

4<sup>th</sup> February 2023

## Culture

**“Make no mistake. We are here on Indigenous land, not because we were invited in, but because we forced them to the corners of society and stripped them of them of their dignity and human rights.”**

Shahzi Bokhari, *What Bodily Autonomy Means – Raise the Hammer*

My reflection recently on “unanswerable questions” such as “Why does a postman wear shorts in the winter?” elicited an interesting response. “Postal operatives,” a friend suggested, “would be better wearing kilts all year. That way they would be warm in the winter and cool in the summer – with plenty of air circulating round the parts that needed it the most.”

As a kilt-wearer, I know the truth of that: warm when warmth is needed, cool when it’s too warm. That’s the wonder of Scotland’s national dress. So, when I follow the Tartan Army abroad – as I’ll be doing with friends for a Scotland match this year – we’ll be dressed for *all* weathers.

A kilt is a wonderful piece of kit. There can be eight yards of material in a good kilt, and, pleated around your “nether regions”, it gives all the protection needed. Most kilts are pleated to match the style of the tartan, so the pattern shows all the way across the pleated area. Kilts designed to a “military cut”, where the stripes of the pattern on the pleats are close together, is made of even more – and often heavier – material.

In Scotland, each clan has its own tartan. In the Highland Clan system, there was loyalty only to God, the monarch and the Clan Chief. Following the Jacobite rising of 1745, the government of King George II, fearful of the rebellious clans and their allegiance to the “king over the water” and not the British monarchy, imposed the “Dress Act” of 1746, outlawing all items of Highland dress, including kilts, to suppress highland culture. The clans were “stripped ... of their dignity and human rights”. The penalties were severe; six months’ imprisonment for a first offence and seven years’ transportation for a second. The ban remained for 35 years.

The suppression of an indigenous culture is to be condemned. As Shahzi Bokhari suggests above, too much damage has been done over the years by imperialist oppression and the subjugation of tradition. Let culture flourish. Where it’s been destroyed, let it rise again. If I can have my kilt, surely every society deserves its own “dignity and human rights”.

### A prayer for today

*Made in your image, Lord, we all matter. So shouldn't we matter to each other? Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>