

Clothing: A Global History or, The Imperialists' New Clothes, by Robert Ross. Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 2008. viii, 221 pp. \$70.95 Cdn (cloth), \$26.95 Cdn (paper).

A photograph of world leaders taken at the 2003 G8 summit held in Evian, France, shows a group of men all dressed in dark suits with the exception of the President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, and the Saudi Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz al Saud, both of whom are wearing what might be termed indigenous dress. It is with this image reproduced on page 1 of *Clothing: A Global History* that historian Robert Ross draws the reader immediately into his remarkable study which examines the reasons that have led to the near global adoption of European-style dress – or, on the contrary, to its sometimes rejection. Pointing out that an equivalent depiction of world leaders several hundred years ago would have displayed an obvious diversity of sartorial styles and no doubt splendour, Ross argues that it would be too simplistic to explain the homogenization of dress solely by the pervasive influence of Westernization, if only because it denies agency to those individuals and societies who choose, or chose, regimes of dress associated with Europe, and, later North America. Rather, the author attributes the phenomenon to a concordance of historical circumstances that can be subsumed under the term “globalization,” understood as a corollary of western colonial, economic, and technological power, and he has in fact arranged the book accordingly into ten short chapters, each adding new elements to, and offering a different perspective on, the global peregrinations of western dress.

The carefully conceived structure permits the reader to grasp the overlapping factors and narratives involved in the politics of dress, but it equally provides the author with the means to write a truly global history detailing dress practices and policies at different epochs and in different parts of the world. Ross weaves together these geographical and historical portraits with such acumen that they not only provide a template for the writing of global history, but often simply delight the intellectually curious reader. However, the fact that *Clothing: A Global History* is an entertaining work of erudition accessible and of use to both a general and academic readership must not overshadow its value for specialists. The book clearly marks out the history and geography of western attire, underscoring its role in the particular marriage of thought and economic theory that served as the intellectual premise of modern capitalism and consumption. It equally reveals the complexity of sartorial practices by demonstrating their intrinsic relationship to social, economic, political, and geopolitical contexts and forces. By situating clothing these intersect, *Clothing: A Global History* makes a significant contribution to the history of dress, the history of imperialism, the economic history of modernity, and, as noted above, to world history.

The first part of the book contextualizes the inquiry, underscoring the link between power and dress, and tracing the effects of modernity on clothing practices in the West. Ross begins by discussing sumptuary laws in both Asia and Europe to show how the regulation of dress was consistently aimed at upholding prevailing social hierarchies or systems of class. The author charts the unique set

of societal factors that led to these laws being strongly contested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, Great Britain, and France, in order to underscore the historic consequences of their disappearance, which in effect brought about the modern democratization of dress, a demand-driven economy of clothing, and the emergence of the culture of fashion. It was, however, prosaic technical developments that made possible the development of ready-to-wear clothes, the founding of the modern retail and fashion industry, and the global spread of such fashion. It will no doubt come as a surprise to most readers that the technology enabling the shift from made-to-measure to *prêt-à-porter* was not uniquely the invention of the sewing machine in the mid-nineteenth century; the tape measure, the paper pattern, and the standardization of sizes played equally important roles. The development of an efficient system of production and distribution of clothing permitted Europe to prosper from its clothing industry and non-western countries to emulate and adopt modern western norms of dress. Ross's discussion of the history of manufactured clothing constitutes one of the most interesting aspects of the book.

The following chapters address the adoption of European clothing in non-European contexts from colonial India to white settlements in Australia, delineating the complex politics underwriting dress and its reception. For example, the chapter examining the imposition by missionaries of their sense of dress morality on various groups of "natives" reveals how these clothes often became social markers, not of propriety, but of status for their wearers. That western dress operates as a potent symbol for western power is perhaps best exemplified by the internalization of the idea that western-style dress constitutes a necessary accoutrement of modernity and a sign of "civilization," thereby elucidating why rulers as different as Russia's Peter the Great or the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Atatürk, decreed their citizens to adopt variants of it. However, in colonial contexts there developed a paradox that continues today, namely that societies, social elites, or nationalist movements seeking to counter western hegemony and pose as equals with the West may don western attire or, on the contrary, consciously opt for reinvented indigenous traditions of dress. The author devotes the last chapter to gender to give emphasis to his idea that all regimes of dress are gendered. Having established in the first chapters that what is considered prototypical western dress is a clearly gendered system prescribing sober dark suits for men, and hence for the public domain, with women, once relegated to the private sphere, becoming the sole bearers of colour and sartorial "frivolity," Ross examines the relationship between gender, dress, and the "West" in early-twentieth-century China, post-independence Anglo-Africa, and present-day England with regard to visibly Muslim clothing such as the headscarf.

One might think that covering such a vast array of periods and places might lead to errors of historical accuracy, and yet in my own field, that of Islamic history, the only critique I have to proffer with regard to the work is that "Koran" is more accurately spelled as "Qur'an." *Clothing: A Global History* is a well-researched and well-written work. Packed with information and avoiding unnecessary jargon, the book demonstrates how pathways of trade and taste abet global interconnectedness, but equally how they are shaped, directly or indirectly, by

power; only the most powerful possess the authority to establish norms that will be copied or internalized by others. From this perspective, and particularly at this time in which non-western powers are on the rise and the West is oft perceived as waning, Ross makes us wonder how present realities will shape the sartorial politics and practices of tomorrow.

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Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007. xx, 536 pp. \$90.00 US (cloth), \$34.95 US (paper).

Looking at my old, well-read translation of José Gentil Da Silva's *Histoire maritime des Portugais*, I realize how Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto offer us a chance to revisit and explore anew the colonial endeavours of the Portuguese sailors and adventurers.

Portuguese Oceanic Expansion was born out of the need "to provide the English-speaking academic world with a better, more up-to-date intellectual resources" (p. xi). Setting aside Da Silva's work and browsing through library catalogues, one does not find many works covering the story of one of the first and most important European expansions, with the exception of A.J.R. Russell-Wood's twenty-year-old overview.

The book's fourteen thematic chapters have been divided into four parts, giving attention to the economy and society (part I), politics and institutions (part II), the cultural world (part III), and a comparative look at the Portuguese undertaking from the global point of view (part IV).

The first part of the book is well-structured and informs us about the two main economic systems that made up Portugal's commercial world. One of them was the Estado da Índia, centred on Brazil. On the one hand, we learn about the huge quantities of pepper and other spices brought home from Asia, on the other we learn about the cost of these undertakings. According to the enclosed tables, profit was surprisingly low, expenses were growing, and every year witnessed a number of ships disappearing due to stormy seas, tempests, ship damage, and pirates.

In the following chapters, which make up the second part of the volume, we find further information essential for any student of history, as the authors explain the mechanisms of trade and conquest of the Portuguese economic empire. This part is devoted to the institutions responsible for the functioning of the empire and is fundamental for the understanding of the running and coordination of the enormous (compared to the size of the country) trade efforts of the Portuguese.