The recording and reception of Portuguese expansion from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and its role in the development of imperial cultural identity is the focus of Diogo Ramada Curto’s present volume. Originally published in Portuguese in 2009, the book comprises nineteen chapters (or discourses, as the author prefers to call them) and is divided into three parts. Each chapter is a case study that illuminates a discursive moment in the history of the Portuguese Empire and its moral dimension or political lesson. On a deeper level, the stated goal is to dismantle the internationally accepted neo-lusotropical celebration of empire cultivated under Salazarism. More concretely, it is an attempt to depoliticize the Portuguese Empire’s formation and demonstrate the necessity of examining both dogmatic interpretations and doubts concerning imperial identity. By reconstructing competing views of the agents involved in imperial formation, Curto successfully debunks the notion that the empire was a global integrating force. Rather, he shows that the imperial experiment was one of various configurations and transformations, as objections to imperial expansion are discussed alongside ardent justifications. These justifications evolved over time as chivalric impulses soon gave way to economic and even ethnographic rationalizations in the face of humanist and enlightened criticism. Therefore, the book investigates not only the physical but also spiritual and intellectual expansion of empire through multiple discursive channels ranging from Jesuits and colonial officials to slave interpreters and creole collaborators. By dissecting competing discourses and their employment, Curto is free to highlight the influence of negotiation, exploitation, and pushback on Portuguese culture—themes that have otherwise been largely neglected in Portuguese historiography.

In addition to these arguments, Curto declares that in order to adequately trace imperial cultural formation, one must investigate four crucial aspects. The first is the comparative nature of empire. The opening chapters compare the effects of expansion and the influence of classical and Italian models during the early centuries of the Portuguese Empire. Subsequent portions of the text treat the use of Portuguese history in the broader political economy of eighteenth-century Europe as the English, Dutch, and French attempted to justify their own imperial endeavors. The second as-
pect is an analysis of reactions and local responses—both in how the Portuguese attempted to rebuild the perspectives of contacted cultures through the written word and how they themselves were perceived by foreign authors. Regarding this point, the very focus of the book makes the source material examined throughout Eurocentric. This is not a problem considering what the author is attempting. The third aspect is a broadening of the source material beyond what is actually literary. In addition to the traditional reports, chronicles, manuscripts, published histories, and epic poetry, Curto analyzes the discursive elements of cartography, printing, and public ceremony. By so doing he effectively links the increase in discourses to the institutionalization of imperial authority in a given locale. The last aspect considered, a reflection on historiographic models and ideological organisms, pervades the text as Portuguese imperial culture is analyzed as both transformer and transformed through the process of expansion. This includes—but is not limited to—detailed discussions on evolving Portuguese identity based on the Catholic experience and changes to the Portuguese language.

The source material throughout the work is impressive and stems from years of archival research in five countries. However, the book with its many chapters, as Curto admits, has a “fragmentary and incomplete character” (p. 1). Combined with the theoretical underpinnings of the topics discussed (i.e., identity, cultural formation, language evolution, etc.), the work is clearly intended for an academic audience. Still, the contributions are multiple. For studies on imperial history the work is of inestimable value beyond simply providing a much-needed Portuguese example. The inclusion of negotiation and pushback as key factors in imperial cultural formation provides a fuller picture of topics that are misunderstood at best and understudied at worst. At a more basic level, the volume exposes the anglophone researcher to the complexities of the Portuguese Em-

pire and its unique character that varied according to time and place.
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