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## The place of children among the Guji of southern Ethiopia: school, work and play<sup>†</sup>

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This article explores everyday life among Guji children in southern Ethiopia and the place of children in an intergenerational social order. Based on data generated through ethnographic fieldwork among the Guji, we show that work, school and play are significant and intertwined social practices. Local knowledge and skills of importance for sustainable livelihood are acquired through children's participation in these different social practices. Oral tradition represents a key element of local knowledge and social practices in everyday life. However, political and social changes, such as settlement policies and the introduction of schools, affect the dynamic interconnectedness of these practices, as well as relations between different generations. These changes also have implications for local knowledge and local livelihoods.

**Keywords:** children; work; play; learning; social change

### Introduction

A person who cultivates land when his hair on his head is long rests and eats when his moustache is long.

Someone who works in his childhood will be happy in his adulthood.

Fatten your cattle.

Increase your farmland.

Produce and possess cattle.

Castrate the bulls.

Rear the cows.

Bow down and dig the ground.

Get up and climb a tree.

Live in such a way.

Learn how to herd cattle.

Know the honour of yaa'aa [the council of the Gada].

Know the laws of my people.

Respect the ayyuu [the elderly].

This narrative was delivered by Nigusse, a man in his 50s, one evening at his home during fieldwork. He was telling it to his sons, aged 5–12, as a way to teach them the value of work. The

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narrative is part of the oral tradition of the Guji of southern Ethiopia being passed to young boys by their fathers and grandfathers. The text clearly reflects core cultural values among this cattle-raising people, as well as a particular generational contract. Furthermore, it reveals that a main task of parenting is to force children to participate and become hard workers as farmers and cattle-herders to ensure a sustainable livelihood and happiness in their present and future lives. The fathers and grandfathers also inculcate the value of hard work in the minds of boys from an early age through this expression (Beriso 2004).

Today, as in the past when Nigusse was a child, children's everyday lives among the Guji are characterized by their participation in different work activities such as herding cattle and doing various household tasks (Debsu 2009). The term 'work' in this article refers to a variety of age-based subsistence activities carried out as a means of contributing to the household's livelihood (Abebe 2007; Boyden 2009). Today, these activities include cattle-herding, crop cultivation, fetching water, fetching firewood, looking after younger children, cooking food, making coffee, washing clothes, cleaning the home and home compound, and performing other household tasks, as well as selling items in the market. In the household division of labour, as part of an intergenerational contract, these activities are considered to be children's duties. Among the Guji, as in rural Ethiopia in general, children's participation in work is understood as crucial to acquiring an economically sustainable lifestyle (Woldehanna et al. 2005; Sorsa and Abera 2006; Abebe 2008; Tafere, Abebe, and Assazine 2009). Furthermore, this participation is an integral part of the enculturation process through which children learn essential livelihood strategies, as well as the Guji's core cultural values. Differentiated forms of local knowledge and skills are thus acquired through social practices in everyday life. As the narrative quoted in the introduction reveals, oral tradition is an important part of local knowledge among the Guji in respect of childhood and the governance of intergenerational relationships (Van de Loo 1991; Jirata 2012).

Development, play and learning are concepts closely connected with childhood seen as a life-phase in modern western societies (Aries 1962; Montgomery 2009). Global politics, which aims to bring about the development and modernization of countries in the global south, often reflects these notions of childhood. However, the fact that this notion represents a particular understanding, constructed within a specific social and cultural context at a particular time in history, is not always recognized. This western view is often seen as a model for improving children's well-being and future lives, but the idea that schooling and formal education is the route to development and a better life overlooks the continued importance of local knowledge acquired through informal learning in everyday life (Abebe and Kj rholt 2013).

The aim of this article is to discuss the place of children in Guji society and the dynamic relationship between work, play and learning as part of everyday life. A particular focus will be the implications of political and social change on 'traditional' livelihoods. We argue that, through the life course, all human beings are learning and developing subjects, acquiring their competence, agency and knowledge from being active participants in different collective activities with adults as well as children (Kj rholt 2005; Abebe 2008). However, the different intergenerational and intra-generational relationships vary cross-culturally, as do the particular skills and competences that are developed and practised. People's agency and intergenerational relationships are thus inter-dynamic, contextual and constructed in time and place. Based on ethnographic fieldwork that involved participant observation and narrative interviews with grandparents, parents and children, we explore how children's participation in many different activities is perceived by both children and grandparents among the Guji. Moreover, we aim to contribute to the academic debate within the field by showing how children's work, play and learning are intersected in new ways as part of socio-economic changes. An important point we want to underline is the link between children's work and social responsibilities in everyday life on the one hand, and local knowledge derived through oral tradition on the other.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork that involved participant observation and narrative interviews with grandparents, parents and children, we explore how children's participation in a whole variety of activities is perceived by children and grandparents among the Guji. Today, as we will show, play and oral tradition as part of local knowledge are practised in new ways among children when they are herding cattle. Furthermore, the ways in which socio-economic changes affect children's participation in school and work are discussed, pointing to new forms of time pressure.

In addition to presenting empirical knowledge about children and childhood among the Guji as experienced through different generations, we also aim to challenge and broaden the concept of 'children's voices' and children's perspectives by pointing to the need to include their voices and daily lives within an intergenerational context. Our aim is to show that children's agency and voices form part of processes of socialization or enculturation. Our methodological choice to apply a multigenerational approach is connected to this perspective. Moreover, we wish to question further the dichotomy between children as objects of socialization and children as active participating subjects by trying to link the two concepts, which are also connected to perspectives on local knowledge and learning as a dynamic and lifelong process.

### **Everyday life, work and knowledge in processes of social change: recent research**

Through the life course, human beings become learning and developing subjects, acquiring their competence, agency and knowledge from being active participants in different collective activities with adults as well as with children (Kjørholt 2005; Abebe 2008). Although there is a substantial literature on children's social competence and agency, as well as on the constraining effect of work on their mobility, play and formal education, the link between social change, children's social responsibilities, intergenerational relationships, play and local knowledge has received little attention.

The literature on this area largely emphasizes that social change and work restrict children's mobility and constrain their access to both play and formal education. Katz (1986, 1991, 2004), for instance, argues that a social change introduced at a particular time in history transforms the way human beings develop, learn and acquire knowledge. Katz presents this argument based on the social change imposed by a state-sponsored agricultural development project in rural Sudan in 1981 that dissolved the unity of children's work and play and in turn resulted in their limited acquisition of local knowledge. Katz stresses that the differentiation and commodification processes introduced by the change in the production system increased the demand for child labour, which conflicted with the traditional social system in which children combined work with play and developed their environmental knowledge. In her earlier study (see Katz 1991), Katz observed that work and play in the traditional context fostered children's knowledge of the environment, including their knowledge of the local names and uses of plants and animals, as well as the local names and values of places. However, as a result of socio-economic change attributed to the introduction of state-sponsored agricultural development which demanded intensive child labour, children were detached from the domestic work and play through which they used to acquire environmental knowledge. Even though her study is based on children's livelihoods in the context of social change introduced by the mechanized agricultural system, Katz mentions that, in the context of the traditional ways of life in rural Sudan, there is a unity of work, play and learning through which children acquire environmental knowledge. In the context of social change, the unity of work, play, learning and local knowledge has not been sufficiently highlighted by Katz or other researchers such as Abebe (2007), Skelton (2009) and Porter et al. (2011), who explore the spatiality and temporality of children's livelihoods, with their focus on work and mobility. The literature on the relationship between children's

work responsibilities and local knowledge, which has been described as local, contextual, shared and acquired through practices within a community, is inadequate. Local knowledge is acquired through informal learning in everyday life, but its importance is often overlooked, whereas school and formal education are seen as the path to development, reducing poverty and having a better life (Abebe 2008; Abebe and Kjørholt 2013).

Similarly, as Abebe (2008) and Katz (2004) discuss using cases from Ethiopia and Sudan, respectively, the complex ways in which children are integral to processes of economic, political and cultural reproduction in a society are often to a great degree overlooked. Using examples from Norway, Kjørholt (2004) shares the complexity and dynamics in children's participation by arguing that children's participation and agency is contextual, and closely intertwined with the socialization or enculturation processes that they are part of. Based on research into children's livelihoods in the context of poverty in Ethiopia, Boyden (2009) attributed children's agency and participation to local social contexts and ways of life. According to this study, children derive their agency and survival skills through participating in domestic tasks with adults. Thus, children's work reflects their role in averting household hardship and is a potential source of protection, resilience and skills' development. Boyden and Levison (2000, 51) explain the social injustice involved in excluding children from participation in work as 'excluding children from social, political or economic processes, [which] simply because they are young, cannot be justified any more than can the exclusion of any other group in society.' However, using cases from Sudan, Katz (2004) argues that economic structuring restricts children's everyday lives by intensifying, diversifying and spatially expanding their work, which in turn may prevent them from attending school. This conflict arises because Boyden and Katz are referring to two different concepts of work: Boyden to unpaid domestic work that children perform as part of their household roles and responsibilities and Katz to the paid work of children in a mechanized, state-sponsored agricultural firm. Katz (1986, 2004) and Porter et al. (2011) emphasize that this form of children's work restricts their local mobility and hampers their access to play and local knowledge about their environment. Abebe and Kjørholt (2009) argue that through domestic work, children learn essential life skills. 'Gedeo children learn about work and the environment in conjunction with play through participation in household chores and on farms by observation and instruction from adults and through trial and error.' According to Abebe (2007), Bourdillion, (2001) and Boyden (2009), children are independently engaged in the full range of household reproductive work in their own right, and it is through such engagement that they contribute to the sustainability of family income. In contrast to Katz (2004) and Porter et al. (2011), these authors claim that work increases children's local mobility (movement from home to town or from home to farm to work), but limits the time they have available for school. There is thus a debate over children's participation in work: children's work as a source of their skills and a contribution to household economic survival on one hand, and children's work as an impediment to their play and formal education on the other. The former debate is based on the understanding that work demands time from children and limits their agency of movement from place to place, which in turn constrains their opportunities for play and school, while the later emphasizes that the opportunity to work increases the chances for children to move from place to place. Both categories of debate accept that social transformation mainly changes livelihoods and production systems and diversifies forms of children's work, for example, by moving them from household chores to entrepreneurship (Abebe 2007; Abebe and Kjørholt 2009), or from unpaid domestic work to paid work on mechanized farms (Katz 1986, 1991, 2004). Overall in contemporary studies, the impact of social change in altering children's forms of work and mobility has been emphasized, but its impact on the diversification of their social responsibilities, play and learning has been explored less. However, questions such as 'Are children's work and school always incompatible practices?' and 'What is the link between social change, children's responsibility

for work and learning, and intergenerational relationships?’ are not raised or answered in the existing literature. The importance of children’s work as a source of informal learning and local knowledge in everyday life is often overlooked, whereas its impact on children’s school attendance and formal education is emphasized (Abebe 2008).

### Fieldwork

The data in this article are drawn from ethnographic fieldwork carried out among the Guji in southern Ethiopia. The Guji, whose population is estimated to be 1.6 million according to the Ethiopian Population and Housing Census of 2007, are one of the branches of the Oromo who speak the Oromo language (FDRE 2008). Hinnant (1977) and Van de Loo (1991) described them as a people still adhering to the ancestral Oromo traditions. Beriso (2004) and Debsu (2009) described how descent in the form of the *hagana* (clan), *balbalaa* (sub-clan), *warraa* (relatives) and *maatii* (family) goes along with gender- and generation-based divisions of labour that characterize the social responsibilities of men and women, as well as of adults and children. Guji land consists of diverse ecological areas with altitudes ranging from 1000 to 2000 m above the sea level and with climatic conditions which mainly consist of semi-highland and lowland areas (Van de Loo 1991; Beriso 1994; Debsu 2009). The people who live in both areas today subsist on mixed farming. Traditionally (20 years ago and more), their main subsistence activity was raising cattle. However, during the last two generations, there has been a change towards combining this activity with farming. Today, the Guji raise cattle, goats and donkeys and cultivate food crops such as maize, beans and sweet potatoes on a large scale and false banana and coffee on a smaller scale. In the lowland areas, where there is a limited amount of rainfall, animal husbandry and poor food-crop production are more usual as subsistence activities (Van de Loo 1991; Beriso 1994). Animal products, such as milk, butter, and charcoal are now the main sources of income for Guji living in the lowland areas (Debsu 2009).

During the fieldwork, which lasted for one year, we adopted a generational approach, using participant observation and narrative interviews with grandparents, parents and children from three different villages. Our methodological choice to adopt a generational approach was connected to the need to include children’s voices and daily lives in an intergenerational context. Accordingly, our participant observation emphasized the responsibilities that children exercise as part of their everyday lives, what children do in cattle fields, at home and in school, and how they coordinate their work time with school time, as well as work with play and intergenerational interaction. For some of these children, one day-long period of continuous observation was carried out across the three different sites. Interviews were also conducted with children, parents and grandparents in different places, including homes and work places. Sixty-five children aged 7–14 years were interviewed, 25 girls and 35 boys. The interviews with parents and grandparents (as was also true for participant observation at home) comprised six extended families with children, parents and grandparents living in close relationships with each other, as well as five nuclear families in which members of two generations (children and parents) were living together. Six mothers, five fathers, four grandmothers and five grandfathers from these families were interviewed. The interviews with children were focused on their views about work and school, work and play, work and intergenerational relationships, as well as their values and experiences related to work, play and learning. Interviews conducted with parents and grandparents included what childhood and children’s work, play and learning among the Guji looked like in the past and the difference between the past and the present with regard to children’s social responsibilities, local knowledge and everyday life. In all places, observations were combined with narrative interviews and informal dialogues (Spradley 1979). Staying, playing and working with children in the cattle-herding fields, working with parents and grandparents and staying with the families’

members at home were used as means of obtaining knowledge and insights into the Guji way of life and their thinking. Furthermore, the present-day cultural leader of the Guji people and other Guji 'culture bearers' participated in narrative interviews. In addition to the above methods, the everyday activities of children across the three sites were recorded in the form of a diary by the children themselves as well as the researchers.

### **The place of children in the intergenerational social order**

In this paper, the intergenerational social order is treated as consisting of patterns of relations and interdependence between children and adults as part of everyday life, as discussed also by Punch (2002, 2007) and Poluha (2004) in the context of rural Bolivia and Ethiopia, respectively. Among the Guji, one of the most common intergenerational social orders is the division of labour through which household routines and subsistence activities are shared between children and adults (Beriso 1995; Debsu 2009).

Among the Guji, the change from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism (we will come back later to this point) increased children's social responsibilities and made them key contributors to their families' livelihoods through participation in subsistence activities that include farming and animal husbandry. As a result of the change, a division of labour was introduced among the Guji, and work activities such as herding cattle, fetching water, caring for younger siblings, looking after the home when the parents are away, cleaning the home, washing clothes for parents, cooking food, going to market, making coffee and doing simple jobs on the crop farm became children's responsibilities, even though some of them, such as cooking food, going to market and making coffee, also are shared by women. The change brought about by introducing a division of labour increased the demand for children's contributions and for intergenerational interdependence. As the narrative quoted at the beginning of this paper clearly shows, children are considered to be key assets for parents and the wider community, and their participation in work increases their local mobility (Admassie 2003; Abebe 2007; Abebe and Kjørholt 2009). This traditional division of labour within the household is common in most rural areas of Ethiopia (Woldehanna et al. 2005; Tafere, Abebe, and Assazinew 2009). From all the interviews we conducted with parents and grandparents, the view that children's work represents a major contribution to family survival is evident. Adults normally accept that work represents essential local knowledge and that it is a way of preparing children for their present and future lives. The voice of Turi (a 50-year-old man) clearly illustrates how important children are for the survival of the family and the wider community:

As you can see me, I am old enough. I don't have endurance, but my grandchildren are my forces. They herd cattle. The boys cultivate land and grow crops. The girls prepare food and make coffee. They fetch water and collect firewood. They help me by collecting firewood from the bush and taking it to market to sell. If I didn't have these children, I couldn't survive.

As shown in this narrative, the grandfather's very livelihood is strongly dependent on the economic contribution of his grandchildren, an example of intergenerational interdependence (Abebe 2007). In the Guji intergenerational order, parents consider having a large number of children as a blessing and as providing sufficient hands to work. Galgale (a 45-year-old man) expressed this view as follows:

Children are a blessing and wealth. Anyone who gives birth to many children is a prosperous person. Children are forces for their parents. Someone who has many children has many hands to work. When the elder child marries and establishes his own home, the younger child continues helping the parents. Thus, a person who has many children has support until the end of his life.



As expressed in this narrative, the idea that children are a blessing and that they bring prosperity and power on which one can depend for lifelong support is a pillar of the relationship between children and adults.

The voices of two grandmothers, namely Sora (62 years old) and Qumba (64 years old), whom Tadesse met and interviewed in a cattle field provide further illustrations of the mutual interdependence between adults and children among the Guji. They were the wives of the same husband and the grandmothers of several grandchildren. They were currently living with their children and grandchildren. Here is an extract from the dialogue:

Tadesse: What are you doing here?

Sora and Qumba: Our grandchildren are busy with work. Therefore, we have replaced them and herd cattle. They work on the maize farm and we herd the cattle, since we cannot work on the farm.

Tadesse: You herd cattle and your grandchildren work on the farm?

Sora and Qumba: Yes, we support each other. That is how we live. Our grandchildren are our forces.

The interview demonstrates that intergenerational interdependence between grandmothers and their grandchildren extends to the exchange of roles: the grandparents took over the role of the children by herding cattle, and children took over the predominant role of the adults by working on the farm, reflecting the fact that family livelihoods are largely dependent on children contributing to sustainable subsistence. The economic and social places of children in the context of poverty-stricken societies are discussed by Boyden (2009) as showing ability in the context of rural adversity.

Among the Guji, children's work is interpreted not only as a means of subsistence, but also as a context of learning, unlike its meaning in the literature on childhood in the global north, where work is conceptualized as labour and expressed as hampering children's social development (Gunn and Ostos 1992; Cohen 2001). In contrast to parents in the global north, Guji parents commonly observe that children's participation in work is essential for their development, as it is a means of learning and acquiring survival skills. In a dialogue about children and work, Shiferra (a 40-year-old man) argued that to work is important for children, as it equips them with the necessary skills for their present lives as children and their future lives as adults. The following are his words:

Unless they work in their childhood, what do children eat when they become adults? Unless they work in their childhood, how can children work when they become adults? Children have to work because without working, how can they learn?

This narrative shows that children's work is perceived as a source of local knowledge and survival skills. Thus, work is seen as a practice that is closely connected with learning and as a way of becoming a competent child. It is also clear that Guji livelihoods are fully dependent on children's contributions to their families' subsistence and that the main ingredient of parenting is to train boys to become hard workers in farming and raising cattle and girls to become skilful cooks and housewives.

In general, in the Guji intergenerational social order, children's participation in work represents not only intergenerational interdependence, but also a system of knowledge transmission in which children learn through participation in everyday activities. Gaskins and Paradise (2010) describe this educational process as learning through observation in daily life. Thus, children's work, the core of children's everyday lives among the Guji, is an aspect of the intergenerational social order and a source of local knowledge. In other words, work is at the heart of the interdependent, mutual and reciprocal relationship between children and older generations, and of the enculturation processes that are embedded in everyday life.



### Being in the field and herding the cattle: intertwined processes of work, play and learning

Following the change from pastoral to agro-pastoral livelihoods and the subsequent intergenerational division of labour, cattle-herding became the children's responsibility and cattle fields became sites where children worked with each other, played with each other and learned from each other. They became places where children combined work with play and informal learning. For the purpose of herding cattle, children of different ages from different households come together and interact with their peers, interactions through which they perform play. Children's play in cattle fields mainly encompasses different forms of oral tradition (storytelling, riddles), games and pretend play. As it gives children a means of access to interactions with their peers and play practices, cattle-herding attracts them. Uddessa (a 10-year-old boy) expressed this situation as follows: 'I am happy to herd cattle because it is in cattle herding fields that I can meet different children and play *duri-duri* (storytelling), *hibboo* (riddling), *oduu* (self-stories) and *giricha* (the stone-throwing and catching play)'. Children's engagement in these forms of oral tradition in cattle fields reveals that work and play are not separate activities, but closely intertwined processes of amusement, joy and learning. By combining play and work, children understand and interpret the local contexts in which they are living while at the same time connecting themselves to their future as adults. Except for pretend play such as home-making and kraal-making, play involving oral traditions and games was not gender-specific, and both girls and boys participated in such play. However, various forms of pretend play related to home and family life were gender-specific in being mainly performed by girls. In this play, girls make 'home utensils' from local materials (mud, leaves, the stems and fruits of plants) and pretend that they are preparing food and coffee and serving them to men. In their play, the boys construct kraals for their cattle from mud, leaves and stems and collect small stones or fruits to put in them, saying that the latter represent the cattle. In these forms of play, children are creating a play space based on their experiences of home and family life, as well as their visions of their future lives (Schwartzman 1978).

In addition to these forms of play,<sup>1</sup> children share oral stories about what they saw, heard or did on previous days. In this form of peer interaction, a child who has seen or heard something strange (delightful or sorrowful) about his family, other children or adults shares her or his experience, and the other children listen and comment. A story told by Birqe (an 8-year-old girl) to Soree (a 7-year-old girl) in a cattle field illustrates this practice, captured by Tadesse through his participation in the children's interactions:

Birqe: Shall I tell you what I saw yesterday?

Soree: Tell me.

Birqe: I went to market place with my mother to sell milk and buy salt. In the market place, I saw two young men beating each other. They beat each other, they beat each other, and one of them picked a stone and hit the other one on the head. Then, blood flew out of the head the beaten man and the people who were around cried. Then, two men who were in grey clothes came and arrested both. My mother told me that the men were known as police. They put both young men in their car and went away.

Soree: Were you frightened when you saw the young men beating each other?

Birqe: Yes, I was frightened and said to my mother, 'Let's go home' and she said, 'Do not worry, they will not touch us.'

Soree: I would not be there if I were you.

Birqe: You are a coward but I am not.

Soree: Am I a coward? It is you! Not me!

In such stories, children share their everyday experiences and reflect on the events they observe in their environment. They may understand the events in similar ways or in different ways, but they argue with each other and finally construct a similar understanding. This form of play is one of many ways in which children practise their agency. Schwartzman (1978) described pretend

play among children as a way of commenting on the social/cultural context they are a part of. These stories thus represent knowledge about how children actively interpret, transform and even change their cultural environment. In this way, children's oral traditions are connected to children's work as cattle-herders transforming the cattle field into places not only for work, but also for play and learning. Thus, the household division of labour, introduced through socio-economic change, has resulted in the creation of a space where children combine their responsibility for work with their opportunities for play and informal learning.

### **School, settlement and changing livelihoods: their impact on children**

The school, representing formal education and new visions of reduced poverty, a modern life and a better future, was a new element affecting children's time investment in work. As we have seen, in the 'traditional' cattle-rearing society, Guji children's allocation of time was mainly spent in work in the home and/or in the cattle field. However, as part of social change the Guji had to supplement their livelihood sources with farming (crop production). Here, we give some details about the changes to livelihood. As Beriso explained (1995), from 1974 to 1993, the Ethiopian regime known as the *Derg* introduced school and permanent settlement among the Guji, as a result of which the people started to live in larger villages. This resettlement limited the pastoral livelihoods of the people, as it stopped them from moving their cattle from place to place in search of sufficient water and pasture. This resulted in the adoption of crop cultivation as another means of livelihood in addition to raising cattle, signifying a change from a pastoral livelihood to an agro-pastoral livelihood. This change resulted in a division of labour between children and adults among the Guji, with children herding cattle and performing several domestic tasks, while the adults mainly worked on the crop farms. Children seem to have more responsibilities in different kinds of work routines than they had before, while in addition also being obliged to attend school. Thus, Guji children systematically treat their work (cattle-herding) and school as compatible responsibilities. Age-based work shifts is the usual system. Usually, small children, who do not attend school (children aged 5–7); look after the cattle from morning to noon in the nearby grazing fields, while the older children (above 7) attend school. The households in a village have common grazing land that can accommodate several cattle and where small children can herd cattle. While the grown-up children attend school or are engaged in working on the farm, herding cattle is the responsibility of small children. At noon, these children come home from school, have their lunch and proceed to carry out their herding responsibilities. They lead cattle to the distant field, where there is more water and grass, and look after them until the evening, when they lead the cattle back home. The younger children, who look after the cattle from morning to noon, come back home, have their lunch and engage in afternoon activities such as looking after the calves and weaker animals, which are kept around the home. Among the Guji, herding cattle from morning to noon in the nearby grazing land is called *warsaa* (to keeping in waiting place), whereas herding cattle in a distant grazing field from noon to evening is known as *bobbaasa* (to release cattle to the field). This causes dilemmas related to the allocation of time. There are two busy working seasons for the Guji, the first, from November to the end of December, being the season for harvesting, and the second, from March to May, being the season for cultivation. During these seasons, large numbers of children drop out of school, and the dropout rate is increasing. Due to the seasonal and labour-intensive character of the work, it is difficult to combine school with work responsibilities such as herding cattle, fetching water, collecting firewood or going to the market with family members.

The following interview that Tadesse conducted with Sora (a 62-year-old woman) and Qumba (a 64-year-old woman) in a cattle field shows that the cultivation of crops and formal education have been the main social changes among the Guji:

- Tadesse: Did you herd cattle when you were children?
- Sora and Qumba: When we were children, only men could herd cattle. Men, with gun and spear, herded cattle because these fields, which are plain and clean today, were bushy and full of lions. The lions attack cattle. Using gun and spear, the men protected the cattle from the lion. Today, children herd cattle. No lion, no beast to attack cattle.
- Tadesse: Do adults herd cattle today as well?
- Sora and Qumba: Today, adults do not herd cattle. Herding cattle is the children's responsibility. Poor adults (adults who do not have any children) may herd cattle. Adults like us (who cannot work on the farm) also may herd cattle for a short time (until children come back from school or work).
- Tadesse: What did you do when you were children?
- Sora and Qumba: We used to make food, fetch water, serve food, and clean the home.
- Tadesse: You did not work on the farm?
- Sora and Qumba: When we were children, Guji didn't cultivate crops extensively. There was no crop farm as such. We used to sell milk and butter and buy food (*warqee*).
- Tadesse: Do you have anything that you feel you have missed?
- Sora and Qumba: The time when we were children was a time of ignorance. We were ignorant, and we are still ignorant. But our grandchildren are not ignorant. Your time is better than our time. I wish I was a child today.

This conversation is one of many examples revealing that children see the need to combine work and school as a solution to their learning, and children often make great efforts to combine school with the household subsistence activities, in which they shoulder equal responsibilities with adults. The children said that they must work and attend school and that handling these two practices side by side is their responsibility. This indicates that children are competent in reconciling their work and school responsibilities in the context of rural life and hard-to-obtain family subsistence based on farming and animal husbandry (see also Poluha 2007). The voices below of two grandmothers reflect similar views:

- Tadesse: What do your grandchildren do? Do they work or attend school?
- Sora and Qumba: They do both. They attend school and also work.
- Tadesse: Is it not difficult for children to work and attend school side by side?
- Sora and Qumba: They have to work because without working how can they learn? What is bad is dropping school permanently to work. Doing both is good for children. They learn from both work and school. It is a good child who both performs work and attends school side by side.

This narrative shows that the change in Guji livelihoods, that is, the resettlement and the change from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism, increased the work responsibilities of present-day children by introducing a division of labour. In addition, the Ethiopian government, with the aim of achieving Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2010), pushes every child to attend school. To fulfil this goal, the local district leaders force parents to send their children to school. As a result, besides striving to meet global expectations regarding school attendance, children are responsible for herding cattle while their parents work on the farm. This creates dilemmas related to the allocation of time, as is shown in a conversation between Tadesse and Getu, a 10-year-old boy in second grade:

- Tadesse: Do you work or attend school?
- Getu: I do both.
- Tadesse: What work do you do?
- Getu: I herd cattle.
- Tadesse: How do you carry out both herding cattle and attending school?

- Getu: I go to school two days and herd cattle three days a week. In the two days I attend school in the morning and herd cattle in the afternoon.
- Tadesse: That means you devote more time to herding cattle than to attending school?
- Getu: Yes.
- Tadesse: What do you think about this?
- Getu: It is good. I am both learning and herding cattle.
- Tadesse: Why don't you spend more time on your learning in school?
- Getu: How can I learn without working? I have to work in order to learn. It is when I work that I can learn.
- Tadesse: Do you think that learning in school is not as important as working?
- Getu: Both learning and working are important. How can I leave the one and do the other?

This conversation is one of many examples revealing that children interpret the combination of work and school as a solution to their learning (attending formal education). Below, we present another example showing how children carry out their work and school responsibilities side by side:

Tadesse was walking from Samaro village to a village called Wallamme. A girl (11 years old) was walking in front of him to the same place. She was leading three donkeys loaded with bundles of firewood. The girl was carrying something on her back as well. Tadesse greeted her and continued the conversation.

- Tadesse: From where did you get the firewood?
- The girl: I and my siblings collected from the bush.
- Tadesse: What about your mother?
- The girl: She does not do this. Why should she have to collect firewood while she has children?
- Tadesse: Who loaded the donkey for you?
- The girl: I, my father and my brother loaded three of the donkeys
- Tadesse: Are you also attending school?
- The girl: Yes, I am in grade 5.
- Tadesse: No school today?
- The girl: There is school today. But I am absent.
- Tadesse: Why?
- The girl: My mother is sick and I have to go to market to buy goods for use at home.

### **Memories of the past: in the shadow of the tree**

As we have seen, since the 1980s Guji society and the everyday lives of children and adults have been characterized by extensive processes of social and economic change, affecting their livelihoods and previous ecological adaptation to the environment as people raising cattle alone. The socio-economic change increased children's responsibilities (especially the responsibility to combine work with school and to support one's family and oneself) and increased their opportunities for play and learning (acquisition of local knowledge) through combining work with play and with interaction with their peers. It also seems that this change has affected the intergenerational relationships between children, parents and grandparents. As part of our concluding reflections, we will present the voice of one of the grandfathers, who experienced the changes this way:

In the past, when I was a child, and when my own children were small, neighbours used to come together, drink coffee and play. We entertained one another in the shadow of a tree by telling tales and riddles and by playing *duqo*<sup>2</sup>. The children sat close to the adults, listening and learning. These days, adults don't have time to sit down and play. At present, children can't learn from adults. As a result, they are poor in telling and understanding tales and riddles.

Another grandfather expressed similar views:

Everybody toils day and night in order to sustain daily survival. Early in the morning a man goes to his workplace and works throughout the day. In the evening, he comes back home. At home, he washes his hands, drinks coffee, has dinner and goes to bed. This is how we live today. In the past, there were trees under which adults came together and talked. Today, these trees don't exist. They have been cut down. Like the trees, the tradition of coming together under a tree and talking has melted away in the air. Today, it is only in church that people come together. Today my grandchildren have little knowledge of Guji values and norms. My children (the fathers of my grandchildren) know Guji values and norms. But my grandchildren don't know much.

As these short narratives illustrate, both grandfathers experienced a loss of 'tradition' related to social practices in everyday lives, in which children inhabited a particular place in an intergenerational social order. Moreover, their voices reflect the fact that in recent generations, in their opinion, there has been a loss of the local knowledge that was formerly transmitted to children from the older generations as part of socialization processes. According to the narratives, local knowledge and informal learning generated through work, play and social gathering in everyday life are essential to developing life skills for the present and for one's future life as an adult.

However, as this study has revealed, today children's work and play still represent important sources of learning and knowledge, albeit slightly different from previous generations. In the cattle field, children play and practise storytelling and riddles among themselves as part of an oral tradition.

School represents new places for learning and social practices for Guji children. However, as we have seen, the combination of formal education and school with work responsibilities as part of a survival strategy puts children and their families under great pressure in spite of the efforts made by schools to adapt to this situation. This confirms former research conducted in southern Ethiopia (Abebe 2008). Thus, paradoxically, the particular combination of settlement and changing livelihoods with the introduction of formal education has increased children's responsibilities in daily work rather than decreased them. The combination of formal education and work responsibilities as part of livelihood strategies demands both knowledge and competence by the children in order to survive and cope with the challenges they face (Boyden 2009). Important questions to be addressed are related to the potential and content of the school curriculum and the prospects and knowledge that this represents for Guji children's lives and welfare at present and in the future. The important point that needs attention from researchers and policy-makers is the potential of the school curriculum to connect children's everyday lives to formal education and the content of the latter. The need to reflect critically on the curriculum and content of formal education by adapting a locally oriented curriculum is obvious (Serpell 1999; Jirata and Benti 2013). Similarly, the valuable skills, learning and local knowledge acquired through children's active participation in work and everyday life activities with different generations should not be overlooked. Furthermore, broader questions related to global discourses on sustainable development and ecological sustainability should be contested.

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### Notes

1. Folktales and riddles as children's play and learning practices have been discussed in Jirata (2011a, 2011b, 2012).
2. Duqo is a tradition count and capture game that two individuals play with each other.

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