

The 'skirt of 1,000 pleats' worn by the Flower Among people in Vietnam



TEXTILES: A World Tour - Discovering Traditional Fabrics and Patterns

by Catherine Legrand
Thames & Hudson,
pb, £19.99

Clothes are more than just clothes. Catherine Legrand informs us in her introduction: 'Colour, shape, fabric and decorative details all provide codified information.' How we dress is who we are.

Her book, then - stitched together like

a patchwork - reads the clues provided by traditional forms of dress to uncover a story of slow decline. Women of the Vietnamese Lolo community are 'the uncontested queens of appliqué', the thousands of triangles that make up their costumes representing the empire over which the Lolo people once ruled. Now, they mostly wear trousers and T-shirts.

That such traditions are dying is partly down to economics: the Rajasthani *ghaghara* (skirt) that Legrand admires is now made of synthetic material, not cotton, because it lasts three years, dries in no time, and doesn't fade in the sun. But it's also about Western style taking its toll, particularly among men; the first to

go is the shirt, then the trousers, until only the accessories - the belts and hats - remain. Yet it's possible to achieve a striking combination of the two: a photo from the Guatemalan region of Todos Santos shows a pair of young men wearing baggy trousers, untucked shirts and baseball caps, but all made in the local bright, striped fabric.

Other compromises abound: the tilak, the dot painted on the forehead to represent the third eye that sees the truth behind appearances, now comes in the form of a self-adhesive disc. Legrand's book, full of fascinating detail, is comprehensive, colourful and vibrantly illustrated to boot. **MICK HERRON**



THE LOCAVORE'S DILEMMA: In Praise of the 10,000-Mile Diet
by Pierre Desrochers and Hiroko Shimizu
Perseus, pb, £18.99

Pierre Desrochers and Hiroko Shimizu have gone all out to make their case for the 'globavore' diet, to ground it in their interpretation of science and to make it look unbiased. Science, after all, isn't supposed to take sides. But Desrochers is a fellow of the Political Economy Research Center, a free-market environmental think-tank funded by

industry that gave George W Bush environmental advice during his presidency.

The authors acknowledge their links with industry but dismiss their relevance. As a result, their tone can only be described as arrogant, snotty even, and defensive. Local-food advocates are 'romantics', 'protectionists' or worse, 'cultists', while those who advocate a global diet are 'rational' and 'scientific'.

There is certainly a lot to chew on here and some starting points on which many could agree. But what happens as our energy and economic infrastructures collapse? The authors argue that a freer market will sort it all out and that peak oil is a myth - and even if it isn't, there is plenty of liquefied coal, shale oil and tar sands to fuel the global diet. The book

takes a darker turn when the authors suggest that we need to feed the poor because we need them as labour.

The food system (and the economic system on which it depends) is broken and wasteful. No amount of 'eat global' cheerleading can change that. The world is finite, the climate is changing, oil and water are running out, and what Desrochers and Shimizu have to offer is, in the end, mostly sarcasm.

Local-food advocates don't wish to return to the past, they wish to move forward in a way that is resource appropriate and in line with human individual and cultural needs. Many would be tempted to ignore this book. I would argue that they should read it and know their enemy. **PAT THOMAS**