field. Her research group the Fashion/Textile Futures, http://ftfutures.aalto.fi, is involved in several significant research projects, which integrate closed loop, bio-economy, and circular economy approaches in fashion and textile systems and extend the understanding of strategic sustainable design. Niinimäki has published widely in top scientific journals, and she is a leading scholar in the field of sustainable fashion.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Fashion and transnational inequalities – what, where, and why?

Anna-Mari Almila and Serkan Delice

Introduction

Scholars of fashion in the 2020s face two pressing and intertwined issues: environmental crisis (often framed as 'sustainability' questions within fashion systems) and decolonising. When talking of the inequalities inherent in fashion systems, we cannot avoid either. The various decolonising projects ongoing in the field of fashion studies (e.g. Gaugele and Titton 2019; Slade and Jansen 2020; Cheang et al. 2021; Cheang et al. 2022) are made all the more pressing by fashion production's extremely heavy environmental cost (Niinimäki et al. 2020), the socially and geographically stratified consequences of climate change (Fletcher and Maki 2022), and ongoing exploitation of vulnerable workforce in textile and garment production (Mezzadri 2016; 2017; Delice 2019; Niessen 2020; Sullivan 2022). Further issues exist, too. We might ask where fashion scholarship and education are located, both in terms of global geography and in terms of subject-specific versus general educational institutions. Where are various fashion knowledges located? Where lie fashion's value production and garment production respectively, and why are they so very differently rewarded (Aspers 2010)? Not that any of these divisions and factors are geographically fully stable. Around the world people travel, goods travel, thoughts travel, money travels. These movements are never based upon equality, either, but are ridden with many sorts of privileges, hindrances, and vulnerabilities. Some humans are forced to move, or forced to stay, while others (including many fashion scholars based in high-status institutions in places considered fashion capitals) move freely in a highly privileged manner. The movement of fashion commodities is likewise either restricted or facilitated by international laws, contracts, and trade agreements. Ideas and images of fashion, and about fashion, move differently from physical objects and human bodies, but at the same time they reflect the global and local inequalities and injustices inherent in fashion systems and demonstrate that influencing and accessing flows of information is not as free and open as the early (somewhat optimistic) ideas about the internet's power seemed to promise.[1]

In this book, we bring together contributions from scholars who share a fascination for fashion on the one hand, and the worry and concern of the persistent

inequalities induced by its operations on the other. Fashion scholarship has grown with extreme rapidity over the recent decades and is now well above being accused of frivolity or marginality. Yet we feel that areas remain, such as different forms of aesthetic and material inequality, ethical problems of production, labour exploitation, and environmental issues, to which fashion studies could pay more, or different kind of, attention. In this volume, we speak of some of them, while also seeking to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debates about fashion's nature as a deeply interconnected transnational, transregional, and global phenomenon (Rabine 2002; Niessen et al. 2003; Maynard 2004; Rivoli 2009; Hansen and Madison 2013; Riello 2013; Ling and Segre-Reinach 2018; Peirson-Smith and Hancock 2018; Cheang et al. 2021; Steorn 2021; Bartlett 2022).

Fashion has for a long time been associated, either loosely or firmly, with 'modernity' (e.g. Braudel [1967] 1992; Wilson 1987). There are, indeed, good reasons to argue so, even though it is generally accepted that fashion's triumph in Europe began well before modernity, in the late medieval period (e.g. Lipovetsky [1987] 1994; Ribeiro 1986). However, what has often been glossed over is that 'modernity' and colonialism have been fundamentally intertwined (e.g. Quijano 2007), and so, too, in the establishment and functioning of fashion systems (Ahmed 2022; Cheang et al. 2021). Indeed, if 'civilization' was a highly imperialist and violent concept in evaluating 'fashion' (Niessen 2010), 'modernity', when it replaced 'civilization', continued to carry many of the colonialist and imperialist ideas associated with the latter (Almila and Inglis 2017). The global power imbalances that shaped and framed 'modernity' were also observable in many elite-driven 'westernising' dress 'modernisation' projects and initiatives, perhaps most obviously in the 1925 Turkish 'hat law' that banned the Ottoman fez and enforced 'western' hats for men (Adak 2014; Libal 2014).[2]

Modernity and colonialism were also fundamentally built upon racist ideas. 'Modern' ideas of 'race' created systematic racism, which established, justified, and enabled large-scale slavery (Grüner 2020). This ensured, among other things, extensive cheap cotton supply for textile production in England, who in the 19th century was aggressively competing against the Indian cotton producers (Beckert 2014). As Cheang et al. (2021, 1, emphasis in original) point out, India had a long history of transregional cotton trade:

Sarasa, also known as cotton calico or chintz, formed part of a significant Indian export industry that globalized Indian design in a flow of fashion textiles *from* the Indian subcontinent to Egypt and Indonesia in the 13th and 14th centuries or earlier, West Africa from the 15th century and Europe from the 17th century.

Given that Europe's, and especially north-west Europe's, rise to the position of global hegemonic power can be traced back to the mid-14th century (Abu-Lughod 1989), India managed to hold its own in cotton production and trade for

a remarkably long time. But eventually the violent European strategies won the game (although hardly 'fairly') (Beckert 2014).

Fashion, fashions, fashion systems, and fashion industries are interconnected and networked in multiple ways. In this book, we seek to bring new insights into fashion scholarship and fashion theory by tracing the numerous ways in which fashion is networked and interconnected across and beyond national borders, as well as time. This does not indicate a commitment to a certain theoretical or disciplinary position, or, indeed, to a specific (or any) form of decolonising project. Instead, we include different theoretical and methodological approaches to exploring the connectedness of fashion phenomena, be that in a specific 'national' context, between nations, or in a more general global scale. In all of this, we seek to contribute to the need and desire within the field of fashion studies to understand and analyse different forms of production, consumption, and everyday practices of fashion as interconnected phenomena, a limitation in earlier scholarship, which many colleagues have pointed to and sought to overcome (Phizacklea 1990; Fine and Leopold 1993; Braham 1997; Skoggard 1998; Rabine 2002; Barnard 2014; Craciun 2013; Brooks 2015; Crewe 2017). By including very different sorts of contributions, from theoretical/conceptual/ethical to empirical and historical, we stress the complexity and multiplicity of kinds of scholarship needed to understand fashion in its manifold ramifications.

The persistent inequalities within fashion systems provoke difficult, even vexed, questions. Who, for example, has the power and privilege to consume fashion, when millions of fashion objects are currently being produced by immigrant and refugee workers in a globalised sweatshop? What would happen if all the people in the world had the same rights and resources to consume fashion, when even current production and consumption severely harms environment? How does the hierarchical division of labour between the still dominantly Eurocentric symbolic, cultural, and discursive production of fashion on the one hand and the peripheralised and marginalised material production on the other (Hoskins 2014; Kuldova 2016; Mezzadri 2017; Mensitieri 2020; Delice 2019) further contribute to the various inequalities of fashion systems? Difficult questions to do with the older and newer foci, as well as possible biases, of fashion scholarship add another motivation for our work to bridge areas of fashion scholarship and geographical locations alike.

Therefore, we see fashion as fundamentally, and unavoidably, political in terms of the central role it plays in reflecting, producing, and reproducing existing and new forms of poverty, inequality, and precarity – as well as various means of enacting political, economic, and cultural agency, creativity, and entrepreneurship – across and beyond national borders. In this regard, we stress the importance of paying increasing attention to the economy and finances of fashion, as these are at the heart of many fashion systems' problems. Who gets paid, how much, and for what kind of labour? Under what kinds of conditions are these different forms of labour performed? Who pays, and how much, for garments, and who are praised, blamed, or condemned for their consumption habits? A luxury garment may well be declared slow fashion and ecologically sound, but when the vast majority of

world's population has absolutely no chance of buying such a garment, how great is its impact? Likewise, a fast fashion garment may be hazardous to both environment and workers' rights, but how much choice does a poor parent of a rapidly growing child have in terms of providing their offspring with clothing?

We thus recognise that at the era of Anthropocene, which rapidly threatens not only our lifestyles but also the existence of all species, the highly urgent questions as to the environmental effects of fashion systems must be central to analyses of fashion phenomena (Black 2012; Fletcher and Tham 2015; Fletcher 2016; Brooks et al. 2017; Gwilt et al. 2019). These have much to do with inequalities, too. The negotiation of international and global agreements concerning carbon cuts, or other methods of preserving the environment, involves answering the question of whether the carbon footprints of textiles and garments should be counted as the responsibility of the producing or the consuming countries. And while climate change is transforming the living environment of everyone, it is the case that poorer countries are often hit hardest as a consequence of lifestyles of the more privileged. We therefore also take seriously fashion researchers' responsibility to tackle current and urgent human and environmental global problems in a way that is sensitive to global power asymmetries and relations of domination.

No book can achieve everything. What we offer here is a collection of chapters where many of fashion's pressing issues are discussed from different points of view. Some chapters are based upon, use, and set to critique 'classical' fashion thought, while others take an alternative stance. We consider both kinds of positions essential for fashion scholarship's future development.

In this chapter, we first provide a background to fashion scholarship's dealings with fashion's globality. Then we discuss the question of 'transnationality', and what its conceptual and analytical significance for fashion studies could be. While each author in this volume has their own approach to these questions, this introduction chapter indicates some potential directions that fashion scholars might find productive and illuminative when discussing the transnational inequalities inherent in fashion's empirical realities today.

Towards a post-/decolonial turn in fashion studies?

Whether there are grounds to talk about a 'turn' regarding post- or decoloniality in fashion studies is of course open to question. However, if one is to believe in conference calls, decolonising is one of the top themes in the field in the 2020s, along with sustainability. While the latter is rather specific for the field – and for good reasons, as the textile and garment industry has been claimed to be the second most polluting field of industry in the world (Niinimäki et al. 2020) – post- and decoloniality are more general topics of analysis and debate within social sciences and humanities.

Fashion studies have always followed general trends in social sciences. Not only were the early scholarly commentators of fashion often social scientists and thinkers (e.g. Spencer [1854] 1891; Veblen 1899; Sombart [1902] 2004; Simmel

1904; Tönnies [1908] 1961), but when fashion research started to develop into its own field during the 1980s and 1990s, it was in many ways driven by trends in social sciences. Thus, it is no great surprise that only five years after the publication of Samir Amin's (1988) classic work *Eurocentrism*, first comments on the idea appeared in fashion scholarship.[3] Baizerman et al. (1993) reflected upon the field's division into geographic areas, where specialism was either focused upon upper- and middle-class Euramerican dress (which, according to them, culturally included South America, Australia, and New Zealand, too) or 'non-Western' dress. They argued that such a division was problematic, and scholars should rather focus on 'the interrelationship of the two, for we need an effective model for studying dress in the modern, globally interconnected world' (Baizerman et al. 1993, 19). Dress influences, they argued, spread not only from elites to masses and from 'the West' to other parts of the world.

More importantly for the future developments in the field, Baizerman et al. (1993) pointed out some problems in terminology associated with these different parts of the world.

> The terms *non-Western* and *non-industrial* no doubt arose in an attempt to bring a more objective, neutral approach to the study of dress, an approach that respected the cultural authenticity of a people, but at the same time acknowledged their uniqueness in a modern European world. However, as time has seen their broadening application, these terms have likewise provided a residual designation, into which the different and the unfamiliar are discarded. The prefix *non* gives them a built-in negative. Where *Western* and *industrial* are associated with the Euroamerican, and thus with the progress of civilization, the negative prefix, as in *non-Western,* implies clothing traditions that have fallen short of the standard of modernity and technological sophistication.
>
> (Baizerman et al. 1993, 23, emphasis in original)

Baizerman et al. (1993) argued that dress styles are in fact often hybrids, both stylistically and technically. The view was very much shared by Craik (1994), who pointed out that studies of fashion exhibit strong elitist and Eurocentric biases. Empirical realities, according to her, are hybrid in character, as the (fashion) world is indeed interconnected in multiple ways (see also Jirousek 2000).

One problem in earlier dress scholarship was disciplinary, that is, sociology and cultural studies tended to focus on 'fashion' and 'style' in the (presumed) Euramerican context, while anthropologists and ethnographers were interested in other locations and peoples and tended to focus on 'dress', being often untrained or incapable of seeing change and hybridity in what they studied, laden as they were with pre-assumptions and preconceived ideas regarding 'tradition' and 'modernity' (Almila and Inglis 2017).

Such a conceptual division was problematised by Rabine (2002), who argued that far from being opposite, or clear-cut, categories, 'traditional' and 'modern' may indeed be mixed up and do not form a binary system. According to her, '[t]he

African fashion systems [that she studied] […] challenge not only the tradition/ modern dichotomy but also the opposition between Western fashion and other forms of dress' (Rabine 2002, 12). The same garment could in fact be considered 'traditional', 'modern', or 'authentic', depending on who wore and observed it, thus questioning established conceptual divisions shaping much of fashion scholarship (and social science more generally).

Also Niessen (2003) took issue with how fashion was considered exclusively 'Western', regardless of empirical realities. This, according to her, was 'reflected in a century of writings by sociologists, anthropologists, art historians, and students of popular culture' (Niessen 2003, 243). Indeed, she pointed out that to talk of fashion globalisation while believing that fashion is purely 'western' is contradictory by definition. In fact, such a belief is a result and part of orientalising knowledge-production, whereby contrast and difference is created between 'us' and 'them', between that which is assumed to be stable and that which is changing. Niessen argued that

> alternative uses of the word 'fashion' do not seem to have inspired a review of its accepted definition. New directions of theoretical inquiry that have been launched within the study of dress have not led to a critical retrospective of the field, and a division of analytical labor in clothing studies appears to have stuck, whereby anthropologists continue to study non-Western 'dress', and Western fashion remains the focus of fashion studies.
>
> (Niessen 2003, 246)

Thus, 'Western' centric, or Eurocentric, model of fashion had proven to be surprisingly persistent, even in the face of evidence of its flaws. This might, indeed, have been a failure of temporary focus. According to Allman (2004, 3)

> much of the ethnographic work on African dress, because it has tended to operate in a normative present, has not provided a sustained, historical challenge to this Eurocentric vision. Yet it is through the foregrounding of African histories – local histories set in transnational contexts and transnational histories set in local contexts – that the stubborn binary 'fashion studies of the West' vs. 'ethnographies of costume form the rest' is transcended.

In the early 2000s, colonialism, post-colonialism, or, indeed, decolonising were not the catchphrases they have since become, but the intention, or determination, to change the field was clearly already there.

A lot of this discourse centred around terminology. Some, as we have seen above, argued that 'fashion' as a concept needed to be rethought. If the concept was not extended outside its initial geographical boundaries, other sorts of problems would follow. Finnane (2007, 9) pointed out that

> when fashion is defined very narrowly on the basis of particular empirical detail about 'a particular sort of society', the possibility of any other clothing culture

being described as 'fashion' is by definition excluded. At the very least, this creates terminological problems in how to describe or analyse the phenomenon of short-term shifts in taste and consumption evident in non-Western urban societies that featured social mobility.

But at the time, some remained committed to the idea that fashion and 'the West' were equitable. According to Barnard (2007, 3), fashion is a specific dress phenomenon 'found in Western modernity', as well as being 'a good test of whether [a given] society is modern, or western'. It is not without reason that Moors (2009, 177) called his logic 'circular'.

But was fashion history Eurocentric, or simply a geographically focused history? In a conference in 2009, the question was debated. According to McNeil (2010, 9), historian Giorgio Riello 'noted the challenge of the new notion of global histories. We now have unsuitable literature on fashion for this new global audience. […] "Fashion" is a European narrative, not a Eurocentric one, he argued. Standard fashion history does not even pretend to address extra European material'.

Therefore, the fashion narrative can arguably be seen as European, rather than Eurocentric history, but a history which nevertheless needs to be expanded well beyond its original geographical boundaries (Riello and McNeil 2010). Yet, over the years, scholars have tended to forget – or worse, willingly ignore – that European fashion was never just European, but drew upon material, cultural, technological, and other resources from other parts of the world. This does raise questions about Eurocentric biases. European fashion system could not have existed, or at the very least would have developed in radically different ways, without the manifold transnational and transregional connections that fuelled its development. Indeed, according to Welters and Lillethun (2018, 2), 'history of fashion should be understood as a global cultural phenomenon', shaped through 'interrelationships and interdependences in space and time' (Welters and Lillethun 2018, 1).

Demanding change

In the 2010s, increasing media, political, and scholarly attention and criticism was directed against the 'whiteness' and colonial legacies of curricula in schools and universities. This was not a new topic; the one-sidedness (or whiteness) of various curricula had been commented on already in the 1980s and 1990s, and their legacy was questioned (Style [1988] 1996; Goduka 1996; Allen 1999). In fashion studies and fashion pedagogy, the early 2020s witnessed calls for radical change in fashion curricula across fashion education. Whether this means decolonising pedagogical practice through indigenous perspectives (Ahmed 2022), recognising and using institutional power for justice in fashion education (Barry 2021), the uncomfortable task of retraining oneself as an educator beyond 'diversity' (Cheang and Suterwalla 2020), or stressing the centrality of politics to fashion education (Stevenson 2022), the principles of justice and responsibility are central to the statements. Bedford (2020, 948) argues that 'the meaningful integration of Indigenous ontologies and

epistemologies into fashion school is an important step in decolonizing a space that has so often engaged Indigenous design with an ever-present ethnographic gaze'. Yet such integration requires a multiplicity of voices in the fields of fashion, which highlights the need for fundamental changes in the power structures that uphold these fields.

Clearly, such calls are part of the postcolonial trend in fashion scholarship described above, which started as 'recognising' fashion elsewhere, but which has since moved into recognising the fundamental inequalities embedded within fashion education and industries alike. If fashion is built upon modernity, and fuelled by it, as fashion scholars have argued for a long time (e.g. Wilson 1987), the problem is that modernity, and its close companion capitalism, has all along been embedded in colonialism (Ahmed 2022; Cheang et al. 2021). Colonialism was, and continues to be in its neo-colonial forms, fundamentally based upon the exploitation of both nature and humans, using resources from the South to generate wealth in the North (Peirson-Smith and Craik 2020). In 'sacrifice zones' of fashion, the 'Other' remains undervalued and ignored today. The systemic ethnic and racial biases remain embedded in colonialist capitalism, creating 'physical locations that are designated expendable for the sake of economic activity' (Niessen 2020, 860). Indeed, racism is such an integral part of capitalism that some refer to Cedric Robinson's conceptualisation of 'racial capitalism', which is very much part of today's fashion industries, too (Robinson 2019; Sullivan 2022).

Colonising strategies also involved 're-educating' local populations in order to 'civilize' them (Chauchan 2022). Thus, colonial knowledge-production entailed changing local ways of knowing and thinking on the one hand, and producing 'knowledge' about those populations in light of Western ideologies on the other. In light of this, decolonising projects are often seen as sorts of critical dismantling processes, rather than attempts to achieve certain set goals of decoloniality: 'the path towards that promise [of decoloniality] becomes open-ended. This is in part because there is no pure pre-colonial space, or pre-colonial dress, to return to. […] we therefore explore decolonizing not as a destination but as non-linear process, ever revised, re-evaluated, revisited and relived' (Cheang et al. 2022, 248).

The efforts to critique the global dilemmas of fashion systems are often conducted as (more or less) collaborative projects. Be this through 'research collectives' (Slade and Jansen 2020) or 'research hubs' (Bartlett 2022), there is a recognition that the task is too enormous for any scholar to tackle alone. The challenge is not made any easier by the pressing question of the climate crisis that adds to the problems of colonial histories. In many ways, 'decoloniality and sustainability are intimately linked' (Slade 2020, 838; see also Peirson-Smith and Craik 2020). The relationship between fashion and transnational capitalism, the inequalities and injustices that this relationship embodies and engenders within the interconnected domains of production, consumption, labour and environmental ethics, and national and transnational ways of evading, resisting, and dismantling those inequalities and injustices are all fundamentally intertwined. To tackle them means challenging, critiquing, and dismantling 'the different forms of coloniality

that make up the foundations of the world, and subsequently the fashion industry, namely: anthropocentrism, imperialism and capitalism' (Elhichou 2021, 213–214). This is no small task even for a group, or a full field, of researchers and educators.

One important shift in scholarship has been, and must be, getting over thinking in terms of 'production' and 'consumption'. If fashion is to be understood as globally interconnected, then to focus on just one or the other can only provide limited accounts of fashion's totality. Thus, in addition to transnational inequalities in the use of material resources, also style and taste systems may be inequal, such as when 'colonial systems of taste' (Slade 2020, 838) dominate. Fashion's borders, just as political borders more generally, are both arbitrary (Maples 2022) and deeply performative, both aesthetic and labour- and resource-driven. 'The power dynamics of cultural interconnectedness, and the transboundary nature of fashion objects over time' (Cheang et al. 2021, 5) are underpinned by international contracts, trade deals, legislations, and agreements. The questions of racism and representation in fashion (Gaugele and Titton 2019) are intertwined with the questions of global environment inequality (Peirson-Smith and Craik 2020). Decolonising involves seeing supposed cultural entities not as one but as complex and diverse (Cheang et al. 2021), as much as it requires a de-centred and nature-centred approach to fashion's globality (Peirson-Smith and Craik 2020). Furthermore, the questions to do with the appropriation of cultures and traditions remain at the heart of fashion systems: whose property are cultural resources? Are local gatekeepers allowed to 'share' local traditions with transnational high-street brands without compensation to local communities? Is it ethical to create (cheap) fashion for masses out of marginalised cultural traditions? (Delice 2022).

As fashion's world map keeps transforming, new global actors and cultural powers emerge, such as China, seeking actively their place in the global cultural industry (Ling and Serge-Reinach 2021). New kinds of transnational relations are forged, such as the deeply interconnected co-production of Chinese-Italian transnational capitalist system, where Chinese investment, factories, and labour force have fundamentally shaped the landscape of the Italian fashion production system (Rofel and Yanagisako 2019). Exploited labour force does not remain geographically stable, either – racialised exploitation happens in Europe, too, such as in the sweatshops in Leicester that made news during the early phases of Covid pandemic (Sullivan 2022). Hostile border regimes create vulnerable populations, such as refugees, who are at high risk of ending up as precarious, exploited labour force within textile and garment production industries (Delice 2019).

Towards transnational inequalities: The capital

We do not know what to do in this situation. Whether to commit suicide or become a thief. I can't survive without getting our pay each month, but it has been more than four months. Missguided and the UK government should help us or the government [of Pakistan] should force the company [Missguided] to pay for the Bismillah factory.

These are the words of Muhammed Irfan, a garment worker at the Bismillah Clothing factory in Faisalabad, Pakistan, that had been making clothes for the UK-based fast-fashion retailer Missguided since 2017, until the latter fell into administration in 2022. Irfan is one of the hundreds of Pakistani garment workers left destitute due to not being paid for more than four months through the collapse of Missguided (Baloch 2022). The grim situation described by him has become all too familiar, especially since the start of the global Covid pandemic in 2019. The characteristically erratic demand from Western fashion retailers destabilised all the more by the deleterious effects of two years of lockdowns and trading restrictions on high streets on the one hand and the exigencies of burgeoning online shopping on the other have put the livelihoods of millions of fashion and garment workers, both in and outside the West, on the edge.

Once an award-winning brand celebrated as 'a truly inspirational British digital business', Missguided had already started to suffer the effects of capital over-accumulation and unsustainable growth back in 2017 (Wightman-Stone 2017, n.p.). It had fallen into the red, seeing its operating profits drop from £381,000 in 2016 to a £1.45 million loss, despite the 40% growth in its online sales in the UK and more than 100% in the US, France, and Germany. The company attributed this loss to its expansion into physical retail, that is, the setup costs for its first physical stores in London and Kent (Wightman-Stone 2017; Jahshan 2017). Thus, in 2018, Missguided launched a redundancy scheme 'to make the business more efficient', placing around 100 of its 800 jobs in Manchester, London, and Leicester (Stevens 2018, n.d.). This was followed by the news of its expansion to the Middle East through a franchise agreement with the Beirut-headquartered retail company Azadea that operates more than 40 leading international brand names across 13 countries in the Middle East and Africa (Jahshan 2018). Still, Missguided was considered to be among a small number of internet fashion brands, including Asos, Boohoo, and PrettyLittleThing, to have enjoyed success at a time when the traditional high street was already struggling. In 2019, it was making headlines in the UK with its £1 bikini, which it claimed to have sold at a loss as a marketing stunt. 1,000 new products were landing on its site every week, and it had shifted more than £200m worth of clothes the year before (Wood 2019).

While its fortunes appeared to improve during the Covid pandemic, thanks to a boom in garment sales online, in May 2022, Missguided ended up having to call in administrators after it had been issued with a winding-up petition by clothing suppliers reportedly owed millions of pounds. One Leicester-based supplier owed more than £2m had been forced to send over 90 workers home, as he was unable to pay them. Another owed about £600,000 was unconfident about the future of his business without orders from Missguided, which made up the bulk of his work, (Butler 2022a). Back in Faisalabad, Nadeem Siddique, the owner of the Bismillah Clothing factory, recounted how Missguided had wanted to increase orders and demanded in 2019 that the factory expand capacity, hire more workers, and produce exclusively for the brand. Since then, they had been making 200,000 pieces for Missguided each month. Siddique maintained that he had no other option than

to fire workers as he was already owed more than £2m in unpaid invoices and had thousands of pieces of clothing ordered by Missguided stuck in his storerooms and port to be shipped (Baloch 2022).

The intellectual property of Missguided was, in the end, bought for around £20m by Frasers Group, one of the largest sports, lifestyle, and luxury retailers in the UK, which owns, among others, Sports Direct and the Flannels fashion chain. In June 2022, Labour Behind the Label, an organisation that works to improve conditions and empower workers in the global garment industry, wrote to Missguided's co-owners and investors, urging them to prioritise the payment of debts to suppliers, to prevent the permanent closure of the supplier factories. Their letter noted that the workers at a growing number of UK suppliers had not been paid owed wages and that an unknown number of suppliers both in the UK and overseas had laid workers off without wages due to Missguided's non-payment (Labour Behind the Label 2022). Finally, in July 2022, it was reported that Missguided would pay out less than 1.7p for every pound it owed factory owners supplying the brand. The factory owners would therefore be paid less than 2% of the £30m owed to them (Butler 2022c).

Such flagrant transfer of value from peripheralised, labour-intensive manufacturing to capital-intensive metropolitan centres of fashion is not a new phenomenon. The sheer precarity and dispossession caused by it, and suffered by garment workers, cannot fully be understood, and meaningfully challenged, without addressing the ways in which fashion is produced, distributed, and consumed transnationally within the context of contemporary capitalism. These processes of production, distribution, and consumption are shaped by, and reproduce, systemic and structural inequalities that extend across national boundaries and can therefore be effectively confronted only through transnational collective action and solidarity.

These inequalities are made systemic and structural, above all, by what Karl Marx calls 'the coercive laws of competition'. These laws, Marx argues, subordinate each individual capitalist to the immanent laws of capitalist production, compelling them to constantly expand their capital by means of progressive accumulation, in order to be able to preserve it (Marx 1887, 415). In the context of a competitive environment, a capitalist, in other words, *must* reinvest in expansion to protect and enlarge their market share. As David Harvey explains, if a capitalist does not reinvest in expansion and a rival does, then after a while they would be likely to be driven out of business (Harvey 2010, 43). Thus, there is an inherent tendency in capital to enhance the productiveness of labour so as to cheapen commodities and, through such cheapening, to cheapen the labourers themselves (Marx 1887, 224).

Contemporary fashion production, as can be seen in the case described above, continues to be driven by the coercive laws of competition. Indeed, it was reported in June 2022 that Missguided was not the only online fashion retailer suffering due to increased competition from high-street groups such as Next, M&S, Zara, and H&M, which had been improving their digital offer, as well as from rapidly growing Chinese rival Shein. Asos, for example, had made a £15.8m pre-tax loss in six

months, compared with a £106m profit a year earlier. Boohoo's profits, on the other hand, had plummeted 94% in a year. The latter responded to this slump in profit by aiming to 'maximise efficiencies' by adding more automation at its warehouses and shifting some production from China and South Asia to Turkey and North Africa, in order to cut freight costs (Butler 2022b, n.p.).

Fashion's systemic and structural economic inequalities acquire a transnational character as the need to raise a surplus labouring population necessitates the opening up of new labour-intensive lines of production and offshoring of labour as a means of enhancing the absolute mass of profit. As production and accumulation advances, the mass of available and appropriated surplus labour must grow. As can clearly be seen in the example above, and as is often the case in the industry, fashion retailers continue to end up relying upon the 'cheapness and abundance of disposable or unemployed wage-labourers', that is, the industrial reserve army of labour (Marx 1894, 167).

This transnational structure of capital accumulation through the systemic exploitation of living labour in production goes hand in hand with the creation of global consumer markets and geographical expansion for the rising mass of surplus products to be absorbed, leading to systemic environmental degradation on a planetary scale. Moreover, these processes entail not only a transfer of value from labour-intensive to capital-intensive but also a further expansion of big capital through takeovers of small capital units, mergers, acquisitions, and investment rounds.[4]

As accumulation increases the concentration of the means of production and the command over labour in a few hands, the capitalist industries, including that of fashion, also undergo what Marx characterises as 'centralisation', that is, the 'concentration of already formed capitals, the destruction of their individual independence, the expropriation of capitalist by capitalist, the transformation of many small capitals into a few large ones' (Marx 1887, 438–439). Such tendencies towards centralisation, oligopoly, and monopoly, Harvey notes, help capitalists 'deal with the vicissitudes and uncertainties that derive from the fiercely competitive but destabilizing drive to procure relative surplus-value through technological changes' (Harvey 2018, 424). In other words, capital, through monopoly power, keeps the potentially equalising pace of technological innovation and digitalisation, and the coercive laws of competition, under control. Thus, competition 'always tends to produce monopoly, and the fiercer the competition, the faster the tendency toward centralisation' (Harvey 2018, 291).

In these processes of concentration and centralisation, capital acquires transnational autonomy in relation not only to the peripheralised, dispossessed garment workers but also to the centralising capitalists themselves based in the centres of fashion who appear to have control over its advances. As Sawaya elucidates, capital 'itself tends to expropriate the capitalist, demonstrating clearly that it is not "the individual capitalist" that is in command of the process, but capital itself, which uses the capitalist or contracts an "executive" tasked with the valorisation' (Sawaya 2018, 10). Yet this very freedom of movement of capital can also become a trigger for the formation of cyclical and structural crises if capital encounters barriers that impede its movement, if there is no capacity to absorb the rising mass of capital.

While such crises occur on a transnational scale, not all regions, communities, and individuals are equally affected by their effects. Looking at the production, representation, distribution, and consumption of fashion from the angle of the notion of 'transnational inequalities' allows us to critically understand how the broader, worldwide forces of capital accumulation, concentration, and centralisation shape fashion and its political economy on a global scale. While it is clear that an increasingly transnational, centralising capitalist class and, ultimately, capital itself benefit from these inequalities, it is also true that different regions, communities, and individuals are disadvantaged by them to different degrees.

Why transnational capitalism?

There is no understanding of fashion over the last several hundreds of years without understanding the capitalist economy. 'Modern' fashion, the 'child of capitalism' (Wilson 1987, 13), is structurally bound up with capitalist logics, even if popular, media, and even scholarly attention is often focused on its glossy aesthetics.

By the late 1960s, social scientists began to investigate the emergence of an international capitalist class along with the rise and spread of multinational corporations due to the concentration and centralisation of capital intrinsic to the capitalist accumulation process (Baran and Sweezy 1966; Barnet and Muller 1974). It was, however, sociologist Leslie Sklair who pioneered the idea of a transnational capitalist class as the characteristic institutional form of political and economic transnational practices in the global capitalist system (Sklair 1995; 2001, 2016). These transnational practices 'cross state boundaries but do not necessarily originate with state agencies or actors' (Sklair 2016, 330).

The transnational capitalist class, according to Sklair, comprises four fractions, namely, those who own and control the major transnational corporations and their local affiliates (corporate fraction); globalising politicians and bureaucrats (political fraction); globalising professionals (technical fraction); and merchants and the media (consumerist fraction). Sklair's argument is that these groups, together, constitute 'a global power elite, ruling class or inner circle' that organises 'the profit-driven culture-ideology of consumerism' and is 'working continuously to obfuscate the effects of the central crises of global capitalism, namely the simultaneous creation of increasing poverty and increasing wealth within and between countries, and the unsustainability of the global system' (Sklair 2016, 330–331).

Multinational corporations, that is, corporations from particular nation-states with foreign subsidiaries operating in a number of countries, are more prevalent in the fashion industry than transnational corporations, that is, global corporations without a national identity with operations and executive offices in multiple countries throughout the world (Drucker 1997; Robinson and Sprague-Silgado 2018). Still, contemporary fashion corporations do demonstrate some of the characteristics of the transnational capitalist class identified by Sklair: as non-state global players, their economic interests are 'increasingly globally linked rather than exclusively local and national in origin'; the markets with which they associate themselves are

either the global market or markets which may or may not coincide with a specific nation-state; they seek to 'exert culture-ideology control in everyday life through specific forms of global competitive and consumerist rhetoric and practices'; and they have 'outward-oriented global rather than inward-oriented local perspectives on most economic, political and culture-ideology issues' (Sklair 2016, 331–332). Their marketing highlights national identities and differences to the extent that they serve what Sklair aptly calls a 'global nationalism', a nationalism that seeks to incorporate each country into the growth- and competition-centred global capitalist system, while maintaining its identity by promoting its well-known products and brands as national competitive advantages (Sklair 2016, 336).

Sklair's work made it clear that globalising capitalists 'have no nation' and that the global capital system is increasingly driven not by national interests but by the demands of the global market. However, it was William Robinson and Jerry Harris' seminal article 'Towards a Global Ruling Class? Globalisation and the Transnational Capitalist Class' (2000) that asserted that it is the globalisation of the production process, that is, the fragmentation and decentralisation of production chains, and the transnationalisation of the circuit of capital, that form the basis for the transnationalisation of classes, including not only the transnational capitalist class but also national working classes.

Robinson and Harris interrogate, first, what they describe as 'the traditional assumption by Marxists that the capitalist class is by theoretical fiat organised in nation-states and driven by the dynamics of national capitalist competition and state rivalries' (Robinson and Harris 2000, 12). The distinction that they make between 'international' and 'transnational' is illuminating in terms of understanding their critique of the nation-state framework of analysis:

> Inherent in the *inter*national concept is a system of nation-states that mediates relations between classes and groups, including the notion of national capitals and national bourgeoisies. *Trans*national, by contrast, denotes economic and related social, political and cultural processes – including class formation – that supersede nation-states.
>
> (Robinson and Harris 2000, 16, emphasis in original)

A conception of capitalism organised through national economies and national capitalist classes interrelating to each other within an international system of nation-states does not account for the fact that the self-expansion of capital no longer recognises the territorial barriers of the nation-state and thus cannot be understood through the international dynamics that derive from the system of nation-states. The transnational capitalist class as the dominant sector of the ruling class – including the owners and managers of the transnational corporations; the elites and bureaucrats associated with the supranational agencies such as the IMF, World Bank, and the WTO; media conglomerates; and technocratic elites – is located in the global class structure through its ownership and control of transnational capital. Its members, in other words, have transcended their historical and

territorial rootedness in particular nation-states by 'cross-penetrating' and developing transnational class relations with each other around the world, in both Global North and South (Robinson 2017, 181). Indeed, in a later article, Robinson and Jeb Sprague note that by the twenty-first century, in both India and China, several powerful conglomerates 'began to go global, setting up subsidiaries and operations on every continent, integrating into transnational corporate circuits rather than turning inward to build up protected national or regional economies' (Robinson and Sprague-Silgado 2018, 320).

Thus, while the world, in the nation-state phase, was connected through commodity and financial flows across national borders within an integrated international market, today 'the worldwide social linkage is an internal one springing from the globalisation of the production process itself and the supranational integration of national productive structures' (Robinson and Harris 2000, 16). Robinson refers to this globalisation of the production process as 'transnationalisation', which he clearly distinguishes from 'internationalisation': internationalisation means 'the extension of economic activities across national boundaries'; it is fundamentally a *quantitative* process and leads to 'a more extensive geographical pattern of economic activity'. Transnationalisation, however, is *qualitatively* different in the sense that it entails not only the geographical extension of economic activity across national boundaries but also the transnational fragmentation and functional integration of the different segments within the decentralised production chains (Robinson 2011, 16–17). In this context of transnationalisation, the general direction of production worldwide and the circuits of global accumulation are both determined, increasingly, by the mobile, deterritorialised, and speculative global financial system, i.e., by money capital rather than by investment or productive capital (Robinson and Harris 2000, 24). This logic of global accumulation, instead of national accumulation, shapes the political and economic behaviour of the transnational capitalist class as a 'global hegemonic bloc' establishing and maintaining the domination of global capital over global labour (Robinson 2017, 173).

Nation-state, centre, and periphery

Does the existence of a world-scale system of production and accumulation mean that the hierarchy of nation-states and the divisions between centre and periphery, such as between 'fashion capitals' and peripheral locations within the capitalist world economy no longer matter? It might be argued that contemporary fashion multinationals remain linked to the nation-states and national classes from which they originate, operate, and benefit. Is it not the case then that as capital moves and expands at an ever-increasing speed across the boundaries of nation-states, the deepest divisions within the global capitalist class structure are still along national lines?

Samir Amin defines contemporary capitalism as a system of generalised monopolies, that is, monopolies as an integrated system rather than as autonomous corporations, which, he argues, is a product of a new stage of centralisation of capital

in the countries of the Triad (the United States, Western and Central Europe, and Japan) that took place during the 1980s and 1990s. The generalised monopolies tightly control the productive systems of the peripheries (the whole world beyond the partners of the triad) of world capitalism. The system of generalised monopolies makes it possible for these monopolies to derive 'a monopoly rent levied on the mass of surplus-value (transformed into profits) that capital extracts from the exploitation of labour'. The capital accumulation process is thus governed by the maximisation of monopoly, a form of 'imperialist rent seeking', at the expense of labour incomes and revenues of non-monopolistic capital in the peripheries (Amin 2013, 15–16). The 'collective imperialism' of the triad seeks to maintain its privileged position in the domination of the world and prevent any emergent country (including even China, according to Amin) from confronting this domination (Amin 2019). Despite the extent of transnationalisation, capitalist societies, Amin argues, should therefore be seen as national societies (Amin 2014, 110–112).

In defining capitalism as 'a world system that is imperialist by nature', a system that produces what he describes as an ever-deepening centre–periphery polarisation, Amin positions himself within the broader framework of dependency and world-systems theories (2014, 145). Indeed, from the 1970s onwards, the perspective of world-systems theory critically investigated issues of development and world inequalities by focusing on how surplus produced in the peripheries of the world economy is transferred to the centres through unequal exchange enforced by strong states on weak ones, by core states on peripheral areas, and a geographical, territorial world division of labour. Such transfer of surpluses from peripheral to core regions through the hierarchical, international division of labour ensures, in a systemic way, the development of the core and the underdevelopment of the periphery. This perspective was pioneered by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein who argued that capitalism involves 'not only appropriation of the surplus-value by an owner from a labourer, but an appropriation of surplus of the whole world-economy by core areas' (Wallerstein 1974, 401).

According to Wallerstein, capitalism and the world economy, that is, 'a single division of labour but multiple polities and cultures', are 'sides of the same coin; one does not cause the other'; they define the same indivisible phenomenon, which is the world capitalist economy as a historically specific totality (Wallerstein 1974, 391). It would be pointless, therefore, to speak of a transnationalisation of capital, since capital 'has never allowed its aspirations to be determined by national boundaries in a capitalist world-economy' and thus capitalism was, from the outset, 'an affair of the world-economy and not of nation-states' (Wallerstein 1974, 401–402). The strengthening of the state machineries in core areas, on the other hand, simply meets the needs of capitalists to maximise their profits within the real economic market of the world economy, but ultimately none of these states controls the world market in its entirety (Wallerstein 1974, 406). Also, a particular state or region (in the core sector) that is dominant at a given time can move down into the semi-periphery playing a specialised, intermediary role between the core and the periphery within the hierarchically structured capitalist world system (Wallerstein 2011 [1974], 350).

Still, what lies at the heart of the world-systems perspective is a geographical and territorial concept of core and periphery whereby the international division of labour takes a nation-state form. As Robinson points out, from the world-systems perspective, 'core-like (e.g., high-wage, high-technology, high-productivity) and peripheral-like (e.g., low-wage, low-technology, low-productivity) production processes' are seen as 'spatially distinct zones in the world-system ... coterminous with particular nation-states characterised as core, semi-peripheral and peripheral states' (Robinson 2011, 17).

More recently, Intan Suwandi and John Bellamy Foster (2016) have drawn attention to the fact that while capital can indeed move relatively freely, labour, in general, is confined within national borders as its movement is restricted by draconian immigration policies. Giant multinational corporations, mostly located in the West and representing the configurations of national capitals associated with particular nation-states, can take advantage of the lowest unit labour costs within what they call an 'imperialist system of world value', intensifying the overall centre-periphery division. They also note that between 2005 and 2010, the growth in what the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development calls 'non-equity modes of international production', that is, practices of contract manufacturing and services outsourcing, far surpassed the growth rate for the global industry in its entirety. Through this 'global labour arbitrage', which they define as 'a system of unequal exchange based on a worldwide hierarchy of wages, sharply dividing centre and periphery', multinationals continue to maintain control over production: they can relocate production to externalise transaction costs as they deem appropriate; they establish monopoly control over finance and technology, buttressed by the imperial power of the states concentrated at the core of the system; and they, and the Global North overall, benefit, disproportionately, from these processes of value capture rather than value creation (Suwandi and Foster 2016, n.p.).

Why transnational inequalities then?

The prevalence of subcontracting, in the case of fashion production, is not a new phenomenon at all; rather, it has been an intrinsic component of the system of production of ready-to-wear as a means of providing flexibility – especially in the face of constantly changing, erratic consumer demand – since at least the 18th century (Phizacklea 1990; Godley 1996; Green 1997; Briggs 2013; Delice 2019). Still, if it is true that today it is mostly the multinational fashion retailers headquartered in the profit- and accumulation-oriented *national* states of the Global North that benefit from subcontracting and outsourcing within the context of an uneven, international division of labour, why is there a need, then, to talk about *transnational* inequalities?

Robinson's critique of the world-systems perspective provides a convincing answer to this question. He argues – and our discussion of the shared plight of garment workers in Leicester and Faisalabad supports his argument – that core and peripheral production and accumulation processes now 'correspond increasingly

less to the logic of geography and to specific territorially defined nation-states' (Robinson 2011, 18). The transnational social forces and institutions that govern these processes are grounded less in an inter-state and more in a global system. The value that is extracted through unequal exchanges within the commodity chains is appropriated not by a specific country but by fashion conglomerates, one example of what Robinson calls 'clearing houses for transnational capital from around the world' (2017, 178). Therefore, the nation-states and national economies, he argues, should be seen neither as an immutable, immanent feature of world capitalism nor as discrete units in competition and cooperation with each other within the larger world system. After all, the nation-state 'does not have a form independent of the constellations of class and social forces that configure the state' (Robinson 2017, 174).

Thus, critical analysis of contemporary capitalism and its systemic inequalities should not start by putting the nation-state centre stage as *a priori* to configurations of social and class forces: 'we cannot start analysis with the state and work forward to class. We must work backward from the state to the political economy of civil society in which social classes and groups are constituted' (Robinson 2017, 183). The cultural impact of transnational corporations such as Apple, Nike, Unilever, and McDonald's, Robinson argues, cannot be reduced to the domination of one specific country or region upon another; rather, they facilitate much more widespread cultural change, promoting a global capitalist culture based on consumerism, individualism, and competition which is 'flexible and adaptable to distinct regional cultures' (2011, 11). The disputes around the emergent global hegemony are not necessarily among nation-states but among transnational social and class groups unbound from specific states or geographies (Robinson 2011, 19).

Speaking of transnational inequalities, however, does not mean that the nation-state has disappeared. Neither does it suggest denying the role played by the nation-states in terms of, for example, protecting their domestic markets from competition with capitalist classes from other nation-states. Rather, it allows one to understand how the relationship of national systems to the larger global system is being transformed and how the interests of powerful transnational capital class groups both in the Global North and South lie in promoting and defending global capitalism itself, rather than national and regional economies. To this end, transnational conglomerates do utilise national state apparatuses and draw on 'local' identities and cultural differences to advance their interests on a global scale in the context of aggressive competition (Robinson 2017, 179). As Robinson and Sprague-Silgado argue, 'core' and 'periphery' may therefore be 'more fruitfully seen as denoting social groups in a transnational setting than core and peripheral nation-states' (2018, 323).

The fashion industry continues to draw upon cheapened labour, and even by capturing unpaid labour inputs from those in a lower position within the hierarchical global commodity chain. The fact that unions and workers' rights groups have recently protested at Adidas supplier factories and stores in 38 cities in more than a dozen countries, including Pakistan, Cambodia, Italy, and the United States, against 'pervasive wage theft and union-busting' demonstrates that fashion's inequalities

spawned by systemic flexibilisation, precarisation, and exploitation of labour extend, and are resisted, across national boundaries (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2022, n.p.). The appropriation of surplus labour that is 'crucial to global capitalism insofar as it places downward pressure on wages everywhere and disciplines those who remain active in the labour market' takes place on a transnational scale (Robinson 2021, 31). The extent of ongoing violence resorted to by the police to discipline garment workers in Dhaka protesting unpaid wages is a harrowing testament to how nation-states offer forms of containment that facilitate transnational capital in extracting relative surplus value from the ranks of surplus labour (France-Presse 2019; Glover 2020; Peoples Dispatch 2021).

The organisation of this book

As is clearly demonstrated above, questions of inequality within transnational fashion systems raise further, related questions – those of justice, fairness, and responsibility. The chapters in this book approach these thematics in multiple ways, be it through conceptual considerations, reflections on ethical principles and practices, or analysis of empirical realities, or, indeed, all of these. From chapter to chapter, we move from one region to another, one location to another, one illuminative fashion case to the next one. From Asia to Europe, from Latin America to North Africa, the chapters throw light on multiple, intertwined practices that all are part of fashion's operations in the past and today.

In Chapter 2, Flavia Loscialpo argues that racial and ethnic hierarchies are at the very heart of capitalism. Exploitation of labour in 'sacrifice zones' of fashion is shrouded in invisibility, lack of access to information, and wilful ignoring of forced labour and unsafe working conditions. For economic gain, both nations and corporations may exploit populations of ethnic minorities, such as the Uyghur Muslim population extensively and violently exploited by China and transnational fashion companies alike. Loscialpo argues that for the sake of social sustainability (as well as environmental), more collective global responsibility must be recognised. Drawing upon Black Marxism and Marxist feminism, she unpicks the complex structures and practices of oppression based on racism, sexism, and nationalism that are imposed upon the Uyghurs.

Chapter 3 begins from China but moves on to South Korea and the US. Serkan Delice reflects upon heated arguments of claimed cultural appropriation in different cross-national and cultural contexts, bringing questions of cultural appropriation in the frame of the Marxist critique of transnational capital and labour exploitation. Culture in this framework is not simply culture as claimed by nations or groups of people, but it is instead deeply political and embedded in transnational economic relations. Cultural appropriation in the field of fashion, he argues, is not appropriation of culture as an abstraction, or even as claimed by nations and individuals, but is fundamentally a form of appropriation of living labour. The persistence and global scale of the cultural appropriation debate can thus be viewed as a manifestation of the deterritorialising effects of contemporary transnational capitalism.

In Chapter 4, Rimi Khan reflects further upon questions of cultural appropriation, but also, and most importantly, on the themes of cultural sustainability beyond cultural preservation, as well as indigenous autonomy and participation. Her case study of Vietnamese garment design and creation presents a post-colonial critique of Euramerican fashion scholarship, which, even with well-meaning calls for 'inclusion', tends to re-enforce the invisibility locations outside 'the West' by upholding the centrality of fashion scholarship in the global North. A relocation of fashion studies, she argues, must recognise the cultural complexity and dynamic, adaptive networks which form the reality of fashion practices across the world. These collaborative realities bringing different local groups of people together are where the sociality of decolonisation lies, and have the potential to contribute towards sustainability, both social and environmental.

Sustainability is the central theme in Chapter 5. Kirsi Niinimäki considers the conflicting rights – right to consume, right to fair pay and safe working conditions, right to profit, environment's rights – that come to clash in fashion production and consumption. Do people have a limitless right to consume at any price? What about workers' rights? Does not the environment have a right in itself, not merely as a resource for humans? At the heart of these questions lies the global division between North and South, where people's rights are pitted against each other, while capitalist corporations and their owners benefit financially. As long as fashion systems remain embedded in colonial and anthropocentric ideas, fashion ethics remains an unachievable goal. Instead, ethical discussions regarding the inherent value of things are necessary. The fashion industry needs to take responsibility, and a radical cut of consumption especially in the Global North is required, for a just system of clothing production and consumption to emerge.

In Chapter 6, Frédéric Godart reflects upon global fashion inequalities from another point of view, posing questions about 'stylistic capital' and 'stylistic inequality'. What are the solutions to the unequal distribution of legitimate capital? Should we seek to widen access to legitimate, dominant styles to individuals by enhancing and cultivating equal stylistic skills? Or would such widening access to mainstream, widely accepted 'stylishness' only advance fashion's transnational social and environmental problems? Should we instead seek to resist mainstream, dominant, or normative ideas of style, seeking to create forms of un-hierarchical stylistic diversity? De-centring of fashion and style practices clearly needs to happen, but it is not enough, for accessible production at a reasonable cost to individuals must happen in a transformed industry, lest it accelerates the already existing environmental problems that fashion industry in its current form is creating.

Just as style can be considered as unequal, so too has fashion for a long time been seen as fundamentally based upon hierarchies. In Chapter 7, Giselinde Kuipers, Luuc Brans, and Luca Carbone set to test one of the most established theories of this kind, namely the trickle-down theory, which suggests that fashion trends trickle down from high-status to lower-status actors. This model, widely accepted among fashion professionals, as well as by many scholars, is taken to reflect inequalities not only within societies but also transnationally, from fashion's core locations to peripheries. The authors contend that while status-based imitation may exist within fashion systems to some extent, it is by no means the only driving force. Fashion does operate in unequal ways, but not always as expected – even locations considered peripheral may develop their own styles and national fashion identities, which are not directly dependent on styles spreading from fashion capitals.

In Efrén Sandoval's chapter (Chapter 8), transnationality is considered from yet another angle, namely that of the border. While ideas and styles may at least theoretically travel freely across boundaries, humans and garments may not always do so, at least not legally. The border between Mexico and the US is a marker of inequality in multiple ways, be that in terms of whether an individual is able to cross the border at all, is forced to do so for economic reasons, or may do so for leisurely tourism, or in terms of access to different sorts of garments across the border. In Mexico, the vintage garment trade is focused upon second-hand clothes from the US, but forms of spatial and economic inequality abound. Individual's class position, or disposition within the Mexican society, shapes their access to goods, skills, cultural tastes, and resources, and thereby affects their opportunities within the vintage fashion trade. Local and transnational inequalities alike are deeply reflected in the subfield of the fashion trade.

Finally, in Chapter 9, Anna-Mari Almila turns her analysis to European fashion history, but seeking to rewrite parts of said history in a less Eurocentric way than is customary, recognising that fashion history has in fact always been transregional and transnational. The lens of analysis she uses is epidemics and pandemics that have had far-reaching consequences for the structures of fashion. Here, the point is not to focus on visible trends that have historically risen from pandemics, but to consider the structural effects that various diseases have had on fashion, as it has appeared in Europe. Just as pandemics have always treated humans unequally, so, too, has their impact on fashion systems been unequal. The chapter contends that the point of seeking to understand pandemics in and across societies is not the superficial, obvious changes, but instead the underlying, fundamental consequences that different pandemics have had for different people in different places. Out of these consequences, structures of fashion have emerged, and therefore, by looking into these consequences, what we consider European fashion can be understood differently than has usually been the case.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, inequality is at the very heart of the most pressing questions facing both the fashion industry and scholars of fashion in the 2020s. The urgency of these questions cannot be stressed too much. On our own part, we have sought to advance the scholarly debates, which, we hope, eventually will also instigate change in industry practices harmful to both humans and the environment. As both scholars and educators, we take seriously our responsibility to critique existing unethical ideologies, structures, and practices within transnational fashion systems. All the contributors to this book have in their own part and in their own ways sought to push this critical discussion forward. We trust the debate will go on in the years to come, and hope to see a future where destructive and unethical capitalist institutions and operations give

place to practices which are more sustainable, less racist, less sexist, and more beneficial for all.

Notes

1 This is true well beyond 'fashion influencers', who nevertheless form an illuminative example of how fashion systems are efficient in incorporating and institutionalising emerging 'external' forces, thus re-enforcing existing hierarchical structures (see Pedroni 2022).
2 However, not all dress modernisation projects were forms of 'Westernisation'. For example, Bamber (2022, 257) describes a 19th-century Hyderabadi dress style as follows: 'by 1890 the sherwani was widely recognized within India as a distinctively Hyderabadi garment, symbolizing the state's continued autonomy and claims to civilized, modernizing legitimacy. Yet the sherwani encompassed many influences, from colonial European to Ottoman Turkish and regional Deccani, and was a product not of deliberate design, but gradual and often haphazard evolution within the specific social context of 1860–90s Hyderabad'.
3 Interestingly, the source for defining Eurocentrism in Baizerman et al. (1993) was not Amin's text, but the *New York Times*.
4 For a recently published timeline of the fashion mergers, acquisitions, and investments that took place between 2020 and 2022, see The Fashion Law (2022).

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Chapter 2

Ethno-racial capitalism in contemporary fashion

Forced labour and the Uyghur crisis

Flavia Loscialpo

Introduction

Just as the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic games start in the midst of polemics and a diplomatic boycott, details about the treatment of Turkic Muslim ethnic minorities in China, and in particular the Uyghurs, are reaching the general public. At first sight, the level of proximity Westerners may have with certain abuses seems obscure. However, evidence provided by NGOs, researchers, investigative journalists (ASPI 2020; Zenz 2019; Human Rights Watch 2021; Murphy et al. 2021; Tobin et al. 2021), and intergovernmental institutions (United Nations 2022) allows one to retrace the long and tortuous journey that from the cotton fields of China's north-western Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR),[1] home to the Uyghurs, unravels on a global scale.

The Uyghur crisis needs, in fact, to be understood within both the Chinese national context and also in relation to the global scenario and operation of international corporations. China's embracing of a market economy, since the reforms of the late 1970s, has notoriously led to its remarkable economic growth, with the state playing a central role in economic, political, and social matters (Hsu and Hasmath 2012). As the liberalisation of global markets intensifies both transnational and local inequalities, across race, ethnicity, class, and gender lines (Treitler and Boatcă 2016), the repression and exploitation of the Uyghurs seem to be particularly 'convenient': not only do they reflect the Chinese government's internal strategic priorities, but they allow international corporations to make even greater profits.

The case of XUAR, which has only lately surfaced to international attention, is one of the many examples in the long history of labour exploitation within the textile and garment industry. Being relatively unexplored, at least from the perspective of fashion studies, it represents a new instance of colonial-capitalist expansion, which sheds light on complex and institutionalised forms of labour exploitation within fashion. It also represents a rather unique case, due to the particular intersection of state power, private corporations, and digital surveillance in the production of 'a permanent underclass of ethno-racial minority workers' (Byler 2022, 33).