other things, attempts to challenge the lack of knowledge, interest and credibility around design from the government and the public. It presents designers with possibilities and these spaces enable designers – specifically those who feel on the margins – to feel safe to share who they are. Most importantly, it provides hope and reasons to stay and contribute to the development of design culture(s).

1 In Jordan, admission to design requires a high school GPA of 60-65 per cent without the need to submit a portfolio.

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Anti-Fashion: using the sari to decolonise fashion

Tanveer Ahmed

During my interview for the role of a fashion design lecturer in London in the early 2000s, I suggested that if appointed I would run workshops on how to make non-western garments such as the *shalwar kameez* or the sari. After the interview I was taken aside by the course leader and told "not to bother with that multicultural fashion". This left me with the feeling that looking at garments from the Indian subcontinent in contemporary fashion practices in the UK was not just unfashionable, but irrelevant in the context of contemporary fashion curricula and practice.

Today, some estimated 16,000 fashion design students graduate annually from over 326 fashion degree programmes in the UK (Eagle, 2013), with an increasing number of these students coming from international and Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (BAME). Yet, in the sector of art and design higher education, teaching staff continue to be predominantly white (Richards, 2017) with fashion design curricula centred around Western-led design and scholarship. How might fashion educators therefore better integrate multiple perspectives and knowledges into fashion design pedagogies? The focus here is on fashion design practice, however, the need for more inclusive and diverse fashion knowledges across all fashion design disciplines - from fashion business, fashion history to styling and fashion photography - is gaining increasing recognition (Kent, 2018).

Some fashion design degree programmes do successfully reflect debates around wider ethical issues concerned with sustainability, climate change and consumption (Fletcher & Grose, 2012). A number of undergraduate fashion design programmes in the U.K are establishing more sustainable focused fashion design (see The Centre for Sustainable Fashion, London College of Fashion) and ethical and critical fashion in the US (see Critical Fashion and Social Justice, Parsons School of Design, The New School). Yet, with increasing industry-led projects in design schools, the normalisation of industry internships and an often-uncritical emphasis on neoliberal capitalist modes of production, there are

calls for sustainable fashion design debates to more fully tackle issues linked to consumerism, luxury fashion, ethical trade and cultural appropriation (Lavergne, 2016; Kent, 2018). To dissect and understand these debates, it is crucial to address the relationship between hegemonic modes of fashion production and histories of racism, patriarchy and capitalism. How could fashion design education address European colonialism and imperialism, economic exploitation and racial hierarchies related to dominance and control?

This challenge is complex. Design historian Cheryl Buckley has noted that amongst all design disciplines, fashion design's constant experimentation and innovation contributes to its position as 'arguably the most extreme manifestation of modernism' (Buckley, 1986, p.13). This sped-up and endless search for the new signifies fashion design at the apex of capitalist design practices. There is a need, therefore, to expose how capitalism operates as a driving force in design practices; and, capitalism's entangled relationship with patriarchy and racism. It is this relationship between fashion design and capitalism that is rooted in the oppressive structures of Eurocentric bias in fashion design. It is only by deconstructing how fashion design shapes sexism, ableism, racism, xenophobia, class exploitation, homophobia and transphobia that alternative and inclusive – decolonial feminist - forms of fashion design can be imagined; and, racialized and gendered hierarchies in fashion design education can be resisted.

Racism in the Fashion Design Process
Several fashion theorists have argued that cultural hierarchies have, over many years, become embedded in fashion design cultures through the continued reproduction and entrenchment of a binary that has been created between ideas about a 'modern' west and a 'traditional' non-west (Eicher, 2001; Niessen, 2003; Hoskins, 2014).

Fashion Collections
— The Knitted Circle, 1969
The Ukraine and 'Chevron Shawl', S/S 1970
New York and 'Indian Feathers', A/W 1970
Elizabethan Slashed Silk Collection, S/S 1971
Paris, Frills and Button Flowers, A/W 1971
The Lily Collection, A/W 1972
The Shell Collection, A/W 1973
The Ayers Rock Collection, A/W 1974
The Cactus Cowboy Collection, S/S 1976
The Mexican Collections, 1976-78
The Conceptual Chic Collection, 1977-78
The Painted Lady Collection, A/W 1978
The Chinese Collection, S/S 1980
The Chinese Constructivist Collection, A/W 1980
The African Collection, S/S 1981
The Renaissance/Gold Collection, A/W 1981
[...]

A list of fashion collections from 1969 onwards, The Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection

This can be seen in many fashion collections both past and present; including, for example, the designs of celebrated British fashion designer Zandra Rhodes. Since the 1960s Rhodes has been practising as a fashion designer and continues to exert an influential role in the fashion design community as the owner of *The Fashion and Textile Museum*, London; and, recipient of a damehood from the Queen in 2015. Her archive offers insights into how ideas of cultural difference are typically drawn on as part of the fashion design process. Rhodes celebrates the inspiration she has taken from predominantly non-western cultures, such as Mexico, China, India and many more (figure 1). The ways in which marginalised communities and their symbols and motifs are used as design inspiration and as a creative strategy by fashion designers in the west, such as in the designs of Rhodes, can often result in stereotypical representations and can also be seen in the work of many other western fashion designers, season after season: from over twenty years ago in John Galliano Dior's *A Voyage on the Diorient Express* (1998), or the *Story of the Princess Pocahontas* collection which misrepresented and exoticized native American

dress and culture to the more recent use of offensive Blackamoor imagery in Dolce and Gabbana's 2013 collection and Gucci's A/W 2018 balaclava jumper which resembled 'Blackface'.

It should therefore come as no surprise to regularly see designs in the sketchbooks of fashion students which spectacularize non-European cultures through their representations based on 'cultural appropriation', exoticism, the 'Oriental Other' and countless variations of racial stereotyping.

The on-going lack of criticality in fashion design education that results in the 'othering' of marginalized groups in the design process has been reflected upon by the academic Angela McRobbie. She characterises this dominant design approach rooted in simplistic, essentialist binary concepts of west/non-west as an approach that relies on the "uncritical plundering and exoticisation of other cultures in search of new fashion ideas" (McRobbie, 1998, p. 11). The origins of this contemporary fashion design approach can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Paris emerged as both fashion and colonial capital (Rovine, 2009). In her study of how French fashion takes inspirations from African influences, academic Victoria Rovine asserts that "Africanisms in French and other Western fashion design continue to emerge out of a globetrotting, decontextualized, and ahistorical practice of borrowing that differs little from early twentieth-century practices." (Rovine, 2009, p.59)

Rovine highlights two dominant design approaches in African inspired fashion designs: 'reproductive' where elements of African dress are adapted to Western design; and, 'mimetic' where African imagery is depicted through clothing' (Rovine, 2009, p.56). These design approaches continue today, Rovine argues, based on both a 'desire to civilize (Westernize) colonial subjects, and to draw on their "primitive" practices in order to enrich French culture.' (Rovine, 2009, p.59).

Whilst Rovine also acknowledges a minority of fashion designers who seek to subvert this design approach, her overall point is that the global dominant way of designing fashion reproduces asymmetric power relationships between the colonizer and colonized. Elite fashion designers and international fashion houses continue to culturally construct marginalized people and cultures in the context of *their* choice. And, the ways in which the powerful fashion industries circulate globally means that this dominant design approach cannot been seen in isolation from continued and increasing racial divisions in wider society across Europe and beyond (Hoskins, 2014).

In these contexts, challenging how fashion design students are taught to design in higher education needs careful consideration. There is a longstanding debate amongst academics, educators and policy makers about the role the education system places in societal inequalities. Firstly, education systems continue to play an important role in reproducing racial inequalities: from racial discrimination in the interview selection processes to western-led curricula and teaching resources (Gillborn, 2008; Gabriel, 2013). It is a challenge to better understand how design activities in fashion design education (student's work and curricula) encourage practices that marginalize and 'Other' different racial groups (Puwar & Bhatia, 2003; Kondo, 1997; Geczy, 2013). Secondly, pedagogical interventions have been encouraged as a powerful way to disrupt hegemonic thinking and to achieve the aims of social justice and equality (hooks, 1994 and 2000; Giroux, 2005).

Fashion design educators have a responsibility to address how racism shapes fashion design practices and how this impacts on the ways in which they teach fashion design. Yet, the present situation is bleak. In the article *Design for/by "The Global South"* (2017), design theorist Tony Fry notes that a great deal of design education, "is redundant (it is about the past of designing, not its future) and, notwithstanding exceptions, is delivered mostly by educators who themselves have not been adequately educated" (Fry, 2017, p.35).

Decolonising Fashion Design Education

Challenging the dominant narratives in fashion design practices that maintain that the west has fashion and the non-west does not can provide a pertinent starting point for those fashion design educators looking to develop an alternative education model that disrupts and de-centres Eurocentric biases in the design process. An increasing recognition of this issue in the field of fashion studies has resulted in an 'epistemological turn' towards the establishment of critical global fashion perspectives (Gaugele and Titton, 2019, p. 11). This shift enables a more critical study of fashion by drawing attention to how fashion produces racism through designs that culturally appropriate different cultures; the exclusion of non-white bodies in the fashion media and catwalk shows; and, the global status of European and America fashion collections and fashion weeks.

While a number of fashion scholars have analysed structures of racism in contemporary fashion design, less attention has been given to how these structures have historically been embedded in fashion theories. Fashion scholars Gaugele and Titton link key writings on fashion by early scholars to racist thinking to argue that the influential writing by author Georg Simmel (Simmel 1904) suggests that marginalized groups would be afraid of "anything new" and uses terms such as "savages" and "primitive races" to describe non-European people (Gaugele & Titton 2014, p. 165). While Simmel's writing is from over a century ago, its influence persists in fashion theory today, remaining one of the key authors for fashion students of all disciplines to read (McNeil 2016). Indeed, in the recent book *Thinking Through Fashion* (Rocamora and Smelik, 2016), a chapter on Simmel uncritically appraises his contribution to the study of fashion, arguing that Simmel's legacy has been to help define fashion as 'an outstanding mark of modern civilization' (Blumer cited in McNeil, 2018, p. 78).

To resist these problematic and exclusionary concepts of fashion a number of fashion commentators have used alternative ways to define fashion practices, such as unfashionable or anti-fashion (Davis 1992; Moors and Tarlo, 2013; Hoskin,s 2014). In her book Re-Orienting Fashion (2003), Sandra Niessen also specifically explores the term anti-fashion as a way to challenge coloniality thinking in fashion. Taking inspiration from Ted Polhemus and Linda Proctors's Fashion and Anti-Fashion (1978), the term *anti-fashion* is used to define all forms of fashion, both western and non-western, that have been relegated as outside hegemonic capitalist fashion systems (Polhemus and Proctor, 1978).

The concept of *anti-fashion* can be seen in many examples of counter hegemonic fashion, for example in fashion blogs that have been set-up by communities as a result of their exclusion from fashion discourse: *Singh Street Style* by UK based Pardeep Singh Bahra who started his blog documenting fashion from the Sikh community; Bryanboy from the Philippines who explores (LGBT+) dress from a Asian perspective; modest fashion *Tokio* by Dina Torkia part of the trend of 'hijabi bloggers', amongst many others. Further examples of *anti-fashion* can be seen in the ways in which fashion culture is curated through exhibitions as seen in Trading Styles (2013) at Weltkulturen Museum, (Frankfurt, Germany) where four international fashion labels were asked to create an exchange between global street style and prototype ideas for new fashion collections by responding to the museum's ethnographic collection; or, *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* (2018) at The Museum of Modern Art (New York, US) which shows 101 fashion items, such as the sari and motorbike jacket to show the interconnectedness between different fashion cultures; and, finally, the thousands of fashion designers from the Global South, such as Ituen Basi, a contemporary Nigerian designer drawing on Nigerian heritage to challenge dominant western fashion traditions. In all these contexts the boundaries between notions of fashion and anti-fashion are challenged and blurred.

To develop a narrative in fashion that includes a wider range of counter hegemonic fashion voices, Niessen proposes a new concept of fashion - *fashionalization* – "a process of fashion in which anti-fashion is produced and reintegrated (fashionalized)" (Niessen, 2003, p.263). Adapting the term, originally coined by Polhemus and Proctor (1978) to describe the appropriation of *anti-fashion* by fashion, Niessen argues that shifting this dominant conceptual binary of West/non-West in fashion design to fashion/*anti-fashion* opens space to examine "the relations of power that operate between fashion and anti-fashion (Niessen 2003, P. 244). This approach is echoed in Arturo Escobar's concept of pluriversal design in which "nondualist conceptions" of design are central to challenging capitalist and coloniality thinking (Escobar, 2017, p. 52).

Such examples of *anti-fashion* and discourses around resisting fashion are rarely included in fashion design pedagogies. Indeed, Niessen asserts that most fashion design students only learn about "popular conventional" notions of fashion, such as that found in mainstream fashion media, fashion retail and designer collections (Niessen, 2003, p. 263). Dominant discourses around fashion practices in education continue to narrowly focus on Western Anglo-American popular concepts of fashion centred on designers from the fashion capitals of Paris, Milan, London and New York. For example, I regularly ask fashion students in my classes to name one contemporary fashion designer practising in Africa; the room usually remains silent, despite Africa having fifty-four countries from which students could pick just one designer. Therefore, the project to re-define fashion as *fashionalization* can offer great potential to educators to help integrate a wider range of perspectives and challenge the status quo in fashion design pedagogies.

My mother wearing a sari, circa 1970, The Chelsea Flower Show, London, UK.

Decolonial Fashion Design

In 2017 at The University of Arizona, bell hooks concluded her talk *Revolution and Resistance: Ending Domination* by asking a question, "What do decolonized images look like?" (hooks, 2017). Using this as a starting point and influenced by the concept of *fashionalization*, I have been exploring how to integrate counter-hegemonic narratives and voices into fashion design pedagogies to develop a critique against Eurocentric biases in fashion. In this context, drawing on Black and Women of Colour feminist literature has been useful because it emphasises challenging structural racism, sexism and class hierarchies using an intersectional approach (hooks, 1994; Mohanty, 2003, Mirza & Joseph, 2013; Ahmed, 2017). The challenge, therefore, is to expose systems of inequality in education and this requires the "decolonialisation of [our] minds and our imaginations" for both students and teachers

(hooks, 1994, p. 47). hook's call is rooted in a long tradition of feminist scholarship that argues how political issues cannot be addressed separately from the personal (hooks, 1994; Ahmed, 2017). Thus, adopting a decolonial approach in fashion design pedagogies has the potential to establish a politics of diverse representation based on a critique of the fashion system and an integration of those fashion narratives that are ignored by the mainstream to create a system of valuation to embrace more pluralistic narratives.

The feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty, characterises the practice of decolonization as a process of active withdrawal from and resistance to structures of 'psychic and social domination' through 'self-reflexive collective practice' (Mohanty, 2003, p. 243). There are clear points of connection between what Mohanty is proposing and how to experiment with decolonising fashion design pedagogies. Mohanty proposes a pedagogical strategy called *The Feminist Solidarity or Comparative Studies Model.* The framework for this pedagogical model is based on locating similarities and differences to develop Mohanty's key concept of solidarity, described as "mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities" (Mohanty, 2003, p.7).

Translated into the context of fashion design pedagogy, this model could be used to encourage students to collaboratively explore the different cultures and histories that they are either directly or indirectly involved. This approach could help fashion design educators challenge the uncritical neoliberal educational spaces they now often occupy, disengaged from fashion knowledges outside of the modernist canon, such as everyday clothing worn by ordinary people.

Such a curricula strategy, according to Mohanty, would need to be: "[B]ased on the premise that the local and the global are not defined in terms of physical geography or territory but

exist simultaneously and constitute each other. It is then the links between the local and the global that are foregrounded, and these links are conceptual, material, temporal, contextual, and so on." (Mohanty, 2003, p. 242).

Mohanty's relational approach can be utilised to foster an active awareness amongst students' of how local and global cultures and histories might be more co-creatively interwoven. The goal here would be to create a design process that resists stereotyping, appropriation and racist forms of representation. This pedagogical model, according to Mohanty "moves away from the "separate but equal" (or different perspective) to the co-implication/ solidarity one' [...]Thus it suggests organizing syllabi around social and economic processes and histories of various communities of women." (Mohanty, 2003, p. 242).

Decolonial feminist theories offer resources that can be drawn on to imagine a new design process. A process that could enable fashion educators and students to understand that fashion operates in a wider socio-political-cultural context of injustice and is never politically neutral.

A Sari Workshop

Adopting a decolonial methodology in fashion design education can transform how fashion design is taught and offer new ethical paradigms. To experiment with what decolonial fashion might look like, I have been devising new ways to teach fashion as *fashionalization* – that is, incorporating counter-hegemonic perspectives into fashion design pedagogies. To achieve this, I have been drawing on my own family histories and the clothing that my mother has always worn, the sari, "a highly dynamic garment" from the global South as a fashion resource (Banerjee and Miller 2008, p5). The sari is an unstitched garment that has existed since the pre-capitalist era and is, like the poncho from South American - arguably - a sustainable garment. However, unlike the poncho, the sari is a form of clothing that covers the whole human form and

can accommodate people of different sizes and genders (Khaleeli 2014) to last over a user's lifetime (Siegle, 2017). In their study of the sari Banerjee and Miller argue that "the sari is not some antique or folk costume but is instead a living and effective alternative to the stitched cloth of the West. [As we argue] this can help challenge our own taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of 'modern life". (Banerjee and Miller, 2008, p. 3).

Therefore, using the sari to challenge modernity/coloniality thinking in fashion design practice is clearly pertinent. Indeed, using the sari as a form of resistance also has precedents: during the 1980s, the UK based anti-racist female activist group Sari Squad wore saris to protest against far-right racist groups (Welton, 2016).

Students experimenting with sari draping, pleating and tying techniques, London, UK

To start a fashion design class based around the sari I adopt Mohanty's *Feminist Solidarity or Comparative Studies Model* to disrupt fashion hierarchies and look for points of connection and disconnections in hegemonic fashion cultures. Using a decolonial feminist approach, I draw on my own biography to validate clothing that originates from India; in other words, validating *anti-fashion* in the context of UK undergraduate fashion design education. Thus, everyday Indian garments can be used as a lens to critique how broader hierarchical orders have been and continue to be applied in hegemonic fashion cultures. Sharing both personal family photographs and my mother's garments with students has given voice to marginalized knowledge from the global South in the fashion design class. Working in pairs and small groups, undergraduate fashion students are invited to discuss the question 'is the sari fashion?'. Students are then shown images of saris worn by my mother in the UK during the 1970s (Fig. 1); images of saris transformed into other garments such as the *sarini* (bikini sari), *sarong sari, gown sari* and *divided trouser sari*; images of *hijra* (third gender people) wearing saris; and, YouTube instructional videos explaining different ways to put on a sari. After, students work in groups to co-create different possibilities to construct clothing from my mother's saris (a selection of both evening and work sari's made of a variety of materials, from silk and cotton to polyester) on each other, rather than using a standard mannequin (Fig. 2).

A great number of questions typically arise from students during the class, including the question of why saris are never taught as part of their fashion curricula. Interesting dialogues are also fostered: for example, students who have worn a sari before will share the different ways to wrap and drape the fabric with others new to wearing the sari; and, those students originating from the Indian subcontinent will discuss the regional variations they are familiar with when wearing a sari. Questions of gender are also explored as the usual heteronormative gender fashion binaries of 'menswear' and 'womenswear' are blurred as students use their own and others bodies to work on. The same applies with classifications of body size as students are no longer confined by fashion industry sizing standards.

This exchange and experimentation with the sari can produce some new and experimental outcomes that subvert heteronormative body values as students test out different draping, pleating and folding techniques. Furthermore, discussing the challenge of how such experiments can be replicated for mass consumption in the fashion market exposes how market-driven, short-termism and unsustainable contemporary fashion design practices can be.

Most importantly, however, many students remark on the fact that they would never have thought about designing a sari at undergraduate fashion level. These rich discussions invariably also open-up space for the collective discussion of issues of Eurocentrism in fashion; especially, why Western forms of dress are privileged over others and issues of cultural appropriation. Questions focus on the fashion curricula and whether a sari constitutes 'design' practice when it is an unstitched cloth; hierarchies of knowledge based around tailored garments versus unstitched fashion forms; and, how designers in the UK can *learn* from (rather than using what Rovine terms the 'reproductive' or 'mimetic' design approach, referenced earlier) Indian fashion forms. While there are no easy answers, this approach opens possibilities for a critical, decolonial fashion design praxis to emerge.

To further discuss fashion design's drive for constant new garment designs and profit, it is vital to debate how Eurocentrism supports capitalist structures, racism and other forms of exploitation, such as waste and inequality. In this way the utilisation of a sari as a fashion resource and example of *anti-fashion* provides a point of contrast to dominant forms of fashion culture. And, therefore, also a basis for multiple conversations reflecting the urgent need to reconfigure and decolonise the dominant fashion system.

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