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Images of Women and the Society's Attitude in Wolaita Proverbs. By Dereje Haile Mamo. Riga, Latvia: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2018. Pp. 171.

This book examines the relationship of traditional proverbs and the role of women, based on an MA thesis from Addis Ababa University. The strength of such the book is that the author has an insider's view of the subject. The weakness of this book is that the author has quoted too many claims and theoretical constructs about women and men in society from outside of Ethiopia, the vast majority from the West.

Many scholars are now studying if/how the proverbs of various cultures depict and reflect the attitudes of societies towards women. Much of the interest in this subject has followed the pioneering work of Mineke Schipper, author of *Source of All Evil: African Proverbs and Sayings on Women* (1991) and *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet: Women in Proverbs from Around the World* (2003). Related to Ethiopia, the work of discussing proverbs and the differences between the sexes began with the work of Jeylan Wolie Hussein (2004, 2005). The author quotes this work in relation to Africa but does not discuss similarities or differences between the Wolaita and Oromo societies in this regard at a more local level.

After discussing foreign ideas, mostly Western, about women for many pages, the author brings up the contrasting concept of "African Feminism" (62). The author approvingly quotes Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, "When African realities are interpreted based on these Western claims, what we find are distortions, complications in language and often a total lack of comprehension due to the incommensurability to social categories and institutions" (p. 62). Based on the study of this Wolaita proverb corpus, the author accepts this theory rather than Western ones. It will be interesting to see how Western ideologies cope with such

a challenge to their views of gender and their simultaneous calls for multiculturalism.

After this lengthy theoretical discussion, the author discusses each of the 90 proverbs in the corpus. Each of the Wolaita proverbs discussed is cited in its original form with an English translation underneath. The proverbs are discussed under categories, such as “Society’s Attitude towards Male and Female Children”, “Women as Other”, and “[Female] Circumcision”. Many of the proverbs show negative associations with women, though not always in ways that are clear to non-Wolaitas, e.g. “A woman is single hearted while a man is multi hearted” (p. 103).

This study is based on traditional Wolaita proverbs, but views about women and men are changing. “Some of my interviewees told me that the change that equally treated men and women in sexual matters came because of the influence of Biblical ideologies after the conversion of Wolaita society into Christianity. They also told me that the issue of women’s rights is primarily improving because of the biblical teachings the society adhered to. I think this needs further study in the Wolaita society because religion has been identified by other researchers like Jeylan Wolie Hussein (2005) as the cause of gender related problems” (p. 102). This finding in the present book is significant, once again contrary to what many Western writers assume and promote. (The interviewees’ comments refer to Protestant Christianity, which is widespread in the Wolaita area, first planted in the area in the 1930’s (Balisky 2009). The Ethiopian Orthodox church was in some Wolaita areas centuries ago.)

Having discussed the proverbs, the author summarizes, “The analysis of the above proverbs shows that the ideology of thinking women as the source of all evil does not hold any ground even in the proverb of a traditional people like Wolaita” (p. 133).

Though the long introductory discussion of foreign theories is not new to most readers of *Proverbium*, the strength of the book is the discussion of women and Wolaita proverbs by an insider. Those who want to spread a contrary agenda will be disappointed with the book. Those who want to read an African’s perspective will be interested in what the author has to say.

References:

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