

provides an excellent analysis of the shifting parameters of labor patterns, commodity production, indigenous resistance, and failed ecological policy in recent decades. Covering the broader time frames of landscape formation and change, however, requires interpretations that can tease out the links between ecological change and indigenous knowledge. Analyses of the legacies of sacredness, the shifts in ascriptions of value to plants and animals, and the ecological history of husbandry practice are needed complements to Sunseri's close reading of the documentary sources. Conservation, and ultimately restoration, depend upon all the historical knowledge we can muster.

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**Elizabeth E. Watson. *Living Terraces in Ethiopia: Konso Landscape, Culture and Development*.** London: James Currey, 2009. xii + 242 pp. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$90.00. Cloth.

Elizabeth Watson is the rare scholar who has mastered the disciplines of anthropology, ethnography, geography, and history. She has synthesized these methodologies in her informative study of the cultural construction of landscape among the Konso of southwest Ethiopia, a work that goes beyond previous studies which have focused on material and climatic processes and neglected the importance of the cultural, social, and political dimensions of landscape construction.

The book contains seven chapters and an introduction that summarizes the research: its objectives, its methodology, and its structure. The first chapter describes Konso's production of a terraced landscape, including how intensive agriculture required a huge "landesque capital" (14) and a high degree of labor. Watson then explains in detail how the landscape is socially produced, focusing on the importance of social networks. In the center of many of the social networks are the *poqallas*, or lineage heads, who often held large plots of especially productive land. The *poqallas* used these large landholdings to access even more labor to produce and maintain the landscape. The *poqallas* also served as spiritual leaders or priests, and in Konso society their spiritual and economic functions were inseparable. The extra labor they received was seen as a form of payment or tribute for their role in keeping the spiritual order. Thus they formed the center of a moral economy, which both served the public good and sustained the produced landscape.

Watson also analyzes the political role of the *poqallas* in the early history of the Konso. The *poqallas* "accumulate[d] symbolic capital" (118) in the form of reputation and prestige, as well as by inheriting it through their

office. Such “symbolic capital” was transformed into labor when people worked for the *poqallas* as a type of payment for their spiritual role in maintaining moral harmony, performing rituals, and consecrating the people. The *poqallas* thus gained both symbolic and economic capital, both of which were used to access labor. After the incorporation of Konso into the Ethiopian Empire, the *poqallas* were made “customary authorities” (127) by the new rulers because of their notable lineages, and this new position afforded them extra land and tax exemptions. Even though their roles as intermediaries for the state changed their position, they continued to be instrumental in producing the landscape and controlling agricultural life.

In chapters 5 and 6 Watson discusses the impact of the post-1974 revolutionary military regime as well as the changes brought by Protestant Christian missionaries. The missionaries and the regime viewed Konso’s traditional practices as backward and oppressive and worked to undermine the *poqallas*’ power. The 1975 land reform, which nationalized the nation’s land, hit the *poqallas* especially hard. Without access to large amounts of land, they were unable to access labor, and the military regime also made it difficult for them to fulfill their ritual roles. Both of these changes had the effect of weakening their position and power.

Watson’s final chapter focuses on the changes in Konso society that took place after the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front replaced the military regime in 1991. The post-1991 government promoted decentralization based on ethnic lines and encouraged individual groups to adhere to their traditional culture. As a small ethnic entity, Konso was afforded the status of Special District within a larger southern regional state. In this context, the *poqallas* acquired renewed importance and began to exercise their traditional roles. This process was not without a challenge, however. Past equation of the *poqallas* with negative representations still lingered, and authorities were reluctant to support this particular institution, which was still linked with oppression. This and other new changes made the reinstatement of the *poqalla* system rather difficult.

In her conclusion, Watson sees opportunities for development initiatives in Konso that will use traditional practices of land maintenance to revive a productive agricultural system and maintain a sustainable landscape. Such initiatives, however, will have to find ways to mobilize the people just as the *poqallas* once did, but without embodying the inequalities of the old system.

This book is well written, thoroughly researched, coherently organized, and free of frustrating errors. If there is a criticism to make, it is about the absence of any demographic analysis that would have provided a more complete picture of land–labor relations in Konso. This minor criticism aside, the book raises critical issues for research in indigenous knowledge and practices in developing societies. It is of timely interest to students of economic history, geography, anthropology, cultural studies, and the environment. Development scholars and organizations as well as policymakers

will also find in it insightful information and sound interpretation. Adding to the book's interest and usefulness are thirty-five photographs by the author depicting various aspects of Konso's social life, livelihood activities, and cultural and natural landscape. Watson is to be commended for a work exceptionally well done.

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