

of different parts of the continent, interpreting the evidence as material traces of micro-histories which he locates in a medieval global perspective.

Textual sources include Chinese accounts of eastern Africa dating from the eighth and fifteenth centuries, Marco Polo's thirteenth-century description of Madagascar and the Horn of Africa, a fourteenth-century Italian description of the Saharan trade, and late fifteenth-century Portuguese texts on the 'discovery' of Atlantic and Indian Ocean Africa. However, the bulk of the author's documentary sources come from the Islamic world: geographies, travelers' accounts, correspondence, and administrative reports. Archaeological data provide valuable information relating to elite material culture, as revealed in architecture, for example, Nubian cathedrals and monasteries, Ethiopian churches, Great Zimbabwe constructions, as well as in richly endowed elite tombs, such as in Ethiopia and in the Middle Senegal Valley, and in buried 'treasures' discovered at sites in Ethiopia and southern Africa.

It might seem that the limitations of the source material would produce disjointed narratives and preclude the construction of a synthesizing theme-driven narrative; however, this is not the case. Through the African golden age metaphor, the author is able to shift from the fact and event-driven optic of the sources to engage with broader issues concerning connections between continental history and world history. The reader gains not only a sense of upper-class material life and the circulation of prestige objects, but also a vantage point on political, cultural, and commercial milieus, and their interactive networks. Sources offer vignettes of particular episodes, such as a Malian ruler's early fourteenth-century Atlantic voyages, commercial transactions and political interactions, and events, such as religious conversion. Fauvelle gives the African Middle Ages an 'identity' and demonstrates that this phase of African history is a rich and fruitful academic field of study. While this proposition is self-evident for Africanists, it would be a revelation for non-Africanist scholars as well as university students with an interest in the African past. Fauvelle has written an intellectually provocative and insightful study that offers interested Africanists new channels of historiographical inquiry and new conceptual possibilities.

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FASHION AND BODY POLITICS IN IMPERIAL SUDAN

Khartoum at Night: Fashion and Body Politics in Imperial Sudan.

By Marie Grace Brown.

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Khartoum at Night: Fashion and Body Politics in Imperial Sudan, by Marie Grace Brown, is a well-researched and well-written volume guided by an insightful understanding of

Sudanese society in general and Sudanese women's history and social status in particular. The book uses a feminist scholarly lens, which results in a rich coverage of a variety of themes and topics. It considers, for example, women's bodies and dress as vehicles of traditions and politics; honor and respect; international politics and economy; the political economy of women's dress; the workings of patriarchy and class; gender and agency; education and social mores; as well as forms of resistance and transgression by individual women. All of the above issues are woven together in a spectacular publication proving that intersectionality is central to gender and women's issues.

At the center of Brown's analysis is the *tobe*, a 4.5 meter-long piece of cloth that Sudanese women have worn over their dresses since the late eighteenth century (9). Brown notes that, as an imported garment, the *tobe* 'proclaimed a woman's connection to an expansive global economy, far beyond the boundaries of her town' (10). When the British administration started a project for growing cotton, the Gezira Scheme, in 1925, the harvest went to England and *tobes* were manufactured there from that cotton. To date, some *tobes* are still imported from England. However, whether they are made locally or abroad, white *tobes* are marketed to women of all ages as respectable dress, and also as appropriate for professional settings. Women perform respectability by wearing white in public, which helps them to manage the social and legal restrictions that impinge upon their mobility.

Brown links fashion as an 'indicator of self and place' (10). Women's *tobes* may have changed in texture and design through the years, yet they have not lost their Sudanese identity. Indeed, Brown writes, 'the tradition that women evoked in their *tobes* was not a period of isolation, but a centuries-long history of luxury, fertility, and transnational trade' (11). In the colonial era, British administrators promised not to interfere in the traditional and religious lives of the Sudanese society, and they respected the *tobe* as an appropriate form of female dress (11). That approach indicates that women's traditions played an active part in making British colonial policy.

In her discussion of colonial education, Brown conveys a clear understanding of its social effects and relationship to dress. Sudanese girls typically only gained access to a minimal education, so as not to surpass that which boys obtained. Girls' education also focused on reinforcing gender roles: for example, sewing, cooking, and managing family hygiene. Brown astutely claims that, in this regard, girls' education was actually a men's issue, rather than a women's one. That is, girls' education was designed to benefit men; Sudanese girls were taught to 'raise their children, comfort their husbands, and understand their religious duties' (84).

The patriarchal norms that afforded girls little to no education hampered the marital prospects of many women, as some men preferred educated women from non-Sudanese families or from other countries. The women's magazine *Sawt al-Mar'a*, established in 1955, started to publish articles that criticized Sudanese men for marrying 'foreign women', and they rightly linked the practice to girls' education.

Brown does describe some different types of education available to girls in imperial Sudan, such as the Omdurman Midwifery Training School (MTS), which was managed by the Wolf sisters, Mabel and Gertrude. MTS midwives and attendants wore, of course, proper women's attire: white dresses and white *tobes*.

Although physical and domestic violence against women was not commonly discussed in imperial Sudan, Brown highlights other types of violence to which women were subject, such as restriction of movement and social ostracism. As an example, Brown analyzes the case of Malakat al Dar Mohamed, who was born in 1922 and is considered Sudan's first female novelist (141). Members of Malakat al Dar's family objected to her education and many of her other activities, and they especially objected when she started to promote girls' education. As a result of violence that she suffered at her brother's hand, she fled El Obied, the city of her birth, and to avoid a forced marriage, she directly petitioned Ina Beasley, the Controller of Girls' Education in Sudan. Beasley wrote a letter in her official capacity, stating that Malakat al Dar was a government employee and could not marry because it would interfere with her professional duties. In effect, Malakat al Dar's personal issue became a public and political one. In 1969, Malakat al Dar was promoted to the position of educational inspector, and she was directed to move back to her hometown. But on the eve of her departure to El Obied, Brown reports that 'Malakat and her husband had a heated argument. A short time later Malakat al Dar was found dead' (142).

Malakat al Dar's 'untimely and violent end' demonstrates the risks that women experienced when they asserted their agency (142). Action made women visible and hence vulnerable in a society where their bodies were disciplined through dress and where opportunities for education and access to public life were restricted. Women's bodies were — and still are — governed by their gender and social status. A good woman was to be circumscribed, to bear face marks for purposes of beautification and ethnic identification, and to wear clothes that indicated her class and conveyed respectability. In Brown's words: 'As shared experiences, body rituals determined who was or was not a part of one's social world. In ways that could not be denied, gender expectations, obligations, and responsibilities were written on the body' (148).

Brown's discussion of trends in *tobe* designs and names is illuminating and complements her discussion of Sudanese women's awareness and their efforts to use their dress to make political and social statements. The names given to different *tobes* marking political moments, such as *Ousbou` Almara'a* (Women's week), *Liq'a Assayidain* (Meeting of the two dignitaries), and *Alistiqlal* (Independence), were adopted during the first years of independence, which was declared in 1955. I remember a *tobe* named *Eyoon Zarooq* (Zarooq's eyes). It was inspired by Mubarak Zarouq, a lawyer who served as the first Foreign Affairs Minister after independence. He was famous for his politics, good looks, and, especially, his large eyes. Naming *tobes* is like posting flags on the timeline of Sudan's political and social history.

A minor critique of the book is nonetheless merited. Brown's claim that the *tobe* is 'an entirely Sudanese fashion not shared by other women' is widely believed to be true by Sudanese people (11). However, in the 1960s and 70s, Sudanese became aware that the *tobe* was also worn in western Sahara, Mauritania, Chad, and parts of Niger, with different prints on less sheer fabric.

This engaging book is recommended for students of the liberal arts, at both undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as for scholars and general readers interested in Sudan, the history of women and women's issues, and the history of clothing.

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