

the claim, noting that factors which might explain the nature of political narratives as well as genocide, such as ethnic demography or the economic value of a social group, fail to travel across countries. As Straus himself acknowledges, however, political elites must work with the social fabric they have if they want to govern (331). While the specifics may vary from case to case, Straus' own analysis suggests that elites faced economic or political incentives to build inclusive, multi-ethnic coalitions at critical junctures in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Senegal. Côte d'Ivoire faced a labor shortage which encouraged immigration as well as internal migration, while Mali has been characterized by cross-cutting identity cleavages. No one ethnic group constitutes a clear majority in Senegal, and Casamance is an important region economically for its agriculture and tourism. These features suggest that elites in these instances faced incentives to engage in inclusive politics, building coalitions across groups in order to come to and maintain state power. Conversely, the cases which resulted in genocide are examples of incentives for exclusive politics. Arab-Muslims controlled the state in Sudan and seemed to have little need to build coalitions with southerners, while Hutus constituted a super majority in Rwanda.

To acknowledge that political narratives have material underpinnings does not necessarily deny the power of ideas. Indeed, the narratives which emerged out of these political coalitions that were formed at critical historical junctures may in turn come to play a key role in perpetuating genocide, as well as other phenomena. In conclusion, Straus' analysis clearly advances our understanding of genocide and powerfully demonstrates the role of ideas. It also raises important questions about the interplay between material and ideational factors, shaping the agenda for future research.

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HORN OF AFRICA

Getnet Bekele. *Ploughing New Ground: Food, Farming & Environmental Change in Ethiopia*. Woodbridge, UK: James Currey, 2017. xv + 207 pp. Maps. Bibliography. Index. \$90.00 Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-847-01174-9.

Over the past century, and especially since the late 1950s, successive Ethiopian regimes have sought to modernize and commercialize agriculture by pursuing often contradictory land policies and development approaches. In *Ploughing New Ground*, Getnet Bekele provides a rare and interesting, spatially disaggregated analysis of what became of farmers, herders, local landscapes, and Ethiopia's overall food security as a result of these efforts. The study focuses on the lake region of Ethiopia's middle rift valley, an area with high agricultural

potential roughly marked by the towns of Bishotu, Hawassa, Adama, and Buta Jira in the north, south, east, and west, respectively. The main finding of the study is that none of those policies and programs has succeeded in completely transforming the region's complex cropping system, diverse herd composition, pragmatic land use patterns, and resilient landscapes. In the absence of structural change in the social and technological organization of production, the majority of people in the region have continued to rely primarily on some combination of crop cultivation and animal husbandry as their culturally preferred, as well as most economically viable, way of life.

Getnet Bekele depicts the nuances of this continuity by combining the methods of critical agrarian history and political ecology. This approach required an understanding not just of the hardships inflicted on farmers and herders by ill-fitting government land policies, but also of the agency of households and community-level institutions, as well as the role of non-human environmental factors in influencing outcomes. The book opens with a panoramic description of the region's salient bio-physical features and political economic conditions as observed in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The most important of these included the prevalence of contrasting micro-ecologies (due to variations in altitude, topography, moisture, etc.), competing, and occasionally symbiotic, land use practices between settled farmers, nomadic herders, diverse ethnic groups, and influential lineage leaders but with fragmented authorities.

The first policy challenge to these features came in the decades leading up to 1916, when the newly centralized government of Ethiopia sought to increase food production and revenue from land by converting communally owned range lands into privately operated agricultural plots. This was to be achieved through cadastral surveys in which all land was measured using a roughly uniform unit called *qalad*. The land units were then to be allocated to individual users either as free grants by the royal court in Addis Ababa or by purchase from local government agents. In *Ploughing New Ground*, Getnet Bekele provides a compelling analysis that challenges earlier studies, which tended to view rural people in this and other parts of Ethiopia as hapless victims of this government policy. He argues that the actual implementation of the *qalad* system unintentionally increased pasture land. The main reason for this outcome was local peoples' strategic refusal to buy any of the newly apportioned land units. In the absence of any buyer, much of the land continued to be used as communal pasture, and this in turn led to the revival of grasslands and nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism. The book does an excellent job of discovering such paradoxes and unintended consequences.

That rural people were not hapless victims of perverse policies is further developed in several subsequent chapters. During the long reign of Haile Selassie (1917–1974), for example, rural people in the region responded creatively to a series of ill-advised policies. One of these policies that received coverage in this and several other studies involved dispossessing land from rural people to accommodate the regime's desire to grant land to urban-based government functionaries and soldiers who fought

against Italian forces. This policy was vigorously implemented especially in pockets of highly desirable fertile areas, such as Ada, Lume, Gimbo, Aje, Meki, and Marqo. However, most of the grant recipients were unable to derive maximum benefits from the land, as they did not farm it by themselves. Instead, much of the benefit went to ambitious, land hungry, local farmers who were able to farm the land in broadly informal sharecropping arrangements. With rising food prices in Addis Ababa and towns elsewhere, the sharecroppers were rewarded with increased income, some of which they invested in purchasing land from their not-so-rich landlords. However, with yet another policy in which land grants became strongly secure private property of the grant holder, the balance started to shift in favor of the landlords. Fortunately, the 1975 land reform arrived just in time, before many sharecropper tenants were evicted by a rising class of urban-based landlords-turned-commercial farmers.

Beyond state action and farmer agency, the book also recognizes the role played by other (non-human) factors in shaping agrarian landscapes and social relations. One such example concerns substantial changes that have occurred due to the advent of specific crops and/or increased cultivation of local cultivars. Drawing on agronomic practices and ecological conditions well-suited to a long list of crops, most notably corn/maize, tef, wheat, chickpeas, chili peppers, and chat, the book provides original insights into what it means for the local landscape and community when households prefer to produce certain crops but not others. Related to this discussion are the ecological and agrarian limits of oxen-drawn plow farming versus hoe cultivation. The effectiveness of each technology varies with local bio-physical features and cropping systems.

The dynamics of change and continuity in the lake region of Ethiopia discussed in this book are strikingly similar to James McCann's now classic historical comparison of agrarian and ecological change in three localities. Richly documented and beautifully written, Getnet Bekele's book merits reading by anyone interested in comparative understanding of agrarian and environmental change, rural development, and food security in Africa and elsewhere.

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EAST AFRICA

Gufu Oba. *Herder Warfare in East Africa: A Social and Spatial History*. Winwick: The White Horse Press. 2017. x + 357 pp. No price given. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1-874267-96-6.

Gufu Oba has attempted a long and very ambitious survey of pastoralist migration, expansion, and warfare over the last seven centuries through a