

1.1.3. Children's Oral Tradition in Ethiopian Childhood Studies

In the studies on Ethiopian childhoods less attention has been given to children's oral tradition and local knowledge.¹⁰ As a significant number of research contributions in Ethiopian childhoods emphasize the influence of societal (structural) forces such as poverty, labour division and HIV/AIDS, culture and children's local knowledge, particularly their oral tradition and play practices in the local rural contexts, have not been brought to light (see Abdulwasie, 2007; Abebe and Aase, 2007; Boyden, 2009; Camfield, 2010; Camfield and Tafere, 2011; Tafere et al., 2009). Again, the fact that most of the studies in Ethiopian childhoods are situated in urban areas meant that less was known about the lives and knowledge of children in the rural setting, although significant studies are now emerging to bridge these gaps of knowledge. Research works such as Abebe (2007), Abebe and Kjørholt (2009), Boyden (2009) and Admassie (2003). Abebe (2007) and Abebe and Kjørholt (2009) construct the dynamics of children's roles and exploitation of labour in the rural contexts of the Gedeo people in Ethiopia, while Abebe and Aase (2007) explore the dynamics that put urban children at risk and how children cope with such risks. Abebe (2008), more broadly, observed children's livelihoods across different social and geographical settings and portrayed the economic adversities characterizing Ethiopian childhoods. I will particularly mention two significant contributions that the studies render to the development of research in Ethiopian childhoods. The first is the use of mixed methods in order to understand childhood from the perspectives of children across different social and cultural contexts, combining semi-structured interviews, semi-participant observations, story writing and snowballing techniques and demonstrating the reflexive thinking that such an approach in research with children requires. By employing these methods, the studies connected children's local lives to global academic debates. In other words, the studies contributed in-depth knowledge about the interplay between global political economy and children's local lives. The second

¹⁰ Children's local knowledge includes children's play practices, skills of life, values, norms of intragenerational as well as intergenerational interactions and other shared practices.

contribution is that these studies have responded to the critiques that research in Ethiopian childhoods has been urban biased by shedding light on the conditions of both urban and rural childhoods in Ethiopia. Abebe (2008), for instance, explores orphan-hood and children's work as important parts of children's life through cases from Gedeo (rural setting) and Addis Ababa (urban setting). However, these studies throw less light on how working children in the rural context combine work with play. Similarly, there is a lack of research focus on how children (in both urban and rural contexts) apply their oral tradition (for example, their jokes, storytelling and folksongs) to express challenges in their everyday life.

Contributions in the anthology edited by Eva Poluha (Alemayehu, 2007; Chuta, 2007; Tamene, 2007; Poluha, 2007a) shed light on children's dynamic situations and roles in both rural and urban contexts of Ethiopia. Authors in the anthology show how rural children live in and struggle to cope with environments characterized by remoteness and cultural intricacies, while children in urban areas are seemingly better off in that they live in settings that are relatively accessible and less complex in value systems. As discussed across these studies, children who live in rural areas are more burdened by livelihood hardships. The studies compare the urban and rural childhoods in the contexts of the northern, southern and central parts of Ethiopia and argue that cultural practices and harsh economic burdens have put rural children, mainly the female children, in a position of collective vulnerability. According to the studies, the cultural intricacies in rural environments in turn constrain the social and individual actions of children, particularly through gender-based discrimination and everyday life full of difficulties. Poluha (2004) also argues that children's social activities such as play and peer interactions are windows for understanding the continuity of social hierarchy in Ethiopian society that persisted despite the several political changes in the past century. With data generated from school children in Addis Ababa, the study shows how children play active roles in perpetuating a culture of power relations. This study demonstrates that children are social actors in ensuring the continuity of traditions in society. In contrast to this finding, the earlier study by Abbink (1996), conducted in Surma community in southern Ethiopia, discusses the negative effect of the absence of traditional knowledge on the quality of children's learning and argues that rural childhood in Ethiopia is in crisis. Abbink emphasizes that among the Surma, the emerging social changes (particularly the decreasing value of traditional institutions and customary practices) challenged the relevance of formal and informal education and eroded the traditional concept of childhood that embodies children as

learners through normal interactions with adults. Although Poluha (2007b) demonstrates, based on a bibliography of studies in Ethiopian childhoods, that studies in Ethiopian childhood are limited in number and in scope (focusing on children in risky conditions in urban settings), what I have discussed above shows that such studies are growing in terms of scope and increasingly encompass the everyday life of both urban and rural children. The studies emphasize constraints that society imposes on children and that structural phenomena such as the economic, cultural and political traditions shape children's agency and livelihoods. HIV/AIDS, poverty, children's work, gender based power relations and social hierarchy are discussed as conditions that characterize the everyday life of Ethiopian children. However, studies on how children perform their play practices in their interactions with each other as well as with adults in their local cultural and social contexts are still inadequate. Research that focuses on the importance of studying children's local knowledge (for instance oral tradition) for understanding the dynamic concerns of children and enhancing children's participation in facilitating their own formal and informal learning has been less observable.

1.2. Research Questions and Objectives

My investigation in this thesis is stimulated by two interrelated situations. First, at the global level, mainly in the context of the US and Europe, researches on children's folklore and the social study of childhood are well established but studies that combine perspectives from both areas of study are few. This shows that even though both of them emphasize children as competent actors, they remain separate and have so far failed to mutually enrich one another. Second, the same trend can be observed in the African context: researches on the functions of oral tradition in enriching oral communication and transmitting local knowledge are growing; similarly, researches on childhood and children's livelihoods are increasing and becoming more prolific. However, fruitful collaboration between both areas has not kept pace. The study of oral tradition overlooks children's roles in the interpretive reproduction of oral tradition whereas the study of childhood has given less coverage to children's oral tradition and local knowledge. It is only recently that studies that connect the two areas through exploring children's roles in the performance and transmission of oral tradition have started to emerge. This situation shows that researches on oral tradition as a means for documenting children's culture or as contexts to understand children's everyday life are few. Thus, little is known on how African children participate in performance and interpretation of oral tradition, such as through storytelling and riddling, and learn about their social world through these

practices. In other words, the ethnographic researches of how African children perform their oral tradition and how, through it, they interpret and learn about their social and cultural worlds and participate in transmission of local knowledge, is less available in the body of literature on children and childhood studies. To bridge these gaps, and thereby show how construction of oral tradition enriches the interdisciplinary study of childhood, I study children's roles in interpretive reproduction of oral tradition through presenting oral tradition as a social construct and a component of children's everyday life. My study is based on the following three questions:

1. What roles do children play in the production and reproduction of oral tradition?
2. What does analysis of oral tradition as part of children's everyday life reveal about childhood and children's position intergenerational relationships among Guji people?
3. How does children's participation in the practices of oral tradition contribute to their formal and informal learning activities?

The first question requires an inquiry into the roles of children in the interpretive reproduction of oral tradition, an exploration of what children do when they perform storytelling and riddling. The second question involves learning about Guji children and the future of rural childhood through analysis of storytelling and riddling in combination with children's everyday life, which includes their work, peer culture and relationships with adults at home, at the workplace and at school. The third question intends to demonstrate how children's creative use of oral tradition enhances their informal and formal learning opportunities.

Through answering these questions, the thesis aims at contributing to developments in empirical knowledge on Ethiopian childhood in terms of children's roles in interpretive reproduction of oral tradition and their everyday life in a rural setting. Based on these questions, the thesis discusses children's practices and processes in performance, interpretation and transmission of folktales and riddles by presenting these forms of oral tradition as social constructions (the constituents of contextual interactions between adults and children as well as among children). The thesis explores children's peer practices and interactive events with adults across three places (workplace, home and school) and shows how children perform and construe their oral tradition across these circumstances to facilitate their formal learning (within school) and informal learning (in everyday life situations); thereby, contribute to cultural change and continuity. The thesis also aims to demonstrate that

children's oral tradition and related practices are contexts through which one can document how children understand their social environments, appropriate the cultural and economic realities into the realm of their everyday life and cope with the values and challenges of the society they live in. Through such exploration, the thesis intends to bring rural children among the Guji people to the global notice and enrich the knowledge of readers, researchers, policy makers and child care organizations. It contributes to development of awareness of the family, schools, government and child care organizations about the relevance of children's oral tradition and local knowledge in enhancing children's contextualized learning and development.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

I structured the thesis into six chapters. In the first (this chapter) and second chapters I present the gaps of knowledge in the existing literature and the theories and concepts on which this study is based in order to bridge these gaps. In the third chapter, I discuss the social and cultural context in which the thesis is situated. In the fourth chapter, I present the methodology, with my focus on descriptions of the fieldwork sites, research participants and methods of data collection in the fieldwork process. In the fifth chapter, I present a synthesis of six articles (some published and others in the process of being published) that report the major findings of the study; this chapter includes a summary of each of the six articles, discussions on the crossing-cutting themes of the articles and conclusions. The last chapter (the sixth chapter) contains the six articles.

Arrangement of the articles is based on logical relationships among the issues embodied in them. Accordingly, chapter five (the synthesis chapter) and chapter six begin from Article One where methodological reflexivity is discussed as an approach to examine children's social practices and everyday life across different places—workplace, home and school. This is followed by Article Two which is a discussion of children's everyday life as the interplay of their everyday social practices (work, play, learning) across these places. Article Three deals with how children perform storytelling in these places with their roles in its transmission from adults to children, as well as among each other. This idea is continued in Article Four that deals with the idea of children as competent persons in interpreting folktales and construing their social world through their interpretations. Article Five builds on these ideas through demonstrating how children produce and interpret riddles and through it learn about

phenomena in their social environment. Finally, Article Six is presented, which discusses how children creatively perform folktales in school classrooms and through such activities connect their everyday life to classroom learning activities.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND KEY CONCEPTS

In the tent of the social studies of childhood, James et al. (1998) discuss four theoretical positions: the socially constructed child, the tribal child, the minority group child and the social structural child. These theoretical positions reflect different approaches to childhood studies. My thesis is informed by the first theoretical position (the socially constructed child) and presents childhood as a social construction and children as social actors. This theoretical position is based on social constructionism and has engaged international researchers with interdisciplinary academic backgrounds—sociologists, anthropologists, historians, geographers, psychologists and pedagogics—who have contributed to the development of interdisciplinary childhood studies that, according to Kjørholt (2004, p. 19), represents ‘a new scientific research paradigm’. In this thesis, under the auspices of social constructionism, I draw on perspectives from not only the social study of childhood but also the social construction of oral tradition to explore children and their oral tradition. As the focus in the thesis is the role of children in storytelling and riddling practices, I am inspired by the social construction of childhood with my focus on the perspective of the socially constructed child and William Corsaro’s interpretive reproduction that he used as a concept for understanding children and their play culture. In line with studies in Europe and USA such as Murphy (1978), Anttonen (2005) and Sims and Stephens (2005) as well as those in Africa, I explain how the notion of social construction of oral tradition is relevant for my investigation.

In short, by connecting the social study of childhood to the study of oral tradition, I analyse how oral tradition is performed, interpreted and transformed by Guji children. In other words, by linking perspectives such as the socially constructed child, interpretive reproduction and the social construction of oral tradition, I study storytelling and riddling as components of children’s oral play and everyday life, which encompasses children’s work, education and social interaction. In this chapter, I begin by discussing the perspective of the socially constructed child that informs the way I understand children and childhood in this project. Next, I present the concept of interpretive reproduction (based on works of William A. Corsaro) through which I explain how children produce and reproduce their peer (play) culture. Then, I discuss the social constructionist perspective of oral tradition. The concept of interpretive reproduction and social construction of oral tradition grounds my analysis of oral

tradition as play and interactive event among children and between children and adults. Finally, I discuss how I link the perspectives to each other as well as to my study.

2.1. The Socially Constructed Child

This perspective presents children as social actors and childhood as social construction. James and Prout (1990, p.1) explain it as an interpretive frame of exploring the ways children are perceived and articulated in particular societies into culturally specific sets of ideas and philosophies, attitudes and practices. Researchers whose works are based on this perspective have presented children and their everyday life as culture-specific phenomena meaningful within the local social contexts, as opposed to the earlier psychologists who presented childhood as a universal phenomenon (Alanen, 1988; Corsaro, 1985; James and James, 2004; James et al., 1998; Jenks, 1982; Prout and James, 1990). Prout and James (1990, p. 26) assert that ‘Childhood ... is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.’ What I mean by ‘culture’ in this scenario pertains to Marianne Gullestad’s concept of ‘culture’ which she defined as the social meaning dimensions in everyday life. This refers to social and political organizations, family life, friendships, neighbourhood relationships and communications (Gullestad, 1992). The implication of presenting a childhood and children’s everyday life as socially constructed phenomena, according to Prout and James (1990, pp. 8-9), is promoting the idea that ‘children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right and children are actively involved in construction of their own social lives’. This perspective, which emerged as a new paradigm in the 1980s, has continued to influence later researches such as Kjørholt (2004), Lancy (2008), Montgomery (2009) and Wyness (2006) to present childhood and children’s everyday life as a discursive phenomenon embodied in cultural practices and social interactions. For example, based on an analysis of contemporary global discourses on children’s right to participation, Kjørholt (2004) argues that childhood is a social and symbolic space. The central idea illuminated by Kjørholt’s argument is that childhood is a component of culture and its meaning varies across social and cultural circumstances. Within the frame of the socially constructed child, I further discuss two of the key concepts on which this perspective is built. These concepts are ‘childhood as relational phenomena’ (studying children and childhood in relation to adults and adulthood) and ‘children as social actors’.

The concept of 'childhood as a relational phenomenon' was introduced by Leena Alanen and Berry Mayall and pertains to dynamics in intergenerational relationships (the relationships between children and adults) based on cultural values and norms (Alanen, 2000; Mayall, 2002). With their position in social constructionist epistemology, these studies contend that the social construction of childhood should focus on generational relations (of which the relation between adults and children is one) for knowledge about the everyday life of children is understood as a result of the interactions and negotiations between these generations. In other words, children and their parents are social relational beings and are often engaged in interactions in which the meaning of childhood is symbolically constructed. For example, the concept of 'generationing' which Leena Alanen coined to express childhood as a relational phenomenon represents the process through which generation is constructed, with its accompanying roles and behaviours in a particular culture. Alanen (2000, p. 15) asserts that, 'To theorize childhood would mean to arrive at a conceptual understanding of childhood as a generational condition.' As emphasized by Mayall (2002), viewing childhood as a relational phenomenon is to place children in the system of generation through which some people are identified as adults and the others as children. According to this perspective, children and their social actions are shaped by the interaction between generations and the impact that one generation has on the other. Viewing childhood as a generational condition and children's everyday life as the interplay of intergenerational interactions in a specific situation is more relevant in researching rural children, particularly children of rural Africa as the intergenerational relationships in Africa are more vigorous than the ones in Europe and America (Katz, 2004; Moritz, 2008; Poluha, 2004). For example, among the Guji people in Ethiopia, the norms of generational relationship, embedded in the social and cultural practices, shape the social places and roles of boys and girls (Beriso, 1983).

The concept of 'children as social actors' had emerged as a new paradigm in research with children by engaging children as active participants in the research process about their everyday life (Corsaro, 1985; James et al., 1998; Lancy, 2008; Montgomery, 2009). Based on this concept, researchers involved children as active subjects who are competent to shape each other as well as to influence their social situation which shows that they have rich perspectives about their social world. Kjørholt's (2004) analysis of children as social participants in Norway, for instance, illuminates how children are social actors in construction of national identity, in creating their places in the society and perpetuating

intergenerational relationships. Corsaro (2011) also asserts that children, through their peer culture and routines, achieve their autonomy and reduce adult control. This study emphasizes that the fact that children, in their play activities, demonstrate their desire to achieve freedom from the rules and authority of adults and to gain control over themselves shows that they are social actors. In line with this concept, researchers in the social studies of childhood argue that children are not seen as passive recipients of adults' perspectives but are active actors in the construction of their own childhood realities. Alanen (2000, p. 12), for instance, says that:

Children are seen to act in the social world and to participate in on-going social life and are centrally involved in the construction of their own childhood through their negotiation with the adult world and among themselves.

Thus, Corsaro's and Alanen's notion of children as social actors as well as Kjørholt's analysis of children as social participants show us that children are subjects with the capacity to construct meanings in response to the social practices in which they find themselves. Following this concept, I observe the roles that the Guji children play in the performance, interpretation and transmission of oral tradition and construction of knowledge through these processes.

2.2. Interpretive Reproduction: Children as Creators of their Play Culture

Interpretive reproduction is the concept that William A. Corsaro used to express how children form and share their play (peer) culture. Corsaro (2011, pp.20-22) explains the concept in this way:

The term interpretive reproduction captures the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society. ... Children create and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively taking or appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns. The term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalizing society and culture but are creatively contributing to the cultural production and change.

According to Corsaro, interpretive reproduction involves children's processes of social participation and friendship as well as appropriation and sharing of information through interactive events—children's time play and interaction with each other and adults. In other words, Corsaro conceptualizes children's appropriation and sharing of play and cultural

routines as peer culture and terms the process as interpretive reproduction. Corsaro (2011, p. 120) defined peer culture as ‘a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers’. According to this definition, the play activities children perform with each other, the rules and patterns they share with each other, the controls and negotiations they make with each other, the values and concerns they hold among each other are the constituents of children’s peer culture. Thus, children create their peer culture based on the information they gain from adult society (Corsaro, 2012). In other words, children appropriate the information they gain from adults into their peer culture through their own ways of doing and sharing. This notion of appropriation and sharing thus denotes that through interactive events children become part of cultural systems but create and maintain their cultural practices through their own way of teaching each other. The notion of ‘interactive event’ pertains to children’s play practices within the context of dual interaction, which includes peer interactions (children’s interaction with each other) and intergenerational interaction (children’s interaction with adults), and is a ground to investigate how children use their social practices to create their own sense of shared activities and social world (Corsaro, 2011; Corsaro and Eder, 1990).

What William A. Corsaro discusses as children’s peer culture is articulated as children’s culture by Hengst (2000) and Kjørholt (2003; 2004) and children’s play culture by Mouritsen (2002). As explained by Hengst (2000, p. 233), children’s culture refers to ‘an intricate web of meanings in which children are entangled in many different ways’. Kjørholt (2003, 2004) similarly states that children’s culture represents play practices, everyday routines that express children’s collective values, interests and their relationships with adults. Mouritsen (2002) viewed children’s play culture as involving activities and networks as well as the artistic and symbolic expressions that children produce and share through their interactions with each other as well as adults. Hengst’s explanation of children’s culture is more general, centring on meanings that children give to their activities within peer and group interactions, which makes it different from Mouritsen’s description of children’s culture. The later study observes children’s culture in a more specific way and state what it includes. Mouritsen, for instance, clarified that children’s play culture is constituted of three fields: the culture produced for children by adults, the culture that children produce in cooperation with adults, and the culture that children produce with each other through their social networks. The first field includes children’s literature, drama, music, children’s film, videos and computer games while the

second constitutes leisure activities to which children go to with adults, and informal learning and play projects that children organize and perform with adults. The third field consists of children's games, tales, songs, rhymes, riddles, jokes, joshing, teasing and walks.

Earlier studies in children's folklore in USA and Europe, as noted by Meire (2007), present children's culture as different from adults' culture (see chapter one). Meire (2007, p. 17), reflects on his own practice as, 'I have often been criticised for focusing too much on children's culture as separated from adult culture and for neglecting relationships with adults'. In contrast to this, the studies mentioned above view children's culture as an outcome of children's interaction, not only with each other but also with adults. Hengst (2000) for example argues that children's culture is not an enclave separated from adults' culture although it remains unique from adults' culture as it encompasses peer oriented expressive practices. Thus, children's culture denotes distinct social practices of children rooted within culture of a society. It is rooted in culture because children are part of a society and it is distinct because children have ways of life that they share with each other because of being children. For Corsaro (2011), children produce and reproduce their peer culture through their interactions with adults (appropriation of adult information) and by sharing it with each other (creation of their social world). Kjørholt (2003, 2004) supports this assertion by stating that children's culture is connected to the wider cultural context of a society in which children live.

In the light of interpretive reproduction, children's culture is dynamic, vibrant and subject to change as part of the cultural system of the adult society. Informed by this perspective, the work of Ekrem (2000) and Mushengyezi (2008), which are studies in Finland and Africa respectively, demonstrate that children learn their lore (games, stories, songs) from adults but employ their own ways to create their meanings out of it independently of the meanings that adults create for them, through which they understand and express their environment independently from adults. What is notable from this argument is that children's culture pertains to play and learning practices that children perform through social networks with each other as well as with adults (Fine, 1995). Three concepts mentioned in the conceptualization of children's peer culture by Corsaro (2003, 2011) and children's play culture by Mouritsen (2002) are useful for my analysis of children's lore and oral tradition. These concepts are interactive events, appropriation and sharing. In the context of my study, interactive events represent the interaction among children and between children and adults in

the process of oral tradition. The interactive event that involves children and adults (the interaction between children and adults) is a context for children's appropriation of oral tradition and the one that involves only children (interaction among children) is a basis for children to share the oral tradition in their own ways. Based on the concept of interpretive reproduction I understand that children do not simply internalize and share oral tradition from adults but actively cooperate with them in the process of production and recreate this process in the way it fits their social world. This concept helps me to observe how children are participants in the dynamic events of interaction and how this dynamic event is a locus for exploring how children contribute to production and reproduction of oral tradition.

In Africa, children's culture (peer culture) predominantly encompasses elements of oral tradition such as storytelling, singing, riddling and joking and games such as stone plays, wrestling, jumping rope, running and hide-and-find (Mtonga, 2012). However, such aspects of children's culture are being lost in Europe and the US as discussed by Cross (2002), Lester and Russel (2008) and Tucker (2008). As observed by Lester and Russel (2008) and Tucker (2008), the development of media technology in Europe and the US has resulted in the diminishing of oral play culture as it provides children with situations in which they perform their play practices through media such as radio, television, computers and mobile apparatus, individually. Tucker (2008) emphasizes that contemporary children in the western and globalized environments do not have access to oral forms of children's folklore such as stories, games, songs, jokes and nursery rhymes as these forms of children's culture have been eroded by media technologies. According to Livingstone (2003), Wartella and Jennings (2000) and Marsh et al. (2005), modern technology has transformed the way children produce and reproduce their culture, from oral and face-to-face culture to practices based on digital and online communication. However, in Africa, children's culture is produced and shared through interactive events that involve face to face interaction among children as well as between children and adults in diverse settings of which home, school and workplace are the recurrent ones (Eder, 2010; Mushengyezi, 2008). Thus, based on interpretive reproduction, I explore how children produce and reproduce oral tradition in the context of their interaction with each other as well as with adults and show that oral tradition is the main constituent of children's culture. I argue that children learn oral tradition through active participation with adults in interactive events and reproduce it in creative ways through interactions with each other. This is to say, this perspective is a ground to see how, through their participation in oral

tradition, children produce their distinctive social world and at the same time, connect themselves to adults and involve them in their play culture.

2.3. The Social Construction: Studying Oral Tradition as Part of Everyday Life

The concept of social construction was introduced into social science by Berger and Luckman (1967). Similarly, in 1991, the concept of narrative construction was introduced by Bruner (1991). Both concepts focus on the domain of human interaction and hold that reality is constructed and reconstructed through interaction among human beings. Human beings, according to Berger and Luckman (1967), construct concepts of each other's actions through interaction in everyday life and habituate these concepts into social roles played by actors in relation to each other. Along the same lines, Bruner (1991, p. 4) also held that human beings establish ideas of each other, experience with each other and their memory of everyday life in the form of narrative. He says that:

We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative—stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual's level of mastery and by his conglomerate of prosthetic devices, colleagues, and mentors.

According to Bruner, narrative is a version of reality and instrument of mind in construction of it (Bruner, 1991). These interrelated concepts (social construction and narrative construction) connect oral tradition to reality of everyday life. Oral tradition, as already illustrated by Bronislaw Malinowski, is part of people's everyday life and is created and maintained through interactive events that includes play events, rituals, family festivals, ceremonies, group meetings and discussions. Through introducing 'sociological context' as a concept to express 'interactive event', Malinowski emphasized the importance of fieldwork and the ethnographic approach in the study of oral tradition (Bascom, 1983; Young, 1979). Drawing on Malinowski, Murphy (1978, p. 113) explained that in the social construction of oral tradition great emphasis is put on how people use their tales, proverbs, riddles, songs and sayings to express their everyday life and how anthropology should approach such a study. In Murphy's own words, 'People use oral literature [Oral tradition] to express their ideas, beliefs, values and negotiate through their net of social relationships. The essential anthropologist gaze is to understand the relationship between this form of speech and its

communicative place in social life.’ With a similar gaze, Anttonen’s (2005), study on folklore in Finland, and Sims and Stephens’s (2005), study on folklore in the USA, underlined that in the light of the concept of social construction, oral tradition is observed as part of people’s everyday reality. Anttonen (2005, p. 20), says:

...the most important perspectives in the study of social phenomena that followed the shift in the philosophical, epistemological and ontological premises of social sciences concerns the study of social life ...as process of social praxis, experience, performance, language, dialogue.

Based on these premises, Anttonen argues that oral tradition is best analysed and understood from the social constructionist perspective according to which people’s participation in it is constructed and reconstructed in a continuous process of interaction and interpretation. Anttonen rejects the notion that oral tradition is part of the ancient by asserting that it is part of the present. According to Anttonen (2005: 35), oral tradition is not ‘handed down’ from the past to the present, from the old generation to the young, but ‘lifted up’ in the process of interaction in the present. Thus, oral tradition consists of practices echoing the present even though it is a ‘model’ of the past. Sims and Stephens (2005), similarly, put forward a social construction of oral tradition as an ‘interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating, and performing as we share that knowledge [knowledge of oral tradition] with other people’. According to these authors, oral tradition is living and part of people’s everyday life.

In Africa there is emerging interest in studying oral tradition from the perspective of social construction. Recent research by Gameda (2008) and Tasew (2007), which are studies on Oromo and Anuak oral traditions respectively, are unique in this context. Gameda (2008, p. 9), analyses ‘interactive events’ in which the Oromo-speaking society in Ethiopia uses folktales to express their values and reconstruct their history. His explanation of his study as the ‘investigation of the relevance and dynamics of oral text within context of contemporary social and political order and the way it should be adapted or adjusted to modern outlook’ reflects this position. Tasew’s (2007) analysis, based on interactions in the events of conflict resolution in Gambella —the region where Anuak and Nuer ethnic groups live— revealed that the Anuak and their neighbouring ethnic groups use their oral tradition to resolve their conflicts and maintain peace and friendships. There are also a few studies that draw on the perspective of social construction to investigate children’s participation in production and

reproduction of oral tradition. Argenti (2010), McMahon (2007), Mushengyezi (2008) and Nyota and Mapara (2008) (see chapter one), for instance, show that through their peer interactions, children create and maintain oral tradition (folktales, folksongs) as part of their play practices, social networks and friendships.

The presentation of oral tradition as part of interactive process in everyday life encapsulates the idea that oral tradition is a component of people's local knowledge. Local knowledge, as discussed by Akpan (2011), is generated, applied and held by people in a local circumstance. It is people's knowledge of local life conditions, practices and problem solving strategies. It spreads from person to person or from generation to generation through systems of social interaction. In this line of argument, Kolawole (2009, p. 8) viewed local knowledge as 'wisdom gained and developed by a people in one particular locality, through years of careful observation and experimentation with natural [and social] phenomena around them.' Among the wisdom of people is oral tradition that grows out of people's observations and experimentation in everyday life. Presentation of local knowledge as wisdom is further illuminated by Kresse (2009). With examples from Swahili speaking communities in Kenya, the study demonstrates that local knowledge in the African context is wisdom related to social interactions, oral expressions, narratives and songs. In this sense, wisdom stands for skill, ability and cumulative experience. This trend of connecting African life and local knowledge to oral tradition is associated with the fact that Africans are predominantly oral societies and that their knowledge is held in memory and transmitted orally from generation to generation. The point that oral tradition links the past to the present, thereby communicating local knowledge from the elderly generation to the present one, is clear through Scheub's (1985, p. 1) statements:

The African oral tradition distills the essences of human experiences, shaping them into ... readily retrievable images of broad applicability with an extraordinary potential for eliciting emotional responses. These are removed from their historical contexts so that performers may re-contextualize them in artistic forms. The oral arts, containing this sensory residue of past cultural life and the wisdom so engendered, constitute a medium for organizing, examining, and interpreting an audience's experiences of the images of the present.

As the quoted statements show, oral tradition sanitizes local knowledge (which Scheub expressed as ‘human experiences’), gives local knowledge a memorable image and takes it across historical time. On the other hand, studies such as those by Mhando (2008), Nogueira (2003) and Zulu (2006) argue that oral tradition is a form of local knowledge by itself. These studies relate oral tradition to local knowledge based on the fact that oral tradition signifies assemblages of knowledge, memories, values and symbols generally constituted in oral communication and recognizable collectively across generations. According to Finnegan (2007), the practices that oral tradition involves – memorization, performance, and interpretation – are considered to be knowledge that a person acquires as a member of a society. From these discussions, I learn that oral tradition is a local knowledge as it is a wisdom that a person acquires through observation, participation and creative reproduction. I also understand that children acquire oral tradition through their interactive events with adults and share it with each other in their own ways as their local knowledge. Drawing on these discussions I also examine the ways in which oral tradition is a means through which children communicate and perpetuate their local knowledge. Children express their collective experiences, skills, social and cultural practices, beliefs and values through their folktales, folksongs and riddles. This interconnection implies that the study of oral tradition enhances the continuity of children’s local knowledge. Put in other words, through investigation of oral tradition, it is possible to sustain children’s local knowledge.

Observation of oral tradition from the view of social construction (oral tradition as everyday life, as interactive event and as local knowledge) has epistemological and methodological implications for my study. The methodological implication is that fieldwork and the ethnographic approach are means of constructing how children use oral tradition to construe meanings within contexts of everyday life. The epistemological implication of the perspective, on the other hand, is that oral tradition is embedded in everyday life as well as articulated and interpreted through interactive events (Nicolopoulou, 2011). Drawing on the perspective of social construction, I make use of two interrelated concepts in my study of oral tradition as part of children’s everyday life. These concepts are the everyday interactive events and contextual interpretation. What I call interactive events include the verbal and non-verbal communications and collaborations that participants in a performance of oral tradition make with each other and the place and time in which the communications and collaborations take place. I focus on children’s everyday interactive events– their interaction with each other

as well as with adults. In other words, I use this concept to investigate children's creative use of oral tradition as a form of play and how this involves their skills of communication and negotiation with each other as well as with adults.

From the view of social construction, oral tradition is interpretively produced and reproduced and such interpretation is meaningful within its local social setting. This is to say, the interactions that involves negotiations, oppositions, competitions, cooperation that social actors unfold in the process of production and reproduction of oral tradition is subject to contextual interpretation (Bruner, 1991; Reich, 2007). Malinowski's definition of context relates to the local social setting (time and place) and discourse that entail expressions of values, knowledge, beliefs and practices that characterize an actor's interactions in the performance of oral tradition within the setting. According to Ben Amos (1982) and Burke (2002), contexts are always in change and new contexts come up with changes in social setting. Drawing on these notions, I understand social setting as a site for the dynamic social interaction among children and between children and adults (DuBois, 2003). Children's interaction in oral tradition – in storytelling for instance as described by Kuyvenhoven (2007) – involves a particular time, place and social process that characterizes a social setting. The dynamism in social setting, thus, make children's interactive events variable which in turn results in the discursiveness of knowledge about childhood and children's oral tradition. Thus, the interpretation process is based on the notion that childhood and children's culture are created, mediated and sustained through children's interactive practices within a social setting. Drawing on these interrelated concepts, I observe how the oral tradition of the Guji children is part of the Guji people's culture and everyday life.

2.4. Linking the Perspectives

Even though it has been taken for granted in Europe and USA, empirical studies of children's competency in cultural production and reproduction have been fewer in Africa and literature on the subject is limited. However, through my observation during the fieldwork, I learned that even though they are developed in the context of Europe and the US, the theoretical perspectives and concepts discussed in this chapter are relevant for understanding how children in the context of Africa produce their play (peer) culture, connect their play (peer) culture to adult culture and participate in the social and cultural practices of their society. Thus, drawing on the perspective of the socially constructed child, I observe that the everyday

life of Guji children is meaningful within the social and cultural circumstances of the Guji people. Based on the concept of interpretive reproduction, I study how the Guji children, through their everyday interactive events, appropriate, create, share and maintain riddling and storytelling traditions, and thereby contribute to production and reproduction of the Guji oral tradition. By combining these perspectives with the social construction of oral tradition, I observe that children produce and reproduce oral tradition through their social network with adults and peers. I examine how the children perform and interpret their oral tradition and through such processes learn about their social environments. Following Corsaro (2011, 2012), Kjørholt (2003, 2004) and Mouritsen (2002), I argue that the oral tradition of children is not a completely separate phenomenon but part of the Guji expressive culture and everyday life, and through producing and reproducing it, children contribute to the change and continuity of the Guji oral culture.

In general, the discussed perspectives are appropriate for my study on three grounds. First, they are pertinent to see children as competent actors in performing and interpreting oral tradition and understanding their social environment through it. The social competency of children is, as stated by Corsaro (2011, pp. 43-44), manifested through ‘children’s creative appropriation of information and knowledge from adults’ world, children’s production and participation in the series of peer cultures and children’s contribution to the reproduction and extension of adults’ culture’ Based on these notions, I examine how children creatively use their oral tradition (their folktales and riddles) to reflect on and construe their social world, which includes both adults and children’s everyday life. Second, the perspectives are relevant to examine oral tradition not only in the context of children’s interaction with each other but also in their interaction with adults as part of their everyday life. As asserted by Corsaro (2011, p. 29), ‘children are always participating in and are part of two cultures—children’s and adults’—and these cultures are intricately interwoven.’ According to this notion, the oral tradition that children perform as their peer culture expresses the social world that children share with each other as well as with adults. Third, in the context of this perspective, I study oral tradition as part of social interaction rather than as static text meaningful on its own. Generally, based on the perspectives and key concepts discussed in this chapter, I observe oral tradition as a cultural concept that is best understood through the contextual and ethnographic study of social interactions among children as well as between children and adults (Fleppa, 1986)

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, I discuss the major social and cultural realities of the Guji people with my emphasis on the place and roles of children in these spheres. The main aim of the chapter is to introduce the social setting in which children live with adults and perform their everyday roles. As discussed by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), in an ethnographic research, background and general information about people and their everyday life is a useful context for a better understanding of the research process. Thus, in this thesis, I present the social and cultural realities of the Guji people with the aim of introducing glimpses of the setting in which children live and perform their oral tradition. In my description, I focus on the roles and places of children in the social and cultural practices of the people.

The southern part of Ethiopia is inhabited by communities who predominantly lead traditional ways of life based on subsistence economic activities. The majority of adults and children who live in conditions of intensive poverty and illiteracy are found in this part of the country.¹¹ Even though there is economic progress in Ethiopia, according to The African Development Bank Group Chief Economist Complex (2010), the concern for improving children's wellbeing in this and the other parts of the country has been insufficient (UNICEF, 2011). As indicated by The African Child Policy Forum (2008), Ethiopia stood 42 out of the 52 African countries in its child friendliness. This implies that although Ethiopia is among the countries that ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, issues related to children have not been prioritized within the mainstream governance system of the country. It was only in 2006 that a government body known as the *Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs* has been established with the aim of promoting child-friendly policy and development schemes at the national level. Despite the efforts of this government body, Ethiopian children, particularly those in rural areas, live in poor economic, health and social conditions (Save the Children, 2004; UNICEF, 2011). As shown by The African Child Policy Forum (2010), Ethiopia's rank in providing children with adequate nutrition, health services

¹¹ In Ethiopia in general, 83% of the people in rural areas live on agriculture; children make up 55 % of the population and out of this figure 47% live in rustic conditions (FDRE 2008).

and hygiene is still low—26 out of the 52 African countries. In terms of formal education, even though there has been tremendous expansion of schools and increment in school enrolment in rural areas, the quality of education in primary schools is still poor (UNICEF, 2011). This poor and adverse condition of life is the same for children of the Guji people for whom, besides their social and economic constraints, cultural practices influence their everyday life in a manner similar to what Ellis (2000), Panelli (2002) and Punch (2002a) have discussed in the context of rural areas of developing countries. In this chapter, I present the wider social and cultural context that helps to understand the everyday life and practices of children. I presume that children's arenas of social practices such as home, school, work and play can be understood more clearly when the social and cultural contexts in which children live and interact are adequately constructed. Accordingly, a description of the Guji people's cultural, social and economic ways of life is relevant to capture a glimpse of the contexts in which the discussions in this thesis should be understood. Thus, in this chapter, first I introduce the Guji people and discuss the place of children in Guji cultural practices such as the Gada system, oral tradition and family structure. Then, I present the elements of the recent social changes and contemporary life of the Guji people with my emphasis on how these elements characterize the everyday life of Guji children. These elements are villagization, cattle herding, crop cultivation, formal education and expansion of Christianity.

3.1. The Guji People

The Guji people, as stated by Beriso (2004), Debsu (2009), Hinnant (1977) and Jaleta (2009) are among the Oromo¹² ethnic branches and speak the Oromo language—one of the most widely spoken languages in Ethiopia. According to the present administrative structure of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Guji people are part of the Oromia Regional State¹³ and their population is estimated to be 1.6 million, of which 90 per cent reside in rural areas (FDRE, 2008). Geographically, they are in the southern part of Ethiopia, which 56 ethnic groups inhabit. Of these ethnic groups, the Guji people share borders with Borana in

¹² Oromo consists of seven ethnic branches. These are Arsi, Barana, Guji, Mecha, Tulama, Arfan Qallo, Karayyu Wallo and Raya. All of these branches speak Oromo language and share cultural identities. Geographically, Arsi, Arfan Qallo and Karayyu reside in the eastern part of Ethiopia, Tulama and Mecha inhabit the western and central part of Ethiopia, Guji and Boran live in the southern, while Wallo and Raya reside in the northern part of Ethiopia (Beriso 1995; Hinnant 1977; Van de Loo 1991).

¹³ Oromiya is one of the 9 regional states of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It is the region inhabited by the Oromo society to which the Guji people belong.

the south, Burji and Amaro in the southwest, Wolayta in the west, Arsi in the east and Gedeo and Sidama in the north (Beriso, 2009). The following map presents the geographical location of the Guji people.

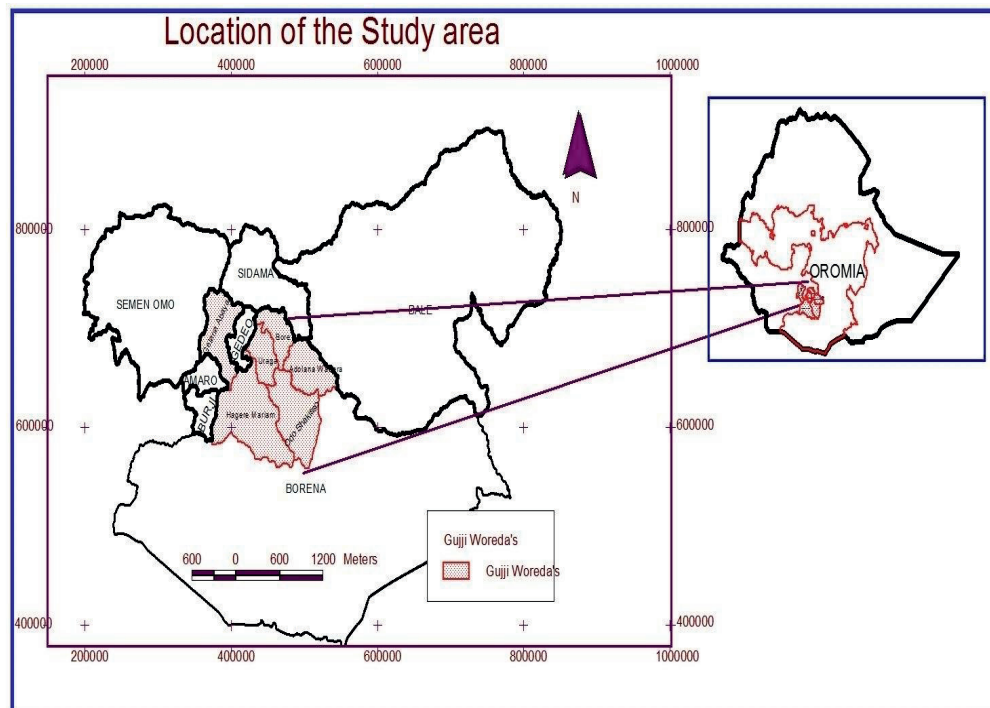


Figure 1: The location of the Guji people (Source: reproduced by Abiyot Legesse in 2009 from Google Map). Section of the map on the right shows the location of the Guji people in Ethiopia and the left points its place in the Oromiya regional state.

According to Beriso (1995), Van de Loo (1991) and Debsu (2009), the area in which the Guji people live consists of three ecological zones: lowland, semi-highland and highland. The lowland, which is below 1,500 metres above sea level, lies in the East African Rift Valley and the temperature in the area ranges from 28 to 35 degrees Celsius. This area has low average annual rainfall and suffers from recurrent drought while the population is spread sparsely over the vast land, subsisting predominantly on cattle herding and limited crop cultivation. During the dry season, as the grass withers and rivers run dry, those people living in the lowland area move, along with their cattle, to the semi-highland area. Similarly, during the wet season, those living in the semi-highland and highland areas often move to the lowland area as pasture

lands are occupied by food-crop plantations and as it is in the lowland area that grazing fields are available for their cattle. The semi-highland, lying between 1,500 and 2,500 metres above sea level, has a maximum average temperature of 20 to 30 degree Celsius. This ecological area contains evergreen vegetation and big forests. The Guji population density in this area is greater than the one in the lowland area and the people practice mixed agriculture—cattle herding and cultivation of crops, including coffee. The highland, with an altitude of 2,500 above sea level, covers a small portion of the Guji land and is located on the northern part. This area has been predominantly occupied by the *Maatti* — one of the three Guji phratries. The average annual temperature in this area ranges between 10-25 degrees Celsius. Here, rainfall is more frequent and many food crops and coffee are cultivated in addition to cattle herding. As the majority of the Guji people live in the lowland and semi-highland ecological areas, it is smaller population that inhabits in the highland area.

The Guji, according to Beriso (2009), Hinnant (1978) and Van de Loo (1991), is a confederation of three culturally interrelated phratry (*hagana*)¹⁴; namely, *Huraga*, *Maatti* and *Hokku*. Because the three phratries are culturally interconnected they perform the Gada¹⁵ rituals together. According to Hinnant (1978) *Huraga* is the senior phratry; *Maatti* is the second senior; whereas *Hokku* is the junior phratry of the Guji people. Geographically, the three phratries occupy different areas with free inter-clan movements and residences. Accordingly, the *Huraga*, the *Maatti* and the *Hokku* take the south-western, the northern and the eastern areas of the Guji land respectively. Even though the phratry have their own Abba Gada (leader), they are mutually interdependent and have their delegates in the Guji Gada council (Yaa`a) which is led by the *Abbaa Gada* of the Huraga as this phratry is considered to be the senior (Hinnant, 1978).

¹⁴ The moiety-clan-lineage system of the Guji people has *hagana* (phratry) at its top and *maatii* (family) at its bottom. It descends as *Hagana-balbala-warraa* and *maatii*. The origin and expansion of the three Guji *Hagana* is stated in a tale commonly accepted as historical evidence among the Guji people. The tale goes as follows. The father of the Guji was known as Gujo. Gujo had three sons from his first wife. He named his sons as *Huraga*, *Maatti* and *Hokku*. The sons, after coming of age, married wives and begot children. The three sons of Gujo moved to a large unoccupied area and divided it among themselves and agreed to call their share after their names. Accordingly, the area taken by *Huraga* was called *Huraga*, that owned by *Maatti* was called *Maatti* and the third *Hokku*.

¹⁵ The Gada (often known as the Gada system) is a system of ranking, authority and decision making for the entire Guji people. It is a system of leadership and intergenerational role division.

The three Guji phratries are further divided into clans known as *balbala* which literally means entry. The *Huraga* consists of seven clans known as *Gola*, *Sorbortu*, *Agantu*, *Halo*, *Darartu*, *Zoysut* and *Galalcha*; the *Maatti* includes three clans known as *Hirkatu*, *Insale* and *Handoa* and the *Hokku* has six; namely, *Obborra*, *Bala*, *Buditu*, *Micille*, *Hera* and *Kino*. Each clan is further divided into a category of close relatives known as *warra* and the category of close relatives (*warra*) is again further divided into family, called *maatii*. This Guji moiety-clan-lineage system is patrilineal and categorizes the Guji people into two non-exogamous moieties known as *Kontoma* and *Darimu* (Beriso, 2004; Hinnant, 1978). Such social categorization, patrilineal heredity network, residence in rural ecology and agrarian livelihoods characterize the Guji as people with relatively intact traditions.

3.2. Cultural Practices of the Guji People

The Guji culture, according to Van de Loo (1991) is elaborate and profound, and is manifested through three components: Gada system, oral tradition and family structure. In this subsection, I discuss these components of the Guji culture with my emphasis on the roles of children in them.

3.2.1. The Gada System

The Guji Gada system was intensively studied by Hinnant (1977) and described as a complex scheme of ranking, authority and decision making consisting of a successive generational structure that rotates every eight years. According to Hinnant, and as also discussed by Legesse (1973), the Gada system is characterized by the following functions. First, it categorizes all members of the Guji people into 13 generational-grades that succeed each other every 8 years in assuming progressive roles and social responsibilities. The thirteen generational-grades are known as *Suluda*, *Daballe*, *Qarree*, *Dhajisa*, *Kuusa*, *Doorii* and *Gadaa*, *Batu*, *Yuba*, *Yuba Gada*, *Jarsaa* and *Jarsaa Qululu*. In the system, social hierarchy is a central organizing principle through which the generational grades are grouped in two categories as adults (*gurgudda*) and children (*xixiqqa*). Members of the lower five grades (*Suluda*, *Dabballe*, *Qarre*, *Dhajisa*, *Kusa*) are categorized as the generation of children and that of the upper eight grades (*Raba*, *Dori*, *Gada*, *Batu*, *Yuba*, *Yuba Gada*, *Jarsaa*, and *Jarsaa Qululu*) are conceptualized as the generation of adults (Hinnant, 1977). In the relationships between the two generational categories, the children's generation is positioned as subordinate to the generation of adults, whereas the adults' generation has power and control

on those in children's positions. Studies such as Van de Loo, (1991) and Wako (1998) assert that the system organizes social roles around these series of generational grades and assigns obligations as well as rights to all members in both the categories.

Second, membership in the Gada system is based on generational-set in such a way that a child remains exactly five stages (ideally forty years) below his father. This was based on the norm of keeping five generations between a father and his child. All persons who are five grades below their father occupy the same grade regardless of their age. Third, the length of time that a person stays in a generational grade is eight years. Fourth, only males are direct participants in the Gada system, women's direct participation in this institution is extremely limited. As a result, girls are affiliated to the generational grades through their fathers, whereas married women are associated to the system through their husbands.

According to Debsu (2009), Jaleta (2009) and Van de Loo (1991), through the Gada system, the Guji people reinforce their customs (*aadaa*), as well as enforce their norms (*seera*) and moral values (*safuu*) and govern all aspects of their lives. All members of Guji people (men, women, and children) have their own roles in the system even though those of the men are extensive and regular. Here, I discuss the system with my focus on the roles of children in it. According to Wako's (1998) study on Gada rituals, through their roles in the Gada system, children integrate themselves into the social and cultural world of their people. The two common integrative rituals through which children's place in the Gada system is noticeable are known as *biifaa* (blessing ritual) and *maqibasa* (naming ritual). Through the *biifaa*, children receive blessings from elderly men (elderly men in the Gada generational grade) and this practice symbolizes children's tradition of collaboration with adults to appropriate to themselves the tradition of the people they live with. Participation in this ritual is inclusive and involves all members of the Gada grade, families of the children and the *lubas* (elderly men in the generational grades after Gada) who gather at *arda jila* (ritual site) and perform ritual songs. All children in the *dabballe* generational grade are eligible to participate in this ritual. They stand in mass in the ritual site in front of the elderly men who give them blessings through spitting milk on their heads and reciting ritual rhymes that the Guji people recognize as 'holy' verses, known as *eebifata*. The elderly men hold a small pot full of milk on their right hands and fresh grasses on their left hands. The milk and the fresh grasses are often used in such rituals to symbolize fertility and prosperity (Van de Loo, 1991). Each of them sips

from the milk and spit on the heads of the children and recites the following ‘holy’ verses turn by turn.

Let God and earth make you raise and shine
Be cool and precious like the milk
Be ever green like the grass
Let there be fertility and abundance for you and your clan
Let there be peace and prosperity for you and your clan
Let God say as we said.

When the elderly persons recite these verses, the audience reply by saying ‘*waqa jedhu*’ which literally means ‘Let God say it’ and the children recite the following verses of the *mudanna* song, through which they express their roles and their wishes for their people:

We are children of branding
We are children of abundance
We want abundance
We want victory
We want fortune
We want kin
We want prosperity

Likewise, children participate in the *maqibasa* (naming ritual) when they enter the *qarree* generational grade. As discussed by Van de Loo (1991), at this stage children are given a collective name by which they start to identify themselves with one of the five age-set names— *robale*, *halchiisa*, *harmuufa*, *dhallana* and *mudana*— which the people call the *fincaan Guji* (the seeds of the Guji people). The naming ritual, like any other Gada ritual, is performed once in eight years and all men who are in Gada generational grade give a common name to all of their children. The ritual is led by Abbaa Gada and involves slaughtering of a bull, prayers and performances of folksongs known as *qexala*. First, all men who are in the Gada generational grade are gathered at a ritual site along with their children. Then, the Abbaa Gada and his children come to the centre of the gathering. Sitting at the centre of the gathering on the fresh grass, the Abbaa Gada shaves his children and leaving a small amount of hair on the top of the children’s heads. This unshaved top of the children is called as *qarree*, literally meaning ‘top’. The shaving is followed by Abbaa Gada’s speech. He says repeatedly: ‘I am naming my children, listen to me.’ The audience reply by saying, ‘We have

heard.’ Then Abbaa Gada calls the name of the children by one of the Guji age-set names depending on his own age-set name. If the age-set to which he belongs is *mudana*, the name of his children is *robale* which means five age-sets (40 years) behind him. When Abbaa Gada calls the name, for instance ‘robale’, the audience repeats the same. Accordingly, all children of the men who are in the same Gada generation are given the same name.

Children in the *qarree* generational grade are identified as attendants of the seniors and these ideal roles show that children in this generational grade are supporters and followers of the elderly persons. They are expected to give physical assistance to old people and acquire social and cultural knowledge from them. When they enter the *dhajisa* and *kuusa* generational grades children are in their youth stage and are assigned with the role of defending their people from any external attack (Beriso, 1994, 2004). Above all, the *kuusa* is the stage at which young men’s childhood is over and they pass through a rigorous initiation ceremony, into adulthood. The initiation ceremony is known as *lagubasa* (liberating ceremony) and involves testing the youth in the skills, knowledge and morals required of adulthood. When entering the *raba* grade, a person attains adult status and legitimacy to have social authority with intricate social roles and responsibilities.

What is notable from the children’s participation in both rituals is that through the Gada system, children collaborate with adults to fit themselves to Guji people’s ways of life, values and norms. The *Biifaa* represents the process through which they learn values such as abundance, fertility, peace, prosperity, goodness, helpfulness and obedience and the *maqibasa* embodies the way children position themselves in the cultural space, system of role division and social hierarchy of the Guji people.

3.2.2. Oral Tradition

Oral tradition plays central roles in interpersonal, intergroup and intercultural communications in Ethiopia (Azeze, 2001). According to the population and housing census of Ethiopia (FDRE, 2008), only 27 per cent of the Ethiopian population is able to read and write, and thus has access to the written communication. The remaining 73 per cent of the population is able to participate only in oral communication, in which various forms of oral tradition such as oral narratives, songs, expressions and performances are spoken as recurrent forms of

knowledge transmission and information sharing (Nyota and Magara, 2008). Thus, for the majority of the Ethiopian population, it is oral traditions that make possible the passage of knowledge from generation to generation. This condition is more observable among Guji people where, on average, 4 out of six family members are unlettered (Debsu, 2009). Studies such as Belay (2011), Jaleta (2009) and Van de Loo (1991), show that the Guji people have a rich oral tradition through which they make sense of their world and teach their children. According to these studies, they have relatively similar forms of oral tradition with the other Oromo-speaking communities such as Borana and Arsi. According to Jaleta's (2009) study on Guji proverbs, Kidane's (2002) account on Borana folktales, Hussein's (2005) study on oral tradition in the context of the Arsi-Oromo and Gemedu's (2008) study on Oromo folktales, the Oromo society have four genres of oral tradition: *Wedduu* (Folksongs), *Oduuduri/ Duriduri* (Oral Narratives), *Jecha* (Expressions) and *Xapha* (Games) and these are performed on different cultural occasions such as rituals, neighbourhood social events and family social times. These forms of oral tradition share some similarities with what Lindfors (1977) discussed as forms of folklore in Africa. Gemedu (2008) and Kidane (2002) discuss that these forms of oral tradition are performed by adults and children in different social and cultural contexts. In some contexts children participate with adults and in the others children participate with each other. In the performances of riddles, cattle songs and games, for instance, children participate without involvement of adults, while they collaborate with adults in the process of performance and interpretations of folktales. However, children do not participate in performances of myths, legends, proverbs and sayings as these are considered to be adults' lore of communication and the contexts in which these forms are performed are not the prerogatives of children. However, detailed information on how and where children perform riddles, folktales, folksongs and games is lacking as this aspect of the Guji culture has not been documented adequately.

3.2.3. Family Structure

The family structure of the Guji people and children's place in it is described by Beriso (1983) and Debsu (2009) as an arrangement consisting of extended family that includes ancestors from the father's lineage. According to Van de Loo (1991), these extended family networks include five patrilineal family lineages which the Guji people call the *warra Guji shanani* (the five Guji family lineages) and to which women are affiliated through their

husbands. These are (from the seniors to the juniors) *botoro* (great, great grandfather), *abaaboo* (great grandfather), *akaakoo* (grandfather), *abbaa* (father) and *ilma* (children). Among these generations of extended family, there is a close social network based on intergenerational interdependence. Children play pivotal roles in maintaining the network and reinforcing the social as well as economic connections among family members. According to Beriso (1983) through the network in extended family, both grandparents and parents have the obligation to socialize and care for children in line with Guji norms and values. Verbal advice, admonishing and physical punishments are the major means of socialization. Warning and punishing children whenever they make mistakes is considered to be a good way of parenting and shaping children into normal childhood.

The relationships among members in the extended family are based on social hierarchy in which the juniors should always respect the seniors, as discussed by Beriso (1983). Accordingly the great grandparents, grandparents and parents are considered to be seniors and are always respected by the children, who are their juniors. Children are expected to be obedient, hardworking and loyal to the seniors. They are obliged to respect and obey their elders, including their elder siblings. It is believed that there should be formal relationships between adults and children in order to comply with the values of hierarchical social relationships and teach the children about the authority of adults.

The other important feature of the Guji family, according to Debsu (2009) and Hinnant (1977), is their gender based relationships between males and females, including boys and girls. The Guji are a patrilocal community in which a female moves from her birth family to the family of her husband on marriage. As result, after she gets married, a woman is not considered to be a member of her birth family. That is why the Guji people think that a female child is a temporary member of her birth family. Because of the influences from such perceptions, parents give more value to having boys than girls. This is indicated in many cultural practices and three of them are important to see here. First, the celebration at birth is different between baby-boys and baby-girls. When a baby-boy is born, the participants in the celebration ululate four times but for a baby-girl, they ululate only three times. This is to show that the baby-boy is more valuable than the baby-girl. Second, a heifer is given as a gift to a baby-boy on his birth but this is not done for a baby-girl. A father puts a piece of the umbilical cord of a baby-boy in the mouth of a heifer and says to the baby, 'Your life is found inside this heifer.' It is a symbolic practice of connecting the baby-boy to abundance and

prosperity. Thirdly, a girl is not eligible to inherit the wealth of her parents. These customary practices reflect that parents do not give attention to building the social and material wellbeing of their female children. Rather, they focus on shaping their female children to become good wives and skilful in home management in the future.

3.3. Social Changes and Contemporary Life among Guji People

The forms of social changes that characterize the contemporary life of Guji people are legacies of the 1980s villagization programme (programme for resettlement in villages) and include a change from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism, household labour division, formal education and expansion of Christianity. I discuss how villagization implied change in labour division, as well as the introduction of formal education and Christianity and how these changes shaped the contemporary everyday life of the Guji children.

3.3.1. Villagization

Beriso (1995) and Beriso (2002) discussed that the socialist military regime of Ethiopia from 1974-1993, commonly known as *Derg*, implemented a villagization programme in 1985. The programme was aimed at grouping the scattered rural households into small clusters of villages holding 200-300 households with 100 km² compounds per household. The policy objectives of the programme were provision of access for education, health and clean water as well as promotion of equitable land use and reinforcement of state security. According to Beriso (1995), the Guji people were also exposed to and affected by the *Derg* villagization programme, which introduced remarkable changes in the ways of life of the people. First, it influenced Guji people to change their ways of life from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism as well as from mobile and scattered residence to settled and confined villages. Second, these changes were accompanied by new ways of life in which crop cultivation; schooling, Christianity and household division of labour were introduced. Thus, integrating cultivation of crops with herding cattle became a burden for families and this burden, combined with social problems in villages, compelled the people to make a strong effort for survival. Third, these situations gave rise to labour divisions among family members through which activities such as herding cattle, fetching water, fetching firewood and cleaning houses and homesteads were designated as children's roles; whereas activities such as crop cultivation, home management and parenting were presented as adults' duties.

Thus, settlement in villages was the cause of social changes among the Guji people. It caused labour division between adults and children. Following the settlement in villages, schools were established and formal education was introduced. Settlement in villages also became a favourable condition for introduction and expansion of an exotic religion, namely Christianity, among the Guji people. These changes had a significant impact on the social roles and everyday life of the contemporary Guji children as discussed under the following subheadings.

3.3.2. Cattle Herding as Children`s Responsibility

Studies such as Beriso (1983) and Van de Loo (1991) discuss that children are considered to be part of the work force as well as symbols of fertility and abundance among Guji people. They are closely connected to cattle and define the social and economic status of their family. A family that does not have a child does not have a cattle herder and thus cannot have large number of cattle. Such a family is identified as a poor family (*warra iyyessa*). On the other hand, a family with a large number of children does have many cattle herders and thus has the potential to have large number of cattle; such family is called as prosperous family (*warra dureessa*). That is why children are considered to be valuable assets and cattle herding is their prime role in the contemporary situation of the Guji people (see the articles for details on children`s role in cattle herding).

Cattle, as asserted by Beriso (1994) and Hinnant (1978), have a special place in the customary practices and subsistence of the Guji people. Cattle products are the main elements of customary practices in their traditional way of life. For example, rituals involve bull-killing (*qorma qala*) which is a symbol of paying homage to the supernatural power. Put in other words, a bull (*korma*) serves as sacrificial material by which the conflict between human beings and the God (*waaqaa*) is resolved. The Guji call this customary practice as *hariirata* (paying homage) and do it when social, cultural or natural disorders such as epidemic disease, draught, war and infertility occur. Similarly, products such as milk and butter are symbolic of Guji beliefs and values. Milk is a symbol for abundance (*iticha*). As discussed earlier, elders give blessings to children by spitting it over children`s heads and saying, ‘*ititi*’ (be abundant). The Guji call this practices *biifaa* (blessing). Butter is a symbol for honour. A woman honours a man who has *midda* (who killed wild animals such as lions, elephants and buffaloes) by putting butter on his head. A bride (*missirro*) is highly respected and is given

greater social respect. As a symbol of this respect, her girl friends and relatives put butter on her head on the day of her wedding. Furthermore, the Guji puts the umbilical cord of a newly born baby-boy in the mouth of a small heifer. This is a symbolic practice to establish kinship between the cattle and the child and tell the boy that his life is totally dependent on cattle. The heifer that swallowed the umbilical cord of a boy and the cattle reproduced from that heifer will be the properties of the boy forever.¹⁶

The economic significance of cattle is widely recognized among the Guji people. Animal products such as milk, meat and butter serve as staple food items. Children use milk as daily food, mainly in the lowland areas. The Guji also exchange milk and butter for *warqee* (a plant that serves as the staple food in southern Ethiopia and usually called in English as false banana) with the Gedeo people and this practice signifies the economic interdependence between the Guji and the Gedeo who also demonstrated several cultural similarities.¹⁷ Children have an essential role in sustaining this culturally and economically valuable practice of the people. Put in other words, cattle herding is the main duty of children to the extent that the number of children in a family determines the amount of cattle the family can possess.

3.3.3. Crop Cultivation as Adults' Responsibility Mainly

According to Beriso (1995) and Hinnant (1977), cultivation of land was despised among Guji people in the earlier days. The people used to call persons who cultivate land as *Garra* which means persons who were not knowledgeable in cattle herding. As the settlement in villages resulted in less productivity of cattle, because of dislocation from pasture land, epidemics of cattle diseases in villages and scarcity of land for grazing and sheltering the cattle in the villages, the Guji people engaged themselves in cultivation of land as alternative means of subsistence. Men and youth plough land and cultivate both food and cash crops (coffee). The food crops that those living in lowland and semi-highland areas produce include maize, *teff*, potatoes and cabbages; people living in the highland areas cultivate barely, wheat, beans and *teff*. Those residing in the lowland areas are less involved in producing food crops than in

¹⁶ The tradition of putting the umbilical cord of a newly born baby in cattle's mouth does not include baby-girls as they are perceived to be members of another family after their marriage and are not entitled to inherit the property of their birth family.

¹⁷ The Gedeo people produce *warqee* in abundance but the Guji predominantly herd cattle and produce milk and butter. Both of them need *warqee*, milk and butter as necessary food materials.

animal husbandry but those in highland and semi-highland areas give equal attention to both activities. Children participate in crop cultivation in two ways: in weeding, as it is an activity that is simple and manageable by children, and in observing and learning about crop cultivation from their parents, as a resource for the future. As activities of crop cultivation are generally perceived to be hard for children, children do not have extensive roles in them.

3.3.4. Formal Education

Formal education is a recent development among the Guji people (Beriso, 1995). Before the 1980s, schools were not established and formal education was not introduced among the Guji people. The reason, according to Beriso (1994, 1995) was that, before 1980s, the Guji people were pastoralists and moved from place to place in search of grass and water for their cattle. They did not have permanent villages, where schools could be established. In the 1980s, *Derg* regime introduced schooling among Guji people with the aim of promoting social changes. The primary schools were established in a few villages as a means of transforming the people even though only few parents sent their children to school as they gave little importance to modern education and were resistant to the transformation programme. However, the changed political system in 1993 led to a new education and training policy of Ethiopia (Ministry of Education, 1994), resulting in the wide establishment of primary schools all over Ethiopia, including the remote villages of the rural and pastoralist societies. The most recognized element of change was that education in the primary schools started to be given in children's native languages (United Nations, 2010). As a result, children started to learn school subjects in their mother tongues and this development attracted children to attend school and motivated parents to value modern education (Ethiopian National Agency for UNESCO, 2001). In the present context, there is one primary school in each village of rural and pastoralist societies including the Guji people (The World Bank, 2005). Primary schools encompass two cycles in which the first cycle includes grades one to four and the second cycle consists of grades five to eight. In Oromiya Regional State to which the Guji people belong, in both first and second cycles, the medium of instruction is Oromo language (*Afan Oromo*) except for two subjects, which are Amharic¹⁸ language and English language. Curricula and text books for the subjects in primary schools are prepared by experts at regional state level— the Oromiya Regional State— and handed over to schools for

¹⁸ Amharic is the most widely spoken language in Ethiopia

implementation. As stated in the educational policy document (Ministry of Education, 1994) the age for school entry for children in Ethiopia, which also applies for children among Guji people, is seven, and most of the children in the primary schools are in the range of seven to fifteen years. However, there are children who go to school late and stay in primary school beyond this range.

3.3.5. Introduction of Christianity

According to Bersio (1995) the Guji people, several other ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia, had been followers of traditional religion. Their traditional religion constitutes belief in God (*Waaqaa*) and Earth (*Lafa*). Following the settlement in villages, Christianity was introduced among the Guji people and challenged their value and respect for their traditional belief systems. Van de Loo (1991) states that even though there was resistance from the elderly people, children and the young generation of the people accepted Christianity and helped to spread it all over the Guji land. Children and the young people form choirs in churches and become leaders of prayers at home. This indicates that the children and young people played significant roles in the expansion of Christianity among Guji people and this in turn increased the social roles of children.

Generally, the everyday life of the Guji children, similar to the everyday life of rural children in Africa, as discussed by Bloch and Adler (1994), Boyden (1994), Boyden and Levison (2000) and Lancy (1996), is characterized by interaction with adults in the context of intricate cultural stratifications, oral tradition as a popular form of play, work as social responsibility and school as a modern place of learning. Through the cultural stratification that is effected through the Gada system, the Guji children position themselves as competent persons and such competence is manifested in children's participation in oral tradition as well as their roles in the social hierarchy and extended family networks. The social change, on the other hand, introduced new contexts of children's everyday life, expanded the scope of children's social roles and positioned children as responsible agents to exercise their social roles and contribute to sustainable livelihoods of their families. In other words, children are empowered to have a sense of handling responsibilities through which they contribute to the sustainability of their family life.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This thesis is situated in the interdisciplinary social study of childhood based on ethnography, which is considered to be ‘a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood’ (Prout and James, 1990, p.18). Informed by this methodological perspective, I have used methods such as participant observation, ethnographic interview, in-depth interview and focus group discussion. Ethnographic interview, as explained by Spradley (1979), is a contextual inquiry of data through combination of interviews with participant observations. According to Spradley, it is a method of generating data through observing and questioning informants as they perform their activities in their natural setting. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.108) similarly defined the ethnographic interview as ‘spontaneous, informal conversations in the course of ... activities’. Based on these methods, I did the fieldwork for one year—ten months of main fieldwork and two months of follow-up fieldwork— among Guji people in Ethiopia. I carried out the fieldwork predominantly in the area in which members of the Guji major clan, *Huraga*, were living. I preferred this clan because of two reasons. First, the *Huraga* has occupied the largest area of the Guji land (Beriso, 2004). The area in which the clan resides extends from highland to lowland areas and ecologically represents the whole Guji land (Beriso, 1995). Second, *Huraga* is the biggest clan to which the majority of the Guji people belong. The cultural practices that signify the Guji people, the Gada system and its rituals, are actively observable among the *Huraga* even though such cultural practices are shared among members of the other two clans (Van de Loo, 1991). Because of these ecological and socio-cultural characteristics, I focused on oral tradition and the everyday life of children in the area where the *Huraga* Guji clan live.

In the beginning of the fieldwork, I made a wider visit across all the Guji areas and contacted grandparents, parents and children in nine villages. The aim of this visit was twofold. The first was to extract preliminary information that would support me in identifying specific villages for the main fieldwork activities, as it was unrealistic to make ethnographic investigation across the nine villages. The second was to learn about the conditions and processes of entry to the identified villages. Through the wider visit, I observed the everyday life of children and adults in different ecological conditions (highland, semi-highland and lowland) and

understood their broader social and cultural contexts, which helped me in the process of organizing the detailed fieldwork activities in specific villages. I selected three villages with the aim of concentrating on children's contexts and practices in particular and manageable sites. With the aim of achieving ecological representativeness and accessibility for continuous observation, one village was selected from relatively semi-highland areas and two from lowland areas as the Guji land comprises predominantly semi-highland and lowland areas. Selection of villages from both ecological settings is useful for investigation of children's oral tradition as part of children's everyday life in the diverse ecological regions (Leyshon, 2002). In this chapter, I discuss why I based my study on the ethnographic approach, describe the villages in which the fieldwork was done, introduce those children and adults who participated in the fieldwork and present the methods, activities and ethical principles employed in the process of the fieldwork. This chapter is an umbrella for the methodological issues discussed in each article.

4.1. Why Ethnographic Approach?

Researches in the social studies of childhood present ethnography as a useful approach because of two reasons. First, according to Corsaro (2011), it enhances children's participation in the research process. In line with this idea, Prout and James (1990, p.8) argue that 'Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research.' According to these studies, the ethnographic approach presents children as competent subjects (as social actors) in the construction of data about their own lives. Christensen (2004, p.166) argues that the ethnographic approach allows children's active participation in research because it encapsulates dialogical approach and reflexivity.

Ethnographic field illustrations are used to suggest ways in which a dialogical research process can be accomplished through entering into what elsewhere I have called children's 'cultures of communication'. Understanding the ways that children engage with and respond to research include considering two key questions: are the practices employed in the research process in line with and reflective of children's experiences, interests, values and everyday routines; and what are the ways in which children routinely express and represent these in their everyday life?

Participation in the children's culture of communication which Christensen explained as 'a practical engagement with local cultural practices of communication' allows a researcher to understand ways of social interactions and connections among children as well as between children and adults which in turn help her learn how she should communicate with children and behave among children. This participation includes attending to children's interactive events to learn their experiences, interests, values, everyday routines and linguistic futures and enables a researcher to solve problems related to power and adulthood in the research with children. For Christensen (2004), power is not inherited by being an adult but in perceiving children as different from adults. The study emphasized that power does not reside in persons or the social positions of persons but is embedded in the process of interactions and activities among persons, which means in the process of doing of research. In the process of reducing the influence of power, thus, it is vital to observe how 'the social world looks from children's perspective but without making a dubious attempt to be a child' (Christensen, 2004, p. 174). These statements reflect that the ethnographic approach allows children to have direct participation in the research process and illuminate their perspectives about their everyday life.

Second, it is through the ethnographic approach that a researcher can participate in children's interactive events and create closeness with children over extended periods of time to understand their everyday life from an insider's point of view. Christensen (2004, p. 166) expressed this as follows:

Ethnography is a distinct type of research where the knowledge that is produced depends on the researcher taking part in close social interaction with informants over extensive period of time. It is because of its intensive and long character that ethnographic work provides important insights into the nature of researcher's relationships with their informants.

As explained by Christensen, the ethnographic approach allows close interaction with children through engagement with their peer culture that embodies their process of communications in their everyday life. In an ethnographic study, a researcher becomes a part of the local settings of the children and their family; lives with them, acts with them across different places and times and studies how they make meaning of their social practices and relationships. Several studies confirm that this approach enables a researcher to observe that childhood and children's

culture are local and social processes that are understood through the contextual study of children's peer activities and their interactions with adults. For example, Corsaro and Molinari (2000), in an account on children's peer culture, argue that ethnography allows a researcher to be an active member of children's peer group through participation in their interactive events and everyday activities to capture the full involvement of children in a research activity. Solberg (1996) and Pole (2007)) also observe that ethnography permits not only observing children's everyday life from perspectives of children (and also adults) but also allows reflexivity through which a researcher can address the dynamic social circumstances of children. Saarikoski's (2006, p.1) which is a survey of the literature on children's folklore, further elaborates that ethnography involves 'a detailed description of particular children's activities, interpreted as their life experiences in culture and awareness of the researcher of her (his) own position in dialogues with children and in discussions about children.' From these debates, it is possible to note that ethnographic approach involves multiple interactive activities which include watching, listening and understanding (sensing) the everyday circumstances and practices of children and acting and reacting in accordance with the norms, values and needs (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Warming, 2005).

The relevance of this approach for my study of children and oral tradition among the Guji people is obvious. First, understanding children's play culture and everyday life among Guji people—where the traditional ways of life is dominant—requires continuous engagement, participation and observation. It entails close interaction and participation with children in the multiple arenas of their social practices such as school; home and workplace (see Article One in this thesis). It is only through the ethnographic approach that I can document about how the Guji children produce and reproduce (perform, interpret and transmit) oral tradition in such social circumstances. Second, the study of oral tradition as part of children's everyday life—studying oral tradition as children's play practice, means of learning and interaction with each other and with adults—demands what Christensen (2004) termed as a dialogical process and reflexivity through an extended period of time. Christensen's notion of engagement with children's culture of communication and Saarikoski's (2006) argument for detailed description of children's activities are important ethnographic tools in my fieldwork activities (see Article One in this thesis). Based on these rationales, I chose the ethnographic approach and employed methods such as participant observation, ethnographic interviews in-depth interviews and focused group discussion as the central activities of data generation.

The fieldwork comprised three phases. I undertook the first phase from June, 2009 to December, 2009; the second from May, 2010 to August 2010 and the third in November and December, 2011. The first two phases covered the main fieldwork activities, while the third one was a follow-up observation aimed at completion of gaps in the already generated data as well as evaluation of changes since the second phase. The purposes of dividing the fieldwork into three phases were two; the first was to achieve stage by stage organization and understanding of data through off-field analysis and supervisors' feedback. After the first phase of fieldwork, I had four months' off-field time during which I examined the data as well as obtained feedbacks from my supervisors, on the basis of which I identified my methodological and ethical drawbacks as well as the gaps in my data. This experience facilitated flexibility in the research process, allowing me to modify my fieldwork activities so as to correct the drawbacks and fill in the identified gaps. In the second phase, I conducted the fieldwork activities in more reflexive and intensive ways and generated data in depth.

4.2. The Villages

The identified villages were three¹⁹. According to my observations as well as information from the Abaya and Bule-Hora District Administrations,²⁰ the first village comprises 5 per cent semi-highland and 95 per cent lowland; the second covers 40 per cent lowland and 60 per cent semi-highland and the third covers 90 per cent lowland and 10 per cent semi-highland areas, approximately. In terms of population, the first contains 3,497 persons, the second 2,352 persons and the third 4,025 persons. In terms of household number, the first, the second and the third villages had 513 (472 male-headed and 41 female-headed), 392 (341 male-headed and 51 female-headed) and 575 (490 male-headed and 85 female-headed) households respectively. In each village, there is one primary school, one small health centre and one political administrative office called *ganda* (local administration). All households in the villages subsist on agro-pastoralism that includes cattle herding and crop cultivation. Children

¹⁹ The names of the villages have been kept confidential.

²⁰ The first and third villages fall within the Abaya District (Aanaa) and the third village is found in Bule-Hora District. Oral information about the villages was generated from administrators of the districts.

and young people below 18 years old form the majority of the population of the villages (approximately 66 per cent).²¹

As it is unrealistic to include all households in the villages in the detailed observations and interviews, I purposefully selected twenty-one households (seven from each village) of which only two were led by women. My selection was made in such a way that it was possible to include households in extended family networks; the 'extended family network' includes the neighbourhood and within it, interdependent relationships among grandparents, parents and children in each village. Grandparents and parents in such relationships live in neighbourhoods (with the houses built near to each other) and care for children in cooperation with each other. Accordingly, six households from each village had an extended family relationship. Each household consists of 4-12 members, which means that a household, on average, comprises seven members including parents and children or grandparents and grandchildren.



Figure 2: An extended family: Three generations living interdependently in one of the villages

Even though the study focuses on children, I was convinced that inclusion of adults (parents, grandparents, teachers and elderly persons) is relevant for construction of how children perform oral tradition through their relationships with adults and for eliciting adult perspectives about the everyday life of contemporary children. Studies reveal that in their relationships with each other, both adults and children face the realities about each other. Mayall (2002, p. 28) for instance asserts, 'In their relationship with adults, children find themselves faced with adult knowledge and experiences... In turn, adults must face up to children's distinctive ways of understanding the social world.' Mayall's statements denotes

²¹ The information about the number of population in the three villages was obtained from the Galana and Abaya District administrations.

the importance of adults' perspectives in two ways: first, adults' perspectives are important for understanding how children interact with and learn from adults, and second, adults' perspectives are useful to document how adults construct the social practices and behaviours of the children. Based on these notions, I considered adults as sources of data about the everyday life of children. Children's everyday practices—their storytelling, riddling, and other play activities—are situated within contexts of peer interactions, intergenerational interactions, work and family relationships. These contexts of children are in turn defined by values and principles embedded in cultural systems and social institutions. Adults, as participants in these micro and macro contexts, have perspectives that contribute to understanding of children's social practices. All children from the selected households were participants in the observations and interviews. However, the participant observation in the cattle herding fields and in school compounds included other children with whom children from the households had peer networks. For example, Tariku (12-year-old boy) and Tigist (9-year-old girl) were from the selected households in one of the villages. When they herd cattle, they play riddling and storytelling with children from other households in the village. Again, in the school, they play riddling and storytelling with children from other households in their village. In both contexts, I observed the interaction that Tariku and Tigist had with their peer members through play activities. Thus, children from the selected households were the key subjects and their social interactions and play practices with different children from different households were observed and recorded.

4.3. Research Participants

The fieldwork involved four categories of participants—children, parents/grandparents, primary school teachers and elderly persons—with the aim of exploring children's oral tradition and everyday life in the context of their interactions with each other as well with adults in different social settings that included workplace, home and school.

Children: Children whose ages were in the range covered by primary school (7 to 14 years) were the target population of the study. Sixty children (twenty from each village) participated as key subjects in the observation and interview processes in different contexts such as home, cattle herding place and school. The study included both genders; thus, of the sixty children, twenty-five were girls and thirty-five were boys. Most of the children whose everyday practices of play and social interactions were observed were siblings, while others were those

who had close relationships and regular networks with each other. For example, a child who was selected as key subject in this study had interactions with different children in school and cattle herding fields. She interacted with a group of children on one day and with another group of children on another day. These groups were children who herd cattle in the same field, children who were friends in school and children who belong to extended family networks. The social practices and interactions of these children were emphasized as contexts for their performance and interpretation of oral tradition. The fieldwork activities I did with these children included participant observations in the riddling and storytelling events at home, in cattle herding places and in schools; and ethnographic interviews based on the observed events and related social practices of children. These activities were central in the fieldwork process and aimed at eliciting data about how children perform their oral tradition as part of their everyday play practices and learn their social environment through it.

Parents and Grandparents: 21 parents (10 fathers and 11 mothers) and 15 grandparents (7 grandfather and 8 grandmothers) were included as participants. Most of the parents and grandparents have neighbourhood and extended family relationships. For example, Morma (a grandfather) is a father of Galgale (a parent) and both live in a village as neighbours. Parents and grandparents in such relationships were included with the aim of exploring children's practices of oral tradition in close interaction with both parents and grandparents as well as of generating the perspectives of these persons on contemporary childhood. The parents and the grandparents were members of the households described above (see profile of parents and grandparents in Appendix).

Primary School Teachers: Teachers from three primary schools were included as participants. In each school, there were 13-15 teachers of whom 5-7 were interviewed. The interviews with the teachers were aimed at eliciting data about children's play practices in the school compound, the relationship between children's oral play practices and learning, participation of children in school, school disciplinary rules, children's oral play and learning time in school, the school's system of operation and children's reaction to it, the school-home connection to relate children's practices at home with their activities in school and the relationship between children's work and learning. The teachers were from both genders and were in the range of 27 to 45 years old. Educationally, all of them were trained as teachers in the Colleges of Teacher Education for one to two years. All of the teachers were government employees and lived on their monthly salary, which they described as a 'hand-to-mouth life'.

Elderly Persons: Among Guji people, any person does not have the right to articulate and interpret the macro cultural practices, for example the Gada system and its rituals.²² This right is given to a few elderly persons who are in the *luba*²³ position and these persons participated in the focus group discussion. The discussion with these culture bearers was useful to learn about and document the place of children in Guji customary practices and intuitions, values and norms related to the relationships between children and adults, differences between the past and the present childhoods, the meanings and values that the Guji people attach to children's customary practices, economic activities and social interactions.

4.4. Access to the Villages

4.4.1. Negotiation with Gatekeepers

Studies such as Leyshon (2002), Panelli (2002), Punch et al. (2007) and Robson et al. (2007) assert that doing ethnographic fieldwork in a rural society where the people live in multifaceted social and cultural value systems requires negotiation with different gatekeepers at different levels. This situation makes field entry a crucial step in ethnographic research with children. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), it is at the entry stage that a researcher tackles challenges in a new environment and gets acquainted with the people in a research site.

There were two types of structures that I faced as gatekeepers to the Guji people in the villages. The first was the current political administration while the second was the systems of norms; values and social institutions of the people (see Article One in this thesis). In both cases there were gatekeepers, and it was through their consent and support that I could get access to the people in the villages. Before this stage, it was imperative for me to identify the right gatekeeper—a recognized person whose consent and support was respected and accepted by all members of a village. The consent from such persons was a gate-opener and guaranty of acquiring the freedom to live in the villages and participate in the social and cultural practices of the people, which in turn helped me to be recognized as a member of the community. Getting consent from gatekeepers in the political administration enabled me to

²² The macro cultural practices of the Guji people include performing the Gada rituals, offering prayers to supernatural powers, giving blessings, resolving interpersonal conflicts and telling the history and culture of the Guji people to children, young people and people from other cultures. .

²³ Persons in the *luba* positions are those who are in Gada and beyond Gada generational grades.

have administrative recognition as a permitted fieldworker in the villages. However, as the people trust their cultural leaders more than the political administrators; the consent I obtained from the latter was not as helpful as the one I gained from the former. For example, in the beginning of the fieldwork, I went to the villages with a couple of letters of consent from political administrators. But, by showing these letters to the people in the villages, I could not obtain genuine acceptance. The people in the villages rather understood me as a secret agent sent to their village by district administrators. It was through approaching the cultural leaders in the villages and obtaining their consent and support that I was able to establish myself in the villages. After long deliberations on my identity, my personality and my purpose among the Guji people, the leaders gave me permission to stay in their villages and participate in the social and cultural practices of their people.

As my fieldwork focuses on investigating how children perform and interpret oral tradition as part of their everyday life, the places where children may be situated during everyday activities, such as cattle herding fields, home and school and their interactive events in these places are sites of my observations and interviews. After I established myself in the villages, I worked to have access to these places, where the adults with whom the children live and interact are also to be found; for example, at home, children live and interact with parents/grandparents, in school they interact with teachers. These adults are not only everyday life partners with children but also gatekeepers to these places. Thus, I gained access to these places of children through consents from parents, grandparents and school teachers.

4.4.2. Acquaintance with Children in the Villages

The everyday life of children among Guji people comprises cattle herding, attending school, play and social interaction. The play practice and social interactions are closely connected with cattle herding and attending school, and involve children's interaction with each other as well as adults. The Guji children perform oral tradition as peer play practice in cattle herding fields. Home is another social place for children to play with oral tradition through interaction with their parents and siblings. In school, children's participation in performance of oral tradition through interaction with each other is also important. I used Christensen's notion of 'engagement with children's culture of communication' to enter such scenes of everyday life and interactive events of the Guji children. However, in the early stage of my approaches to children, I encountered a difficulty.

The difficulty was my being an adult and physical difference from children—the fact that I was older and bigger than children—and the second was the power that the children attributed to me based on the Guji people’s norm of the intergenerational social hierarchy. As a result of these difficulties, I learned that engagement with children’s social world and participation in their work and play culture was not easy to achieve as an adult researcher (Wyness, 2009). The physical difference between me and the children embodied differences in identity, role and behaviour because the children knew their social difference from adults and perceived an adults’ act of crossing this line of difference as strange (Mayall, 2000). As it was unrealistic for me to put aside my adult identity even though I was in the children’s place, I acted in a way that could reduce my perceived adult power through learning children’s culture of communication.

In the beginning of the fieldwork, I stayed with children across different places observing their social practices and interactive events. I introduced myself to them and told them why I was there among them. Then I started telling them folktales and riddles through which I became more familiar to them (see Article One in this thesis). Many children started to come to me to listen to my stories and riddles. After four weeks, the children began to tell me their folktales and riddles voluntarily. This was evidenced through children’s confidence to come around me, touched different parts of my body (my hair, my hands, my clothes, my shoes and my bag) and invite me to participate in their play culture. I sometimes asked them whether I was a child or an adult, and they responded, ‘You are not a child, you are an adult.’ I asked them why they wanted to play with me if I was an adult, and they responded, ‘because you know children’s play.’ This response indicates that the children gave their attention to my engagement with their peer culture rather than my adulthood. This encounter supports Christensen’s (2004) argument that power in research with children is inherited not in being an adult in the interaction and practice that an adult researcher makes with the children. In other words, researcher’s engagement with children’s culture of communication positions children to approach her/him, understand her/him and allow her/him to take part in their peer culture.



Figure 3: The researcher participating in children`s peer practices

This experience revealed to me that clearing the shadow of adulthood and entering the world of children requires a child-friendly way of communication (see Article One in this thesis). It was through such child-friendly ways of interaction that the children learned to approach me and accepted me as an adult-friend. After achieving familiarity with the children and obtaining their friendship in cattle herding fields, I participated in their peer culture and cattle herding activities. The children gave me roles in their plays, shared their stories with me, asked me to tell them my stories and ordered me to do everything in the way they ordered each other. When I failed to perform storytelling in the right way, the children were embarrassed by my ignorance and some of them laughed at me, while the others corrected me. I guessed the reason was that children expect an adult person to know such cultural practice. They often asked me, ‘Aren’t you an adult? How do not you know this play?’ To such a question I replied that I used to know them but I forgot them now. The children were proud of guiding and correcting me whenever I failed to perform a play activity in the way they did. In this world of children, I lost my adult power through my failure to perform a play activity in the correct way but the children gained power over me as they knew plays that I did not know (Corsaro, 2011). This context gave the children the confidence to include me in their peer activities and the autonomy to perform their play activities in their own way—without paying attention to the presence of an adult among them.

In the various contexts of interaction, the children were more inquisitive than adults. Whenever I met new children in the cattle herding fields, they asked me why I went to their place, why I wanted to stay with them, where my home was, with whom I was living, why I wanted to participate in their plays, why I asked their names and names of their siblings, why I recorded their voices, and why I took their photos. To these questions, I had to give relevant

answers that would satisfy the children and develop their trust in me. I often explained to them that I wanted to learn storytelling from children and write a book that children can use for learning in school. This response generated another question from the children; the question that always recurred in the mind of the children. They asked, ‘Being an adult, how do you not know storytelling?’ My response to this question was usually, ‘I used to know them when I was a child, but I forgot them now.’ Through such practices and interactive events, I learned the values of the children and how to respond to their inquiries. Interactive events such as storytelling and riddling in the cattle herding fields entail their everyday play practices which they regulate and perform as part of their peer culture. Thus, one of my important duties during my participation in children’s interactive events was to conform to the rules and control of the children. This way of my engagement with children’s peer culture made the children forget my physical difference (see Article One in this thesis).

I extended my interaction with the children from cattle herding fields to home and school. However, the children who acted with me as one of their friends changed their position and approached me as one of their elder family members at home and as their teacher in school. In other words, the children with whom I established rapport in cattle herding fields took me to their home and introduced me to their siblings and family members. The same children facilitated my contact with their friends in schools. However, the relationship between me and the children in the home and school contexts was different from the context in the cattle herding place because in the home and school contexts children are sensitive to the norm of intergeneration hierarchy (see Article One in this thesis). As children’s interaction in the home and school contexts include both children and the adults with whom children live and perform their social actions, my activities for establishing contact included adults. Based on the arguments of ethnographers (as discussed above), I established social contact with adults through multiple activities. First, I introduced myself to parents of children and simultaneously learned the norms of intergenerational and intra-generational as well as inter-gender interactions among the people through participating in different social activities in the villages. My ethnic identity—that I belong to the Oromo ethnic group—and my ability to speak the Oromo language as well as my familiarity with the Guji people’s ways life in the rural areas helped me establish myself as part of their community(as one of them).

As argued by Christensen (2004), researcher’s conformity with children’s culture of communication gives the children the confidence to share their knowledge and the power to

guide the researcher. In the circumstances controlled by children (as in cattle herding fields) researcher's understanding children's culture of peer communication is important. In the settings ruled by adults like home and school, children's culture of communication with adults is useful. This situation reflects two points that are important in ethnographic research with children. The first is that methodological flexibility is vital to address children's culture of communication and enter their social world and the world they share with adults. The second is that power is inherited in the researcher's reflexive communication and practices with children rather than in her/his adulthood (see Article One in this thesis).

4.5. Methods of Data Collection

Methods of data collection in ethnography, as stated by Hammersley and Atkinson, (2007) and Luders (2004) are based on three concepts: time, people and context. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), knowledge of the time when the phenomenon to be observed naturally occurs, the people relevant for the phenomenon, and the context (place and situation) in which the phenomenon takes place, are important. When I connect this notion to my fieldwork, three times in the day (morning, afternoon and evening), two generations of people (children and adults) and three places (workplace /cattle herding places, school and home) become relevant. Among Guji people (also true for most rural areas in Ethiopia), children's and adults' daily activities are characterized by movement across these places at the different times. Children attend school in the morning and herd cattle in the afternoon. They stay at home with their parents during the evening time. Adults work on farms during the day time and stay at home with their children during evening time. When they move across these places, children do different activities and face different social realities. I assumed that understanding the dynamics in children's everyday life, including practices of oral tradition, was possible through moving with children across these places and observing how they made meaning of their practices and interactions (see Article One in this thesis). Similarly, adults move to workplaces in the morning and back to home in the evening. Here, children's interaction with adults in the circumstance they share with them and adults' perspectives on their relationships with children is my focus. To study children's oral tradition as part of their everyday life and knowledge from the perspective of both children and adults in such contexts, I employed two main methods— participant observation and ethnographic

interview—along with two minor methods,²⁴ which are in-depth interviews and focused group discussions. Ethnographic interviews, according to Spradley (1979), combine engaged observation and on-the-spot interviews to achieve contextual gathering of data. In line with this notion, I blended observations with interviews and performed them simultaneously. That is to say, while conducting interviews, I observed practices and behaviours of the participants and again while conducting observations with children in cattle fields and among the family members at home, I asked them contextual questions (questions that arise from what I observed in the setting). Thus, combining observation with interviews enabled me to simultaneously examine how children perform and construe their oral tradition in combination with work and school practices. With the children, as their social practices and interactions are dynamic across workplace, home and school, I employed flexible strategies of observations and interviews. In this subsection, I described the four methods employed for data generation.

4.5.1. Participant Observation and Ethnographic Interview

The participant observation and ethnographic interview were conducted in three circumstances: workplace (that is, cattle herding fields), home and school. I first describe the participant observation and ethnographic interview with children in cattle herding fields and then discuss the one I did with children and adults in the home and school circumstances. I begin by a quote from my field note.

One day, I saw when Getu (10-year-old boy) was leading cattle to a distant pastureland. I greeted him and walked with him helping him by leading the cattle. While we (Me and Getu) were walking towards the pastureland, Getu saw an old woman who was standing by the side of the road. He said to the woman, ‘Ayyee, yooyaa’ which means ‘Mother, I salute you’. The woman replied, ‘Getu, Nagaa siif ta`u’ which means ‘Getu, let peace be upon you’. As we continued the journey, Getu saw an old man. This time, he went near to the man and stood in front of him saying, ‘Ayyaa yooyyaa’ which means ‘My Father, I salute you’. The man kissed the child on the head and said, ‘Badhaadhi, Hoori’ which is to mean ‘Be blessed and abundant’. Then, Getu

²⁴ Main methods are those I used with children and adults more frequently and minor methods are those I used only on some occasions or less frequently.

and I continued leading the cattle to the pastureland. I asked him why he went to the man and stood in front of him but did not do this to the woman. He replied, ‘Namichi fira; jaartiin miti’ which means ‘the man is my close relative but the woman is not’.

This text shows points. The first that I by moving with the boy, I observed his culture of communication with adults. The second is that by combining participant observation with interview, I learned how the child interacted differently with the two persons—close saluting to an adult relative and distant saluting for an adult who is not his relative—and how he constructed his dynamic relationships with those two persons. I started the participant observation and ethnographic interview with children from cattle herding fields as discussed in this chapter. There were two shifts of cattle herding for children: the first shift from morning to noon and the second shift from noon to evening. Herding cattle from morning to noon in the nearby grazing land is called *warsaa* (looking after cattle until noon in the nearby grazing field) whereas herding cattle in distant grazing fields from noon to evening is known as *bobbaasa* (leading cattle to distant grazing field).



Figure 4: Children in cattle herding fields

A child who herds cattle from evening to noon doesn't continue herding from noon to evening.²⁵ Another child who has been working in a different place or has been attending school from morning to noon comes and leads the cattle to the distant field for water and more

²⁵ During school time and cultivation (sowing and harvesting seasons), small children herd cattle in the nearby field from the morning to the noon. The grownup children, after coming home from work or school and having their lunch, take the cattle to the distant field, make them drink water and keep them in the grassy area until evening.

grass and looks after them until the evening. When it is evening, the same child leads the cattle back to home. The child who looks after the cattle from morning to noon comes back home, has his/ her lunch, and then gets involved in the afternoon activities such looking after calves and weak animals that are kept around the home. I observed that both boys and girls can herd cattle in the nearby grazing field but only boys can do the herding in the distant grazing field. Informants asserted that it is unnatural for girls to herd cattle on distant grazing fields as they could be exposed to sexual abuse in places that are far from home.

Cattle herding fields are where children perform folktales, riddles and cattle songs freely. In addition to these oral play practices, the children perform games such as *giricha* (stone-game), *utaalcha* (jumping), *figicha* (running), *wallanso* (wrestling), and *waltolcha* (make-believe such home-making, kraal-making). During my participation in children's interactive events in cattle herding fields, I observed how they perform oral tradition in combination with herding cattle, how they compete and cooperate with each other through this oral play practice and how they interpreted it.



Figure 5: Children in Peer interaction and storytelling in cattle herding fields

I joined groups of children, sat among them, shared my stories and listened to their stories and took part in their peer activities through sharing roles. In the storytelling and riddling plays, for example, a child has telling, listening and interpreting roles. I participated with the children in sharing those roles while also recording the practices on my digital voice recorder. My participation and observation of the children's peer activities were combined with interviews through which I elicited how children interpreted their play practices as well as learned about their social environment through them. The interview questions emerged from

children's interactive events that include context, process and interpretation of riddles or folktales.

The study is informed by the perspective of 'childhood as relational phenomena' and focus on not only children's peer culture but also on the culture that they share with adults. Thus, children's interaction with adults is part of the participant observation and ethnographic interview. With the aim of learning how children interact with adults in social contexts outside the home, my participant observation and interview in the workplace included adults as well. I stayed at farms (where adults work with children) and worked with them and talked to them while working. I also walked with adults in the neighbourhood and went with parents for herding cattle, especially in the late afternoon when they went out to help their children in directing cattle back to their kraal to observe the nature of relationship between adults and children in the outside-home contexts. Home and school were the places where I mainly observed and inquired about how children, through their oral traditions and the combined social practices, interact with adults (their parents and their teachers) and other children (their siblings and school mates). Home is where children play with their siblings and interact with their parents during night times. School is another place where children learn, and play with their school friends as well as interact with their teachers. I stayed with children in these places, observing and participating in their oral tradition and the combined social practices.

The oral play at home was between parents and children when it was storytelling and among children when it was riddling predominantly, even though children can play storytelling with each other at home as well. Grandparents and parents tell folktales to children and the children listen attentively and react through laughter and asking questions. The tradition was that while parents tell, children listen and entertain. When parents were busy with discussion among each other, children went to a different place in the house or outside the house (in the homestead) and played riddling and storytelling with each other. I attended the oral play and interaction of children and elicited how they creatively perform and reproduce their oral tradition in that context. However, it was not easy for me to join children and participate in their storytelling and riddling events in the home context. Because of the social hierarchy of which they were conscious in the home context, the children were inhibited whenever I sat among them and participated in their play practices. In order to construct a relatively relaxed

context of interaction with children, I used to begin my participation by telling them folktales and riddles. The following example illustrates this process:

It was night and all members of the family were at home. Mormma (grandfather) was talking with a guest man (as old as him) while his wife and her granddaughter were cooking food for dinner and making the evening coffee. Their grandchildren (Girma, boy and 12 years old, Tibebu, boy and 10 years old and Ayano, boy and 7 years old) were sitting in the corner inside the house and playing. Even though I was sitting with Mormma and the guest man, I was interested in joining the children. But, I did not go and join them directly. I first listened to and observed their play activities from a distance. Then I moved to sit near them, and asked them what they were doing. However, the children did not feel free with my presence among them; they were shy and reluctant to reply. I continued asking about what they were doing. One of the children—with his eyes looking down—replied that they were playing. I asked them what they were playing and another child told me that they were playing riddling. Then, I told them that I also know storytelling, that I can tell them. They all looked at me and replied, ‘Tell us. Tell us.’ This time, I sat among them and told them the folktale about ‘A Donkey and A Dog’. The children became animated and asked me to tell them another folktale. Then, I told them the folktale about the ‘Woman and Her Stepchild’. I also told to the children that I knew riddles and they again asked me to tell them. I told them several riddles and the children participated by receiving and interpreting. Now, the children became free in their interaction with me. They started to tell me their own riddles turn by turn. Now, my role slowly converted from telling to listening.

My practice of telling folktales to children in the home context is not strange for the children as it is normal that an adult tells folktales to children. In other words, storytelling is a practice that parents and grandparents often do with their children at home. However, through telling riddles and making the context of interaction less formal, I transcended the scope of interaction between parents and children. In other words, my engagement with telling riddles to the children changed the nature of interaction between me and the children—the change from formal adult-to-child interaction to the informal child-to-child interaction as riddling is part of children’s peer culture (the play culture that children share with each other but not

with adults). As result, children started to tell me their own riddles; this practice of children is absent in their storytelling process with their parents. The other activities I did in the home context was joining the evening storytelling events—events in which parents tell stories to children—as a teller and listener and observing children’s roles in the process. In such events, I took different roles, meaning that I sometimes told folktales and at other times listened to the tales of the adults. Through my observation in the home context, I also documented what parents talked about their children with each other, how they interacted with their children and how their children approached them, what they felt about present childhood and family members’ activities, and how they networked with other people outside home (Bushin, 2007).

School was the other setting of my observation and ethnographic interviews. The school day started at 8:00 am and ended at 12:00 pm. One session ran for 40 minutes and each day children attend six sessions. After attending three sessions, they have a 20 minute break time during which they leave the classroom and engage themselves in different play activities. Some of them play football; others stay in groups and play storytelling and riddling. Still others meet their friends in different sections and walk together and talk to each other. My role in this context was to observe children’s performance of storytelling and riddling and to ask them questions, which often resulted in conversations between me and the children as well as among the children. However, as the break was short, we (the children and I) did not have adequate time to hold long conversations.

The other angle of my observation and interview in the school context pertains to participation in the riddling and storytelling sessions in the classroom and doing interviews with children, simultaneously. I observed that a few Oromo language teachers devoted one or two sessions in a month for children to perform riddles and folktales, although only few of these cultural practices had been included in school syllabus. Children were very active and interested in such sessions and organized their activities by themselves. In such sessions, children were highly eager to demonstrate their competence in telling folktales and riddles as well as interpreting them. My roles here were to replace the teachers and have storytelling and riddling sessions with children in grades from two to six. I organized sessions in which children voluntarily told folktales and riddles they knew. There were two ways by which the children performed storytelling and riddling. The first one was the lockstep, in which a child told his/her folktale or riddle to all the children in the class. In this kind of performance, the teller took the front position (that is, stood in front of the children in the class) and told riddles

and folktales that children in the class listened to and interpreted. The second way was group storytelling, in which children in the class were divided into several groups and shared riddles and folktales with members of their group. This second way of telling had two drawbacks. First, in a classroom, there were several groups telling riddles and folktales at the same time. This created disruptive level of sound that divided the attention of the listeners and adversely affected the motivation of the tellers. Second, all children did not have equal knowledge of telling and interpreting folktales and riddles. As a result, in some groups all children could tell riddles and folktales and in the other groups all children might not have the adequate level of competence. Thus, this way of performance hinders children's chance of learning from each other.

In general, interviews were conducted in combination with participant observation in the contexts of children's performance of oral tradition. Children's interpretation of folktales and riddles as well as their reactions to characters, images, events and behaviours emerging from the context and performance of these forms of oral tradition were generated through the combination of these methods. Thus, raising questions for discussions with children and adults in relation to a storytelling context and performance and comparisons of their comments and reflections made the methodology more complete, eliciting comprehensive information on how children are social actors in interpretive reproduction of oral tradition. Through discussions on issues that came up through riddling and storytelling, I learned the way children compared and contrasted situations in their oral traditions with situations in the real world.

4.5.2. In-depth interviews

I conducted in-depth interviews with adults (parents, grandparents, school teachers) and children with the aim generating data about the everyday life of children (Hopf, 2004). The in-depth interview usually ranged from one hour to two hours, involved one or two individuals at a time and took place at home on holidays. The home was selected as it is a place where it was possible to contact an individual child or adult and conduct interviews without interference from other children and adults. Holidays (Sundays) were the days on which both children and adults stay at home and have free time for the interview. I sat with selected children, grandparents, parents and school teachers over long periods of time and produced their individual perspectives and everyday experiences. The in-depth interviews

with children focused on children's narratives of their daily activities. I asked the children to tell me their daily activities starting from early in the morning to late in the night. Such narratives of daily activities helped me capture how children combine their oral play with their work and school as well as how they apply it in their interaction with adults. It also helped me learn the everyday activities of the children and trace their places and times of oral tradition systematically. I also used in-depth interviews to elicit children's perspectives on work, education and intergenerational relationships. The in-depth interview with parents and grandparents emphasized memories of childhood and perspectives on contemporary children. The in-depth interviews with school teachers stressed the place of oral tradition in school and modern education, the everyday teaching and learning process and practices in schools and teachers' reflections on contemporary childhood.

4.5.3. Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussion, as Bohnsack (2004) explains, is useful for deeper understanding of cultural practices in a qualitative research. The focus group in my study were locally popular elderly persons who have deep knowledge of the Guji culture with the social authority to articulate it. Multiple discussions with a group consisting of five to seven elderly persons emphasized specific topics such as systems and practices in the Gada system, the place of oral tradition among Guji people, past and present adult-child relationships and the social changes and everyday life among Guji people. These topics were discussed by the same group of elderly persons on different days. The focus group discussions were held predominantly in the beginning and end phases of the fieldwork with the aim of understanding the overall picture of the culture and everyday life of the Guji people in the initial phase and, towards the end, generating data that can help to connect the everyday social practices of children to their macro social and cultural contexts.

My participation in these methods of data generation—observation, interviews, discussions—enabled me to learn that both engagement with and detachment from practices and behaviours of a society are useful for different purposes. Engagement is useful to observe and understand social and cultural phenomena of a society from an insider's point of view. Detachment is useful to avoid taking things for granted and to be sensitive to all practices and actions in a society (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Since I was familiar with the local social and cultural practices and values of the Guji people, I might not have been sensitive to

everything I saw and heard during the fieldwork activities among the people, because of which there was a probability of missing useful information. In order to avoid such a problem, I tried to be alert to all cultural and social activities and behaviours that I observed and to ask the people about them as if I was not familiar with them. I tried to forget my prior knowledge and understanding of the local social and cultural practices and behaviours and instead seek their meanings from the people. For me, engagement was easier than detachment but being inside and remaining curious about everything was not easy to achieve.

4.6. Data Recording

I employed three means of data recording that are used in qualitative research. These were: taking field notes, audio/video recording and taking photographs.

4.6.1. Taking Field notes

In illuminating the importance of taking field notes, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 142) state that 'it (taking field notes) does often constitute a central research activity, and it should be carried out with as much care and self-conscious awareness as possible.'; They believe that taking field notes, though a traditional method, is still an important way of obtaining rich information in ethnographic research. Accordingly, I employed two forms of taking field notes. The first was descriptive field notes in which I sketched down the events, places, activities and behaviours I observed at a place in a time. Through descriptive field notes, I recorded events, performances, processes of storytelling and riddling and behaviours I observed and sensed during my interactions with children and adults in the performance process as well as during my movements in the field. During the observation and interview process, I jotted down important points in my note book. Immediately after the observation and interview, I used the jotted points as well as my own memory and described in greater detail the phenomenon I had observed. The second was the reflective field note in which I recorded my own reflections on the events, places, activities and behaviours I observed. In this method, I narrated my immediate understandings of and reflections on a particular event, action, behaviour, performance, expression and situation in a particular time and place.

4.6.2. Audio Recording

Audio recording is another means of documenting data in ethnographic fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Using the digital audio recorder, I captured narratives,

events, places, actions and discussions in multiple circumstances. This way of recording helped me to control some data losses that could occur in the process of taking field notes. In events where video recording is possible (that is, where video recording does not affect the context and process of riddling and storytelling) I used video recorder in addition to the audio recording, but as the use of this equipment often disturbed the natural context of children's oral tradition—children's attention goes to looking at their images in the equipment—I did not use it frequently to record children's interactive events. Thus, to record storytelling and riddling events at home and in children's workplaces, I predominantly used audio recording. However, in schools, where children did not stop their actions and follow their interest (in watching their images) because of the school discipline and rules, I used video recording in addition to the audio one.

4.6.3. Photography

Harper (2004) asserts that photography is important to obtain images of participants, places and contexts in a qualitative research. Based on this assertion, I used photographs (still images) to supplement audio recording and the field notes. In other words, through photographing, I produced still images of the context in which data was generated. In the participant observations and interviews, I used this method to capture the still images of children at the end of an event (storytelling event, riddling event, interview event, and so on) as taking photos in the beginning or in the middle of an event distracted children's attention and disturbed the natural context and process of performances.

4.6.4. The Merits and Demerits of Using Digital Cameras in Fieldwork

In the use of the digital camera for recording data during the fieldwork, I encountered variable experiences. The important experience was that each of the data recording material I used had their own merits and demerits in the process of interactions with children and the people in the fieldwork settings. The digital audio, video and photo recordings, for example, played significant roles in creating friendly relationships between me and the children. Not only the children, but adults also were happy when I recorded their voices and captured their images and played or showed them back for them. Through this process, I created a strong friendship with children as well as solved my social difference with adults.

However, there were also drawbacks with using these digital tools during participant observations in children's interactive events. For example, when I used a video or a photo camera to record a storytelling and riddling practices, the children competed with each other to have their image recorded. They gave their attention to the camera and their images in the camera forgetting their storytelling and riddling practices. This situation often changed the normal storytelling and riddling context because children's attention was drawn to the camera and they stopped their performance or did it without engagement or interest. When they saw a camera on my hand, they would start to laugh and stop their oral play practices and ask to see their photos. Thus, the video recording and photographing had challenges in fieldwork activities with children as both disturbed children's natural contexts of performances of oral play activities.

4.7. Data Analysis, Transcriptions and Translations

4.7.1. Data Analysis

My process of data analysis entails scrutinizing and compiling the information documented in the field notes, audio recordings, videos and photographs. Each day, immediately after observations and interviews, I carried out two activities. I enriched my field notes through remembering the situations in the observed events and listening to the audio/video recordings. Again, I used the field notes to enrich transcriptions from audio recordings. Each day and week during the fieldwork and right after the fieldwork, I studied my data (the transcriptions and field notes) to make sense of it and identify the theme it contains. Through such process, I produced a cluster of themes that developed into thematic categories and later on gave rise to concepts. In other words, from each thematic category, I produced concepts which I developed as the topics of articles. Remembering and taking notes and enriching and completing the field notes from the audio recordings and putting them under thematic categories were the central and recurrent processes of data analysis throughout the fieldwork.

4.7.2. Data Transcription

Data recorded in audio/video materials should be transcribed in order to be organized and analysed. But, transcription of long conversations, narratives, storytelling and riddling processes was a complex activity that demanded the investment of time, patience and huge energy. In the process of transcription, I first listened to the audio/video recordings repeatedly until I understood the oral texts and their respective contexts clearly. Then, I used the play

button to write the oral texts into written texts. After transcribing a text, I replayed the recording to check my transcription. The transcription process was aimed at transformation of the voice data to written data without changes in content, meaning and structure. As transcription of the entire audio and video recorded data required lots of time, and would have extended beyond the time line of this project, I limited myself to transcribing those data with high relevance for addressing the research questions at hand.

4.7.3. Data Translation

I translated the transcribed data from the Oromo language (the language of the participants) into English language (the language in which the study is to be reported). Translation of oral tradition as well as oral narratives is one of the challenges in ethnographic studies as oral materials contain local symbols, expressions and images for which one may not find words or phrases in English (Newmark, 1982). With the aim of solving this challenge, I used the communicative translation that Newmark presents as an appropriate way of translating cultural texts. According to Newmark, communicative translation makes a translated text communicable to a reader. It also helps the translator make the text smoother and more readable and understandable. Newmark asserts that the communicative approach gives a researcher the right to correct or improve the logic, to replace the clumsy words, to remove obscurities, to eliminate repetition, to exclude the less likely interpretations of ambiguity and to clarify the highly cultural-specific terms. As I was familiar with this way of translation – I had used the communicative translation in my previous researches – and proved the efficiency of this way to maintain the meaning and flavour of the original text through my previous translations, I used it and translated the texts in such a way that they communicate the meaning of the original text. However, I would like to admit that there could be losses of the poetic quality of the original texts as such problems are inevitable in translations of cultural texts (Newmark, 1982).

4.8. Ethical Concerns and Dilemmas

Several research-related obligations are stated in the ethical guidelines of the National Committee for Research Ethics in Norway (2006) – *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and the Humanities*. Some of these obligations are to respect human dignity, integrity, freedom and participation, to inform research subjects about the purposes and essence of the study, to obtain free and informed consent, to care for children's right to

protection, to respect individuals' privacy and close relationships, and to ensure confidentiality and concern for the values and motives of the research participants in particular and their society in general. As discussed by Ennew et al. (2010) a proper ethical strategy in research with children includes protection of research participants from harm, ensuring voluntary participation, respecting the cultural tradition and knowledge of participants, establishing and maintaining equality and reciprocity with participants, ensuring confidentiality of information and behaviour of the participants and responsibility for participants' images. I condensed these rules into three ethical principles—*informed consent, confidentiality and reciprocity*— as I was convinced that I can meet the stated ethical obligations through implementing these principles. However, the processes of implementation of these ethical principles are not always smooth and simple in the contexts of the cultural and social complexity of the Guji people. As Punch (2002b) puts it, the dilemmas in the implementation of these principles become more complex in the context of research with children. In this subsection, I discuss how I implemented each principle and the dilemmas I encountered in the process.

4.8.1. Informed Consent

Question about whom informed consent should be obtained from had to be answered at the start. Based on this question, I identified six social categories from who I should obtain informed consent in the entry phase of my fieldwork. These categories were *Warra Gada* (local community leaders), *Jaarssa Biyya* (village elders), *Warra Ganda* (sections of the local government), *Abbaa Warraa* (family heads), school heads, parents and children. The next question was about what form of informed consent I could obtain and how I should go about it. Thus, the form of the informed consents and the way I obtained them were variable. From the local government organs, for example, I obtained written consent signed by the administrator of the local district. The consent of the local district administrator was a prerequisite to obtain written consents from school principals and *ganda* (village) and political leaders. From community leaders, village elders, family heads and children, I obtained oral consents. The local district administrators gave their consents, through formal letters, to move, stay and research among the people in their district while the school teachers and principals permitted me to include them in my research fieldwork activities and do participant observations and interviews with the children in the school compound. The village elders, local government organs and family heads allowed me to live in their villages freely,

to be with them at their homes and to obtain any information I required from them and their children. However, the process and the time I took to obtain consents from these bodies were different. For example, I presented written requests to district administrators and got written consent within a day. To the local community leaders and village elders, however, I presented oral requests to which it took me a longer time and process to obtain consent. This was because of the cultural reality that I was a guest –somebody from outside of the villages; the elders had to investigate about me before they grant me consent to live among their people. The elders and local leaders were responsible for finding out about my background and my genuine purpose of coming to the villages in order to grant me their consent. On the other hand, consents from these people were a guaranty to getting approvals from parents and children. Through consents from these bodies, I entered the villages and became familiar with the adults. After this stage, everything was accepted and there was no need for me to ask for consent every time I met children or adults or for everything I did with children or adults. In other words, after the consents of the mentioned bodies, I became a *jaala* ‘a familiar friend’ in the villages and every action and behaviour allowed for members of the community was consented for me as well. Rather than asking children and adults for their consent in every activity of the fieldwork, I learned what is consented and not consented in the process of interactions and activities with children (what children and adults like to do or like to be done for them as well as with them) and committed myself to act in line with such social norms and values. That is to say, having obtained consent, to be at someone’s home and spend time with their children became assented actions. The other point regarding consent from children is that I informed them of the purposes of my activities with them.

4.8.2. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the other principle I applied in this study. Keeping undisclosed all speech, action, behaviour and documents that directly or indirectly could expose the subjects to a problem was the principle that underlay my interactions and relationships with children and adults. My goal in this regard was to avoid any situation that might put participants in a problem because of their participation in the fieldwork activities. As stated by Abebe (2009), it was challenging to maintain confidentiality during interviews with children as well as adults among the rural community in Ethiopia because of the general absence of privacy of an individual interviewee. Among a communal society like the Guji people, individual’s privacy is not recognized as a norm; instead, collective actions and reactions are often observable as

part of social life. Children (at home, school and workplace) stayed and acted in groups from which isolating and interviewing an individual child seemed unnatural for the children as well as their parents. Thus, I conducted interviews with children while they were in groups. However, when the children wanted their response to be kept secret from the other children and asked to be interviewed in private, I did so. With adults, the need for privacy depended on the issue to be talked about. For some issues, adults demanded privacy and for others privacy was not required.

Confidentiality in terms of participants' identity was the other concern, mainly in the analysis part of the study. Two points put me in a dilemma about this issue. The first was the issue of keeping the identity (names) of participants unknown in data analysis. The second was the concern for presenting informants with their contribution as the way of keeping the data valid. With the aim of harmonizing these two concerns, I used only the first name of participants with their correct sex and age in the data analysis. When this way of presenting the identity was suspected to expose the participant to any problem or when the issue in discussion was something that the participant did not want to identify herself/ himself with, I used the term 'informant', for adults and 'child'/'children' or 'boy'/'girl' for children, along with correct ages and sex.

4.8.3. Reciprocity

Reciprocity in research was for a long time conceptualized as a material provision from a researcher to research participants as compensation for the time they spend in research activities (Schieffelin, 1990; Thi Lan and Jones, 2005). According to Abebe (2009), reciprocity in research with children is a practice of establishing solidarity with children through paying them compensation and sharing their circumstances. Abebe believes that paying compensation creates social intimacy between a researcher and children in a research process. In contrast to this argument, Ennew and Plateau (2004) assert the inappropriateness of paying compensation in research with children. They emphasize that material reciprocity (that is, giving money or other forms of material gift to children) reinforces the power imbalance between the researcher and children and increases undependability and powerlessness on the part of the children. My experience with children among the Guji people is in accord with the latter assertion. In the beginning of my fieldwork, for instance, I had an interview with an 11-year-old boy called Gudata in a cattle herding field and paid him some

money as compensation for his time and willingness. My assumption was that giving the money may establish a close relationship between me and him. On the second day, I went to the same place to continue the interview and observation with the same child and his friends. However, when he saw me from distance, the child jogged away to the bush and hid himself. For the time being, I was confused by the action of the child but later on, I learned that, among the Guji, it was abnormal for a child to receive money as payment for a service she/he rendered to an adult. As a result, I realized that it was the money I paid for the child on the previous day that forced him to shy away from me. From this encounter, I learned that giving or not giving material reciprocity depends on children's cultural circumstances.

I employed two ways of implementing reciprocity. The first and most important was interacting with research participants (sharing their roles and values) in particular and the people in the villages in general in such a way they could understand me and my activities, feel at ease in their communication with me and build trust and friendship with me. This was because of the fact that among Guji people understanding norms and values and committing one-self to them were the standard for somebody to be accepted as a member. I interacted with people of different ages and sexes in line with their values and interests, which in turn activated their concern and commitment to appreciate and support my fieldwork activities. This process gave them clarity regarding my activities and the purpose of my research and also enabled me to adjust my research activities and techniques to their interest, values, norms and everyday realities. As mentioned above, giving money to children as compensation became a violation of the societal norm which in turn was unethical. On the other hand, children do deserve compensation for the time they spent with me; how this could be done was the question I couldn't answer for a long time during my fieldwork. After long observations among the people, I learned that giving educational materials as support for children was not against any norms but giving this support for some children and not others in the same village became discriminatory. Thus, I supplied all school going children in the villages with notebooks and pens, even though it was beyond my financial capacity. I also took care of sick children and their parents to the extent that I could afford to. Solving children's social problems, taking sick children to the clinic, providing extremely poor children with school clothes and buying food for extremely starved children were some of the activities I often did in line with my care principle. On the basis of the notion that material compensation should be made for research participants as to reciprocate for the time they

spent on the activity of the research (Gummerum and Takezawa, 2009), I gave money in return for their time and energy to those adults who participated in the fieldwork activities.

4.9. Summary

The ethnographic fieldwork discussed above included multiple methods and activities sited at different places and contexts where children lived or gathered. The methods comprised participant observation, ethnographic interview, in-depth interview and focused group discussions. The activities were walking and talking with children and adults, participation in children's work and interactive events (play events such as storytelling and riddling), sitting with and talking to children and adults and observing their practices, participating in discussions with children and adults and participating in the night time family social events. The places emphasized in the fieldwork were the workplace (cattle herding fields for children and the farms where adults worked), the home, where children interact with their family members and the school, in which children acquire formal education. The fieldwork involved participants from three generations (grandparents, parents and children) and this strategy enabled me to obtain multigenerational perspectives about the childhood and the oral tradition of contemporary children. Consideration of children's everyday circumstances, on the other hand, helped me to observe the dynamics in children's social positions and play practices, the interrelationship between children's work and oral tradition, the place of oral tradition in children's interaction with adults and the relevance of oral tradition for children's formal education. The medium of communication and interactions throughout the fieldwork was *Afan Oromo* (Oromo language) which is my native language as well as the language that the Guji people speak. Field notes and digital audio recording were the tools for data recording. Data generated in these ways were organized, analysed and discussed in six articles.

CHAPTER FIVE

SYNTHESIS OF ARTICLES

The articles present the roles that Guji children play in production and reproduction of oral tradition, analyse the everyday life of children and features of childhood among the Guji people, discuss how Guji children enhance their formal and informal learning through participation in oral tradition and put forward the methodological approach most relevant in research with children in the rural context. The chapter consists of three parts: a summary of each article, a discussion of the crosscutting themes of the articles and the conclusions. The articles are identified by number, as Articles One to Six.

5.1. Summary of the Articles

Four of the six articles (Articles Three to Six) examine traditional Oromo oral narration, that is, folktales (*duri duri*) and riddles (*hibboo*), which are the two common types of children's oral tradition among the Guji. The remaining two articles present the everyday life of Guji children (Article Two) and insights for ethnographic approach to understand it (Article One).

Article One, '*Changes of position cause changes of relation: Insights for reflexive ethnographic research with children*', presents methodological insights for ethnographic research with children and discusses how a researcher who employs this approach can understand children in their manifold contexts. This article discusses that ethnographic methods in research with children should engage with children in their holistic natural environment, which includes their home, work and school settings. It presents the insight that an ethnographer should be aware of the dynamics in children's social circumstances and that it is the interplay of these circumstances that shapes the social position and relationship of children. As discussed in the article, children are autonomous actors in the workplace, subordinate members at home and disciplined learners in school. In other words, in the home and school contexts, children are social actors in facilitating their interactions with adults but with active consciousness to the values and norms of intergenerational relationships. They do have play practices and intergroup relationships in the home and school contexts but these practices and relationships are regulated by norms embedded in the family and school practices. In the workplace, however, children are less conscious of the adult values and norms and thus regulate their play practices in their own ways. The article argues that this

dynamic social position of children demands that ethnographic research with children should be reflexive so that a researcher uses flexible strategies to understand children's lived experiences.

Article Two '*The place of children among the Guji people in Southern Ethiopia: school, work and play*' analyses everyday life of the Guji children with its focus on work, attending school and play as intertwined children's practices. It presents the interplay of these practices and changing livelihoods in shaping children's learning and relationships with adults. It discusses that social changes such as introduction of school and resettlement changed children's everyday life circumstances by imposing children to combine work, formal education and play. It explores that work as the main social responsibility and context of play for children is combined with school that represents children's new place of learning. In contrast to the western academic discourse, this article shows that children's work has been a positive scenario for children's learning and play. This is to say that through working and playing, children acquire local knowledge which includes skills of survival and information about their social and natural environment. However, when it becomes hard for them to combine attending school with working, children drop the former and keep the latter as they give priority to securing subsistence before school attendance. Among Guji people, it is commonly accepted that a competent child is the one who is able to combine work with formal learning.

Article Three, '*The roles of Oromo-speaking children in storytelling tradition in Ethiopia*', focuses in particular on the performative dimension of narrating folktales (*duri duri*) and examines the roles of children as narrators, audience and commentators. It presents that the performances of folktales are best analysed as a dialogue between narrator and audience, in which children and adults are regarded as interlocutors. Situations of storytelling events among the children are compared to situations in which adults narrate folktales to children. The article shows that children are eager narrators and attentive listeners, who, comparable to adults, intervene in the narrations to clarify points, arrest the narrator if the tale is rendered incorrectly, discuss the moral messages of the tales, and make meta-communicative comments on the proper roles of narrator and audience. However, the asymmetric power relations between adults and children characterize those storytelling events where persons from different generations are present; whereas the children-to-children narrations are characterized by narrations take place between equals. In the latter situation, there are many

more interventions, and more discussion and commentaries as the stories are told, and the children tend to perform a different repertoire of folktales, than when adults are present.

Article Four '*Children as interpreters of culture: Producing meanings from folktales in southern Ethiopia*' also examines folktales (*duri duri*) but here the analytical emphasis is placed on how children's interpretation of the folktales may serve as meta-commentary on their social positions within the complex generational system (*gadaa*) of the Guji people. The article makes the methodological point that by underplaying the authoritative position of adulthood and trying to engage in dialogues with the children on their own terms, the researcher empowers the children's ability to reflect on and discuss folktales and this enables the researcher to elicit and record much more comprehensive comments and views from the children as informants.

On the basis of post-narration dialogues with the children in storytelling events, the article analyses children's notions of the past and the previous generation, their own social positions in the present, and changes between the generations. The article shows that the children are able to develop rather comprehensive views on past and present and their position as juniors (*xiqqaa*) in relation to seniors (*guddaa*) within the generational system, and to reflect upon social change and discontinuities of ideas between the generations. It discusses how children use folktales as windows to culture, rooted in the past and persisting as cultural objects in the present. In other words, through folktales, the Guji children tried to make sense of the past and put forward their own perspectives on social and cultural events in their present social environment. Even as they valued the knowledge and opportunities they associated with modernity, their interpretations also affirmed existing cultural norms with regard to consensus building and adult-child hierarchies. Thus, interpreting folktales exposes children to not only reflecting on and critiquing the knowledge and values of the people in the past but also suggesting common values as the basis of intergenerational solidarity.

Article Five '*Learning through play: An ethnographic study of children's riddling in Ethiopia*' analyses children's performances of riddles (*hibboo*) as a form of child-centred play and learning practice. The article deals with issues such as how the time and place of children's riddling is different from adults and how children perform and interpret riddles, and through this process, learn and develop their local knowledge. The article describes how, just a generation ago, riddling was commonly done in the evenings by adults for children and

looked upon as a way of educating and disciplining children. Popular myths about severe consequences for children of riddling among themselves enforced the norms of adults putting up riddles to children for disciplinary purposes. Under the present condition of sedentary agro-pastoralism, riddling has become a tradition almost exclusively carried out by children. Today, the Guji children no longer believe myths about the consequences of breaching the norm of riddling among themselves. Through their riddling, they construe an autonomous network and sphere of entertainment and knowledge acquisition, from which they resist adult impositions. It observes that riddling as child-centred local knowledge not only defines children's arena of social practices but also reflects how children can have different perspectives from adults. The article argues that riddling has two interrelated significances for children. First, similar to storytelling, it embodies children's local knowledge in the context of rural childhood. Second, unlike storytelling, it provides children with the contexts through which they exercise their local knowledge and learn about their local environment without cooperation from adults.

Article Six '*Storytelling, local knowledge, and formal education: Bridging the gap between everyday life and school*' argues that Oromo oral tradition should be systematically integrated in school curricula so that children can easily relate learning activities in the classroom to the social and cultural realities outside it. It is based on action oriented ethnographic practice in rural primary schools and discusses how children can use storytelling to connect their local knowledge to their formal education. It also argues that children's engagement with storytelling in the classroom enhances their participation in learning activities. It shows how children performed storytelling in the classroom as narrative, in which one child tells and the other children listen; as drama, in which a group of children represent the characters in a folktale, performing the roles of the characters while the other children in the classroom listen; as drawing, in which children, in groups or individually, present the characters and their actions pictorially. Through performing storytelling in these ways children played active roles to connect their local knowledge to their formal learning practices in their classroom. The article argues that this process enhances children's activities in the classroom, thereby increasing their motivation for learning and creating a friendly learning environment for themselves.

5.2. Crosscutting Themes of the Articles

The articles commonly discuss four major themes. These are the role that the Guji children play in the practices of oral tradition, the everyday life of Guji children, oral tradition as source of formal and informal learning for children and reflexive ethnography as an approach for understand children in their everyday life.

5.2.1. Children's Roles in Oral Tradition

In this subsection, what the articles present about the roles that the Guji children play in the practice of oral tradition – production, interpretation, transmission, play, completion and negotiation – are discussed.

5.2.1. 1. Producing, interpreting and transmitting riddling and storytelling practices

The articles demonstrate that children produce, interpret and transmit folktales and riddles. Article Six, for example, explains that children perform storytelling in different forms — as narrative, as drama and as drawing in a classroom. These forms of performance reflect that the children are creative in storytelling processes. Article Five elaborates children's roles in oral tradition through describing how children create, tell and interpret riddles as part of their everyday play and learning practices. Article Four, similarly, demonstrates that children are social actors in not only telling folktales creatively but also interpreting them in their own ways. It shows that children interpret folktales and through their interpretation connect the past to the present and critique the present social heterogeneity among their people. Article Three builds on this notion by exploring the significant role that children play in interpretive reproduction of storytelling tradition. This article demonstrates how children initiate storytelling events and transmit the storytelling tradition from generation to generation — from adults to children and among children. In other words, it reveals that children's roles in the process of oral tradition are part of their work, play and learning practices. As discussed in the article, children perform and interpret folktales in cooperation with adults as well as with each other. They use the family social events as the context to initiate and perpetuate the storytelling process. They also use peer interaction for producing, interpreting and transmitting folktales and riddles. Through interaction with new peers entering their group, children have access to new forms of folktales and riddles. In such a way, the production and interpretation process of oral tradition continues to form new peer groups and the continuous

formation of peer groups in turn reinforces transmission of oral tradition. This cyclical process shows that peer interaction is the most important site for children's participation in the practices of oral tradition. Thus, children's roles in production, interpretation and transmission of oral tradition are a significant part of their everyday life.

All of the articles contribute to the ethnography of children's roles in this process of oral tradition as it is a neglected field of study in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular. Moreover, all the articles show that children of contemporary Guji people have more opportunities for telling and interpreting riddles and folktales without adult presence and interventions than previous generations. Under the present condition of sedentary agro-pastoral life, the children assume a more significant role in the reproduction and change of Guji oral traditions than under the former pastoral way of life.

5.2.1. 2. Playing, competing and knowledge-sharing

All articles present oral tradition as an integral part of the Guji culture and expressive means of entertainment and communication. The Guji children not only perform folktales and riddles as popular play practices but also understand them as knowledge that characterizes their childhood. To begin with, Article One indicates that children love to be told stories by adults, which means that they also pay great attention to this form of oral tradition in their communication with an adult researcher. It shows that these forms of oral tradition are valued knowledge of children and child-friendly way of interaction through which a researcher can easily communicate with children in an ethnographic research process. Article Two adds that the insight that through play practices in cattle herding fields which is predominantly oral tradition, children turn workplace into 'playground' and demonstrate their grasp of local knowledge. Article Three elaborates this idea by discussing how children acquire knowledge of play by storytelling from adults through participation in family storytelling events and transmit it to each other in peer storytelling events. It shows that oral tradition is adults' means of playing with children and simultaneously equipping them with knowledge relating to life, and livelihood in particular, as it is the channel through which children love to play with and listen to adults. Article Four and Article Five further demonstrate that oral tradition is part of children's play practice by concluding that children exercise storytelling and riddling as practices through which they show their knowledge of oral play. In both of the articles, performing and interpreting these forms of oral tradition is discussed as children's

everyday play practice through which they compete and cooperate with each other. Article Five underlines that children's interest in riddling is attributed to three realities. First, in the riddling context, children have autonomy in controlling and leading their interactions and play activities as riddling is free from adult involvement. Secondly, as it is a competitive play that involves a win-lose interaction between two or more children, riddling creates concerns for power among children. Thus, the ability to tell and interpret many riddles positions a child as knowledgeable among her peer members. Article Six connects children's knowledge of folktales to formal education and discusses how this knowledge helps them connect their everyday life to their formal education. In other words, the article presents storytelling as play and acquisition and display of local knowledge of children through which they can compete with each other and contextualize their activities in the classroom. Thus, storytelling and riddling embody children's play culture and knowledge of how to interpret the social environment as well as information sharing. These forms of children's oral tradition constitute children's local knowledge that involves memory and skill of telling and interpreting as well as awareness of values related to it.

5.2.2. The Everyday Life of Rural Children

The everyday life of the Guji children comprises work, play and learning (attending formal education) and involves home, workplace and school as everyday social places. The articles discuss children's action across these places constitute children's play practices (mainly oral tradition), vibrant multigenerational interaction and dynamic social position.

5.2.2. 1. Home, herding fields and school as play areas of children

All the articles demonstrate that home, cattle-herding fields and school are the places in which the Guji children perform their play practices as part of their daily activities such as family interaction, work and formal learning. Article Three describes the family social events at home, where children interact and cooperate with members of their family (grandparents, parents and siblings); an integral element of this interaction and cooperation is to play through performance of oral tradition, mainly storytelling. As presented in this article, such family interaction and cooperation takes place in the night, when members of the family gather at home and share their daily experiences, as this is a time when everybody is relaxed and free to chat and enjoy each other's company. Article Five argues that riddling is the play that children perform with their siblings during night times at home. The play among siblings is

based on cooperation, in which older children take the responsibility of telling riddles to the younger ones, unlike the play among peers, in school or on the cattle-herding fields, which is based on competition.

During daytimes, the Guji children herd cattle on the pasturelands away from villages. All articles present the cattle-herding field as a place where children form peer relationships and perform various forms of play activities, of which storytelling and riddling are the common ones. Articles Three and Four discuss how children perform storytelling in cattle-herding fields; while Article Five describes how the peer interaction in the cattle-herding field is an emerging context for riddling as it was believed to be abnormal for children to perform riddling during the daytime among the Guji people in earlier times. The articles describe how cattle herding brings children of different villages together and helps them get to know each other and play with each other. In this space, children share their experiences in addition to their tales and riddles. Each child takes his/her turn and narrates the tale he/she knows. One tells and the others listen and interpret. During and after each telling and listening process, it is normal to break into laughter and express one's impressions by gestures and emotions. School is the other place for children to form peer relationships. As shown in Articles Three, Four and Five, even though they have limited time, children share experiences, riddles and folktales in school settings. In other words, even though children's rest time in school is short and not as relaxed as the herding field and home, it serves as a space where children from different villages can share their tales and riddles.

As discussed in the articles, social activities in these places provide children with new folktales and better experience for understanding their meanings. Through the social interactions in these places, children learn not only telling and listening but also the ways of understanding and interpreting folktales and riddles. As discussed in Article Two, children combine these play practices with their social activities, which shows that home, cattle-herding fields and school are the common play areas of the Guji children (this point is discussed in the following subsection).

5.2.2. 2. Dynamics in social practices and positions

All the articles show that the everyday life of children in the rural setting of the Guji people comprises dynamic social practices and positions. To begin with, Article Two discusses how, among the Guji people, children are involved in different forms of social practices in different places. Children perform their household responsibilities based on the family social order and intergenerational interdependence. They herd cattle and participate in household routines in line with household labour divisions through which they contribute to sustainable family livelihoods. In school, they perform activities that are quite different from their activities at home and in the workplace. What is important is that children combine their oral play practices (oral tradition) with their social activities across these places. That is, they combine play practices with work in workplaces, with family interaction at home and with learning activities and disciplinary rules in school. For instance, Article One elaborates on children's dynamic social positions by showing that children's social positions are variable across their everyday settings. It shows that children are autonomous in cattle herding fields, subordinate to adults at home and disciplined learners in school. Such variations of position have implications for research with children. Article Three discusses the dynamic social practices of children in a more specific way. It presents observations on how children combine storytelling with work in cattle herding places and integrate it in their interaction with parents at home. The roles of children in the performance of oral tradition across these places are variable. At home, storytelling is part of children's interactions with parents. Children initiate storytelling by asking their parents for a story and perpetuate the storytelling process through asking questions, voicing interests and motivating discussions. However, in this storytelling site children are conscious of the norms related to storytelling and intergenerational interaction; thus, they are not as free of inhibitions as when they are in cattle herding fields. In school, children adjust and control their storytelling practices according to the school disciplinary rules. Article Four elaborates on the dynamic social practices of children through a discussion of how children's practice of storytelling comprises not only telling and listening but also interpreting folktales and, through this, observing the differences between past and present social circumstances. Such practices in storytelling are observable through children's profound discussions and interpretations of folktales in their own ways. Article Five also illustrates the social practices and position of children through analysis of children's participation in riddling. The article discusses how children combine riddling with work in

cattle herding fields, intra-sibling play at home and peer play in school, all without the involvement of adults.

However, children's social position for the intra-generational interactions across these places is variable. They interact as cattle herders in cattle herding places, as family members at home and as students in school. Such variation in social position characterizes the way they interrogate each other in the process of riddling. Accordingly, the process of riddling with peers in workplace and school involves competitions but with siblings at home it is based on sharing new riddles with each other. Again, contexts across these places are different and characterize children's involvement in riddling in different ways. In the workplace, children are autonomous in their process of riddling but at home and in school, children's riddling process is affected by household norms and school disciplinary rules respectively. Article Six focuses on demonstrating the dynamics in children's storytelling in school classrooms. It argues that combining storytelling with learning practices in the classroom repositions children as active learners. It shows that by performing oral tradition in three different ways children connect their local knowledge to formal learning and expose themselves to the social contexts beyond workplace and home to acquire more new values and practices in an authentic way. Unlike workplace and home, school provides children with a new social context and storytelling enables children to understand this new social context in relation to their local knowledge.

The dynamics in children's social practices and positions discussed above show how features that characterize childhood are embedded in social and cultural contexts across the different places where children spend their time. In the workplace, for instance, children are self-directing and their childhood is characterized by free interactions among each other. The free interaction in this place involves play practices, talks and work activities that children choose, regulate and perform in line with their own needs and skills. Here children combine the play of oral tradition with work. As they are temporarily out of the adult-centred normative context, they perform their oral tradition based on their own interest and choice. At home children's autonomy is limited; they must act in line with norms of intergenerational relationship in which social hierarchy is the governing principle. In this context childhood is characterized by obedience and respect for elders. Children are expected to submit to the

words and actions of adults which are interpreted as showing respect. In such a context of norm-oriented intergenerational interaction, children perform their oral tradition normatively and incorporate it in family social interactions. In the school context, childhood becomes different. Children become disciplined learners, which are different from their home and workplace contexts; childhood is largely shaped by the school rules that give teachers the right to discipline children. Here the play of oral tradition is integrated with peer group relationships in the school.

In general, all articles reflect that rural children move between multiple places in a day and the social contexts in these places are different and thus require the children to have dynamic positions. They show that children are adept at adjusting and readjusting themselves to a variety of social circumstances and position themselves in harmony with the social norms embedded in these everyday places.

In addition to variation across places, as shown above, childhood among the Guji people has changed across history. Article Two discusses how childhood before the 1980s was not characterized by participation in labour division. Similarly, school had not been introduced among Guji people so formal education was not part of children's everyday life. However, with the change from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism as well as the introduction of settlement in villages, cattle herding and schooling became conditions that greatly characterized the childhood of Guji children. Article Four reflects this variation across historical time through the changes that took place in the physical location and time of riddling. It explains that in earlier childhoods (during the childhood of the present adults), riddling was performed during night time at home. However, there are no restrictions of time and place on riddling in contemporary Guji childhood. The contemporary children do not accept the value associated with limiting riddling to the night time at home and thus play with telling and interpreting riddles at any time and place. As discussed in Article Three, through interpretation of folktales, the children themselves constructed the past as different from the present, which implies that they perceive their childhood as different from the childhood of their parents and grandparents.

5.2.2. 3. Multigenerational interactions and negotiations

Intergenerational relationship among the Guji people is based on social hierarchy in which children are positioned as subordinates to adults. Respect for elders and intergenerational

interdependence are the recurrent norms that characterize the interactions between children and adults. All the articles discuss intergenerational phenomena and show that though they are positioned as subordinates to adults, children are not passive objects but active subjects who have the competence to cooperate and negotiate with adults. In Article One, it is shown that the interaction between adults and children is based on social hierarchy and that children are competent in adjusting and readjusting themselves, within this cultural context, to perform their social roles. In Article Two, the interaction between children and adults is discussed as interdependence and reciprocity that is observable through work that children do for their parents and knowledge that parents impart to their children. In this practice, children are supportive agents for parents as they execute a majority of the household subsistence activities and parents are guides for their children in the process of knowledge transmission.

As discussed in Article Four, through storytelling, children initiate and perpetuate their social interactions with adults and this social interaction involves children's negotiations with adults to initiate the storytelling process. They solicit folktales from adults and through such interaction involve adults in their play culture. The storytelling contexts that children initiate draw parents and children together and serve as a situation for family social interactions. In this process, children not only integrate their oral play in family social interaction but also influence adults to participate in children's oral tradition. Again, through sharing their knowledge, they influence each other and maintain their peer culture. Children are thus pivotal actors in intergenerational as well as intra-generation transmission of local knowledge.

In Articles Four and Five, the other dimension of children's relations with adults, which is intergenerational difference, is discussed. Article Four discusses how, through the interpretation of folktales, children present adults as concordant and children as discordant persons which implies that they construct adulthood as different from childhood. Similarly, Article Five shows that children understand their riddling practices as their discrete play practice in which adults are not involved. It presents riddling as child-centred practice and contends that children have their own peer traditions which involve creating their play activities out of their immediate social and natural environments and sharing these activities with each other without the involvement of adults. In fact, children reject adults' knowledge of riddling and their beliefs related to the appropriate time and place of riddling. Through such constructions, children present childhood as different from adulthood, and this affects the interaction between adults and children. For example, children do not perform riddling

with adults as they think that riddles are children's knowledge. Thus, through riddling, children demonstrate that they can create and share their peer culture through which they negotiate with adults.

In general, as discussed in the articles, children apply their oral tradition to position themselves in multigenerational social networks. The articles demonstrate that through their oral tradition and the related social practices, children reinforce the social networks by which they facilitate their interaction with each other as well as adults. Their network in cattle herding fields provides them with a context of free interaction through which they control and shape each other. Their network at home gives them two forms of oral play interactions: intergenerational and intra-generational. Both forms of interactions are based on the norms that the home context throws up, while in the school context, children adjust their social networks and oral plays to rules and disciplinary measures that regulate the nature of children's interaction with their school teachers. Through participation in such multiple intergenerational networks and interactions, children recreate their social world and articulate intergenerational differences. On the other hand, through their multigenerational network, children contribute to the continuity of local knowledge and through this social network, position themselves as agents in receiving knowledge from adults and transmitting it to each other. Thus, children connect home to field through reproducing the folktales they heard from home. Such social processes indicate that through sharing and shaping their oral tradition, children play significant roles in the process of multigenerational interactions and negotiations.

5.2.3. Learning through Participation in Oral Tradition and Everyday Practices

The articles show that children's everyday practices in the rural context include their oral tradition which is their popular play practice, their work through which they perform their household responsibilities and their social interaction with adults as well as with each other. These practices are the means of children's informal and formal education and the media through which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation as well as within a generation. As active participants in these social processes, children have multiple practices of learning that include storytelling, riddling and work: riddling and work involve informal learning at home and workplace; whereas, storytelling is for formal learning in school and informal learning at home and workplace. In Article Two, for example, work is

interpreted as the context in which children combine oral tradition with informal learning. It shows that children are active in sustaining household subsistence, enhancing their local knowledge through their participation in work and negotiating their time between work and school. This article argues that work and play signify important sources of learning for children. Article Three builds on this idea through discussing how, through the process of storytelling with adults as well as with each other, children develop their skill of storytelling and effect its transmission from generation to generation. In the process of this performance, they evoke thoughts, negotiate ideas and control each other and thus enhance their knowledge of oral tradition. Article Four further elaborates that children learn through storytelling. This article shows that through interpreting folktales, children learn the difference between the past and present; that difference in values can cause social heterogeneity and that intergenerational difference results in intergenerational miscommunication. It also debates that through interpreting folktales children learn to critique and safeguard the values of their people. In other words, through their storytelling practices, children construe their social environment and reflect on the realities in their social world.

In Article Five, riddles are presented as children's contexts of play and learning. The article argues that through riddling, children learn about the social and natural phenomena in their social environment and enhance their local knowledge and interpretative skills. In riddling, they expose themselves not only to the realm of play, but also to living and non-living objects as well as social practices in their local environment. They learn from each other and enhance their problem-solving skills and their ability to interpret metaphorical images by associating them with the social and natural phenomena in their surroundings. Article Six, similarly, presents storytelling as a means of enhancing children's learning in the classroom. It describes how, through storytelling in the classroom, children connect their local knowledge to their formal education, by which process they can enrich their participation in learning activities in the classroom. It also shows that through storytelling in the classroom, children can increase their participation not only in speaking and listening, but also in visualization of ideas in their learning activities.

In a nutshell, the articles describe how, by performing and interpreting oral tradition across different places, children reflect on and understand their social world and acquire more knowledge about it. Through storytelling, children connect themselves to the social and cultural practices of the past and learn how they are different from the present, critiquing

some forms of social change and safeguarding others. Through these interpretative processes children learn the values and world views of their people and develop their local knowledge to substantiate their formal and informal learning.

5.2.4. Reflexive Ethnography as the Methodology to Understand Childhood in the Rural Context

All the articles reflect that the everyday life of children in the rural context is characterized by social interactions with persons of different ages. Children interact with their parents at home, with their teachers in school and with each other in the workplace. Article One argues that doing research with children in such multiple social contexts requires a methodology that handles the interplay of these contexts in constructing childhood. As discussed in this article, across these multiple contexts, children have dynamic social positions and it is through reflexive ethnography that children's everyday life in such variable contexts can be understood. In other words, the (adult) researcher should be aware of four interrelated features in ethnographic research with children in a rural context: that children move through different places in their everyday lives; that contexts across children's everyday places are different; that children's relationships with a researcher can change in line with the contexts in children's places; and that research with children should involve reflexive strategies that fit the contexts in which children live their lives.

The other articles (Articles Two to Article Six) are built on this notion of reflexive ethnography and show how the dynamics in children's everyday life can be investigated through reflexive activities and relationships in the dynamic social contexts of oral tradition. As demonstrated in these articles, understanding of children's participation in production, interpretation and transmission of oral tradition is effective when activities of data generation are flexible and adapt with the social contexts and norms of interactions across the multiple locations of children. Article Three and Article Four, for example, show that the participation of children in the performance of oral tradition in the workplace is based on free interactions, free choice, balanced negotiations and cooperation. Participant observation and ethnographic interviews in such a context are effective when the researcher approaches children as autonomous actors. However, in home situations, children's participation in the performance of oral tradition is based on the principle of social hierarchy that pertains to norms of intergenerational interaction. In this context, children perform oral tradition in cooperation

with adults and the cooperation involves adults as tellers and children as listeners, inquirers and negotiators, and children are conscious of the social hierarchy and norms of interaction with adults. In the school context, on the other hand, children shape their social interaction to the school disciplinary rules that require them to be silent in the school compound and be respectful to their teachers. Children's participation in the process of oral tradition is thus based on the directives of the disciplinary rules. The participant observations combined with the interviews with children in the events of oral tradition in these contexts are effective when they are based on children's social positions and realities. In general, in the rural contexts where children's everyday life is characterized by movement from place to place and interactions in variable contexts, reflective ethnography is a relevant methodological strategy in constructing childhood and children's culture.

5.3. Concluding Remarks

The thesis shows that among Guji people, oral tradition is a key constituent of children's everyday life and the means through which they participate in the process of knowledge production and transmission. Through interpretation of oral tradition, children produce knowledge. Through interaction with each other as well as with adults in the performance of oral tradition, children transmit knowledge. In this process, children make oral tradition part of their everyday life and understand their social world through it. It is also argued that rural childhood is embedded in intricate cultural practices, social orders and practices of generation-based division of labour and social responsibility. Arguments in the thesis imply that children living in the rural environment are capable of creatively adjusting and readjusting themselves to their relationships with contexts and actors in their social environments. Corsaro (2011, p. 18) explains this capacity of children: ' "Children are innovative and creative parts of a society and are not simply internalizing society and culture but actively contribute to cultural production and change. ' As social actors, the Guji children commonly live in three immediate social groups: with the family (at home), with teachers (in school) and with peers (in workplace). Through their interactions with these social groups the children use their oral tradition to create their own sense of a shared and meaningful environment and socialize themselves with situations in the rural way of life.

Such complexities depict rural childhood as different from urban childhood where less difference is observable between the social and cultural situations of children across home and school (Abebe, 2008; Poluha, 2007b). In other words, children's double responsibility, which is to work and to attend school, characterizes rural childhood as different from urban childhood because in the latter, children's involvement in agricultural work is less or non-existent. In other words, the fact that rural children combine play with work makes rural childhood unique. In a rural setting, workplaces are a space where children carry out their household responsibilities and perform their play practices. In such circumstances, work exposes children not only to the spaces of play but also to opportunities, within a real context, to acquire skills of survival.

The thesis recognizes children as social actors in the events and processes of oral tradition and this implies a different concept of 'culture' than that characterized by earlier studies of oral tradition among Oromo-speaking groups and other groups in Ethiopia, which have chiefly been based on textual interpretations and, by neglecting the performative dimensions of storytelling, have ignored the fact that folktales and riddles are interpreted differently according to age, gender and social positions and thereby slipped into the danger of essentialist assumptions of 'culture'. In this thesis it is emphasized that by recognizing children as social actors and avoiding essentialist assumptions of 'culture', researchers are in a better position to produce more comprehensive knowledge about the intergenerational perpetuation and change of oral tradition and the cultural values and norms transpiring through them.

The thesis demonstrates that conditions in the rural environment compel children to learn in their own ways through observation and appropriation, which are the common ways in which children learn (Gaskins and Paradise, 2010; Lancy et al., 2010). Parents only guide children in this process. In the workplace and home context, children's learning takes place through observation and participation in everyday social practices and interactions, while in school it takes place through formal instruction by teachers. Oral tradition creates socially meaningful contexts for children's learning across these places. Through their work and oral tradition, children construe their dynamic social environments, correct the cultural and economic realities to fit into the realm of their everyday lives and cope with the values and challenges of the people they live with. The main objective of informal learning for children in such places is to make themselves fit into the rural ways of life and survive the physical and social

challenges that characterize the rural society. In this practice, children do not passively absorb the values and knowledge produced by adults but they negotiate with adults and appropriate the values and knowledge into their own social world that they require. In addition, children create and recreate their own child-centred values and knowledge through which they combine play with learning. Oral tradition facilitates these ways of children's learning.

Thus, observation and appropriation in the process of oral tradition and the combined social practices enhance children's learning from three angles: cognitive, social and cultural. The practices of creating and interpreting folktales and riddles require children to exercise their mental processes such as thinking, associating, reciting and imagining. This process enhances children's cognitive learning and development as also discussed by Edstrom (2006) and Lenox (2000). Similarly, through producing and reproducing oral tradition, children develop their social networks with each other as well as with adults, and this process helps them acquire skills of communication (Mello, 2001). Again, through such oral processes, children make sense of the values and norms embodied in customary practices and further develop their cultural competence. Thus, inclusion of oral tradition in the formal learning process enables children to connect their local knowledge to their lessons in the classroom and contextualize their learning process in which they enhance the authenticity of their learning activities.

What can be noted from this thesis is that children's learning objectives and processes are culturally defined; the social and cultural contexts of children characterize what they prioritize to learn and how they prefer to learn. In the rural social and cultural context, the cultural complexity and agriculture based livelihoods demand that children must have a detailed knowledge of their immediate environment and skills needed for work and life. For example, in the tradition of household labour division that characterizes the rural family, children are expected to be skilful in exercising social roles. The cultural complexity among agrarian societies, on the other hand, necessitates that children make sense of the common values and norms of intergenerational relationships in order to position themselves in normal relationships with adults. These priorities of children's learning in a rural context can be enhanced through children's oral tradition, which rural children perform as their oral play (Omolewa, 2007; Zulu, 2006).

Furthermore, children are good at combining their oral play practice with their work, school, peer relationships and family interactions. Through such processes, children use oral tradition as a context of learning, play and cultural reproduction, as well as intra-generational and intergenerational interaction. In school, for instance, children are motivated to learn and can easily find meaning when they understand their lessons through their own life experience and everyday practices which they articulate by performance and interpretation of oral tradition. However, in the Ethiopian context, it seems that school curriculum designers and policy makers as well as teachers are less aware of the power inherent in children's oral tradition and local knowledge to enhance the quality of children's formal and informal learning, which is reflected in school syllabuses, even though parents and the community are cognizant of these values. In other words, riddling and storytelling and the context of informal learning have not been well integrated in formal learning. Teachers' effort and skill to connect children's home context and cultural realities to learning in school and to enable children to relate school lessons to their everyday life fall far short of rural children's need for meaningful and friendly way of learning.

Thus, the need to critically reflect on the curriculum and content of formal education by adapting a curriculum that is oriented to local knowledge is urgent. It is necessary to consider the power of oral tradition and children's local knowledge embedded in it to make learning activities meaningful for children and improve the quality of children's formal education. In this regard, three issues are worth considering. The first is further research on how to make the primary school curriculum compatible with children's local knowledge and everyday life. There should be further research endeavours on how to present oral tradition as the context of and channel between children's everyday life and learning activities in schools. Secondly, there is also a need to work out strategies for continuous training for teachers and school leaders in primary schools on how to contextualize learning activities through connecting school lessons to children's local knowledge and everyday life. Third, curriculum designers, policy makers, teachers and organizations working on children's development and care should be made aware of the inherent power in oral tradition to enhance children's motivation for learning and making learning activities meaningful in the everyday lives of children.

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CHAPTER SIX
The ARTICLES

Article One

**Changes of Position Cause Changes of Relation: Insights for
Reflexive Ethnographic Research with Children**

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**Changes of Position Cause Changes of Relation: Insights for Reflexive
Ethnographic Research with Children**

Tadesse Jaleta Jirata

tadesse.jaleta@svt.ntnu.no

Key words: ethnography, reflexivity, children's positions, children's places, Guji people, Ethiopia

Introduction

Studies about children's position¹ in their relationships with adults in African contexts have been widely discussed in the literature on childhood studies. However, most of these studies have an urban bias and emphasise children –at-risk. This does not mean that research studies that have brought to light children's social positions in African rural contexts are totally absent. Katz (2004), for example, demonstrates how the childhoods of rural children in Sudan were transformed under the effects of capitalist social and economic development structures. Katz's manifold methodological approaches imply that understanding children's positions across their multiple everyday places in rural contexts demands a mosaic of methods. When it comes to Ethiopia, where 83% of the population reside in rural environments (FDRE, 2007), the majority of research studies focusing on childhood studies are situated in urban areas and foreground the experiences of children-at-risk such as street children, orphans, working children and abused children (Abebe 2009; Abebe and Aase, 2007; Adugna, 2006; Chanyalew, 2008). However, there are some studies that deal with the social positions of children in rural contexts of which Abebe (2007), Abebe and Kjørholt (2009), and Poluha (2007) are noteworthy. Abebe (2007) and Abebe and Kjørholt (2009) constructed the dynamics of children's roles and the exploitation of their labour in the rural contexts of the Gedeo people in Ethiopia by

utilizing a mosaic of approaches that entailed semi-structured interviews, semi-participant observations, story writing and snowballing techniques. Poluha (2007) also observed gender-based discrimination and the socioeconomic challenges of children in rural contexts of Ethiopia by using semi-structured interviews, focused group discussions, household visits and semi-participant observations.

The aforementioned studies have contributed to the development of knowledge about children's positions in rural Ethiopia, but when I examined them in relation to my field experiences, it became apparent that the dynamics of children's positions and their implication for ethnographic research with children are still not fully incorporated in the literature.

As is evident in the body of literature, the social position of rural Ethiopian children are different from that of their urban counterparts in several ways (Alemayehu, 2007; Chuta, 2007; Tamene, 2007). Firstly, rural areas in Ethiopia are characterised by remoteness and cultural complexities² whereas urban areas are relatively accessible and less complex in value systems (Alemayehu, 2007). The cultural complexities in rural environments, in turn, constrain the social and individual actions of children (Pluha, 2007). Secondly, in rural environments, children have multiple places for social action and interaction (Chuta, 2007). These places are homes where children live with their parents, workplaces where they work (herd cattle, fetch water, collect firewood) and schools where they learn. In all these places, rural children have different positions and different contexts for social action. However, for children in urban settings, homes and schools are the places they often occupy as cattle herding and farming activities are not the kind of activities urban households engage in (Alemayehu, 2007; Temesgen, 2007). Thirdly, children in rural contexts have their workplace as a space relatively free from adult surveillance, but in urban settings, children remain under close surveillance by adults across their everyday places— by parents at home and by teachers in school.

These complexities in rural environments and the diversity of children's places in rural settings necessitate reflexive ethnographic research through which a researcher might address how children's positions change across their local places and the

implication of such change for ethnographic research with children. Reflexive ethnography, as discussed by Auger (2004), refers to the need for researchers' to be sensitive to the social and cultural contexts of research subjects across different places and their strategies of shifting their –techniques, positions, roles and ways of communication in such a way that they fit subjects' actual contexts. Alvesson and Skåldberg (2000) add that reflexive ethnography involves the act of being conscious to the social and cultural realities of research participants and making profound understanding of their interests, values, and norms in their local settings. In line with these notions, reflexive ethnography in research with children emphasises that a researcher has to be in children's local places, live with them, be conscious of their situations and positions across different places and act with them reflexively in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of childhood and children's social action in their local contexts.

Thus, how the position of children changes across children's places in rural settings and how these contexts affect the relationships between an adult researcher and children in ethnographic research processes are the interrelated gaps that I seek to bridge in this paper. My inquiry is based on answering the following two questions: 1. Do children's positions change across their everyday places in rural settings? 2. What implications does this change have for ethnographic research with children? With my focus on these questions, I discuss children's dynamic positions across diverse local places and the reflexive ethnographic practices that such positions of children demands. My aim is to illuminate how a researcher can employ a reflexive ethnographic process to construct the change in children's positions across diverse places of rural children and depict how understanding childhood requires comprehending children's social action and interaction with each other and adults in these places. Using my interactions and relationships with children in diverse social contexts among the Guji people, I argue that it is through reflexive relationships across the multiple social contexts of children that one can gain a deeper understanding of childhood in an ethnographic research process.

Views on ethnographic research with children

Ethnographers in interdisciplinary studies of childhood recommend diverse ways of creating closeness with children in children's local places and contexts (James, 2007; Levine, 2007; James and Prout, 1990). Pole (2007), for example, argues that the social intimacy of a researcher with children is an effective way of understanding children's interior lives. Pole states that in the process of ethnographic research with children, there are two challenges that a researcher may encounter. The first is the inevitable physical difference between an adult researcher and children (the fact that adults are older and bigger than children) and the second is the perceived adult power associated with the physical difference. It is the researcher's way of solving these challenges that help her achieve friendly and close interactions with children in an ethnographic research process. Similarly, Christensen (2004) puts forward the dialogical approach as a technique for reducing adult power when entering children's local places. She asserts that an adult researcher should not pretend to behave like a child in children's milieu for children may not accept such childlike actions from adults as genuine. According to Christensen, a researcher should give attention to views and wishes of children rather than to imitate their actions. Corsaro (1985) and Corsaro and Molinari (2000), on the other hand, argue that an ethnographer should be an active participant in children's peer relationships through taking part in their everyday activities in order to attain their full involvement in an ethnographic fieldwork activities. Solberg (1996) also asserts that an ethnographic research with children entails processes of adjusting and readjusting one's positions and roles across children's social contexts. Solberg further claims that the success in ethnographic research lies in multiple methodological activities which include watching, listening and understanding (sensing) children's social practices in their local contexts. These views show that observation of children in their social and cultural contexts is the primary concern of ethnographic investigations. However, the existing child-centred ethnographic research studies have paid less attention to the dynamics of children's everyday places, the variations of children's positions across these places and the interplay of the social and cultural contexts on children in these places. Some ethnographic studies have considered children in school contexts without paying attention to children's home and playground contexts. Others have observed children in home or playground contexts and not made linkages between these places and their school contexts in order to produce a complete picture of

childhood in a certain social and cultural setting. Thus, the way children's positions change across different places affects children's relationships with adult researchers. Hence, how such dynamics are captured through reflexive ethnographic process are the gaps that still demand further examination.

Research Context and Methods

My fieldwork for this research was situated among the Guji people of Ethiopia. The Guji people, whose population is estimated to be 1.6 million according to the Ethiopian Population and Housing Census of 2007 (FDRE, 2007), live in a rural area and subsist on traditional agriculture that includes cattle herding and crop farming. The Guji speak a language known as Oromo and are more connected to the traditional Oromo institution known as *Gada System*³ that regulates their values, norms and customs (Hinnant, 1977). The rural area in which the people live is characterised by cultural complexities, absence of infrastructures such as electricity, road, and telephone as well as poor access to public services like schooling, health services, clean water and environmental hygiene (Van de Loo, 1991; Debsu, 2009). I conducted the fieldwork in three rural villages; namely, *Bunata*, *Samaro* and *Surro*

I entered the villages through negotiation with gatekeepers at different levels (Montgomery, 2009; Morton, 1996). In the Guji social setting, there were two types of structures that I encountered as gatekeepers to the local places and contexts of children. The first was the modern administrative structure that extends itself from the regional state to the local administrative district known as *Ganda* — *Ganda* is an Oromo term which means the lowest administrative division. The second structure was the local cultural institution (this institution consists of elderly men who are members of the Gada generational grade and are perceived to be knowledgeable persons) that governs the norms, values and social practices of the people and consists of elderly men who are seen to be bearers of the culture. At both levels, there were actors whose consent was imperative for me to obtain in order to gain access to people in the village and to the everyday places of their children. As I am an Oromo and speak the Oromo language, this placed me in a good position to be

accepted and supported by the gatekeepers as well as enabled me to be at ease with men, women and children in the villages.

After I entered the three participating villages and gained access to the social and cultural milieu of the people, I focused on identifying the everyday places and contexts of children in line with my research objective (Lancy, 2008; Maybin and Woodhead, 2003). Where is the frequent place of children? Is it home? Is it school? Is it workplace? Is it playground? Answering these questions was vital to my purpose of connecting with Guji children in their diverse local places (Roberts, 2008). Eventually, I realised that children's everyday places in the setting of my fieldwork were home, workplace, and school. My interviews with Guji children and observations of their social practices as well as their relationships with adults were contextualised in these places.

I generated data that represented children's positions and relationships with adults across these places through 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork. In these places, children had different social contexts of interactions and practices. The social context of children in cattle herding fields was different from those at home and in schools. With the aim of investigating how children's social positions change across these places and knowing the implication of this change on ethnographic research with children, my observations and ethnographic interviews were guided by the following questions: 1. How do children act and interact with each other in workplaces? 2. How do children interact with their family members (siblings and parents) at home? 3. How do children interact with their school teachers and schoolmates in schools? 4. How would I interact with children in their contexts in these different places? I also asked children the following questions: In which place do you feel free to talk and play with each other? What are your Dos and Don'ts at home, in the workplace and in school? My observations comprised different reflexive methods of which working, walking, talking, storytelling, riddling, and gaming with children as well as watching children's interactions with adults (parents, teachers and me) and with each other were the major ones. By situating these methods within a framework based on clear child-

friendly interactions and activities, I minimised the barrier of respect that Guji children exhibit in their relationships with adults and that blocks the free interaction between children and an adult researcher.

Both boys and girls participated in the research process although girls did not feel as confident as boys in their interactions with me in workplaces and schools because of the Guji norms of girlhood (Debsu, 2009). They were also not as interested as boys to introduce me to their parents. However, they were more curious than boys to get to know me better. They often asked me why I wanted to be with them in their workplaces, why I asked them questions, where I lived and why I wanted to participate in their play activities. Boys did not ask me such questions as often as girls did. Over time, I noticed that girls were freer when they interacted with me within a group than individually. Therefore, I used this reality as an opportunity and focused my interactions and involvement with girls when they were sitting in a group, working in a group, talking in a group and playing in a group. Such groups of children often included both boys and girls even though sometimes there were more girls than boys and other times the opposite was true. In those groups, I asked girls the same questions as boys but in more interactive ways that entailed initiating discussions, motivating girls to participate and appreciating their actions to minimise their shyness. Interestingly, this method improved the self-confidence of girls and encouraged them to become more interactive and self-reflective. Within the sphere of the home, although my gender (i.e. that I am male) did not especially influence my interactions with the girls participating in the study, it was problematic for me to observe their activities in kitchen areas, as these places were prohibited for males according to Guji custom (Debsu, 2009). Thus, I generated data about the activities of girls in the kitchen and in their interactions with their mothers in that sphere through interviews with both the girls and their mothers.

In total 25 children (15 boys and 10 girls) who were between seven and 14 years old participated in the research study, but my discussion in this paper is based on close interactions with a sample of children; namely, Getu (boy; age 10), Ashebir

(boy; age 10) and a group of children (7-10 years old; boys and girls) in three dynamic contexts: workplaces, homes and schools. These children (Getu, Ashebir and the group members) live in rural villages with their parents and perform two major roles: working and attending school. They usually attend school in the mornings and herd cattle, carry out household chores and duties and work on the farm in the afternoons. I used audio and video recordings as well as with field notes to record the data.

Approaching children as autonomous actors in workplaces

In workplaces, mainly in cattle herding fields, Guji children are autonomous in their social actions and interactions as adults do not have close surveillances on them in these places. In other words, as they are away from adult control when they are in cattle herding fields—the common workplaces of children— children behave freely as well as choose and direct their social actions in line with their own common interests. This shows that children are able to exercise self-rule in these places. Understanding such autonomy of children is important for a researcher to build up rapport with children and observe their social practices through friendly participation in their activities. However, it is not easy for an adult researcher to enter the ‘natural’ contexts of children because of the inevitable adult identity (Christensen and James, 2000; Wyness, 2009). With the aim of addressing this age-based barrier, I made persistent interactions with children and my interactions included child-friendly activities such as walking with children to different places, telling them my stories as well as making conversation and engaging them in discussions. Through implementation of these reflexive practices, I was able to establish myself as an adult-friend in children’s everyday places (Mandell, 1991). I became an adult-friend in those child-dominated places through engaging in children’s activities and noticing what children wanted to hear, wanted to know, wanted to do and what they liked others (including adults) to do for them. Such interactions with children, which enabled me to observe their likes and dislikes, facilitated my ability to communicate

with them during the ethnographic research process. Drawing on these contextual realities, it is possible to note that when a researcher walks, works and talks with children and when these activities are accompanied by child-friendly stories, she can better understand children's needs and values and adapt her research practices to suit them. The following text (Text 1) illustrates this idea.

Text1: Getu, 10 years old boy, is living with his parents in Samaro village of Guji people. On August 5, 2009, (in the afternoon) I saw him while he was walking to a river to fetch water. I greeted him and walked with him. Walking with him to the river, I asked him different questions including 'where are you going?', and 'What do you do with the water that you are going to fetch?' He was not responding to any of these questions. I read a sense of fear from his face and understood that he was afraid of a strange adult man walking with him which was unusual. On the second day (i.e. on August 6, 2009, in the afternoon), I saw him again while he was walking to the same river carrying an empty water-jar. I greeted him, walked with him and asked him to tell me where he was going. He kept quiet. I again asked him the same questions but I could not get any response from him. I changed my questions and asked him, 'Shall I tell you a folktale?' Now, he responded by nodding his head and I understood that he was interested in listening to my tale. I told him the folktale about a Monkey and a Lion⁴. It was observable on his face that he was happy to listen to folktales. He asked me to tell him another folktale and I told him the folktale about a Fool Man⁵. Getu started to talk with me. He told me the folktales and riddles he knew. Throughout the long way from the village to the river and from the river back to the village, we walked and talked with each other. When we reached in the village, he thanked me for telling him the folktales and accompanying him to the river. On the third day, while I was walking in the village, he came to me and asked me to tell him another folktale.

This text demonstrates the two actions I used as ways of approaching children in my ethnographic research process. The first action was asking children to tell me something (asking them to tell me a tale) and the second was telling them something as a means of developing their confidence and initiating their interest. As shown in

the text, Getu was responsive to the second action and hence the barrier between us was minimised. This situation underlies two points. Firstly, in an ethnographic research study with children, doing something for children (telling them something that appeals to their interest) is more effective than asking them to do something (or tell something) to maintain friendly interactions with them. Secondly, in a research process with children in a place dominated by children, the primary action of an adult researcher would be to identify child-friendly ways of interactions rather than concealing the age differences between him and the children through pretentious actions. Researchers' use of child-friendly ways of interaction (telling folktales to children as in the above case) would break the barrier of age and norms and establish a friend-like relationship between an adult researcher and children. For example, communication between Getu and I in a context where social hierarchy is the underlying principle regulating relationships between children and adults, became possible when I shifted my way of interaction from 'asking him to tell me something' to 'telling him something' that I thought would appeal to his interest. The following text (text 2) contains a similar response from children in a different workplace (here in a cattle herding field where children from different households come together and look after cattle).

Text 2: I was in a cattle herding field with a group of children. Even though I continuously tried to create social rapport with those children, I was not successful, as almost all of them were reluctant to talk to me. The big problem, as I understood, was my being an adult and a stranger in a place which was specifically for children. On the day (September 15th 2010), while I was in the field with the children as usual, I asked them to play riddles, but they kept quiet. Then, I told them riddles and asked them to interpret. The children interpreted my riddles. I continued telling and they went on interpreting. Later on, they started to tell me their riddles and ask me to interpret. In this way, the barrier between the children and I suddenly disappeared and they began to sit by my side in the field, touch my hair, appreciate my clothes and ask me questions.

Remembering the great interest I had for riddles during my childhood, I chose telling riddles to the children as a way of building a relationship with them. When I

obtained a positive response from the children, I was surprised that 20 years after my childhood, storytelling and riddles were still popular with children. Learning from my mistake (Solberg, 1996), I changed my approach of interaction by being sensitive to the communicative interest of the children and such a shift in approach resulted in minimising the barrier between me and the children. Both texts (text 1 and text 2) exhibit that children's reluctance to interact with me was reduced as a result of shifting my approach from asking them 'to do something' to, instead, 'doing something with them' and this reflexive action provided the children with information and social practice pertinent to their situation which appealed to their interest. In other words, the reflexive social exercise transformed the children from the position of perceiving me as a strange adult man to the state of accepting me as a recognisable adult-friend. It seems to me that the reflexive social exercise cleared apprehension and suspicion from the mind of the children and unlocked their social world to my participation and observation (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; Warming, 2005).

Children's refusal to respond to my questions is contrary to the norm of Guji people which dictates that children must reply instantly to adult enquiries (Beriso, 1994). This indicates that, in their workplaces, children exercise autonomy in deciding what questions they will and will not respond to. From my interactions and practices with the children in the workplaces, I noted that the age and value differences between an adult researcher and children can be reduced by interacting with children as autonomous persons who are willing to respond to what appeals to their interest. In other words, the age and value variation between an adult ethnographer and children can be less salient through researchers' recognition of children's autonomy in their actions and interactions as well as spot-on understanding of children's needs and values which, in turn, results in putting the researcher and the children in a 'friend-like' position. The following text (text 3) illustrates this situation.

Text 3: I was in a cattle herding field with children. Many of them were in the field. They were sitting in groups in different areas of the field and were looking after cattle as well as playing with each other. I was in one of the

groups doing what the children were doing along with making observations and conversations. The children in my group were six in number of whom two were girls. They played riddling and switched to rope-jumping. One of the children (Ashebir) ordered us (the children and I) to be in queue to jump over a rope turn by turn. I accepted the order and got in queue with the children to jump. I jumped but not as high as the children. This time, all of the children cooperated with each other to teach me how to jump high and they did the same for other children who also failed to jump.

This text demonstrates that children are autonomous actors in organising their social activities, teaching each other and supporting each other in work places. For children, this place is different from home and school, as it is away from adult restrictions and gives them freedom to act in line with their own interest. As shown in the text, after establishing a relationship with the children, they started to perceive me as an 'adult-child' and they supported me. In addition, I was governed by rules of their play activities. The children paid less attention to my physical difference and acted with me in the same way they acted with each other. This idea shows that places in which children work in rural settings are children's own spaces where they act autonomously and govern their social activities in their own right. Through this ethnographic process, it became clear that it is more practical for a researcher to capture what children actually do, how they behave and the way they give meanings to their social actions in the places where they are free from adult control and sanctions.

Realising that children are positioned as subordinate members within the home

Children's social position at home is quite different from that of the workplace as the social hierarchy at home positions children as subordinates to adults. In this place, children's obedience to their parents and the service they provide to parents are the central principles in everyday relationships between parents and children (Beriso, 1994). At home, therefore, children are subordinate to the power of adults (parents) and this subordination is signified through the respect and deference that children are expected to owe adults. As a result of these normative principles, there is always

presumed social and physical distance between children and adults and such distance is expected in relationships between parents and their children as well. The autonomy children exhibit in the workplace is not found at home as their actions in the latter sphere is closely supervised by parents. Thus, in the home context, it was more practical for a researcher to have close relationships with parents than with children as the children place adult researchers in the same category as their parents and approach them with the same reservation they approach other adults including their parents. For example, the children with whom I had free and friend-like interactions in cattle herding fields altered their way of relating to me when I visited their homes and interacted with me in the same way they did with their parents. In the cattle herd fields, they played and acted with me freely and guided me in the same way they guided each other. At home, the same children were not happy with my request to join their play activities as they gave me the deference that they did for their parents. The following text (text 4) demonstrates this situation.

Text 4: I was in the Ashebir's home with his parents. Ashebir came from school and saw me in the home. He came to me and greeted me formally. Then, he went away and sat with his siblings in the distant corner of the house. I called him to come and play with me. He became shy and kept quiet. I went to where he was sitting and tried to talk to him and his siblings with whom he was shouting and laughing. He and his siblings kept silent when I joined them and were too reserved to talk to me.

Ashebir was one of the children with whom I had a friend-like relationship in cattle herding places. However, he changed his behaviour towards me at home due to norms that insist on a respectful relationship between adults and children. However, even though he changed his position from autonomous actor in the field to subordinate status at home, Ashebir played an important role by introducing me to his parents. He invited me to come to his home and told his parents what he did with me in cattle herding fields. This shows that children link their field experience to their home situations. They share what they did in the field with their parents and siblings at home and these kinds of discussions increase familiarity between researchers and

both parents and their children. Thus, children are actors in connecting a researcher to homes and in facilitating her/relationship with parents.

In line with the home context of the children, I made use of two ways of participation and observation. Firstly, I observed their play activities and home routines without direct participation in them. When the children finished their activities, I conducted interviews with them to elicit their views on their social activities, meanings they give to their social practices and their relationships with their parents at home. Secondly, in some play activities (for example, storytelling and riddling) I joined parents to perform for children. I told my tales and riddles to children in the same way parents told them stories. When parents told tales to children, I listened along with the children. In storytelling contexts at homes, children were not expected to tell stories; their role was to listen and be entertained. I told tales and riddles as an adult and also listened to the tales and riddles of adults as an adult-listener. Thus, in the context at homes, I observed children's social actions without making informal contact with them. This illustrates that in the rural settings of Ethiopia, the context at home does not allow a researcher to observe the free actions of children and the meaning that children give to their actions independently from adult influences. This is because, in this context, children avoid what adults do not like and do what they think is suitable for adult values. However, ethnographic observation in this context is useful as it enables researchers to learn children's conditions at home, their relationships with adults and how they act in the places where they sense adult sanctions.

In general, the empirical evidence discussed above shows that a researcher cannot have the same relationship with children in their workplace and in their homes. This is because children change their positions across these places and the changes, in turn, alter the forms of relationship between a researcher and children as a result of which the researcher changes his techniques of participation and observation.

Knowing that children are disciplined listeners in schools

Children's situation in schools is not much different from that at home. Disciplinary principles such as silence, respect for teachers and obedience to instructions govern the everyday actions and behaviour of children in schools. This situation, again, changes the position of children in their relationship to a researcher. For instance, in a school context, the children associated me with their teachers and such an association created a different form of relationship between me and the children participating in the study. As a result of the 'teacher' position that the children ascribed to me, I changed my position from an 'adult-friend' (in the work place) and 'adult-observer' (at home) to an 'adult-leader' in school. The following text (text 5) reflects the relationship between me and children in a primary school.

Text 5: I was standing in a school compound near classrooms and observing how children interact with their school friends. Ashebir saw me from distance and came to me running. He stood in front of me, greeted me formally and respectfully by saying 'Barsiisa akam jirtu?' which means 'teacher, how are you?' Then, he went away from me and joined a group of children. He did not stay and talk with me.

Ashebir, with whom I had friendly interactions in the cattle herding fields, called me 'teacher' (which is the title by which children call their teachers to signify a formal relationship) in the school compound as he associated me with the school teachers. This shows that in school, children placed me in the same position as their school teachers and approached me in the same way they approached their teachers. During their free time, they came to me and asked me academic questions. When I asked them to tell me something or to do something for me, they responded instantly. After telling me something, they asked me to tell them whether what they told me was wrong or right. I replied to their request by saying, 'Yes you are right' when they tried well and 'you are right but do it again' when I felt they should to do it again. In these ways, I participated in children's social actions as a leader and my participation entailed initiating and guiding children's social activities, observing their actions, and eliciting their meanings through interviews. In this context, the children recognised my age and power difference and were submissive to my comments and inquiries. Even though they recognised my difference in age and position, they had positive contact with me and participated with enthusiasm in the storytelling, riddling, interviews and

group discussions with me. In this place, I was not asked by the children to do children's activities as in the workplace, but to observe and approve their actions. Such a relationship indicates that children cooperate with an adult researcher in the process of knowledge construction with the sense of learning from her and winning her appreciation. Thus, in school contexts, unlike workplaces and home contexts, a researcher has the opportunity to regulate the actions and behaviours of children and investigate their practices and perspectives in line with his research questions. This way of interacting with children in an ethnographic research process is useful as it enables researchers to observe children's social engagements and elicit their meanings in the context of hierarchical communication with an adult researcher.

Towards conclusion

Discussions in this paper illustrate that in the three places focused on in this study, children have three different social positions and this diversity requires a researcher to adopt three different ethnographic positions with children. In workplaces, where children are autonomous actors, a researcher is positioned as an adult-friend in his interactions with the children. At homes, where children are subordinate to adults, a researcher acts as an adult-observer. In schools, where children are disciplined learners, a researcher takes the position of leading children's actions.

As an adult-friend in children's places, a researcher has a chance to understand children's independent perspectives and practices which they articulate with a sense of freedom from adult control. However, in this context, a researcher has little power to guide children's interactions and practices in line with her research questions. Again, as an adult-observer at homes, a researcher construes how children interact with each other and with their adult counterparts in the value-laden home context. However, unlike the context of the workplace, a researcher does not have the opportunity to gain an insight into the independent perspectives and practices of children. As an adult-leader in school contexts, a researcher has close contact with children and can observe their practices and elicit their meanings by leading their actions. This context is different from the workplace context as it is influenced by the researcher. These three contexts of children embody the three realities of childhood,

and I argue that without understanding these dynamic positions of children, it is less practical to understand the comprehensive image of rural childhood. This idea implies that these contexts of children are complementary in shaping the everyday social actions and interactions of rural children.

Thus, in an ethnographic fieldwork with children in rural environments, a researcher's access to children's places and contexts as well as his reflexive participation with children in their places and contexts are important methodological practices. In other words, ethnographic fieldwork in children's everyday places requires reflexive participation as a key to understanding the multiple and dynamic local contexts of children. Therefore, reflexive ethnographic research with children in rural settings should consider the following notions:

1. Children have different places in their everyday life;
2. Contexts across children's everyday places are different;
3. Children's relationships with a researcher can change in line with contexts in children's places and;
4. Research with children should involve reflexive strategies that fit the contexts in which children live their lives.

The practice for obtaining access to children's places and contexts depends on the local social and cultural realities of children; therefore, becoming familiar with the contextual needs and values of children should be a primary step (Brewer, 2000). Thus, depending on local cultural and social situations, reflexive participation with children, as a scheme in ethnographic research, can be applied in multiple forms. It can include telling stories from one's own childhood to children in a way they can understand or telling them popular folk narratives or showing them their own pictures, the pictures of their friends or their family or and singing songs popular with children.

In general, reflexive ethnographic research with children in rural settings would be seen as a set of multiple endeavours in the social places and contexts of children. This multiple endeavours are the base for the common ethnographic techniques

which are social engagement, participant observations, and ethnographic interviews. In reflexive ethnography, it is not the length of time that a researcher takes in the field that can result in the establishment of trust and rapport with children, but the degree of reflexive interactions between the researcher (fieldworker) and the children.

Notes

1. Refers to the social status that children take in their relationships with adults across different social contexts (Montgomery, 2009).
2. The complex values and norms that guide the childhood social behaviours and actions as well as the perceived child-adult relationships.
3. The Gada is a system of generational grade that successses each other every eight years in assuming cultural power and ritual responsibilities. Each grade remains in power in a specific Gada Period (which is eight years) and begins and ends with ritual of power transfer.
4. This is a popular folktale with Guji children. It presents the relationship between a monkey and a lion (both wild animals but are physical opposites) in which a monkey which is a small animal tricked and killed a lion which is a big animal. Children enjoy this folktale as it portrays victory of a small and week animal over a big and powerful one.
5. This is also a popular folktale with Guji children. It embodies a man who has been fooled by his village mate and killed his own wife. The village mate fooled the man by telling him that he killed his own wife by cutting her neck and brought her to life by kicking her on the buttock. The man appreciated the wisdom of his village mate and tried this wisdom on his own wife but he could not bring her to life and lost her forever. Children make fun of the foolish character of the man and observe how foolishness can destroy somebody.

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Article Two

The place of children among the Guji of southern Ethiopia:
school, work and play

Forthcoming in *Children`s Geography*

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Article Three

**The roles of Oromo-speaking children in storytelling tradition in
Ethiopia**

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Children as Interpreters of Culture: Producing Meanings from Folktales in Southern Ethiopia

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Article Five

**LEARNING THROUGH PLAY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF
CHILDREN'S RIDDLING IN ETHIOPIA**

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LEARNING THROUGH PLAY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF CHILDREN'S RIDDLING IN ETHIOPIA

Tadesse Jaleta Jirata

Udessa: Take a riddle.

Elema: I took a riddle.

Udessa: I said 'Take a riddle', and you said 'I took a riddle?'

Elema: Yes.

Udessa: An owner of one hundred spears is standing and dancing.

Elema: [after thinking for a while] Is it a living thing or a non-living thing?

Udessa: It is a living thing.

Elema: [after thinking for a while] Is it a domestic thing or a wild thing?

Udessa: It is a wild thing.

Elema: Yes, I've got it. It is a buffalo.

Udessa: Wrong.

Elema: Now, I've got it. It is an acacia tree.

Udessa: Wrong.

Elema: Pick a country.

Udessa: I picked Borana land and possessed it with its people and cattle. The answer is a palm tree. It has sharp leaves.

Elema: I see. A palm tree has sharp leaves.

This is a transcript of riddling performed by Udessa (a ten-year-old boy) and Elema (an eleven-year-old boy) and demonstrates one of the popular play arts in the repertoire of the Guji people's oral tradition (Beriso 2000). The Guji people have a rich oral tradition that includes *oduu duri* (myth and legend), *duri duri* (folktales), *hibboo* (riddles), *mammassa gababa* (proverbs) and *weedduu* (folk-songs). Of these forms of oral tradition, the proverb, the myth and the legend are regarded as arts of communication for adults, whereas the folktale and the riddle are forms that constitute children's play practices. The folktale is told by adults to children as well as by children to children. Parents perceive this process as a means of knowledge transmission, whereas for children it is a form of play. However, the riddle is performed and transferred between children alone. In addition to these oral arts, Guji children play *giricha* (a stone-throwing game like jacks), *duqo* (a 'count and capture' game known elsewhere as *mancala*) and *waatolcha* (impressions), but attribute great significance to riddling and the processes of interrogation and interpretation that it involves. For example, when I asked Udessa and Elema about the type of play practice they like to play every day, both of them responded that they play riddling. It is the game every child knows and enjoys, they said.

TADESSE JALETA JIRATA is a PhD Fellow in Interdisciplinary Child Research at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway; and a lecturer and researcher in African Literature and Oral Traditions at Dilla University, Ethiopia. He is the author of *A Contextual Study of the Social Functions of Guji-Oromo Proverbs: the savor and rhetoric power of verbal arts in everyday communications of African peoples* (VDM Verlag, 2009). Email: tadejaleta@yahoo.com

Most studies of riddles in African contexts emphasize their role in instilling cultural values (see Ben-Amos 1977; Beriso 2000; Derive 2003; Finnegan 1970, 2007; Kyoore 2010; Njoroge 1994; Noss 2006; Okpewho 1992; Schmidt 1971, 1977). They discuss the use by adults of riddles – and, in a similar way, other forms of African folklore – as a means of educating and disciplining children. However, the social and educational meaning of riddling from the children’s perspective, and the way these meanings are played out in the making of children’s peer culture, have only been included in studies of childhoods and children’s folklore in African contexts to a limited degree. These shortcomings of studies of African oral tradition are being recognized. A good example of this development is the work of Nicolas Argenti (2010), which approaches folktales as child-centred verbal play through which children express their lived experience. Argenti discusses folktales told by children in Cameroon and argues that children appropriate folktales to make sense of their context and express their own views through them. Helen Schwartzman’s (1978) conceptualization of play as child-centred exercise, which provided the basis for Argenti’s interpretation of folktales as child-centred practice, is also relevant here. Schwartzman’s comparative study was based on reports from Africa, America, Asia and Europe, and showed how children create and recreate discrete play worlds for themselves. Argenti’s and Schwartzman’s approaches are relevant for this analysis of riddling in showing how children produce and share riddles independently of adults, and how they manipulate riddling as the process and occasion of learning and playing together. Also important in defining the questions for this research is Carol Eastman’s (1984) account of Swahili oral tradition in which she states that the study of riddling should cover the time and place of riddle telling and interpreting, the identity of participants, how the participants perform and interpret riddles, and the description of the riddles that participants tell and interpret. Although Eastman does not examine riddling as a discrete sphere of children’s play, this agenda is useful in showing how riddling constitutes a form of expressive culture.

In this article, I use Argenti’s and Schwartzman’s notion of child-centred verbal play and the aspects of the context of riddling presented by Eastman to demonstrate how Guji children perform riddling and facilitate their own informal learning through it. The central objective of my study is to document riddling as a sphere for children’s autonomous entertainment and knowledge acquisition. My discussion is based on the social constructivist epistemology which, according to James *et al.* (1998) and Wyness (2006), presents children as social actors who are able to perform their play activities without direct involvement of adults. In the Nordic context Mouritsen (2002), for example, adopts this perspective when he argues that children have their own, independent practices that they perform as play activities without the involvement of adults.

Thus, I view children as social actors and construct riddling as a critical element of their cultural practice through which they produce informal social networks and learn about the physical and social phenomena in their local environment. Grounded in this epistemological perspective, I raise two questions. First, how do children recreate their social world and share their play interactions through riddling? Second, how does riddling, as a child-centred practice, function as a context for children’s informal knowledge acquisition? I begin my discussion by presenting the everyday lives of Guji children as the social background to my

research and the methodological practices that I employed for data generation. Then, I analyse adults' and children's perspectives on the place and time of riddling; riddling as a discrete practice for children; the way in which children perform riddling; and the various forms of children's riddles among Guji people. Finally, I describe the way in which children acquire knowledge through performing riddling.

EVERYDAY LIFE OF GUJI CHILDREN

Every day, I wake up early in the morning, clean the house, fetch water and make the morning coffee. My brother also wakes up early and works on the farm near our home. When the coffee is ready, I wake my parents, call my brother back and invite the neighbours to drink the coffee. When the coffee is over, my brother takes his notebooks and rushes to school. But I have to wash the coffee pot and the cups, and put them back before I leave for school. We walk for twenty minutes in order to reach the school. From morning (8 a.m.) to noon, we stay at school and learn; there are six periods in a day. During the break time and when a subject teacher is absent, we play riddles, storytelling, and *giricha* ('jacks') with our friends, but without shouting. At noon, I come back home along with my brother. At home, my mother gives us food to eat and water to drink. Then I rush to the bush to collect firewood and my brother goes to herd cattle. In the evening at home we [the siblings] come together and play riddling with each other as well as listening to stories from our parents. My brother shares the new riddles he learns from other children while herding.

This is the account of the daily routine of Idile, a ten-year-old girl, and her twelve-year-old brother, and it represents the life of children among Guji people—one of the Oromo ethnic groups living in a rural part of southern Ethiopia. The Guji people practise traditional subsistence agriculture, which includes crop cultivation and animal husbandry (Beriso 1994; van de Loo 1991). According to the 2007 housing and population census of Ethiopia, the Guji have a population of 1.6 million and 90 per cent of this population reside in a remote rural environment (FDRE 2007). The overall literacy level of the people is not known officially, but my household observations show that in the areas covered by this research only one out five household members have basic reading and writing skills, and oral communication has been and remains the primary means of interaction.

Children below fifteen years old constitute 41 per cent of the Guji population, of whom only 40 per cent attend school on a regular basis (FDRE 2007). As indicated in Idile's story, the contemporary everyday life of the Guji children is characterized by three social engagements: work, school and play. Every day, the children are absorbed in routines such as fetching water, collecting firewood, caring for smaller children, cultivating the garden and herding cattle. Through these activities children expand their social networks. Cattle herding, for example, is a daily activity in which children combine work with play (Beriso 2000; Debsu 2009). The pasture used for herding cattle brings children from different homes together and creates opportunities for them to play together and to establish peer relationships without adult surveillance. In contrast, children's interactions at home are heavily influenced by strict values of intergenerational respect between *gurgudda* (seniors) and *xixiqqa* (juniors) that

place children in a subordinate social position (Beriso 1995; Jirata 2011). These disciplinary regimes mean that at home, as I shall discuss further below, children share storytelling with their parents, but perform riddling only with their siblings.

Guji children do not attend school regularly. According to the children themselves, the two social factors discouraging them from school are domestic work and the limited play opportunities they get at school. Children recognize their domestic obligations and the need to herd cattle or help out at home, which are prerequisites for school attendance. For example, Ashagire (a ten-year-old boy) said, 'How can one learn without eating and eat without working?' As a result, those children that go to school attend for half the day only (from 8 a.m. to noon) and devote the rest of their days to herding cattle and household routines. The disciplinary measures that the school imposes on children's play activities are another factor that discourages attendance. Genet (an eleven-year-old girl) explained the situation: 'In school, we do not have sufficient time to play. . . . It is only in the break time and when a subject teacher is absent that we can play silently. It is not allowed to play loudly in school.' Such school rules compel children to remain quiet in the school compound and constrain their play time. As a result, work rather than school provides Guji children with the time and space in which they can play with freedom from adult control.

METHODOLOGY

The empirical data in this article are drawn from ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in three rural Guji villages.¹ Fieldwork included participant observation in children's riddling sessions in three schools,² four cattle-herding locations and ten homes, along with ethnographic interviews with children and their parents in their homes and workplaces. I carried out participant observations in thirty-five children's riddling sessions and ethnographic interviews with sixty children (twenty-five girls and thirty-five boys), eleven parents (six mothers and five fathers) and nine grandparents (four grandmothers and five grandfathers), all of whom were randomly selected from the people in the villages. In all riddling sessions, I blended the observations with interviews and performed these simultaneously. My ability to speak the Oromo language spoken by Guji people, my familiarity with the Guji culture and environment, and my ethnic affinity with the people helped me to establish close relationships with adults and children in the villages, to participate in their social and cultural events, and to be with children in diverse places and at different times while observing their social actions and customary practices. I played with children in school compounds, in cattle pastures and in their homes. I also worked with parents on their farms and stayed with them in their homes in order to elicit their views about their childhood play activities and observe their current relationships with their children. In this study, I focused on children between seven and fourteen years old.

¹The names of these villages were Samaro, Bunata and Surro.

²The three schools were Samaro Primary School, Bunata Primary School and Gongua Primary School.

RIDDLING AS PLAY

Guji children and adults perceive riddling as a form of children's play that occurs exclusively between children. However, children and adults have different ideas about the appropriate time and place for riddling. Galgale (a 45-year-old woman), for example, reflected on this difference:

When I was a child, children played riddling during the night-time at home. My parents used to tell me and my siblings that if we played riddling during the daytime our uncle might die, and we used to believe this. Today, our children play riddles everywhere and every time they meet each other. This is strange. Children today disobey our traditional values.

Morma (a 60-year-old man) added:

When I was a small child, I used to play riddling with my siblings at home during the night-time. We did not play riddling during the daytime because we believed that if we played during the daytime our uncle would die. But my grandchildren do not accept this belief. They perform riddling during the daytime in the cattle pasture. Time is introducing changes to our culture.

Children today do not therefore relate riddling to a specific time and place but rather, in contrast to adults' traditions, they perform riddles during the day and at night, both inside and outside of home. This trend is perceived by adults as a form of misconduct by children who, in turn, reported that they no longer believe in the supposed dangers of daytime riddling. Demekech (a ten-year-old girl), for example, said, 'It is said that "if children play riddling in the daytime, their uncle may die". I do it in the cattle herding place with my friends and in school with my schoolmates during the daytime. But my uncle has not died.' Another child (Asnake, a nine-year-old boy) added, 'Uncles do not die if children play riddling in the daytime. It is a lie by adults. Our parents say this to make us stop playing riddles in the cattle pastures.' For children, adults promote this belief to prevent them from playing riddles during the daytime because it is believed to distract them from performing their household duties effectively. The intergenerational tension expressed through children's resistance to adults' beliefs about the correct time and place for riddling is attributed to two developments in children's social context. The first is the emergence of children's own places and times for peer interaction. Three decades ago, when the Guji people were exclusively pastoralists, children used to stay in close proximity to their parents and grandparents (Beriso 1995; Hinnant 1978). Small children and older girls stayed in the home and worked with their mothers while older boys worked under the close supervision of their fathers and grandfathers. As a result, children did not have peer relationships with one another outside their homes and their play activities were limited to interactions among siblings in the home. Through the division of labour, children have been assigned to household activities such as herding cattle, fetching water, and collecting firewood, and these assignments have given them places and times relatively free from adult supervision (Jirata 2011).

The second development is the beginning of schooling among Guji people in the early 1980s (Beriso 1995). Schooling exposed children to a new social environment in which they gained access to information from beyond the

domestic domain. The introduction of schooling also seems to have allowed adults indirect involvement in the reproduction of riddling, through the writing and the circulation of children's books of riddles. As ten-year-old Ashagire said, 'I also learn riddles from books that I use for learning Oromo language in school. Then I tell those riddles to my siblings at home, as well as my friends in the cattle pastures.' Both these developments of sedentarization and schooling have drawn children together and enabled the formation of peer relationships in which children produce and share various play activities, of which riddling, storytelling and games are the commonest examples.

The changing times and places of riddling have also produced variation in the form and content of riddles across the generations. Waqoo (a 45-year-old man), for example, articulated this variation as, 'I do not know some of the riddles that my children perform with each other today. They are different from the ones I used to play when I was a child.' Through my participation in riddling with children, I understood that all of the riddles the adult informants recalled were known and performed by the children, but that adults did not know the newer children's riddles. This suggests that old riddles, with their set patterns, are being reproduced by the children. They pass from generation to generation through elder children telling riddles to the younger ones, as we learn from Ashagire's words, 'I learn riddles from my elder siblings and friends and also tell them to the younger ones', and from eleven-year-old Genet: 'I learned riddles from siblings and other children who know them more than me. Small children learn from me and I used to learn from older children when I was small.' Secondly, the fact that children perform riddles that adults do not know shows that each generation of children invents new riddles. Children's riddling traditions continue to be an important means by which children construct their social world because they are adapted over time. These generational shifts reflect improvisation and innovation in riddling forms themselves, along with structural shifts from pastoralism to a more settled agriculturalist way of life.

RIDDLING NETWORKS

Children's play activities take different forms and engage children in different ways, as discussed in Mouritsen (2002) and Argenti (2010) in Nordic and African contexts respectively. In the Guji context riddling is perceived as a form of play exclusive to children, as the following interview with Galgalo (a 40-year-old man) demonstrates:

Tadesse Jaleta (TJ): What did you play when you were a child?

Galgalo: I used to play riddling, storytelling and games.

TJ: Which ones do you play now as an adult?

Galgalo: I do storytelling with my children.

TJ: What about riddling?

Galgalo: I do not do riddling now. I am an adult. But, my children do it with each other.

TJ: Do you not tell the riddles you know to your children?

Galgalo: My children know more riddles than me. They do not want me to tell them riddles. They want me to tell them folktales.

TJ: Do your children not want to play riddling with you?

Galgalo: Children do not play riddling with adults. They play it with each other.

As this exchange shows, adults among Guji people consider riddling to be a social exercise that children perform together outside the adult domain (McDowell 1981). Children are reluctant to play riddling with adults as the ten-year-old boy Uddessa suggests: 'I do not want to play riddles with my parents and other adults. I do not feel free to play with them. I play with children. Riddling is children's play. Why would adults play it? Adults do not know many riddles.' Children therefore perceive riddling as their own play activity, one that they seek to protect from interference by adults. Indeed, as Corsaro and Eder (1990) and Kyratzis (2004) explain in their reviews of studies of children's peer culture in the European context, children tend to protect their play space from intrusion by adults, especially when they do not trust adults' knowledge of their play activities. This control over a social network and cultural world is what the Guji children are exercising through their riddling.

Furthermore, riddling is a popular form of entertainment and play. Bonise (a nine-year-old girl) said: 'I enjoy playing riddling. I want to play it always. I play with my siblings at home and with my friends in the cattle pastures.' Children's passion for riddling can be attributed to three factors. First, as we have shown, riddling is free from adult involvement and it offers children autonomy in controlling and leading their interactions and play activities. Secondly, riddling creates a close social interaction among children, along with the motivation of competition. Gemechu (an eleven-year-old boy) described this motivation: 'When I am able to tell and interpret more riddles, I am proud of myself and feel that I am a winner.' Children strive to gain recognition and therefore participate enthusiastically in riddling sessions. Such interaction among children is observable in the other forms of children's play, as asserted by Mouritsen (2002) and Retting (1995) in Western contexts. Thirdly, riddling involves interpretation and gives children an opportunity to experiment with language. As Buchoff (1996: 667) shows, riddling enables children to test each other with language and feel a sense of accomplishment when they interpret a riddle successfully. These three factors underlie children's active engagement in riddling and their entertainment by it.

RIDDLING AMONG GUJI CHILDREN

Kyooore (2010) and Njoroge (1994) show that African riddles are usually presented in the form of statements or questions that contain images of objects from people's social and natural environments. Thus, a child asks a riddle and another child interprets the image contained within it. By observing children's social events across different times and places (for example, night-time at home or during the day in the cattle pastures) I learnt that Guji children perform riddles in this familiar format. The following transcript of a riddling session demonstrates how Guji children perform riddling. In the session, the nine-year-old Bonise was the teller and her schoolmates were receivers. The riddling session occurred in a school compound and all of the participants were girls (seven to eleven years old).

Bonise: *Hibboo* (Take a riddle).

Children (in chorus): *Hiphi, Hiphi* (We took a riddle).

Bonise: *Hibbo Jjennaan hipi jettani?* (I said 'Take a riddle.' Did you say 'We took a riddle?')

Children [in chorus]: *Ewo* (Yes).

Bonise: Something is a corpse when it sits down and a lion when it stands up.

Children: Gun.

Bonise: Correct.

Children [shouting with happiness]: Yes! Yes!

Bonise: Take a riddle.

Children [in chorus]: We took a riddle.

Bonise: I said, 'Take a riddle.' Did you say, 'We took a riddle?'

Children [in chorus]: Yes.

Bonise: People with grey hair stand in a field.

Children: Old men.

Bonise: Wrong.

Children: Horses.

Bonise: Wrong.

Children: Pick a country.

Bonise [smiling]: I picked Sidama land. I attack the people and confiscate their cattle. The correct answer is maize plants that are flowering.

Among the Guji children, the opening exchange is as in the example above. After this exchange, the teller asks the riddle and the receiver tries to interpret it. The receiver has a right to try several times until he or she can answer the riddle correctly or gives up. A receiver who fails to interpret a riddle correctly ends his or her attempt by saying '*Daga Fudhadhu*' ('Pick a country'). The teller replies, '*Daga Fudhadhe*' ('I picked a country'). Then, the receiver calls out the name of a place, a country or a region and the teller says, 'I have picked it'. Finally, the teller interprets the riddle. Thus, the failure of a receiver to interpret a riddle is compensated by his or her promise to 'give a country' to the teller. This forfeit in turn reflects Guji people's history of warfare, in which war parties from Guji used to attack their neighbouring ethnic groups (Sidama, Borana, Walayta), control their territory, and confiscate their cattle.

Only one child asks a riddle at any one time, but there can be several receivers. In that case, the receivers help each other and have the chance to interpret a riddle together. While these groups reinforce social interaction and friendship, interpreting in a group also creates a sense of competition among the children and those who can tell and interpret more riddles than their companions win the accolade of a 'knowledgeable child'. Njoroge (1994) states that children feel more satisfied with interpreting riddles than with asking them because they feel a stronger sense of accomplishment by using their logic to search for clues and solve the riddles. Children's participation in such a context encourages them to learn more riddles and to become competent in riddling so as to attract their peers and reinforce their social network.

CONTEMPORARY RIDDLES

The riddles of Guji children capture everyday human activities such as preparing food, farming, travelling, planting, dancing, herding, hunting, fighting and loving. They also include references to the features of and relationships between objects of the physical environment such as wild animals, domestic animals,

plants, crops, water, the sky, the earth, the sun, the stars, the moon, rain, home utensils and human beings. The riddles have simple and complex forms. The simplicity or complexity of the riddles, as discussed in Njoroge (1994), can be analysed by the length of the sentences used to construct them, the imagery they involve and the knowledge required in order to interpret them, as explained in the following examples.

Simple riddles

The simple form of a riddle consists of short sentences and contains metaphorical images that relate to social and material realities in the children's local environment. The riddle images are usually presented in the form of a metaphor or comparison, a plain statement puzzle or a question. The comparative form is exemplified in the riddle: 'Something is a corpse when it sits down and a lion when it stands up.' Riddles as plain statements are presented in the form of an affirmative sentence such as 'You see it but you do not know it.' Finally riddles in question form would include 'I put you here, who put you there?'

The following transcript of a riddle session demonstrates simple riddles performed between Beka (an eight-year-old boy) and the ten-year-old Ashagire in a school compound.

Ashagire: Take a riddle.
 Beka: I took a riddle.
 Ashagire: I said, 'Take a riddle.' Did you say, 'I took a riddle?'
 Beka: Yes.
 Ashagire: Something does not have shelter to live in but has always food to eat.
 Beka: It is a flea.
 Ashagire: Correct.
 Beka: Take a riddle.
 Ashagire: I took a riddle.
 Beka: I said, 'Take a riddle.' Did you say, 'I took a riddle?'
 Ashagire: Yes.
 Beka: Something is poor in the day and rich in the night.
 Ashagire: Earth.
 Beka: Wrong.
 Ashagire: Mountain.
 Beka: Again wrong.
 Ashagire: I do not know it. Pick a country.
 Beka: I picked Borana land; I keep my cattle there, and I build my home there. It is the cattle's enclosure. During the daytime it is empty because the cattle leave it. In the night it is full as the cattle gather within it.

Maranda (1976) described these as riddles that pose overt questions with covert answers. Simple riddles are easily memorized by children and are therefore performed frequently by children in varied social contexts.

Complex riddles

A complex riddle is presented in long sentences and consists of questions that children answer using knowledge of their social and natural environment. It involves a cluster of images or characters in complex relationships with each other that demand logical associations and skills of interpretation. The following

example of complex riddling was performed by two children, Temesgen (an eleven-year-old boy) and the ten-year-old Uddessa in a school compound. The children called the riddle ‘What is one?’

Temesgen: Take a riddle.
 Uddessa: I took a riddle.
 Temesgen: What is one?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger.
 Temesgen: What are two?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger and two are goat’s teats.
 Temesgen: What are three?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger, two are goat’s teats, and three are hearth stones.
 Temesgen: What are four?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger, two are goat’s teats, three are hearth stones and four are cow’s teats.
 Temesgen: What are five?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger, two are goat’s teats, three are hearth stones, four are cow’s teats and five are a hand’s fingers.
 Temesgen: What are six?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger, two are goat’s teats, three are hearth stones, four are cow’s teats, five are a hand’s fingers and six are calves for dowry.
 Temesgen: What are seven?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger, two are goat’s teats, three are hearth stones, four are cow’s teats, five are a hand’s fingers, six are calves for dowry and seven are days of a week.
 Temesgen: What are eight?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger, two are goat’s teats, three are hearth stones, four are cow’s teats, five are a hand’s fingers, six are calves for dowry, seven are days of a week and eight are lion’s cubs.
 Temesgen: What are nine?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger, two are goat’s teats, three are hearth stones, four are cow’s teats, five are a hand’s fingers, six are calves for dowry, seven are days of a week, eight are lion’s cubs and nine are members of *Gada* council (traditional administrative council).
 Temesgen: What are ten?
 Uddessa: One is a ring on a finger, two are goat’s teats, three are hearth stones, four are cow’s teats, five are a hand’s fingers, six are calves for dowry, seven are days of a week, eight are lion’s cubs, nine are members of *Gada* council and ten are members of a military unit.

This riddle is popular among Guji children and is performed as a form of play of associating numbers to objects. In its structure, the riddle is similar to the English riddle, *One Fat Hen*, although it is difficult to trace reasons for this similarity.³ Complex riddles, in general, are presented in the question form and involve the long rehearsal of sentences that move towards increasing complexity. The major differences between simple and complex riddles lies in their structure and in the number of metaphorical images they present.

³Children play the riddle by inserting different images in the set template. For example, they replace ‘ring on finger’ by ‘human sex organ’, saying ‘One is a human sex organ’. Again, ‘goat’ can be replaced by ‘donkey’, resulting in ‘two are donkey’s teats’. They also replace ‘hearth stones’ by ‘Guji clans’ and say ‘three are Guji clans’.

RIDDLING AS LEARNING

The underlying motive for children to riddle is entertainment. However, according to the children, interpreting riddles helps them develop their capacity of associating images to reality and to understand their social and natural environments. The children said that when telling and interpreting riddles, they imagine the phenomena contained in riddles and learn their characteristics and relationships. Tigist (a nine-year-old girl) stated that, 'Through telling and interpreting riddles with my friends, I can learn names and places of objects as well as how to associate words to things.' Tigist's statement implies that in the process of riddling children cooperate with each other and learn from each other.

Let us observe how the children performed riddling and how they reflected on it. The following examples were taken from a children's riddling session that took place in the cattle pastures. Five children, namely Desta, Bonise, Ashebir, Tamirat and Tigist, participated in the riddling session. Two of them were girls (both nine-year-olds) and the other three were boys (nine to eleven years old). They performed the riddling as follows:

Ashebir: Take a riddle.
 The children: We took a riddle.
 Ashebir: Blood sprinkled on the farm of my father.
 The children: Ripe coffee fruits.
 Ashebir: Correct.
 Bonise: Take a riddle.
 The children: We took a riddle.
 Bonise: You see it but you do not know it.
 The children: Off-spring in the womb of a cow.
 Bonise: Correct.

At end of the session I had the following conversation with the children.

TJ: Do you perform riddling at other times?
 The children: Yes.
 TJ: What do you gain from riddling?
 The children: We get to play. We also learn from it.
 TJ: What do you learn from it?
 The children: We learn several things. We learn names of things as well as colours, places and what things are used for.

The children said that riddling is more than the chance to play. By associating images in the riddles to objects in their physical environment they also learn the names and characteristics of things that surround them and develop the skill of associating abstract images to the realities in their local context. According to my observation of the riddling process, the norms of interpersonal interactions and acceptable values are also contained as recurrent messages in the riddles. Through telling and interpreting the riddles, therefore, children evaluate and understand cultural and social phenomena appropriate to their contexts (Argenti 2010), as is illustrated in the following text:

TJ: What do you like to play?
 Desta (a nine-year-old boy): I like playing riddling, storytelling and children's games.

TJ: Why do you like riddling and storytelling?

Dest: I use them to play with my siblings and friends. Hearing and telling riddles and folktales make me happy. Through folktales and riddles, I also learn our culture.

The children also stated that in addition to the social value of the entertainment arising from contesting with each other, riddling has educational advantages. Gemede and Boru (both eleven-year-old boys), for example, asserted that riddles such as the following help them activate their memory and develop their ability to solve problems. They performed the following riddles in a cattle pasture:

Gemede: Take a riddle.

Boru: I took a riddle.

Gemede [presents the riddle]: There are parents (a father and a mother) and two children who want to cross a big lake. There is a boat that they can use for sailing across the lake. This boat can carry only 100 kilograms or less at a time. Each of the parents weighs 100 kilograms but each child weighs 50 kilograms. How do these people use the boat to cross the lake?

Boru [interprets the riddle]: First, the two children cross the lake together using the boat. Then, one of the children stays and the other child brings the boat back to the side of the mother and the father. Then, the father takes the boat and crosses the lake. Then, the father stays and the child who crossed the lake first brings the boat back to the side where the mother and the other child are. Then, the two children again cross together and one of the children stays and the other brings the boat back to the mother. Then, the mother crosses the lake using the boat. Then, the child who stayed with the father brings back the boat to his brother. Finally, the two children cross together and join their father and mother.

Gemede: Correct.

Boru: Take a riddle.

Gemede: I took a riddle.

Boru [presents the riddle]: A person is migrating from one area to another area. There is a big river between these two areas. He has tiger, goat and cabbage that he wants to take with him. Along with these three things, he reached the river and wanted to cross it. He can cross with only one thing (tiger, goat or cabbage) at a time. He cannot take all the three things with him at a time. He also cannot leave the cabbage with the goat and the goat with the tiger for the goat eats the cabbage and the tiger eats the goat. Thus, how can this man take these things to the new area?

Gemede [interprets the riddle]: First he crosses with the goat. Then, he comes back and crosses with the cabbage. He leaves the cabbage and comes back with the goat. Then, he keeps the goat at the former place and crosses with the tiger. Then, he comes back and finally crosses with the goat.

Boru: Correct.

The children also reflected on how interpreting such riddles helps them to develop their intellectual capability. Here are their words:

TJ: Is it not difficult to interpret such riddles?

Boru: It is difficult.

Gemede: Yes it is difficult.

TJ: How are you able to interpret it?

Boru: I first worked out in my mind how the children and the parents can use the boat to cross the river in line with the given information. The weight that the boat can carry at a time is given. The weight of each person is also given. Then, I have to think and find the way these persons can cross the river.

Gemed: I also worked out in my mind how this person can take his animals with him across the river. I used the given information and found how the person can take the animals across the river safely.

The children stated that through the performances of complex riddles they acquire not only an abstract ability to solve problems, but also skills that are useful in their everyday lives. For example, in the ‘What is one?’ riddle they count the numbers one to ten and associate them with objects in their social and natural environment. This is in line with what Buchoff (1996) and Eshach (2007) describe as children’s informal ways of learning. Hence, as Njoroge (1994) argues, riddles are brain teasers that help children develop their social and intellectual skills. In general, then, through riddling children interact, entertain and negotiate with each other, and teach each other about situations in their local settings.

CONCLUSION

The empirical material in this article shows that riddling, which is a popular form of children’s folk culture among Guji people, has social and educational values for children. The social value of riddling derives from the fact that it is the children’s own play practice and differentiates Guji children’s culture from the adult cultural world. It also shows that children can create and share their own cultural realities through which they resist adult imposition. Riddling creates a context in which children entertain one another through testing each other, and which also sustains their social networks. As children’s artistic performance, riddling exposes children not only to the realm of play, but also to situations that enhance their problem-solving skills and their ability to interpret metaphorical images by associating them with social and natural phenomena.

Riddles thus provide children with contexts in which they experiment with language and solve problems. This, as discussed by both Buchoff (1996) and Burns (1976) in Western contexts, enables children to develop their memory and interpretative skills through their own play activities. As children acquire and recall a large number of riddles and interpret their meanings in association with social and natural phenomena, they steadily extend the scope of their intellectual awareness. Thus, riddling epitomizes child-friendly play, providing informal learning situations through which children reconstruct their social practices as different from those of adults, exercise their intellects and acquire knowledge about realities in their local environment.

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ABSTRACT

Although the educational value of African oral traditions, particularly folktales, has been discussed widely in social studies of children, education and folklore, riddling is not commonly investigated as a part of children's everyday social practice. In this article, I present riddling as a part of children's expressive culture, through which they play together and learn about their local environment. I generated the data through ten months of ethnographic fieldwork among Guji people in southern Ethiopia. Based on analyses of the times and locations of this activity, as well as the social interaction involved, I argue that children perform riddling in order to entertain themselves and to learn from their immediate social and natural environment through discrete peer networks.

RESUMÉ

Si la valeur éducative des traditions orales africaines, notamment des contes populaires, a certes fait l'objet de larges discussions dans les études sociales consacrées aux enfants, à l'éducation et au folklore, en revanche la devinette n'est pas communément étudiée comme un constituant de la pratique sociale quotidienne des enfants. Dans cet article, l'auteur présente la devinette comme une composante de la culture expressive des enfants, à travers laquelle ils jouent ensemble et apprennent à connaître leur environnement local. Les données de cette étude sont le fruit de dix mois de travaux ethnographiques menés auprès des Guji dans le Sud de l'Éthiopie. Sur la base de l'analyse des temps et des lieux de cette activité, ainsi que de l'interaction sociale en jeu, l'auteur affirme que les enfants pratiquent la devinette afin de se divertir et d'apprendre de leur environnement social et naturel immédiat à travers des réseaux discrets de pairs.

Article Six

Storytelling, Local Knowledge, and Formal Education: Bridging the Gap Between Everyday Life and School

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Chapter 9: Storytelling, Local Knowledge, and Formal Education: Bridging the Gap between Everyday Life and School

Tadesse Jaleta Jirata with Dessalegn Benti

The gap between local knowledge and modern education, which Kresse (2009) observed in Swahili contexts, has been a challenge that children experience when they start attending schools in rural societies in Africa (Serpell 1993). The disconnection between the knowledge that children use at home and the learning activities they are subjected to in school make it difficult for them to contextualize the school lessons and understand their social environments (Staden & Watson, 2007). In this chapter we explore the potential of storytelling as a means to bridge this gap between local knowledge acquired in daily living, and the knowledge taught to children in schools. We demonstrate how storytelling, commonly used in familial contexts, can be applied in primary schools to enhance children's participation and creativity in learning. We argue that connecting the local knowledge of children to their learning situations in schools narrows the gap between classroom learning activities and social and cultural practices and values and enhances children's participation and creativity in the classroom.

African local knowledge includes oral tradition and customary practices that transmit ways of knowing in the course of everyday social and cultural lives (Eder, 2010; Kresse, 2009; Kresse and Marchand, 2009; Nyota & Mapara, 2008). Storytelling is an integral part of African oral tradition, which grows out of the lives and imaginations of the people (Finnegan, 2007; Jackson, 2005). Stories embody African local knowledge, which is, through the telling of the stories, passed on from generation to generation. Among Guji-Oromo people ((hereafter called Guji), storytelling has been a didactic practice since time immemorial (Van de Loo, 1991). The Guji believe that folktales are voices of the past that embody the lived culture and experiences of the previous generation and they transmit these lived cultures and experiences to their children (Jirata, 2011). Thus, storytelling is a means of continuation of culture.

As we learned from our field notes and personal interviews with the Guji people, adults and children engage in storytelling during the evening or night-time hours. Night is a special time when kraal and home are full and cattle and human beings rest (Wako, 1998), and this is when children initiate storytelling by asking their fathers, mothers, grandfathers, or grandmothers to tell them a folktale. The children sit around the storyteller and listen with great enthusiasm and ask questions as the story goes or at its end. The telling of stories often goes on until parents or grandparents go to bed.

Storytelling is not only a practice between adults and children; it is also a practice among children (Jirata, in press). Children tell stories to each other in different places and at different times. They tell stories while herding cattle, in schools, and at home.

As we learned from our observations in primary schools in the Gungua and Bunata Villages of the Guji people, and from interviewing teachers and students, storytelling is not well utilized in primary school curriculums; thus, is less connected to the modern way of teaching and learning. In this chapter, we aim at bridging this gap through demonstrating the pedagogical advantage of using storytelling when teaching school subjects. We address the following questions:

- Are children interested in storytelling in the school classrooms?
- In which ways do children prefer to perform storytelling in the classroom; and
- How does this contribute to enhancement of their participation in learning activities?

Through answering these questions, we will demonstrate that storytelling helps children to connect the lesson in the classroom to their everyday life outside classrooms and put the learners in authentic learning environments.

Storytelling as means to connect school learning activities to local cultural practices

The use of storytelling in schools has been widely discussed, but mostly in the context of the global north (e.g., Caruthers, 2006; Davis, 2007; Edstrom, 2006; Mello, 2001; Rabin, 2011; Wright, 1995; Zabel, 1991). While there are significant cultural differences between the global north and the global south, exploring these studies can help us capture the notion of storytelling as a means of connecting school learning activities to local cultural practices. Indeed, the power of cultural practices to motivate and engage children is universal.

Studies in the global north reveal a trend in education; one in which classroom learning activities are viewed from a cultural perspective. Classroom participants are seen as co-constructors of local culture, which contextualizes the learning activity and bridges the gap between the classroom and the social and cultural realities in the immediate environments of children (Eshach, 2007). Researchers such as Lancy (2001), Kyratzis (2004), and Gentle (1984) suggested that children learn best when the teaching is flexible, contextualized, and

responding to their social and cultural contexts. As such, it bridges the gap between children's interest and the curriculum as well as the disparity between the classroom and the local culture.

The use of storytelling as a means of contextualizing learning in the classroom is also emphasized by Davis (2007) and Mello (2001)—both in the context of the global north. They argued that storytelling is a useful tool for promoting motivation, skills, and learning in the classroom. According to these studies, storytelling has a two-fold pedagogic value. First, it creates authentic teaching situations through which children learn naturally as the stories embody the social and cultural realities in the immediate environments of children. Second, it enriches the classroom experience with practical knowledge that is relevant to the social and cultural contexts of children. In the African context, little concern has been given to studying the potential of this cultural practice to enrich and contextualize children's learning in school settings. Only Staden and Watson (2007) discuss the pedagogic values of bringing storytelling to the classrooms. Staden and Watson (2007, p. 3) state:

Storytelling has the ability to create the right learning environment for childhood learners. All children love a well-told story. A well-told story catches children's attention and stimulates therefore a love for learning. A well-told story, like all good teaching approaches, is grounded in the encouragement of principles of active participation, critical reflection, flexibility and cultural diversity.

While storytelling is an effective and flexible way of teaching and learning, there is inadequate research and insufficient educational policy to promote storytelling in African classrooms. This gap is observable for example in Ethiopia where educational policy and practices related to primary school do not emphasize the importance of connecting learning activities in the classroom to the local knowledge of the students through storytelling. In this chapter, we use findings from studies in the global north to demonstrate how storytelling enhances children's participation and learning in school classrooms of the Guji people.

Methodology

The Guji People

This study is conducted in schools of the Guji people, who are one of the Oromo ethnic branches in Ethiopia. They live in lowland and semi-highland areas

in the southern part of the country. According to the 2007 Population and House Census of Ethiopia, the Guji population is estimated to be 1.6 million (FDREPCC, 2008) and the majority of this population resides in remote rural environments and lives on subsistence agriculture, which includes livestock husbandry and crop cultivation (Wako, 1998; Beriso 2002). Twenty years ago, the Guji people were pastoralists and nomadic cattle herders (Beriso 1995). As a result of the villagization program of the Ethiopian Government in 1980s, the Guji established sedentary lives in villages and started to cultivate food crops in addition to livestock husbandry. However, livestock husbandry, mainly cattle herding, is still the main economic activity among the people.

The majority of Guji people are illiterate. Even though the contemporary rate of illiteracy among the people is not known, from our observations in three rural villages, we learned that in each household at least four out of five members cannot read and write. Illiteracy is predominantly observable among the adult population and more common among women than men (Debsu, 2009). As a result, the Guji are an oral society; interpersonal communications and transfer of information are performed orally (Van de Loo, 1991; Jaleta, 2009). In this form of communication, folk narratives—which include folktales, proverbs, riddles, sayings, myths, and legends—play a central role.

Participants

The textual and qualitative data in this chapter are drawn from ethnographic fieldwork carried out in two primary schools in Guanga and Bunata villages of the Guji people. The schools encompass two cycles: the first cycle includes grades one to four, the second cycle consists of grades five to eight. In both first and second cycles, the language of instruction is *Afan Oromo* (Oromo language) except for two subjects, which are Amharic language and English language. The curriculum of the schools includes mathematics, natural science, social science, art and aesthetics, Oromo language and English language for first cycle; and mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, social science (which include geography and history), civic and ethical education, sports, Oromo language, Amharic language and English language for the second cycle. Oromo, which is the language of the Guji people, is offered as a subject from grades 1–8. We selected the second cycle (grades 5–8) as our focus for this study for two reasons. First, children in first cycle (grades 1–4) are not competent storytellers as they, by and large, listen to stories from older children and adults. Second, children in the second cycle are competent storytellers and are able to reflect on the folktales they share with each other in the classroom. It was impractical to include children from all grades in the second cycle. Therefore, we selected one grade which was grade seven and included all children of this gra-

de in the study. The number of grade seven children included from both schools was 114; 46 of these were girls and 68 were boys. The children were between 10–14 years of age. Almost all of them came from rural areas. The two teachers who were teaching Oromo language in the selected grade also participated in the study as informants. Both were trained for two years as a teacher of Oromo language in a College of Teachers Education and taught in the schools for more than five years. Adults from different social backgrounds also participated; five parents, three local elderly men who were considered to be culture bearers, one district education officer, and the principals of the selected schools were interviewed.

The study included action-oriented research as part of the broader ethnographic fieldwork. The action oriented study aimed to introduce storytelling as a teaching practice in the schools. In cooperation with the teachers, a storytelling component in teaching and learning activities was implemented in grade seven in the two primary schools. The action research included three activities; namely, storytelling with children in the classroom during Oromo language sessions, observations of children's actions and reactions during the performances sessions, and interviews with the children, their Oromo language teachers, and other research informants.

The first method, storytelling in the classroom with children, followed this format: In the first week of the study period, we introduced ourselves to the school principals, observed the schools and the classrooms, and introduced ourselves to the Oromo language teachers and children in grade seven. Then, we solicited the informed consent from teachers, the school principals, the children, and their parents (whose consents were required for us to work with, observe, and interview their children). After obtaining consents from the participants, we collectively came to agreement on how to start the project in the selected classroom. We also agreed to keep the names of all participants confidential in our reporting of the results. In line with our agreement, we have not stated names of the children, teachers, and other research informants in this paper.

On the first day of our activities in the classroom, we asked the children in the class to tell us the folktales they knew. Only a few of the children raised their hands and were eager to speak. On the second day, a large number of children volunteered to participate. On the third day, the majority of the children in the class were interested in telling folktales.

In the second week of the research project, we recorded 10 folktales from 10 children in the classroom and selected three of the recurrent folktales. We prepared weekly learning activities for Oromo language on the basis of the context of the folktales; in other words, by relating the lesson to the issues in the folktales. We told these folktales to the children in the classroom and the children

listened and reacted. Again, we asked the children to tell the same folktales to each other in groups. Then, we discussed the content and meaning of the narrated folktales with the children. The discussion encompassed ideas that the children raised based on the narrated folktales and activities that we designed as part of the lessons.

In the third week, we again asked the children to tell their favorite folktales and documented eight folktales from eight children. Then, we selected two of the frequently reoccurring folktales and repeated our first week's procedure. We encouraged children to discuss issues that emerged in the narrated folktales.

In the fourth week, the children came up with a new idea for storytelling; to perform storytelling in the form of drama. We accepted and encouraged this. The children took control of the performance and our roles were limited to guiding the activities, solving any problems, and encouraging all children to partake in the storytelling. In these classroom performances, first some children came to the front of the classroom to tell their favorite folktale while the other children listened and reacted through gestures and smiles. Then, a child whose folktale was particularly liked by other children led the process of preparing the folktale in the form of drama. The child selected some children as characters depending on the number and gender of characters represented in the folktale. They performed the tale as actors and entertainers for the children in the classroom. The dramatization of the folktale turned out to be more popular with the children than the narrative version as it was more connected to the local social and cultural practices. What was interesting to us was that the children were able to translate the folktale into drama very quickly (less than ten minutes).

In the fifth week, we introduced the third form of storytelling, which was unfamiliar to the children, but which became popular as well. This form of storytelling was through drawing. We drew actions and actors in folktales in their sequences on flip charts and showed them to the children. Then, we put the children in groups of three to five, gave them charts, pencils, and markers and asked them to present any folktale in drawings. The children did these activities successfully and explained their drawings to other groups in the classroom. Explanation of the drawings was the same as telling the folktale. Thus, this activity involved a dual process: creating a visual representation of the folktale and orally reproducing it.

The remaining weeks of the study period were covered by repeated performances of the three activities: narrative performances, dramatic performances, and performances in drawing. Performances of children's interest-centered folktales, group discussions, and reflections from the children were the core activities across these three forms of storytelling.

The second method, which was continuous observation of children's activities in the classroom, was key to our data collection process. Observation of how children participated in listening to stories, telling folktales, discussions, and interpretations of folktales during narrative performances, dramatic performances, and drawings were made continuously. Differences in participation of storytelling due to gender were included in the observations. We recorded observations of children's participation using field notes and a video recorder and later on transcribed and constructed the information. The extent to which storytelling generated children's motivation to ask and answer questions, to share their views, and debate with each other was a key emphasis in the observation process.

The third method, interviews, emphasized feelings and reflections of children and their Afan Oromo teacher as well as that of other participants on storytelling and the application of storytelling for learning activities in the classroom. Unstructured interviews focusing on what the children benefited from or lost in classes where storytelling was applied as a strategy for teaching and learning were conducted with 14 children (five girls and nine boys) from our sample. Five parents, three local elderly men who were considered to be culture bearers and one district education officer were also interviewed.

The Beginning of Formal Education

According to our informants, the first primary schools were established in villages of the Guji people in the mid of 1980s. The Guji people were excluded from modern education, initially because of their way of living. Before 1985, the Guji people were nomadic pastoralists who moved from place to place in search of grass and water for their cattle. They did not settle in permanent villages, as they do today. Second, Guji people value their traditions and ancestral knowledge and for a long time, they did not attach any importance to modern education. As a result, during the feudal regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1930 to 1973, schools were not introduced in the Guji area (Beriso, 1995). However, the socialist regime of Ethiopia, which was known as the Derg regime and which was in power from 1974 to 1993, introduced schools among the Guji people as part of its villagization program. Informants asserted that the Derg regime discouraged the nomadic lifestyle; it settled the Guji people in villages and established primary schools in a few villages as a means of transforming the people. According to the research informants, even though the schools were established in a few villages, an insignificant number of Guji children attend them as they gave little value to it. It was in 1993 that schools were widely introduced in the rural villages of the Guji people. As a result of the changes in

the policy of education (Ministry of Education, 1994), the Guji people came to understand that modern education is a useful instrument for development. The participants emphasized that the first and most recognized reason for Guji people's change in perception of formal education was that education in the primary school started to be offered in their native language—Afan Oromo (Oromo language). Oromo language became also the main language in the workplace. The introduction of the modern administrative systems at local levels and the expansion of Christianity also made reading and writing more important. Reading and writing letters for local administrators and reading and understanding the Bible for followers of Christianity were seen as important abilities. Thus, parents became more motivated to send their children, and sometimes themselves, to school.

In the present context, there is one primary school in each village of the Guji. The maximum distance between a home and school in a village is three kilometers. Primary schools are administered by district education departments and each school has one primary school principal trained in school leadership. Curriculums and textbooks for the subjects in primary schools are prepared by the Oromia Regional State one of the nine regional states in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The curriculum in the first cycle includes subjects such as mathematics, natural science, social science, art and aesthetics, Oromo language, and English language. The second cycle encompasses subjects like mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, social science (which include geography and history), civic and ethical education, sports, Oromo language, Amharic language, and English language. Teachers in the primary school's first cycle have been trained for one year as teachers for all subjects, those in the second cycle have been educated for two years as teachers of a specific subject.

Ethiopian children, including the children of the Guji people, enter school at age seven. Most of the children in primary schools are between seven and 15 years of age. However, there are children who enter school later and stay in primary school even though they are physically grownups. Children from both sexes attend school, but we observed that boys outnumber girls at all grades in primary schools.

Storytelling: Not an integrative part of the curriculum

In the books and learning experiences of Oromo language students, little attention is given to storytelling. Very few folk narratives and riddles in Oromo language were included in students' books of the Oromo language subject. In

Oromo language grade seven textbooks, for example, over 15 learning texts are included, only two of which are folktales. The other texts embody global and contemporary issues that are disconnected from the immediate social and cultural realities of the children. To make matter worse, the teachers tend to disregard the few folktales included in the students' textbooks because they perceive them to be of no educational value. The teachers feel that children are more interested in new and unfamiliar issues and stories. The following conversation with an Oromo language teacher is an example.

Researchers: Do you use storytelling as part of your lesson in the classroom?

Teacher: I rarely use it. I use it only when there is free time.

Researchers: There are some folktales included in the curriculum. Don't you use them?

Teacher: I use them rarely. I use other texts instead. I use texts about issues that are new to children.

Researchers: Why?

Teacher: Because children can learn folktales from home. In school, they have to learn something new.

This teacher made a distinction between academic teaching and moral teaching, including through storytelling, conducted in the free time. Although he noted the potential of storytelling in enhancing children's motivation for learning and for connecting values and moral standards, he gave less attention to using it in the classroom.

Introducing storytelling as learning practice

An integral part of our fieldwork was action-oriented research aimed at giving children possibilities to perform storytelling in the classroom. We introduced storytelling as part of the children's local knowledge and everyday play practice as an activity to improve the learning contexts for children. The children performed storytelling in three ways: narrative, dramatic, and pictorial. The narrative and dramatic ways of performances were recommended and introduced by children and the pictorial one was introduced by us (the researchers). In the organization of the narrative and dramatic ways of performance, children played central roles and we continued as listeners, supervisors, and observers as shown in the continuing discussions.

Narrative: Children as tellers and listeners

Narrative is the traditional ways of performing folktales among children of Guji people. It involves telling and listening; one child is the teller, the others are listeners. The teller explains the characters and their actions in the order of events in the folktale from beginning to end. A teller uses words, gestures, and voices to tell the actions in an authentic manner. A teller imitates the character's actions, voices, and behaviours and in order to do that, she or he uses certain means of communication to add to the beauty and artistic quality of the performance. The children in the classrooms we observed, for example, listened to the narration and mimicked the characters accurately. We noticed that children gave their attention to the telling-child and expressed their feelings through laughter, smiling, and facial expressions. When the teller made an error, imitated the characters wrongly, or forgot events, the listeners helped him or her and brought the story back on track. The following is an example of such a storytelling activity. Most of the children in the classroom knew the folktale, which was narrated first, then performed as drama. The folktale was narrated as follows:

Once up on a time there were two men who were neighbours (*olla*) who had agreed to cooperative work (*agooda*). The names of the men were Gowwee and Qaroo. One day while they were working on Gowwee's farm, Qaroo told Gowwee that he could kill his own wife and bring her back to life by kicking her buttocks. Gowwee replied, «I don't believe you! How can you do that?» Qaroo assured him that he would show Gowwee the next day at lunchtime. After finishing the day's work, Qaroo went back to his home and had his dinner. Then he called his wife and told her that the next day, he would come with Gowwee at lunchtime. He killed a hen and collected its blood in a small bag. He gave the bag with blood to his wife and told her, «tomorrow at lunch time, put this on your neck and sit on the chair and wait for us. When I come and cut this bag, you have to fall down and pretend to be dead. Then, when I kick your buttocks, you stand up and sit back down on the chair.» The wife accepted the order from her husband. After working on Qaroo's farm the next morning, both Gowwee and Qaroo came to Qaroo's house for lunch. Before having lunch, Qaroo was going to demonstrate his magic ability to Gowwee by killing and bringing back to life his wife. When they entered to the house, Qaroo's wife was sitting on a chair. Qaroo said to Gowwee, «Look how I can kill my wife and also bring her back to life.» He took a knife, went to his wife, and rubbed the knife against her neck. She fell down and blood flew from her neck. Qaroo

said, «Now, look how I return her to life.» He kicked her buttocks and she woke up. Gowwee was impressed by the ability of his friend. He wanted to try this with his own wife. After the day's work, Gowwee went home. After having his dinner, he called his wife and said, «Now, I want to kill you and then return you to life.» His wife was scared and asked, «Why and how you do that?» He replied, «I want to show you my magic ability and bring you back to life by kicking your buttocks.» After some resistance, his wife agreed. He told her to sit on a chair. Then, he took a knife and cut her neck. She fell down and blood flew from her neck like a river. After a while, he kicked her buttocks to return her to life. He kicked her again and again but no response from her. Then Gowwee ran to the home of Qaroo to tell him what had happened. He told Qaroo that he tried to kill and return his wife to life like him. He killed her and kicked her buttocks but she did not wake up. Qaroo replied to Gowwee, «Don't try to be like others, be yourself.» Gowwee understood that Qaroo had fooled him and started crying for the loss of his wife.

When the child narrated this folktale, the children in the class were quite focused. Some of them were laughing at the foolish actions of Gowwee and others were shocked by the destructive act of Qaroo. All children in the class listened to the teller attentively and enthusiastically and expressed their views about the characters and events in the folktale without reservation and fear. They argued for and against the views of their classmates by connecting their ideas to the realities in their everyday social environments. The pedagogical implication of these developments is that storytelling provided these children with contexts in which they could listen, understand, reflect on their views, argue for or against the views of others freely, and connect the tale to realities in their environments. This is supported by Staden and Watson (2007, p. 3): «the purpose of storytelling as a teaching approach is to impart children the skill of active listening.»

Dramatization: Children as actors

In dramatizations of folktales, impersonation of characters and demonstration of the actions and events are fundamental. The children played the roles of the characters in the folktale. Dramatization of folktales is not common in the culture of the Guji people and it is not a traditional way of storytelling. It was initiated by the children themselves. In a dramatization of a folktale, actions could be more contextualized and the local ways of life and values could be mirrored. The children could relate the actions in the folktale to the real situations

and ways of life of the Guji people and placed the folktale in the context of their local social and cultural environment. In other words, through the dramatizations, the social and cultural contexts useful for understanding of the folktale became overt and observable. Thus, the performance became more complete and meaningful as shown through the folktale presented in this chapter.

As suggested by the children, dramatic performance was done subsequent to the narrative performance. In line with number of characters in the folktale that was acted out, four children were selected to play the different roles. Two of the four children were girls and acted as wives. The boys represented the two male characters: Gowwee and Qaroo. Prior to the folktale, the children prepared the setting. The children brought objects (props) that signified two different houses and farmlands. The two girls played working in the houses, as wives, and the boys played the roles of working on the farm as husbands. They used props such as a coffee pot, fire-pit, plates, water containers, chairs, and tables. The boys also used farm tools that the Guji people use for cultivation. After having set the stage, the four children began acting the folktale.

Early in the morning, the wives in both houses woke up and cleaned their houses. Gowwee's wife roasted coffee and prepared it for drinking. The neighbours, Qaroo and Qaroo's wife, were called to drink. After drinking the coffee, Qaroo and Gowwee went out to work on the farm. On this day, they went to Gowwee's farmland (*fichaa*) carrying their farm tools on their shoulders. They reached the farmland and started digging the ground. They sang work songs (*Geelle*) while they dug the ground. After working for some time, they were tired and took a short rest. While resting, they had the following conversation:

Qaroo: I want to tell you something. Do you know that I can kill my wife and bring her back to life?

Gowwee: I cannot believe this. How can you do that?

Qaroo: I cut her neck with a knife. When she dies, I kick her buttocks and she wakes up.

Gowwee: Can you really do that?

Qaroo: Yes, I can do that. I will show you tomorrow at lunchtime.

Gowwee: Okay, let us work now.

They dug the ground and sang Gelelle. When it was lunchtime they went back to Gowwee's home for lunch. On this day as they were working on Gowwee's farm, Gowwee's wife prepared lunch. She cooked everything and prepared coffee. Gowwee and Qaroo, putting down their farm tools, entered the house for lunch. The wife greeted them from a different room where she was preparing coffee and food for lunch. After a while, she brought them water to wash their hands. Then she served them coffee. After Gowwee and Qaroo had coffee, the wife brought in lunch, invited them to eat, and went back to kitchen to prepare the second round of coffee. While they ate she prepared the coffee. When they finished eating, she collected the plates and served the second coffee. After eating and drinking and resting, they went back to the farm and worked until night. When it was evening, they thanked each other and went back to their own homes. After reaching his home, drinking coffee and eating dinner, Qaroo killed a hen, collected its blood in a bag and had the following conversation with his wife.

Qaroo: Tomorrow at lunchtime put this bag on your neck. When I rub a knife against your neck, you have to fall down and pretend to be dead. Then, when I kick your buttocks, you have to wake up.

Wife: What are you saying? Why and how will you do that?

Qaroo: I will do that to show my ability to Gowwee. When I kick your buttocks you have to wake up.

Wife: Okay, I will do that.

Qaroo: At lunchtime, sit by the table and wait for us.

In the morning, Qaroo's wife woke up early, cleaned her house, and prepared coffee. After they drank their coffee as usual, Qaroo and Gowwee left to Qaroo's farm. They worked on Qaroo's farm until noon and went back to Qaroo's home for lunch. Qaroo's wife had put the bag full of blood on her neck, sat on a chair and was waiting for them. After reaching home and entering it, Qaroo had the following conversation with Gowwee.

Qaroo: Now, I can show you how I can kill my wife and return her to life.

Gowwee: I want to see that. Please, show me.

Qaroo took a knife and rubbed it against the neck of his wife. Blood flew from her neck and she fell down.

Qaroo: You see how I killed her? Now look, I can wake her.

Gowwee: Do that please.

Qaroo kicked her buttocks and she woke up.

Qaroo: This is my wife alive. You see how I killed her and returned her to life?

Gowwee: Yes, I saw it. You have the ability to kill and awake people.

Qaroo: Yes, you are right.

Gowwee was impressed by what Qaroo did and wanted to try it with his wife. When he came home, he had the following conversation with his wife:

Gowwee: I want to kill you and when you die, I will wake you and return you to life.

Wife: What do you mean?

Gowwee: You will not die forever. You will die for a moment and then I will return you to life.

Wife: (scared) Why and how you do that?

Gowwee: I want to check that I can kill and wake a person. I will kill you by cutting your neck and wake you by kicking your buttocks.

Gowwee asked his wife to sit on a chair. When she sat on the chair, he took a knife and cut her neck. She fell down and blood flew from her neck. After a while, he kicked her buttocks to bring her back to life. There was no response from her. He kicked her again. No response. He kicked her again and again, no response. When she refused to wake up, he ran to Qaroo's home and met Qaroo at home. They had the following conversation.

Gowwee: (sounding terrified) Qaroo, Qaroo!

Qaroo: What is wrong with you? What happened to you?

Gowwee: My wife has refused to wake up.

Qaroo: What?

Gowwee: I did with my wife what you did with your wife. I cut her neck and she fell down. Then I kicked her buttock to return her to life. But she remained dead. I could not bring her back to life.

Qaroo: I am sorry Gowwee. I did that to teach you that you have to be yourself. Do not imitate others. Do what you know and act in the way you know. You have lost your wife in order to be like me.

Gowwee: [sobbing] Au!!!!!!!. I lost my wife. Au!!!.

Through the dramatization of the folktale, the children related to and enacted the everyday social and cultural lives of the Guji people. The gender based labour divisions in households and cooperative work and social lives as neighborhood traditions were made clear through the performances. This performance showed that in Guji society, cooking food, preparation of coffee, serving food, cleaning the home, and fetching water are women's (wives') work. Working on farms and the cultivation of food crops are men's (husbands) work. The performance also reflected that cooperative work and the lunch and coffee social times are valuable traditions among Guji society. The folktale mirrored the social and cultural realities of the children and increased the authenticity and artistic quality of it. The children performed every action in their own time and used their personal preferences. They also instructed us, the researchers, how to perform folktales in a classroom. From the reactions and motivation of the children, it was clear that dramatic performance is more interesting for children than narration.

Even though both dramatic and narrative ways of performances were useful in the contextualization of lessons and enhancement of children's participation in classroom learning activities, the dramatic performance enabled the children to relate folktale characters' actions to their own way of life. In other words, the performance mirrored their real life.

Pictorial: Children as artists

Drawing was the third way of engaging with of folktales in the classroom. This way of presenting folktales was not initiated by the children but was introduced to the children by us (the researchers). We divided the children into groups and provided them with paper, pens, and pencils and asked them to draw the above

folktale on the paper. It did not take the children long to draw the characters and their actions from beginning to end. Even though the artistic ability of the children varied, all the children were successful if one asked them to draw. As in the dramatic performance the children related the characters and their actions to their personal, social and cultural environment. When it was difficult to show the action of a character or characters in drawing, children explained it in words. Even though it was an activity introduced by us, the children showed an interest in it and were eager to draw their folktales.



Children on drawing

Drawing permitted each child to contemplate and interpret a folktale individually. It also permitted two or more children to sit together and draw a folktale in cooperation. Thus, drawing the folktales suited both individual and group based learning activities. Children relied on a range of strategies and techniques to draw the tale, and showed the ability to meaningfully understand and organize events and ideas in a folktale through drawing. Presentation of the folktale in drawing helped the children use ideas from a written or oral text in a new and meaningful way. This exercise in turn enhanced the children's skill and ability to understand and reproduce lessons in their own meaningful ways.

Perspectives of children and teachers

After participating in storytelling activities in the classroom, children shared their views on storytelling activities in the context of school. The teachers also reflected on the relevance of storytelling in facilitating students' participation in classroom learning activities. The children expressed that they learn storytelling from their parents and elder siblings, and that they engage in storytelling with other children while herding cattle. This shows that the children were very familiar with storytelling. However, only telling the story (i.e narrative performance) was practiced in those contexts. The children knew that narrative performance was an intergenerational and customary way of storytelling among Guji people. A child (a 13 year old boy) compared the telling of stories to acting them out and said, «A folktale is more interesting when it is performed through drama than narrative. It is in dramatic performance that our folktale can reflect our culture.» Another child (a 12 year old girl) also expressed the perception that the narrative way of storytelling is archaic and less attractive and does not encourage creativity. Another child (a 13 year old boy) also preferred acting out folktales to the narrative method. According to this child, dramatic performance encourages children's creativity and interest for performing folktales. In this way of performance, not only one, but many children act as tellers. As it involves not only speaking but also acting (includes doing and behaving), it enables children to easily demonstrate the actions and behaviours of characters in the story, thus making the folktale more meaningful. In drama, according to the children, one can demonstrate one's own social and cultural realities as contexts for understanding meaning of a folktale.

Thus, children's interest for the dramatic way of performance emerged from the fact that dramatic performance involved not only telling but also acting. Through acting, the teller can demonstrate behaviours and actions of characters in a folktale. On the side of the listeners, the dramatic performance appeals to the sense of hearing and observing actions and behaviours.

Drawing folktales was interpreted by children as an exercise they could accomplish, memorizing and putting the actions in the folktale in chronological order, and then creating images of the events not only in sequence but also in creative ways. The children emphasized that this helped them develop their ability to express ideas in drawings.

In general, children interpreted storytelling as a way of connecting their social and cultural traditions to classroom learning activities. The following example is taken from the conversation with a 13 year old boy.

Researchers: What do you think about this session (the storytelling sessions)?

The child: I like to learn in such sessions. Not only me; we all enjoy it.

Researchers: Why do you think you like them?

The child: When I learn through storytelling, I don't get bored and tired. I am fresh and attentive through the sessions. Storytelling is attractive and it can help me learn through what I know [the context with which the student is familiar].

The children noted that storytelling appeals to their interest and emotions for two important reasons. First storytelling represents the social and cultural realities with which children are familiar. For example, the *gelelle* (group work on farm), the *gelelle* (work song), the gender based labour divisions, and the coffee and meal customs of the Guji were represented in the folktale included in this chapter. These contexts were familiar to all children and helped them connect the outside classroom reality to learning activities in the classroom as expressed by the children. Second, the manners and actions of the characters give children pleasure and excitement. The tricky act of Qaroo and foolishness of Gowwee in the above folktale, for example, caught the attention of the children and made them enjoy the session in which the folktale was performed. The children expressed that storytelling in the school classroom was useful as it enables them to learn through doing.

The teachers expressed that they observed a huge change in the children's participation. One of the teachers stated,

I am surprised that children who have been shy and reluctant even to speak in the classroom are actively participating in these storytelling activities. I learned that storytelling is an effective way of learning Afan Oromo and can make a real change in children's motivation for learning activities.

This demonstrates that not only the children but also the teachers understood that storytelling creates a context in which learners willingly engage in discussions among each other about various issues, actions, and characters in the story. Storytelling in the classroom avoids mechanical ways of learning and develops smooth, natural, and unconscious ways of acquiring knowledge (Davis, 2007; Wright, 1995; Zabel, 1991).

Discussion

Our work demonstrates that children are very interested in storytelling activities. As the analysis in the chapter reveals, folktales are among the most popular forms of children's narratives and are of great significance in language and literacy development as well as in the contextualization of learning activities for children. They are particularly important to children because they help them understand their world and share it with others. Folktales enhance children's participation and learning, and enable teachers to learn about their students' cultures, experiences, and relationships. Through performing stories in the classroom, teachers and children create friendships, mutual understanding, and an environment for cooperative and meaningful learning.

Children can be involved in many different storytelling activities. We explored three storytelling activities: narrative, dramatic and drawing. When a folktale was told by a child, in the narrative performance, all children in class paid close attention and expressed their feelings by smiling, laughing, or nodding their head. When classroom activities were given in relation to a folktale told in the class, the children were strongly motivated. This was different from regular school activities according to the teachers, when children were less focused and engaged. Dramatic performance really caught the attention of children and motivated them to participate. Drawing also encouraged all children to engage in learning activities. When children reproduced and performed folktales in their own ways in the school classroom, storytelling became a powerful way to enhance their participation in learning activities and became an important tool for their social and cognitive growth.

Our study reveals that through storytelling in the classroom, children can increase their participation not only in speaking, and listening, but also in visualization of ideas in their learning activities. Children with experience in hearing and telling folktales are eager to create their own tales which is similar to what Davis (2007) and Caruthers (2006) discussed in the context of the global north. We argue that the critical thinking skills, vocabulary, and language patterns of children can be enhanced through use of storytelling in the classrooms (Zabel, 1991). The enhanced motivation and participation of children shows that affording children an opportunity to engage with folktales through narration, drama, and drawing in the classroom is an effective pedagogical tool. In addition, storytelling by children offers a glimpse into the social and cultural context of children. Children's interest in folktales is rooted in the fact that folktales connect children to their own social and cultural background and involve moral imperatives such as victory of virtue over vice, reward for hard work, kindness, respectfulness, and helpfulness (Staden & Watson, 2007; Bartel, 2010).

In general, collaborative storytelling in the classroom, in all three discussed ways, motivates children to actively participate in learning activities. We conclude that storytelling is a child-friendly and effective means of teaching and learning for not only language subjects but also other subjects such as mathematics, chemistry, geography, and more.

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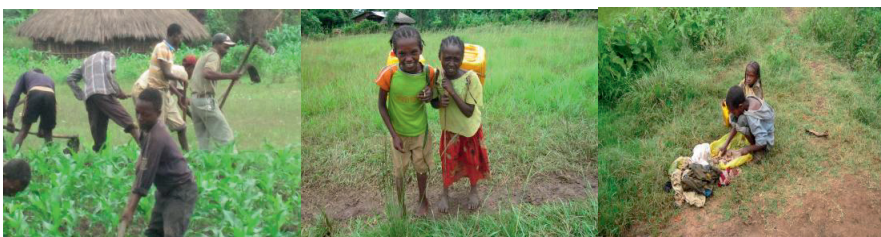
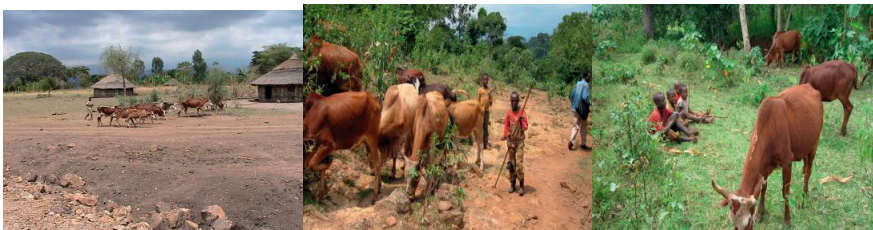
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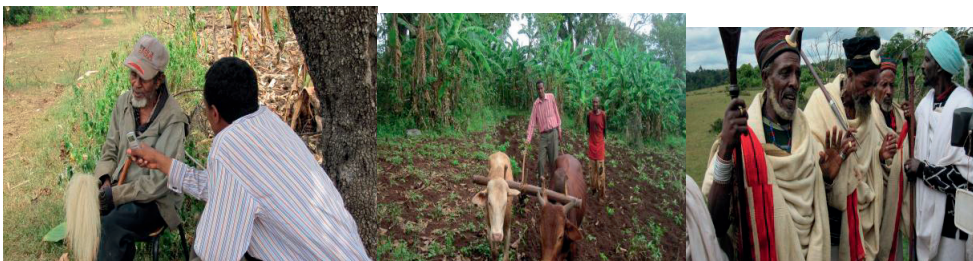
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APPENDICES

Sample Pictures from the Flied work

The Portrait of the Everyday Life of Children among Guji People





Lists of Participants

Households Involved

Head of the Household	Age	Sex	Status	No. of Household Members	Composition			
					Wife/husband	grandchildren	Children	others
Ababa	30	M	father	5	1		3	
Amarech	38	F	mother	6	-		5	
Ayele	35	M	father	7	1		5	
Dabale	30	M	father	6	1		4	
Dullacha	55	M	grandfather	8	1	5	2	
Gala	45	M	father	9	1		7	
Galgale	45	M	father	7	1		5	
Godana	40	M	father	8	1		6	
Jarsoo	40	M	father	9	1		7	
Lammesso	26	M	father	4	1	-	2	
Waqoo	60	M	grandfather	16	2	4	9	
Morma	65	M	grandfather	7	1	5	-	
Nugusse	55	M	grandfather	8		1	6	
Morma	60	M	grandfather	13	2	7	3	
Shiferra	40	M	father	9	1		7	
Shoree	40	M	father	8	1		6	
Shumbulloo	70	M	grandfather	6	1	4	-	
Sora	62	F	grandmother	13	2	5	1	
Turii	50	M	grandfather	12	1	4	6	
Uddee	70	M	grandfather	7	1	5	-	
Waqayyo	45	M	father	8	1		6	
Waqoo	60	M	grandfather	16	2	4	9	

List of the key participants from Children

Name	Age	Sex	education
Aberrash	11	F	grade 4
Addisu	8	F	0
Amanuel	12	M	Grade 6
Ashagire	10	M	Grade 4
Ashebir	10	M	Grade 4
Asnake	9	M	Grade 2
Ashagire	10	M	Grade 5
Asnake	9	M	Grade 4
Aster	12	F	Grade 5
Ayane	8	F	Grade 1
Ayantu	10	F	Grade 3
Balachoo	12	M	Grade 6

Beka	8	M	Grade 1
Birge	8	F	Grade 1
Bonise	9	F	Grade 1
Boru	11	M	Grade 2
Buzunesh	12	F	Grade 5
Demekech	10	F	Grade 4
Demekech	9	F	Grade 1
Desta	9	M	Grade 3
Dharra	8	F	Grade 2
Dinke	11	F	Grade 5
Diribe	11	F	Grade 5
Dureetti	9	F	Grade 3
Eddeo	12	M	Grade 5
Ediluu	11	M	Grade 5
Elema	11	M	Grade 4
Gadisa	11	M	Grade 2
Gudeta	11	M	Grade 4
Gelgeloo	12	M	Grade 1
Gemechu	11	M	Grade 5
Gemedede	11	M	Grade 5
Genet	11	F	Grade 5
Genet	9	F	Grade 2
Getu	10	M	Grade 3
Girma	12	M	Grade 6
Gurmessa	13	M	Grade 7
Hannaa	13	F	Grade 7
Idile	10	F	Grade 4
Kafala	9	M	Grade 3
Tigist	9	F	Grade 2
Martaa	8	F	0
Michaelu	7	M	0
Qabane	10	F	Grade 3
Qumbutaa	9	F	Grade 2
Quttu	12	F	Grade 6
Samuel	10	M	Grade 4
Soree	7	F	Grade 7
Tariku	12	M	Grade 6
Tekalign	10	M	Grade 4
Teklu	12	M	Grade 5
Temesgen	13	M	Grade 7
Temesgen	11	M	Grade 5
Tamu	8	M	0
Teshalee	11	M	Grade 5
Uddessa	10	M	Grade 4
Warqu	10	M	Grade 3
Wondimuu	10	M	Grade 3
Zekyos	9	M	Grade 1
Zenebuu	11	F	Grade 5

Introductory Fieldwork Guidelines

In homes:

- A) What kind of household (male-head, female-head or child-head)?
- B) Household members
- C) Livelihood Activities of the household
- D) Roles of children in the household
- E) Relationships (interactions) between children and parents
- F) Everyday practices in the household and children's participation in it
- G) Children's Play activities at home

In cattle herding fields:

- A) Which children herd cattle (age, sex)?
- B) Children's activities in cattle herding fields
- C) Children's peer interactions and practices in cattle herding fields
- D) The particular place and time of children's peer play activities in the cattle herding fields
- E) Constituents of children's peer play activities (song, storytelling, chatting, football, riddling, etc)
- F) What children value and devalue in cattle herding fields and during their play interactions

In Schools:

- A) Children's peer interaction and play activities in the school compounds
- B) Children's participation in oral tradition in school and school classrooms
- C) What does the social and cultural environment in the school look like?
- D) To what extent the school environment is related to the external social and cultural environment?
- E) Children's interactions and relationships with teachers
- F) The formal teaching and learning process in primary schools
- G) Oral tradition in school curriculum

In Storytelling and Riddling Events

1. Context

- A) Place of the an event
- B) Time at which the event took place
- C) Length of the event
- D) Place at which the event was held
- E) Participants: Children with children? , children with adults?
- F) Number of participants
- G) Sex Composition
- H) Purposes of the event:
- D) Participants` interest for storytelling and riddling
- J) Emotions and actions of the participants in the event
- K) Family background of the participants
- L) Educational background of the participants

1. Performance

- A) The performed tale or riddle and process of performance
- B) Who told the tale or the riddle in this event and why?
- C) Who listened to the tale or riddle and why?
- D) Where do the teller sit in relation to the listeners and why?
- E) Is there anything that makes the teller different from the listeners in this event?
- F) How does the teller tale the tale or the riddle (his/her voice, gesture, rhythm, etc.)?
- G) How does the teller begin and ends the telling?
- H) How do the listeners act and react when the tale is being told (who does what)?
- I) How the storytelling or riddling in the event does continues (i.e. who tell next; the same person or swapping?)
- J) Customary processes and practices related to performance

2. Interpretations and discussions

- A) How does a teller explain meaning of a tale to listeners?
- B) How do listeners react to the explanation?
- C) How does a listener receive and interpret a riddle?
- D) How do participants (both the listeners and the storyteller) express the characters and situations contained in a tale?
- E) Issues raised in the discussion