

Indigenous Knowledge System in Craftwork: The Cases of Some Local Furniture Making among the Oromo of Gumay District (Bunno Awraja) to 1991

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Abstract

The paper attempts to investigate indigenous knowledge system (IKS) in making traditional furniture by the Craftsmen of the Oromo of Gumay district of Bunno Awraja to 1991. Like any other indigenous group of people, which are noted for their distinct traditional skill, the Oromo of Gumay have developed IKS in furniture making. Methodologically, the researcher attempted to use both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are exclusively oral interviews with important informants in the district. Qualitative research method has been used as it suits description and analytical reasoning checking and counter-checking sources against one another. The study shows how indigenous furniture are essential in the daily life of the Oromo of Gumay. Furniture are produced locally from a variety of materials that are available locally and naturally. These include: animals' horn and skin; soil, stone and rock, minerals, plants, etc. The study also assesses the contribution of Gumay Oromo's women in the development of local furniture and the tradition of using some local furniture. However, recently the Gumay people have been overlooking the use of locally made furniture because of the infiltration of alien products of aluminum and plastics that have been mitigating the demand for the usage of locally made furniture. The study finds out that, though the locally produced furniture are suitable for usage and environmentally friendly, the tradition of making and using some local furniture in Gumay may vanish within a few years owing to this external influence. While few members of the community appreciated the skill of local craftsmen for making local furniture from local resources, the majority however did not. These craftsmen thus have been suffering from prejudice and relative discrimination in the society. They lived in very poor conditions in the community. They were accorded different pejorative designations like tuumtuu for those who produce metal products, duugduu for tanners, anaxiifor wood products workers and etc. More than others, the Derg government is acknowledged for its attempt to change the living conditions of these groups and above all else the prejudice and discrimination against them and craftsmanship of local technology. The researcher recommends that policy that protects local craftsmen and IK in general should be in place to promote local technology that reflects the identity of the Gumay people in particular and the Oromo in general.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, local Furniture, tuumtuu, dugduu, external influence.

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INTRODUCTION

The historiography IKS at the international level was begun after the end of World War II (WWII). The studies of indigenous knowledge also go side by side with the acknowledgment of indigenous people as "people" (Christoph Antons 2009, 40-42). However, before that for a long period of time, travelers, explorers and adventures made observations and recordings of indigenous inhabitants in their attempts to understand and portray the indigenous world view. Historically studies in indigenous communities are about how knowledge was gathered, classified and represented through the lens of the West. Studying the history of IKS has been viewed as primitive, unscientific, irrational, and unsystematic as some said. Most scholars looked at IKS as being part of a romantic past, the major obstacle to development, superficial and often plain wrong (B. Kingsbury 998, 415). However, IKS is a way of knowing, seeing, and thinking that is passed down orally from generation to generation (A. Agrawal 2002, 173). In fact, it had sustained the world for the longest period of time before the rise of modern technology. It has been pervasive and touched every way of life and problems of our ancestors.

These days, the studies on the history of IKS have attracted attention of many disciplines both in support and criticism of it (Ibid). The historiography of IKS has its own centers in Berlin, Chicago and Zurich. In these centers, the history of IKS released its works in journals and conference papers. For instance, the Berlin center for the history of knowledge has intensified their cooperation in the history of IKS over the past ten years (Lukas M. Verburgt 2020, 1). In various literature, IKS is defined as a body of knowledge held by a group of local people, unique to a given society and acquired through generation by living in close contacts with nature and largely transmitted orally (A. Agrawal 1995, 4). Berkes and his co-authors define indigenous knowledge as follows: "Indigenous knowledge is collectively a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, norms, values and belief,

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evolution by adoptive processes and handed down through generation by cultural transmission” (Berkes and Berkes, 2009).

IKS is also an integral part of the culture and history of a local community (Ibid). Among the intellectuals of indigenous studies, the term indigenous knowledge is used interchangeably. Among such appellations: local knowledge, traditional knowledge, people’s knowledge, ethno-science, village science, community knowledge, and rural people’s knowledge (Adedipe 2004 and Battiste 2002).

Ethiopia is one of the ancient states of Africa with remarkable early civilization acknowledged as the cradle of human beings by the international community. Ethiopia is not only a country with long history and ancient civilization but also has diverse ethnic groups manifested through rich spiritual and material cultures (Yishak Alemayehu 2009, 1). This is largely evidenced by the existence of rich cultural heritages which are the reflection of remains of the past civilization of the country (Solomon Gebreyes 2010). Among the Ethiopian writers on the issues of IK in relation to indigenous knowledge of land uses among the Ethiopian people’s Amsalu Akilu notes that: “making good use of and building upon indigenous knowledge and practice of the land users in the development and implementation of conservation technologies could bring about effective technological transfer and sustainable land use” (2001, 4-5).

In similar way the Ethiopian Herald notes that, some traditional practices and indigenous knowledge values are considered as part and parcel of cultural values in many communities in Ethiopia. In relation with this the Ethiopian Herald issued on August 25, 2015 underlined that, IK is an integral part of the development process of local communities and it is an underutilized resource in development process of developing countries like Ethiopia. Adding to this, the newspaper illustrated that learning from IK by investigating first what local communities know and have, can improve understandings of local conditions and provide a productive context for activities designed to help the communities (Ethiopian Herald 2015). Generally speaking, in Ethiopia, there are over 80 ethnic groups with their own cultural identities. These ethnic groups have their own ways of traditional knowledge systems on how to manage crops, biodiversity, soil, water and livestock husbandry that enabled them to sustain their livelihoods as well as landscapes for a long periods of time. These IK and cultural practices have been passed from generation to generation up to the present time. Most of these IK and cultural practices have been very useful and have contributed much and perpetuate the society as a whole. Like other nations and nationalities of Ethiopia, the Oromo developed their own indigenous and distinctive political, cultural, economic and social systems by which they have properly managed the entire society throughout their history. For the sake of manageability, this study focuses on IKS, particularly craftwork: the cases of some Furniture making in Gumay District of *Bunno Awrajjain* southwest Ethiopia to 1991.

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA

Geographically, Gumay District is located in southwest Ethiopia, Jimma Zone of Oromia regional state. Formerly it was part of Gumma Oromo kingdom, one of the five Gibe states emerged in the early nineteenth century. It existed as an independent Oromo state until its independence and prosperity ended by conquering forces of *Negus* (King) Menelik of Shewa Kingdom, led by *Dajjach* (later *Ras*) Tasama Nadew in 1886. Consequently, Gumay assumed a new status, i.e. reduced to a District within the province of Ilu Abba Bor region (Anteneh Wasihun 2018). Accordingly, from 1889 to 1942, Gumay was part of Ilu Abba Bor province. The 1942 decree, which is known as the administrative regulation created provinces (*taqelaygezat*), the sub-provinces (*awrajjja*), districts (*warada*) and sub-districts (*meketelwarada*) (Archive of Gumay District). Based on the 1942 declaration, Gumay was divided into two *waradameslane*. These are Gumaay Satema and Gumay Toba (Yasin Mohammed 2009, 23). According to this administrative structure, between 1942 and 1989, Gumay maintained the status of district under Bunno *awrajjja* within the Illubabor *teqlaygezat* and after 1974, *kifle-hager*. It was among the nine districts of the former Bunno Bedele *awrajjja* (sub-province). The latter itself was one of the five *awrajjja* (sub-provinces) of Illubabor administrative region. At the time, Illubabor administrative region was divided into four *awrajjja* (sub-provinces) and later in 1978 increased to five: Gambella, Mocha, Gore, Bunno Bedele and Sor and Geba *Awrajjja* (Ibid). Bunno Bedele *Awrajjja* was also further divided into five districts. These were: Bedele, ChoraKumbabe, Darimu, GumaayDambi and Gumaay Satema districts. Later the number of districts was increased to eight in 1964. These were: Dega, Bedele, Gachi, Gumaay Toba, Boracha, GumayDambi, Gumaay Setama and Gumay Sigmowaradagezat (Districts administrative) (Habtamamo 20017, 54). From 1989 to the downfall of the *Derg* in 1991 Gumay Toba was merged with Dhidheessaa district and became part of Dhidheessaa *Awrajjja* administrative unit and continued up to the downfall of the *Derg* in 1991.

According to the post 1991 administrative arrangements of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), Gumay having its administrative center at Toba became one of the eighteen districts of Jimma zone, which is one of the eighteen administrative zones of the Oromia regional state (Anteneh 2018, 6). Currently, Gumay Toba is one of twenty-two districts of Jimma zone and its administrative town Toba is 71 kilometers from a zonal town, Jimma town, located on the main road to Bunno Bedele zone and 416 kilometers away from Addis Ababa (Gumay District, Culture and Tourism Bureau 2009, 7).

In its relative or vicinal location, it is bounded with Dhidheessa district in the north, Gomma district in the east, with Gera district in the south and Setema district in the west. It is situated in the northwest part of the zone. Gumay's astronomical location extends between the grid coordinates $7^{\circ} 50'N-8^{\circ} 13'N$ latitudes and $36^{\circ} 15'E-36^{\circ} 40'E$ longitudes. As a whole, it has an area of 40, 976 hectares and its average altitude approximately ranges between 1800-2000 meters above mean sea level and characterized by undulating topography with isolated hills, plateaus and plains (Samueal and etal 2019, 16 and Girma and Kenate2017, 3).

Gumay district is sub-divided into small administrative units (*ganda, kebele*). The highest elevation area in the district is. The ups and downs, the chain of hills and valley around the town of Toba are impressive. The hills and mountains of Gumay Toba are the sources of several tributary rivers that join the main rivers of the area. There are also a number of natural springs in the district (Anteneh Wasihun). Gumay is divided into three agro-ecological zones, namely highlands (*baddaa*) 9.47%, midland (*baddaadaree*) 60.63% and hot land (*gammoojjii*) 29.9 (Ibid).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The historical data used in this article consists of two kinds of sources. The first category is secondary literature both (published and unpublished). In this category, the attempt was first started with reading written materials. The second sources category that is used in this article is oral sources (which also included personal observation) and archival materials, which has great contribution in the history. The study also interviews were conducted individually with 10 selected informants who were considered to be knowledgeable concerning relevant issues. All information gathered was therefore, crosschecked carefully by interviewing similar informants, referring to the relevant literature. For controversial issues, informants were interviewed in group for issues which were no longer well remembered. The oral sources were collected from May-June, 2022.

This study had, therefore, the following basic questions:

- What are local furniture that are produced by the craftsmen in Gumay districts of *Bunno Awraja*?
- In what ways did the Gumay people predict, monitor and utilize their cultural and traditional furniture?
- What are the challenges that affect the indigenous knowledge systems of the productions and uses of local furniture by the craftsmen in Gumya?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study was to reconstruct one of the least studied themes in Gumay districts of *Bunno Awraja*, that is investigate indigenous knowledge system (IKS) in making traditional furniture by the Craftsmen of the Oromo of Gumay district of *Bunno Awraja* to 1991 and this was to be achieved through the following specific objectives:

- Identify local furniture that are produced by the craftsmen in Gumay districts of *Bunno Awraja*.
- Investigate the ways in which the Gumay district predict, monitor and utilize local Furniture knowledge systems.
- Assess the states of the indigenous knowledge of Furniture making by Craftsmen in Gumay districts of *Bunno Awraja*.

As a result, by filling the gap left by previous research works this study will help understand the social and economic importance about some locally made furniture, the central role of this paper is to inspire other scholars for conducting further detailed and comprehensive study on the subject.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CRAFT WORKING

The knowledge of handcraft working has a long history in making the most important utilities related with the daily activities of both urban and rural communities in our country. A history of craftwork among the Oromo people is traced back to the period before the Oromo population movement (Bula, Sirka2007, 5). Just in any house of an average family in any village of Gumay, we are certain to found local furniture which is made up of clay, grass, leather, wood, horn and the like. Weaving, pottery, and basketry are also craftsmanship developed in Gumay (2007A manuscript found at Gummay District). In Gumay, the household furniture items are still essential in every household. In some houses in Gumay this objects are hang on the wall of living room, this is because some of these objects are rare for everyday use, and others are hang for decorative purposes(Informants: FaaxeeOli, FeqaduDuraa and Shamsiyaa Abba Goddu).

Most of this furniture items are local and they are also grass products. The arts of handmade house furniture are a mirror of the cultural diversity in different parts of the world. Likewise, in the Gumay Oromo tradition, handcraft products have always been a way of life. They are in fact results a combination of indigenous creativity, culture and heritage and environment (Ibid). The art of handmade house furniture making is passed down from generation to generation and involves everybody from children to adults in both genders (Ibid). It seems to be difficult to identify written sources on the history of the art of handmade house furniture among people of the study area. However, oral sources in the area have been used as primary sources for this study as it has been indicated above.

Some people have been specialized in the productions of specific furniture; some of them had been involved in handcraft industries (Deressa Bayessa2013, 13-17). One of these was iron work, *hojiisibilaa*, which was an occupational specialization related to *oggeyyisibilaa*, pejoratively called *tumtuu*. This group of people had produced iron tools highly needed for agriculture, warfare, as well as spears for investiture of the chiefs. More than other former Gibe kingdoms iron work in Gumma had direct relationship with the state formation process (Ibid). It had significant values for expansion of a territory as well as to defend from external attacks. Like other Gibe kingdoms, the kingdom of Guummaa had also developed their indigenous knowledge and material culture of the art of local house furniture. According to oral sources, some members of the society had a skill in producing different tools like knives, spears and digging materials used for various day to day activities and also for war (Informants: Jihaad Abbaa Boor, and Gurmu Fufa).

The Oromo of Gumay produced household furniture from a variety of materials that are available naturally. These include: animals' horn and skin, soils, clay in particular, stones and rocks, minerals, plants (fruits, guilds, leaves, tree bark, and wood), recycling of textiles, plastic, metals. The furniture have also diverse forms and applications like beads, farming implements and harvesting tools, home items like kitchen kits, construction materials various household objects, Jewelers, pottery, textiles and the others (Ibid).

Nevertheless, despite the enormous contribution of the art and uses of some local furniture in Gumay, they have been neglected by the leading scholars of the country. However, little attempts were made by scholars like Bartels, Huntingford, Knutson and Lewis. The works of these scholars only focused on technical aspects of the furniture. ¹Among others, Beke in his study indicated that, the craft works in Jimma and its surroundings enjoyed a reputation for being advanced. Beke also showed that, " manufactures flourished here in a higher degree than anywhere else in this quarter of Africa" and the craft products in Jimma were exported to northern parts because they produced goods" much superior to that of Abyssinia" (T. Charles 1984, 252-269).

In his important historical study of the agricultural ecology of Ethiopia, *People of the plow: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia 1800-1990*, James C.McCann, assessed the ox-drawn plough crafts and other locally made agricultural tools in the former kingdom of Gera (McCann, J.C.1994, 151.). The famous Oromo scholar Mohammed Hassen who has eminent work on the Gibe region did not give much emphasis to the local furniture in the region; however, he mentioned the names of few of them (Mohammed Hassen1984,117). Very recently, the former Jimma University's History Department staff member Bula studied the pottery making crafts among the Jimma Oromo (Bula2008, 15).

Generally speaking, scholars have not deeply studied local made furniture making, even a few existing fragmented works have focused on the northern part of the country; the southwestern region of Ethiopia has been the subject of comparatively scant study (Ibid). The art might disappear altogether after a few generations. In the study area local made furniture have been dominated by the plastic materials which are the alien products (Informants: Gurum Fufa and Abdalah Ahimed).

DEVELOPMENT OF FURNITURE MAKING

After people learned to farm and live in permanent settlements, they began to make furniture. In Europe some of the earliest known furniture could be traced back to a stone age. A case in point is a village at *Skara Brae* in the Orkney Islands in Scotland which is as old as about 2000 BC (S.A. Brandt, and R. Fattovich1990,94). The Stone Age farmers lived in stone huts with roofs of whalebone and turf. Inside their huts they had stone furniture such as cupboards and beds (Thomas C1997, 59). Meanwhile in Egypt, rich Egyptians lived in large, comfortable houses with many rooms. Walls were painted and floors had colored tiles. Inside their homes, they had wooden furniture such as beds, chairs, tables and chests for storage (George H1968, 15). Ordinary people lived in simpler homes made of mud. They sat on brick benches around the walls. They used reed chests or wooden pegs on walls to store things (Ibid). Likewise, as it has been mentioned above, the people of Gumay have used a variety of furniture made up of materials available in their surroundings. Let us see some of them below:

FURNITURE MADE UP OF LOCAL STONES

Stone tools making has had a profound effect on human evolution. The time in which human beings started to make tools from stone is called by historians and archeologists as Stone Age. This period of time began r.2.5million year's age. So, the Stone Age was a period of human technological development characterized by the use of stone as the principal material for tools (Roy T.Matthews and Dewitt Platt2003, 75). Before the introduction of the modern *Xaanaa*, mill the people of Gumay were used *majji*, literally mill stone for grinding grain. *Majji*, is one of locally made household furniture in Gumay, it is/was used for grinding grain, in flat handmade stone mill. *Majji* is/was made from of a heavy block of stone.

Its usage is that, a small rounded stone is moved by two hands of knelt down person, usually women or young

¹ What is not forgotten her is that the works of the scholars were not referring the name Gumay rather than Gumma the former kingdom. In this study an attempt is made to show the difference between Gumma and Gumay as follow see section. 2.

girls back and forth over the surface of the *majii*, in a grinding motion, thus producing the flour. Operation could be compared to the operation of an old fashioned washboard (Informants). This was traditional way of grinding grain sandwiching between two stones. It is/ was actually heavy work. It was the task of women and girls. The girls and women of Gumay in the past while grinding grain sang traditional songs which are known as *weeduu*; soothing of children, appreciating their heroes and clans, love of environment and ecology, etc. The type of songs varied between girls and women. But after Islamization of the Gumma Oromo, such songs were replaced by *Bakuratul-waliid*. *Bakuratul-waliid* is a religious song (*manzuma*) which glorifies *Allah*, Prophet Muhammad and his deeds, written by the local Guumma Sheik, Sheekoota Guumaa (Anteneh2018, 47). *Sunsumaa*, three hearthstones made up of clay produced by potters. Their function is to support cooking materials put on the hearth during cooking.

Recently a few small scale industries has begun to emerge in Gumay, grain milling was perhaps the earlier one. The first grain mill was a water driven mill or water mills, which is also known as *xaanaabishaan*, water mill. After the 1950s the number of grain mills grew in number. The first grain mill was established in 1958 by two foreigners from Nigeria: Sayid Muhammed and Sayed Nasir. The second grain mill was installed in 1961 by Arab Yemeni named Ali Jubral (Ibid). An Italian Merchello set up the third grain mill in the 1960s. In 1970, following the footstep of the foreigners, two individuals called Sheik Mohammed Wollo from Jimma and Dagga Abbulu from Bunno Bedele set up grain mills in Gumay. Abbaa Giddi and Bakkare from Wallaga were the two individuals who were well known as grain mill technicians. MuluShawa who learned from Merchello later replaced Bakkarre and Abbaa Giddi (Ibid). The Muslims from Jimma during the nineteenth century were not responsible only for the expansion of Islam; they also took part in introducing modern small scale industries as we have seen above. They also introduced the first water mills to Wallaga during the same century (Nagaso Gidada1984, 118).

However, transformation from using *majii* to grain mill was far from over. For so long, there has been the tradition of using *majii* to grind pepper and a variety of spices of amour species consisting of *Coriander,Irdii(Curcuma longa)*, *Zinjibila(Gingeror Zingiberofficinale)* and *Ogiyoo/Korormaa* (Informants).

POTTERIES FURNITURE AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

In the Oromo folklore pottery is more than a functional object. It is a cliché to state that, there are different arguments about the original homeland of the Oromo in the past. Among these arguments, oral tradition associated the origin of the Oromo with Walabu, a place where clay is said to have been changed to human being by *Waqaa* (Sky God) (Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau2015, 114-115). *Waqaa* created the first men from clay (Ibid). On this view Bula adds the following: "pottery is perceived to have agency in terms of its capacity to embody spirits and certain deities... in Oromo traditions people are formed from clay and pots" (Bula SirikaWayessa2016, 58b). In addition to the above explanations and narrations, most of the pottery objects parts are described with the terms of the human body: *teessuu* (seat), *garaa* (stomach), *mudhi* (waist), *moorma* (neck), *afaan*(mouth), *hidhii* (lip) and *guraa* (ear) (Ibid).

In Gumay, most commonly, *suupheedhahuu*, the craftsmanship art is transmitted from mother to daughter and from elder to younger within the household or to the neighborhood; the majority of the potters today in Gumay are those who inherited the skills from family and neighbors (Informants). Some of the pottery products which are highly related to the traditional food preparation, preservation and consumption habits of the local people. Many of the household equipment of Gumaydistrict are made by potters from clay. The pottery products were/ are so many with their own local names.

Among the people of Gumay traditionally pottery furniture were and still are divided based on their services (Ibid). The first groups of pottery type include different kinds of small containers which largely used for storing. *Okkottee*, is a jar used to store water and fetchwater from the river.It also served for the making and storage of local beer (*farsoo*), for preparation of *araqee*(string traditional drink in Ethiopia) and honey beer (*birzii*) and others. These jars are locally called *okkotteebishaani* (*pot of water*), *okkotteefarsoo*(local mead pot) and *okkoteedamma*(pot for honey).

Out of all these the biggest one is *okkotteefarso* in its size (Ibid). Another large jar known as *hurooguddaa* is used to brew local beer on special occasions when people gather for cooperatives, wedding, funerals and other related big social events. The larger jar can hold an average of 500 liters. The tradition of using *okkottee*, jar among the Gumay District Oromo have been under threat due to the intrusion, spread and wider use of kitchen materials made up of aluminum and plastic. These modern alien materials reduced the demand for earthen jars. According to oral informants, the tradition of *okkottee*, jar making and using in Gumay within a few years might disappear (Ibid).

Before the dominations of alien products in the study area the second groups of traditional furniture were under the categories of local cooking utensils, the people called them by different names. The most common or widely used cooking utensils in Gumay were/ are *xuwwee*(small pot) and *elle* (griddle). *Xuwwee*, is used for cooking *ittoo* (stew), *marqaat*(porridge) and *muluu* (cooked wheat or corn or other similar cereals), while *Elle* is flat baked clay griddle, which set on three pieces of *sunsumaa* discussed earlier also called *goolichaa* for making

bideen (pancake, flat bread and staple food in many parts of Ethiopia). *Elle* has different kinds the most common one is, *Elle buddeni* and *Elle Bedde*, which is used for *akkii*, roasting and toasting. The production of *Elle buddeni* needs high profession while *Elle Beddee* does not needs very much experience, children's first trained in producing *Beddee* (Informants).

Jabannaa, is a pottery product which is commonly used to make coffee. Among the Gumay oral informants a women named HadhaaBashaa is remembered for her quality *Jabana* making the following couplet:

Afaan Oromo	English
<i>JabannanhincaabinekanhadhaaBashaati</i>	<i>Hadha Bashaa's janan is not easily broken</i>
<i>Jabannihinsharaminnekanwaqaajabati</i> (Informants).	<i>The era of waqa does not have defectors.</i>

Rekebot, cups' seat, was/is made from curved single piece of a large tree trunk or from different pieces of lumber. An incense burner made out of recovered rifle bullet shell cases was furniture. Colorful straw plate for containing *qursiibunna*, snacks and sweets, coasters, spoons gourds, soft wood goblets (Ibid). The Oromo in general did not use the new clay products before treatment putting in the fire, *siilessuu* (Informants). Members of the neighboring individuals would be invited to attend a post-treatment dish or drink. They would drink or eat what was made or bowled with the new clay pot or other clay products. They would bless the person that invited them to the food or drink saying: *gaffaahatiisiikalqixeedutucabii*, "let you get broken when your maker mother die." This is to express their wish long life or service for the clay material in which the food or drink they ate produced (Bula2016, 63). *Waciiti*, is another clay product furniture of the household used for melting butter. It was used and still use for the preparation of *Buna qala*. In addition to this, among the Maacaa Oromo, *Waacitii* is a symbol of the lineage's cohesion (Bartels Lament 1990, 289).

Afaan Oromo	English
<i>Waactiidhinqarra</i>	The wactii in the back room
<i>Biyooqabobichoo</i>	Is soil and pinches of clay
<i>Wajinninmidginna</i>	Together we are fine
<i>Yaaqomookoishoo</i> (Ibid).	Well Done! My lineage!

The Oromo of Gumay before they are converted to Islam and different sects of Christianity when they are the followers of traditional religion women's had praying ceremony which was took place before putting the *Waacitii* on the fire for melting butter or preparing *Buna qala* women prayed saying: "O *Waqaa*, I am coming towards you: come to me to keep away all evils. O *Waqaa*, I have come to you for your blessing, stay with me" (Ibid290). *Bunaqala* is the best and sweet traditional food among the *Maacaa* Oromo in general (A manuscript found at Didessa District, 2010.77).

FURNITURE MADE FROM ANIMAL PRODUCTS

During the Oromo population movement and expansion, pastoral Oromo mainly wore dresses of animal skins and hides, leather products. The increasing demand of leather dresses at the time was accelerated tanning industry (Mohammed1994, 131). The Oromo people nowadays, still make harnesses for horses and mules, sleeping skins like sheets, etc (Bartels,183).

At present, songs are still sung remembering the former skin-dresses as follows:

Afaan Oromo	English
<i>Sawaasawileekoo</i>	Cows Oh! My cows
<i>Birraanwatileekoo</i>	Oh! Also you my calves!
<i>Sawaaesajibu</i>	Which part of our cattle be disliked
<i>Sawaaqensaaqichoo</i>	The of soft hooves
<i>Kottenshinnita'e</i>	Their hooves become cups
<i>Fonirbataata'e</i> . ¹	Their meat becomes our dinner.

The Oromo girls in their traditional song which is known as *weedu*, also praise their traditional skins known as *kalle*. This praise song is documented by Bartles as follows:

Afaan Oromo	English
<i>Waansadiinjaala</i>	I like I like three things
<i>Tokkoharmekottii</i>	The first is my mother
<i>Tokkoqarrekottii</i>	another is my qarree
<i>Tokko kale kottii</i> . ²	the next is my kale, skin dress.

Anqalba, is another animal product, which is a leather strips used to carry the babies. *Boratii*, headset is also another leather local product highly used by the people of Gumay District of Bunno *Awraja* for decorating house

¹Ibid,p.183 Most of the Oromo people did not use the name shinni rather they preferred to call *finjala*, it is also used to measure the amount of traditional medicine and used to drink local alcohol specially the objective that used to measure local alcohol is called by the name *Abbatuu beekka*, literally to say it is a person who know his potential to drink one, two, three and so.

²Ibid, Among the Oromo in general until resent time *qarree* is seen as a symbol of virginity and the girl who has *qarere* is also call as *durbaqarree*.

particularly among the Muslim Oromo's. The Gumay Oromo has been produced headset both from leather and wood. However, the most chosen headset was the one which was made from leather.

Yet, by the nineteenth century in the Gibe region radical transformation from the tradition of weaving leather dress to cotton clothes existed (Muhammed1994, 131). The Oromo women's and men ignored dressing leather, than it became the dress of female slave. After the nineteenth century onwards no more using leather dress, leather is used to made containers. Such as *qanqaloo* or as some said *qalqallo*, sacks, this is a leather product which is used to hold 25 kilograms of grain, the other one is *qorbotta*, which is used to hold honey and butter. *Sirre*, bed which is actually two kinds, *sire tepha* (bed from strip) and *sire muka*, bed from woods (the people of Gumay have also a tradition of making different furniture including *sire* and others from *shimala* which grows in the lowlands and *lemman* which grows on the highlands) *sijaja* (prayer mat) and chairs for big men is some of them (Informants).

The horns of cattle were also used to make drinking cups (*waancaa*). Not many sheep and goats were kept but a very few big men had *darabaa* for sheep at *baddaa*. The skin of sheep was used as a carpet. Bags and bellows were mostly made from goats' skin. Gradually, hides and skins have become among the largely used exchange commodities (Deressa Debu2018, 90). Among other in the former Gibe kingdoms animals and their products were being used as tribute payment." Informants say that horses and mules were given fully harnessed and other gifts were accorded to win the favor of Menelik and Taitu" (Ketebbo Abdiyo2012, 38). However, according to some sources there are some groups of peoples in the northern part of our country those use animal skin as dress.

LOCAL FURNITURE FROM WOODS

There are literally thousands of natural and man-made materials used for making furniture ranging from soft woods, hard woods and various grasses all the way to steel, glass, plastic and a host of man-made materials. However, the most common, versatile and oldest material that is used for making furniture is wood. Almost all varieties of furniture can be made of wood. Wood is used almost universally for furniture construction, due to; It is easily worked. Wood is a soft material and can be easily shaped. It is highly decorative. The finish obtained is very good and occasional polishing can make it look like new at all times. It is poor conductor of heat; therefore, normal changes in the air temperature do not make wood unpleasantly hot or cold to the touch. It is comparatively noise less under movement or impact. *Gabate*, a wooden bowl, usually handmade material which is used among the Oromo's for a long period of time, for serving porridge and similar foods. Traditionally porridge among the Oromo became the favorite food. The wife's prepared the porridge for their husband's at morning by the name *olijeedha*, porridge is prepared from main cereal crops however, and porridge from *qocco* or *enset* is the most favorable (Deressa Debu2018, 56).

Qunna is another traditional material among the Gummay Oromo and its surroundings which became the local furniture. *qunna* is a basket of wove used grass, used for carrying and for storing purposes. It is also used for measuring quantities of grain. According to tradition farmers in Gummay measures quantities of grain in *qunna* *Sirremukaa*, bed from wood is also the local furniture in Gumay which is made from wood however, poorest people slept on piles of straw because they could not afford beds (Informants).

In 1973, an Italian by the name of Senyore Negale established the first saw mill in Gummay. Before the introduction of this modern mill two individuals Tesema Yembero and Ayimalo those come to Gumay from Dawuro were engaged in wood furniture. In 1974 another saw mill was set up as a joint venture compact under the name of *hailu En Sira*. The forest of Gumay and Gatera became the main sources of raw material. *Waddeessaa* (*Cordia africana*), *Hidhessaa* (*Juniperus procera*), *Ejersa* (*Olea europea*), *Birbirsaa* (*Podocarpus falcatus*) are few of them (Informants). The local elders of the study area emolument the saw mill did not work on environmental conservation; it used the forest sources without replacing, this later lead to deforestation and soil erosion to the study area (Ibid). Even the *Derg* established *ye golmasmaselxenxabeya* in 1971, there was no privately owned small wood furniture workshop in Gumay.

Recently students those trained in polytechnic open their own. After 1991 onwards Gumay shows a great development in wood furniture products (Ibid). It became one of the Jimma zone districts where best and quality wood furniture is produced. In the 2000's and 2010's a new style of furniture was introduced. It is also well designed furniture which is beautiful, attractive and convenient (Ibid).

LOCAL FURNITURE FROM GRASS

Fan which is circular, made from *migira*, type of grass or sometimes people made it from the hide of some animal; it is used for fanning the waste materials from grain. *Gingilchaa*, is a circular sieve with woven, basket-like sides, used for straining various materials in the home and in the field.

Gundoo, flat basket of a type of grass called *migira*, it is used for storing *biddeena* after it is baked it is also an instrument for winnowing and a local measure for grain. Alessandro Triulzi and Tamene Bitime have documented the following:

Afaan Oromoo
Gundoo malee

English
without *gundoo*

Maalumaan qadaadaanii How will they cover, it
Qadaadikaa cover it
Yaa Nama gundooho dhuu Oh! Who would make *gundoo*
Lamii malee without one's nation
Maalumaan gamadii How we would be happy?
Gammadii kaa Feel happy
Yaa Nama lammii gobbuu (Alessandro Triuli) . Oh! Those with many nations

The people of Gumay traditionally categorized the making of furniture in to two by saying *hojii Xibbarri*, means furniture that made without far above the ground training. Most of the time these people made furniture from grass, plastic and aluminum. Mostly this furniture is used for decorating the house rooms. *Hojii Ogumma* furniture needs skill. This skill is believed to be transformed from generation to generation only through lineage. Their *ogumma*, work is attached to their lineage name. Most of the time the community appreciates and increased their children's and relatives to engaged in the first one while they despised and discouraged the second, even the community were accorded different pejorative designations. *Sanyii Tuumtuu, sanyiidugdu, sanyiaanxii* and other relative works or skill (Informants). In Gumay mostly the cart workers were marginalized. Regarding this Dena Freeman, appropriately expressed the condition in which the craft workers lived in. To borrow Dena's words:

Throughout southwest Ethiopia there are a number of marginalized minority groups who work as potters, tanners, smiths, weavers, woodworkers and hunters. All these groups are defined by occupation, or notional occupation (i.e. their hereditary occupation, even if they do not practice it any more). In distinction to the majority among whom they live, they are not farmers (Dene, Freeman2005, 1).

Even though the works of hand craft in solving problem of unemployment and changing the life situation of the workers was high, most of these groups were marginalized and have got low status (Tekle Haimanot Gebre Sellassie, Cerulli, Enrico1922, 355). These groups in Gumay had suffered from prejudice, relative isolation in society and lived in very poor conditions (Informants). When we assess the role of the Ethiopian regimes, in changing their situation the oral informants of the study area more than others acknowledged the *Derg* government. According to them, the *Derg* held several meetings to improve the relationship between the occupational and none occupational groups. At these meetings, *Derg* officials ordered the occupational to be proud of being *Tuumtuu, Dugduu, Watta, Dhooftuu*. However, this top-down policy was not totally successful (Ibid). The trade activities of the local furniture in Gumay excluding wood furniture all are going to decline. According to oral sources at the present time there is no individual or group how made furniture from Iron. However, during the imperial time a man by the name of AbbaaGoddu is remembered by oral informants how issued different coins and the stamp of *Dejazmach* Wasane. Such like indigenous knowledge did not properly preserve because of this know a day no one can work as *Tuumtuu* or iron worker in the district (Ibid).

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CRAFTSMEN

The Oromo did not learn from the *gadaa* system to have negative attitude towards occupational groups. Makoo Bili, who was known among the maccaa Oromo as a law maker, beats laws regarding the occupational groups and gave them great attentions (Dirribi Damise2011, 285-288). According to the law of Makoo Bili, the workers of pottery should be guarded by the nation and their place of finishing products (burning place) of pottery should be far away as seventy kilometers from the home. Any class of Oromo should secure and protect their blacksmiths who produce spear for war, knives, bridle and other tools for various works and tanners who made shields (Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau2015,239).

The local views that this study investigate in respect of traditional knowledge, heritages and Cultural values in particular to the condition of the occupational groups in the study area is in argue against to the literature that this study try to assess. According to, oral sources that this study explore the occupational groups are not called by their proper names rather their occupation became their collective names, *warra caamsituu* is the name given to individuals those can drive rain away and who can bring rain, *gandaa warra Dugduuis* literally the village of the tanners, *warra abidaa* to mean the clan of the fire is the name given to the Blacksmith (Informants). They were subjected to all forms of marginalization and discrimination among the people whom they lived in. The blacksmith and tanners were given the name evil eye and were also hated by others. Mohammed further adds that they were freighted and discriminated because "they were thought to possess fantastic supernatural powers which enable them to harm others" (Mohammed1994, 131-132). Oral sources collected by the study states the inferiority of these groups as here under:

Afaan Oromo	English
<i>Firrahalla manna</i>	Rather than having relatives at distance
<i>Olla faaqiwayya</i> (Informants).	The tanner neighbor is better.

In addition to the above proverb there were also other popular proverbs among the Oromo of Gumay which can help as to understand the existence of negative attitude of the local people against to the occupational groups as follows: *kan ulfina hin qaabne bo'iicha tumtuu dhaqxii*. This is literally to mean that: "he who has no respect goes

to the mourning of blacksmith” (Informants). According to oral sources, the occupational have been considered ignoble by the rest of the majority of the local people. The disregard of the occupational groups among the Maccaa Oromo including the Oromo of the study area was characterized by Lambert Bartels as follows:

...Blacksmiths are not allowed to partake...In the making of laws, since they are iron smith, if they would make the law, people would start beating each other. Weavers are always moving their hands, if they would make the law, the people will grow unstable and continue to, get skin disease and start scratching their skin (Lambert, 189).

The social status of the occupational groups was from the low incomes. Only because of their occupation they formed trades with limited groups. For instance the *watta's* occupational groups in Guumaa are having villages and territories distinct from those of the adjacent peoples (Ibid). The *watta* were existed at the lowest level of the social structure. They live in the forest by hunting animals for their subsistence and gathering fire wood for making charcoal (this is the case of *Watta* hunters groups). They were segregated and despised by the rest groups of the population. Economically, as well as politically they were also in the lowest stage of development (Anteneh2018, 5-9). Compared to Gommaa to work as *Dugduu*, *Tumtuu*, and *Dhooftuu* in Guumaay Tobba would in possible because of an intense shame based on what others are thinking and saying about them and their family. Most of them are insulted because of their skill. Occupational groups in the study area suffered from prejudice and relative isolation in society and their settlements tend to be separated from the rest of the community (Informants).

There are some scholars those blamed the Oromo *gadaa* system for the exclusive of the occupational groups from possessing lands. However, Boshara Jarbo in his way explains that in the early days, the *gadaa* system did not allow the handicrafts worker to possess land. The intention was to keep them continue working on their crafts. If they owned the land, they would become independent farmers and it was expected that they would abandon craft. In general, the submerged groups such as *Tumtuu*(blacksmith), *Duugduu* (tanners), *Supheedhooftuu*(potters), *Wayyaadhooftuu*(weavers) and *Mukasoofuu*(wood workers) did not have right over the land at all. These groups provided the Oromo warriors and society with various significant tools. Generally, why the *gadaa* set this law was not to stigmatize these social classes and from the view of inferiority but also not to lose those skillful men (Boshara Jarbo1988, 1). Truly speaking, let allow the *Ogeyii*, Oromo experts traditionally the Oromo under the umbrella of the *gadaa* system would bring even non-Oromo members from social periphery in to communal life through *Guddeffacha* | *Mogassa* or adoption that lend a hand to the adopted to enjoy more or less equal privilege as any Oromo (Mohammed Hassen2015,157b).

Generally, our sources did not tell us full information when and in what way the Oromo developed negative attitudes towards the Occupational groups. But some scholars try to argue in their studies that such negative attitude began at the beginning of the 16th or the 17th centuries (Negaso1984, 125 and Bartles, 190-195). Bula Sirika in his article substantiate that, the growth of feudal relations and accumulation of wealth (above all land after the emergence of monarchal system among the *Maccaa* Oromo's) attributed for the development of the right to land ownership. Further he points that under such system those who were properly engaged in farming land and handicraft works retained only handcrafting activity for they lost access to farm land (Bula2008c). According to the oral sources collected by this study there were some wealth individuals who give land for the craft workers groups. However, the land that given to the craft workers was not ferrite land, the intention of giving land to these groups was to create buffer zone (Informants). Bula substantiate the oral sources ideas. To borrow his words:

The tenants and artisans were not entitled to the qabiyye, land right. Perhaps, if any right to land ownership, they were given by the clan leaders or the wealthy, soressaas well as the kings. In some cases, they were allowed to have only small plots of land around their homes, borqii, fallow land or the less productive plot of land. Even the borqii could be expropriated by the respective soressa if need arise (Bula2008).

The negative attitude of the local people towards the local traditional craft, technology and the peoples engaged in it for a long period of time could also be attributed to the absence of the country's agricultural development.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous knowledge system in furniture making in Gumay District has been investigated in this article. The process of traditional furniture making and its usage is an age old phenomenon in Gumay. However, only few local furniture products are seen in the markets of Gumay District during field work to gather data for this study. Instead the markets have been dominated with plastic and ceramic foreign products. The traditions of using local furniture by the Oromo of the study area have been under serious threat due to several factors like modernization and globalization. Besides, the raw materials for pottery and other furniture making like clay and trees during this study have been severely diminished.

The local skill and knowledge of producing household furniture has also been declined among the wider members of the society and there has been no systematic encouragement to develop local furniture production and its usage. Although the occupational groups played a pivotal role for the expansion and transformation of local knowledge from generation to generation and produced essential tools for agriculture, warfare, beautification and

household furniture, which have been investigated in this work, they have not been encouraged. They were rather subjected to discrimination and prejudices than being respected and supported in Gumay district like other parts of Ethiopia. Despite the presence of profound indigenous knowledge practices and their importance for the livelihood of our society, their role and contribution have not been well studied by professional historians and other social science scholars. There should be a detailed study of different aspects of the traditional knowledge of the local people and the masterpieces they have been producing for centuries that could sustain the Oromo of Gumay before the intrusion of alien products like plastics and ceramics. This study has thus been conducted with the desire and enthusiasm of contributing something to indigenous knowledge, its preservation and passing onto the posterity as the knowledge and the products themselves are the expression of our identity.

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