

# Fashion and Postcolonial Critique

Elke Gaugele

Monica Titton (Eds.)



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We thank the editors of this volume, Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton, for proposing this volume on the nexus of fashion/fashion theory and postcolonial critique. Fashion as an artistic, cultural, social and of course economic phenomenon provides ample necessity for a critique coming from a postcolonial perspective. Colonialization and globalization play a prime role within fashion and so a critical perspective, looking closely at the structures and processes that shape all the dimensions of this section is important. The authors tackle the topic from fields and disciplines that are all important areas of research at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, cultural studies, anthropology, textile studies, art history, gender studies and fashion theory, and bringing together these perspectives by inviting an international group of authors is a great achievement of the editors. Moreover, this volume is part of the Austrian Center for Fashion Research ACfFR, a research group initiated and led by the editors, who established a consortium of partners from other art universities. We would like to thank Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton for their excellent work and their commitment to the ACfFR and to the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, as well as the authors for their contributions. As always, we are grateful to all the partners contributing to the book, especially Sternberg Press.

The Rectorate of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna  
Eva Blimlinger, Andrea B. Braidt, Karin Riegler

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# Fashion and Postcolonial Critique

## An Introduction

Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton

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At present we are witnessing an epistemological turn in fashion research. Fashion theory is increasingly concerned with the project of a critical global fashion and design history that takes into account a postcolonial fashion perspective.<sup>1</sup> This paradigmatic shift is part of an ongoing process that, over the past two decades, has initiated complex interdisciplinary debates within disciplines such as fashion history, anthropology, sociology, art history, and cultural studies that aim to establish a postcolonial perspective for fashion research. Since the works of key postcolonial thinkers like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have to a large extent not yet been adequately received in fashion theory, there is still a lot of conceptual and theoretical work to be done. Postcolonial theory is a critique of European knowledge and predominantly employs post-structuralist discourse and literary analysis.<sup>2</sup> When this heterogeneous, theoretical apparatus—characterized by an intellectual history with a dialectic between Marxism and post-structuralism/postmodernism<sup>3</sup>—is applied to the equally heterogeneous field of fashion research—a discipline that largely focuses on material, bodily, economic, social, and cultural practices—postcolonial theory itself is challenged and eventually even revised. Although decolonization is, in the words of James Clifford, “an unfinished, excessive historical process,”<sup>4</sup> the main corpus of postcolonial theory, which emerged in the 1980s and ‘90s, has seen many paradigmatic shifts and transformations of its scope and reach. Consequently Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak opens her book *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) with the declaration that postcolonial/colonial discourse studies are becoming “a substantial sub-disciplinary ghetto.”<sup>5</sup> Also Stuart Hall has asserted that “the post-colonial” as a decisive, hyphenated temporal marker within the general process of decolonization is highly problematic, yet he still saw it as a useful concept “to describe or characterize the shift in global relations which marks the (necessarily uneven) transition from the age of Empires to the post-independence or post-decolonization movement,” and as a frame of mind “to identify what are the new relations and dispositions of power which are emerging in the new conjuncture.”<sup>6</sup> And even though the growing “postcolonial theory industry” has enforced the

1 The idea for this book goes back to a symposium organized by Elke Gaugele, Monica Titton, and Birgit Haehnel entitled “Re-visioning Fashion Theories: Postcolonial and Critical Transcultural Perspectives” (symposium, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, December 11–12, 2015). The symposium was organized in cooperation with the research group Art Production and Art Theory in the Age of Global Migration, Verein für Kunst und Kulturwissenschaften, Ulm.

2 Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 44.

3 Gandhi, viii.

4 James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 6.

5 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1.

6 Stuart Hall, “When Was ‘the Post-colonial’? Thinking at the Limit,” in *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge 1996), 246.

culturalization of these issues in the past two decades, the urgency for the analyses of imperial power structures, neocolonialism, and global migration has been stressed by the anti-globalization movement in the twenty-first century.<sup>7</sup>

As Robert J. C. Young summarizes, "Above all, the assumption guiding post-colonial critique is that it is possible to make effective political interventions within and beyond its own disciplinary field by developing significant connections between the different forms of intellectual engagement and activism in the world today."<sup>8</sup> It is via this form of theory as the basis for political and social activism that postcolonial theory has reached fashion studies and comes into fruition. Postcolonial studies, a transversal field of research characterized by constant negotiations about its terminology and, as Leela Gandhi argues, about "the relationship between [its] material and analytic cognates,"<sup>9</sup> was developed at the same time as fashion studies, a transdisciplinary research platform since the 1980s and 1990s. Following the main strains of postcolonial theory since then, we observe three different modi of postcolonial fashion critique.

First, a revision of fashion based on the unraveling of imperialist and colonialist premises woven into historical and contemporary theories and definitions of fashion, comparable to those found in the history of science.<sup>10</sup> This fundamental epistemological critique was initiated by Jennifer Craik who questions the distinction between Western and non-Western fashion systems and uncovered how "consumer fashion simultaneously draws on discourses of exoticism, the primitive, orientalism and authenticity."<sup>11</sup> As Victoria Rovine observes, the schism between fashion and traditional dress is comparable to the separation between "art" and "artifact": artifacts stand for non-Western visual and material artworks prior to their recognition by the Western art system.<sup>12</sup> Rovine argues that in this hierarchical division "fashion serves as a measure of cultural attainment," and, we might add, cultural superiority: "Who has, and who does not have fashion is politically determined, a function of power relations."<sup>13</sup>

Second, a revision of fashion history and globalization of fashion and dress histories, inspired by postcolonialism and world history. Throughout the past three decades, fashion and costume historians have attempted to rewrite the histories of fashion from a critical perspective by producing new knowledge for a global historical narrative. As a methodology for the investigation of the "multi-sited and various nature of design practices," global design history has been conceptualized by Sarah Teasley, Glenn Adamson, and Giorgio Riello to shed light on the topos of global interconnectedness as well as on situations within networks that are "often of asymmetrical power and exchange."<sup>14</sup> Leslie W. Rabine's multi-sited approach in *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (2002) has set a core example in connecting the study of fashion's material culture to the workings of the global capital.<sup>15</sup> Building on the important and pioneering work of authors such as Joanne B. Eicher and Lou Taylor,<sup>16</sup> the

project of revisioning fashion histories has taken on a momentum of its own, and since the 2010s, a number of systematic, encyclopedic historical works have been published.<sup>17</sup> Among others, the impressive ten-volume *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* testifies to the academic importance accorded to the revision of global fashion and dress histories.<sup>18</sup>

Third, the establishment of a postcolonial perspective for fashion research. This modus of critique operates with a wider understanding of fashion, dress, and style and engages in empirical research and the analytic scopes of post-coloniality, decolonization, and globalization.<sup>19</sup> By arguing for the term "style"

- 7 María do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie: Eine kritische Einführung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 12, 286. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are our own.
- 8 Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 11.
- 9 Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 3.
- 10 Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1993); Yuniya Kawamura, "The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion," *Fashion Theory* 8, no. 2 (2004): 195–224; Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2012); Gudrun M. König, Gabriele Mentges, and Michael R. Müller, eds., *Die Wissenschaften der Mode* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015); and Elke Gausele, "Kostümgeschichten und frühe Modetheorien als Wissensordnungen der Moderne," in Mentges, König, and Müller, *Die Wissenschaften der Mode*, 49–80.
- 11 Craik, *Face of Fashion*, 41.
- 12 Victoria L. Rovine, "Colonialism's Clothing: Africa, France, and the Deployment of Fashion," *Design Issues* 25, no. 3 (2009): 46.
- 13 Rovine, "Colonialism's Clothing," 46. See also Sandra Niessen, "Afterword: Re-orienting Fashion Theory," in *Re-orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress*, ed. Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, and Carla Jones (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 245.
- 14 Sarah Teasley, Giorgio Riello, and Glenn Adamson, "Introduction: Towards Global Design History," in *Global Design History*, ed. Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello, and Sarah Teasley (London: Routledge, 2011), 3. See also Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013).
- 15 Leslie W. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2002). For critical investigations on the global economies of fashion and art, see Elke Gausele, ed. *Aesthetic Politics in Fashion* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).
- 16 Joanne B. Eicher, *Dress and Ethnicity: Change across Space and Time* (New York: Bloomsbury, 1995); Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); and Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).
- 17 Margaret Maynard, *Dress and Globalization* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); and Joanne B. Eicher, Hazel A. Lutz, and Sandra Lee Evenson, *The Visible Self: Global Perspectives on Dress, Culture and Society* (New York: Fairchild, 2014).
- 18 Joanne B. Eicher, ed., *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2010).
- 19 Jean Allman, ed., *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Jennifer Craik and M. Angela Jansen, eds., *Modern Fashion Traditions: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity through Fashion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); Victoria L. Rovine, *African Fashion Global Style: Histories, Innovations, and Ideas You Can Wear* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Simona Segre Reinach, "China and Italy: Fast Fashion versus Prêt à Porter: Towards a New Culture of Fashion," *Fashion Theory* 9, no. 1 (2005): 43–56; and Simona Segre Reinach, "The Identity of Fashion in Contemporary China and the New Relationships with the West," *Fashion Practice* 4, no. 1 (2012): 57–70.

used instead of “fashion,” cultural studies scholars synthesized postcolonial with post-structuralist perspectives. Style should accordingly be decoded as “a phantom history of race relations since the War” and has been conceptualized as a semiology that narrates the historical sequence of migration routes and highlights different waves of immigration and their changes in dress cultures.<sup>20</sup> Within this strand of research, scholars examine a wide variety of objects of investigation ranging from micro-histories in regional or national identities,<sup>21</sup> to the study of migrant and diasporic “style-fashion-dress” cultures, and the intersection of religion and fashion in urban immigrant communities.<sup>22</sup> Building on the theoretical legacy of cultural studies, their aim is to “re-orient fashion,”<sup>23</sup> and to create new terms and concepts when studying fashion and style in a global, postcolonial, transnational, post-black, and post-migratory society.<sup>24</sup>

The contributions in this book build on the theoretical legacy of the three strands of postcolonial fashion critique mentioned above. Coming from a diverse range of disciplines including textile studies, art history, anthropology, history, literary studies, gender studies, cultural studies, and fashion theory, the essays in this book reflect on the multidisciplinary nature and diverse scope of contemporary fashion studies. Each of the authors addresses a form of postcolonial critique understood as a “theoretical attempt to engage with a particular historical condition.”<sup>25</sup>

With an academic background rooted in cultural anthropology and sociology, we, as editors, have a specific, empirically trained perspective on the project of postcolonial fashion critique. We are indebted to an understanding of post-colonial critique that, as Young programmatically posited, “focuses on forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world,” and “constitutes a directed intellectual production that seeks to articulate itself with different forms of emancipatory politics.”<sup>26</sup> As a cultural anthropologist and sociologist respectively, we are obliged to analyze cultural phenomena in a larger context and to take into account micro and macro levels of social reality, such as colonization, globalization, decolonization, postcoloniality, and neocolonialism.

Apart from Spivak, thinkers such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and James Clifford have informed our research of postcolonial fashion in their writing. While compiling our research, we observed how essential fashion critique had been for the work of the predecessors of the “post-colonial” and their decolonizing concepts of the modern era, as practices of fashioning, styling, and their visual representation had been considered as having a fundamental role in the production of emancipatory identity politics, countercultural resistance, and the foundation of corresponding image archives.

This book proposes five subjects of postcolonial fashion critique exemplarily carved out from historical as well as contemporary positions: the decolonizing

of historical fashion narratives; decolonizing concepts of fashion research; the expansion of decolonizing fashion archives, imaginaries, and media; a critical revision of key postcolonial theories; and critical global fashion histories and the analysis of global migration.

### Decolonizing Historical Fashion Narratives: Fashion Critique in *La Revue du Monde Noir: The Review of the Black World* (1931/32)

At the beginning of the 1930s, the Paris-based voice of the Pan-African movement was *La Revue du Monde Noir: The Review of the Black World* (1931–32), the bilingual literary journal that introduced modern decolonizing fashion critique.<sup>27</sup> Following pioneers of later postcolonial theory, such as the sociologist and civil-rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois, members of the Harlem Renaissance movement (1917–28), and the philosopher Alain Locke who called on “the new Negro” (1925) to write him- and herself, *La Revue du Monde Noir* aimed to bring a contemporary Afro-Latin self-consciousness into existence.<sup>28</sup> The agenda of the journal, described

20 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), 41.

21 Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (London: Hurst & Company, 1996); M. Angela Jansen, *Moroccan Fashion: Design, Culture, and Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); and Masafumi Monden, *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

22 Carol Tulloch, *The Birth of Cool: Style Narratives of the African Diaspora* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Carol Tulloch, “Style – Fashion – Dress: From Black to Post-Black,” *Fashion Theory* 14, no. 3 (2010): 273–303; Reina Lewis, “Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail,” in “African Diaspora,” special issue, ed. Valerie Steele, *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 4 (December 2007): 423–41; Annelies Moors, “Fashionable Muslims: Notions of Self, Religion, and Society in Sanà,” in *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 4 (December 2007): 319–46;

Heather Marie Akou, “Building a New ‘World Fashion’: Islamic Dress in the Twenty-First Century,” *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 4 (2007): 403–21; Emma Tarlo and Annelies Moors, eds., *Islamic Fashion and Anti-fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005); and

Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford: Berg, 2010).

23 Carla Jones and Ann Marie Leshkowich, “Introduction: Globalization of Asian Dress,” in Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones, *Re-orienting Fashion*, 37.

24 Yuniya Kawamura, “The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion,” *Fashion Theory* 8, no. 2 (2004): 195–224; Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2012); and Gertrud Lehnert and Gabriele Mentges, eds., *Fusion Fashion Culture beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013).

25 Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 4.

26 Young, *Postcolonialism*, 11.

27 Thanks to Christian Kravagna for bringing *La Revue du Monde Noir*, nos. 1–6 (November 1931–April 1932) to our attention. See his essay on pp. 40–53.

28 See T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 40; and Alain Locke, “Enter the New Negro,” in “Harlem Mecca of the New Negro,” special issue, *Survey Graphic*, no. 6 (March 1925): 629–34.

as “a query on European Fashions as followed by colored people,”<sup>29</sup> had been programmatically announced in the first issue, which was founded by the Parisian Afro-Martiniquan intellectual Paulette Nardal.<sup>30</sup> Although the neologism *négritude* as an expression for the Francophone “new Negro” and its inauguration of black humanist thought had been coined later in the years 1936 to 1937 by the Martiniquan poet Aimé Césaire, it was Jane Nardal who, as a vanguard of the movement, had introduced the term “Afro-Latin” in her essay “Internationalisme noir” (1928) long before Césaire.<sup>31</sup> As progressive thinkers of the *Négritude* movement, hosts of the Clamart Salon, and editorial managers of the *Revue*, the Sorbonne University-educated sisters Andrée, Jane, and Paulette Nardal—known as “les soeurs Nardal”—broached a provocative fashion debate in the journal’s “Question Corner” in the fall issue of 1931.<sup>32</sup> The journal espouses the triple aim “to create among the Negroes of the entire world, regardless of nationality, an intellectual and moral tie, which will permit them to better know each other, to love one another, to defend more effectively their collective interests, and to glorify their race.”<sup>33</sup>

By raising a survey on the question “How should negroes living in Europe dress?” the *Revue* mirrored European colonialism and racism in a double entendre.<sup>34</sup> At first sight it points the finger at the French philosopher Henri Bergson, who asked in his book *Laughter* (1911), “Why does the sight of a Negro dressed in European Fashion provoke the laugh of the white man?” He answered his own query with the words: “Because the white man thinks the negro is disguised.”<sup>35</sup> From an epistemological perspective, the *Revue*’s inquiry unmasks Bergson’s inept example that aimed to explain masquerade as a deeper philosophical principle of identity and society. Historically, fashion has been set up as a discourse in the cultural sciences with an expelling demarcation line that distinguished the “West and the rest” and substantiated the expansion of the European empires during the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> The premise that fashion is a phenomenon that could only emerge in the “civilized” West is the epistemological basis of modern (sociological) fashion theories from Christian Garve, Thorstein Veblen, and Werner Sombart to Georg Simmel. In this volume, Christian Kravagna discusses Adolf Loos’s writings on fashion. Pervaded with concepts of the “primitive” and a belief in the superiority of Western culture borrowed from orientalist and colonial discourse, Loos’s essays on fashion aimed at westernizing his home country of Austria via an internationalism based on the universalized model of British colonial modernity. In France in the early twentieth century, at a time when its colonies were at their most expansive, the construction of non-European cultures as “traditional” was an important element of the colonial enterprise and its support at home.<sup>37</sup> With its sarcastic critique of Bergson’s epistemic racism and colonialism, the *Revue* opened up an actual question corner on the fashioning of contemporary emancipatory *Négritude* identities, with the clarification that “the natural reply to such a question” should be “just like everybody else, according to the climate and the social

life!”<sup>38</sup> In the following two issues of the *Revue*, five authors contributed to this discourse: Magd Raney, the alias of the Parisian Afro-Martiniquais writer Marie-Magdeleine Carbet, the Parisian-Antillean intellectual Louis Thomas Achille, the American educator and translator Clara W. Shephard, Jean Baldouï, and a white subscriber to the journal under the pseudonym “Rosario.”

Reversing Bergson’s interpellation that “the sight of a Negro dressed in European Fashion always provokes the laughter of the white man,” Raney opens the discourse with a sarcastic speech act and further brings racial and colonial injurious stereotypes into ridicule.<sup>39</sup> She also interviewed a tailor and a milliner atelier, both well known among the Caribbean community for their sympathy. “Good taste” is the overarching benchmark of all contributors to the inquiry, and all authors consider it part of the human condition that transcends all cultures as an expression of intellectual, aesthetic, and social ability. Everybody should pay attention to his or her complexion as to “other conditioning factors of smartness (size, corpulence, age, social standing, type, etc.) which every person of taste white, yellow, or black must consider,” as Achille summed up.<sup>40</sup> While he and Raney define the limits of “good taste” by warning of the ridiculousness of overdressing and of “certain shortcoming in their style,”<sup>41</sup> Shephard was “very seriously concerned with the choice of tints and shade,” and to get to know “which would bring out the light and the latent beauty of our complexion.”<sup>42</sup> Thereby Shephard refers to dressmaking classes in the American “Negro schools” at that time, where students were taught how to figure out their styles and “the particular colors that are most becoming.”<sup>43</sup> In 1931 *La Revue du Monde Noir* finally finished its explorations on how Negroes living in Europe should dress by teaching Bergson a last lesson. Baldouï concludes “that colored people can perhaps give more lessons than they have need to take from people who think that in all civilization they alone are privileged.”<sup>44</sup>

29 *La Revue du Monde Noir* 1 (1931): 4.

30 With the help of Haitian Dr. Leo Sajous, see Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 17.

31 T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Femme négritude: Jane Nardal, *La Dépêche africaine*, and the francophone New Negro,” *Black Feminist Research* (Fall 2000): 8–17; 10–12; and Jane Nardal, “Internationalisme noir,” *La Dépêche africaine*, June 15, 1928, 4.

32 “Nos enquêtes/Question Corner,” *La Revue du Monde Noir* 2 (1931): 60.

33 La direction, “Ce que nous voulons faire,” *La Revue du Monde Noir* 1 (1931): 4.

34 Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 56.

35 Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloutesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 55.

36 Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest. Discourse and Power,” in *Modernity: An Introduction to the Modern Societies* ed. Stuart Hall (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 185–227.

37 Rovine, “Colonialism’s Clothing,” 44.

38 Magd Raney, “Nos Enquêtes/Question Corner,” interview by Louis Thomas Achille, *La Revue du Monde Noir* 3 (1932): 50. Also see fig. 17.

39 Raney, 50.

40 Achille, “Nos Enquêtes,” 53, see fig. 20.

41 Raney, “Nos Enquêtes,” 51; see fig. 18.

42 Clara W. Shephard, “En Marge de Notre Enquête,” *La Revue du Monde Noir* 3 (1932): 54; see figs. 1, 21.

43 Shephard, 54; see fig. 21.

44 Jean Baldouï, “Comment les Noirs vivent en Europe doivent-ils s’habiller,” *La Revue du Monde Noir* 4 (1932): 52; see fig. 24.



Fig. 1

Young women cutting and fitting clothing in class at Agricultural and Mechanical College, displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition of 1900

As discussed in the *Revue* in relation to fashion, the issue of always being looked at in a preposterous way follows both Jane Nardal's concept of an Afro-Latin double-belonging and the legacy of W. E. B. Du Bois. His seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) diagnoses a "two-ness," "two unreconciled strivings," and the "double consciousness" within African American identities.<sup>45</sup> Du Bois defines this double consciousness as a "peculiar sensation" and the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."<sup>46</sup> His concept of double consciousness as identity formation is based on a visual paradigm and on the textile metaphor of the veil. According to Du Bois it is the "Veil of Race" and respectively the "Veil of Color"<sup>47</sup> that socially constitute double consciousness in "a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."<sup>48</sup> Following Du Bois, in 1928 Jane Nardal had already given voice to a "double appartenance," a double belonging between Frenchness/Latiness and Africaness/blackness and had formulated a new self-consciousness of an Afro-Latin identity that embraces cultural métissage to return *en soi*, to the self.<sup>49</sup> Politically, these ideas of difference, symbiosis, hyphenations, and the nascent self-consciousness of black Francophones

threatened French body politics and inaugurated the historical processes of decolonization.<sup>50</sup>

### Decolonizing Concepts for Fashion Research: W. E. B. Du Bois's Visual Sociology and the De/Postcolonial Counter-archive



Fig. 2

Display of W. E. B. Du Bois's "American Negro" exhibition at the Paris International Exposition of 1900

<sup>45</sup> The concept of the "double consciousness" appears in the first chapter of W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essay and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903). Reprint of the text of the first edition: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007). Du Bois first uses the term in his article "The Strivings of the Negro People," *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1897. See also John P. Pittman, "Double Consciousness," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/double-consciousness/>. Further reading on Du Bois's discussion of double consciousness and visual culture, see Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 26–35.

<sup>46</sup> Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Du Bois, 55, 123.

<sup>48</sup> Du Bois, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, "Femme Négritude," 14.

<sup>50</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, 16.

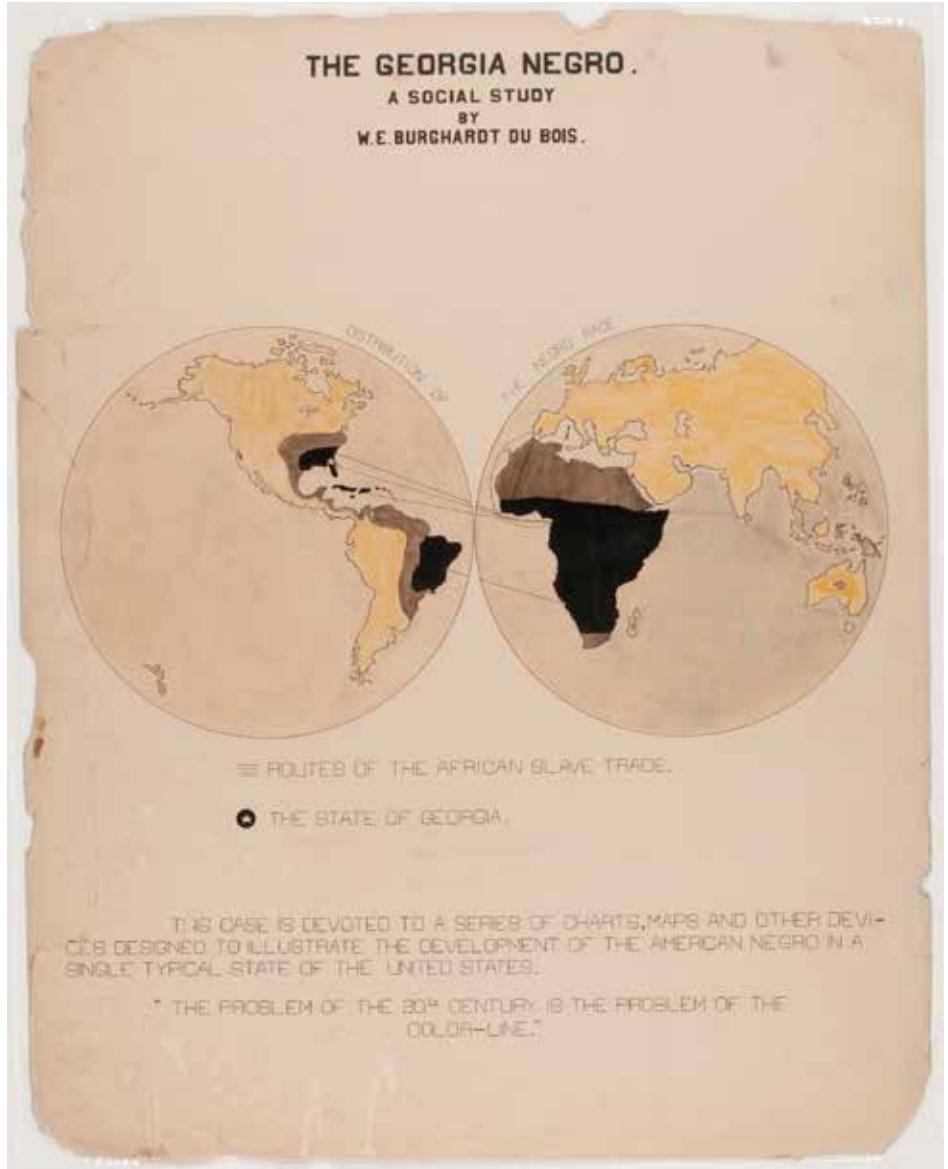


Fig. 3  
 "The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line," chart prepared by Du Bois for the "American Negro" exhibition at the Paris World Exposition of 1900 to show the routes of the African slave trade and the economic and social progress of African Americans since emancipation

The reexamination of Du Bois is important for postcolonial fashion research as he can arguably be considered a visual theorist of race and racism as well as a visual sociologist who actively refuted racist images and systematically worked on the transformation of the white gaze and against the scientific legitimization of white supremacy. His exhibition "The American Negro,"<sup>51</sup> cocurated with the American "Negro special agent" Thomas J. Calloway, was held at the Palace of Social Economy at the Paris World's Fair in 1900 (fig. 2). The exhibition produced a counter-discourse to contradict racist images of late nineteenth-century anthropology, to challenge the usual colonial displays of exotic otherness at the World's Fair, and to disprove Western visual and popular culture of the 1890s in which black people were represented as "deracinated 'sambos'" and lascivious 'coons.'<sup>52</sup> Du Bois's counter-archive reflects his trust in the power of empirical and visual sociology to bring about social change.<sup>53</sup>

Du Bois positions the exhibition as "explicitly sociological in the larger sense of the term—that is an attempt to give, in as systematic and compact a form as possible, the history and present conditions of a large group of human beings."<sup>54</sup> His methodological approach to visualize his empirical and theoretical work by producing thirty-two modernist-style charts and maps related to his study on the Georgia Negro, to show five hundred photographs of contemporary African American life, and to present two hundred books as well as nearly 150 weekly periodicals authored by African Americans aimed to decolonize the Western order of knowledge of his time (fig. 3). Du Bois's insight on the agency and the afterlife of pictures, his dedication to the systematic collection and the arrangement of panels resemble Aby Warburg's later work *Mnemosyne* (1924), a picture atlas.<sup>55</sup> But beyond that, Du Bois devoted his work to changing the regimes of representation by compiling and exhibiting a decolonizing counter-archive showcased using magazine racks, picture frames, and bookshelves. From a fashion studies point of view, it is highly interesting that in Du Bois's collection of photographs showing modern African American life he includes a documentary image of young women cutting and fitting clothing in a class of Greensboro Agricultural and Mechanical College during the

<sup>51</sup> Du Bois and Calloway's work for the "American Negro" exhibition was highly awarded by the Paris exhibition judges and other institutions: Grand Prix for the exhibition as a whole as well as gold, silver, and bronze medals and honorary mentions. See W. E. B. Du Bois, "The American Negro at Paris," *American Monthly Review of Reviews* (November 1900): 577, [http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b215-i231/#page/1\(mode/1up](http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b215-i231/#page/1(mode/1up).

<sup>52</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "W. E. B. Du Bois' Talented Tenth in Pictures," *The Root*, February 12, 2010, <http://www.theroot.com/w-e-b-du-bois-talented-tenth-in-pictures-1790881827>.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 14.

<sup>54</sup> Du Bois, "American Negro at Paris," 576.

<sup>55</sup> Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas: Mnemosyne*, ed. Martin Warnke (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008).

Figs. 4–6  
*Portrait 1899* displayed at the “American Negro” exhibit at the Paris International Exposition of 1900



Fig. 7  
*Portrait 1899/1900* displayed at the “American Negro” exhibit at the Paris International Exposition of 1900



1890s<sup>56</sup>—the class had been described as an emancipatory self-fashioning strategy by Clara W. Shephard in *La Revue du Monde Noir*. Furthermore, many of the portrait photographs show African American women posing in fashionable styles of the time, such as fur collars or ruched blouses with high-fitting collars (figs. 4–7). With their dandy-esque looks, some even seemed to transcend the “gender” categories of that time in their clothing, wearing men’s jackets, shirts, or coats in the styles of soldiers’ uniforms. The hope for radical cultural change is embodied in Du Bois’s figure of the dandy, an “odd or queer Race Man with revolutionary ideas about race, gender, sex, and nation.”<sup>57</sup>

For the Paris World’s Fair, Du Bois had also styled himself as an elegant African American gentleman with a black tailcoat and top hat so as to represent himself as a man educated at an elite university, as man of science and culture. The “Race Man’s uniform,” suggested by Du Bois at that time, adopts the well-fitting Victorian three-piece suit and thus appropriates a highly symbolic piece of normative masculinity and authority.<sup>58</sup> This style appropriation of black dandies was metaphorically regarded as a modern outfit that expressed freedom, opposition, and power within the racist environment of American society.<sup>59</sup> Du Bois points out that the attention to beauty and art as well their cultural production should be part of emancipatory efforts.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Most of the pictures exhibited were taken by photographer Thomas Askew from Atlanta, and those of the South were shot by Harry Shepherd, the first African American photography studio owner in St. Paul, Minnesota. Images of the Hampton Institute were taken by Frances Benjamin Johnston, one of the first female photo journalists. See Elisabetta Bini, “Drawing a Global Color Line: ‘The American Negro Exhibit’ at the 1900 Paris Exposition,” in *Moving Bodies, Displaying Nations: National Cultures, Race, Ethnicities, Gender in World Exhibitions, 1873–1939*, ed. Guido Abbattista (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2014), 25–52.

<sup>57</sup> Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 145.

<sup>58</sup> Miller, 139.

<sup>59</sup> Richard J. Powell, “Sartor Africanus,” in *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture*, ed. Susan Fillin-Yeh (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 226.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, *Slaves to Fashion*, 153; See also W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Criteria of Negro Art,” *The Crisis* (October 1926): 290–97; and W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Negro in Literature and Art,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49 (September 1913): 233–37.



Fig. 8  
“The Hidden Fashion Library,” exhibition photo,  
state rooms Alte Post, Vienna, April 26–29, 2017

## Fashion Media, Imaginaries, and the Global Postcolonial Counter-archive: Representing Alternative Fashion Imaginaries

Photography has been, and is central to that aspect of decolonization that calls us back to the past and offers a way to reclaim and to renew life-affirming bonds.

—bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*

Fashion media—from fashion magazines to blogs—are important hubs for the dissemination of representations and collective narratives on gender, race, class, body, identity, and sexuality; therefore they carry the potential for a decolonizing transformation from within the fashion system. In the past fifteen years, the emergence of digital fashion media has put long-standing hierarchies of power into question, and while to a large extent the established orders were largely reaffirmed after all,<sup>61</sup> the so-called digital revolution also gave rise to a plethora of independent, globally connected blogs, online platforms, and most recently a renaissance of print magazines that eschew the received categories and orders of fashion. These new fashion media represent archives of counter-cultural imaginaries and visual discourses that challenge, disrupt, and renew the hegemonic order of fashion. Following the footsteps of Du Bois’s tradition of visual sociology as a critical intervention, we curated the exhibition “The Hidden Fashion Library” in April 2017 to research and present the ways in which images can contribute to a change in regimes of seeing and how fashion imaginaries partake in the formation of collective visual memories.<sup>62</sup> The exhibition explored the global landscape of independent magazines that have been founded in recent years as both a reaction to the digital-media boom of fashion and street-style blogs and as a second wave of the 1980s and early ’90s alternative and avant-garde magazine production. Our spatial and curatorial concept of creating a hidden fashion library was indebted to Michel Foucault’s programmatic epistemological critique in his book *The Order of Things*, originally published in 1966.<sup>63</sup> We selected magazines that to us represent new forms of counter-archives of fashions, styles, knowledge, and identities. Therefore the exhibition as a whole can be seen as a repository (or: library) for counter-archives of the global, critical, and post-colonial fashion media

<sup>61</sup> Monica Titton, “Fashion Criticism Unravelled: A Sociological Critique of Criticism in Fashion Media,” *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 3, no 2 (2016): 209–23.

<sup>62</sup> The exhibition “The Hidden Fashion Library” (April 26–29, 2017, Alte Post, Vienna) was curated by Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton. The exhibition space was

designed by gangart | Simonetta Ferfoglia and Heinrich Pichler. For detailed information, catalogue, and exhibition views, see <http://hiddenfashionlibrary.net/>.

<sup>63</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xix–xx.

production and as a tool for postcolonial visual fashion research (fig. 8). The names of the magazines unfold a narrative of global politics: migration, decolonization, casualization, diaspora, and hybrid identities are reflected in mastheads such as: *Diaspora Drama*, *Boat Magazine*, *Born 'n' Bread*, *Migrant Journal*, and *White Lies*.

Some of the visual material from the exhibition found its way into this book because we wanted to give space to these instances of inherent postcolonial critique and therefore included the work of journalists, fashion photographers, stylists, and designers who contribute to a critical expansion and postcolonial revision of fashion imaginaries. The timeless portrait of Grace Bol on the cover of this book was taken by the revered fashion photographer Sølve Sundsbø.<sup>64</sup> With its classic composition and coloration, the image recalls Renaissance portrait paintings, yet with Bol's minimalist wardrobe and the whimsical set design of a fast-food *nature morte*, the photograph conveys a clever, glorious representation of contemporary fashion in a postcolonial context. "Re-mastering the Old World" is the title of a series of printed silk tapestries designed by Walé Oyéjidé Esq. for the fashion label Ikiré Jones. In this book we showcase a selection of these prints based on historical paintings that pay "homage to the work of time-honored artists, while celebrating the perspectives of unheralded people of color."<sup>65</sup> Heval Okçuoğlu is the editor in chief of *212 Magazine*, a biannual magazine launched in 2016 that is based in Istanbul and distributed internationally.<sup>66</sup> From its first three issues, we chose seven images that represent the magazine's unique aesthetic and that testify to its mission to unveil and create alternative visual archives. Helen Jennings is the editorial director and cofounder of *Nataal*, "a global media brand celebrating contemporary African fashion, visual arts, music, travel and society."<sup>67</sup> As a journalist, writer, and consultant, she has been at the forefront of African fashion media production and we invited her to write about contemporary African fashion. "Last Stop Palenque" is a fashion editorial published on *Nataal* in March 2016. We spoke to photographer Hana Knížová and stylist Sabrina Henry about the fascinating history of San Basilio de Palenque, the Afro-Caribbean village in northern Colombia in which they produced the editorial.

## A Critical Revision of Key Postcolonial Theories through the Lens of Fashion Research

Despite the heterogeneity in terms of their disciplinary background, their methodological and theoretical approaches, the contributors of this volume all read fashion as a cultural text and analyze it as a historical, social, and political phenomenon involved in and affected by histories of colonial domination, anti-colonial resistance, and processes of decolonization and

globalization. In this book, postcolonial theory is one of the main frames of references for the development of concepts and theses, but it also serves as a theoretical lens through which specific historical and cultural constellations can be analyzed and understood. Some essays are a rereading of a key text that is used to analyze specific sociopolitical and historical constellations—this is the case for Gabriele Mentges's "Reviewing Orientalism and Re-orienting Fashion beyond Europe."

The title, *Fashion and Postcolonial Critique*, however, speaks of our commitment to go beyond just theorizing: one aim of this volume is to showcase practices of postcolonial and transnational resistance and forms of postcolonial critique along with academic analyses and concepts. Thereby, this volume covers not only academic endeavors in postcolonial theorizing but also practical modes of decolonization through representation and insights about the condition of postcoloniality. In this vein, we also invited practitioners from the field of fashion media to contribute their journalistic and photographic work to this book.

References to Fanon's seminal work on the psychology of colonial oppression and on the process of decolonization serve as a theoretical lens through which the decolonization of imaginaries, historical examples of psychological resistance to colonialism, and anti-colonial political activism can be analyzed. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961),<sup>68</sup> a book that became a manifesto for armed, anti-colonial liberation movements throughout the world, Fanon analyzes the economic and social exploitation of the colonized subject as an effect of racial inequalities and weaves together tricontinental Marxism with his previous work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1954), on the psychology of racial power dynamics.<sup>69</sup> Here Fanon rearticulated the Du Boisian concept of double consciousness, a concept that was later taken up in postcolonial theory by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993).<sup>70</sup> Gilroy extended the idea to black diasporic cultures beyond the American context and argued against an essentialist understanding of race.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Many thanks to Sølve Sundsbø for letting us use his photograph on the cover of the book and many thanks to Grace Bol for agreeing as well. The image is part of the fashion editorial "Sunrise Market" that was published in *Luncheon Magazine*, no. 3 (Spring 2017). The white cape worn by Bol is by Duro Olowu, and the styling is by Mattias Karlsson.

<sup>65</sup> "The Archives, Ikiré Jones, <https://ikirejones.com/archive/>.

<sup>66</sup> "About," *212 Magazine*, <https://212-magazine.com/about/>.

<sup>67</sup> "About," *Nataal*, <http://nataal.com/about/>.

<sup>68</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; repr. London: Penguin, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Young, *Postcolonialism*, 278–79. See also Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; repr. New York: Grove Press, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

<sup>71</sup> Pittman, "Double Consciousness."

For Spivak, fashion (and the neocolonialism in the fashion world) is a core example of the “implicit working of the axiomatics of imperialism in the vocabulary of radical critique.”<sup>72</sup> She harshly criticizes that “the ‘alternative’ discourse of fashion remains as asymptotic to radical theory as is the garment industry to fashion.”<sup>73</sup> Spivak’s work challenges Western critical theory by pointing out that the reality of so-called Third World women reflects the inadequacy of critical theory to grasp the intersections of multiple forms of female oppression under colonialism, decolonization, and globalization.<sup>74</sup> She argues that the female subaltern subject “disappears [...] into a violent shutting that is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world-woman’ caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development.”<sup>75</sup> In her essay on Indian nationalism and dress, Ruby Sircar critically discusses Indian president Narendra Modi’s political use of dress with regard to Spivak’s thoughts on postcolonial, subaltern resistance to neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism through fashion.

More than any other, two figures of postcolonial theorizing in particular run through the book like a red thread and are employed by several authors for their theoretical and analytic versatility: Said’s concept of Orientalism and Bhabha’s concept of hybridity.<sup>76</sup>

Said famously developed the concept of Orientalism as “a form of thought for dealing with the foreign,”<sup>77</sup> and showed how the Orient has been constructed as the dark, uncivilized, exotic, and fascinating “other” of the Occident through literature, academic fields such as philosophy, geography, literary studies, and philology, and through what he calls “European imaginative geography.”<sup>78</sup> Although it has been criticized and modified in many ways, Orientalism still constitutes a paradigmatic conceptual model for postcolonial theory and therefore its meaning has been revised in many contributions to this book.<sup>79</sup> In their essay “Textiles Designing Another History,” Gabriele Genge and Angela Stercken argue that if fashion and textiles are conceptualized as moving actors and signifiers of entangled histories it is possible to overcome the binary view on cultural processes inherent in Orientalism and its critique. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Uzbekistan, Gabriele Mentges critically examines the theoretical legacy of Orientalism in fashion studies, and in particular how recent discussions on “re-orienting fashion” can be used to analyze emerging fashion discourses in transnational contexts and processes of nation building through fashion in relation to postcoloniality.<sup>80</sup> In her text on exoticism and tropicalism in Brazil, Alexandra Karentzos employs the concept of “tropicality” with regard to Said’s Orientalism and explores the discursive production of Brazilian fashion and art through processes of transcultural exchanges. Christine Delhaye, on the other hand, problematizes processes of economic exchanges within the neoliberal global market through the lens of cultural appropriation with her analysis of the production of African wax cloth by the Dutch company Vlisco.

In contrast to Said, whose work focuses on discourses and collective narratives, the writings of Bhabha revolve around questions of identity and culture. Bhabha set out to revisit the concept of Orientalism and criticized Said’s implicit assumption “that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer,” which he calls “a historical and theoretical simplification.”<sup>81</sup> Bhabha emphasizes the hybridity of culture and rejects the notion of a pure, essential identity—both for the colonizer and the colonized, and by doing so he opens up a space for what he calls “strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.”<sup>82</sup> He positions his concepts of “hybridity” and “third spaces,” which he elaborated in *The Location of Culture* (1994) in the tradition of Du Bois and Fanon.<sup>83</sup> But in contrast to Bhabha, Du Bois referred to the transnational interdependence of liberation struggles and pointed out that the civil rights movements in the global north will not succeed in gaining freedom as long as colonial serfdom exists and colonial power structures in the global south won’t be eliminated.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Du Bois reflected on his conceptualization of the “color line” from a Marxist point of view and brought to the fore the “question of labor” as its inherent predominant concern.<sup>85</sup>

In her essay on African diasporic masculinities, Christine Checinska looks into the various strands of criticism aimed at the concept of hybridity in postcolonial studies, cultural theory, and race studies. With recourse to these critical academic debates about hybridity and to the concept of creolization, Checinska carves out her own theoretical approach to analyze African diasporic male attire. Also Birgit Mersmann takes up Bhabha’s concept of diasporic double-negativity, which has been advanced as “strategy of mimicry as double articulation” by the postcolonial media theorist Niti Patel to enable both “power and signals a loss of agency by simultaneously stabilizing and destabilizing the

<sup>72</sup> Spivak, *Critique of Post-colonial Reason*, 400.

<sup>73</sup> Spivak, 341.

<sup>74</sup> Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 2003), 7.

<sup>75</sup> Spivak, *Critique of Post-colonial Reason*, 304.

<sup>76</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003); and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>77</sup> Said, 46.

<sup>78</sup> Said, 57.

<sup>79</sup> Said, 384.

<sup>80</sup> Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones, *Re-orienting Fashion*.

<sup>81</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question ... Homi K Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype

and Colonial Discourse,” *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983): 25.

<sup>82</sup> Bhabha, “The Other Question,” 112.

<sup>83</sup> Castro de Varela and Dhawan, *Postkolonialismus*, 220.

<sup>84</sup> De Varela and Dhawan, 310.

<sup>85</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “To the Nations of the World” (lecture, First Pan-African Conference, London, July 23–25, 1900). A transcript of the talk is available in *Great Speeches by African Americans: Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Barack Obama, Jr., and Others*, ed. James Daley (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 85–87; and Castro de Varela and Dhawan, *Postkolonialismus*, 310.

position of power.<sup>86</sup> Investigating the transcultural strategies of historical fashion appropriation through multilayered identity enactments in the work of artists Yinka Shonibare and Mary Sibande, Mersmann examines how these two artists deploy fashion and dress in the construction of a postcolonial subjectivity that subverts historical memories of colonial and diasporic embodiment and proposes new, emancipatory identity politics. Also Birgit Haehnel refers to Bhabha in her text about the white gaze in fashion. Following the work of Arjun Appadurai, Haehnel employs the notion of "fashionscapes" as a theoretical concept with which the multisited circulation of fashion in the global economy can be analyzed. Haehnel expands Appadurai's model with Bhabha and identifies hybrid spaces within fashionscapes as sites of negotiation and the revision of heterogenous cultural products such as fashion.

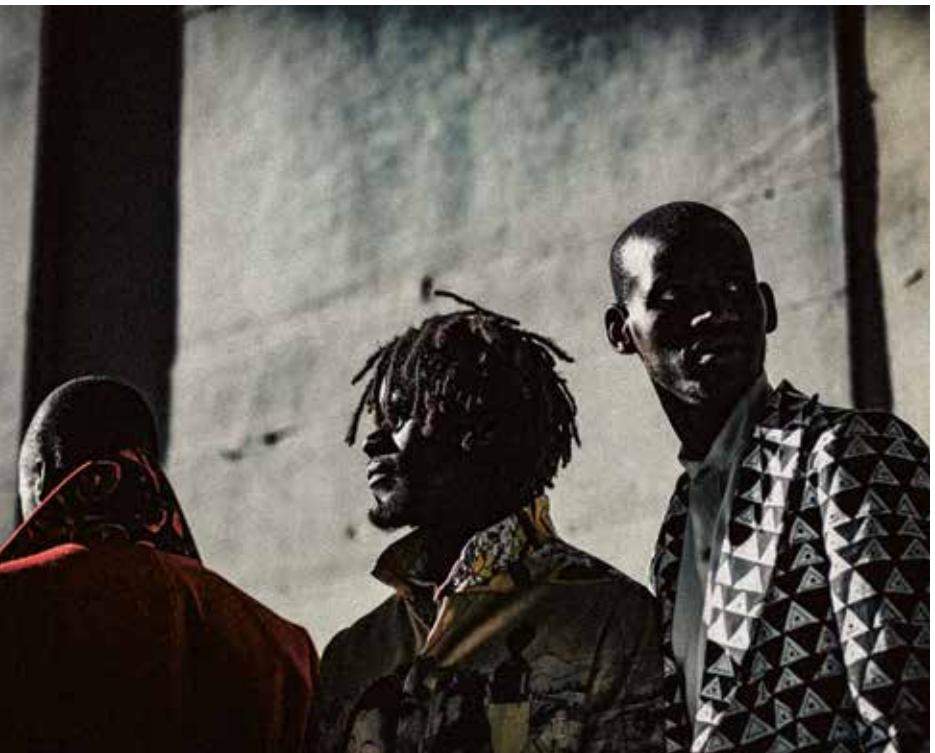


Fig. 9  
Walé Oyéjidé, "After migration,"  
Ikeré Jones Lookbook  
(Fall/Winter 2016/17)

## Critical Global Fashion Histories and the Analysis of Flight and Global Migration

Highlighting forced migration as one of the defining characteristics of the current phase of globalization, Burcu Dogramaci's essay underlines the necessity to outline an approach to study fashion and migration. Consequently, Dogramaci suggests building upon already-existing research on exile that focuses on the experiences of strangeness, speechlessness, violence, trauma, and fear caused by flight and forced migration. She also refers to the de-/postcolonial concept of double consciousness when she identifies the exiled person and his or her material and metaphorical translation of the language and syntax of fashion as a "double bottom."<sup>87</sup>

As suggested by both the studies of forced migration and the study of global design,<sup>88</sup> this volume also pursues a multi-sited approach by focusing on breaches and divisions within the current globalization process in which "flows of people, information, capital and goods across national and geographical borders accelerate" while at the same time movements are blocked "through immigration controls, tariffs and other trade barriers."<sup>89</sup> In her text, Leslie W. Rabine examines T-shirt designers and artists in Senegal and in the United States by means of a multi-sited fieldwork approach. Thereby she highlights incommensurable gaps as well as interconnections of creative labor between the Senegalese informal economy (*l'informel*), on the one side, and the globalized model of "platform capitalism" in the United States, on the other.

The large-scale refugee movement between 2015 and 2016 saw the forced migration of 65.3 million people worldwide<sup>90</sup>—this global social change calls for a paradigmatic shift in fashion research and requires fashion theory to engage in deeper conversations with global and forced migration studies.<sup>91</sup> Forced displacement continuously gives rise not only to a new source of inexpensive labor for the global fashion industry (as, for example, is happening in Turkey today), but also to the "ethnicization" of the garment sector.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Niti Patel, *Postcolonial Masquerades: Culture and Politics in Literature, Film, Video and Photography* (New York: Garland, 2001), xviii.

<sup>87</sup> Tim Trzaskalik, *Gegensprachen: Das Gedächtnis der Texte: Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt* (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2007), 247–55.

<sup>88</sup> Finn Stepputat and Ninna Nyberg Sørensen, "Sociology and Forced Migration," in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyah et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 95.

<sup>89</sup> Adamson, Riello, and Teasly, "Global Design," 3.

<sup>90</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2016), 2.

<sup>91</sup> Elke Gaugele, "Entangled Histories: Fashion and the Politics of Migration," in *Fashion and Materiality: Cultural Practices, Global Contexts*, ed. Heike Jenss and Viola Hofmann (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

<sup>92</sup> Emre Eren Korkmaz "Syrian Refugees and the Ethnicization of Turkey's Informal Garment Sector," *Ethical Trading Initiative*, October 21, 2016, <http://www.ethicaltrade.org/blog/syrian-refugees-and-ethnicization-turkeys-informal-garment-sector>.

In 2016 the topic of flight and migration influenced the cultural performances of the fashion industry for the first time. The showcasing of the Fall/Winter 2016–17 collections by Generation Africa designers and the deployment of three asylum seekers on the runway, as orchestrated by the World Trade Center's Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI) at Pitti Immagine Uomo 89 indicated fashion's approximation to the global governance of the "refugee regime complex."<sup>93</sup> Walé Oyéjidé's collection "After Migration" presented at Pitti Immagine Uomo aestheticized the precarious status of asylum seekers by drawing on the persona of the suit-wearing Pan-African dandy and the mingling of tourists, pilgrims, and migrants (fig. 9).

### New Perspectives for Contemporary Postcolonial Fashion Research

Under three sections, "Decolonizing Global Fashion Archives," "Conditions of Postcoloniality," and "Entangling Critical Global Fashion Histories," five programmatic subjects for the revisioning of fashion studies and the emergence of a contemporary postcolonial global fashion theory are presented in this book: the decolonizing of fashion narratives in the wide range of historical and contemporary colonialisms; the work on decolonizing concepts for fashion research; the expansion of decolonizing fashion archives, imaginaries, and media; a critical revision of key postcolonial theories through site-specific in-depth analyses; and the connection between critical global fashion histories and the study of global migration.

In all contributions presented in this volume, fashion is understood as a term in the space of a "contact zone" that refers to a score of colonialisms and is until today generally used for comparison in a strategic and contingent way—but that "at the same time gets us some distance to fall apart."<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Alexander Betts, "International Relations and Forced Migration," in Fiddian-Qasmiyah et al., 68.

<sup>94</sup> Clifford, *Returns*, 110.

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# Decolonizing Global Fashion Archives

Photography has been, and is central to that aspect of decolonization that calls us back to the past and offers a way to reclaim and to renew life-affirming bonds. Using images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct racial identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye.

—bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*

# The Implementation of Western Culture in Austria Colonial Concepts in Adolf Loos's Fashion Theory

Christian Kravagna

Christian Kravagna

41

Around 1910, Austrian architect Adolf Loos designed two of the most elegant fashion stores in Vienna: the shops of Kniže and Goldman & Salatsch. At the end of the nineteenth century, numerous polemical articles by Loos were already published on the concepts of modern culture and the modern man, and often addressed fashion as key issue in defining modern identity. Loos's writings on fashion (just like his essays on other topics of modern life) are interspersed with concepts of the "primitive" and superior Western culture borrowed from orientalist and colonial discourse. However, contrary to the predominant version of the civilizing mission of the colonial period that targeted colonized others, Loos's writings—as well as his buildings—were meant to proselytize his own Austrian culture he considered backward and provincial.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I argue for a reading of the architect's crusade to modernize Austria as an endeavor to attack provincialism and nationalism in fin de siècle Vienna by relying on a sort of internationalism that equates the modern with the culture of the colonial power. It is exactly this project of modernizing Austrian culture by the exclusive standard of the British model he considers universal—Loos's writings on fashion and style prove to be shaped by a particular Viennese cultural environment located at the periphery of the colonizing powers.

To begin, I will start with a reference to a performative artwork that can be read as a late-modern response to Loos's fashion theory. In 1970 Austrian artist Heinz Frank posed in different outfits in front of several buildings and fashion shops in Vienna that were designed by Loos at the start of the twentieth century. The pictures show the artist posing in fancy costumes, which set him apart from other passersby (figs. 10–13). Frank understood this performance as a commentary on Loos's 1898 article "Men's Fashion."<sup>2</sup> In his ironic performance, Frank obviously adopts the figure of the *Gigerl* (the fop), heavily criticized by Loos as the ridiculous antipode to the modern man who is supposed to dress "correctly" to avoid individual expression through external appearance.

"Correct" is the key term in Loos's fashion theory, and it needs to be understood to grasp his concept of the modern. The crucial question for Loos was not whether a particular garment is beautiful, but whether or not a person is well dressed. But what does it mean to dress well? he asked in the quoted article on men's fashion. His answer reads as follows: "To be correctly

1 I have elaborated on this point in my essay, "Adolf Loos and the Colonial Imaginary," in *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past, Rebellions for the Future*, ed. Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali, and Marion von Osten (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), 244–61.

2 Heinz Frank and Adolf Loos, "Die Herrenmode," in *Leben mit Loos*, ed. Inge Podbrecky and Rainald Franz (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 73–88.

Figs. 10-13  
Heinz Frank, performance as a commentary to Adolf Loos's  
"Zur Herrenmode" (1898)



dressed! With this expression I feel as if I have removed the mystery with which our fashions have been surrounded until now. For fashion we use words such as beautiful, elegant, chic, smart, or dashing. But that is not the main point at all. The point is to be dressed in such a manner as to attract as little attention to oneself as possible.<sup>3</sup> Later in the text, Loos recognized the need to clarify his definition since, in his words, "one cannot expect a person from

a culturally advanced society to dress in the Chinese fashion in Peking, in the East African in Zanzibar, and in the Viennese in St. Stephen's Square."<sup>4</sup> Therefore he specified: "Being correctly dressed means not to attract attention to oneself at the center of one's own culture."<sup>5</sup> According to Loos, London was the center of Western culture at the turn of the century. After reasoning further on local and cultural differences within the city of London, Loos came to the following proposition: "An article of dress is modern if, when wearing it on a particular occasion in the best society at the center of one's own culture, one attracts as little attention to oneself as possible."<sup>6</sup> Building on this definition of modern clothing, Loos juxtaposes what he calls the English understanding of modern clothing to the fiercely criticized the Gigerl, whom he locates in German and Austrian culture—a figure who wants to set himself apart through his choice of conspicuous attire.

### Proselytizing Austria

Upon his return to Vienna in 1896 from a three-year stay in the United States and London, Loos worked tirelessly to modernize the culture and society of his home country. The state of Austria-Hungary was a major power around the turn of the century and the years before World War I, but unlike other major Western powers, it was not a colonial power in the narrower sense of possessing overseas territories. Austria's actual involvement in colonial ambitions will not be addressed here, but the hitherto repressed issue of the country's participation in Europe's colonial projects formed the context of my initial preoccupation with the colonial thinking of Loos. What I call Loos's "self-missionary" sort of cultural criticism actually had to come from a country like Austria—a country that could regard itself as a major European power and as part of the West, but unlike England, France, or Germany did not devote itself to a mission of modernizing or civilizing allegedly backward peoples in overseas colonies.<sup>7</sup> Loos's theory of modernism and modern life engaged in colonial discourses and imaginaries, modeling its particular form on the adaptation of colonial concepts and images for the specific context in which its author articulated himself—fin de siècle Vienna.

<sup>3</sup> Adolf Loos, "Men's Fashion," in *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Mitchell, ed. Adolf Opel (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Loos, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Loos, 40. Here, the English translation is misleading. Loos does not speak of the center of one's own culture, but much more absolutely of the center of culture (*im Mittelpunkte der Cultur*). See Adolf Loos, "Die Herrenmode," in *Ornament und Verbrechen*, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna: Georg Prachner Verlag, 2000), 53.

<sup>6</sup> Loos, "Men's Fashion," 40. Again, in the German original Loos speaks of the center of culture (*im Culturzentrum*), which makes a crucial difference since Loos, being the downright opposite to a cultural relativist, insists that there is one authoritative center of modern culture. See Loos, "Die Herrenmode," 54.

<sup>7</sup> Austria partly did so in its crown lands of the (south-)east.

Loos's articles on fashion issues are a significant part of his writings on cultural criticism, which predated his work as an architect and later were written concurrent to his building practice. In about fifteen texts, he wrote about shoes, hats, underwear, uniforms, and of course ladies' and men's fashion. The importance of fashion for his program of westernizing Austria is illustrated by the design of the covers of the journal *Das Andere: Ein Blatt zur Einführung abendländischer Kunst in Österreich* (*The Other: A Magazine for the Introduction of Occidental Culture into Austria*), founded by Loos in 1903. With the journal, which was entirely written by Loos, he attempted to introduce Austrians to the customs and tastes he regarded as high culture. The covers of both issues—only two journals were published—prominently displayed advertisements by Goldman & Salatsch, the company whose first store was designed by Loos years before he designed their flagship store on Vienna's Michaelerplatz in 1910. The first issue displays a yachting dress style that refers to the maritime activities



Fig. 14  
Adolf Loos, *Das Andere*, no. 1,  
1903



Fig. 15  
Adolf Loos, advertisement for *Das Andere*, no. 2, 1903

that were part of British culture. The second issue displays an English gentleman's city dress to be worn in the center of culture. Apart from presumably financial reasons to place these ads of his personal "Tailors and Outfitters" so prominently, there is definitely a programmatic side to it. At the time of publishing, a title like *The Other* would commonly have been used for publications about foreign, colonized cultures. In this case however—a sort of polemical reversal of orientalist assumptions<sup>8</sup>—the title signifies a civilized Other, namely, Western modernity, in comparison to what Loos considered as backward Austrian culture. The anglicized ads for Goldman & Salatsch reinforce the title's connotations of Western culture with modern English style.

### The Coloniality of Modern Style

With his own journal, as well as in his numerous public lectures and newspaper articles, Loos offered advice on almost all aspects of modern life. In doing so, he repeatedly used colonial imagery, defining the center and periphery of modernism and dedicating himself to a diffusionist model of colonial modernization. In his article "Gentlemen's Hats" (1898), in which he criticized the Viennese association of hat fashion, Loos stated that the English display a global economic talent for producing and supplying different goods for different markets, including Viennese customers: "Even for savages they produce the items most popular there and, as you can see, the English treat us in the same way as they do savages. And they are right to do so."<sup>9</sup> Loos completely identified with the (cultural) imperialism of the largest colonial power of his time: "When the English entered their period of world dominion," wrote Loos in his 1908 text "In Praise of the Present," "they freed themselves from the imitations of the monkey costumes they had been condemned to by other nations, and imposed mankind's original dress on the whole world."<sup>10</sup> In the same year, Loos predicted in "Culture": "In the twentieth century there will be only one culture dominating the globe."<sup>11</sup> Ten years earlier, in "Plumbers" (1898), applying colonial imagery when referring to what he calls the Germanic-English culture of purity, Loos had already stated: "Those who accept it become great and powerful, for example the Japanese. Those who resist are crushed, for example, the Chinese."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Here I borrow of a phrase from Daniel Purdy who writes with reference to Loos's journal: "The title thus sets up a double displacement by reversing orientalist assumptions—the West is the other that needs to be brought to Austria." Daniel Purdy, "The Cosmopolitan Geography of Adolf Loos," *New German Critique* 99, no. 3 (2006): 43.

<sup>9</sup> Loos, "Gentlemen's Hats," in *Ornament and Crime*, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Loos, "In Praise of the Present," in *Ornament and Crime*, 158.

<sup>11</sup> Loos, "Culture," in *Ornament and Crime*, 160.

<sup>12</sup> Loos, "Plumbers: Baths and Kitchen Ranges at the Jubilee Exhibition," in *Ornament and Crime*, 82.

In all of these statements, with their violent rhetoric of trampling down, stamping out, and coercing others, it becomes clear how, for Loos, to be modern becomes the apparently natural legitimization of colonial practice. The very term “original dress,” meaning the practical, staid, and discreet clothing of the English gentleman, which allegedly unites the transhistorical essence of clothing with the highest degree of modernity, suggests the right to impose this style globally. Loos largely concurs with the colonial conviction that the blessings of Western culture must be taught to the “uncivilized” peoples—the “civilizing mission” as the “burden of the white man”—but that they would never succeed in assuming Western culture in keeping with its meaning. In *The Other* Loos poses the rhetorical question: “Could a Zulu Kaffir who puts a top hat on his head claim to be dressed according to the customs of Western culture?”<sup>13</sup> In a later text in *The Other*, he states: “Modern clothing is not enough. One must also have modern manners and speak modern German. For otherwise one looks like a Negro chief in Central Africa, who considers himself a modern man because he is wearing a European top hat on his head.”<sup>14</sup> These remarks evoke the contemporary genre of racist-joke pictures based on the motif of the ridiculousness of the “savages” who try to assume Western habits but fail abysmally in their misunderstanding and by doing so reveal themselves as all the more “savage.”<sup>15</sup>

## Against Provincialism

Before coming back to Loos’s colonialist imagination, it might be apt to have a look at the Vienna he encounters after returning from the United States and England. Politically, it was a time of intense anti-Semitism. Karl Lueger, who is considered an “inventor of modern populist anti-Semitism”<sup>16</sup>—and was adored by Adolf Hitler as “the greatest German mayor of all times”<sup>17</sup>—had been elected mayor of Vienna in 1895 and would remain in this position until his death in 1910. In an urban and social surrounding marked by industrialization and mass immigration from the Austrian empire’s provinces, Lueger not only played successfully on anti-Semitism but also on a politics of local identity allegedly threatened by influences from the West, and opposed the character of Vienna to that of American cities. Against this ideological backdrop of anti-Western and anti-Semitic resentments, the internationalism of Loos’s beliefs and his cooperation with Jewish businessmen appear in a different light. Furthermore, the conditions of late empire regionalism often worked as a strategy to stabilize the imperial order threatened by nationalist movements in the crown lands.<sup>18</sup> From the late nineteenth century to World War I, numerous projects in the fields of culture and cultural politics in the Habsburg Monarchy applied an ethnographic approach to the empire’s diversity in which folk culture, regional craft aesthetics, and traditional costumes were used to elevate the status of distinctive Austrian product and fashion design. Many projects and publications that attempted to create a folklorist view of Austrian culture include: the 1896

Hungarian National Millennium, in Budapest; the 1894 Exhibition of Home Industries and Agriculture, held in Lviv; the 1895 Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition, in Prague; and *Kronprinzenwerk* (1893–1902), a twenty-four-volume publication on the people, customs, and arts of all provinces of the Austrian empire, initiated by Rudolf, Crown Prince of Austria.

Michael Haberlandt, the cofounder of the Austrian Museum of Volkskunde in 1894, a museum of folklore, spoke of the “urban world corrupted by cosmopolitan culture.”<sup>19</sup> As Rebecca Houze writes, Haberlandt did not consider the objects in the exhibitions he organized as “evidence of a past tradition, now tragically extinct, but rather should be seen as a guide for the future rebirth of its authentic Austrian spirit in the modern applied arts, like ‘a phoenix rising from the ashes.’”<sup>20</sup> The “cosmopolitan geography of Adolf Loos,” as Daniel Purdy puts it, should be considered as a response to the manifold ethno-folklorist projects on cultural identity constructions in Austria at that time. “His call for English restraint, his dismissal of folklore crafts,” writes Purdy, “can be read as an erasure of ethnic differences, a renunciation of the many particularities of Central Europe in favor of a single understated industrial culture.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Loos often makes a critical reference to some of the above-mentioned projects to renew culture in a spirit of regional arts and crafts. But I doubt a term like “cosmopolitan” is sufficient to adequately describe Loos’s project of Westernizing Austrian culture. There is definitely a colonialist dimension in Loos’s idea of the modern that has been largely overlooked so far.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Adolf Loos, *Das Andere: Blatt zur Einführung abendländischer Kultur in Österreich* 1, no. 2 (1903): 1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. See also the modern reprint *Das Andere: Ein Blatt zur Einführung abendländischer Kultur in Österreich / The Other: A Journal for the Introduction of Western Culture into Austria*, ed. Beatriz Colomina and Kimberli Meyer (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 35.

<sup>14</sup> Loos, “Antworten auf Fragen aus dem Publikum,” in *Trotzdem*, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna: Georg Prachner Verlag, 1982), 140.

<sup>15</sup> In his famous text about laughter, first published in 1900, Henri Bergson makes the point that a European man inevitably must laugh when he encounters a black man in a European outfit. This example of the racist foundations of modern Western philosophy is given a critical twist by the editors of the *Revue du Monde Noir* who ask their predominantly black readers in a survey of 1931: “How should the negroes living in Europe dress?” Louis Thomas Achille, “Premières réponses à notre Enquête,” *La Revue du Monde*

*Noir* 1, no. 3 (1931): 50. See extracts from this debate later in this publication, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Heidemarie Uhl, “Karl Lueger: Ein verdienstvoller Antisemit,” [scienceorf.at](http://scienceorf.at), March 9, 2003, <http://scienceorf.at/stories/1641259/index.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Adolf Hitler, quoted in Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler’s Vienna: A Portrait of the Tyrant as a Young Man* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 299.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Falser, “The Picturesque Eye: Investigating Regionalist Art Forms in Late Empires” (conference, Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, Vienna, December 3–5, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Haberlandt, quoted in Rebecca Houze, *Textiles, Fashion, and Design Reform in Austria-Hungary before the First World War: Principles of Dress* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 116.

<sup>20</sup> Houze, 118.

<sup>21</sup> Purdy, “Cosmopolitan Geography of Adolf Loos,” 51.

<sup>22</sup> A rare exception is an essay by Mitchell Schwarzer. See his “Ethnologies of the Primitive in Adolf Loos’s Writing on Ornament,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18, no. 3 (1994): 225–47.

The writings of Loos have been read critically by a number of authors since the 1980s from various viewpoints, but rarely from a perspective informed by postcolonialism. Loos's article "Ladies' Fashion" (1898), however, provides an idea of his characteristic transition from economic to sexual to racial accounts. Hildegund Amanshauser, who was the first to undertake a comprehensive analysis of Loos's writings, noted a "covert animosity towards sexuality and sensuality" in his battle against ornament.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Loos speaks several times, most extensively in "Ladies' Fashion" of a "sick" or "unnatural" sensuality as a force that destroys culture. Considering the wasteful gesture of ornamentation as a danger for the economic competitive capacity of a nation, Loos's rejection of false decoration also applies to a wasteful eroticism regarded as a threat. "Women's clothing," wrote Loos, "differs in appearance from that of men due to a preference for ornamental and colourful effects and the long skirt which completely covers the woman's legs. These two tendencies alone show us that women have remained far behind in development in the last few centuries."<sup>24</sup> Owing to her social position, a woman is "forced to appeal through her clothing to the sensuality of the man, subconsciously to his morbid sensuality."<sup>25</sup> In his aesthetic and moral defense against female sexuality and its symbolic representation, Loos follows the discursive figure of the *Weib* (a pejorative term for a woman), who is "seducing" the man—a theme that characterized numerous texts from Vienna at the turn of the century.<sup>26</sup> Therefore it is unsurprising that Loos declared prostitutes to be pioneers in matters of fashion: "It is clear from the aforementioned words that in matters of gentlemen's clothing the leader is the man who assumes the highest social position, whereas women's fashion is led by the woman who must develop the greatest sensitivity for arousing sensuality, namely the coquette."<sup>27</sup> "Women's fashion represents the 'unmodern' Other," summarizes Janet Stewart, "the display of difference, while men's fashion stands for the 'modern' Self, the disguise of difference."<sup>28</sup>

Immediately after noting the regressive nature of women and their clothing, Loos characteristically repeats his litany of the ornamenting lower cultures, such as the "Indian," the "Papuan," and the "criminal." In various texts, Loos speaks of the "ornament epidemic" in Austria, whereas he considers "freedom from ornament" as a "sign of spiritual strength."<sup>29</sup> In conjunction with blistering remarks about the "female art" of batik, he sarcastically called the Viennese Arts and Crafts Museum a Polynesian colony: "Tattoos and batiks are abhorrent to modern man, even if both of these techniques signify an artistic achievement in Polynesia and its colony on Stubenring."<sup>30</sup>

A rare contribution to the discussion of reading Loos through the lens of race is "Ornamento e Racismo" by the Argentinian architecture historian Jorge Francisco Liernur. Focusing on the social Darwinist ideas in "Ornament and Crime," Liernur reads the opposition of modern man and the Papua in Loos's progressivist ideology as an expression of the time's racism in anthropology

and mass-cultural spectacles such as the anthropological exhibitions. He refers to the genealogy of "the link between 'primitives,' 'criminals,' and tattooing" being "scientifically" established by Cesare Lombroso, the Italian criminologist/phrenologist.<sup>31</sup> Liernur sides Loos's writings with those of Max Nordau, whose most famous book was *Entartung (Degeneration)*, 1892. With Nordau, Liernur detects "the author that most probably could have a direct influence on Loos."<sup>32</sup> Finally, he ascribes Loos a "totalitarian tendency towards homogenization."<sup>33</sup>

## Race and the Mask of Fashion

In a recent essay, art historian Elana Shapira made a relevant point. According to her, Loos was mainly working for Jewish clients to whom the problem of being dressed correctly was of particular importance. Assimilated Jews in Vienna were afraid of being identified in public as different. Shapira refers to Sigmund Freud, Arthur Schnitzler, and others who articulated their fears of being ridiculed or insulted if publicly exposed as being Jews. Loos's equation of being modern and being inconspicuous when dressed correctly supported the efforts by assimilated bourgeois Jews to be integrated in society by distancing themselves from the orthodox eastern Jews in Vienna who were visibly conspicuous by wearing the caftan and traditional headdress. Interestingly, Loos described "the caftan as a symbol of the old way of life in the ghetto" and compared it to Secessionist dresses, and he "criticized Jews for creating a new ghetto for themselves by comparing their choice of Secessionist interiors in their homes to the striking appearance of the caftan in public."<sup>34</sup> According to Shapira, "Loos wanted to grant his clients a sense of belonging to an elite intellectual club" by promoting the cosmopolitan style of the English gentleman.<sup>35</sup> This particular politics of style provided the double value of integration as well as distinction.

<sup>23</sup> Hildegund Amanshauser, "Untersuchungen zu den Schriften von Adolf Loos" (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1985), 209.

<sup>24</sup> Loos, "Damenmode," in *Ornament und Verbrechen*, 124.

<sup>25</sup> Loos, 122.

<sup>26</sup> Sander L. Gilman, "Male Stereotypes of Female Sexuality in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna," in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 39–58.

<sup>27</sup> Loos, "Damenmode," 124.

<sup>28</sup> Janet Stewart, *Fashioning Vienna: Adolf Loos's Cultural Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 112.

<sup>29</sup> Loos, "Ornament und Verbrechen," in *Ornament und Verbrechen*, 202.

<sup>30</sup> Loos, "Antworten auf Fragen aus dem Publikum," in *Trotzdem*, 152. The Stubenring indicates the location of the Arts and Crafts Museum, which is today the MAK – Museum for Applied Arts.

<sup>31</sup> Jorge Francisco Liernur, "Ornament and Racism: The Anthropological Prejudices of Adolf Loos," *ArqTexto* 13, no. 2 (2008): 12.

<sup>32</sup> Liernur, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Liernur, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Elana Shapira, "Adolf Loos and the Fashioning of the 'Other': Memory, Fashion, and Interiors," *Interiors: Design/Architecture/Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 216.

<sup>35</sup> Shapira, "Adolf Loos and the Fashioning of the 'Other,'" 222.

Sympathetic as I am to Shapira's interpretation, I nevertheless have my doubts about her reading of Loos's forceful promotion of English modern fashion as being first and foremost at the service of Vienna's acculturated Jews. First of all, not all of Loos's clients were Jewish, albeit a significant percentage were. And certainly, not all of Goldman & Salatsch and Kniže customers were Jewish. Secondly, Loos's writings on fashion, design, and architecture cannot be separated from his remarks on cooking, eating, and plumbing that were of no particular significance to any one specific group in Austrian society. More importantly, in almost all of his texts Loos speaks of "us" (the Austrians) as those who were in urgent need of being civilized and modernized. The backward Austrians needed to overcome the "Indian in us" to become modern in the sense that the English (and the Americans) already were.<sup>36</sup> The Jewish part of the story is definitely of relevance, but it is in no way the whole story.

How can we cope with these different interpretations that ascribe Loos's argumentation such divergent qualities as "totalitarian tendencies of homogenization,"<sup>37</sup> a "cosmopolitanism"<sup>38</sup> opposed to nationalist agendas (Purdy), and a fashion concept empowering the Austrian Jews (Shapira)?<sup>39</sup> I do not think that we can opt for just one of these readings. In most colonial discourse, the Western subject and his or her modern culture are considered the climax of the progress of world history, and the "savage" is constructed in opposition, thereby legitimizing the colonial mission of civilization. Loos, however, locates a momentum of this difference in modern humanity—a differential momentum that hinders people from becoming truly modern. Indeed, it is not in Western people in general Loos detects the "inner Indian," but specifically Austrians (and to a lesser extent Germans). "On the occasion of the Jubilee parade, we shuddered to note that we still have tribes from the fourth century in Austria," wrote Loos.<sup>40</sup>

What is astonishing is that while Loos is considered a cosmopolitan, cosmopolitanism is understood almost exclusively as an expression of liberal-minded openness to the world. If we consider Loos's understanding of the English gentleman as a prototype of the correctly dressed cosmopolitan man, we should turn our attention to the construction of the cosmopolitan subject in eighteenth-century Britain as a man of learning, culture, and taste whose thinking was not limited by what David Hume—the "ideal cosmopolitan subject of his age"—called "narrow bonds, either of place and time."<sup>41</sup> As Simon Gikandi puts very clearly in his book *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (2011), philosophers like Hume and Immanuel Kant laid the foundations for modern racism through their celebration of the modern subject who is understood to be free of all preconceptions, while at the same time judging the intellectual and cultural capacities of other peoples and races by their skin color. Gikandi also points out how ideals of restraint and refinement—ideals that are pivotal in Loos's fashion theory—gained prominence in English society based on

colonial economies of slavery in an attempt to counterbalance a colonial culture of greed and exploitation. The gentleman is the one who does not display his wealth by means of flamboyant architecture and extraordinary outfits. Rather, he is keen to hide his economic success behind good manners, taste, and ordinary appearance. When Heinz Frank, in his performance of 1970, mocked Loos's conception of the modern man as being inconspicuously at the center of modernity, he certainly did not have in mind the colonial history of the gentleman. Nevertheless, he humorously addressed the architect's concept of fashion as a mask. According to Loos, a strong personality is happy to hide individualism behind the inconspicuous facade of modern fashion.

To conclude, I suggest a reading of Loos's fashion theory as an attempt to counter provincial and nationalist attitudes by Austrian society perceived as backward. Loos endeavored to westernize his home country through an internationalism that in turn was deeply imbedded in colonialist worldviews of the time. Issues of fashion and style play a key role in the projected implementation of a concept of the modern based on the universalized model of British colonial modernity. If there is a critical aspect in Loos's "cosmopolitanism" regarding regionalist, anti-Semitic, and nationalist concepts of identity in fin de siècle Vienna/Austria, this criticism is indebted to a categorical identification with colonialist conceptions of cultural imperialism including its racist stereotypes. Thus, Loos's undertaking of modernizing Austrian culture is a striking example of the coloniality of modernity, even in a seemingly remote place of colonial world order.

In 1931 *La Revue du Monde Noir*, published in Paris by Jane and Paulette Nardal and Léo Sajous, posed the following question to its predominantly black readers: "How should Negroes living in Europe, dress?" With its inquiry, the journal made reference to Henri Bergson's famous essay on laughter in which he wondered why the sight of a black man dressed in European fashion caused the laughter of the white man. The critical discussion of the topic by authors and readers of the *Revue du Monde Noir* highlights that issues of fashion, race, and modern subjectivity as posed by Bergson, Loos, and like-minded

<sup>36</sup> Using the term "Indian," Loos refers to Native American people.

<sup>37</sup> Lienur, "Ornament and Racism," 14.

<sup>38</sup> Purdy, "Cosmopolitan Geography of Adolf Loos," 41.

<sup>39</sup> Shapira, "Adolf Loos and the Fashioning of the 'Other,'" 213–37.

<sup>40</sup> Loos, *Ornament und Verbrechen*, 196.

Loos refers to the procession paying homage to the sixtieth anniversary of emperor Franz Joseph's regency in 1908.

A huge public spectacle in Vienna, the *Kaiserhuldigungsfestzug*, displayed a multicultural folkloric image of the diverse cultures of the Austrian empire. See Elizabeth GroBegger, *Der Kaiser-Huldigungsfestzug Wien 1908* (Vienna: VÖAW, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> David Hume, quoted in Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 99.

white thinkers of the early twentieth century directly concerned the self-perception of nonwhite people and their position in Western societies. To shed light on this important response to the colonial foundations of Western cultural theories, this historic inquiry is reproduced on the following pages.

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# La Revue du Monde Noir Nos Enquêtes

Louis Thomas Achille, Jean Baldouï, Marie-Magdeleine Carbet,  
Paulette Nardal, Rosario, and Clara W. Shepard

Louis Thomas Achille, Jean Baldouï, Marie-Magdeleine Carbet,  
Paulette Nardal, Rosario, and Clara W. Shepard

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## Nos enquêtes Question Corner

« Pourquoi la vue d'un Noir habillé à l'euro-péenne provoque-t-elle le rire du Blanc? » s'est demandé Bergson dans son étude sur le rire. « Parce que le Blanc a l'impression que le Noir est déguisé ». Dans son dernier numéro, *La Revue du Monde Noir* a annoncé une enquête sur Les Noirs et les modes européennes. Voici la question que nous posons à nos lecteurs : « Comment les Noirs vivant en Europe doivent-ils s'habiller? ». Nous prions ceux de nos lecteurs que cette question est susceptible d'intéresser, de vouloir bien nous adresser leurs réponses dans le plus bref délai.

La traduction des articles de *La Revue du Monde Noir* est assurée par Miss Clara W. Shepard et Mlle Paulette Nardal.

« Why does the sight of a Negro dressed in European fashion provoke the laugh of the white man? » is the question which Bergson asked himself, in his study on Laughter. « Because the white man thinks the Negro is disguised », is his answer. In its last issue, *The review of the Black world* announced an inquiry on Negroes and European fashions. This is the question we are asking our readers : « How should Negroes living in Europe, dress? ». Will our readers who find this question interesting please send us their replies as soon as possible?

The translation of the articles in the *Review of the black world* is done, by Miss Clara W. Shepard and Mlle Paulette Nardal.

Fig. 16 (p. 55)

*Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*, no. 2, (1931): 60

Figs. 17-21 (pp. 56-60)

*Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*, no. 3 (1932): 50-54

Figs. 22-24 (pp. 61-63)

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## Nos Enquêtes

by

L.-Th. ACHILLE

MAGD RANEY

Comment les Noirs vivant en Europe doivent s'habiller ?

La réponse semble venir naturellement : « Mais comme tout le monde, selon les exigences du climat et de la vie sociale. Il faut bien que sous les ciels froids de l'Europe civilisée le pardessus et le revolver remplacent le pagne, l'arc et les flèches en usage dans la jungle africaine. D'ailleurs robes asiatiques et draperies hindous sont aussi bien sacrifiées.

Alors? L'enquête de la revue n'a pas de raison d'être? Non, si l'on omet ceci que « la vue d'un Noir habillé à l'europeenne provoque le rire du Blanc ».

Il faut compter avec le Blanc? Comptons avec lui. J'en ai questionné quelques-uns. Voici des réponses :

— Le Noir? mais il peut aller tout nu s'il lui plaît, on se retournera toujours sur son passage.

— Qu'il le veuille ou non, il attire l'attention. Qu'il tâche de la soutenir honorablement.

— Le Noir fait rire? Mais n'amuse pas son prochain qui veut et c'est une des formes de la charité.

— Le pagne? oui, sans doute, ce serait bien... La fringale d'exotisme du public s'en trouverait bien. Mais alors il nous faudrait un rudiment de cadre. Nous commanderions des paillotes et un bout de forêt vierge au décorateur de la scène du

MAGD RANEY

How should the negroes living in Europe dress?

The natural reply to such a question to be, « Just like everybody else, according to the demands of the climate and of social life! Of course, under the cold grey skies of civilized Europe, the overcoat and the revolver must replace the loin-cloth and the bow and arrows in use in the African jungle. Likewise, Asiatic costumes and Hindoo draperies must also be sacrificed. Well, in that case, the inquiry of the Review is pointless. Not in the least; for we must keep in mind that » the sight of a Negro dressed in European fashion always provokes the laughter of the white man ».

Then we must reckon with the white man? Very well, I have questioned several, and here are their replies :

« The Negro? But he could go stark naked if he liked. People will always turn round to look at him. »

« Whether he wants it or not, he will always attract attention. It is his duty to live up to it. »

« The Negro makes people laugh? Oh well, it's not so easy to amuse ones neighbours and it is a way of being charitable. »

« The loin-cloth? Yes, undoubtedly that would be very good especially since the recent fad for everything colonial. But then we would need at least a shade of background. We would order up some some thatched huts and a bit of virgin

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Châtelet, un soleil aussi africain que possible à l'électricien qui embrase la Tour Eiffel au compte de Citroën et le tour serait joué.

Mille réponses de ce genre sont tombées des lèvres des facétieux Parisiens.

Le seul qui prit la question au sérieux fut Keller. Keller, tailleur des étudiants, et leur Providence.

Je croyais le trouver dans une souperie de la rue Saint-André des Arts. Confortablement installé rue de Bondy, près du boulevard Saint-Martin, Keller qui depuis de longues années habille le quartier latin, a vu défiler chez lui tous les étudiants.

A-t-il une sympathie particulière pour ses clients exotiques? Je ne sais; mais il n'a aucunement le désir de les comparer à des singes parce que vêtus à l'euro-pennaise. Il souligne d'ailleurs sans hésitation certaines faiblesses de goût chez eux. « Exubérance de tempérament ou travers de jeunesse, dit-il en substance, ces jeunes gens sont fâcheusement enclins à exagérer les tendances de la mode. » Mais il s'empresse d'ajouter que, mal mis à leur arrivée, ces clients qui s'habillent toujours avec recherche et coquetterie, se mettent très vite « dans le mouvement ».

Et sans doute pour se faire pardonner sa franchise dénuée de toute flatterie du début, Keller finit sur des compliments :

« Généralement très bien bâts, ils sont faciles à habiller. Ils portent la toilette avec élégance. Ils ont un galbe que je ne trouve pas toujours chez mes clients européens ».

Voilà pour les hommes. A la maison « Madyvon » où l'on s'exerce depuis des années à coiffer des faces camusées on a bien voulu me confier ceci :

« Nous aimons coiffer les créoles. Cela nous change. Mais devant les plumes qui menacent le ciel ou balaiant la nuque devant les tricomes et les marquis, déjà si difficiles à porter par les

forest from the scenery director of the Châtelet and a sun as African as possible from the electrician who illuminates the Eiffel Tower and the trick would be turned ».

A thousand replies of this kind issued from the lips of the Parisians who must have their joke.

The only one who took the question seriously was Keller. Keller is the students' tailor and a real god-send.

I expected to find him in a hole in the wall in rue Saint-André-des-Arts. To the contrary, comfortably established in Bondy Street, near Saint-Martin boulevard, Keller who has for many years made clothes for The Latin Quarter, has seen at one time or the other all the Negro students in his shop.

Has he a particular sympathy for his Creole customers? I don't know but he certainly has no desire to compare them to monkeys because they are dressed in European style. Moreover, without hesitating, he indicated certain shortcomings in their taste. Because of the exuberance of their temperament or because of their youth, these young men are regrettably prone to exaggerate the tendencies of fashion, was the substance of his remarks. But he made haste to add that although upon their arrival, their home-made suits leave much to be desired, these clients very quickly fall into step and always dress themselves with a smart elegance.

And probably to excuse the brutal frankness which marked the beginning of his conversation, Keller finished by complimenting them :

« They are generally very well-built and quite easy to fit. They wear their clothes with a real smartness. They have a physique which I do not always find in my European customers. »

So much for the men. At « Madyvon's », where for many years they have been used to making hats for flat-nosed faces, I was told, we like making hats for Creoles. It gives us a little variety. But as to the feathers which threaten the

Européennes elles-mêmes, nous crions casse-cou à nos beautés exotiques.

Certaines d'entre elles nous ont suggéré l'idée de nous inspirer de la coiffure de leur pays — toujours la plus seyante à leur type — pour leur fabriquer des chapeaux parisiens par la matière et le détail d'ornementation. C'est une question d'adaptation.

C'est le mot juste. Un effort d'adaptation spéciale des formes et des couleurs « à la mode » à la ligne et au teint particulier à chacun — Dieu sait quelle diversité de teintes se peut rencontrer chez les Noirs — est absolument indispensable. Le bon goût se mesure justement à ce souci de « s'accommoder » à la mode.

Les Européennes mêmes par qui et pour qui sont créées les modes ne le négligent pas. La femme, brune ou blonde, dit-elle passer à côté de ce qui tient la vogue du jour, ne choisira jamais que lignes et nuances qui la mettront en valeur.

Savoir choisir. Là est tout le secret de se bien habiller. Ne l'oublions pas.

#### LOUIS-TH. ACHILLE

Si la vue d'un Noir habillé à l'euro-péenne provoque souvent le rire du Blanc elle provoque aussi quelquefois son admiration, par son aisance à se mouvoir dans les modes et coutumes européennes. Bergson, si tel avait été son sujet, ne l'eût pas contesté; non plus qu'il eût refusé d'admettre que bien des Blancs provoquent le rire parce qu'eux aussi, ils semblent ridiculement déguisés, telle fillette en femme, telle femme du peuple en dame, tel laïcker en beauté, et telle « coquette en ruines », en jeune et jolie femme.

Mais la question n'est pas là. Comment les Noirs vivant en Europe doivent-ils s'habiller ? Dans leurs costumes nationaux? Non sans doute ! certains de ceux-là sont impossibles à porter sous ce climat dit « tempéré », de plus bien des Noirs, même dans leurs lointains pays extra-européens, ne connaissent d'autre costume national que ce

sky or brush the nape of the neck, the tricoms and the « marquis » which the Europeans themselves cannot wear easily, we advise our colonial beauties to avoid them. Certain of them have suggested to us the idea of using as a basic idea the Antillian headress, which is always most becoming to their type in order to create for them hats, with Parisian materials and trimmings. This is a question of adaptation.

That is exactly the right word. A special effort to adapt the shapes and colours in vogue to the stature and to the particular complexion of each, God only knows what a gamut of shades is to be found in Negro complexion, is absolutely indispensable. Good taste is measured exactly according to this concern for adjusting oneself to the mode. Europeans themselves by whom and for whom these fashions were created do not neglect this necessary adaptation. A blonde or a brunette would rather give up being in style than choose designs or colours which would not add to her charm. To know how to choose; that is the real secret of being well-dressed. Let us not forget it.

#### L.-TH. ACHILLE

If the sight of a Negro dressed in European fashion provokes the laughter of the white man, it sometimes provokes his admiration too, for he wears European clothes with real ease. Bergson would not have made this statement, nor would he have denied that many white people make others laugh because they too look as if they were disguised, as, for instance, the young girl dressed as a grown up, the plain Jane who imitates a ravishing beauty, the housewife self-styled as a « grande dame », and the wrinkled coquette who looks like a young and pretty girl, at least from the back.

How should Negroes living in Europe dress? In their national costumes. Of course not, because some of them cannot be worn in European

même costume européen qui fait rire. Sous peine de vivre dans l'inconvenance, de se faire constamment remarquer, en détonant dans une civilisation qui a son harmonie propre, les Noirs, vivant en Europe, doivent, semble-t-il, user des modes européennes. Mais comment ? à la manière des Blancs, sans égard pour leur couleur ? Oui, s'ils veulent s'exposer aux rires des Blancs, pas beaucoup plus d'ailleurs que ce vieux beau blanc, plus jeune de cœur que de corps, qui croit encore pouvoir faire des conquêtes sous un costume pour gigolo ! S'ils ont égard au contraire à cette nouvelle condition qu'est la couleur, ajoutée à ces autres qui président déjà au vêtement d'une personne de goût, blanche, noire, ou jaune, (taille, corpulence, âge, condition sociale, tempérament, etc...) les Noirs ne seront peut-être pas des objets de rire. Et puis faut-il vraiment s'inquiéter de ce rire ? Il ne peut venir que d'un esprit mal instruit, étroit, dépourvu de cette précieuse expérience qu'est la connaissance des autres races; d'un esprit qui n'a pas encore compris que la civilisation européenne, pour une grande part, n'est plus nationale, ni raciale ; simplement humaine par de nombreux côtés, elle se destine elle-même à être adoptée de races humaines bien diverses. La règle générale semble donc, pour les Noirs, comme pour toutes les races : du goût, et, si elle peut-être supportée, une petite pointe d'art, et que rient donc ceux qui veulent rire !

#### EN MARGE DE NOTRE ENQUETE

##### CLARA W. SHEPARD

En dépit de l'apparente facilité avec laquelle Mme Lucie Delarue-Mardrus décrit, dans un conte récemment publié par *Le Journal*, les différentes toilettes portées par les dames du cortège, à une cérémonie de mariage célébrée à Harlem, je dois avouer que j'ai eu quelque mal à reconnaître là le goût de mes compatriotes. D'abord, d'autant plus que je m'en souviens, les jeunes noires américaines ont toujours apporté le plus grand soin au choix des couleurs et des nuances de leurs vête-

ments et furthermore, many Negroes have no national dress other than the European ones. In my opinion, Negroes should follow European fashions when they live in Europe, if they don't want to feel uneasy or to introduce a false note in the harmony of the civilisation in which they come to dwell. But must they behave like white persons ?

Yes, if they wish to be laughed at, almost in the same manner as an old beau with a heart younger than his body who endeavors to look seductive in a suit that would do credit to a gigolo. But if they would pay attention to their complexions, as they do to other conditioning factors of smartness (size, corpulence, age, social standing, type, etc.) which every person of taste, white, yellow or black must consider they will probably avoid being laughed at. Is it worth while to heed this laughter? It can only come from uneducated, narrow minded individuals who lack the invaluable experience of the knowledge of other races; from someone who is still ignorant that European civilisation is no longer either national or racial, that, being only human in many respects, it is likely to be adopted by different human races, who will consider it as their own modern civilisation. As regards the dress of Negroes in Europe, as well as that of the whites and yellows, here is, in my opinion, the only general principle : dress with taste, and if your type permits it, with art, and let them laugh who will!

#### FROM CLARA W. SHEPARD : AN INDIRECT REPLY TO OUR INQUIRY

In spite of the apparent facility with which Mme Lucie Delarue-Mardrus describes in the short-story recently contributed to *Le Journal* the frocks of a wedding party in Harlem, I must confess that as an American girl, I certainly had some difficulty in recognizing my compatriots. To begin with, as far back as I can remember, young ladies of colour in America, have been

ments. Il m'a donc été difficile d'imaginer les noires qui componaient l'assistance dans la noce en question, dans des robes d'un rose cru. Il y a dix ans, on s'imaginait que les Noires les plus bronzées ne pouvaient porter que des étoffes d'un bleu sombre ou marron foncé. Nous comprenons maintenant que nous devons rechercher les couleurs qui mettent en valeur la lumière et la beauté latentes de notre teint. C'est pour cette raison que, dans les écoles noires américaines, pendant les classes de couture, les professeurs exercent leurs élèves au choix des couleurs en drapant sur leurs épaules des étoffes de tons différents.

Après avoir vainement essayé de concevoir l'horrible mascarade que Mme Delarue-Mardrus nous présente comme l'image authentique d'un mariage à Harlem, je fus très aise de découvrir dans les mondanités d'un journal nègre, « La Philadelphia Tribune », la description suivante du mariage d'une de mes amies : « La mariée, grande, mince, le teint d'un bronze chaud, portait (naturellement) une toilette de création française, une longue robe de velours ocre clair. Les robes des demoiselles d'honneur, en velours également, présentaient toute la gamme des tons de l'automne, allant du jaune canari (une jeune fille à peine colorée) au rouge laque de chine (teint bronze clair), en passant par les tons abricot (teint ambré) ; or, cuivre, mandarine et ocre rouge ». Cet ensemble de couleurs prouve clairement que, loin de singler leurs compatriotes blanches, les jeunes noires ont sagement choisi des nuances qui, par leur éclat, font valoir les tons si chauds et si riches des teints bruns.

De toute évidence, Mme Delarue-Mardrus n'a jamais eu la bonne fortune d'assister à un mariage à Harlem, non plus qu'à un bal de société. Elle aurait pu alors y vérifier la justesse de l'opinion souvent exprimée par certains écrivains blancs américains, à savoir que, pour la sûreté du goût, la toilette des beautés brunes de Harlem ne laisse rien à désirer.

very seriously concerned with the choice of tints and shades becoming to their complexion. Therefore I found it difficult to imagine the rather dark attendants of this particular wedding as being garbed in a glaring pink. Ten years ago, it was thought that a dark girl must confine herself to drab blues and lifeless browns. Now, we understand that we must find colours which would bring out the light and the latent beauty of our complexions. To this end, in the dressmaking classes of Negro schools, the instructor drapes squares of different coloured materials around the shoulders of the students in order to discover the particular colours which are most becoming.

After trying to understand the dreadful nightmare which Mme Lucie Delarue-Mardrus created as being an authentic picture of a Harlem wedding, I was very much relieved indeed to come across the society column of a Negro newspaper which gave the description of the wedding of one of my friends. « The bride, tall, and of a rich brown complexion, wore a French creation of egg shell wedding ring velvet. The gowns of the attendants were of velvet in Autumn shades. The colours were canary, gold, copper, Japanese red, carmine, tangerine and peach bloom. » From this galaxy of colours, it can be readily seen that far from being credulous enough to ape their white contemporaries, coloured girls have wisely chosen to wear the very colours that by their brilliancy, set off the warm rich tints of a brown skin.

Evidently, there are still two experiences which Mme Lucie Delarue-Mardrus has not yet had the good fortune to attend a wedding « in the Negro capital ». It is indeed most unfortunate, because this inexperience deprives the story of local colour. It would be equally advantageous to attend one of the large annual balls held there during the winter season, for according to some American writers, the brown belles leave nothing to be desired from the point of view of the unerring good taste of their attire.

## Notre Enquête Answers to our Inquiry

Réponse à votre question : Comment les Noirs vivant en Europe doivent-ils s'habiller ?

Nous recevons d'une abonnée de race blanche, qui signe ROSARIO, la réponse suivante :

Selon moi, 1<sup>e</sup> comme il leur plaît puisque ce sont des hommes libres; 2<sup>e</sup> selon leurs moyens et suivant les exigences du climat occidental.

Quant à rire à la vue d'un Noir vêtu à l'Européenne, voilà une idée qui ne m'est jamais venue à l'esprit. Je me flatte cependant d'avoir un sens aigu du ridicule.

J'ai vu, il n'y a pas huit jours, un Monsieur en tenue de chasse, et l'œil gauche affligé d'un monocle, faire une entrée plutôt sensationnelle dans un dancing noir. Le Monsieur était Blanc. Il se croyait irrésistible. Il l'était en effet, mais pas dans le sens où il l'entendait ! C'est pourquoi ce soir-là, les Noirs prirent sans le savoir une belle revanche sur le « Blanc qui rit » dont parle M. Bergson.

Que ceux qui seraient tentés de rire des Noirs, mal vêtus, se souviennent d'une époque où ils étaient « déguisés » en soldats français. La nuit où ils défilèrent dans Paris, personne ne riait. Ils s'en allaient vers le carnaval de la Mort, pour y défendre le Droit Blanc. Peu d'entre eux sont revenus. Parmi ceux-là, j'en connais dont le veston européen s'orne d'un modeste mais éloquent ruban rouge.

Enfin, pour en revenir à la question : Que les Noirs s'habillent selon leur convenance. Je connais

In my opinion, Negroes should dress in the first place, as it pleases them since they are free men and secondly, according to their means, always considering the demands of an Occidental climate.

As to the laugh of the white man who sees a Negro dressed in European fashion, that is an idea which has never occurred to me. And I pride upon having a keen sense of the ridiculous. Scarcely a week ago, I observed a gentleman dressed in a hunting outfit with his left eye suffering under the strain of a monocle, make a rather sensational entry in a Negro cabaret. The gentleman was white. He believed himself irresistible. And indeed he was, but not the way he thought. Therefore, at least this evening, the Negroes had their revenge upon « the white man who laughs », described by M. Bergson.

Furthermore those who are tempted to laugh at badly dressed Negroes should remember the time when they were « disguised » as French soldiers. The night they paraded through Paris nobody laughed. They were moving towards the Carnaval of Death, to defend the rights of the Whites. Only a few of them returned. And among them I know some whose European sack coat is decorated by a modest but eloquent red ribbon.

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beaucoup de Blancs, intelligents et bons, qui les considèrent, bien ou mal vêtus, comme des frères. L'avis des sots ne compte pas.

*Un abonnée blanche  
Amie des Noirs,  
ROSARIO.*

JEAN BALDOUI

« Comment les Noirs vivant en Europe doivent-ils s'habiller? »

Et d'abord, est-il bien sûr que la vue d'un Noir habillé à l'euroéenne provoque le rire du Blanc? Ne rie-t-on pas autant, à Paris, d'un campagnard endimanché? en province, d'une mode nouvelle non encore acclimatée?

Le ridicule vient de l'inadaptation et je ne crois pas que la couleur de peau y soit pour grand'chose. S'il la fallait considérer, je serais plutôt tenté de croire que l'adaptation se fait plus vite, et mieux, chez les Noirs que chez certains Blancs mal dégrossis.

Imaginerait-on, d'autre part, sans en rire, un Blanc transplanté sur une terre primitive et adoptant le costume ou l'absence de costume des indigènes? Prenez les plus notoires de nos contemporains et mettez-les en pareille posture : vous m'en direz des nouvelles.

Une seule fois, peut-être, un Noir m'a donné à sourire, parce que, comédien amateur, il interprétait un rôle de Pierrot, ce symbole de l'absolue blancheur. Encore mon sourire était-il moins un réflexe physique que l'effet d'une association d'idées paradoxales.

Je me souviens aussi de certaines cérémonies protocolaires en redingotes et chapeaux de forme qui faisaient assez triste figure sous le ciel des tropiques. Mais cette austérité vestimentaire était aussi malséyante pour les blancs que pour les indigènes.

Finally, to return to the question, Negroes in dressing should be guided by utility. I know many intelligent and good natured whites who consider them as brothers no matter whether they are well or badly dressed. A fool's opinion doesn't count.

A friendly white subscriber.  
ROSARIO.

JEAN BALDOUI

*How should Negroes living in Europe dress?*

First of all, is it really certain that the sight of a Negro dressed as a European provokes the laugh of the white man? Don't Parisians laugh just as much at a rustic dressed in his Sunday best? Just as country people laugh at ultra modern styles? The comic element is the result of inadaptation and I don't believe that the colour of the skin counts very much. If it were necessary to consider the complexion I would be rather tempted to believe that the adaptation is made more quickly and with better success for Negroes than for certain inelegantly attired whites. On the other hand, is it impossible to imagine, without laughing a white man transplanted to a primitive land who adapts the costume or the lack of costume common to the natives? Take our most celebrated contemporaries and put them in a similar position, and I wager that some interesting stories could be told.

Only once, perhaps, a Negro made me smile, because, as an amateur comedian, he interpreted the role of Pierrot, the very symbol of whiteness. Furthermore, my smile was less a physical reflex than the effect of the association of paradoxical ideas. I also remember certain state ceremonies in frock coats and high hats which made the participants look rather sad under tropic skies. But this severe attire was as unbecoming to the whites as to the natives.

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Ce que l'on peut affirmer d'une façon à peu près certaine, c'est que les Noirs n'ont rien à gagner en s'habillant à l'euroéenne, surtout dans leur pays d'origine. Je conçois qu'en Europe ils céderont aux usages du milieu et qu'ils se refusent à servir de point de mire à une curiosité gênante, fût-elle admirative, mais ils se doivent alors, et beaucoup d'entre eux l'ont fort bien compris, de ne pas adopter aveuglément toutes les fantaisies de la mode. Ils doivent conserver quelque chose qui soit approprié à leur type, de même qu'en évoluant intellectuellement, ils doivent garder les qualités de leur race.

Les femmes de couleur se peuvent permettre mieux que d'autres, certaines audacités de tons dans les robes qu'elles portent. Leur beauté corporelle ne doit jamais s'emprisonner dans des ajustements ni s'encombrer de fanfreluches, mais elle réclame d'être mise en valeur par des lignes simples et des tissus souples. Le mieux qu'elles puissent faire est ne point s'affranchir de leur charme exotique et d'en rappeler les caractéristiques dans leur coiffure qui pourra tenir du madras ou du turban.

As a last world, I should like to make it known that coloured women can, more advantageously than others, indulge in certain audacities of colour. Their beautiful bodies ought never to be imprisoned by tight dresses or encumbered with gaudy finery. On the contrary, they need to be set off by simple lines and supple materials. One of the best things they can do is not to abandon their native charm. They can recall its characteristic features by wearing hats modelled upon the madras or the turban.

As a last world, I should like to make it known

that coloured people can perhaps give more lessons than they have need to take from peoples who

think that in all civilizations they alone are privileged.

J. BALDOUI.

# Afrofuturism as a Strategy for Decolonizing the Global Fashion Archive

Sonja Eismann

Sonja Eismann

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Western fashion—which is often posed as universal—draws “inspiration” (though some might call it appropriation) from historical as well as global sources. It follows a colonialist, hegemonic logic of exploitation that pits *us* against *the others*, ending in the well-known capitalist scenario in which the winner takes it all. In thinking about decolonizing imaginaries of the fashion world, three areas of thought have led me to investigate the possibility of what might be called the decolonization of the fashion archive: the transgression of borders, the concept of time, and, most importantly, the idea of the archive. Decolonizing the fashion archive—an imaginary archive understood here in the Foucauldian sense as the sum of conceptual and material evidence of historical as well as contemporary articulations selected to qualify as “fashion”—could be a way to find a valid answer to fashion narratives centered exclusively on Western (colonial) discourses. The paradoxical nature of an archive of something like fashion, which is by its very nature bound to the present—fashion being commonly defined as the vestimentary practices happening in the *now*—is further complicated by the division of historical garments into categories such as “fashion” and “ethnographic artifacts” in museums. The former, assigned to occidental, northern, or “developed” parts of the world, are seen as evolving according to a historically constructed fashion time line, whereas the latter are seen to largely attest to an unchanging “local” or “tribal” life. So how may a postcolonial perspective on fashion contribute to troubling its archive?

In this essay, I will explore how Frantz Fanon’s deconstruction of national as well as symbolic borders and how postcolonial positions regarding the destabilization of the archive and the contingency of time might contribute to a decolonization of the fashion archive, before moving on to specific examples of Afrofuturist fashion strategies. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon expands on ideas he had already put forward in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952): “The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil.”<sup>1</sup> The limits of the colonized world are of geographical as well as of psychological nature, so the colonizer can take complete possession of his or her new subject. Fanon continues: “The native is a being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world. The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits.”<sup>2</sup> Kemi Bassene argues that it is vital for the decolonized

1 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 40.

2 Fanon, 50.

to deconstruct and to destabilize these very borders in their creative imaginary as well.<sup>3</sup> What does this tell us about the nature of a postcolonial archive?

For Adeline Koh, "a 'postcolonial' archive is one which examines and questions the creation of imperialist ideology within the structure of the archive. Additionally, it aims to assemble a previously unrepresented collection of subaltern artifacts."<sup>4</sup> She then turns to Elizabeth A. Povinelli who in her essay "The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall" (2011) has written that a postcolonial archive should also "investigate the compositional logics of the archive as such: the material conditions that allow something to be archived and archivable; [...] the cultures of circulation, manipulation and management that allow an object to enter the archive and thus contribute to the endurance of specific social formations."<sup>5</sup> Koh also references Allen F. Isaacman, Premesh Lalu, and Thomas Nygren who have noted that a "postcolonial" archive will seriously interrogate "the need for scholars to overcome the traces of colonialism and apartheid that persist through forms of knowledge production."<sup>6</sup>

So the postcolonial archive does not only function as a source for versions of alternative histories or herstories, a kind of counter-archive, but it also troubles the very notion of the archive itself. What constitutes an archive? What is in it? Who put it there? Bassene states that many non-Western artifacts have been dispossessed and displaced to museums in the West rather than being kept in local archives. The significance that is conferred onto these objects might differ greatly: what might be considered as an insignificant piece of clothing or jewelry in the West could have originally been "personified, like a sacred being."<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of his text "Unpacking My Library Again" (2005), Homi K. Bhabha describes exactly that: unpacking books from crates, without apparent order. Quoting Walter Benjamin's essay "Unpacking My Library" (1931), he asks the viewer to participate in the "dialectical tension between the poles of order and disorder" that have marked Bhabha's life and work.<sup>8</sup> Eleanor Byrne, in her book on Bhabha, takes this description of the unruly library with books "in the most unlikely pairings" as a starting point from which to reflect on a postcolonial version of the archive, which she likens to Bhabha's "disorder of crates."<sup>9</sup> She states that "postcolonial criticism is characterized by a profound skepticism about the truth claims of 'archives'—understood as narratives that structure people's lives and interpellate them—in the West and in postcolonial nations."<sup>10</sup>

Byrne goes on to explain that "Bhabha evokes a guardianship of 'meanings,' histories and interpretations that have to be actively undone by a postcolonial intervention."<sup>11</sup> She sees Bhabha foremost as a "reader of archives" who reorders them and liberates "them from what Derrida calls their domiciliation, their house arrest."<sup>12</sup> In his article "'Race,' Time and the Revision of Modernity," Bhabha introduces, with reference to Fanon, a new conceptualization of time from a

postcolonial perspective in response to the racist notion of the "belatedness of black man,"<sup>13</sup> "the time-lag of cultural difference":<sup>14</sup> namely, a "'projective past'" or a time lag that interrupts Western modernist forms of thinking.<sup>15</sup> Achille Mbembe, in his 2015 talk "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive," spoke specifically about the continuing racism at universities in South Africa, and also pointed to the notion of time in relation to concepts of colonialism and hegemonic whiteness.<sup>16</sup> "Colonization itself was a fundamental negation of time," he claims, as indigenous peoples were seen as "outside of time," incapable of change and creation, and therefore devoid of any kind of future.<sup>17</sup> The time of decolonization is, according to Mbembe, directly opposite to that of colonization: it is double time, one of closure (of the past) and one of possibility (for the future). And it therefore also calls inherently for a "de-mythologization of whiteness," because "human history is about the future. Whiteness is about entrapment. Whiteness is at its best when it turns into a myth. It is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside."<sup>18</sup>

One strategy to deal productively with the contingencies of postcolonial time(s) is found in the concept of Afrofuturism, which is not only useful in the realms of art, music, film, and theory, but also in the world of fashion. In Afrofuturism's self-fashioned universe of alternative histories, geographies, and identities, members of the African diaspora imagine themselves as utopian space travelers

- 3 Kemi Bassene, "Decolonizing Imaginaries in the Fashion World: From the Generation of Ma Grias Casset to a Postcolonial Fashion Perspective" (lecture, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, December 12, 2015).
- 4 Adeline Koh, "Addressing Archival Silence on 19th Century Colonialism—Part 2: Creating a Nineteenth Century 'Postcolonial' Archive," March 4, 2012, *Adeline Koh* (blog), <https://web.archive.org/web/20170816162333/http://www.adelinekoh.org:80/blog/2012/03/04/addressing-archival-silence-on-19th-century-colonialism-part-2-creating-a-nineteenth-century-postcolonial-archive/>.
- 5 Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall: Archiving the Otherwise in Postcolonial Digital Archives," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 22, no. 1 (2011): 152–53.
- 6 Allen F. Isaacman, Premesh Lalu, and Thomas I. Nygren, "Digitization, History, and the Making of a Postcolonial Archive of Southern African Liberation Struggles: The Aluka Project," *Africa Today* 52, no. 2 (2005): 6.
- 7 Bassene, "Decolonizing Imaginaries in the Fashion World."
- 8 Walter Benjamin, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, "Unpacking My Library Again," in "Identities," special issue, *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 5.
- 9 Bhabha, 5.
- 10 Eleanor Byrne, *Homi K. Bhabha* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 52.
- 11 Byrne, 53.
- 12 Byrne, 54.
- 13 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 339.
- 14 Bhabha, 340.
- 15 Bhabha, 363.
- 16 Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive" (lecture, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, May 2, 2015).
- 17 Mbembe.
- 18 Mbembe.

with roots in Egyptian mythology as well as in space-age mysticism, unbound by the chains of slavery and racism. "Time, for an Afrofuturist, is a fluid concept, and the terms past, present and future aren't necessarily linear," Laura Havlin notes in her article on "A History of Female Afrofuturist Fashion" (2015).<sup>19</sup> Reynaldo Anderson and John Jennings, drawing on radical black thinkers like Paul Gilroy, Kodwo Eshun, and Mark Dery (who coined the term in 1994),<sup>20</sup> see Afrofuturism today as engaging with the aesthetic and intellectual dimensions of "the so-called post-human/post-racial future" while staying "connected to an African, humanistic past."<sup>21</sup> Nonnormative embodiment and visual self-styling have been key elements of an Afrofuturist aesthetics from its inception around the middle of the twentieth century. Jae Jarrell, member of the Chicago-based black art collective AfriCOBRA and designer of the Revolutionary Suit (1970)—a two-piece suit designed for a woman with a sewn-in ammunition belt—remembers: "One of the tenets of AfriCOBRA was to reinvent yourself."<sup>22</sup> She quotes fellow Chicagoan Mae C. Jemison, NASA astronaut and first African American woman in space, as saying that "the future didn't just happen; it was created."<sup>23</sup> While it is most commonly musicians like Sun Ra and his Arkestra, George Clinton with his band Parliament, Grace Jones, Missy Elliott, or, more recently, Janelle Monaé who are associated with Afrofuturism—owing to their musical and lyrical themes, but also their "space age" outfits ("a high-shine mash-up of cyborg themes, loosely tribal motifs, android imagery and gleaming metallic"), as described in the *New York Times*,<sup>24</sup> the fashion world itself has also caught on.

At a recent panel on the theme of "Afrofuturism: Imagining the Future of Black Identity" at Civic Hall in New York, one of the attending journalists, Steven W. Trasher, identified the foundations that the concept comes up against as follows in an article for the *Guardian*: "To me, a tenet of Afrofuturism deals with black people being told they must adhere to divisions which don't exist, and only accept a limited number of stories about ourselves, such that we have an extremely limited concept of what material reality can be. Racism can give black Americans the impression that in the past we were only slaves who did not rebel; that in the present, we are a passive people beaten by police who cannot fight back; and that in the future, we simply do not exist."<sup>25</sup> One of the speakers at the conference was Walé Oyéjidé and one of the two designers of American menswear label Ikiré Jones. Trasher writes that for Oyéjidé, "Afrofuturism offered a way out of the 'present nature' of depicting black people in a limited way, and instead offers a vision of us with a 'shout out to the future'."<sup>26</sup>

It is compelling to see what strategies Oyéjidé and his business partner, Sam Hubler, deploy to make use of an archive of the past and the future, of global and specific locations, in their design practices. They describe their method as follows: "Ikiré Jones is a Menswear company that marries African aesthetics

with Neapolitan tailoring. In an era where caricatures parade the streets like Emperors in New Clothes, we pride ourselves on offering a new perspective through an old lens; a new dialect for an old tongue; and an irreverent approach that twists the portrait askew while paying homage to the most classic of canvases—the suit."<sup>27</sup> By reworking this icon of bourgeois white maleness, the designers establish an essential link to the history of black dandyism, since the donning of an impeccable suit has always been at the heart of dandy sartorial practices. Although the figure of the dandy is almost always invariably conceived of as a white, bohemian individual, Monica L. Miller documents the existence of black dandy styles that date centuries back, beginning "in part with the contact between Africans and Europeans that initiated the trade in slaves."<sup>28</sup> In her book *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (2009), she describes the adornment of slaves during the Middle Passage. Although they wore no textile clothing, many of them had beautified their bodies with "small objects" like "precious or shiny bits like beads and ribbons," which they took great care to later incorporate into the "Coarse Shirts and [...] Drawers" the slaveholders forced them to wear.<sup>29</sup>

Miller observes that this act of "styling out," as she calls it: "The dandyism practiced is both personal and political, about individual image and group regard, and begs to be read from both an intraracial and interracial perspective."<sup>30</sup> In his article "Sartor Africanus" (2001) written on the phenomenon of the black dandy in the interwar years, Richard J. Powell stresses the importance of visibility that turns the often-ridiculed routine of dressing up into a political statement: "The black dandy's striking, audacious appearance on America's

<sup>19</sup> Laura Havlin, "A History of Female Afro-futurist Fashion," *Another Mag*, September 16, 2105. <http://www.anothermag.com/fashion-beauty/7791/a-history-of-female-afrofuturist-fashion>.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Dery "Afrofuturism Reloaded: 15 Theses in 15 Minutes," *Fabrikzeitung*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.fabrikzeitung.ch/afrofuturism-reloaded-15-theses-in-15-minutes/>.

<sup>21</sup> Reynaldo Anderson and John Jennings, "Afrofuturism: The Digital Turn and the Visual Art of Kanye West," in *The Cultural Impact of Kanye West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 35.

<sup>22</sup> D. Denenge Akpem, "Constructing Future Forms: Afro-Futurism and Fashion in Chicago, Part 1," *Chicago Art Magazine*, February 1, 2012, <http://chicagoartmagazine.com/2012/02/constructing-future-forms-afro-futurism-and-fashion-in-chicago-part-i/>.

<sup>23</sup> Mae C. Jemison, cited in Denenge Akpem.

<sup>24</sup> Ruth La Ferla, "Afrofuturism: The Next Generation: The Year in Style 2016," *New York Times*, December 12, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/12/fashion/afrofuturism-the-next-generation.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Steven W. Trasher, "Afrofuturism: Reimagining Science and the Future from a Black Perspective," *Guardian*, December 7, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/dec/07/afrofuturism-black-identity-future-science-technology>.

<sup>26</sup> Trasher.

<sup>27</sup> "Our Methods," *Ikiré Jones*, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://ikirejones.com/our-methods/>.

<sup>28</sup> Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Miller, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, 3.

street corners disrupted the white majorities' false notions of social order, racial homogeneity, and cultural superiority. Dandy Jim's [a racial epithet of the time for stylish African American men, S. E.] two greatest sins—visibility and indiscretion—can be understood as transgressions only in the context of a society where black people (and specifically black men) had clearly demarcated positions and identities and posed a challenge to the American body politic when they failed to conform to white expectations.<sup>31</sup>

So the designers of Ikiré Jones tap into a rich and highly political but little discussed tradition of black dandyism when they amalgamate an African sense of style with European design traditions.

As Shantrelle P. Lewis points out in her essay "Dandy Lion: (Re)articulating Black Masculinity," written as an accompaniment the exhibition she curated at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago in 2015, fashion has often been used by black men as "a tool of rebellion." The black dandy of today mixes, for example, "vintage with modern pieces designed on London's Savile Row, African print with polka dots and plaid, flamboyant colors with classic lines,"<sup>32</sup> and may thus be said to represent the link between the historical black dandy of the 1920s and the Afrofuturist in the way that clear cut distinctions of time, era, and place are dissolved.

But the Ikiré Jones designers take things a step further by underlining the importance of ethics. They try to counter bad industry practices by producing everything in their town of location, Philadelphia, and thus create designs unalienatedly inside a closely knit circle of family and friends, allowing them to spend time with their partners and children while they work. Their collections have names like "Escape to New Lagos," "Balotelli's Burden," or "The Untold Renaissance." In the text accompanying their Fall/Winter collection for 2014, which was called "Of Saints and Savages," they vehemently dispel the stereotypical assumptions about Africa as a continent that continuously needs saving: "To whom it may concern. This is a challenge to the zealously held belief that Africa is a monolithic village in need of perpetual saving. [...] This is a public disavowing of all who think the cradle of civilization has nothing more to offer than unmolested raw materials and an army of open palms awaiting aid. [...] No more will we sip from hoses gushing hypocrisy and hogwash. [...] We are the children of tomorrow. And we are here to assure that their disappointment awaits."<sup>33</sup>

Under the header "Our Heritage," the pair posted visions of the "Our Africa 2081 A.D." series, which was also displayed at the Vitra Design Museum's "Making Africa" exhibit in 2015, curated by Okwui Enwezor: there are visions of the future and the past, of the diasporic and the local, and they seem to be proudly free from the vernacular of the colonial imaginary. But it is not only up and coming independent designers like Ikiré Jones, Grace Wales Bonner

in London, or Busayo NYC in New York who are using this politically creative movement as a reference, but established designer brands are also making use of its complex imagery. Riccardo Tisci, who hired futuristic neo-soul artist Erykah Badu to be the company's celebrity testimonial in 2014 when he was still with Givenchy, was one of the first high-end fashion designers to adopt the aesthetics. In the Spring/Summer 2014 collection he designed for Givenchy, Tisci used typical Afrofuturist iconography like leopard or python patterns and Egyptian mythological signs like the Eye of Horus and scarabaeus. Around the same time, the young actress Willow Smith, daughter of Jada Pinkett Smith and Will Smith, was outfitted by Chanel with vaguely Afrofuturistic jewelry, and rapper Young Thug could be seen in Calvin Klein's 2016 #mycalvins campaign with a distinctly "spacey" orb around his neck.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

On the one hand, Afrofuturist fashion, with its fluid, hierarchy-destabilizing notion of time, place, and even species—Afrofuturists routinely refer to themselves not as men, but aliens, robots, androids, or the like—seems to possess the power to decolonize or at least trouble the Western-centric fashion archive. Although there is enthusiasm in bringing an Afrofuturist strategy into the still-notoriously white-washed fashion world, we should not forget an observation made by Paul Gilroy, author of *The Black Atlantic* (1993),<sup>35</sup> in an interview with German monthly Spex: "My problem with it [Afrofuturism] is that Africa is missing in this scenario. Everybody who is sitting at his computer or putting a phone to her ear holds a piece of Congo in their hands. There are things that have to be said about Africa as a place where there are neo-imperialist or neo-colonialist conflicts. [...] For me, Africa's future is the future of war. At the same time, Africa's future seems like Africa's past. I find the idea of Afrofuturism intriguing, but Africa has got to play a bigger role in this scenario."<sup>36</sup> So although contesting the "positivist, rationalist, materialist biases of the Enlightenment project"<sup>37</sup>—which was also the colonialist project—via a resort to alternative time- and geo-scapes, can serve as a powerful tool for the transformation of a Western-centric fashion world, we should never forget to make room for the actual, and not only conceptual, role of the African continent.

31 Richard J. Powell, "Sartor Africanus," in *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture*, ed. Susan Fillin Yeh (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 222.

32 Shantrelle P. Lewis, "Dandy Lion: (Re) articulating Black Masculine Identity," April 2015, <http://www.mocp.org/pdf/exhibitions/dandy-lion/39543DandyEssay.pdf>.

33 Oluwatoni Y. Akindele, "Ikiré Jones' Of Saints and Savages," November 4, 2014, [okayafrica, http://www.okayafrica.com/style-2/ikire-jones-of-saints-and-savages/](http://www.okayafrica.com/style-2/ikire-jones-of-saints-and-savages/).

34 La Ferla, "Afrofuturism,"  
35 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

36 Paul Gilroy, "Paul Gilroy: Die Kriegsmaschine ist zurück," interview by Pascal Jurt, Spex, July–August 2013, 39 (my translation).  
37 Dery, "Afrofuturism Reloaded."

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# (Re-)fashioning African Diasporic Masculinities

Christine Checinska

Christine Checinska

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This essay investigates the role of dress in the recreation of self that is central to the experiences of the African diaspora and the negotiation of geographical, cultural, social, and racial borders. The crossing of borders is the defining feature of being part of the diasporas. From an African-Caribbean-British perspective, the diasporic history begins with the forced uprooting of people in the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries because of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This history continued with waves of voluntary migration both within the Caribbean and to the metropolis. This triangulation of the Atlantic resulted in the transcultural/transnational connections underpinning the notion of the "black Atlantic."<sup>1</sup>

Considering two border crossings, I suggest that they each highlight masculinities refashioned via the subconscious interweaving of cultures. The two historical instances are: (1) the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), in which its leaders wore *ancien régime* uniforms, challenging the colonialists' equation of Africans with nakedness and nakedness with primitivism; and (2) the arrival of the *HMT Empire Windrush* at London's Tilbury Docks in 1948, marking the moment when the empire came home. Looking at readings of a wooden bust of Haitian leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines (fig. 25) and the characterization of Sir Galahad in Sam Selvon's 1956 novel, *The Lonely Londoners*,<sup>2</sup> I argue that the creolized style of dress of African diasporic men is a form of nonverbal "nation language,"<sup>3</sup> which is effectively a political assertion of shifting masculinities. I also apply a "carnivalized" theoretical approach in my analysis of creolized diasporic cultural forms.<sup>4</sup>

1 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

2 The use of sculpture and literature as resources to tell of these experiences and to map diasporic histories is key to my methodology. African diasporic histories and fashion/style/dress cultures have been largely missing from the writings of received histories and the fashion theory/history canon beyond ethnographic and/or anthropological accounts of indigenous "world dress" and subcultural or oppositional dress. Since stories of the African diaspora have been largely oral (hi)-stories and since received histories and cultural accounts directly reflect the way in which power operates, other ways of mapping histories and the genealogy of our cultural expressions have to be found. Hence the use of references to sculpture and literature in this essay.

3 Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

4 Joan Anim-Addo, *Touching the Body: Dynamics of Language, History and Publication* (London: Mango Publishing, 2007). Some sections of this text and the ideas explored within it have been included in my essay "Every Mickel Mek a Mockle: Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities," in *Beyond Borders*, ed. John Hutnyk (London: Pavement Books, 2012); and in "Stylin': The Great Masculine Enunciation and the (Re)fashioning of African Diasporic Identities," in "Asserting Creative Agencies through the Sartorial: (Re)Fashioning African and African Diasporic Masculinities," ed. Leora Farber, special issue, *Critical Arts* 31, no. 3 (June 2017).

The theater of fashion inspires me: the staging and performance of masculinities through props like a hat deliberately placed to one side, or the wearing of an immaculately pressed suit, with highly polished shoes. By crossing the border the body becomes a site of transformation.<sup>5</sup> This essay thus discusses creolized self-fashioning and the journey from enslavement to personhood.

## Carnivalizing Theory

"Carnivalizing theory" is a methodology developed by Joan Anim-Addo to analyze creolized literature.<sup>6</sup> Carnivals in the Caribbean represent multi-vocal sites of dialogue where people of West African heritage assert cultural and racial difference. Carnivalizing theory negotiates multiple theories "on Caribbean terms, from the perspective of its creolized culture."<sup>7</sup> According to Anim-Addo: "Carnivalized dialogue in its reflective process carries the polyphony and critical juxtapositioning evocative of carnival space and 'energies'.<sup>8</sup>"<sup>8</sup> The fluidity of this dialogue reflects the schism of migration, creolized trans-cultural exchange, and the idea of a fragmented past acting as an incubator for and cutting into the present. Anim-Addo also suggests that this method, through its critique of hegemony, exposes the absence of black women's theorizing.<sup>9</sup> This approach suits the creolized nature of my topic, while also affirming my voice as a female theorist of Jamaican heritage.



Fig. 25  
Bust of Jean-Jacques Dessalines

Outlining her rationale, Anim-Addo references Carole Boyce Davies.<sup>10</sup> Boyce Davies mobilizes an African proverb to describe a bricolage theoretical approach founded on "critical relationality." "Going a piece of the way with them" as a model for negotiating relations with strangers originates from an African tradition: a host accompanies an acquaintance on part of his or her journey before returning home. The distance traveled depends on their closeness. Carnivalizing theory describes an interdisciplinary mode of investigation that exhibits a "homelessness" that is similar to diasporic experiences. It mirrors the cut-and-mix character of Jamaican music, the bits-and-pieces nature of creolized cultural forms, and the bricolage traditions of Caribbean and African carnival. Various theoretical positions are examined for their efficacy to the analysis of creolized diasporic cultural forms. Binary oppositions dissipate, challenging hierarchies of value and the privileging of Eurocentric viewpoints or "master" discourses, encouraging dialogue instead of separation or essentialism, addressing the plural self and diverse other(s).<sup>11</sup>

Embracing a "carnivalized" strategy, this essay engages in the postcolonial debate about: (i) hybridity and creolization; (ii) the "in-between"/borderland space; and (iii) the performance of diasporic masculinities. I invoke Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi K. Bhabha, Kamau Brathwaite, and Roland Barthes.<sup>12</sup>

Hybridity is defined as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization."<sup>13</sup> Hybridization is viewed as a two-way process of exchange that challenges hierarchical binaries, essentialism, and the notion of purity. Bhabha suggests that cultures are always hybrid, and argues that cultural expressions emerge from the "contradictory and ambivalent" "Third Space of Enunciation."<sup>14</sup> However, hybridity has become shorthand for cultural mixing, where the displaced appropriate and refashion aspects of the host culture. In race studies, hybridity denotes the "mixed or contradictory

5 Masculine identities are seen here as psychosocial constructs, the characteristics of which are continually being created and recreated through representation and material culture—one element of which is dress.

6 Anim-Addo, *Touching the Body*, 228.

7 Anim-Addo, 275.

8 Anim-Addo, 245.

9 Anim-Addo, 250–53.

10 Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migration of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994).

11 Christine Checinska, "Every Mickle Mek a Mockle: Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities," in *Beyond Borders*, ed. John Hutnyk (London: Pavement Books, 2012), 135–52.

12 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera—The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*; Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); and Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, ed., Michael Carter, trans. Andy Stafford (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

13 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 118.

14 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 37.

identities resulting from immigration, exile and migration.<sup>15</sup> John Hutnyk states that “hybridity-talk,” though anti-essentialist, relies on an “anterior pure” that precedes mixture.<sup>16</sup> It is as though within academia the notion of hybridity is embraced as means of negotiating the consequences of colonization and globalization. Used in this way, the nuances are emptied out. Paul Gilroy, who analyzes the shift from the fear of the effects of black culture on Europe’s youth in the 1930s and ‘40s toward the “glamour of difference,” notes: “The main problem we face in making sense of these and more recent developments is the lack of a means of adequately describing, let alone theorizing intermixture, fusion and syncretism without suggesting the existence of anterior ‘uncontaminated’ purities.”<sup>17</sup> I agree with Hutnyk’s and Gilroy’s critique.<sup>18</sup> Hybridity has been co-opted into the glamour of difference that in turn fosters a prescriptive multiculturalism to which I object.

In Avtar Brah and Annie Coombs’s book, *Hybridity and Its Discontents* (2000), they note that much hybridity talk celebrates cultural syncretism involving equal intermixture.<sup>19</sup> Little attention is paid to economic, political, and social inequalities. The hierarchies of power shaping hybrid cultures are ignored. In his essay “What Did Hybridity Do?” Kobena Mercer questions whether hybridity delivered the promised breakup of hierarchical binary codes that marginalize black Britons. He urges us to examine terms like “syncretism” and “creolization” to broaden our appreciation of cultural mixing as a feature of plural modernisms.<sup>20</sup> He asks us to recontextualize hybridization, specifying and interrogating temporal, social, geographical, and linguistic contexts.

I “go a piece of the way” with Bhabha. All cultures are hybrid. However, I am mindful of Mercer’s concerns. Context dictates my focus. Richard D. E. Burton defines African-Caribbean identities as creolized, as emerging from the Caribbean plantation system.<sup>21</sup> (I extend that to the diasporas.) Burton argues that cultural expressions, though syncretic, are informed by an African “substratum.” Creolization began on the slave ships during the Middle Passage. Enslaved Africans interacted with each other and the white *massas*. Brathwaite defines creolization as “a cultural process that took place within a creole society [...] with a tropical plantation polity based on slavery.”<sup>22</sup> This alludes to the interdependent but uneven relationship between colonizer and colonized. Violence and fragmentation within Caribbean plantation slave society coexisted with interaction. He suggests that “the friction created by this confrontation was cruel but also creative.”<sup>23</sup> The creolization process was a creative response between the dominant and the subordinate and their new environment.

Points of convergence exist between the creole space, Bhabha’s in-between space and Anzaldúa’s borderlands. Transformations occur and boundaries destabilize. Bhabha writes that the in-between space facilitates the formation of strategies of selfhood that result in new signs of identity via collaboration

and contestation. Collective and individual experiences of nation-ness and cultural value are renegotiated. Cultural hybridity emerges. Yet cultural differences are also articulated. The Africanized church and Caribbean carnival, key to the creolization process, make visible such exchanges and articulations. The expression of cultural difference challenges social order. However, Bhabha foregrounds negotiation and collaboration at the expense of conflict. In describing the in-between space as the “cutting edge of translation and negotiation,” violence between the colonized and the colonizer is hidden.<sup>24</sup> Bhabha shaped our understanding of cultures as complex intersections of multiple histories, places, and positions. Postcolonial and/or creolized identities, in the moment of enunciation within the in-between space, do reveal a sense of being “neither one nor the other but something else besides.”<sup>25</sup> But can negotiation, collaboration, and touch adequately describe the borderlands experience or the plantation slavery experience?

Anzaldúa captures the tension between loss and newness within the in-between/borderlands space. Mestiza border consciousness emerges from multiple subjectivities, from a sense of unbelonging resulting from the constant criss-crossing of physical and metaphorical boundaries, illuminating pluralities of self or doublings of consciousness. The notion of the border as a site of transformation is counterbalanced by her emphasis on the isolation of in-betweenness. Pain and creativity coexist.<sup>26</sup> This idea influences my thesis. Within Anzaldúa’s serpentine cycle of history, theory, and personal testimony, there is an undercurrent of confrontation, continual shift, reinscription, and translation. Her phrase “To survive the Borderlands, you must live *sin fronteras*, be a crossroads”<sup>27</sup> captures a sense of being in constantly changing realities. The recurring internal tensions in the borderlands between margin and center are highlighted. The holding of these tensions initiates “new signs of identity,”<sup>28</sup> then expressed through dress via creolized nonverbal “nation language,” a term coined by Brathwaite.

15 Peter Brooker, *A Glossary of Cultural Theory* (London: Arnold, 2002), 127.

16 John Hutnyk, “Hybridity,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 81–85.

17 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 250–51.

18 See Hutnyk, “Hybridity,” 81–85; and Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*.

19 Avtar Brah and Annie Coombs, eds., *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000).

20 Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle* (London: Routledge, 1994), 25–27.

21 Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

22 Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, 213.

23 Brathwaite, 204.

24 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 38.

25 Bhabha, 82.

26 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 80.

27 Anzaldúa, 217.

28 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 1.

The equation of fashion and dress with language is not new. I work within the post-structuralist tradition of Barthes, where fashion and dress are languages and texts waiting to be “read.” Language and dress are culturally framed individual and collective communication systems that cannot be separated from their cultural roots/routes. The displacement of just one element changes the whole and produces a new structure. Brathwaite in his analysis of Caribbean languages distinguishes between the imperial languages of Standard English, Creole English, which evolved in the new Caribbean environment, and nation language, the vernacular language of the enslaved. He notes that Jamaican nation language is influenced by West African speech patterns and rhythms. It consciously ignores the pentameter that we are familiar with in Western verbal rhythms to express the everyday from African-Caribbean life, and, by extension, African diasporic perspectives. He writes: “It is an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility.”<sup>29</sup>

West African models also influenced African diasporic male dress emerging from the Caribbean.<sup>30</sup> I align myself to Gilroy’s concept of the black Atlantic, whereby African diasporic cultural expressions connect across Britain, America, and the Caribbean.<sup>31</sup> In Brathwaite’s analysis of the lexical features of verbal nation language, he says that “in its contours [...] it is not English,” even though the garments being worn “might be English to a lesser or greater degree.”<sup>32</sup> As with verbal nation language, tracing creolized self-fashioning to plantation slavery, the attention paid to the design of clothing maintained fragments of shattered histories and traditions. Brathwaite writes that nation language was embraced by the enslaved to express everyday experiences, while still retaining traces of their West African past. The African-ness that submerged was also continually transformed by its new environment. The sound explosions punctuating verbal nation language are alive in the detail of an outfit—the glint of an earring worn with an otherwise somber ensemble, a splash of color, or a principled clash of pattern. The performativity of refashioned masculinities through creolized dress parallels the “total expression” or “orality” of verbal nation language.<sup>33</sup> Echoing verbal “call and response,”<sup>34</sup> the styled body in movement demands a response. The enslaved (re-)fashioned their identities, deploying a creolized aesthetic to create new consciousnesses of self.

Caribbean African diasporic masculinities are rooted in or through plantation slavery. Slavery overturned kinship rites, traditions, and gender roles. Since masculinity from Western Judeo-Christian perspectives is linked to power, honor, property ownership, and familial responsibility—qualities denied to male slaves—masculinities had to be redefined. The everyday dishonoring, invisibility, infantilization, and silencing of people had an impact on the slaves’ sense of self. The relationship between the dressed body and perceptions of selfhood, human dignity, personhood, and autonomy are connected to the wearing

of clothes and the fashioning of one’s appearance. Here the rationing of clothing underlined dehumanization because once the body is clothed, personhood is assumed. Clothing was rationed by the slave owners; new items of clothing were given to the enslaved at Christmas time and this was expected to last over the year. The harsh working conditions, particularly those endured by the field slaves, ensured that clothing wore out quickly. It was not unusual for the enslaved to be naked. In my view this was another form of control and dehumanization. In addition, the practicality and anonymity of slave dress became part of the process through which gender roles were constructed, experienced, and legitimized. For example, young boys from the age of twelve to fourteen wore a smock, as did young girls. The denial of clothing such as trousers or breeches that signified a transition into manhood was a disavowal of masculinity.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the body became a canvas or a peg onto which the inner image was hung.<sup>36</sup> That which could not be articulated verbally was articulated through dressing and styling the body. However slavery is not solely a historical period; it is a matrix against which identities are constructed and read. While Frantz Fanon urged freedom through violence and W. E. B. Du Bois wrote of freedom through “sorrow songs,”<sup>37</sup> I suggest that it is partly through creolized self-fashioning via nation language that freedom from society’s invisible borders based on racial and cultural difference is temporarily won.

## Haiti: The Great Masculine Enunciation

Haiti, the first French colony in the Caribbean to become independent, is important because it symbolizes cultural and racial autonomy. Images of the Haitian leaders have become symbols of power and elegance. When the

29 Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, 13.

30 There was and is no single homogenous West Africa or Africa from which creolized cultural expressions emerged. It must be noted that enslaved peoples were taken from many tribes; families were actively dispersed, children taken from mothers, direct cultural and historical links deliberately broken. The plantation systems demanded this.

31 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*.

32 Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, 13.

33 Brathwaite, 18.

34 “Call and response” in West African, African American, and African-Caribbean cultures, and those of their diasporas, references a to-and-fro pattern of participation. In music forms such as gospel, jazz, folk, and work songs a first phrase of

music is often immediately followed by a second, which can be viewed as a commentary on or response to the first; the two are interdependent. It is a somewhat democratic performance form since it fosters dialogue. It is also an important aspect of African diasporic oral storytelling traditions; the audience and its response is key to meaning.

35 Christine Checinska, “Colonizin’ in Reverse! The Creolised Aesthetic of the Empire Windrush Generation” (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2009).

36 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1959).

37 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1961); and W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1994).

revolutionaries Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Baptiste Belley, and Jean-Jacques Dessalines—former slaves—entered the global political stage, they were elegantly dressed in stark contrast to the near nakedness of the plantation slaves discussed above. Through their self-fashioning, the Haitian leaders visually announced their status as free, equal, and part of humanity of all men.<sup>38</sup> Deploying a creolized aesthetic, they visually articulate the notion of being “neither one nor the other, but something else besides.”<sup>39</sup>

According to Western fashion studies, modern menswear began with the democratization of dress owing to the French Revolution (1789–99). This period is referred to as the “Great Male Renunciation.”<sup>40</sup> Fashions in male dress shifted from an *ancien régime* reliance on color and ornamentation, which denoted social rank, toward clothing that was functional, discrete, and suitable. From the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, sumptuary laws ensured that aristocratic dress was distinct from clothing worn by the lower classes. The ethos of equality that emerged from the French Revolution saw the simplification or democratization in dress; the new social order demanded it. From the perspective of the African-Caribbean and by extension the African diasporas, the Haitian Revolution (1791–1803) fueled another form of democratization of dress. Dress changed from being the functional and anonymous (un)dress of the slaves to being elegant, embellished, and personalized, announcing the status of the wearer as free, equal, and part of the humanity of all men. What took place could be termed the “Great Masculine Enunciation.” This is evident in the creolized self-fashioning of Dessalines in particular.

The National Maritime Museum (NMM) in Greenwich houses a tropical hardwood bust depicting Dessalines (fig. 25). He wears a Napoleonic bicorne hat with three feathers and a jacket embellished with tasseled epaulets and a laurel leaf pattern. However, the presence of a skullcap beneath his regulation headgear moves Dessalines dress beyond mimicry. (The etching, seen in fig. 26, clearly shows him wearing a geometrically patterned skullcap.)

Dessalines had been enslaved and transported to San Domingo at sixteen. The skullcap references his West African past. In the 1810s, Osifekunde of Ijebu (located between Oyo and Benin) wrote: “The common people [...] contend themselves with the botiboti, a simple cap made in the country. The more well-to-do prefer the akode or brimless hat.”<sup>41</sup> When juxtaposed with Western dress, the skullcap is reinscribed, becoming a potent cultural symbol. By including the skullcap, the sculptor conveys Dessalines’s West-Africanness and his journey from slave to soldier to general to emperor: the creolized nature of Haitian society and the creolized aesthetic of the enslaved people is suggested.<sup>42</sup> Drawing on Barthes, I suggest that the “soul” or “meaning” of an outfit is revealed in the “detached detail.”<sup>43</sup> Dessalines’s skullcap is significant.



Fig. 26  
Portrait of General  
Jean-Jacques Dessalines

Military uniforms denote belonging and status. They signify physical and psychological discipline. The disciplining of the body required to wear them is an education in self-governance, shaping the social and inner self. Daniel Roche writes that the military uniform is “at the heart of the encounter between

<sup>38</sup> I deliberately draw on the slogan of the French Revolution, “Liberté, égalité, fraternité,” to highlight the absence of the rights of the enslaved people.

<sup>39</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 82.

<sup>40</sup> Examples of historical and theoretical texts referring to the simplification and democratization of European male dress during the Great Male Renunciation include in Barthes, *Language of Fashion*; Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860–*

<sup>1914</sup> (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Farid Chenoune, *A History of Men's Fashion* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993); and J. C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966).

<sup>41</sup> Helen Bradley-Foster, “New Raiments of Self”: African American Clothing in the Antebellum South (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 268.

<sup>42</sup> Checinska, “Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities.”

<sup>43</sup> Barthes, *Language of Fashion*, 63–65.

appearances and social discipline.”<sup>44</sup> “Detached details,” such as gold buttons, braids, and epaulets, are insignias of power.<sup>45</sup> Echoing masking in West African masquerade and Jamaican Jonkonnu, the military uniforms take on the associated characters. For some African diasporic males, the wearing of a military uniform could be instrumental in the reconciliation of “double consciousness.”<sup>46</sup> As Susan B. Kaiser writes, those who have been historically constructed as objects may use dress as a vehicle for subjectivity. Using the symbols present within the dominant culture, individuals reconstruct their everyday truths. The dominant cultural norms are subverted.<sup>47</sup> Notions of “who I am” or “who I am becoming” are thus articulated through self-fashioning. Dessalines employs a creolized aesthetic to personalize his uniform, appropriating and contesting the hierarchies of power within the plantation slavery regime and the aesthetic values of *massa*.

The Haitian Revolution and spectacle of its leaders’ dress challenged eighteenth-century Western thinking about race. The revolution was unthinkable, as was the sight of ex-slaves in full military regalia, conducting themselves in the manner of Versailles. (From 1758 until the start of the revolution, free blacks and mulattos were legally forbidden to wear swords, sabers, and European dress.<sup>48</sup>) Bonaparte referred to the revolutionaries as “gilded Africans,” boasting that he would not leave a single epaulet on their shoulders.<sup>49</sup>

### Arise Sir Galahad

Nearly 150 years later, in 1948, the men who sailed into London’s Tilbury Docks on the *Empire Windrush* brought with them history, culture, and style. The near-aristocratic formality of their dress bore traces of ongoing creolization. Post-emancipation entanglements between West Africa, the Americas, and Europe were manifest in their self-styling. They embody what is considered an in-between borderlands space. Inhabiting the liminal space between one sense of being and another, they appear on the brink of a new identity.

Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), which chronicles the everyday lives of West Indians,<sup>50</sup> was published at a time when migration from the Caribbean to Great Britain peaked. Arriving from Trinidad, Henry Oliver Esquire makes his entrance through the smog and grime of London’s Waterloo station to meet Moses Aloetta, an established inhabitant of the “big city.”<sup>51</sup> Moses, having scrutinized this “specimen” who “land up from the sunny tropics on a powerful winter evening wearing a tropical suit and saying that he ain’t have no luggage,”<sup>52</sup> christens him Sir Galahad.

Like the Sir Galahad of Malory and Tennyson, Selvon’s urban knight is a heroic figure.<sup>53</sup> His zest for life and determination to “make it big” in England, and

dismissing Moses’s advice to return home to Trinidad on the next steamer, is similar to the daring spirit of the Knights of the Round Table in their search for the Holy Grail. As the book progresses, the conspicuously underdressed Henry Oliver disappears behind the mask of his newly acquired title. Selvon elaborates on Sir Galahad’s appearance: his preferred style, the ritual of dressing, the ceremony surrounding the commissioning of a new suit from a Charing Cross Road tailor rather than an East End one. We learn that “the first things [... Sir Galahad would] do after he [gets] a work was to stock up with clothes like stupidness.”<sup>54</sup> Sir Galahad is aware of the latest cuts. Money is no object. It is impossible to palm off “slack work” on him because he has an eye for quality and perfection in dress. Self-fashioning, for Sir Galahad, is a priority. There is a suggestion in the book that prioritizing fashion is a common trait among Caribbean men; Jamaicans, for example, are regarded as being particularly *hep* (cool).

According to Gilroy’s hypotheses, African American culture is emblematic of the cultural expressions of the African diasporas throughout the West.<sup>55</sup> Gilroy, in his extrapolation on the black Atlantic suggests that black American cultural and political histories are not solely the inheritance of African Americans. He argues that the historical crisscrossing of the Atlantic by black people, whether involuntarily through slavery or voluntarily through migration, facilitated continual cultural exchange. I have seen influences of classic English menswear alongside African American style on Windrush Generation “fine dressing.” For example, the preference for suits made of 100 percent English wool despite tropical climates. In the context of the Caribbean and its diasporas, these exchanges manifest in strategies like the clashing of print and pattern, exaggeration in silhouette, asymmetry, and the dressing of the head.<sup>56</sup>

Sir Galahad displays a zoot approach to dress. When preparing to go out on a date, “the crowning touch [of his outfit] is a long silver chain hanging from the fob, and coming back into the side pocket.”<sup>57</sup> As with African American

44 Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress, Fashion and the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 222.

45 Barthes, *Language of Fashion*, 64.

46 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*.

47 Susan B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing* (New York: Fairchild Books, 1997), 79–83.

48 Kaiser, *Social Psychology of Clothing*, 38–41.

49 James Cyril Lionel Robert, *The Black Jacobins* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980), 271.

50 “West Indian” is the term used to describe Caribbean peoples during the mid-twentieth century.

51 Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (New York: Longman, 1956), 52.

52 Selvon, 34.

53 See Alfred Tennyson, *Idylls of the King and Other Arthurian Poems* (London: Nonsuch Press, 1968), 384; Thomas Malory, *Le Mort D’Arthur* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

54 Tennyson, 85.

55 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*.

56 See Checinska, “Colonizin’ in Reverse!”; and Checinska, “Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities.”

57 Selvon, *Lonely Londoners*, 87.

zoot-suiters, the then classic markers of Western male dress, such as discretion and suitability, which reinforced standards of appearance based on Judeo-Christian values, are challenged. The shining of the shoes, the new socks, the Van Heusen shirt, all serve to create an impression. As Erving Goffman states, when appearing in public one consciously and subconsciously projects a concept of one's inner self, while simultaneously projecting a reading of the situation.<sup>58</sup> Sir Galahad transforms his appearance to fit his new inner image. In London, he feels like a lord and so he dresses like a lord: "he feel like a new man." The angularity of his suit's square shoulders and razor-sharp creases become the armor in which he goes into battle, cruising around Piccadilly Circus or Charing Cross Road; the white shield with red cross of the medieval knight is replaced by the zoot-suiter's elongated silver watch chain. The donning of the suit could be seen as a signifier of the rite of passage from one life to the next; the formality of the suit is like a mask within the masquerade of his (re-)fashioned masculinity. The bulk of the suit increases his physical stature and perceived status. Sir Galahad demands to be seen. The cut of his suit and choice of accessories are strategic.

Barthes describes jewelry as the "soul" of an outfit, a "next-to-nothing" that is "the vital element in getting dressed, because it underlines the desire for order, for composition, for intelligence."<sup>59</sup> In the late 1940s to the early '50s, the period when Selvon's book is set, tasteful jewelry in a British context was meant to be discreet. As Barthes continues, jewelry plays a crucial role in making meaning; the detached term—a silver watch chain—is significant. This is particularly true of the male suit, where subtleties of cut and cloth can be misread. Jewelry worn to accompany the zoot-suit punctuated the outfit in a similar fashion to the "sound explosions" in Brathwaite's nation language, metaphorically emphasizing the journey from enslavement. To reference Brathwaite's nation language, dress in the moment of arrival from the Caribbean to Britain, from the Jamaican perspective, may have "English" features, but in its contours, its silhouette, its "riddimic" use of accessory, it is not English. It is shaped by a creolized aesthetic.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

**In the world in which I travel I am endlessly creating myself. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate my cycle to freedom.**

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Frantz Fanon speaks of the recreation of the self at the border crossing. However, freedom from society's constraints based on racial and cultural difference is fleeting since slavery and colonization are the matrix against which African diasporic male bodies are continually read—black-skinned bodies are at the center of colonial fantasy. As Mercer writes: "[Black men] are implicated in the same landscape of stereotypes which is dominated and organized around the needs, demands and desires of white males."<sup>61</sup> The role of the audience in making meaning or "fixing" us as other cannot be ignored. Creolized aesthetics and strategic nonverbal nation language may herald signs of refashioned African diasporic masculinities; however, the racialized visual field and colonial gaze instigates perpetual flux. There follows an endless crisscrossing of borders and quest for personhood.

58 Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 235.

59 Barthes, *Language of Fashion*, 63.

60 Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole*

Society in Jamaica; Checinska,  
"Reconfiguring Diasporic Identities."

61 Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 133.

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# Last Stop Palenque Fashion Editorial

Hana Knížová and Sabrina Henry

Fig. 27  
Dress Chloé; socks and shoes model's own





Fig. 28

"The whole village is trying to convince this woman to have her picture taken, telling us how shy she can be. Finally a little girl takes her hand they pose together." Dress Maje; mary-janes Celine; sarong Pleats Please Issey Miyake.

Fig. 29  
Dress Maje;  
mary-janes Celine





Fig. 30  
Blazer Marques'Almeida; shorts model's own



Fig. 31  
"Two girls on their way home from school before a minor ruckus broke out over a boy. They weren't involved."



Fig. 32  
"I want to wear this one! Let me try it! Can someone help me with my hair please? Quickly! Ooo what's this? Gimme! It looks good together. Ok I'm ready. Show me the screen ... More, more!" Cape Pleats Please Issey Miyake; skirt Stella McCartney; scarf stylist's own; playsuit and crocs models own.



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Fig. 33  
"Your hair, who did this for you?  
Your mum? Excellent technique,  
and it's so long, muy linda, muy linda."



Fig. 34  
Dress DvF; trainers stylist's own. "It's hot and  
the house we're staying in is missing an entire  
wall that leads to the back garden, but we have  
delicious fruit and so much sun."

Fig. 35  
"Preparing for a presentation at the Batata Music & Dance School in Palenque"  
Hana Knižová, Last Stop Palenque, fashion editorial for Nataal.com, styled by Sabrina Henry, 2016.

Alongside academic essays that deal with fashion and postcolonial critique, the work of fashion photographers and stylists also significantly contribute to the postcolonial discourse through the re-vision and production of postcolonial fashion imaginaries. Featuring the Afro-Colombian village of San Basilio de Palenque, which was a refuge for escaped African slaves in the seventeenth century, the fashion editorial "Last Stop Palenque" was first published in *Nataal* in March 2016.<sup>1</sup> Photographer Hana Knížová and stylist Sabrina Henry traveled to the remote village with a suitcase full of bright summer fashions and asked the descendants of the first free Africans in the Americas to model for them. Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton spoke to Knížová and Henry about their encounter with San Basilio de Palenque's fashionable and style-conscious community and about the fascinating history of the town.

**Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton (EG & MT): Can you tell us something about the history of Palenque?**

**Hana Knížová and Sabrina Henry (HK & SH):** The city of Cartagena is a major port on the northern coast of Colombia. Founded in 1533, it is divided into two main areas: Getsemani and Plaza de los Coches, which was once the square used for the sale of African slaves. San Basilio de Palenque is situated inland, about an hour's drive away from Cartagena. It is a maroon community, which was founded following a slave rebellion led by Benkos Biohó, a former king said to have been born either in Congo or Angola. In 1713 San Basilio became the first free village in the Americas by decree of Philip V of Spain, after he stopped sending his troops on missions to attack the slaves' fortified mountain hideaway after many failed attempts.

Palenque's community has grown to approximately 3,500 inhabitants and maintains its own language (Palenquero, or La Lengua) with established rules and customs outside of Colombian governance.

Palenque has developed its own musical traditions and continues to pass down legacies, from generation to generation, of oral history, dance, and music as a way to preserve its unique sense of identity. In 2005 San Basilio de Palenque was declared as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

**EG & MT: Which designers are featured in the editorial?**

**HK & SH:** We used pieces from Chloe, Stella McCartney, Issey Miyake, Céline, and Marques' Almeida. Most participants chose what they wanted to wear.

**EG & MT: What was it like working with the people of Palenque?**

**HK:** I was inspired by Anita González's 2010 book, *Afro-Mexico: Dancing between Myth and Reality*, in which she states: "In both local and global communities, public understandings about blackness greatly influence who African Diaspora people think they are. [...] Self perceptions influence both self esteem and the sense of belonging."<sup>2</sup> It was a real pleasure to work with the people—a bit manic and hectic also, because we didn't have much time. People were mostly curious. Some really wanted to get involved and loved the attention, giggled and posed, while others were shy and a bit unsure. I think I took the best images of a girl who had to be convinced by her friends and family to have her images taken, because she's beautiful. She was so graceful. It was a new experience for them to try the clothing on that might have been different to what they usually wear, but seemed like it was actually designed for them. It was amazing to see how much of a community Palenque is—everyone knows each other. We heard there was an argument between teenagers while we were shooting and the whole village ran over to watch it!

**SH:** We'd arrived after a shoot for another publication, which essentially made it possible for us to go there, and we had a suitcase full of clothes to take there. When we arrived we were immediately given a tour of the main square, and then we were taken to various people's homes and told more about the community.

**HK:** Everyone knows each other, which gives a beautiful feeling to the place, and any activity draws a crowd! Our guide, Danilo Casseres, helped us find out if people would mind having their picture taken. Some were shy, some were keen. One young girl of about six years old immediately started grabbing clothing from my arms and trying them on, shouting for someone to undo her hair and make her presentable. Another woman who was really shy eventually got bored of being asked to have her photo taken that she agreed, and helped create two of my

<sup>1</sup> "Last Stop Palenque," *Nataal*, March 2016, <http://nataal.com/last-stop-palenque/>.

<sup>2</sup> Anita González, *Afro-Mexico: Dancing between Myth and Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 2.

favorite portraits in the series. One of my favorite moments was being introduced to some aunties who were having afternoon tea on the front porch. They called me over to examine my braids and declared they were very good and very fine. "Muy linda!" they said. But one issue was that although participants were paid to take part, the payments weren't large enough. It was all we could afford—and the participants were happy with the fee—but of course there is concern about the use of someone's image once it is out of their possession.

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# Conditions of Postcoloniality

Let us learn to discriminate the terms colonialism—in the European formation stretching from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries—neocolonialism—dominant economic, political, and culturalist maneuvers emerging in our century after the uneven dissolution of the territorial empires—and postcoloniality—the contemporary global condition.

—Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*

# A Brief History of Postcolonial African Fashion

Helen Jennings

Helen Jennings

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As European colonialism in Africa faltered in the mid-twentieth century, fashion became an expression of a renewed sense of cultural identity and the concept of contemporary fashion took off. Under President Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana claimed its independence from Britain in 1957, and seventeen other countries followed suit by the end of 1960. As a Pan-Africanist, Nkrumah urged his people to reject Western clothing in favor of national dress. Yet members of Africa's young urban elite were keen to define their own image. Inspired by the resistance music and sartorial style of iconic musicians, such as Fela Kuti and Hugh Masekela, and fueled by their university education from abroad, young people mixed and matched clothing from European fashion with more traditional African items made by tailors. Every tailor had his or her own individual flair, especially in Senegal where the art of tailoring was extremely refined at that point and was greatly revered. Yet it was the textile traders—always women—who controlled the market and who traveled the world amassing desirable collections of fabric.

Designer Shade Thomas-Fahm is credited with introducing African ready-to-wear clothing to Nigeria. Having trained at Central Saint Martins, London, she returned home to Lagos in 1960 and opened a chain of boutiques. She created modern versions of traditional Nigerian styles such as the pre-tied *gele* (head scarf), turning *iro* and *buba* (skirt and blouse) into a top and zip-up skirt combination, and adapted a man's *agbada*, a loose-fitting robe, into a woman's embroidered *boubou*.

Postcolonial style in Mali has been immortalized in the work of several now-renowned photographers. Hamidou Maiga and Soungalo Malé—following in the footsteps of studio photographer Seydou Keïta—photographed their subjects against painted backdrops or textiles while posing with their most prized possessions, such as scooters or record players. Malick Sidibé, on the other hand, also known as the “eye of Bamako,” went into the streets and nightclubs to photograph young people dancing and carousing. Young men organized themselves into clubs and would demonstrate their style allegiance by wearing matching suits. The girls would wear mini dresses or full skirts. They were part of a thriving African youth culture that was optimistic about the future—it was a culture that was engaged in a dialogue with international fashion and music trends. Mali was also the birthplace of the celebrated designer Chris Seydou. Born Seydou Nourou Doumbia in 1949, he opened his first tailoring store in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 1967. Relocating to Paris in the early 1970s, he changed his name to Chris in homage to Christian Dior, and worked for numerous fashion houses before achieving widespread acclaim for his innovative use of *bògòlanfini*. This particular type of Malian “mud cloth” is handmade by Bamana women and is distinguished by its brown and white geometric patterns. Believed to possess spiritual powers, Seydou was the first to turn *bògòlanfini* into a fashion fabric rather than a ceremonial one by using it for contemporary womenswear.

Other pioneering African fashion designers include Pathé Ouédraogo, who grew up in Burkina Faso and opened his Ivory Coast studio in 1977. His Pathé'O label focused on modernized *bubus* and *pagnes* and became popular among African political leaders. Ghanaian Kofi Ansah graduated from the Chelsea School of Arts in 1977 and is now considered to be one of the forefathers of Ghanaian fashion. His Art Dress line transformed *kente* and *adinkra* into elegant couture. Niger designer Alphadi cofounded the Fédération africaine des créateurs and in 1998 launched the Festival international de la mode africaine (FIMA) in the Niger desert, a longstanding African fashion event that brings African and international designers together. Senegal's Oumou Sy is a celebrated costume and fashion designer who founded the annual Carnival of Dakar in the 1990s. Her fantastical creations are known for their opulence and turn their wearers into regal symbols of African power. Paris-based Malian designer Lamine Badian Kouyaté, on the other hand, has been creating innovative upcycled, streetwise designs through his brand, Xuly Bët, for two decades.

In the Congo, Europe's sartorial influence created a unique legacy: la SAPE (Société des ambassadeurs et personnes élégantes), an elite group of dandies dedicated to high fashion. The movement La Sape originated in Kinshasa and Brazzaville in the 1920s when men, known as sapeurs, defied their meagre circumstances by dressing in European suits and bourgeois accessories—like those worn by their colonizers. After the Congo gained independence in 1960, economic insecurity and the dictatorship of President Mobutu followed and many sapeurs left for Paris where they became a presence in café society. To this day, sapeurs remain as local celebrities wherever they live.

In Paris it was Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) who also officially put Africa on the international fashion map in 1967 with his "Africa collection" of revealing latticed shift dresses made from raffia, shells, and wooden beads. Born in Algeria, he developed a great affinity for Morocco later in life. After this landmark outing, he secured a second home in Marrakech, where he would travel twice a year to design his collections. Successive seasons reinterpreted safari suits, tunics, caftans, *djellabas*, and turbans. His work has greatly influenced designers of later generations.

YSL was instrumental in introducing African and black models to the international catwalks in the 1960s and '70s, alongside fashion houses such as Paco Rabanne, Pierre Cardin, Courrèges, Oscar de la Renta, Halston, and Stephen Burrows. Africans like Ghanaian Rebecca Ayoko, Khadija Adam from Somalia, Katoucha Niane from Guinea, and Somalian Amina Warsuma were all catwalk princesses, but Iman was queen. In 1975 she first appeared on the New York fashion scene in photographs by Peter Beard, who claimed she was an illiterate tribeswoman whom he had discovered herding goats in the Sahara. In reality, Iman was Somalian, the daughter of a diplomat and a doctor, and had met

Beard while studying at University of Nairobi. His scheme worked—her first modeling assignment was for *Vogue*, she became one of Yves Saint Laurent's muses, and remains one of the most successful African models of all time. Today, African heritage models such as Alek Wek, Oluchi Onweagba, Liya Kebede, Ataui Deng, David Agbodji, Grace Bol, Fernando Cabral, and Herieth Paul lead the charge in New York, London, Milan, and Paris.

Nevertheless, Iman, supermodel Naomi Campbell, and legendary model, activist, and booker Bethann Hardison founded the Diversity Coalition group in 2014 to tackle the lack of diversity in the fashion industry. They published open letters to the directors of the four major fashion weeks, naming designers whose runway shows included either no models of color or just one. Hardison continues to keep diversity at the forefront of the fashion conversation to this day.

The rise in the diversity of models was also an outcome of the seismic changes spearheaded by the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States. As the music of Motown artists stormed the charts, Mohammad Ali declared, "I'm so pretty," and Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and the Black Panthers took on the white status quo, African Americans reasserted their diaspora status through fashion and beauty. The legacy of slavery coupled with the fight for political and social equality was channeled into the politics of dressing the body as a symbol of racial consciousness. From San Francisco to New York, Afros and *dashikis* became the look of the day.

Since the 1960s, legions of Western designers have continued to cherry-pick from Africa's aesthetics. Thierry Mugler's 1985 Spring/Summer show saw Iman walk down the catwalk under the shade of a straw parasol, with a monkey perched on her shoulder. In 1997 John Galliano's debut haute couture collection for Christian Dior included a series of looks inspired by East African warrior hats, chokers, and corsets. Jean-Paul Gaultier's 2005 haute couture show featured models wearing Afro wigs, feathered dresses, and a bridal gown resembling an African mask. And Bernard Willhelm's 2005 Fall/Winter menswear collection refigured the *boubou* into gaudy, baggy streetwear covered in gold animal prints. The 2009/10 Spring/Summer collections saw many designers play with African motifs, including Alexander McQueen, Tsumori Chisato, Louis Vuitton, Junya Watanabe, and Diane von Furstenberg. The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa inspired the likes of Issey Miyake, Marc Jacobs, Kenzo, Gucci, and Dries van Noten to explore African prints, as did major sports brands such as Nike and Adidas. Most recently, Burberry's 2012 Spring/Summer collection included wax prints embellished with beads, stones, and crochet in a series of draped and tailored silhouettes. And for the 2016 Spring/Summer collection, Valentino took inspiration from Africa with a collection strewn with bone necklaces, trade bead belts, and feathers and fringing of all kinds. The show, which featured predominantly white models with cornrows or dreads,

was criticized in the media as being an example of cultural appropriation as well as for its colonial gaze that stages Western fashion on the foreground, with Africans dressed in colorfully ethnicized costumes in the background.

Only a few African designers have shared in the global fashion limelight alongside their Western counterparts. Notable among them are Tunisian couturier Azzedine Alaïa, who is known as the “king of cling” for his body-hugging creations; Morocco-born Alber Elbaz, who was for a longtime creative director at Lanvin; Morocco-born Joseph Ettegui who established the London-based retailer Joseph; and Tunisian designer Max Azria who founded BCBGMAXAZRIA.

In the last decade, however, a new generation of designers in Africa and the wider diaspora have successfully started to rise in popularity through the fashion industry’s ranks. These talents are riding the wider wave of global interest in Africa’s cultural, economic, and technological ascension, and are also taking advantage of the country’s improved infrastructure, education, and governance. According to the World Bank, Africa now boasts seven of the ten fastest-growing economies. In addition, over three hundred million Africans can currently be considered middle class, while the number of individuals with a high net worth continues to grow. International investment is flooding into the continent and the manufacturing, financial, corporate, technology, and telecommunications sectors are booming. This has a trickle-down effect not only on fashion, but on all creative industries; music, literature, film, and art are all gaining traction. Added to this is the fact that an estimated 70 percent of Africa’s population is under the age of thirty. It is this new generation of upwardly mobile designers who, possessed with a global vision, are beginning to shine.

Whereas fashion was not traditionally seen as a viable occupation within Africa, today’s designers are making desirable, well-made, well-marketed collections that hang from rails all over the world. Some designers’ work is more Afro-centric, while others make clothes that do not seem African at all at first glance, but viewed together they reflect the flair and variety the scene has to offer. It is these designers whose collections strike a balance between global seasonal trends and local inspiration, and who present fashion as both fresh and authentic.

The work of African designers is bolstered by growing numbers of fashion events such as Lagos Fashion and Design Week and AFI Johannesburg Fashion Week; magazines such as *Zen Magazine Africa* and *Glam Africa*; coffee-table books such as *New African Fashion* (2011) and *Africa Rising* (2016); websites such as *Nataal* and *Bubblegum Club*; blogs such as *Tee Tee Is with Me* and *Nothing but the Wax*; and e-commerce initiatives such as Kisua and Oxosi. Social media is also connecting African fashion professionals to a global audience—

Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook are abuzz with conversations about African fashion and are used as essential marketing tools for independent brands. Therefore designers now have the means and communication channels to achieve recognition. They are grounded in traditions but are exposed to international tastes, thereby allowing them both the opportunity to satisfy local demand and ignite interest abroad. It is what can only be described as a unique and special moment; African fashion is reaching its apex.

Despite Nigeria’s precarious political situation and war against Boko Haram in the north of the country, Lagos has become one of Africa’s fashion capitals. It is currently home to an influential number of style-conscious, wealthy inhabitants, numerous fashion events, and media and concept stores including Alara, Stranger, and Temple Muse. Designer Lisa Folawiyo is known for reinventing wax print as a luxury fabric through hand embellishments and clean tailoring. Amaka Osakwe uses local textiles such as *ase oke* and *adire* to create her thoughtful, sensual Maki Oh range of womenswear. Tiffany Amber by Folake Folarin-Coker excels at floaty resort-wear such as caftans and jumpsuits. Parsons School of Design graduate Bridget Awosika offers pared back, uptown silhouettes for young women, while Lanre da Silva Ajayi explores demure tailoring with a 1950s twist. For menswear, Adebayo Oke-Lawal of Orange Culture creates gender-fluid, directional menswear and Tokyo James makes sharp, masculine suits with sportswear influences.

South Africa can boast the most thriving fashion industry in terms of media (it has dedicated editions of *Grazia*, *Elle*, and *Marie Claire*), retail culture, and fashion weeks. And Johannesburg competes with Lagos for the continent’s fashion crowd. Seasoned designers include Marianne Fassler, whose signature is the leopard-print frock, and Gavin Rajah, who specializes in romantic womenswear. Sindiso Khumalo covers simple silhouettes in geometric, art deco prints, while KLÜK CGDT’s opulent gowns cascade with feathers, tulle, and ribbons. Black Coffee is a highly conceptual brand by Jacques van der Watt with its mutable garments that can be worn several different ways. David Tlale creates dramatic fashion full of glamour and flair. And Thula Sindi caters to the working woman with his flattering fitted dresses. Emerging designers stealing the international limelight include Rich Mnisi, Lukhanyo Mdingi, and Wanda Lephoto (fig. 36).

Elsewhere in Africa and in the diaspora, there are swelling numbers of designers making a global impact. Accra’s Christie Brown by Aisha Obuobi offers effortless, wearable womenswear with delightful detailing, such as covered buttons and fringing. Paris-based Ivorian Laurence Chauvin-Buthaud dedicates her menswear label, Laurenceairline, to helping women learn production skills in Abidjan. Shirts, shorts, pyjama suits, and parkas come in bold West African and bespoke prints. Fellow Ivorian Loza Maléombho likewise established her



Fig. 36  
Wanda Lephoto, AW 17 lookbook

label as a way of empowering women both through employment and through her sharply structured creations. Casablanca's Amine Bendriouich fuses androgynous tailoring with Moroccan streetwear, and Cambodia-based, Madagascan-born Eric Raisina is renowned in Paris for his feather-soft, hand-dyed textiles and simple cuts. And Ugandan Gloria Wavamunno trained in London before launching her burgeoning label in Kampala.

In New York, the "Afropolitan" fashion scene is particularly strong. Ghanaian Mimi Plange is mentored by André Leon Talley of US Vogue and has collaborated on a shoe line with Manolo Blahnik. Also based in the city is model and shoe designer Armando Cabral, who hails from Guinea-Bissau, and Somalia-American twins Ayaan and Idyl Mohallim, who create clean, crisp, accessible womens wear under the label Mataano. William Okpo is a clothing range designed by sisters Darlene and Lizzy Okpo inspired by the interplay between the immigrant style of their Nigerian grandparents and American cultural sensibilities.

London is also teeming with African fashion success stories. British-Ghanaian Ozwald Boateng invigorated Savile Row with his sharp suits in the 1990s and has enjoyed a tenure as creative director of Givenchy Homme. His Ghanaian contemporary Joe Casely-Hayford studied at Central Saint Martins, and was creative director of Gieves & Hawkes before heading up the menswear label Casely-Hayford with his son, Charlie. They coined the term "Afropunk" to describe their exploration of clashing cultures and the crossing points of ethnicity in the modern world. Sam Lambert and Shaka Maidoh also cut their teeth in Savile Row and now play a leading role in Art Comes First, an artists' collective driven by respect for the craftsmanship and heritage that goes into a gentleman's wardrobe. Nigerian Tsemaye Binitie excels at luxury sportswear for women.

With a foot in both New York and London, Duro Olowu is arguably the most successful independent African designer working today. Born in Nigeria, he trained as a lawyer in London and established his eponymous womenswear brand in 2004. His first capsule collection of dresses based on the Yoruba *boubou* earned him the title of New Designer of the Year at the British Fashion Awards in 2005. He now enjoys global distribution, presents his collections at New York Fashion Week, and counts Michelle Obama as a customer. His approach is to create a freestyle wardrobe for the independent woman through a delightful cacophony of vintage couture fabrics, kaleidoscopic prints, and shapely silhouettes.

Through the achievements of these designers, Africa is beginning to redefine the luxury fashion industry. The 2012 IHT Luxury Conference in Rome, spearheaded by the *International Herald Tribune*, focused on the idea that luxury in the twenty-first century is no longer defined by outward displays of wealth. As the world shrinks and resources dwindle, consumers are looking beyond

the old fashion capitals for new sources of authenticity and for unique goods that have been touched by human hands—something at which Africa excels. Africa cannot compete with other markets when it comes to high-volume fashion but the continent's immaculate craftsmanship, not to mention its appetite for beauty, naturally lends itself to the new luxury marketplace.

In a similar vein, Africa is also feeding the growing demand for ethical and fair-trade fashion as discerning consumers begin to turn against mass-produced fashion. When big brands set up factories in Africa, they also play a role in the “trade not aid” development. Paris Fashion Week mavericks Maiyet collaborate with African artisans to create handmade boho womenswear, while Bono and Ali Hewson’s label, EDUN, produces the vast majority of its collections in Africa and supports cotton farmers in Uganda. And the UN’s Ethical Fashion Initiative enables the likes of Fendi, Stella McCartney, and Vivienne Westwood to craft accessories on the continent.

There are no easy solutions to these issues, but if the rapid progress made by the African fashion industry—and the continent itself—in the past few years is anything to go by, the playing field is rapidly leveling. Just take the number of exhibitions dedicated to African design in the past two years—“Fashion Cities Africa” at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, “Making Africa—A Continent of Contemporary Design” at Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, and “African-Print Fashion Now!” at Fowler Museum, UCLA, to name but three—as proof that the wider fashion world is watching and learning. And little wonder. With centuries of highly sophisticated sartorial acumen behind it to inspire and inform, Africa is swiftly taking its rightful place at the forefront of global style.<sup>1</sup>

#### Literature

De Jaeger, Christophe, and Ramona van Gansbeke, eds. *Haute Africa*. Tielt: Lannoo, 2014.

<sup>1</sup> This essay is a revised version of an essay that first appeared in *Haute Africa*, which accompanied the Fotofestival Knokke-Heist 2014 in Belgium. Christophe de

Jaeger and Ramona van Gansbeke, eds., *Haute Africa: People, Photography, Fashion* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2014).

# Fresh Off the Boat

## A Reflection on Fleeing, Migration, and Fashion (Theory)

Burcu Dogramaci

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"The exile divides life into two henceforth irreconcilable halves: the before and the after. A very banal observation, one can respond, yet for those in exile it is a double bottom as it provides a foundation, but at the same time undermines and splits their nature."<sup>1</sup> Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt came to associate these terms, later in his life, with his childhood experience as a refugee in Nazi Germany. His short story "Die Absonderung" ("The Separation," 1991) finds different ways to explain his traumatizing experience of strangeness, speechlessness, violence, and fear of death. Goldschmidt, who moved to France after the war, wrote for the first time in German, his native language, and through language he was able to revisit his childhood. After moving to France, Goldschmidt's relation to his mother tongue changed. He wanted to protect himself against National Socialism, which he connected with the German language, and so Goldschmidt learned French not only as a concession to the country that had accepted him, but also to hide within himself "the secret mother tongue of the Brothers Grimm, Eichendorff's poems and especially the beautiful everyday language of his parents and his environment."<sup>2</sup> Images of transgression can be found in "Die Absonderung" again and again, marking his entry into the new language through the language itself: "In a street in Florence illuminated with brownish light he memorized, 'nous avons, vous avez,' incessantly repeating it until the words had grown out and sounded just like a regurgitation of the wheels of a distant fast train."<sup>3</sup> In 1938 Goldschmidt and his brother traveled alone by train from Hamburg, through Italy, and then to France: "Then again a very long tunnel through which you boomed again for several minutes. With the ceiling lighting on you raced in the deep hollow ashamed and sweating: it felt like traveling in a Human-sized letter chute. After the tunnel, he entered France. Suddenly his life orientation was changed: he was able to show with his hand the direction for Paris. Now the future was in the after-

1 "Das Exil teilt das Leben in zwei von nun an unvereinbare Hälften auf: das Vorher und das Nachher. Eine sehr banale Feststellung, kann man erwidern, die aber das Wesen des Exilierten als Doppelboden fundiert, untergräbt und zugleich aufspaltet." Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, "Exil und Doppelsprachlichkeit," in *Übersetzung als transkultureller Prozess (Exilforschung: Ein internationales Jahrbuch, 25)*, ed. Claus-Dieter Crohn et al. (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2007), 1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations by Michał Chmielewski.

2 "Die heimliche Muttersprache, die der Brüder Grimm, der Gedichte Eichendorffs und vor allem die schöne alltägliche Sprache der Eltern und der Umgebung, sie lebte weiter unter dem Schutz der französischen Sprache." Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, "Sprachen des Exils," in *Text + Kritik: Zeitschrift für Literatur* 1 (2009): 80–81.

3 "In einer braunlichtigen Straße in Florenz hatte er 'nous avons, vous avez' auswendig gelernt, unaufhörlich wiederholt, bis die Wörter aus sich herausgewachsen waren und nur noch wie ein Aufstoßen der Räder eines fernen Schnellzugs sich anhörten." Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, *Die Absonderung: Erzählung* (1991; repr. Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2008), 34–35.

noon direction. Before the tunnel everything had been lying behind him.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to these images of transition, Peter Handke describes Goldschmidt’s syntax as abruptly changing, lyrically “switching, wincing, re-coloring, deforming the images”<sup>5</sup> to give shape to the agony of the former experience and the memories of the aged writer.<sup>6</sup> Through writing, the dichotomy of life experienced in exile, which Edward Said has referred to as “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place,” can be reflected on through literary writing.<sup>7</sup> But how can the “essence of the exiled person as a double bottom” be formulated in other kinds of artistic and cultural practice?<sup>8</sup> Which artistic concepts could express this serious interruption in the continuum of life?

### Boats, Fractures, and Fashion

This literary reference reflects on the possible (perhaps impossible) way of dealing with flight, expulsion, and migration in fashion. In fashion theory, too, the close relationship between language/writing and fashion has been pointed out: in his post-structuralist book *Système de la mode (The Language of Fashion, 1967)*,<sup>9</sup> the semiologist Roland Barthes analyzed fashion magazines and observed a translation of fashion in written language. This translation produced a system of meaning—the transition from the sensory to sense—and is positioned within a fixed structure and logic.

That textiles used in fashion production can relate to the dramatic experience of flight and migration is indicated by the German expression “Der Faden ist gerissen” (“the thread is broken”), which refers to the interruption of an event. Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault also reflected on the broken thread of Ariadne and the rift in thinking when they articulated a new post-structuralist way of thinking in multiplicities and differences—which is only possible through loss, shock, and uncertainty. Ariadne hangs herself with a cord, and Theseus becomes lost and confused in chaos. Foucault wrote: “The famous thread that was thought to be so firm is torn; Ariadne is abandoned, before you could believe it. And the whole history of Western thought has to be rewritten.”<sup>10</sup> How can contemporary fashion theory be conceptualized in times of global migration? Translocations, displacements, and instability should also be incorporated and, along with them, the experience of various cultural and historical models. In this way, the term “tradition” should also be questioned, because in fashion history it has often been the basis for understanding innovation and reinvention. The practice of tailoring through tearing, cutting, and sewing, which is what happens when clothes are made, comes very close to those abovementioned literary techniques in relation to migration. Fashion offers a space for reflection on the escape and the escapee beyond the material production methods and the making of clothing. The following paragraphs will examine how the existential experience of flight and expulsion can be

translated into fashion through the work of two fashion designers: Alice M. Huynh and Hussein Chalayan.

### Fresh Off the Boat

In her 2015 graduate collection, “FRESH OFF THE BOAT,” Berlin-based fashion designer Huynh refers to her parents’ dramatic escape from Vietnam in the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> At the age of seventeen, her mother fled from the communist country together with her family; they escaped by boat across the sea. After six days they reached Japan and were then able to get visas for Germany. Huynh’s father also left by boat but he went instead as an underage refugee without a family. His grandfather had given him a large sum of money for a place on the boat—it was a dangerous journey that took six days and five nights. Her father experienced oppressive conditions on board, with horrific stories of violence and rape. The ship was attacked by pirates, and once on board they abused the women and killed their husbands, whose bodies were thrown into the water. But Huynh’s father was able to reach the safe shores of Malaysia, and after two nights in a restricted area, he was moved to Pulau Bidong, an island where refugees were kept, and from which they could leave for Germany. Huynh’s parents told her their stories of their escape for the first time in detail while she was preparing her collection. But how did the process of transferring the biographical narrative of the traumatic events into a fashion collection work?

Huynh conceived six looks (fig. 37) to refer to the six days that her both mother and father spent traveling across the water. Owing to the theme of flight and migration, the collection needed to be transferable and functional. These attributes were expressed through a reference to the flight across the sea,

<sup>4</sup> “Dann wieder ein sehr langer Tunnel, durch den man abermals minutenlang durchdröhnte. Mit Deckenbeleuchtung raste man im Schlund dahin, schämte sich und schwitzte sich aus sich selber heraus: Rohrpostfahnen in Naturgröße. Nach dem Tunnel würde es Frankreich sein. Auf einmal hatten sich die Lebensrichtungen verlegt: er konnte mit der Hand auf Paris zeigen. Nun lag alles Zukünftige in Nachmittagsrichtung. Vor dem Tunnel hatte noch alles hinter ihm gelegen.” Goldschmidt, 25–26.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Handke, foreword to Goldschmidt, 8.

<sup>6</sup> On the language and syntax of Goldschmidt in his novels *Die Absonderung* and *Die Aussetzung*, see Tim Trzaskalik, *Gegensprachen: Das Gedächtnis der Texte: Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt*

(Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld Verlag, 2007), 247–55.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2001), 173.

<sup>8</sup> Goldschmidt, “Exil und Doppelsprachlichkeit,” 1.

<sup>9</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*. Translated by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, “Der Ariadnefaden ist gerissen,” in *Der Faden ist gerissen* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1977), 7–8.

<sup>11</sup> The collection was presented as a graduate project at the fashion school AMD Akademie Mode und Design in Munich.



Fig. 37  
Alice M. Huynh, *Fresh Off the Boat*, 2015

a situation in which most refugees hardly carry any luggage with them. Large pockets on one of Huynh's dresses recall the valuables that the refugees carried with them, which are kept close to the body, often sewn into their garments so that they would not be stolen. Huynh's father had money sewn into his waistband.<sup>12</sup>

Huynh alluded to these scarce conditions in her show by presenting those looks on male and female models as they walked barefoot down the runway with flowers in their mouths. With her collection, Huynh denied an obvious translation practice of the *topos* of escape; the use of damaged or dirty substances, cracks, a dark

palette of colors, or fragile materials would have been a more obvious way. Huynh, however, abstained from these direct references. The history that influenced her collection is sewn into the materials rather than made visible. Her designs in the collection are functional and reduced, and follow the central idea that her parents "had fled and only possessed what they were wearing. It had to be practical."<sup>13</sup> For her collection, Huynh developed her own material iconography that contained hidden references to the stories of her parents' flight. As she wrote in her blog: "The moiré, for example, which is shiny and has a tree structure, reminds me of the stories of my father, as he and other refugees were eating bark and leaves when they had nothing else to eat. [...] The bomber jacket and the turtle-neck dress were designed for 'Teddy' fabric made of cotton and reflect for me the restless sea and the structure of a sunburn."<sup>14</sup> Huynh reduced the use of colors, shapes, and styles. Unisex dresses and coats displayed straight cuts and were shaped loosely around the male or female body, with sleeves that were long or too long—it was as if the body could withdraw into the clothing as a sort of protective cocoon. The flowing, sometimes transparent materials emphasized, with the fluid silhouettes of mostly black and, in a few cases, gold-toned garments, a transient moment or feeling. At the same time, the various elements did not refer to the subject of flight or to transcultural experiences. On the one hand, some fabric cuts displayed references to the descent of Huynh's parents from the Asian continent, such as a kimono cut with wide sleeves, a long slit in the high-necked dress. On the other hand, parts of the collection like the bomber jacket or jumpsuit were "contemporary" styles and were recontextualized. According to Huynh, a key piece of her collection was the wide-cut gold dress with dark hair protruding at the hem.<sup>15</sup> Worn by fashion models, this unusual combination of material forms a creaturely appearance, and speaks of a battered life, of the trauma of violence and rape. There were also symbolic references to Méret Oppenheim's surreal objects such as Huynh's fur bracelet or the fur gloves—an uncomfortable symbiosis of objects and living things.<sup>16</sup>

In the collection, Huynh also articulated her own experiences as a child of immigrant parents. Many immigrants and their descendants are often confronted with the same question, "Where are you from (originally)?" With this question in mind, Huynh responded with an asymmetrical cardigan. The garment covers only one half of the body and thus translates the "either-or" implied in the question or the "both-and" that migrants often postulate.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bettina Pfau, "Der Stoff der Freiheit," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 13 (2015): 44.

<sup>13</sup> Huynh, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Huynh, *I Heart Alice* (blog), 2015, <http://iheartalice.com/alice-m-huynh-fresh-off-boat/>.

<sup>15</sup> Huynh.

<sup>16</sup> Surrealistic objects like Oppenheim's works often refer to sexuality and violence, to the

compulsive, the libidinous, and the brute. See the exhibition catalogue Ingrid Pfeiffer and Max Hollein, eds., *Surreale Dinge: Skulpturen und Objekte von Dalí bis Man Ray* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Cultural heterogeneity caused by migration is also a topic for Huynh. It might not be a coincidence that she selected diverse models for her show and the lookbook.

## On the Move: With and without Suitcases

The work of Hussein Chalayan is a particularly pertinent example of how fashion designers have dealt with the fragility of migrant experience. For his 1993 Central Saint Martins graduate collection, "The Tangent Flows," Chalayan worked with textiles that he had buried with iron fillings and that had thus been exposed to weathering and transformation processes to reveal the effects of decomposition and their material appearance. The flaying and aging processes of materials metaphorically represented the suffering of a life marked by hardships. Chalayan's first commercial collection, "Cartesia," from 1994, which dealt with the Cartesian dualism, the separation of the body and the mind, showed clothes made from white Tyvek, which was reminiscent of light airmail paper. The garments contrasted to "The Tangent Flows" collection that was formed out of aged, buried materials.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that migration and (forced) mobility can take various forms of expression through fashion performance is shown by Hussein Chalayan's show "After Words" (Fall/Winter 2000) (fig. 38). In the first act, a family of five was sitting on the stage of the Sadler's Wells Theatre. After they left the stage, four female mannequins entered for the second act, where there was an installation of four chairs and a low table by the Scottish product designer Paul Topen. The women began to remove the seat covers from the chairs and to dress themselves with them. The chairs, in turn, transformed into suitcases. Another mannequin stood on the table and pulled it up like a wooden hoop skirt and fastened it onto her belt. Chalayan used the suitcase to reference travelers and to those who are displaced. In museums, the suitcase is often used as a prop in displays about migration. Chairs and tables are also objects that invite one to stop for a moment and to sit down. It is not coincidental that the set of "After Words" is reminiscent of a classic 1960s living room, when furniture stores and manufacturers propagated a feeling of coziness and when bourgeois-style furniture was a sign of prosperity. But staying put and settling down are not reliable options; they can always be called into question. The social status of the living room, is opposed in Chalayan's show by a precarious status quo. Chalayan's "After Words" can be interpreted as a reference to the Bosnian War of the 1990s, when violence, genocide, and expulsions took place in central Europe. Coverage of the war was broadcast on television and directly brought into the living rooms of many Europeans.<sup>19</sup> In "After Words," the TV transmits an image of a Bulgarian choir who are singing behind a frosted glass pane at the back of the room. As in a Greek tragedy, rather than affecting events, the choir is only able to interpret and comment on what is happening around them.<sup>20</sup>

In Chalayan's collections and fashion shows, commercial interests meet artistic experiments, which are inspired by scholarly questions. The show itself ex-

presses these elements in various ways. Thus, the table-like dress in "After Words" did not go into production, it later was an important exhibit and, as such, presented in the museum space. In this manner, Chalayan's highly conceptual body of work differentiates between the showpieces (sales as the commercial part) and the artworks inspired by philosophical texts as well as technological innovations. In Chalayan's shows, one must also emphasize the importance of performative aspects: His "stagings" touch on rigorously composed artistic concepts that, for him, are a means of dealing with political, social, and cultural topics within the framework of a fashion show. Migration is a constant theme in Chalayan's work and is reflected on, metaphorically, in



Fig. 38  
Hussein Chalayan,  
"After Words," Fall/Winter 2000

<sup>18</sup> For pictures and short descriptions of the collection, see Robert Violette, ed., *Hussein Chalayan* (New York: Rizzoli 2011), 32–33.

<sup>19</sup> For a description and analysis of the show, see Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 285–87; see also Hanni Geiger, "Raum und Zeit überwinden: Hussein Chalayans Design für postmoderne Nomaden," in *Migration und künstlerische Produktion: Aktuelle Perspektiven*, ed.

Burcu Dogramaci (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 165–68. For connections between migration, art, and design in the work of Hussein Chalayan, see Hanni Geiger, *Form Follows Culture: Entgrenzungen im Konzept-Design Hussein Chalayans* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> The chorus is part of the show but captured behind a screen. There might be references to the television news from the Balkan Wars in the '90s coming to the living rooms.

different ways. His show "Between" (Spring/Summer 1998) was inspired by mapmaking as a geopolitical appropriation of the earth and graphic technique of land surveying, on the catwalk the models measured the "sandy beach." During the finale of the show "Geotropics" (Spring/Summer 1999) a model appeared on the runway wearing a chair that was fitted to her body—it was a mobile piece of furniture inscribed in the garment. With this, Chalayan metaphorically reflected on themes such as travel, mobility, migration, and escape to explore "the idea of an itinerant existence."<sup>21</sup>

The work of Chalayan and Huynh demonstrates that flight, expulsion, and migration can be reflected in very different ways and in varying degrees of subtlety and poetic metaphorizations through fashion. The theme of escape can be expressed through objects and decorative motifs, as well as through materials and styles. In the above examples, however, the framework within which fashion is produced, circulated, and addressed should not be disregarded. Economic contexts lead to ethical questions of whether and how historical and contemporary experiences of displacement can be converted into the economic field of fashion. Huynh considers relaying her family history into the public sphere in the form of fashion as ambivalent.<sup>22</sup> While she recognizes that her work is an appreciation of the life story of her parents, which previously would have gone unheard, nevertheless her collection is not a document of their experience of flight. The collection refers to the history of the people who traveled by boat in the 1970s and is also aesthetically autonomous. This balancing act between autobiographical references and (commercial) fashion design is a challenge for artistic and creative works that deal with historical events.<sup>23</sup>

The same can be, for example, postulated regarding the work of the artist Danh Võ whose family had the same experience leaving Vietnam by sea as Huynh's family did. The boat Võ's family was traveling on was rescued by a Danish tanker ship in the South China Sea; he initially lived in Denmark as an asylum seeker, and later became a citizen of the country. In his art, Võ has dealt repeatedly with issues of cultural or gender identity, migrating objects, people and stories in historical and contemporary perspective. For his project *Vo Rocasco Rasmussen* (2003–ongoing) he marries people who are important to him and then gets divorced immediately after. In each marriage Võ takes the name of his spouse so that his last name will grow so that there will eventually fit on his passport. Võ not only criticizes marriage but also the bourgeois gay life concepts as well as the inequality that homosexual couples face because they were prohibited from adopting children.<sup>24</sup> His work makes clear that the passport as a feature of citizenship is not compatible with new lifestyles. In addition, since his arrival to Denmark, Võ has had problems adapting the order of his first and last names—in Vietnam the order is different to that in Denmark. His middle name was registered as his first name, which was followed by his

last name and then his first name. Reference to this act of forced assimilation to the bureaucratic requirements of the country, however, is addressed subtly in *Vo Rocasco Rasmussen* though it is a possible creative approach in thinking about the subject of flight and adaptation.

## Theory, Fashion, and Migration

The theory of fashion has been extensively described and academically examined from a Western perspective so far. The English-speaking literature on fashion theory and fashion history discusses globalization as an instigator of the origination, production, and distribution of fashion (and its historiography).<sup>25</sup> "Cross-cultural objects," that is, traveling textile objects from the early modern era, are, of course, analyzed as well in fashion theory.<sup>26</sup> The museumization of ethnographic collections or "traditional costumes" is also taken into account in fashion research just as the "ethnicity" of fashion is addressed from a global perspective.<sup>27</sup> Also a number of recently published anthologies that include texts from the past two hundred years of fashion theory highlight the following key themes: references to non-European or global theorizing, postcolonial approaches, and non-European fashion producers.<sup>28</sup> To sum up, it is interesting that in the history of fashion theory the issue of migration has barely been dealt with.<sup>29</sup> It is also striking that especially the issue of exile and flight and

21 Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*, 270. Regarding the theme of migration in Chalayan's collection see Judith Clark, "Migration," in *Hussein Chalayan*, ed. Robert Violette (New York: Rizzoli, 2011), 232–33.

22 Huynh, "Der Stoff der Freiheit," 44.

23 Matthias Mühlung, "Wessen Geschichte: Gespräch mit Willie Doherty," in *Wessen Geschichte: Vergangenheit in der Kunst der Gegenwart*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), 58–75.

24 Sascha Wölck, "Untitled" et al. *Irritationen von Geschichts- und Identitätskonstruktionen in der Kunst Danh Võs* (Berlin: regiospectra Verlag, 2011), 46–51.

25 Here with focus on the relations between the local and the global tradition of fashion, see Jan Brand and José Teunissen, eds., *Global Fashion, Local Tradition: On the Globalisation of Fashion* (Warnsveld: Terra, 2005); Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, and Carla Jones, eds., *Re-orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress* (Oxford: Berg 2003)

26 Marta Ajmar-Wollheim und Luca Molà, "The Global Renaissance: Cross-Cultural Objects in the Early Period," in *Global Design History*, ed. Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello, and Sarah Teasley (London: Routledge, 2011), 11–20.

27 Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Joanne B. Eicher, *Dress and Ethnicity: Change Across Space and Time* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1995).

28 Gertrud Lehnert, Alicia Kühl and Katja Weise, eds., *Modetheorie: Klassische Texte aus vier Jahrhunderten* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 51–56; Barbara Vinken, ed., *Die Blumen der Mode: Klassische und neue Texte zur Philosophie der Mode* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2016).

29 Elke Gaugele, "Entangled Histories: Fashion and the Politics of Migration," in *Fashion and Materiality*, ed. Heike Jenss and Viola Hofmann (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

fashion theory has not yet been significantly discussed beyond the subject of (im)migrant labor.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the history of fashion provides clear examples of the interconnectedness between fashion and migration: in the decades of flight and emigration between the Russian Revolution and the end of the Second World War, the movement of people was rarely discussed in relation to fashion. Neither in Istanbul nor Paris, where Russian seamstresses and fashion designers found their first or second refuge in their flight from the Bolsheviks, even in the context of the Second World War, when Jewish fashion companies had to leave their businesses in Berlin, flight and exile was more intensely visualized in the designs as a caesura between the old and the new life.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, in Paris in the 1920s the transfer practices can certainly be noticed when clothes makers of Russian origin designed embroidery or hats in the style typical of their homeland. Although one can certainly find examples of the connection between fashion, exile, and migration, fashion theory has so far hardly ever dealt with them. The exile routes of fashion designers and their fashion practices in diaspora could thus be analyzed as a fashion theory of translocation. Another history and theory of fashion should be dedicated to the narrative and the language of migration.<sup>32</sup>

Questions of migration and flight challenge the established viewpoint of fashion historiography and fashion theory, and as new parameters of examination are found, different questions and contexts must be considered. One could say that fashion is able to react to processes of migration, because *la mode* is eclectic, ephemeral, and cyclical. The fragile status of exiled persons and migrants can be translated through fashion and its materials, manufacturing technologies, and modes of representation. A theory of fashion as a theory of migration could, from a material culture perspective, mean that techniques such as spinning, weaving, cutting or tearing, sewing, and splitting could be used to refer to flight and migration. In these procedures separating and joining can be observed. In an essay about Angela Melitopoulos's video *Passing Drama* (1999), Alexandra Karentzos points out a connection between textile weaving and the interweaving of the history of migration.<sup>33</sup> Both Hunyh and Chalayan, however, go far beyond simply translating migration into the craft of fashion (spinning, weaving, cutting or tearing, sewing, and splitting). They use metaphor and the language of fashion as the language of migration. On another level, certain materials could be interpreted in the context of migration; for example, Hunyh tried to do this in her personal material iconography in a complex manner. Therefore one would have to examine dress or garment cuts for their references to flight and migration in general and extensively for other works. Moreover transcultural syntheses as well as contrasting forms that are alien to one another should be studied in greater detail. This raises the question of whether fashion is capable of responding to migration processes, since fashion is eclectic, ephemeral and cyclical. Exploring the gender and cultural identities in unisex clothing through performance by incorporating costumes and

folkloric elements can be described as negotiating between what is familiar and unfamiliar, between what is old and new. This analysis should also include expressing fashion in the form of shows,<sup>34</sup> photographs, and magazines. Visual dramaturgies and narratives should be included in a possible theory of fashion/theory of migration reflecting their specific circumstances. Finally the economic and commercial system of fashion leads to ethical questions to do with if and how fundamental topics like displacement and loss could ever be discussed in this field.

<sup>30</sup> For further readings on this, see Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Stephan Raes, *Migrating Enterprise and Migrant Entrepreneurship: How Fashion and Migration Have Changed the Spatial Organisation of Clothing Supply to Consumers in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000); Edna Bonacich and Richard P. Appelbaum, *Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> It might be because of the economic constraints that exiled couturiers seldom reflected the loss of their homelands. For most of the emigrants survival has been in the center of their work before and after arriving in the target destinations; they had to look forward instead of working on their flight experiences. Until now the

topic of Exile and Fashion has not been examined in fashion study or art history. One of the rare publications that should be mentioned is Alexandre Vassiliev, *Beauty in Exile: The Artists, Models and Nobilities Who Fled the Russian Revolution* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Barthes, *Fashion System*.

<sup>33</sup> Alexandra Karentzos, "Weben und Verweben. Zur Ästhetik der Migration in Angela Melitopoulos' Video 'Passing DRAMA,'" *IMIS-Beiträge* 46 (2015): 21–34.

<sup>34</sup> In the footage from the backstage area of the fashion show (AMD, Munich, 2015) where the collection "FRESH OFF THE BOAT" had been shown it is obvious that Alice M. Huynh's collection with all its autobiographical references also follows the rules of fashion performance: we see agitated models who are being dressed and made up for the show and we can see the staging of the event in the form of a video. Regarding Huynh's work, it can be said that fashion can give complex answers to the challenges of migration and flight.

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# Reviewing Orientalism and Re-orienting Fashion beyond Europe

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The idea of re-orienting fashion denotes the cultural phenomenon in which some Asian societies—mainly from Southeast Asia—returned to or rather reinvented national and historical clothing styles. This idea is part of larger and ongoing considerations about the term “fashion” in relation to non-Western cultures. The main criticism of these considerations addresses a Eurocentric position within fashion studies, and specifically the notion of change inherent within it. Change and innovation are seemingly rejected in the case of fashion systems of non-Western cultures. The Eurocentric position presumes that fashion is the result of a Western market economy with the middle class as its main actor.<sup>1</sup> When Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, and Carla Jones’s anthology, *Re-orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress*, was first published in 2003, it was a response to the ongoing globalization process of “designing” Asian societies through fashion.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of re-orienting fashion can be used as a tool within postcolonial studies to understand and analyze fashion practices in Asia today. Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones put forward three main points of focus in their book: first, the general meaning of dress in the context of the globalization of Asia; second, the potential of Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism, which is applied to this specific topic; and third, the process and meaning of a particular Asian national dress in the context of globalization.

The introduction of *Re-orienting Fashion* refers to one major paradox in the globalization of Asian dress styles, namely, that “Asian styles may be re-orienting global fashion” while at the same time this process also contributes to “re-orientaliz[ing] Asia and Asians.”<sup>3</sup> The idea that fashion—a concept that previously only connected to the West—also exists outside of non-Western contexts relies on the notion of change and innovation. This concept refers to the relationship between fashion processes and European rural dress cultures, which are also considered “timeless and stable”; Jennifer Craik barely addresses this issue. But which factors shape the relationship between local dress cultures and the current fashion phenomena? In Germany and Austria, local dress cultures often define cultural spaces and social hierarchies in agricultural economies. Small-scale dress cultures are usually based on different ontological requirements. In Myanmar, for example, there is a lack of hierarchical separation between inside and outside the self, implying that one considers dress and material as substance, thus allowing for the worship of dress items as substitutes for real

1 See M. Angela Jansen, *Moroccan Fashion: Design, Tradition, Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); and Jennifer Craik and M. Angela Jansen, “Constructing National Fashion Identities,” *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 3.

2 Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, and Carla Jones, eds., *Re-orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

3 Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones, 5.

people.<sup>4</sup> The surface of the person—which in Western eyes is considered as something that is not to be trusted—is seen in the culture of Trinidad as “real,” but “by contrast what is held deep inside them is seen as false.” How people dress, in this case, argues Daniel Miller, opens the door for understanding the real character of a person.<sup>5</sup> Can the term “re-orienting” be used to describe and explain postcolonial strategies rightly? Or does it evoke a return to conventional colonial bias?

My interest in this subject was inspired by two research projects that took place in Uzbekistan between 2010 and 2014. For the project, I investigated the role of textiles in relation to nation-building processes. In my first visit to Uzbekistan in 2008, I encountered a strong national discourse on textile heritage and fashion design, which was shared by state representatives as well as fashion consumers, teachers, and designers. Central to this essay is the argument that fashion/dress cultures—and material culture in general—allow for an understanding of the materiality, aesthetics, and sensuality of postcolonial processes and transformation processes from the grassroots up. By looking at the specific case of Uzbekistan, I will question the concept of re-orientalization as useful tool for postcolonial fashion studies in highlighting whether the concept can be considered as a component of a decolonizing strategy.

## Othering Europe and the West via Fashion

What fashion studies sometimes neglect is the simple fact that Europe, as well as its Asian counterpart that has been the “colonized Other” since the Middle Ages, is not a homogenous force and culture with clearly defined boundaries. Throughout the centuries, we can identify different kinds of Europe: the traditional Latin Europe with Rome as its center; the Byzantine Europe, the Slavonian Europe (with Moscow as its center); Protestant Europe (developing in London and Amsterdam); and the Latinized, rationalistic Europe with Paris as its center. Whether or not this type of categorization is correct, it gives an idea about the complexity as well as the diversity of colonization processes.<sup>6</sup> Colonization processes within Europe were similarly dominated by biases as external processes of colonization—discourses as anti-fashion tendencies, timelessness—and simplicity with regard to regional dress cultures also play a role here. To discuss postcolonial situations, one should highlight how these processes of internal and external colonization are connected to each other, and how they influence today’s processes of nation building. Therefore, when thinking about fashion and postcolonialism, it is more useful to investigate how smaller fashion narratives are interrelated within and through transnational contexts in a global framework.

The trouble with the Eurocentric view of fashion is that it also stems from a disagreement on the words, terms, and categories used in fashion discourses,

as well as from the differences between dress studies and fashion studies. This could possibly be avoided if fashion studies employed and put forward a definition, which is identical to the one used in European ethnology studies, whereby fashion is defined as an “assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body,”<sup>7</sup> a definition that locates the actor/body and their gender at the center, and includes issues such as materiality, aesthetics, techniques, taste, and consumption. This, however, is one definition that continuously needs to be questioned in the changing historical as well as spatial/sociocultural context.

## A Case Study: Uzbekistan

In South and Southeast Asia, there is currently a displacement of geopolitical centers and pivots of fashion cities as well as a change in how fashion design and production practices are viewed. Within fashion and design industries an Asian Other emerges that is different from Europeans—however, this change in view occurs under different sociopolitical circumstances than it previously did in Central Asia, and supports what Raymond L. M. Lee once described as “Asian modernization.”<sup>8</sup> Uzbekistan is a country in Central Asia: this geographic location is of special interest when questioning how postcolonialism operates within the frame of fashion discourses and practices, because nation-state building is quite different from other Asian and African contexts. As Laura Adams frankly asks: “Can we apply postcolonial theory to Central Eurasia?”<sup>9</sup> This means questioning in which ways the Soviet empire can possibly be characterized as colonial, whether and how we are dealing with a postcolonial

<sup>4</sup> Georg Noack and Inés de Castro, eds., *Myanmar: Das Goldene Land* (Darmstadt: Verlag Philipp von Zabern in Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2014). Georg Noack, *Local Traditions, Global Modernities: Dress, Identity and the Creation of Public Self-Images in Contemporary Urban Myanmar* (Berlin: Regiospectra Verlag, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Miller, “Introduction,” in *Clothing as Material Culture*, ed. Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Rüdiger Korff, “Wo ist Europa?,” in *Auf der Suche nach Eurasien: Politik, Religion und Alltagskultur zwischen Russland und Europa*, ed. Markus Kaiser (Bielefeld: transcript, 2004), 27. In a similar way, Said’s concept of the postcolonial

successor is criticized by Andrea Polaschegg; see Felix Wiedemann, *Orientalismus*, “Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte,” April 19, 2014, [http://docupedia.de/zg/wiedemann\\_orientalismus\\_v1\\_de.2012](http://docupedia.de/zg/wiedemann_orientalismus_v1_de.2012).

<sup>7</sup> Joanne B. Eicher, Sandra Lee Evenson, and Hazel A. Lutz, *The Visible Self: Global Perspectives on Dress, Culture and Society* (London: Fairchild Books, 2000), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond L. M. Lee, “Modernization, Postmodernisms and the Third World,” *Current Sociology* 42, no. 2 (1994): 1–66; and Rüdiger Korff, “Wo ist Europa?,” 21–35.

<sup>9</sup> Laura Adams, “Can We Apply Postcolonial Theory to Central Eurasia?,” *Central Eurasian Studies Review* 7, no. 1 (2008): 2–8.

context today, and also how the historical and contemporary textile and fashion cultures were affected by the postcolonial strategies.<sup>10</sup>

According to Bhavna Dave, the Soviet rule should be considered as "a hybrid entity, combining elements of a centralized empire and high modernist state"<sup>11</sup> that is different from other colonizing European states because it intensely dominated the private sphere of its subjects.<sup>12</sup> However, how did the Soviet rule impact the material and dress cultures of Central Asia? In general, dress practices in Central Asia were considered backward and in need of adaptation to the Western European style, also employed in the Soviet Union by a gradual updating of style and by creating of syntheses between traditional Uzbek and Western European clothing—a process of the transformation of Uzbek society already started under the Tsarist regime in the 1880s and '90s that finally culminated in the permeating Soviet modernization of 1920s and '30s. The Uzbek shirt was combined with European trousers, the suit with the quilted coat, the skirt was worn with a jacket and the bodily shape was molded according to European dress patterns.<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 39  
Women's coat  
"Munisak" (minsak, mursak), also called "Kaltacha", silk ikat, lining printed cotton from Russia, Uzbekistan, 1900



During the entire Soviet rule in Uzbekistan, Islamic rituals such as circumcision, marriage, and funeral were maintained. At the same time, a curious synthesis between an orientally accentuated Western dress style emerged—with a Western cut, but of particular colors and length,<sup>14</sup> and even the colorful ikat fabrics and the headgear *duppi* remained popular as well (fig. 39). Nevertheless, the core of traditional textile-craft manufacturing was transformed into industrial production, causing some textile crafts and the knowledge connected to them to disappear. Traditional Uzbek dress cultures were officially remembered only as an illustration of multiethnic folklore of the Soviet empire, which was construed as an artificial ethno-national entity with regard to

Central Asia. Ethnicity, under Soviet rule, had become a decisive category of research as well as of the governmental technology,<sup>15</sup> a strategy becoming a material and visible reality in textiles and dress in order also to distinguish the different Central Asia nations newly created (1924) under Soviet rule. Ethnic festivals, with the presentation of ethnic dress style and music organized by the Soviet state, pursued the goal of stressing the multicultural feature of the Soviet Union.

To understand the postcolonial process, one has to understand that the path to independence in Uzbekistan was far different from other Asian countries and for countries within the Baltic states. Uzbekistan, together with today's other four Central Asian states, more or less unexpectedly became an independent state because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. That means that the Uzbekistan people involuntarily had to face the challenge of creating their own nation-state based on the regional borders created by the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The presidential regime, which emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and has lasted over twenty-six years, has made great efforts to revive traditional textiles crafts by effectively supporting the production of natural silk and ikat weaving and by encouraging the use of Central Asian dress traditions, including the design of ikat fabrics and headgear. At the same time, a vivid scene of fashion and textile designers has evolved all over the country by (re-)discovering forgotten textile techniques and by fusing different techniques and ornaments into a new, orientalized design and fashion style.

<sup>10</sup> For an instructive survey on academic debates concerning the particular nature of the Soviet regime see Deniz Kandiyoti, "Post-colonialism Compared: Potentials and Limitations in the Middle East and Central Asia," in special issue, "Nationalism and the Colonial Legacy in the Middle East and Central Asia," ed. Fazil Aq Fayez, *International Journal Middle East Studies* 34, no. 2 (2002): 279–97, in particular 289–97.

<sup>11</sup> Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Adams, "Can We Apply Postcolonial Theory to Central Eurasia?," 2.

<sup>13</sup> D. A. Fakhretdinova, *Dekorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Uzbekistana* [The decorative and applied art of Uzbekistan] (Tashkent: G. Gulyam, 1972), 12–13. The efforts to modernize dress also included campaigns against the traditional veiling of Uzbek women, mainly during their

twenties. See Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); and Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Eckert has termed this a "style syncretism." See Julia M. Eckert, *Unabhängiges Usbekistan: Auf dem Wege von Marx zu Timur: Politische Strategien der Konfliktregulierung in einem Vielvölkerstaat* (Münster: Lit, 1996), 77–78.

<sup>15</sup> Kandiyoti, "Post-colonialism Compared," 289–91. See also Wim van Moers, "Sowjetische Ethnographie: Jäger oder Sammler," in *Inszenierungen des Nationalen: Geschichte, Kultur und die Politik der Identitäten am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Beate Binder, Wolfgang Kaschuba, and Peter Niedermüller (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), 107–35.

The Uzbek government not only actively supports designers, but also encourages exhibitions, fairs, fashion shows, and events to show that the country is a modern and legitimate heir to the ancient Silk Road. However, this does not suggest there is a tacit involvement among designers in the political regime. Rather, they each try to forge a path between state control, individual creativity, and business. But still, they cannot escape the nationalistic discourses initiated by the government to establish a new national identity with patriotic and patriarchal/Islamic values within an authoritarian political regime. Since the state discourses and measures intensely address the revival of (textile) crafts—nurtured by state measures<sup>16</sup>—and the usage of traditional dress culture, items like the traditional headgear, such as *duppi*, and *ikat* items made of silk or cotton fabrics have become strong signifiers of Uzbek nationhood. Even under Soviet rule, clothing made from *ikat* fabrics was seen as symbols of Central Asian culture, but at that time they were also a silent protest against Soviet rule. Nowadays, traditional styles have become part of the national project, a project that aims to set the region apart through its national traditional heritage.<sup>17</sup>

What is traditional in Uzbekistan is treated by the state as equal to national values. This not only invites the neo-traditionalization of practices (e.g., rituals, festivities), but also strongly encourages the installment of traditional gender roles and ethnicity discourses as a means of demarcation in relation to the Central Asian neighbors. A slow but continuously stronger covering up of the body (i.e., legs, arms, and shoulders, and the covering of the neck and head with the Islamic headscarf, etc.) is integrated into this process—a factor indicating the growing influence of Islamic dress codes.

Thus, traditional fabrics and dress become crucial as identity markers of Uzbek nationhood. To middle-class actors on the micro level, traditional or national dress helps to transmit values and norms between the generations. Moreover, the idea of tradition evokes and relates to “a certain habitat of meaning and memory” of an imagined non-colonized past that simultaneously presents a historical and a present Central Asia.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, it is interesting to see how a general criticism of Soviet times is activated to define new boundaries between a so-called West and Central Asia, with Asia essentially using similar techniques to produce a “Western Other.”

The touristic gaze, on the other hand, in search of the exotic Orient contributes to the promotion of an image of Uzbekistan as the natural heir to the Silk Road. In this way, the postcolonial discourse about tradition is turned upside down. Melanie Krebs describes how the invention of tradition is negotiated between both the native population and Western tourists: while traditional textile colors for American tourists mean natural dyes, traditional colors for the Uzbeks mean chemical dyes used during the times of the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup>

State processes are geared toward different objectives and target groups: first, they are used to overcome both Tsarist colonization and Soviet modernization; secondly, they are directed toward other post-Soviet Central Asian nations and, albeit in a different way, toward the Western world mainly represented by tourists and the media. The Uzbek government uses many different techniques of representation, according to Timothy Mitchell, to create an image of a modern, open-minded Uzbek society with a clearly defined national identity.<sup>20</sup> Fashion, in this case, becomes an object of strategic cultural interests and planning. “Self-orientalization” via fashion becomes an opportunity to symbolically consolidate territorial claims. Thus, this newly orientalized fashion soon becomes a geopolitical argument to symbolically define the new national borders in Central Asia.

### Categories: Orient, Orientalism, Orientalization

The concept of “orientalizing fashion” calls for a deeper discussion. Before the publication of Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones’s *Re-orienting Fashion*, Dorinne K. Kondo had discussed the terminology in depth with regard to theater, media, and fashion by considering Japanese fashion designers in particular.<sup>21</sup> Above all, Kondo stresses the relationship between Orientalism and politico-historical moments of Japanese history in the twentieth century when Japan desired to share a common culture with Thailand and to compete with Western states as a powerful nation.

But does Said’s concept of Orientalism work at all in this context? According to Said, the conception and imagination of the Orient as a cultural entity is the

<sup>16</sup> Svenja Adelt and Lola Shamukhiddinova, “Die Wiederbelebung zentralasiatischer textiler Handwerkstechniken im Prozess der Nationsbildung in Usbekistan,” *Zentralasienanalysen* 72 (2013): 2–6.

<sup>17</sup> See Orvar Löfgren, “Das Verschwinden und die Wiederkehr des Nationalen: Die schwedische Erfahrung, 1950–2000” [The disappearance and the return of the national: The Swedish experience, 1950–2000], *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 51 (2006): 23–42.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriele Mentges and Lola Shamukhiddinova, eds., *Textiles as National Heritage: Identities, Politics and Material Culture; Case Studies from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Algerian and Peru* (Münster: Waxmann, 2017). See, in particular, my essay “Between Design, ‘National Dress’ and Nation Branding: The Dynamics of Textile Culture

in the Process of Uzbek Nation Building,” 31–66.

<sup>19</sup> Melanie Krebs, “Of Dyes and Colors—Cultural Change in Uzbek Textile Crafts,” in Mentges and Shamukhiddinova, *Textiles as National Heritage*, 119–36.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “Die Welt als Ausstellung,” in *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeira (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2002), 148–76. Its latest invention is the so-called Museum of Resistance in which the time of Soviet rule is described as a colonial regime and Uzbekistan as the hero of resistance—an interpretation that obviously does not tie in with historical facts.

<sup>21</sup> Dorinne Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 84, 86.

result of colonial hegemonic discourses based on administration, military knowledge, and science. From a philosophical perspective, Felix Wiedemann has recently commented that the concept of Orientalism as a metonym for the European Other does not seem appropriate because Said's categories ignore the fundamental difference between the production of the Other (with regard to oneself) and the idea of the stranger (with regard to what is familiar).<sup>22</sup> Said's groundbreaking thoughts are affected by a binary-coded structure, which seems to have also influenced *Re-orienting Fashion*. Re-orienting or orientalization—as the authors have formulated as referring to the emergence of national dress styles seen on international catwalks and other global locations—once again suggests an essentialist idea of the Orient and an oriental aesthetic, even if the case studies provide more nuanced examinations. Orientalization in terms of fashion is far more complicated. It evokes questions about which part of dress heritage is used as a cultural design argument, and hence it refers further to issues of cultural property and national heritage claims and, above all, to strategies of internal and external segregation and the establishment of internal peripheries and centers.

Thus, we can conclude with Kondo that auto-orientalization is not a playful or reflexive mise-en-scène of the self, but a partaking in constellations of power relations by way of consumption and nostalgia.<sup>23</sup> At this point, it makes sense to highlight these practices and discourses of representation within the framework of the rise of Occidentalism, with its goal to put forward the concept of an Asian modernization, as Raymond Lee suggests in his analysis on *Modernization, Postmodernisms and the Third World* (1994).

## Re-orientalization

Are the fundamental ideas and arguments of *Re-orienting Fashion* helpful in understanding the ongoing postcolonial processes outside of Europe? The editors of the book infer that orientalization is closely linked to femininity. Self-exoticization is a measure of gaining control “over the process of defining who is Other,” and is a technique that turns “Western Orientalism on its head.”<sup>24</sup> But if self-exoticizing means controlling who is defined as the Other, we need to ask who is speaking and acting and when and how. For instance, local dress cultures merge with national mainstream fashion. When attacking the relation between femininity and nation building as an essential component of Orientalism, we have to recall that even Rabindranath Tagore in his writings interpreted womanhood as a symbol of rebirth in India.<sup>25</sup> In Europe, the concept of nation was also closely intertwined with ideas of femininity. This is not a specific trait of orientalizing discourse. Rather, orientalizing discourses relate to a specific mode of thinking on binaries, such as tradition versus modernity, temporal stagnation versus the progress of time, the center versus the periphery.

This mode of thinking also characterized colonization processes within Europe and becomes mirrored in many museological discourses throughout the twentieth century,<sup>26</sup> in which Western European rural cultures were becoming the exotized Other or, as was the case mostly for Eastern Europe, the symbolic gatekeepers of national identity lost during the Ottoman occupation.

Comparing old colonial Orientalism and globalization, the editors of *Re-orienting Fashion* expound that globalization, contrary to what one might assume, produces differences based on race, gender, and tradition as past colonial situations.<sup>27</sup> This idea relates to Stuart Hall's definition of postcolonialism in an interesting way. He argues that what differentiates the postcolonial situation from its colonial predecessor is the relocation of difference and its allocation to new places.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, fashion practices and the discourses connected to them mirror categories and value systems of the colonial past. They repeat and reproduce the orientalist discourse in which “globalization as an Orientalizing and gendering phenomenon becomes apparent through an ethnographic focus on dress practices,”<sup>29</sup> a statement that presupposes an in-depth analysis of the particular colonial contexts and the specific ways of colonization. The case of Central Asia, in particular my case study in Uzbekistan, seems to apply the same strategy, but unlike other postcolonial states that Hall is referring to, Uzbek discourses and practices about re-orientalization seem to end up in a modern essentialism of nation, nationhood, and nation-state. The strategies and governmental technologies, however, are not organized in the traditional (European) way of nation building. Rather, they are linked to the surface policies of the actual catwalk economy in which medias play a crucial role. This means that the process of nation building is slightly transformed into nation branding, in which the “re-orientalized” textile culture is turned into a commodity with Uzbek fashion actors becoming their own spectators.

<sup>22</sup> Wiedemann, *Orientalismus*.

<sup>23</sup> Concerning Japan see Kondo, *About Face*, 94.

<sup>24</sup> Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones, *Re-orienting Fashion*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> See Rabindranath Tagore, *Gora*, trans. Gisela Leiste (Düsseldorf: Albatros, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> See recent publication on this subject as an example: Karen Ellwanger, Andrea Hauser, and Jochen Meiners, eds., *Trachten in der Lüneburger Heide und im Wendland* (Münster: Waxmann, 2015), 341–54; and Adriaan De Jong, *Die Dirigenten der Erinnerung: Musealisierung und Nationalisierung der Volkskultur in den Niederlanden*,

<sup>1815–1940</sup> [The conductors of memory: Musealization and nationalisation of folk culture in the Netherlands, 1815–1940] (Münster: Waxmann, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Tagore, *Gora*, 12. See also Valerie Wilson Trower, “Review: Re-orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress,” *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 2 (2004): 197–99.

<sup>28</sup> Stuart Hall, “Wann gab es ‘das Postkoloniale,’” in Conrad and Shalini Randeira, *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus*, 232–33.

<sup>29</sup> Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones, *Re-orienting Fashion*, 6.

The who becomes decisive in order to identify and dismantle the precise power constellations and entanglements during postcolonial processes between the different actors, and also plays into the ways the colonial past is referred to. In the Central Asian case, we are dealing with two different kinds of colonization, both with different claims of modernization: first, the Tsarist rule, and, second, the Soviet rule that followed. For both periods, Dave states that "postcolonial studies as a whole had failed to incorporate Central Asia and the Soviet Empire and with that the failure to discuss the status of the Soviet rule as colonial power."<sup>30</sup>

To analyze this particular process, it is necessary to highlight the relation between the colonized and the hegemonic imperial power, as well as the relations between local elites and groups and the hegemonic power, between center(s) and peripheries. In contemporary Uzbekistan, there is still a strikingly visible cultural gap between the upper and middle classes who were educated—Russified—in previous times because of different access to cultural resources such as fashion, taste, and consumption.

## Conclusion

Re-orienting fashion is an excellent platform to reexamine and discuss these processes, because it provides a theoretical framework for a new empirical phenomenon to be discussed and places it into existing theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism. Meeting Hall's outline of postcolonialism in some ways, still, a clear attempt to evaluate and redefine postcolonial situations via fashion is missing.<sup>31</sup> But it is exactly Hall's definition that suggests the relocation of difference and its assignment to new locations to help evaluate the political and social impact of fashion processes in the new global order. Or, to phrase this as a question: Can these developments contribute to "provincializ[ing] Europe,"<sup>32</sup> and more specifically, to a decentering of still existing fashion hierarchies and conceptions?

First, to better understand these processes, in-depth investigations are needed to differentiate between the hierarchies within different groups of actors, the micro-macro levels, and the interconnection of elites and other groups of society, as well as a clear identification of the hegemonic groups, which are often inter-linked by the same concerns and strategies as the former colonial power, while going beyond colonial interests. Who defines what textile cultural heritage is and to whom it belongs? A discussion about legal claims to culture is needed. This raises the question of how to identify the colonial Other and non-colonial discourses.

Second, colonial and postcolonial processes must be interpreted in the light of their different historical stages and geopolitics. Today, globalization connects economic strategies with cultural issues, which, for example, are well illustrated

by nation branding as a symbolic economy. The question that needs to be asked now is why contemporary fashion has manifested itself as such an important constituent in national and even in religious contexts, with the latter becoming more and more evident of late. In this context, the different platforms of representation need to be taken into account.

Third, we need to be aware of nation-building processes more than ever before. This includes the invention of tradition and—this may be of major importance—the fact that nowadays these processes take place in a postcolonial context, which is quite different from nation building during colonialism. Following Eric Hobsbawm, the central difference when compared to the first stage of nation building is related to the fact that contemporary national-formation processes are centrally built on differences. Wolfgang Kaschuba emphasizes racial and ethnic differences in the context of these processes taking place today.<sup>33</sup> These differences become obvious in developments in fashion, which in turn produce colonial binaries.<sup>34</sup> Above all, we have to take into account the actual strong economic neoliberal tendencies that are evaluating nations as markets and transforming national symbols and cultural heritage into marketing instruments. In this process of nation branding, fashion design turns into a key instrument to represent and sell values, aesthetics and imagery as national commodities.

Fourth, such a critical analysis requires the consideration of fashion processes in the larger setting of material culture of different scales and with a focus on historical and contemporary global perspectives.

<sup>30</sup> Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 9; see also Kandyoti, "Post-colonialism Compared," 286. Concerning the Tsarist colonialization, Said's Orientalist assumptions have to be much more differentiated. Marcus Köhler, for example, claims that the Tsarist colonial reign was realized by systematic extension of natural frontiers, less by conquest, see Marcus Köhler, *Russische Ethnographie und imperiale Politik im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2012); for discussion on the concept of "Russian Orientalism," see Vera Tözl, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Hall, "Das Postkoloniale," 232–33.

<sup>32</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Europa provincialisieren: Postkolonialität und die Kritik der Geschichte," in Conrad and Randeira, *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus*, 283–312.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Wolfgang Kaschuba, "Geschichtspolitik und Identitätspolitik," in *Inszenierungen des Nationalen. Geschichte, Kultur und die Politik der Identitäten am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Beate Binder, Wolfgang Kaschuba, and Peter Niedermüller (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), 21; and Gabriele Mentges, "Introductory Remarks," in Mentges and Shamukhiddinova, *Textiles as National Heritage*, 31–66.

<sup>34</sup> Kondo, *About Face*, 85.

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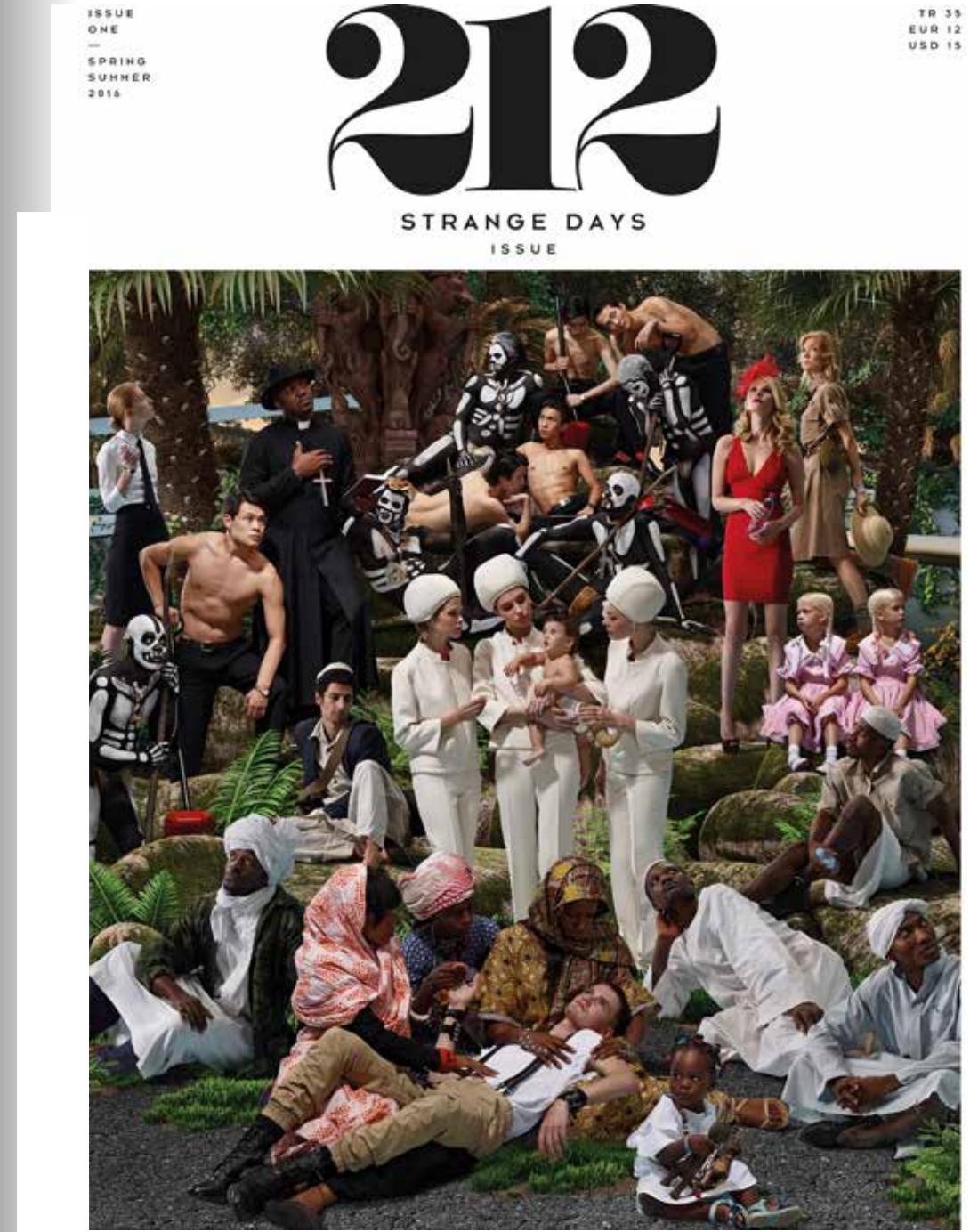
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# 212 Magazine Picture Spread

Heval Okçuoğlu

Fig. 40  
Cover of 212 Magazine, issue 1, "Strange Days"





Heval Okçuoğlu

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Fig. 41

Sandrine Dulermo and Michael Labica, *Strange Days—Visions of Futures Past*, 2016.  
212 Magazine, issue 1

Fig. 42  
Ekin Ozbicer. From 212 Magazine, issue I, "Strange Days—The Bravest Tailor in the East"





Fig. 43  
Hellen Van Meene, *Romance Is the Glamour which Turns the Dust of Everyday Life into a Golden Haze*, 2016



Fig. 44  
Emre Dogru, *Local Fantasy*  
*Global Reality*, 2016

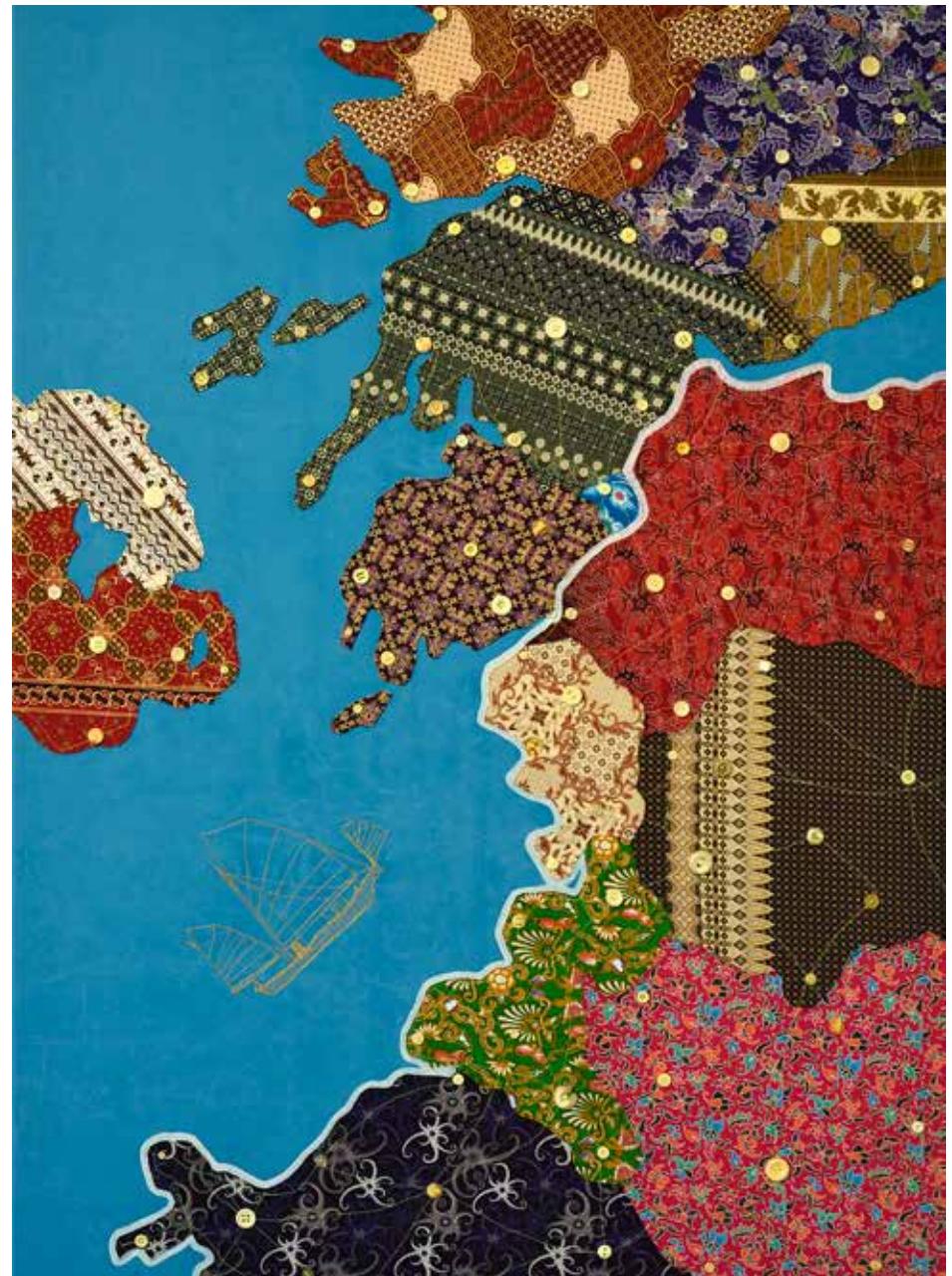
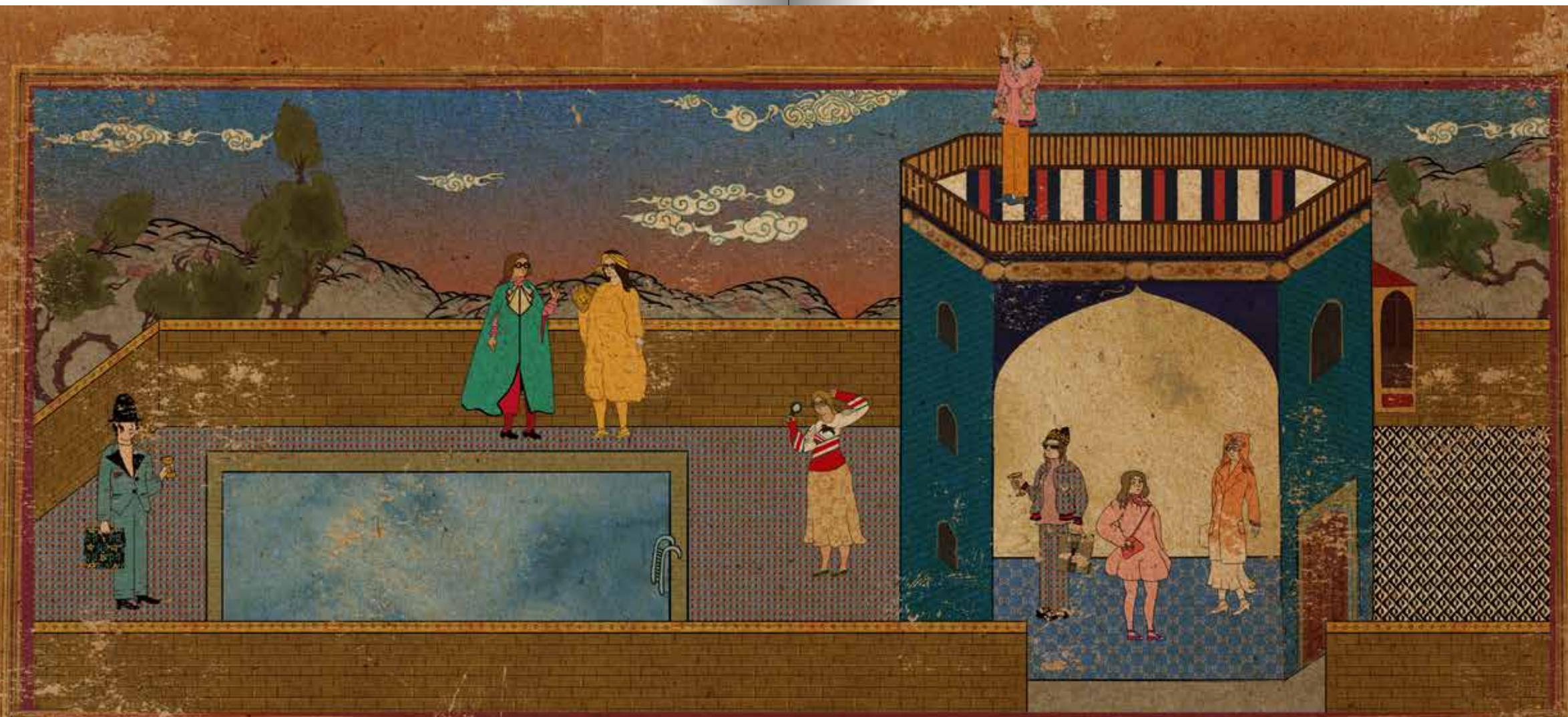


Fig. 45  
Servet Koçyiğit, *Golden Lining*, 2016

Fig. 46

*Murat Palta, Modern Miniature, 2016*

In the past few years, we have witnessed a revival of independent print magazine production around the globe, which puts into question familiar fashion representations and received orders of knowledge. Among the plethora of new style and fashion publications, Istanbul-based *212 Magazine*, a biannual magazine launched in 2016, stands out for its bold international perspective, its unique aesthetic, and its mission to unveil and create alternative postcolonial imaginaries in the form of photo essays, interviews, short fiction, and long-form reportage. In her opening letter in the first issue of *212*, editor in chief Heval Okçuoğlu says that the aim of the magazine is “to gather genre-bending content from different cultures, backgrounds, experiences, and places, and to interrogate the general sense of strangeness we are all too familiar with in modern times.”<sup>1</sup> Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton spoke to Heval about her ambitions for *212*.

**Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton (EG & MT): What is the magazine’s editorial mission? Is there in a post- or de-colonial idea behind *212*?**

**Heval Okçuoğlu (HO):** *212* was born in the schizophrenic city of Istanbul. Even though it was founded in the city where East meets West, as the worn-out cliché goes, the magazine seeks to transcend the loaded dichotomies of Istanbul’s favorite metaphor and to extend its gaze far beyond the region. We would like to believe that we are voices from the periphery. The value of the magazine is representing cultural and artistic points of view from underrepresented locations in the world, mixing it up and presenting it together with a universal vision and aesthetic. I cannot say there is a strict post-/de-colonial idea behind the magazine, but in the larger sense of the term, as far as orientalist, Marxist, or feminist theories go, we try to avoid self-Orientalism as much as we can. There are many different ways to challenge restrictive social notions and perceptions deeply ingrained in any culture or lifestyle, and in our case this questioning comes naturally. We often play with notions of identity as something that is not stable: identity is always changing, always fluid. We try to find ways of thinking about both ourselves and the world that are beyond identity. We seek to create a subtle visual lexicon of different ideas. The magazine is run by three women who feel neither Western nor Eastern; we are attempting to build a democratic playground in which we can present creative and thought-provoking stories.

**EG & MT: Can you tell us how you and your editorial team find the topics for *212*? Which criteria do you follow in your search for the stories, photographs, and illustrations?**

**HO:** We come up with a theme for every issue. The theme is discussed within our team first, in terms of why we want to pursue this specific topic or concept. It often relates to a universal cultural or societal dilemma or an in-between state. We have a vast network of contributors through whom we are able to keep in touch about current news; photography, art, culture, and politics in general. The contributors come up with their own ideas about how they would interpret the theme or what relates to it in their mind—or they simply come up with a suitable reference. We also discuss among ourselves what would be worth exploring within that issue. We spend a lot of time researching and if we come across a name whose work speaks to us, we simply reach out to them and ask if they’d be interested in collaborating with us. Other times, we just fall in love with an idea and ask who is able to express it best. So in the end, it’s a mixed approach. In terms of photography for our fourth issue, we are aiming to feature more unpublished work. We tend to focus on the feeling and the history of photographs. In every issue, a short story by a different Turkish writer is featured and translated into English for the first time. We stick to what we find interesting and what we think needs to be known, hoping that it will resonate with an international audience.

**EG & MT: We are very impressed by how *212* finds and revisits post-Soviet, postcolonial, and “post-orientalist” imagery to create new picture archives. Can you tell us something about the visual production of the magazine and the way you carry out research in the historical image archives?**

**HO:** Magazines published in Turkey mostly rely on the Western gaze. We aim to give a more global perspective, and as mentioned, we are trying to do that through the contexts of underrepresented, rarely represented, forgotten, silenced, and/or suppressed figures. This is also an enlightening process for us because it helps us to learn more. The politics of these contexts help us touch on different geographies and identities. I cannot say we do a systematical archival study because once we have set our theme we turn our eyes to where we want to look, and sometimes we play it by ear. It is an almost instinctive process. We do not categorize images as postcolonial or post-orientalist, but try to dig under the image to uncover its archeological aspects. We aim to give agency to the narrative via photography.

<sup>1</sup> Heval Okçuoğlu, “Strange Days—Issue One,” *212 Magazine*, Spring–Summer 2016, 5.

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Okçuoğlu, Heval, ed. "Strange Days—Issue One." *212 Magazine*, Spring–Summer 2016.

# Rewriting, Adapting, and Fashioning National Styles in India

Ruby Sircar

Ruby Sircar

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In 2002 India faced another wave of ethnic cleansing or, as Martha C. Nussbaum called it, “the active abetting of genocide by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at both the state and national levels.”<sup>1</sup> At the time, the rightwing and Hindu fundamentalist Narendra Modi, India’s prime minister since 2014, was Chief Minister of Gujarat State and began adapting political techniques of local color to a larger painting. His rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) first tried humiliating minorities through acts of violence, and then began concentrating on a possible economic power play by creating a Hindu version of history and grandness. This resulted in the “Modi effect,” as journalist Lance Price calls it.<sup>2</sup> This not only had an effect on the national economy (which moved away from a socialist market system as a result), but every schoolbook was rewritten to glorify Hindu deeds in the past, with regard to various imperialism and colonial times: beginning from the late fifteenth century and the establishment of Mughal rule to 1857 and the rise of the subalterns to British rule in the twentieth century. Fashion and popular street styles were also affected by this political change and new Indian clothing styles were introduced on the market. Along with updating folklore and ethnic strengthening of Hindu relevant styles, pride was taken in the internationalization of Indian design: be it through annexing the aesthetic of left-leaning avant-garde designers such as Amrit Kumar and Mriga Kapadia, or through the re-Indianizing of objects such as those created by Manish Arora, Anamika Khanna, Sabyasachi Mukherjee, and Rana Gill. These processes of political resignification raise the following questions: How can fashion resist the inclusion and instrumentalization by neo-imperial and recolonizing tactics of the Hindutva and its neoliberal economic policies?<sup>3</sup> To answer these questions, this essay outlines the development of the so-called Modi style and how it is tightly connected to the overall development of Indian political fashion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—bridging colonial-style languages and independent attitudes. Subsequently, I will look into the style of the fashion-design label NorBlack NorWhite that also plays with traditional folk and contemporary styles in its products but caters to a differing political world than Modi. The question both developments share is: Why are folk styles in India such an important statement today? And when looking at the very latest development (Narendra Modi visiting ultra-conservative Donald Trump who congratulated Modi on his fashion style and media abilities), I will also consider global interconnections of style languages that India and Modi use as outreach policies.

1 Martha C. Nussbaum, “Body of the Nation,” *Boston Review*, Summer 2004, <http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR29.3/nussbaum.html>.

2 Lance Price, *The Modi Effect: Inside Narendra Modi’s Campaign to Transform India* (London: Quercus Books, 2015).

3 The Hindutva movement is which calls for Hindu ideas as a predominant political form on the south Asian subcontinent. It was formulated in the early 1920s. The BJP adopted its ideas in the late 1980s to campaign. Even though the Indian Supreme Court ruled out the interpretation of fundamentalism in 1995, it is regarded as such in popular thought and media.

## Historical and Contemporary Politics of Appearance in India

Since the early 2000s there has been increasing interest in styles connected to folk costumes. Unlike previous decades, this interest is not connected to bourgeois, traditional right-leaning social entities and milieus but directly influenced the mainstream market. Coloring one's ethnic interests and illustrating one's own imagined routes through style statements became a mainstream everyday fashion practice.<sup>4</sup> When focusing on the Indian subcontinent, while keeping this specific development in mind, it is apparent that traditional costume has played an immense role in emphasizing nationhood, belonging, and style since the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> First, it was a possibility to step away from the Western dictate market of clothing and colonial textile control over the subcontinent and to engage in governing one's own everyday and history.<sup>6</sup> Adapting an imagined clothing style, which held the promise of independence, was the goal of India's modernity. The use of ethnic styles and textile techniques from rural India was used by leaders of the socialist Indian National Congress to connect and communicate with larger groups of people from South Asia to address the need for an independent, self-governed nation. To be very clear: this ethnic and folk style was promoted for the larger South Asian continent, not only India, and included today's Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The political wizard Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was probably the politician who, in his struggle to lead India to independence, wore *dhoti* (wrap trousers) with a shawl and *chappals* (sandals), a traditional style worn by village elders in the northwest of India. Not only did his self-manufactured style become a symbol of independence, but it was also a statement for a very specific class and religious interest. His clothes were not only rural and connected to a specific region, but were also associated with clothing used on pilgrimages by Hindu, Jain, or Buddhists. Gandhi made his own cotton on his *chakri* (a spinning wheel), which was not only free from the colonial market system, but also proclaimed the strong link toward a rural working class and impoverished people in India.

Re-appropriating a textile that was closely linked to being one of the pillars of colonial power (next to jute and indigo), Gandhi liberated it from its colonial past.<sup>7</sup> His style was portrayed as uncivilized in Western media at the time—he was making a strong political statement for the people of South Asia.<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi's style was not adopted by most political leaders at the time but was adapted to a political stage that tried to avoid confrontation and caricature through the West. While Gandhi tried to avoid the caste system by dictating the way he dressed, other politicians, such as class-conservative Jawaharlal Nehru or practical politician Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel, knowingly did. Both were connected to courtly India and bourgeois urban classes as well as nineteenth-century colonial developments in folk costumes, and wore *sherwanis* or *achkan*

(coats) and *churidars* (*jodhpurs*) as a way to be connected to existing power elites. The political ado, the *Band Gale Ka* coat (closed-neck coat) of Nehru and other congress party leaders became so popular that it even hit center stage in the 1960s and was known as the "Nehru jacket." The global wearer demonstrated his or her awareness and respect for "foreign" cultures. The coats were first showcased by popular music groups such as the Beatles, but subsequently lost their appeal because the villains in most James Bond films wore a Nehru jacket.

Caste and class were not the only folk signifiers that were avoided or tried by various politicians: religion (as with Gandhi) also played a big role. Muslim-conscious Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, wore mainly Western clothes along with a *karakul* hat, traditionally made from the fur of an aborted Karakul lamb fetus. The hat is part of the Kashmiri folk costume worn since the struggle for independence in the 1930s and '40s—Kashmir is still being fought over by Muslims and Hindus, Pakistanis, and Indians—as well as the costume of the Pashtun mountain areas bordering Pakistan and the Kashmiri region.<sup>9</sup> Summarizing the development of Indian political fashion and styles of the twentieth century means that the political class of independent and before colonial India has formulated very specific dress codes that very deliberately differ from Western political dress-style codes. Modern styles played a role in the development of political couture in the West as well as on the subcontinent. However, Pakistan still quotes formal dress styles until today, while the style in India was only formalized through its political usage. While *sherwanis* and *achkans* are formal male clothing worn on the upper body by upper-class people in India, Muslims, Farsi, and Hindu alike, these are only part of the political clothing style developed by the central political mass. Further garments worn include *kurtas* (loose shirts) and *pajamas* (trousers). In India, *pajamas* are not two-piece suits designed for sleeping, but are informal or casual clothes worn by the majority of male citizens in private settings every day.

- 4 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991); Ashwani Sharma, Sanjay P. Sharma, and John Hutnyk, "Sounds Oriental: The Impossibility of Theorizing Asian Musical Cultures," in *Dis-orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (London: Zed Books, 1996), 15–31.
- 5 Homi K. Bhabha, ed., "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 291–320.
- 6 Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 6–8.
- 7 Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 38–67.
- 8 Dietrich Alexander, "Für Churchill war Gandhi ein nackter Fakir," *Welt*: N24, January 30, 2008, <https://www.welt.de/politik/article1611566/Fuer-Churchill-war-Gandhi-nur-ein-nackter-Fakir.html>.
- 9 Isabell Schierenbeck and Ulrike Möller, *Political Leadership, Nascent Statehood and Democracy: A Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 2014), 92.

If we look at the development of Indian folk costumes within a wider popular context and at the development of political dress, we can observe that Indian folk costume has until today always played a big role within the ceremonial and everyday culture of the subcontinent, especially in rural South Asia. Nevertheless, a rise in the popularity of folk costumes is also seen in the clothing worn by urban elites in the twentieth century, which is parallel to fashion and trend settings on a global styling agenda. Why has this occurred and what role do political agencies play if a global non-regionalized elite discovers imagined routes?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to take a look at the historical narrative of the development of political styles on the subcontinent until the twenty-first century, and to focus specifically on the late nineteenth century and on various narratives of the twentieth century. In accordance with fashioning its colonial subjects, the British Empire developed garment styles, which seemed prudent according to Victorian style, for its crown colony from the second half of the nineteenth century onward. Gentlemen would not wear an English frock coat but a *sherwani*, and women would be made to wear a decent sari, blouse, and frock. While garment styles connected more daringly to princely courts, religious functions were defined as belonging to a private and non-representable set. Further garment styles were fashioned instead after styles from the northwestern regions of the dominion rather than the south. This is how, for example, the Bengali-style sari has become a classical style in the last two centuries. In the first third of the twentieth century, men's styles were more British looking, on the one hand (e.g., jodhpurs and pyjamas were turned into night and informal clothing), and, on the other hand women's styles were orientalized by creating the *salwar kameez*, or the Punjabi suit in its form known today.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the colonial power was well aware which role styles played within the definition of religions and castes, not class.<sup>11</sup> By creating more universal folk styles, they allowed the construction of a possible modern elite that would act as an agent for the enlightened Asian subject. And even though Gandhi was able to break away from expectations of the colonizing power, the new political elite, who had their training from mainly British schools and universities, gladly accepted formats that enabled them to bridge images between the newly emancipated and post-colonial Indian in the West and the innate Indian governing power at home.

What early politicians in the decolonial struggle for freedom developed style-wise is kept until the present day as a way to illustrate power hierarchies within the democratic power circus of the central government, as well as local and regional governments in the northern part of the subcontinent. They adopted *kurta pajamas* for rallies as a way to represent humble decency, while *sherwani* and *achkan* are reserved for marking one's place at the top of the hierarchy. Fashion and styles have continually played an important role in Indian politics

and have been carefully developed as signifiers of decolonial power. What is interesting is the fact that all politicians seem to carry out all their duties while wearing folk costume. Since the 1990s, the central government's development of fashion and its emphasis on these particular styles can be seen if one watches the television channel Lok Sabha TV: "The word 'Politician' itself is enough to ponder over an image of an uncle with a white *kurta*, those *khadi* jackets and big fat spectacles or a lady in a woven cotton sari. [...] That whatever they wear is linked to their public images. Promoting *khadi* for small scale industries, wearing cotton so as to feel like one from the crowd etc. are some of the inferences."<sup>12</sup> Referring to this broadcasting and media machinery that the parliament set up to promote political work and its inherent importance, one might also follow the developments of contemporary politicians in the last thirty years that have led to the rise and style monopoly of Narendra Modi and his Hindu fundamentalists. But all this is well known and is seemingly a style grammar, which is a tool of communication within the political power play of the subcontinent. Knowing this, it becomes an even more discursive point of interest to adapt this style grammar to the economic and geopolitical role that the subcontinent has played in recent years as well as the fundamentalist Hinduism that is the undercurrent and driving power behind liberal economic policies. After all, the Hindutva movement from 1992 onward had only one goal in mind: to establish for religion a place in popular everyday culture and to create a strong post-colonial/anti-colonial Indian economic empire with the so-called pure-blood Hindu elite governing the cake. The fundamentalist movement, and its reaching out for right-wing power politics, is closely connected to defining an anti-colonial language and anti-global grammar, and to the rewriting of Indian history school books in the late 1990s. When India became an open liberal market and turned its back on the socialist market economy—led by the left-liberal congress party—it was necessary to create a connected and representative style for the newly designed elites. This was done by highlighting, advertising, and enhancing the work of the then newcomers to fashion like the designers Manish Arora and Ritu Kumar, both of whom were working within the values established by a Westernized fashion market. Arora became creative director of women's wear brand Paco Rabanne in 2001 and cooperated with global casual brands such as Swatch and Reebok Fish Fry. Ritu Kumar earned India's highest honor, the Padma Shri Award, to promote Indianness globally in 2013, and had also designed dresses for Princess Diana as well as Madhuri Dixit. Kumar cleverly embedded her own style into Indian and Hindu courtly history by authoring the publication *Costumes and*

<sup>10</sup> Govind Sadashiv Ghurye, *Indian Costume* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995), 34–50.

<sup>11</sup> Spivak, *Critique of Post-colonial Reason*, 120.

<sup>12</sup> Roy Singla, "Fashion in Indian Politics," *ED Times* (blog), February 7, 2014.

*Textiles of Royal India* (2005). The blurb reads: "Acclaimed designer Ritu Kumar has uncovered many of the last surviving examples of traditional royal clothing. Her book is a celebration of this rich legacy of textiles and craftsmanship. This in-depth study of the evolution of Indian royal costume spans the centuries from the first representations of clothing in ancient India."<sup>13</sup>

## Local Styles versus Global Brands

At the same time Western high-capitalist brands such as Hermès, Swarovski, Louis Vuitton, and Chanel began focusing on the new market possibilities by opening up flagship stores in India and catering to the fashion-hungry economic and political elites in the metropolitan areas of Delhi and Mumbai. In parallel, designers like Kumar and Mriga Kapadia began designing folk-inspired styles they marketed cleverly through social-media campaigns showcasing modern and ancient handicrafts and styles, rewriting and adapting Indian fashion to an emancipated monetary and academic elite in the metropolitan regions. Abigail McGowan argues that the politicization of crafts in India was the result of struggles by Indian elites and British officials to establish authority over the lower classes as well as the state itself.<sup>14</sup> One example of this is their Summer 2012 campaign on *ikat* production in the Hyderabad region in Karnataka.<sup>15</sup> In a YouTube video, the brand showed their contemporary designs and gave background information on today's weavers, while also interviewing the grand dame of *ikat* weaving in South India, Suraiya Hassan Bose, widow of Subhash Chandra Bose's nephew, who were all engaged in the swadeshi movement in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> The aim of the movement was to free the subcontinent from British power—swadeshi (self-sufficiency) was declared the heart of the *swaraj* movement (self-rule), or the struggle for independence. As the avant-garde design duo Kapadia and Kumar link their own textile production so clearly to the swadeshi movement, they send their customers very important messages: that they care for India, its self-empowerment, and its post-colonial history, and they place their products within the newfound anti-colonial self-confidence of the subcontinent.

In contrast to Western fashion labels, which refer to swadeshi and its styles as well as the attractive styles of the Indian princely courts and their oriental ornamentation and represent them always through spearhead figures such as Nehru, Gandhi, or imaginary princes, NorBlack NorWhite used the nationalist Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose as a role model, a figure who is far more attractive to an Indian market because he symbolizes a self-sufficient freedom fighter. He once said: "It is blood alone that can pay the price of freedom. Give me blood and I will give you freedom!"<sup>17</sup> Bose, who spoke harshly against Gandhi's nonviolent resistance, founded the Indian National Army in 1942, and even supported Germany under Hitler during the Second World War in hopes to

overthrow the British in India. He sent his elite fighters to support the SS in Berlin and to the Eastern Front. For today's Hindutva movement, Bose is considered a far more enigmatic leader than the pacifist Gandhi.

However, when analyzing the message in NorBlack NorWhite's video directed toward their customers one must not forget that Bose is just one part of the content. His granddaughter by marriage, Suraiya Hassan Bose, is a Muslim who informs customers about the heritage and its loss after the partition. As the textile producers (dyers and weavers) of *ikat* were Muslim, the tradition almost found its untimely end when most Muslim people were expelled from the Hyderabad region in 1947. The craft was revived in the late twentieth century through Bose's work and that of other handloom enthusiasts the craft. Introducing Bose to the scene sends out a clear message to other designers, policy creators, and customers: that NorBlack NorWhite do not cater only to a Hindu market. Bose as a link to Netaji Bose also addresses a global and not only the traditional non-residential Indian-diaspora market. The brand rewrites swadeshi styles in contemporary terms of slow fashion for privilege-conscious consumers, especially at their second home base (apart from Mumbai) Toronto. Kapadia and Kumar write about their label, NorBlack NorWhite: "Their love for Michael Jackson and everything traditional led them to re-invent the textile design business."<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless customers would rather see protagonists of modern Indian history on Kapadia and Kumar's blog and official site—such as the poet Kamala Surayya or actress Zohra Sehgal—than Pan-African artists and their postcolonial styles.

When comparing consumer developments to political developments in India, it is apparent that traditional and seemingly conservative styles have taken center stage in both. And one must admit that these are primarily clearly Hindu-influenced styles.

13 Ritu Kumar, *Costumes and Textiles of Royal India* (Woodbridge: ACC Art Books 2015), back cover text.

14 Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

15 Mriga Kapadiya, "NorBlack NorWhite explores Hyderabad and around, in creating SS12," YouTube, October 7, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOr48MqtjGg>.

16 McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in India*, 15.

17 Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, *Famous Speeches and Letters of Subhash Chandra Bose* (Delhi: Lion Press, 1946), 119.

18 "Mriga's and Amrit's Story of NorBlack NorWhite, Re-inventors #5," YouTube video, 1:53, posted by "Microsoft India," April 28, 2014.

## The Modi Effect

It is worth focusing on the style and policy development of India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, and how he has utilized connections between message, religion, caste, politics, and fashion. As Vanessa Friedman writes in the *New York Times*:

The image-craft of India's new prime minister, Narendra Modi—and its fashion fallout—has been something of a case study. Indeed, even by the standards of India itself, where leaders have perhaps understood the use of clothing as a communication device better and longer than any of their international peers [...] Modi stands out, literally and strategically. After all, not only has he worn a unique garment so often that it is now officially named after him (the Modi Kurta, a revisionist version of the classic Indian tunic shirt with half-length sleeves), but the tailor who works with him to create said garment, Bipin Chauhan of the clothing chain Jade Blue, has trademarked the style and is taking it to Britain, the United States and Southeast Asia.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the phenomenon that Friedman describes on online platforms such as Twitter, with the hashtag #ModiKurta, and various Facebook pages as well as e-Commerce sites focused on Modi mania.<sup>20</sup> All of them praise his take on fashion and style.

And if we agree with what Friedman concludes is correct—that:

One: Mr Modi's choice of a kurta underscores a cultural image that is '100 percent India.' Two: it is democratic—anyone can dress in the same way. Three: it supports local industry. Four: it differentiates him from his political rival, Rahul Gandhi [...]. Five: this in turn underscored Mr. Modi's humble beginnings [...]. Six: the fact that Mr. Modi's kurta is always crisp and neat, and often colorful [...], provides a clear contrast to what India Today called 'the era of unkempt, paan-chewing (politicians) with pot bellies, crumpled dhotis and discolored kurtas.' [...] Seven: the fact that Mr. Modi's kurtas are made from materials that include organic cottons and silks [...]. And eight: this is further highlighted by the story of his tailor, who began by sewing outside garment shops and now has a chain of stores and has become something of a celebrity thanks to his famous client (who, by the way, approved the trademarking of the Modi Kurta).<sup>21</sup>

When and how did fashion become such an important part in Modi's policies? Looking at India's political timeline for the last thirty years, it becomes apparent that Modi consciously incorporated his personal development in his style to represent both the majority of the population in India and its political, economic,

and global influential growth. Modi began his career working as a street activist for Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Gujarat before moving on to join the BJP in the 1980s. These are both extreme right-wing Hindu parties. In the BJP, he jumped up the ranks quickly until he became Gujarat's chief minister in 2001. The following year, Gujarat witnessed the worst religious genocide and rioting in India since the immediate aftermath of the partition in 1947. In 2005 the International Court of Justice as well as the Indian Special Task Force (set to solve the genocide) declared the inaction of Modi's government during the riots negligent. This led to the US high court decision to deny him a diplomatic visa and to remove the tourist and business visa he then held. When it was argued in court that there was no evidence of Modi's involvement in the riots, the chairwoman, Katrina Lantos Swett, stated: "Certainly in our system of justice you can be found not guilty, which is not the same thing as found innocent."<sup>22</sup> It was only after rubbing shoulders with Barack Obama in 2015 that Modi, following his appointment as India's prime minister, was allowed to enter the United States.

How was it possible for Modi to reach the inner circle of power as prime minister? According to various sources, the fact that he managed and governed the language of style enabled him to play the voting masses.<sup>23</sup> From the very beginning, he dressed in orange—shades from saffron to deep vermilion. Hinduism at its clearest. Nevertheless in recent years he has kept a safe distance from deep tones of saffron, reflecting his current political outlook. Instead, he now prefers to go for softer hues of orange. During the US visit, at Madison Square Garden in New York, Modi chose a pale orange *bandhi* over a yellow kurta pajama, asserting his roots to connect with the desi audience. His loud and well-calculated language of fashion has been perceived by international media as the expression of an ambitious self-made politician aiming at setting new rules for fashion in Indian politics: "Whether it's something he wears while addressing a rally in Meerut or what he picks up for his UN General Assembly speech, there is always a fashionable agenda."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Friedman, Vanessa, "Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India: A Leader Who Is What He Wears," *On the Runway* (New York Times blog), March 3, 2014, <https://runway.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/03/narendra-modi-a-leader-who-is-what-he-wears/>.

<sup>20</sup> See <https://twitter.com/hashtag/modikurta>.

<sup>21</sup> Friedman, "A Leader Who Is What He Wears."

<sup>22</sup> "Narendra Modi Shall Not Be Granted US Visa, Says US Official," *NDTV*, August 16, 2013, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/narendra-modi-shall-not-be-granted-us-visa-says-american-official-531846>.

<sup>23</sup> Niharika Mandhana, "How India's Narendra Modi Became a Social Media #Superstar," *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/indias-prime-minister-a-hit-on-social-media-1430905148>.

<sup>24</sup> Tanya Banon, "ALL THE RAGE: How Modi Became India's Fashion Icon," *Mail Online India*, October 25, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2807344/ALL-RAGE-Modi-India-fashion-icon.html>.

By sending out all these messages and adapting everything he can find to personalize it to aid his own goal, Modi has also gained the support of other politicians through his strategic use of fashion. The Gandhi clan and other congress leaders have begun to follow Modi's lead in what is a belated understanding of the Indian fashion language and style dictionary to reach out to the masses in search of imagined traditional Indian signs to show the grandeur of the subcontinent.

A possible position to overcome Modi and its style politics could be through such positions as real politician and market-oriented socialist Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is hailed as being the grand dame of style, which she inherited from her grandmother Indira Gandhi. Is she able to play with fashion and images as radically as Modi? Modi has been pulling each color character to make his message heard: make India great again, especially the Hindu population. Orange and saffron are the colors of the day, while he avoids non-Hindu associated colors such as green, which is often associated with Islam. He will never wear green, according to his tailor, Bipin Chauhan, but will don Western accessories such as watches, pens, and glasses—all which help to further the second part of his political aims: to make India an economic global power.

Naveen Quazi describes Modi's narcissism in her blog, *Something Haute*:

Narendra Modi's bold fashion choices gave him more international acclaim than needed. Earlier this year, the agenda behind meeting President Obama was lost within Modi's gold pinstripes of his dark suit with a checkered pocket square. It was in that moment when close photographs of the meet-up revealed something more important than state-secrets itself. The gold stripes on Modi's suit read: Narendra Damodardas Modi." [...] While fashion critics deemed his style-antics as amusing, others felt that such a choice in wardrobe only highlights his narcissism. It should be kept in mind however that, (unfortunately so) this isn't Modi's first attempt to sartorially oomph up his image.<sup>25</sup>

Angshukanta Chakraborty clarifies Modi's style tactics even more distinctly by pointing out his strategies to seize power by taking over as Father of the Nation and to edge out Gandhi and his iconic spinning wheel—the very symbol of all things *swadeshi* and the root of Indian pride in the freedom struggle by the means of "gauche, fake-rural colour-schemed calendar art."<sup>26</sup> The representation of Modi's image on wall calendars should wipe Khadi's illustrious history clean. According to Chakraborty, the calendar has faced opposition from KVIC employees themselves, "with those at the organization's Vile Parle headquarters planning to stage a 'silent, soul-cleansing' protest in the spirit of Gandhi's own non-cooperation movement."<sup>27</sup> The concluding lines to the postcolonial style and fashion policies and their fundamentalist right-wing

playground opened by such protagonists as Modi is discussed by Gayatri C. Spivak when she talks about radical and eclectic ethnic fashion designers and their industry. Spivak suggests that "plangent individualist garb [...] allows the other [...] to disappear."<sup>28</sup> Modi takes the stage into the apparently opposite direction and works against what Spivak reads as a feminist and woman. He seemingly no longer restricts himself to subaltern modes of representation but merely to post-imperial power play and a globalized dictator's style grammar. He cleverly uses and corrupts what Spivak calls the "native-informant-cum-hybrid-globalist."<sup>29</sup> How to be aware and fight developments that somehow counter and annihilate political values and issues? Spivak would most likely suggest and remind us that regional opposition and recognition of neo-imperial dangers and aggressors must be marked and that culture in general is in high salutary demand to counteract these aggressions by creating a regional and independent language of style. Further to this, Modi and company undo everything that contemporary ethnic and eclectic fashion designers have achieved in their various discourses, as demonstrated by NorBlack NorWhite. Modi also undoes what Spivak has inscribed in post- and de-colonial canon: the responsibility of the subaltern to un-other one's self and consciously work against post-capitalist and neo-imperial market modes.<sup>30</sup> Modi mistakes folk styles, abused as emancipatory means, to reassign subaltern self-imagery. Donald Trump's compliment to Modi in which he described them both as "world leaders in social media" is a stance:<sup>31</sup> on the one hand, media readability and use of styles are dangerous games of abuse, but, on the other, there is still a difference if it is deconstructed for the sake of overcoming a white angry man like Trump, or playing the subaltern victim's historical value to impress and suppress violently—as Modi does. Going against Modi is far more difficult because he wins the capitalist game by abusing the values he seemingly emancipates. Everything Spivak wrote about Marx's miscalculation in setting up an Asiatic mode of production is mirrored here on a fashion stage and illustrates the necessity of undoing (post)colonial design policies.<sup>32</sup>

25 Aaman Haider Isani, "The Power of Fashion," *Something Haute*, June 30, 2017, <https://www.somethinghaute.com/the-power-of-fashion/>.

26 Angshukanta Chakraborty, "Khadi Is Equating Modi with Gandhi—and It's Absurd," *Daily O*, January 1, 2017, <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/narendra-modi-khadi-mahatma-gandhi-spinning-wheel-make-in-india-vibrant-gujarat-summit-swadeshi-movement/story/1/15067.html>.

27 Chakraborty, "Khadi Is Equating Modi with Gandhi."

28 Spivak, *Critique of Post-colonial Reason*, 352.

29 Spivak, 399.

30 Spivak, 340.

31 Steve George, "Trump and Modi Reaffirm Indian-US Relations with a Hug," *CNN*, June 27, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/27/politics/modi-trump-india-us/index.html>.

32 Spivak, *Critique of Post-colonial Reason*, ix.

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# Fashionscapes, Hybridity, and the White Gaze

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Within the current debates about fashion theory and textile and fashion studies there is a vivid questioning of Eurocentric terms, descriptions, and forms of perception of the discipline.<sup>1</sup> Yuniya Kawamura recently pointed out that the term “fashion” and all its variations are of European origin. In her view, fashion is epistemologically a Western concept. However, she has come to recognize a transformation to “fashion as a culturally neutral concept without any borders.” As a fashion sociologist, Kawamura advocates “objective research” that overcomes the “Western perspective” and the “Euro-America-centric alignment,” and understands fashion as a global concept.<sup>2</sup> As accurate and significant the rejection of a Eurocentric perspective of fashion and its history may be, the desire for objectivity and seemingly *neutral* research perspectives is highly questionable from a decolonizing point of view, as it perpetuates the Western orders of knowledge as well. As has been widely discussed, ideas of universalism with its objectification and essentialism simply follow the current globalization processes and the flows of transnational capital. If cultural phenomena like art or fashion are generally described and universalized independently of economic and cultural frameworks, as a result, it is mostly the *white-gaze* regime that is accepted globally and without scrutiny.<sup>3</sup>

The following sections will focus on applying three concepts of postcolonial critique to the field of fashion studies: following cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, I will first develop the concept of “fashionscapes” as a way to look at multi-sited fashion flows within the overall global economy. The suffix “-scape” indicates that the term points to a construct inflected by and used within the linguistic, historical, and political situatedness of different kinds of actors such as national, subnational, or diasporic communities.<sup>4</sup> Second, this will be expanded on by the postcolonial notion of “hybrid spaces” according to Homi K. Bhabha’s concepts of “hybridity” and the “third space.” His theory focuses on transitional transnational and transcultural identities and their representations

1 Gabriele Mentges, “Mode als Objekt der Wissenschaften und der Wissensgeschichte,” in *Die Medialität der Mode: Kleidung als kulturelle Praxis: Perspektiven für eine Modewissenschaft*, ed. Rainer Wenrich (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 73–86.

2 Yuniya Kawamura, “Wie man die Mode als westliches Konzept auseinander nimmt,” in Wenrich, *Die Medialität der Mode*, 185–94. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. For the Western perspective in fashion studies, see also Suzanne Baizerman, Joanne B. Eicher, and Catherine Cerny, “Eurocentrism in the Study of Ethnic Dress,” in *The Visible Self: Global Perspectives on Dress, Culture, and*

*Society*, ed. Joanne B. Eicher; Sandra Lee Evenson, and Hazel A. Lutz (New York: Fairchild Books, 2000).

3 David Morley and Kevin Robinson, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

4 Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 7, no. 2 (1990): 295–310; and Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

as a result of colonialism, imperialism, and mass migration.<sup>5</sup> Third, I will analyze the regime of the *white gaze* with the aid of critical whiteness studies, because the white gaze is an ongoing power active in discriminatory representations of body, fashion, race, and power. Inherent in descriptions of people and their costumes of dress, the white gaze serves to secure European dominance as well.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the conclusion draws on three concepts to argue for a more complex and egalitarian way to overcome ethnocentrism.

## Fashionscapes

The cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai coined the concept of “scapes” as a way to explain complex contexts of social and economic relationships across national state borders in the times of globalization. The accelerated trans-national movement of people, goods, capital, and information (cultural flows) necessitates that the ideas of cultures and communities (imagined communities) are less and less bound to actual locations.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on Appadurai’s concept of scapes, the following section will develop fashionscape as a term for fashion research. Fashion also shapes globally linked landscapes and flows that are interwoven with these scapes, regardless of location. These are de-territorialized spaces that are re-territorialized at specific locations as part of fashion shows and fashion weeks, for example.

David Gilbert has already described the history of fashion systems and their global expansion in terms of Appadurai’s financial- and mediascapes. By mapping the different geographies of fashion, he describes the activities of the world economy dependent on the global networks of migration, which can be understood only in the context of post-imperialism and postcolonialism. Against this background, he concludes: “Fashion was used as a means of expressing the superiority of certain places in the world order.”<sup>8</sup> For a very long time, Paris was the expression of modernity and therefore on top in the hierarchy of fashion cities.<sup>9</sup>

However, Gilbert does not use the term “fashionscapes” at all, but I would like to introduce this term because as well as the structural side of fashion systems, the spatial dimension should be emphasized too. The latter, however, is particularly important when differing—or even opposing—perspectives and evaluations within fashion discourse are located. Within this framework, hierarchical or discriminatory gaze constellations like the white gaze can be made visible and invalid.

Appadurai illustrates that the description of the scapes can never be objective. Social values and norms determine the observation process and guide it so that universally applicable statements can never be made.<sup>10</sup> As will be seen below,

objectivity is generally used as a synonym for the lofty white-male perspective as a control body that has been structuring power since colonial times by setting universal standards. The result of this gaze regime remaining unnamed is the creation of myths, even in academic reflections. For example, this is quite frequently presented as an ineluctable premise. As Elena Esposito argues: “There is no rule governing and controlling fashion, and it largely remains impenetrable—but once created, fashion forces itself upon everyone.”<sup>11</sup>

The concept of fashionscapes is suitable for investigating fashion landscapes without risking the oversimplification of complex contexts or without overlooking central strategies of the dominant power-knowledge apparatus. By using the term “scapes,” Appadurai describes historical developments that led to the establishment of a complex European colonial order, including the proliferation of institutions across the rest of the globe. The former colonies assumed these structures, including the European concept of nations as well as the corresponding vocabulary.<sup>12</sup> Today, through media dissemination, virtual fashionscapes enter rhizomatic relationships: textile techniques, fashion patterns, swatches, and ornaments encounter the familiar and are combined with the foreign. A versatile pool to produce innovation is thus created to keep the flow of goods running. This includes the language of fashion (clothing) and tradition. Due to the accelerated technological developments in transport and communication, textile materials and their vestmental encoding fluctuate across geographical borders into different spaces. The colonial patterns continue to be written primarily from a European perspective even

- 5 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 6 Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie: Eine kritische Einführung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015); Gabriele Dietze et al., *Weiß – Weißsein – Whiteness: Kritische Studien zu Gender und Rassismus* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006); Eske Wollrad, *Weißsein im Widerspruch: Feministische Perspektiven auf Rassismus, Kultur und Religion* (Königstein, Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2005); Karl Hözl, Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, and Herbert Uerlings, *Weisse Blicke: Geschlechtermythen des Kolonialismus* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2005); and Khadija Carroll La et al., eds., *Vienna Zocalo: Critical Crafting as a Postcolonial Strategy* (Vienna: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna: Fashion and Styles, 2012).
- 7 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*. Appadurai writes of ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideo-scapes. See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1987).
- 8 David Gilbert, “A New World Order? Fashion and Its Capitals in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Fashion Cultures Revisited: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2013), 16.
- 9 Gilbert, 16.
- 10 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 27–33.
- 11 Elena Esposito, “Originalität durch Nachahmung: Die Rationalität der Mode,” in *Modetheorie: Klassische Texte aus vier Jahrhunderten*, ed. Gertrud Lehnert, Alicia Kühl, and Katja Weise (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 209.
- 12 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.

though the transnational shift is calling for different constructions of meaning for newly imagined communities. With this background in mind, fashion and tradition, or folklore, should be understood as terms with a deep ideological hue.

One frequently used criterion when defining fashion is the recurring, albeit not continuous, temporal change of fashion styles and patterns that defines fashion no longer exclusively as a strategy of Western modernization processes. On closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that Europe will remain the reference system from which the perspective expands to other fashion landscapes. As noted by Gabriele Mentges, The “language” of fashion presents itself as European almost everywhere and constantly reiterates its anchor in the European-urban world.<sup>13</sup> To reflect on fashion and fashion theory in a scientific context, only those proposals that continue to be viable are the ones that link changing fashion styles to social developments. Yuniya Kawamura underlines that the central significance of the fashion system consists in transforming clothing into fashion and thereby attaching meaning to it. This system consists of institutions, groups and single people with specific interests, events, and practices that all must be considered to explain the specifics of fashion. “That means the institutionally manufactured, marketed and valorized form of clothing which is at a certain time characteristic for a certain social order or group within this social order.”<sup>14</sup> The dominance of an economic logic in this process culminated in the dominance of the French fashion scene, which is why in the 1980s Japanese designers were only able to start their careers after having been recognized designers in the fashion capital of Paris.<sup>15</sup>

In fashion studies, the tendency to dissolve the Eurocentric perspective, which distinguishes the fashion of ethnic styles of former colonies, reduces the entire conceptual construct to a minimum consensus. Fashion in these terms corresponds to the change of color and form in clothing. In this way, the term can be universalized and utilized worldwide. The specific historical meanings, including the complex sociopolitical relationships and especially economic significance, are simply being blocked out. Clearing these elements of all their contexts of significance and returning them to a minimal definition leads to more disorientation than clarity. However, a homogenization of societies to the exclusion of history on a global level corresponds to the imperial world order of transnational capital, as established by David Morley and Kevin Robinson. Hidden behind the universalism of the one world is frequently the absorption of non-European countries through the technologies and thereby the values and norms of the West.<sup>16</sup> Essentializing the term “fashion,” historically developed within European discourse, as a basic constant of human life, and imposing it universally therefore corresponds to a very powerful Eurocentric strategy to continue to maintain the white-gaze regime.

The use of the term “tradition” and the recourse to stabilize images of the past are closely associated with such a strategy. They in turn assure a relatively lucid idea of *modern* identities, even if based on outdated, colonial concepts of alterity. Accordingly, tradition is not a fact but rather an invention to define group associations within one certain world order that is threatening to collapse due to the border-blurring biopolitics of the empire and the associated migratory movements, as defined by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.<sup>17</sup>

The invention of tradition also plays a crucial role in the fashionscapes. Cultural transformations have taken place that fundamentally altered what was once considered dress tradition. But the urge for *pure* clothing forms, which can be associated with obviously alleged, clearly delimited traditions, corresponds to the way the empire functions. The experiences of the diaspora, migration, and exile have changed the relationship and understanding of tradition for a long time. Correspondingly, the time has come to adequately describe these new hybrid forms. It has been pointed out multiple times that visions of the past and of the traditional are always contaminated by the conditions of the present.<sup>18</sup> The consequences of colonization are not reversible. Therefore, there is no way to return to an authentic pre-colonial identity based on traditions. However, the fashions and styles of the decolonization movements express the struggles for independence through textiles.

<sup>13</sup> Gabriele Mentges, “Europäische Kleidermode (1450–1950),” *Europäische Geschichte Online*, February 22, 2011, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/mentgesg-2011-de>.

<sup>14</sup> Yuniya Kawamura, “Die japanische Revolution in der Pariser Mode,” in Lehnert, Kühl, and Weise, *Modetheorie*, 173.

<sup>15</sup> Kawamura, 168–78.

<sup>16</sup> See David Morley and Kevin Robinson, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire: Die neue Weltordnung*, trans. Thomas Atzert and Andreas Wirthensohn (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri understand the current global world order as an “empire” that is characterized by the systematic combination of economics and politics to a “regime of bio-politics.” The current submission of all spheres of life to the interests of capitalist exploitation leads to a shift, dissolution, and reorganization of

differences on all levels. It is characteristic that the presence is being described with terms of the past for simplicity reasons since the newly forming, unstable, and ambivalent hybrid forms quickly disappear from sight due to their complexity. For the invention of tradition, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> “The colonial discourse has shaped colonized societies forever. It is therefore impossible to reconstruct an identity which is not contaminated by colonialism.” Do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan, *Postcolonial Theorie*, 202. For more information on this subject, see also Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” in *Black Film, British Cinema (ICA Documents)*, ed. Kobena Mercer (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988), 30; and Edward Said, “Representing the colonised: anthropology’s interlocutors,” *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989): 225.

## Hybrid Fashion Spaces

At this point, it would be helpful to identify the hybrid spaces within the fashionscapes as defined by Homi K. Bhabha. The imbalanced cultural exchange during European colonization efforts inevitably—consciously or unconsciously—led to the integration of signs and symbols on both sides. “Such cultures of a postcolonial contra-modernity may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to ‘translate,’ and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity.”<sup>19</sup> Throughout the industrialization process, global technologies, from weaving chairs to computers and modern media, played a significant role. They transported images, styles, values, and norms about clothing styles into other countries and societies, causing the geographies to transform into hybrid spaces. A hybrid “third” came into existence that did not correspond to the colonized or the colonizing cultures and therefore can be the starting point for a critical negotiation of meaning. “The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space—a third space—where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences. [...] It spreads beyond the knowledge of ethnic or cultural binarisms and becomes a new, hybrid space of cultural difference in the negotiation of colonial power-relations.”<sup>20</sup> These negotiations take place via images and texts as well as techniques, patterns, and fabrics and lead to the hybrid formations, which make the idea of a closed, primal “pureness” of cultures appear outdated. According to Bhabha, the meaning of the term “traditionalism” is also negotiated in such hybrid spaces. He understands traditionalism as a hybrid term whose meaning depends on time and is therefore always assigned a specific function.<sup>21</sup>

One of these functions is the cultural concept defined by delimited traditions. Bhabha is critical of the fact that within the discourse of multiculturalism, as part of neoliberal politics, the dominant positions of those who initiate segregation remain preserved. Instead of an additive mixture, he emphasizes the construction and processuality of cultural concepts through multifaceted interactions and versatile and mutual influences, the effects of which cannot be reversed. What he refers to as the “third space” now offers a wide-open space in which meaning is negotiated through critical rereading and revisioning by people of different origins and dissenting opinions. For a proper assessment of this space, it makes sense to develop a consciousness of one’s own perspective, and reflect on the visual axes and interpretive strategies. Instead of constantly contributing to the radical separation of cultures because of speech and writing by evoking mythical memories from preindustrial times, cultural interactions should be understood as the production of something culturally different.<sup>22</sup>

In the process of the migration of things and goods as well as technologies and their significance, clothing from abroad is being adapted and reinterpreted while what was brought with the migrants is being irrevocably linked with what is found. Many aspects are used and viewed differently than in the home country. Transnational corporations react by regionally adjusted marketing strategies and sales campaigns so that textile goods become part of each society and its material culture.<sup>23</sup> The need for fashion and the clothes on offer therefore follow the political or ideological conditions of each milieu in the sense of a globally bound localization of the goods.

The descriptions of hybrid fashion design and the evaluation of fashion landscapes within a global context remain interwoven with outdated dichotomous structures. The ethnicizing stereotype regimes are ambivalent forms of recognition and identify both sides as a dependence of one on the Other, meaning that the white norm will always inevitably be constructed along with the structure of the ethnicized Other.<sup>24</sup> With regard to fashionscapes, the question that must be asked is: To what extent do descriptions of the modern era and tradition as well as their additive union display long-outdated models for the description of styles of dress?

Separatist ideologies, like the national and/or colonial imaginary, including its aesthetics of orientalization, primitivization, and exoticization, are still activated even if these attributes have become part of a diasporic system. Frequently, different ethnic patterns and cuts are playfully mixed together in a colorful patchwork. Materials and forms of style of the fashion world are conceived as tools that can be mixed and matched in every which way—turning old into new and especially into fashion. This approach is reminiscent of the discussion in art critique in the 1990s when Thomas McEvilley introduced the concept of “pastiche” as a hybrid concept with his exhibition “Fusion.” The nomad artist roams the world in search of symbols and signs, which he or she then combines into new forms, patterns, and images at will. According to McEvilley:

“[African artists] are adopting elements of the look of Western artworks—elements of style, iconography, and materials—from aesthetic appetite alone, not much caring about the conceptual issues or culture-specific contents that we think saturate them. When they do appreciate specific borrowed elements conceptually, these include the Western idea of the

<sup>19</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Bhabha, 218, 294.

<sup>21</sup> Bhabha, 2–5, 31–35.

<sup>22</sup> Bhabha.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Was ist Globalisierung?*

*Irrtumer des Globalismus, Antworten auf Globalisierung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 86.

<sup>24</sup> Mar Castro Varela, *Postkoloniale Theorie*, 225.

autonomous role of the artist, and along with it the belief in art as a liberating spiritual force in relation to society and its problems. Untroubled by hybridization, armed with elements from both Africa and Europe, they are ready to move into the future.”<sup>25</sup>

This process was criticized as a hegemonic appropriation of cultural values based on the colonial model during capitalist production of goods. The art market also lives off innovations that are found in the seemingly exotic symbols of other cultures. Only those who can afford to travel and have access to the necessary resources can overlook the sociopolitical contexts and cultural hierarchies that radically block off the path for others. Norms and values of the rich north, which do not dissolve the old hegemonic patterns of modern and folklore, are being passed on without further reflection.<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 47  
Stella Jean, Pre-Fall collection, 2017

Such theoretical reflections can be demonstrated using the example of Parisian label KENZO’s 2017 Summer campaign, which was shot in Nigeria, in comparison with Stella Jean’s ethically sound fashion based on sustainably sourced fabrics. For reasons of market interest, both labels have been praised for combining different so-called ethnic national traditions. KENZO promoted their Summer collection in the short fashion film *Gidi gidi bu ugwu eze* (*Unity Is Strength*), which was directed by the photographer Ruth Ossai and the filmmaker Akinola Davies Jr., with the stylist Ibrahim Kamara.<sup>27</sup> The film pays homage to the beauty of Nigerian’s youth and culture. Davies calls the project

a celebration of “young black Nigerian bodies (by) capturing them celebrating Igbo culture and traditions, showing that beauty is always present when there is a commitment to the celebration of culture.”<sup>28</sup> The models were locals from Nsukka, a town and Local Government Area in southeast Nigeria in Enugu State. The dresses cite old and new styles in an unusual but playful manner, bringing together weaving and plastic, ceremonial costumes, and fashion and thereby becoming spectacles. But contrary to this diasporic look, the setting of the film took place in a palm tree forest in the jungle, far from the cosmopolitan area. In the film, the models’ vivid dance movements in slow motion, which is accompanied by rhythmic music, produces a hypnotic effect.<sup>29</sup> It seems as if the viewer is invited to be part of a mysterious secret event. Nigerian history, with its rites and rituals, is transformed into a timeless beauty pageant according to Western ideals, with exoticized African stereotypes from the European colonial past. Thus this film restages African primitivism in new robes.

But in fact the mixing of fashion styles conceals a far more complex phenomenon, which is the result of migration patterns and diaspora. This becomes more obvious with Rome-based fashion label Stella Jean. Born in Rome and of Caribbean descent, the young female designer taps into the current *métissage* trend in which fashion can be a meaningful tool for blending different cultures. Her aesthetic fuses Creole heritage, Italian craftsmanship, and African secular textile traditions. For example, Jean’s 2014 Spring/Summer collection is characterized by her “wax and stripes” philosophy. While the stripes symbolize her father’s European background, the wax print points to her mother’s Haitian heritage with roots in West Africa as well as in Southeast Asia—the fabric is produced in the Netherlands and points to a colonial heritage as well. Therefore, Jean showcases her fashion without any exoticism, primitivism, or magical performances. Aware of the diasporic references in cultures of today, “she added African references from Kente fabrics, kimonos from the Japanese archers, and Russian folk by way of Chagall’s whimsical paintings” for her Pre-Fall 2017

25 Thomas McEvilley, ed., “Fusion: Hot or Cold?,” in *Fusion: West African Artists at the Venice Biennale* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1993), 21.

26 See Nicholas Thomas, “Cold Fusion,” *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 1 (1996): 4–25.

27 See the video <http://www.okayafrica.com/in-brief/kenzo-fashion-film-nigeria/>.

28 Vane Karolle, “Kenzo: *Gidi gidi bu ugwu eze*,” *Globetrotter*, April 11, 2017, <https://www.globetrottermag.com/news-features/2017/4/10/kenzo-gidi-gidi-bu-ugwu-eze>.

29 KENZO, *Gidi gidi bu ugwu eze* (2017), film. Directed by Ruth Ossai and Akinola Davies Jr. See images of the collection on KENZO’s website: <https://www.kenzo.com/en/unityisstrength>; and <http://archive.lofficiel.de/mode/focus-on-kenzo-folio-1-kurzfilm-nigeria-gidi-gidi-bu-ugwu-eze/>.

collection (fig. 47).<sup>30</sup> As Jean states, her fashion style is based on the idea of métissage, which points to the phenomenon of cultural hybridity during colonization since the sixteenth century: "We think wax comes from West Africa. The slaves sent to the Caribbean islands came from West Africa. Yet wax is European, like me. No one ever believes I am Italian, but I am."<sup>31</sup> With this fashion representation she develops a new concept of multiculturalism based on the idea of métissage and promoting sustainable economic developments as well as ethical fashion.<sup>32</sup> In this sense the fashion label's aesthetic expresses an emerging responsibility toward developing countries and their economic conditions as a result of taking into account migration processes and diasporic histories.

### The White-Gaze Regime

The concept of the white-gaze regime as a relic of European colonial rule and therefore of the normative validity of European civilization needs to be further theorized in fashion studies. The question of whiteness represents a critical category for the analysis of the concepts of white dominant culture and their privileges. First and foremost, the associated privileges must be challenged which ostensibly define themselves with the color of skin which is seen as a sign of difference. Privileged positions of white dominance are also expressed by dichotomous terminology in descriptions of the own and the foreign. Being white is to be taken as yet another form of ethnicization that was and continues to be constructed as a hegemonic position through concepts of alterity respectively performing either otherness or assimilating the unquestioned norm, which is white.<sup>33</sup> The regime of the white gaze produces racial bodies by inventing special images, metaphors, and even typical forms of clothing. White perspectives on bodies and how they are dressed are responsible for the existence of discriminating gender understanding, descriptions of peoples and their customs of dress, and for a long time served to secure white survival.<sup>34</sup>

A recent example of the use of this concept is Elizabeth Wissinger's study of the modeling industry. Even if in the last few decades black models have had more opportunities to be successful, they are still underrepresented in the fashion industry because of their facial features, body measurements, hair, and skin color. Confronted with a white standard of beauty, they must fit a particular, always changing aesthetic to produce the right image or brand for consumer desire and economic success. Wissinger states: "Black models more acutely experience these disparate aesthetic demands, sometimes calling for them to produce themselves in line with European ideals of beauty, while at other times, having to emphasize their 'otherness,' for their clients. In this sense, under the 'white gaze,' the look of the 'other' becomes either a bodily resource

or a liability in a stylized workplace performance."<sup>35</sup> She argues that the need for changing aesthetics in appearance-based professions, either styled as more Caucasian or more exotic and primitive, is used to excuse racial exclusion. Concurrently in this manner, racial stereotypes are socially reconstructed. Thus race is performed as an aesthetic look and is determined by the white gaze that defines how black and white models should look.<sup>36</sup>

The problem that now arises is how clothing as a vehicle for white supremacy supports the racialization of bodies. Of particular importance is how the white gaze, which is inherent in the European fashion system, can be identified. Alongside an analysis of racialized body stereotypes we need to have a closer look at key terms as well. During colonialism, the categories of "tradition" or "folklore" were used to describe features of colonized cultures while the category of "modernity," considered to be a superior concept, was associated with whiteness with regard to concepts of Occidentalism and the West. These ideologies were reproduced through clothing too. In this sense, folklore and tradition were essentialized as a delimitation to cosmopolitan and therefore transnationally oriented modern developments for specific countries. The political appropriation of fashion and dress history belong to the "regime of materialization,"<sup>37</sup> which denied the reciprocal dependencies of societies and cultures primarily through economic processes and delimited them in evolutionary terms. The European perspective reshapes projected foreign-cultural influences instead of recognizing the visual powerfulness of other subjects, which would confront Europeans with their own colonial history. But white perspectives are imprinted into the regime of materialization when developing and affirming regime relationships between white people and the rest.

For example, the associated self-ethnicization of Europeans as a superior white civilization is still being latently supported in the production of meaning, especially when dealing with terms such as "nativity," "originality," and "authenticity" as well as "fashion" and "folklore." According to postcolonial insights, the construction of "otherness" inevitably implies the latent construction of

<sup>30</sup> Tiziana Cardini, "Pre-Fall 2017: Stella Jean," *Vogue*, January 16, 2017, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/pre-fall-2017/stella-jean>.

<sup>31</sup> Stella Jean, cited in Marion Hume, "Fashion's New Stella," *Business of Fashion*, September 17, 2013, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/fashions-new-stella>.

<sup>32</sup> Stella Jean, "An Ethical Journey," interview by Janine Leah Bartels, *Something About*, July 26, 2015, <https://www.somethingaboutmagazine.com>

/stella-jean-takes-us-on-an-ethical-journey-through-responsible-luxury/.

<sup>33</sup> See Wollrad, *Weißsein im Widerspruch*; and Dietze et al., *Weiß – Weißsein – Whiteness*.

<sup>34</sup> Carroll La et al., eds., *Vienna Zocalo*.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Wissinger, *This Year's Model: Fashion, Media, and the Making of Glamour* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 227.

<sup>36</sup> Wissinger, 221–42.

<sup>37</sup> Elke Gaugele, "Thoughts on Decolonizing Fashion and Textile Studies," in *Vienna Zocalo*, 7.

the norm. It is only these designations that place clothing styles in the context of the "white epistemology."<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

Throughout the current discussions of fashion theory, textile studies, or fashion studies, questions of Eurocentric perception, description, and evaluation of styles and their history inevitably arise. Following postcolonial theories deconstructing power relations, the terms "fashionscapes" and "hybridity," in line with the critical whiteness studies, have been developed for fashion research.

Fashionscapes allow us to recognize that the concepts of space, place, and people have become much more complex; indeed, dress communities may be dispersed across a variety of sites. They demand the creation of contemporary formulations in consideration of the white-gaze regime. The analysis of fashion in the context of fashionscapes recognizes complex, historical interdependencies with a critical reflection of the research perspective to prevent hasty conclusions and myth development. Instead of an assumed objectivity, which is frequently predestinated to unthinkingly reproduce Eurocentric stereotypes of dominance, a differentiated perspective is needed for nationally, exotically, or primitively defined dresses. Accounts of textile cultural history and its parameters, of fashion and garment history as well as their inherent languages, visualizations and performative productions must be revised to that effect.

Mostly it seems that in fashion shows and advertisements, nationally segregated cultures come together in harmony in the style mix of dress. But in reality, this mix conceals a far more complex phenomenon as the result of migration processes and the subsequent diaspora. It eludes governing dress codes and remains as something incomprehensible, which leads to irritations. Style cannot be defined with clear categories and should not once again be guided back to the old colonial patterns through the differentiation between tradition and modern progress. Instead, such clothing phenomena refer to hybrid contexts calling for a new terminology.

By looking at the effects of globalization in light of the past and through various colonization processes, not simply the European ones, Appadurai's theoretical approach toward hybrid identities becomes a tool for viewing the complexity of textile material culture research in light of fashion(s) within the fashionscapes. Within the hybrid spaces, the terms "fashion" and "tradition," or "folklore," are ideologically shaded terms that cannot be absolved of all analogies and discourse strategies when trying to find a balance of power. Questioning

Eurocentric terms against the background of hybridity enables us to look at multisited fashion flows in an appropriate manner.

In that sense, critical whiteness studies offer helpful conceptual approaches to overcome the white-gaze regime, which is still inherent in fashion and textile studies when body politics meets the fashion industry.

<sup>38</sup> L. Elena Delgado and Rolando J. Romero, "Local Histories and Global Design: An Interview with Walter Mignolo," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 22, no. 3 (2000): 7–33, 21.

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# Entangling Critical Global Fashion Histories

Realism—after poststructuralism and decolonization—presupposes a fractured, contestable narrative perspective [...]. We need to work at multiple scales and among discrepant histories, engaging with multiplicity and contradiction, inhabiting paradox. [...] There is no longer a place from which to tell the whole story (there never was).

—James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*

# Remodeling the Past, Cross-dressing the Future

## Postcolonial Self-Fashioning for the Global Art Market

Birgit Mersmann

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### Art Fashion, Fashion Art? Conspiratorial Liaisons

This essay queries the neoliberal underpinnings of the fashion-art liaison and takes a critical look at the transcultural strategies of politicized fashion appropriation and reenactment clothing as applied by the British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare MBE RA and the South African artist Mary Sibande. Utilizing excessive glamour and features of hybridity, the artists showcase fashion as a valid contemporary art form. By using fabric as their medium of artistic expression and for (cross)dressing performances, they embody the multiplicity of role play in search of their own persona and collective identities connected to their biographies. Common to their artworks is an interest in artistic self-fashioning as a form of transformative “othering” through self-portraiture. Through this particular approach, a new type of fashion art is produced in the (postcolonial) global context of contemporary art.

By investigating self-referential alter-ego reenactments through (predominantly Victorian) fashion transpositions, the postcolonial self-(re)fashioning of the artist between personal autobiography and colonial history, gender and race relations will be analyzed. To demonstrate how past histories can be remodeled and how future lives of emancipatory power designed through fashion practices of retro and cross-dressing, I will focus on Shonibare’s photo series “Diary of a Victorian Dandy” (1998) and Sibande’s “Long Live the Dead Queen” (2009). The main goal of the analysis is to reveal how the diasporic doubleness of the postcolonial subject as staged fashion figure not only subverts fashion as a Western paradigm of colonial embodiment, but also displaces and replaces it through African styles of hybridity that stand for a new, self-conscious politics of appearance and identity.

#### Yinka Shonibare’s Self-Fashioning as Black Victorian Dandy

All identity construction is a form of reenactment.  
—Yinka Shonibare

The novel liaison between art and fashion, including the redefinition of fashion as valid and as an art form and artwork in its own right, is actively pursued and propelled by Shonibare. He was the first black British artist to be nominated by the queen as a member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) and to attain the status of a Royal Academician (RA), and in his career he has been highly successful at producing fashionable artworks for the contemporary art scene in the United Kingdom and internationally through his powerful use of fashion elements and strategies of self-fashioning himself in the role of a dandy. Especially by reenacting scenes depicted in Victorian-era historical paintings and restaging the noble figures and characters represented

in them, he has playfully demonstrated how the cultural and social mobility and nobility of fashion can serve as a marker of differentiation and means of effective identity transformation and elevation in status. The constructive aspect of the artist's fashion/able reenactments lies in the self-critical, even self-ironical, refashioning of the historical role models. The term "refashioning" is understood literally as the redesign of fashion for the purpose of recoding identity. The term is also meant to include the recodification of fashion itself as a paradigm of Western civilization, modernity, and progress-driven innovation through re-costumization.

Questioning of the role of the black African artist in the arena of international, globally oriented contemporary art became the key driver for Shonibare's self-understanding as an artist and for the self-fashioning of his work. To express his skepticism toward any form of fixed identity, in particular when it comes to stereotypically essentializing and racializing African identity, he deliberately selects "African" fabrics as his artistic, symbolically charged design medium: "The fabrics are signifiers, if you like, of 'Africanness' insofar as when people first view the fabric, they think of Africa."<sup>1</sup> Yet, the purpose of the explicit choice of African fabric is to unfold and deconstruct the modes and power-related mechanisms of artificial identity fabrication that underlie the textile in relation to its history of production and trading.<sup>2</sup>

The most powerful visual marker of almost all costumes in Shonibare's artworks is the reference to the Victorian era. The (prospectively) postcolonial re/fashioning of art is enacted through means of Victorian-African hybridizations: Victorian-style dresses for men, women, and children are tailored from Dutch wax fabrics—ambiguously oscillating between pseudo-African and authentic African cloth. The dress paradox could not be more extreme and racially radical: black African pride, as symbolized by the African fabric prints, is coupled with the imperial magnificence and splendor of Victorian rulers and nobles in one-and-the same dress. The design of a hybrid, postcolonial costume is driven by the artist's interest in showcasing the entangled histories and uneven relationships between Great Britain and Africa in colonial times.

Although it can be stated that the artist's entire oeuvre is conceptually imbued with Victorian references, some installation and photo works show more explicit articulations of Victorian fashion than others. In the installation *Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour* (1996–97), a parody of period museum rooms, all textile elements of the Victorian-style salon from the chaise longue to the drapery are redressed and redesigned in African fabrics with the motif of the black football player, thus letting the colonial legacy of British Victorian history surface on the furniture and overall decorum. The refashioning was intended to express the "relationship of patronage [...] between the 'haves,' the colonial philanthropist, and the so-called have-nots, the poor colonials."<sup>3</sup> *Gallantry and Criminal Conversation*, a composite installation arranged from five smaller

pieces for documenta 11 (2002),<sup>4</sup> uncovered the two-faced nature of the Victorian value system drawn between prudery and passion. The scenic reenactment of a Grand Tour of a country outing with life-size, fiberglass mannequins showcases the sexual excess of the noble society in all its pleasure and vulgarity. The figures involved in the sex orgies are headless, a feature that, on a reflective level, becomes metaphoric for their irrational, emotion- and instinct-driven behavior.

The headlessness of the African-Victorian mannequins is a highly visible marker for the loss of face and identity. It can be considered an effective artistic means for deconstructing the central power and authority of control, including the top of society and head of state. For Shonibare, the decapitation of the figures is "an allusion to the French Revolution and the beheading of the French landed gentry and aristocracy." He says: "It amused me to explore the possibility of bringing back the guillotine in the late 1990s, not for use on people, of course—my figures are mannequins—but for the use on the historical icons of power and deference."<sup>5</sup> Another reason for beheading the models was to avoid any racializing of the model figures. The mannequins' undefined skin color, shimmering between light brown, yellow, and white tones, emphasizes the consciously applied postcolonial strategy of de-racialization and de-identification. The fabrication of identity is restrictively delegated to the medium of fashion. A person's identity disappears under the guise and cover of a costume.

1 Shonibare quoted in Rahel Kent, ed., *Yinka Shonibare MBE* (Munich: Prestel, 2008), 43.

2 In the colonial era of the nineteenth century, the Dutch colonizers started mass-producing the batiks in the East Indies with the intention to sell them on the local markets. For this reason, the fabric became also known as "Dutch wax." However, for anti-colonial reasons, the Indonesians preferred their locally produced, handcrafted batiks. Owing to this lacking demand, the Dutch exported the industrially produced fabric to Great Britain. From there, it was once again exported; this time to the African colonies. The textile products sold throughout West Africa were reimported to Great Britain by way of migrant traders where they were validated and sold as authentically African, see Delhaye in this volume.

3 Shonibare quoted in Kent, *Yinka Shonibare MBE*, 43.

4 It consists of *Parasol* (two life-size fiberglass mannequins, two metal and wood cases, Dutch wax-printed cotton, leather, wood, steel, collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody, New York), *Threesome* (three life-size fiberglass mannequins, Libra Art Collection), *Woman with Leg Up* (two life-size fiberglass mannequins, collection of Daniella Luxembourg, Geneva), *Fellatio* (two life-size fiberglass mannequins, collection of Jan and Daniel Lewis, Miami, Florida), and *Carriage* (wood, steel, leather, Dutch wax-printed cotton textile, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, and James Cohan Gallery, New York).

5 Yinka Shonibare, "Setting the Stage," by Anthony Downey, in Kent, *Yinka Shonibare MBE*, 45.

A kind of culmination of Shonibare's work on this topic was reached with the "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" (1998), a photo series with five chromogenic prints. Funded, curated, and produced by the Institute of International Visual Arts in London and shortlisted for the Citibank Photography Prize in 1999, the work belongs to a group of photo works that include his earlier series "Dorian Gray" (2001) as well as later ones such as "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" (2008), "Fake Death Pictures" (2011), the "William Morris Family Album" (2014–15), and "La Méduse" (2015). These photographic series are bound together by the artist's interest in restaging historical paintings and figures from the Age of Enlightenment to modern times.<sup>6</sup> Throughout these photo series, selected historical figures are redressed with postcolonial costume designs that are made from Dutch wax fabrics. An exception to this hybrid African-Victorian fashion branding of figures in historical paintings constitutes the two earlier series, "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" and "Dorian Gray." In these, Shonibare casts himself in the role of the dandy in (presumably) authentic Victorian period clothing. With this self-staging and self-fashioning as a re(tro)dressed artist, he positions himself in the postmodernist tradition of theatrical reenactments of artworks from the Western canon of art history as it was most poignantly introduced by the artist, photographer, and filmmaker Cindy Sherman in her "History Portraits" (1988–90). Shonibare's self-related and self-enacted role play with figures from art and film history challenges fixed notions of identity.<sup>7</sup> Besides gender and social identity, racial identity above all is renegotiated and remodeled in the photographic reenactment scenes. The alter-ego stagings deal with Shonibare's self-definition as a "postcultural hybrid," his ambiguous role of acting as a black African artist in the British art world and society. Owing to this autobiographical, self-reflective perspective, the contemporary postcolonial take and twist on the historical figure of the white Victorian dandy is the central anchor point for the refashioning of the role model.

"Diary of a Victorian Dandy" depicts one day in the life of a Victorian dandy while focusing on five different times and activities of the day.<sup>8</sup> Shot by a professional photographer, the series was recorded in an English stately home with the participation of actors and actresses (fig. 48). The artist played the central figure of the Victorian dandy and was also the stage director for each scene. It should be noted that Shonibare was the only black person among white performers in his reenactment piece—a deliberate decision made on his part to disrupt role expectations and racial codes.

In terms of historization, "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" is a reenactment of William Hogarth's famous series "A Rake's Progress," which was painted in 1733. Why did Shonibare decide to adopt and reenact tableaux with reference to Hogarth's "A Rake's Progress"? The reasons for this are manifold. Britishness appears to be the first decisive factor for the refashioning of Hogarth's rake story. Shonibare

decided to use an English artist whose work is prominent within the art history of Great Britain. The "Englishness" of the Hogarthian work is related to the Shonibare's intensive preoccupation with English society and history, including English values and morals—he focuses on historical subjects from the viewpoint of a pictorial satirist, social critic, and cartoonist. Using parody and satire as sites of semantic ambiguity, Hogarth and Shonibare also share similar personal interests and approaches. In expressive drasticness, Hogarth uncovered social, racial, and gender-related problems and conflicts that existed within a divided English society. He directly exposed that inequality and issues



Fig. 48  
Yinka Shonibare,  
*Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, 11 hours,  
1998

- 6 In *Dorian Gray* Shonibare reenacts the protagonist of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891); in *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* he restages the etching by Francisco Goya of the same title (1799); in *Fake Death Pictures* he stages a series of five death paintings: Édouard Manet's *The Suicide* (1877), Henry Wallis's *The Death of Chatterton* (1856), Leonardo Alenza y Nieto's *Satire of the Romantic Suicide* (1839), François-Guillaume Ménageot's *Death of Leonardo da Vinci* (in the Arms of Francis I, 1781), and Bartholomé Carducho's *Death of St. Francis* (1593); in the *William Morris Family Album*, he uses a selection of photographs from the family album of the English artist, textile designer, and social activist William Morris; and in *La Méduse*, Caravaggio's *Medusa* (1597) and Théodore Géricault's

- The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19) are revisited.
- 7 Shonibare's photo series "Dorian Gray" is primarily based on the filmic adaption of Wilde's novel.
- 8 "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" was first shown in a public space during October 1998. In a large-scale, poster format, the photos were mounted on station walls throughout the London metro as a way to reach a much larger audience. In 1999 the photo series was shown in the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham as part of a larger solo exhibition, "Yinka Shonibare: Dressing Down." The prints were presented in large gilded frames on the wall, mimicking the hanging of (history) paintings. Because of the high theatricality of the staged photographs, they looked like film stills from costume dramas.

related to differences caused by the hierarchical class system in British Georgian society—at a time when society was witnessing the birth of industrialization and consumerism, and when extreme luxury and extreme poverty coexisted. Besides social, economic, and cultural differences, racial difference is openly visualized in Hogarth's graphic and painterly work. Human figures classified as "nonwhites," and ethnically categorized by Hogarth as Africans, American Indians, and as Orientals, have their set yet marginalized place in his work because they "are essential in the establishment of an allegedly genuine and singular English identity."<sup>9</sup> Arguably, the representation of the figure of the Other in Hogarth's socio-critical art, be it the racial, cultural, or social outsider of society at large or a particular stratum of it, was an important point of reference and identification for Shonibare's reappropriation. Since the figure of the rake in Hogarth's "A Rake's Progress" embodied the power and aesthetics of difference and disruption in a particularly pronounced way, it became the ideal role model for a reenactment and reinterpretation as a black Victorian dandy performed by Shonibare. The rakes of Georgian British society are seen as the nouveau riches of the upper class.<sup>10</sup> Because of their special status in society, expressed via a fashionable and luxurious lifestyle, they can be considered as historical forerunners of the dandy. Given this kinship, Shonibare's Victorian-dandyish reappropriation of the figure of the rake is the consequence of his own ambition of refashioning and remaking himself as a fully acknowledged black British artist: "As a black man living in the UK, I find myself in a position where I am not so-called upper class; however, in Nigeria I would be considered upper class. And this got me thinking about social and class mobility in the context of the dandy. The dandy can remake himself again and again; he can do that through the image, he can remake his own image and thereafter re-create and remake himself."<sup>11</sup> Shonibare reenacted the role of Hogarth's rake through the character of the dandy, "a figure of mobility who upsets the social order of things" by constantly remodeling his own image.<sup>12</sup>

One main artistic aim of Shonibare's opulent resetting of the Hogarthian rake story lies in the ability to create fictitious re-imaginings, even reversals of the past, particularly in relation to British imperial colonial history. The self-fashioned reenactments happen through theatrical staging, which was chosen for its pronounced artificiality: "Theatricality is certainly a device in my work. It is a way of setting the stage; it is also a fiction—a hyperreal, theatrical device that enables you to reimagine events from history. There is no obligation to truth in such a setting, so you have the leeway to create fiction or to dream."<sup>13</sup> The hyperreal playfulness and artifice of the theatrical restaging serves to break the "dichotomy in art history between frivolity, fashionability, decoration, and the apparent profundity of high art."<sup>14</sup> It is the shiny master figure of the artist-dandy who embodies theatricality, artificiality, and excess. In short, he is "constructed excess, constructed fantasy."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, due to his conception as a border crosser of the real, he represents a figure of social mobility.

"Historically, the dandy is usually an outsider whose only way in is through his wit and his style. Coming from a middle-class background, the dandy aspired to aristocratic standing so as to distinguish himself from both the lower and middle class. In this sense, his frivolous lifestyle is a political gesture of sort, containing with it a form of social mobility."<sup>16</sup> For Shonibare, Oscar Wilde's protagonist in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is an example of the dandy as a figure of mobility who upsets social order. This is why Shonibare also reenacted scenes featuring Dorian Gray. What fascinates Shonibare most about the dandy is that he is "both an insider and an outsider who disrupts such distinctions."<sup>17</sup> In that sense, he is the incarnation of a transcultural member of society. He uses masquerade and disguise to appear as somebody (an acknowledged member of the upper class) who in reality he is not. The subversive reappropriation of the establishment is part of the dandy's fashion practice and strategy of performance. The idea of the artist as a trickster, which Shonibare defined his character as playing, corresponds with the idea of the dandy. In "Diary of a Victorian Dandy," the figure and role of the African artist-trickster as an intermediary between the worlds, between reality and fantasy, is combined with the figure of the black dandy. Through hybrid images, which include the cross-dressing of characters and (art) histories, Shonibare succeeds not only in refashioning the black subject in art-historical representations, but also himself as a black British artist.

### Art-Fashioning in Mary Sibande's Migrating Self-Images

The practice of imaginary self-projection and self-refashioning also plays a major role in the work of the black South African artist Mary Sibande. For her first solo exhibition, "Long Live the Dead Queen," which was shown in the Momo Gallery in Johannesburg in 2009, the artist created a quasi-fictitious alter ego figure named Sophie. Through the mannequins, whose faces are a cast of the artist's own face, Sibande exposed her personal family history in a series of installations of the life-sized figures that is accompanied by photographs. She traced the labor and social history of her female ancestors, who had all

<sup>9</sup> Peter Wagner, "Spotting the Symptoms: Hogarthian Bodies as Sites of Semantic Ambiguity," in *The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of Difference*, ed. Bernadette Fort and Angela Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 114.

<sup>12</sup> Shonibare, 47.  
<sup>13</sup> Shonibare, 46.  
<sup>14</sup> Shonibare, 44.  
<sup>15</sup> Shonibare, 32.  
<sup>16</sup> Shonibare, 47.  
<sup>17</sup> Shonibare, 47.

<sup>10</sup> For more information about the definition and depiction of rakes in the eighteenth century, see Mark Hallett, "Manly Satire: William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*," in Fort and Rosenthal, *Other Hogarth*, 145–47.

<sup>11</sup> Shonibare, "Setting the Stage," 47.

worked as servants for wealthy white and black families, all the way back to her great-grandmother.<sup>18</sup> The artist is the first in her female genealogy to have broken with this servile, family tradition. Transposed in the art world, the oppressed and degraded servant figure of Sophie is represented as a superheroine of imperial-power fantasies, for example, as a Victorian queen, as an empress on horseback, as a general leading her army to victory, as a female pope blessing her congregation, and as a music conductor. The alter-ego stagings draw on Western representations of the colonial/imperial image of the—usually white and male—ruler to disrupt expectations through postcolonial and feminist refashioning. Using aesthetics of image migration, the refashioning articulates processes of becoming as transitional experiences of border crossing. The reworking serves to symbolize the social mobility and advancement of individual people in the transition phase from the Apartheid regime to the post-Apartheid society in South Africa. The concept triad of race-class-gender is (set) on the move. In the design of traveling fashion,<sup>19</sup> which liquefies fixed identities and causes memories of personal and political histories to wander to new locations of material-aesthetic representation, the migration of the before-mentioned concepts are manifested.

In Sophie's clothing, two contrasting styles are combined: the maid's uniform with the courtly fashion of aristocracy, and clothing worn by servants with those worn by an empress. As a basis for dress designs, Sibande chooses the uniform of domestic workers. The indigo-blue, *shweshwe* cotton fabrics from which the artist tailors the dresses for the models is a cheap material traditionally used for worker uniforms and mass-produced outfits.<sup>20</sup> An additional aspect is that in South African Zionist church groups—religious movements known for mixing Christian elements with African ancestral beliefs—it is common for female members to wear dresses made from starched blue fabric that resemble servant uniforms. For Sibande, the color blue symbolizes servility, submissiveness, and slavery. However, in an act of self-empowerment, the maid's uniform is transformed into an aristocratic and imperial costume of the Victorian era. The design of the maid-servant's apron is elongated and enlarged; the sleeves and skirts are puffed out. Frills and petticoats alter the limitations of the housemaid's uniform. Hems and trains imply bodily expansions of power and ensure that the mannequin dominates the space. By means of fluffing and boosting, the housemaid, Sophie, celebrates her visible presence as ruler. The figure of the servant whose traditional task is to work within the domestic and private space is unobtrusively transformed into a public person through the hybridization of the dress design. In the fashionable masquerade of the queen, Sophie gains the power to represent the whole nation with her black body. During the Joburg Art City project of 2010, Sibande's representations of Sophie from the series "Long Live the Dead Queen" were transferred into the urban public space. Positioned between murals and advertising posters, they were placed on empty walls on residential buildings

throughout the city. The translation of refashioned self-portraits of the artist into public space stresses the artist's pronounced interest in creating a new politics of visibility: the repressed visibility, by which the colonial past and its repercussions in post-Apartheid South Africa are meant, should be made public. The urban strategy follows the maxim of *inside out*: the interior is turned into the exterior, the domestic and domesticated are shifted to the public sphere of the *res publica* as *agoras* of (feminist) political debate, the inner self is disclosed to the outside world. The semiotic transcoding of clothing from servile to noble social status is a strategy to force the viewer to rethink social norms and past histories.

Sophie reveals the desire to escape the dichotomy between servant and ruler, slave and master. The representation of Sophie as an imperial authority from the epoch of European colonialism in the garb of a servant, presents a double articulation of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theorization. In Sophie's mimicry, in which mimesis and alienation coincide, the ambivalence of the colonial discourse is manifested; the imitation of the Other with foreignizing elements of one's own identity. Mimicry is performative since it always involves new negotiations of the mirror(ed) object and the identity of the person who is reflected. The effect of mimicry can be considered postcolonial insofar as it can help to transcode existing norms and hierarchies under protective camouflage.

The postcolonial refashioning of Sibande's alter-ego models for the purpose of revalorizing her own colonial family history on a personal level, and the history of black women on a more general level, is an increasingly ambivalent project. During the design excess of featuring oneself as a historically and socially distinct persona and authority, the imagination turns into monstrosity. The closed eyes of Sophie indicate that the figure is in a state of dreaming, that she undertakes an imaginary journey into a fictive world where the unimaginable and unreal can come true—as, for instance, the coronation of one's own person. In 2013 Sibande stopped fashioning Sophie in blue cloth. She redressed her as an empress figure clad in purple, and staged her in new spatial arrangements. The excess in (fashion) fantasies associated with deliberation and empowerment starts to colonize the body in the design process. Like myriad

<sup>18</sup> She appears under the fictive name of Sophie-Elsie; the artist's grandmother figures under the name of Sophie-Merica; her mother under Sophie-Velucia; and Mary Sibande herself under the pseudonym Sophie-Ntombikayise.

<sup>19</sup> Leslie W. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> This same fabric was refashioned by the contemporary fashion brand Ethnix, thereby manifesting the postcolonial commodification of uniforms and dresses historically worn by colonized and suppressed people.

tentacles, the imaginary grows powerfully out of the body; it entwines the figure like a rhizome, and encapsulates the persona of the queen who is slave to her own boundless fantasies. In this image of entanglement, the self-enmeshing nature and self-absorbing danger of the postcolonial refashioning of colonial-historical identities is uncovered in its full scope. Subversive appropriation of the empowering fashion practice of "dressing-up" turns into the exact opposite: the loss of autonomy and control over one's own body, mind, and imagination. This experience illustrates the paradox of the postcolonial imaginary. According to postcolonial media theoretician Niti Sampat-Patel, the strategy of mimicry as double articulation "both enables power and signals a loss of agency by simultaneously stabilizing and destabilizing the position of power."<sup>21</sup>

### The Fashion Art of Black Dandyism: Self-Fashioning as a Practice of Postcolonial Rebellion

The works discussed above, Shonibare's "Diary of a Victorian Dandy" and Sibande's mannequin installation and photo series "Long Live the Dead Queen," share the goal of challenging and subverting the history, discourse, and claim of fashion as a Western paradigm of colonial subordination, embodiment, and sociocultural othering. Both artists make use of reenactments as a practice of re-othering, which is to be understood as *reversed othering*. Reclothed in African fabric, fashion from the Victorian and Edwardian era in England was chosen to refer to the peak of imperial colonial history and is reappropriated by black models—in particular the figure of the black artist (or family members, as in the case of Sibande). Figures and icons of British colonial and South African Apartheid history are reenacted and refashioned through self-embodied role as a way to reverse traditional societal roles. The essentializing and racializing positioning of white and black figures is disrupted by hybrid expressions of fashion mimicry. The historically colonized and socially marginalized are set on stage to imitate their colonizers and masters: royals and other noble figures of the European white elite are played by black figures to powerfully highlight the history of colonization and segregation, suppression and exploitation. Shonibare adopts the role model of the Victorian dandy, and Sibande refashions herself in dominant roles, such as the role of the queen or the pope. Identity is presented in its constructed and spectacularized form.

Ironic self-fashioning as a dandy can be ascertained for both Shonibare and Sibande, independent of the gender of their alter-ego figures of representation. The dandy-artist embodies social mobility and a life of luxury. This aspect is particularly relevant for contemporary black artists in the global art world

who wish to include a critical, transcultural perspective on the stereotype of poor Africa and the still predominant tendency among art critics and art historians of primitivizing and ethnicizing African art. The figure of the dandy has always been closely connected to social displacement and transcultural migration, and is therefore a suitable model for migrant and outsider artists to identify with.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of black dandyism, the figure of the dandy has become a diasporic cultural icon. In her 2009 study *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*, Monica L. Miller points out that the tradition of black dandyism begins with the displacement of the slave trade. Dandyism was initially imposed on black servant-slaves in eighteenth-century England to enact a civilizing mission and make them fashionable for their new lives in aristocratic society. The dandified servants started refashioning their uniforms and they were soon known for their sartorial novelty. Hybridity in fashion culture was a result of this refashioning process. With regard to black (slave) history, the black dandy can be defined "as a self-fashioned gentleman who intentionally co-opts and then complicates classical European fashion with an African diasporan aesthetic and sensibilities."<sup>23</sup>

Shonibare and Sibande draw upon this transcultural fashion history as an exercise of decolonizing political power. In their fashion reenactments of the figure of the black dandy, they appropriate and cultivate auratic images of superiority. Traditionally, the role of the dandy is identified with masculinity. From a critical postcolonial perspective, this gendered form of appearance and sexual practice of dandyism needs to be revised. If the dandy is defined as a figure of rebellion against false notions of social order, racial homogeneity, and cultural superiority, Sibande presents—mediated by her Sophie figure—the perfect incorporation of the black dandy since she "follows [...] in the footsteps of the male dandy rather than a female one, which most theorists define as those who dress as men, or appropriate male elements into their attire."<sup>24</sup> Precisely by appropriating male dandyism, she is able to refashion and empower the role of black women in South African post-Apartheid society. For fashion and gender theorist Jeremy Kaye, the twenty-first-century recodification of the Victorian dandy is connected with metrosexuality. This points "towards the breakdown of discreet boundaries, towards the continuity and

<sup>21</sup> Niti Sampat-Patel, *Postcolonial Masquerades: Culture and Politics in Literature, Film, Video and Photography* (New York: Garland, 2001), xviii.

<sup>22</sup> Outsider art refers to creative expressions that exist outside accepted cultural norms and the main(stream) art market.

<sup>23</sup> Shantrelle P. Lewis, "Fashioning Black Masculinity: The Origins of the Dandy Lion Project," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 37 (2015): 55.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Corrigal, "Sartorial Excess in Mary Sibande's 'Sophie,'" *Critical Arts Projects & Unisa Press* 29, no. 2 (2015): 153.

fluidity of sex and gender roles. It denaturalizes gender categories, exposes them as social constructs, and perhaps even gestures toward the dissolution of the sex/gender system.”<sup>25</sup>

The self-fashioning art of Shonibare and Sibande demonstrates the effective use of fashion commodities for social-value gain and political empowerment. Although this type of art deliberately exposes itself to the danger of commodity modification of art through fashion, it testifies as a means of relocation after displacement: dressing-up signifies upward mobility. Dandyism is the appropriate/d fashion style to express transition and transformation. As Charles Baudelaire already observed, dandyism is a *topos* of modernity appearing in phases of historical transition.<sup>26</sup> Twenty-first-century dandyism marks the significant transition from national to transnational migratory societies, from the Apartheid system to the post-Apartheid era, from colonial to postcolonial and even neo-colonial, neoliberal global culture. The fashioning of art through the self-fashioning of the artist is a particular, yet popular and effective means of representing and enacting change. The fake cult of fashion and beauty is no escape from factual realities of politics and history, but expresses a self-embodied luxury of the dandy featuring a clear postcolonial critique: “In styling himself, particularly in dress and mostly associated with a particular class, station in life, education, and social status of another race, the dandy cleverly manipulates clothing and attitude to exert agency rather than succumb to the limited ideals placed on him by society.”<sup>27</sup> For the contemporary black dandy-artist as self-styled trickster, transcultural fashion design has turned into a politicized practice of postcolonial rebellion and means of social and artistic identity empowerment.

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25 Jeremy Kaye, “Twenty-First-Century Victorian Dandy: What Metrosexuality and the Heterosexual Matrix Reveal about Victorian Men,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 42, no. 1 (2009): 109.

26 “Dandyism appears above all in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to rotten and fall.” Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1981), 28.

27 Lewis, “Fashioning Black Masculinity,” 56. To articulate the gendered doubleness of the dandy figure, I would suggest adding: “in styling herself.”

# Re-mastering the Old World

## Picture Spread from the Ikiré Jones Archive

Walé Oyéjidé Esq.

Walé Oyéjidé, Esq.

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Fig. 49  
Walé Oyéjidé, *Re-mastering the Old World*, 2016–17



Fig. 50  
Walé Oyéjidé, *Re-mastering the Old World*, 2016-17



Fig. 51  
Walé Oyéjidé, *Re-mastering the Old World*, 2016-17



Fig. 52  
Walé Oyéjidé, *Re-mastering the Old World*, 2016-17



Fig. 53  
Walé Oyéjidé, *Re-mastering the Old World*, 2016-17

Designed by fashion designer, artist, and attorney Walé Oyéjidé, Esq., the Ikiré Jones archive consists of an array of printed silk textiles that illustrate widespread myths and undiscovered postcolonial histories. Recurring motifs appear on the silk scarves or textiles in the label's fashion collections, which are modeled by sub-Saharan asylum seekers in the collection *After Migration* (Fall/Winter 2016), by African American immigrants in *Born between Borders* (Spring/Summer 2017), and by Masai men in *Twnede Rafiki* (Fall/Winter 2017). By replacing the faces of white aristocrats from historical tapestries, Oyéjidé Esq. creates newly imagined portraits of men and women from an imaginative Pan-African history and shows alternative entangled histories of European and African royalties. By re-mastering the old world on the silk textiles, Oyéjidé celebrates "the perspectives of unheralded people of color."<sup>1</sup> Utilizing decolonizing histories of migration and shared narratives of an aesthetic of the cool, the unique postcolonial archive challenges Eurocentric constructions of histories as well as those of the colonial globality. Tapestries from the Ikiré Jones design archive have been exhibited in museums across the world.

<sup>1</sup> Walé Oyéjidé Esq., "The Ikiré Jones archive," <https://ikirejones.com/archive/>.

# Textiles Designing Another History Wael Shawky's Cabaret Crusades

Gabriele Genge and Angela Stercken

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The video trilogy *Cabaret Crusades* (2010–14) by Egyptian artist Wael Shawky, which has been exhibited in numerous large museums in Europe and the United States since 2010, seems to have already become something of a classic, although the third and last part of the trilogy was made in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Shawky's work references current debates on Orientalism and on contemporary art centered on transnational history of migration and exchange.<sup>2</sup> The artist consciously positions his subject in relation to the current political and religious conflicts by shedding new light on the history of the Crusades—and thus on a virulent stage of the religious confrontations between Islam and Christianity that continues up to the present day. Orientalism has often been explored as a fashion phenomenon. The focus has been on oriental costume masquerade as part of representational politics of the West.<sup>3</sup> Currently, global exchange processes are investigated, connections between fashion, dress, and collective ethnicization in the Global South, and their use in re-nationalization processes.<sup>4</sup>

Instead, the medieval fashion that Shawky addresses has long been reduced to its symbolic use in an exclusively Christian society as a "costume," a medium of subject formation and sacralization or veiling, and as part of Western material memorial culture, especially in research on sacred paraments and the veneration of relics. The significance of fashion in Islam, on the other hand, remains largely unexplored, and an integration of both phenomena has been limited to date.<sup>5</sup> However, the word "fashion" is increasingly used to describe the border

1 The third part was realized with the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen and was also presented at the Istanbul Biennial in 2015 (in Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam).

2 Our transnational methodical approach refers to the transcultural and postcolonial aspects of entangled history and new imperial history, with special focus on the agency of moving actors in migratory contexts. Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements 1880–1930s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

3 Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism: Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

4 François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin, eds., *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and*

*Eastern Re-appropriations* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Gertrud Lehnert and Gabriele Mentges, *Fusion Fashion: Culture beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism* (Frankfurt am Main: PL Academic Research, 2013); Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, eds., *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010); and Robert Ross, *Clothing: A Global History, or, the Imperialists' New Clothes* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

5 On fashion in Islam, see Reina Lewis, *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). Looking to entangling forms of sacred textiles, see Mateusz Kapustka and Warren T. Woodfin, eds., *Clothing the Sacred: Medieval Textiles as Fabric, Form, and Metaphor* (Emsdetten: Edition Imorde, 2015); John Gillow, *Textiles of the Islamic World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010); and Avinoam Shalem, "Wie byzantinisch war der Schatz der Fatimiden?," in *Grenzgänge im östlichen Mittelmeerraum: Byzanz und die islamische Welt vom 9. bis 13. Jh.* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2008), 66–80.

between the sacred and the profane use of fabric.<sup>6</sup> Gertrud Lehnert and Gabriele Mentges most recently recognized the period of the Crusades as the starting point of Orientalism and its influence on Western fashion.<sup>7</sup>

In this essay, we will analyze Shawky's restaging of the history of the Crusades and examine how textiles and fashion become, in a completely new manner, anchor points for an "other" transcultural understanding of history. By focusing on the materials, especially his use of textiles worn by the puppets in Shawky's trilogy, we conceptualize these textiles as moving actors and signifiers of entanglements. Within this framework, we discuss how the fragmented body and its veiling gain importance as artistic forms of the sacred and reflect on its political influences in the Middle Ages.

Before *Cabaret Crusades*, Shawky had only dealt with the history of the Crusades in the video production *Telematch Crusades* (2009)—a "fake documentary" featuring children. The decisive impetus for his Crusades trilogy came from the publication *Les croisades vues par les Arabes* (1984) by the Lebanese-French novelist Amin Maalouf,<sup>8</sup> who retells sources from Arabic chronicles to provide a new Arabic perspective on the Crusades, until then almost completely neglected by Western historiography.<sup>9</sup> Shawky follows Maalouf's approach in choosing the high-Arabic language while also providing English or French subtitles.

The cinematic events in the first part of the trilogy, *The Horror Show File* (2010),<sup>10</sup> cover the four decisive years of the First Crusade and culminate in the bloody conquest of Jerusalem by the Franks on July 15, 1099—placing the events and their historical transmission in relation to the barbaric destruction indicated by the title. The second part, *The Path to Cairo* (2012),<sup>11</sup> covers the period between 1099 and 1146, which led to the Second Crusade. At the center of the events is mainly the Islamic protagonists' reaction to the destruction of the city and to the attacks of the Crusaders, but also the ensuing political strategies, power struggles, and alliances on the Muslim side, which had not yet been recorded in European historical accounts.

The third—and, for our purposes, essential part—*The Secrets of Karbalaa* (2014),<sup>12</sup> finally covers the Second (1145–1149) and Third Crusades (1189–1192). It is the time following the recapture of Jerusalem by the Muslims in the Battle of Hattin in 1187, the time of the Ramla Agreement of 1192, which reinforced the Saracen-Muslim rule over Jerusalem and guaranteed entry to the city for Christian pilgrims—and finally the disastrous Fourth Crusade that culminates in the destruction of Constantinople by the Venetians in 1204.

## *Cabaret Crusades* as Reenactment I

From a Western point of view, the history of the Crusades has—due to numerous media representations—entered the popular imagination.<sup>13</sup> The Western protagonists seem familiar to us, especially the Crusaders; however, the Saracens, the caliphs, princes, and the political and religious dignitaries in the regions in question are practically unknown to the Western public.

In Shawky's trilogy, the sources that have previously been excluded from European historiography now play an important role. We are not dealing here with their documentary use, but rather with an artistic work that reanimates a specific period in history in a very unique way. All the actors in the filmic restaging transform into marionettes dressed in specific garments. In addition to European robes and vestments of the Middle Ages, we find mostly recognizable Arab and Ottoman clothing of that time (precious caftans, turbans, *djellabas* or *thawbs*, and the Persian-Ottoman *şalvar* and *dolama*)—even when puppets dressed as Saracens change into timeless animal-human hybrid figures wearing fantastical elaborate gowns in the third part of the trilogy, which are complemented by contemporary, Medieval-like accessories and details.<sup>14</sup> This coherence is confirmed by the common language all actors are speaking—Classical Arabic,<sup>15</sup> that is, the written language used in the Koran.

6 Riello and McNeil, *Fashion History Reader*, 1–15.

7 Lehnert and Mentges, *Fusion Fashion*, 7.

8 Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* (New York: Schocken, 1984). Shawky himself points to his lecture of the book Jacques Sapiega, *Scènes de croisades: Cabaret Crusades, The Path to Cairo de Wael Shawky* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2013), 35–36; and Paul M. Cobb, *The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

9 Judith Wielander, "Making of Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show File," in *Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades*, ed. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2015), 76. Exhibition catalogue.

10 Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show Files* (2010), HD video, color, sound, 31:48 min.

11 Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Path to Cairo* (2012), HD video, color, sound, 59:04 min.

12 Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa* (2014), HD video, color, sound, 90 min.

13 *Anonymi Gesta Francorum* c. 38, 4–c. 39, I, quoted from Peter Thorau, *Die Kreuzzüge* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2012), 11–12.

14 The 2014 exhibition catalogue that accompanied his show at Kunstsammlung NRW, Düsseldorf, mentions the involvement of a Venetian hatter, who specialized in medieval-orientated fashion, as well as other cast members for the third part, manufacturing a combination of contemporary and Middle age handmade costumes and props by using Fortuny textiles. See Doris Krystof and Ansgar Lorenz, "Making-of-Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa," in *Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades*, 125. See also chapter "Textile and Identification" below.

15 Doris Krystof, "Introduction," in *Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades*, 30. "All the figures in Cabaret Crusades—even the European knights and the Pope himself—speak and sing classical Arabic."

But is Shawky's *Cabaret Crusades* a contemporary version of religious wars told exclusively from the Islamic-Arabic point of view? Is it a fantastical puppet show that maintains a distance from the historical events? Or is it simply the expression of the new trend toward "stylistic re-Orientalization"?<sup>16</sup> It seems that Shawky does not wish to revive European historiographical methods of the nineteenth century. We maintain that Shawky is practicing a specialized and highly contemporary form of historical reenactment that is sustained by the material, figures, and costumes in the puppet show and cinematic staging. The special role the textile medium and fashion play in this complex territory between historical facts and myth, between the real and the fictional, will be explored below.

The concept of reenactment, designated in the 1930s by British historian Robin George Collingwood, is currently gaining popularity.<sup>17</sup> This approach is notable for its critique of historical methods dedicated exclusively to the exposition of events and their affective logic that seem to be hardly verifiable. Collingwood describes the task of the historian in the following way: "He must always remember that the event was an action, and that this main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of his agent." The verification and examination of that act of thinking ultimately only succeeds in a specific sort of appropriation: "The history of thought and therefore all history, is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind."<sup>18</sup> The reenactment of history offers the possibility of allowing the distant past to be re-experienced in the present, primarily by means of the critical examination of documents and handed-down facts, but also with the help of a supra-temporal imaginative capability.<sup>19</sup> A multi-perspective presentation of history thus becomes as conceivable as the deconstruction of linear historical processes as they are traced up to the present in Western historiography. All evidential effects, all emotional content that could be created by historicist reanimations of history, are excluded here.

We would like to elucidate a few lines of argument from Collingwood's text as a way to understand *Cabaret Crusades* as a sophisticated and distanced reenactment. If we remain in the medieval worldview, we must, with Collingwood, grant a critical distance to those familiar political events that seemingly unfold subjective power strategies and expressions of hate and physical violence. Instead, we should imagine a history of the Crusades originating from the concept of "agency" in the context of medieval religion and politics. Understanding Shawky's puppet theater as reenactment thus means approaching the history of the Crusaders as performed by sacred historical "agents" in the entangled cultural processes of the Middle Ages. Shawky himself provides an important note about this: "In 'Cabaret Crusades' one sees historical images. The text is not a holy text. [...] I treat it instead as an orally passed-down story, while at the same working on it with a certain precision, in a sacred, devotional manner. I am not trying to change it, nor to play with it, but to treat it like a religious text."<sup>20</sup>

## The Sacred and the Profane: Time and Space of the Other

The chronology of the history of the Crusades pervades all three films of *Cabaret Crusades*. But Shawky's storyboard also supplies recourses and discontinuities, leveling spatial borders, breaking with the continuum of history, and performing the "Contemporaneity of the Uncontemporary."

Already at the beginning of the first part, *The Horror Show File*, we are introduced to Shawky's segmenting and structuring technique: here a *flashback*—a passing of date and site from left to right, in the Arabic reading direction—leads back to Constantinople in "anno Domini 541," reeling from the Justinian plague before the start of the Crusades. The retrospective perspective supplies a causal relationship between the continuous weakening of the Byzantine Empire and the subsequent Crusades. The distanced treatment of time and space becomes evident in the opening sequences of the third part, *The Secrets of Karbalaa* (fig. 54a): reminiscent of the rete of an astrolabe, the disc of a concentric calendar,<sup>21</sup> or the contrary spinning motion of a roulette wheel, the revolving stage becomes a symbol of the everlasting "wheels of history." Rotating in opposite directions, these wheels seem strangely artificial against the background of a North African mountain landscape. A chess game of history, a cabaret or variety show seems to be starting, which is accompanied by one of the few ambient musical loops. The film pulls the spectator into thrilling forms of historical imagination, periodizations, and worldviews even before the title of the film appears. History gains its weight by both astronomical and cartographical models, such as the underlying perpetual calendar from the Catalan Atlas of Abraham Cresques from 1375 (see figs. 54a, c), and also by

<sup>16</sup> Pouillon and Vatin, eds., *After Orientalism*; and Ross, *Clothing*.

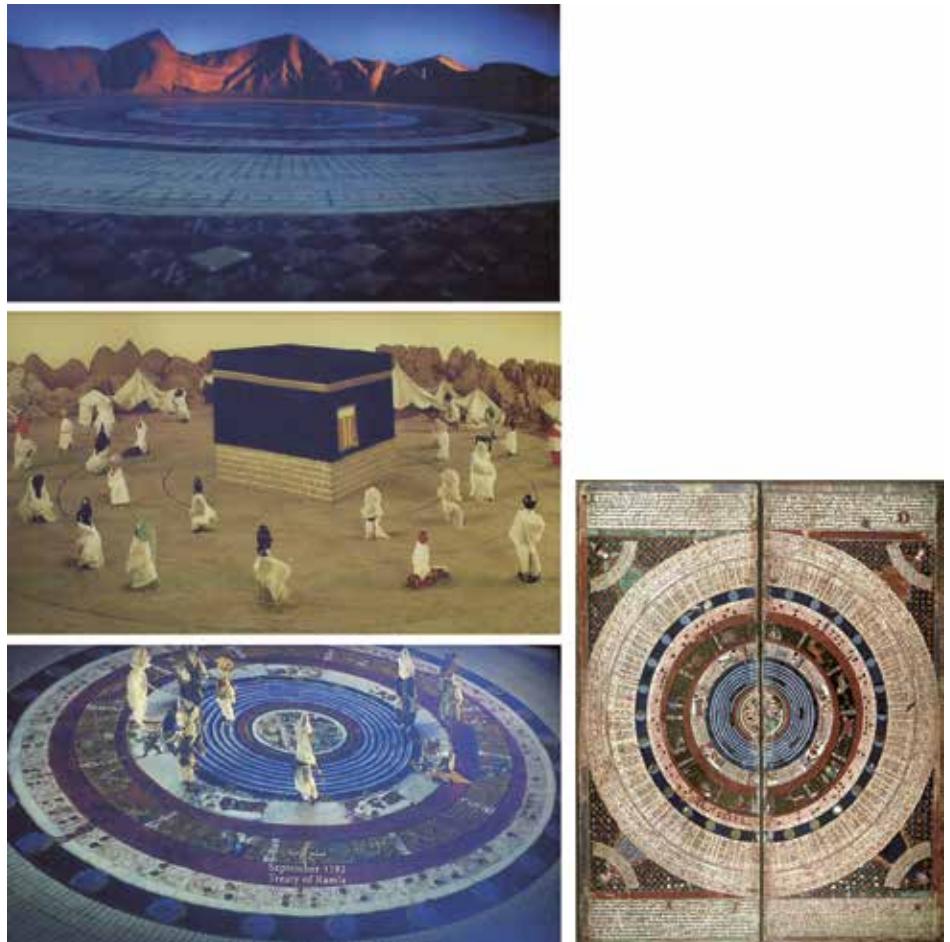
<sup>17</sup> Maria Muhle, "History Will Repeat Itself: Für eine (Medien-)Philosophie des Reenactment," in *Körper des Denkens: Neue Positionen der Medienphilosophie*, ed. Lorenz Engell, Frank Hartmann, and Christine Voss (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013), 121–22.

<sup>18</sup> Robin George Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 213, 215.

<sup>19</sup> Collingwood, 245; and Muhle, "History Will Repeat Itself," 124–25.

<sup>20</sup> Wael Shawky, *Zeitgenössische Künstler: Arabische Welt*, by Sarah Rifky, ed. Johannes Odenthal, Sarah Rifky and Stefan Winkler (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 116.

<sup>21</sup> With the astronomically based calendar and astrolabe, the latter of which arrived in Europe due to Islamic scholars in the Middle Ages and spread there, Shawky refers here as elsewhere in equal measure to differing models of the world order and their religious significance, as well as generally to the medieval transfer of knowledge from East to West. Cf., among others, Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *Die Geschichte der Stunde: Uhren und moderne Zeitordnungen* (Munich: dtv, 1995), 77–81; Ludolf von Mackensen, "Der islamische Mondkalender," in *Die Geburt der Zeit: Eine Geschichte der Bilder und Begriffe* ed. Staatliche Museen Kassel (Kassel: Staatliche Museen, 1999), 115. Exhibition catalogue.



Figs. 54 a-d  
Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbala*, 2014, film stills

playful, imponderable elements.<sup>22</sup> The film quite evidently has neither a beginning nor end, is “reversible,” and is thus influenced by sacred notions of time.<sup>23</sup> The motif of the stage continues in the following scene and intensifies especially in one aspect: next, we are not transported to the time of the Crusades, but instead all the way back to the Kaaba in Mecca—in the religious center of Islam—in the year 681 (fig. 54b): white-garbed glass puppets circle counterclockwise around this visually striking religious site in concentric movements. From Mecca, Shawky guides us back even further to Kufa in the year 680, and finally to the preceding Battle of Karbala, which took place on October 10 of the same year and resulted in the division between Sunnis and

Shiites that still persists to this day. The retracing of the history and conflicts in the region and time in question is performed by a step-by-step turning back of a cyclical-calendrical gear train. During the backward rotation, events in Islamic religious history are uncovered and, throughout the entire third part of the trilogy, repeatedly connected with the events of the Crusades—as becomes clear, for example, in the Scene of the 1192 Ramla Agreement (fig. 54c). The camera takes repeatedly create a considerable distance from the historical events: important sites for the Crusades, crucial changes of scenery, and historically verified meetings and debates are shown in both *wide shot* and *medium long shot*; the times, sites, and historical protagonists are characterized by names and specifications in legends, which are slowly fading in and out, creating an emblematic constellation for several seconds.

In the trilogy, Shawky excludes the religious-political background of the Crusades; that is, the Western perspective—namely, the conquering of those places that were to provide the first access to divine revelation in the form of sacred materials and relics. The aforementioned perpetual calendar, as a rotating stage, underlays the astronomical and Islam-related sacred spatiotemporal concept of the *Cabaret Crusades*. However, the sacred maps of Christian provenience remain hidden even though they were meant to justify the Crusades to the West. With the First Crusade, the city of Jerusalem came into focus as a sacred and political place: the territorial conquest of the city newly made accessible the crucifix relic that was previously located in Byzantium. A piece of the cross was supposedly found shortly after the crusaders entered Jerusalem<sup>24</sup>—the so-called True Cross relic—and immediately justified the status of the city as the political and sacred center of Christianity. Similarly the *Ebstorfer Weltkarte* (Ebstorf Map) (fig. 55) may be seen as the visible expression of this interweaving of sacred and political space.

Christian maps from the High Middle Ages show the significance of relics and of the concept of sacred and (profane) political space during that period. Recent research primarily refers to Mircea Eliade’s phenomenological approach to describe such “sacralization processes,” which not only include profane spaces, but also objects and materials, and which are generally identifiable as

<sup>22</sup> However, Shawky has obviously changed some details for the interpolated rotating stage scenes in the final part of the trilogy; for example, the now partially cut out calendar ring or the now missing explanations of the zodiac signs in the central zone. See Clayton J. Drees, ed., *The Late Medieval Age of Crisis and Renewal, 1300–1500: A Biographical*

*Dictionary* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 119.

<sup>23</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane: Vom Wesen des Religiösen*, trans. Eva Moldenhauer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 63.

<sup>24</sup> Gia Toussaint, *Kreuz und Knochen: Reliquien zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin: Reimer, 2011).



Fig. 55  
Ebstorf Map, ca. 1290, reconstruction



Fig. 56  
World map from the Apocalypse commentary by Beatus von Liébana, 1086

practices of ritual demarcation.<sup>25</sup> Early world maps—like those found in *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1086) by Beatus von Liébana (fig. 56)—indicate sites of pilgrimage with sacred relics, which can be viewed as places of sacralization.<sup>26</sup> The veneration of relics reaches a particular high point in the Christian cult with the First and Fourth Crusades, which constitute the beginning and end of Shawky's trilogy.<sup>27</sup>

The topologies of the sacred at the routes of pilgrims and crusaders were of great influence on those events staged in Shawky's play, and they become implicitly visible in terms of the described astronomical mechanical system. However, they also refer to an Islamic history of knowledge and religion, which superimposes the historical events. The science of astronomy provided the preconditions of the pioneering development of Arabic optical and visual culture, influenced primarily by the writings of Alhazen,<sup>28</sup> which likely affected the ritual practices of venerating the relics, as is further explained below.

### Marionettes as Constructions—Textiles as Agents

Shawky's use of marionettes as agents of history was a far-reaching artistic decision: the popular cultural technique of puppet and marionette shows has, since its reception in Europe at the start of the nineteenth century, lost its status as a "lifelike" medium of performance and enchantment.<sup>29</sup> Instead, it gained favor in modernity for being involved with pure artifice. The "cinematic" treatment of a stage play and puppet show with marionettes reinforces

the awareness in the audience that they are experiencing a fictional event. It seems as if Shawky, who sees the marionettes as "actors without a dramaturgical memory,"<sup>30</sup> has developed further since his previous work for children (*Telematch Crusades*), and is here seeking to literally implement Collingwood's plea for a distanced view of history.

While the first part of the trilogy features historical wooden marionettes of the eighteenth century in new medieval clothing, which emphasizes the Saracen ethnic and physiognomic aspects,<sup>31</sup> in the second part, in contrast, Shawky uses handmade clay figures that are wearing selected manufactured Hermès textiles.<sup>32</sup> The marionettes were made from generic materials with sometimes grotesque physiognomies, but with *The Secrets of Karbalaa* the conception of the figures changes significantly again:<sup>33</sup> now there are discernable glass marionette figures, which were produced in Murano in accordance with Shawky's designed adaptations of African masks and sculptures.<sup>34</sup>

Shawky used literary inspirations for their design and, according to Doris Krystof, draws on a novel by José Saramago, which is based on the Christian salvation history, by making glass figures into symbols for the fragility of the human body.<sup>35</sup> They are all—regardless of their position or origin in the depicted historical events—hybrid creatures, between human and animal,

25 Klaus Herbers, "Pilgerfahrten und die Sakralisierung von Wegen und Orten," in *Heilige – Liturgie – Raum*, ed. Dieter R. Bauer et al. (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2010), 219–35. See also Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane*.

26 See Ingrid Baumgärtner, "Die Welt im kartographischen Blick: Zur Veränderbarkeit mittelalterlicher Weltkarten am Beispiel der Beatustradition vom 10. bis 13. Jahrhundert," in *Der weite Blick des Historikers*, ed. Wilfried Ebbrecht (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2002), 527–49. Thanks to Martina Stercken for this information.

27 Toussaint, *Kreuz und Knochen*, 49–50.

28 Abū 'Alī al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham (around 965, Basra—after 1040, Cairo).

29 See Malda Denana, *Ästhetik des Tanzes: Zur Anthropologie des tanzenden Körpers* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 49–50.

30 Wael Shawky in conversation with Sarah Rifky, 118.

31 Shawky obtains these from the Lupi Collection in Turin. See Lisa Morse, "The Saracen of Opera die Pupi: A Study of Race, Representation and Identity," in *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and*

*Material Performance*, ed. Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell (London: Routledge, 2014), 144–53.

32 Sapiega points to Shawky's decision that the figure's costumes, already in the second part, should follow the medieval iconography. At the same time, however, costumes and synthetic materials that are "too modern" should be avoided in order not to be dismissed as merely "off the peg." See Jacques Sapiega, "Shaping a View of History: Seeing through the Eyes of the Other: The Making of the Path to Cairo," in *Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades*, 101.

33 Doris Krystof understandably sees an increasingly artificial process of abstraction over the course of the three parts. Krystof, "Introduction," 37.

34 Doris Krystof and Ansgar Lorenz, "Making-of-Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa," in *Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades*, 127.

35 In the interview, Shawky reveals the inspiration of Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (originally published as *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*, 1991). See Krystof, "Introduction," 37.

with rather explicit references to animistic hybrid forms, emanating ambivalent abstract and artificial effects. Their appearance as actors in the historical events is ambivalent: seemingly they incorporate their roles, but at the same time, they strangely evade the setting due to their alien, animated character: "The puppets help create a surreal and mythical atmosphere that blends drama and cynicism, telling a story of remote events that could hardly be more topical today," Shawky explains in the PS1 (MoMA) exhibition.<sup>36</sup>

In fact, the marionettes in *The Secrets of Karbalaa* debate, dance, sing, and fight like human beings. The hybrid creatures are bizarre but not unrealistic, especially in the dialogue scenes in which their actions and gestures are brought closer to us but in *slow motion*. But it is in the third part of the trilogy that the dark moments of war and destruction, barbarism and cannibalism also reveal a distanced view of the events, because the fragile glass puppets forbid emphatic reactions. While the often brutal sides of the filmed history are highly charged because of effective lighting and camera direction, the figures, whose heads and limbs mainly are visible under their clothing, remain strangely mechanical and object-like. Human emotions are also excluded because of the puppets' stoic faces and clumsy movements, just like their artificiality is constantly revealed by the visibility of the marionette strings. Shawky continues: "The puppets' strings clearly refer to the idea of control. The work also implies a criticism of the way history has been written and manipulated."<sup>37</sup>

Apparently the artificial, extremely controllable marionettes cause a certain loss of physical "agency" in Shawky's play, which is also due to the transparency of the glass. It is the textile medium that emphatically assumes the role of making visible the transgressions of the sacred and the profane. Two different concepts of the textile are discernible. First, the textile assumes the representational function of clothing and role performing, which can be equally confirmed in the Islamic and the Christian cultural tradition.<sup>38</sup> Second, we find the aspect of anthropomorphic animation by textile, which is manifested in the indexical interaction of bodies, bodily remains, and textile coverings: in the practices that venerate relics, sacred material fragments are given form and powerful presence through the animating effects of visual and tactile contact with the textile.<sup>39</sup> Similar concepts are present in the Islamic textile rites, as can be observed in the anthropomorphizing of the *kiswa*, the green silk material that covers the Kaaba.<sup>40</sup> Both aspects are challenged by Shawky's work and provide the decisive clues for the transcultural readability of the textiles as mediums of representation and revelation, assuming a related form of visualization of the sacred in both cultural traditions.

## Textile and Identification

The real protagonists of the third part of *Cabaret Crusades* are found, however, in the materials, in the combination of glass and textiles, clothing and fashion that construct the identification and personal attribution, using a wide range of references. Observing the meticulously designed costumes of the figures in detail, one first notices their nuanced use of the textile medium: all are made of fine handmade materials, which Shawky commissioned from the Venetian manufacturer Fortuny;<sup>41</sup> the individualized costumes of the glass puppets obtain their effect through completely different, specifically called contexts of material and meaning—an unusual form of transcultural shifting. Shawky consciously interweaves both cultural contexts by historicizing clothing materials and contemporary fashionable pieces of clothing.



Figs. 57 a-f  
Wael Shawky, Glass figures from *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa*, 2014

This becomes recognizable when, for example, the transparent lace used on the dress and headdress of the figure of Eleanor of Aquitaine (fig. 57a) reveals brown Muranese glass underneath it to call attention to the history of Venetian textiles and materials. With the corresponding figure of the French king Louis VII (fig. 57b), who wears a brocade vest over an embroidered linen shirt, in contrast, the dress codes of the European medieval royal houses are also

<sup>36</sup> Wael Shawky, cited in the press text for "Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades" at MoMA PS1, January 31–September 7, 2015, <http://momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/394>.

<sup>37</sup> Shawky.

<sup>38</sup> Kapustka and Woodfin, *Clothing the Sacred*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Toussaint, *Kreuz und Knochen*, 36–37.

<sup>40</sup> Avinoam Shalem, "The Body of Architecture: The Early History of the Clothing of the Sacred House of the Ka'ba in Mecca," in Kapustka and Woodfin, *Clothing the Sacred*, 173–88.

<sup>41</sup> Krystof and Lorenz, "Making-of Cabaret Crusades," 125.

brought into play. At the same time, the brocade tradition of Islamic origin is called by sacral anthropomorphizing contexts, which found its most prominent expression in the already mentioned embroidered plaid of the Kaaba.<sup>42</sup> In addition to, and partly forfeited with the textiles, also other materials are used: thus, the strangely elephantine, anthropomorphic glass figure of the Hohenstaufen king Conrad III (fig. 57c) displays an artful combination of metallic, armor elements with chain mail silver wire threads that form a new textile structure. Despite comparable composite elements at the marionette figures, the representatives of the Islamic side are characterized by almost exclusively light, albeit no less elaborate textile costumes. This becomes obvious in the clothing of the characters Muzalfat ad-Din Kawkaboori, the Fatimid caliph Al Adid li-Din Allah, or even Yusuf (Salah ad-Din), and many others: here, artfully knitted silk gauze, openwork crochet lace, but also ornamental borders, fur applications and accessories are used exclusively on flowing linen, tulle and silk fabrics (figs. 57d-f).



Fig. 58  
Textile relics, 9th/10th century, Church Community Bad Gandersheim

Shawky's artistic shifting of profane or sacred agency in his textile agents shows performative forms comparable to the understanding of the textile in the time of the Crusades. Recent research gives information about the functions of textiles in the context of profane and sacred strategies of assuming territorial and dynastic power (fig. 58). As mentioned, the conquest of Jerusalem brings into the possession of the Crusaders the most important Christian relic, the True Cross, that, as a sacred artifact and privileged relic of the rulers, was previously only accessible in Europe via Constantinople.<sup>43</sup> The Essen Cathedral Treasury vault contains two processional crosses, which the Ottonic abbesses Mathilde (949–1011) and Theophanu (997–1058) commissioned as visible proof of their connection to Jerusalem as the sacred place of the Passion of Christ. The crosses almost always contained crux gemmata reliquies, which were covered



Figs. 59 a + b  
Silk textiles (a) and textile relic cover (b), 10th to 11th century, Cathedral Treasury of Essen

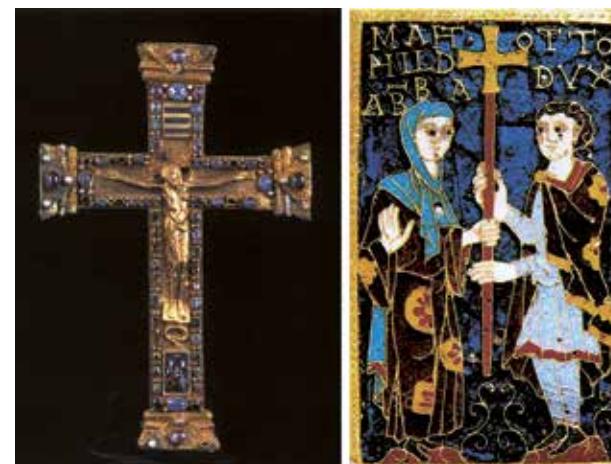


Fig. 60  
Cross of Otto and Mathilde, or:  
Cross of Abbess Mathilde,  
before 982, Cathedral Treasury  
of Essen

in precious silk fabrics imported from Byzantium and hidden inside the crosses. The Essen Cathedral Chapter disposes of a stock of small-sized, precious Byzantine silk textiles, the use of which as relic covers (fig. 59) was likely directly subject to the abbesses.<sup>44</sup> At the older Cross of Mathilde (985–990) in the Essen Cathedral Treasury chamber (fig. 60), the abbess can be discerned underneath the relief depiction of the crucifixion in a donor portrait made from enamel cast. The ornament on her clothing is similar to one of the

42 Shalem, "Body of Architecture."

43 Toussaint, *Kreuz und Knochen*, 30–31.

44 Annemarie Stauffer, "Seide aus dem Frauenstift Essen: Befunde, Herkunft, Kontexte," in *Seide im Früh- und*

*Hochmittelalterlichen Frauenstift: Besitz – Bedeutung – Umnutzung*, ed. Thomas Schilp and Annemarie Stauffer (Essen: Klartext, 2013), 125–26.

mentioned silk textiles, which were also used to cover crucifix reliques. Interestingly, the cross does not contain any relics.<sup>45</sup> Mathilde firmly grips the shaft of a similar processional cross. It seems that by "touching" she would be able to animate a bodily presence replacing the cover and, as such, the relic not present in the *crux gemmata*. But her costume also represents a surprising provocation. The expensive material and style of her dress do not correspond to the usual, modest abbess garb, in particular connected here to her denomination as "Mathilda Abba." Instead, it is cut like a profane outfit according to the "fashion" of the time, in the manner of a royal robe.<sup>46</sup> Above all, however, it is the references to the True Cross that furthermore evoke profane rule and



Fig. 61  
Theophano Cross, 1039–58,  
Cathedral Treasury of Essen

sacredness at the same time: the *crux gemmata* probably has been used in a specific Easter liturgy that concretely enacted the reference and the territorial claim to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> The fabric of Mathilde's dress portrayed in enamel undergoes a multiple significance which addresses the political and sacred rule over Jerusalem, even if the crucifix reliques are still in the possession of Byzantium at this point in time.

### Visuality and Transgression, or: Glass, Textile, and Costume as Actors

Close to the time of the first Crusades, however, there was a completely unusual and new way to exhibit the True Cross, which also brings the material of glass into play. Whereas the pieces of the cross were initially covered in precious fabric and hidden inside the reliquaries, now the complete visibility of these

material remains become a crucial factor in the veneration practice: the relic should now manifest its healing power under crystal glass on a visible, stretched piece of fabric. The crystal replaces the precious, untrimmed materials that are in contact with the reliques and are still kept in church treasure chambers today.<sup>48</sup>

The earliest known example of this relic uncovering is the Theophano Cross (1038–58) in Essen (fig. 61).<sup>49</sup> Here the cross reliques—tiny formless fragments on red silk fabric under a quartz crystal—visibly represent the body of the crucified. The red-patterned textile advances to the abstract pictorial ground and symbol of its place of origin, Jerusalem, that is, the Passion of Christ. This cross is evidence of the influence of Arabic visualization concepts, the spread of which may also have contributed to new ritual requirements regarding the visibility of reliques in the Christian cult. The "turn toward the visibility of the Particle of the Cross" can likely be attributed to the aforementioned influences of the Arabic theory of seeing. Thus, the previously mentioned scholar Alhazen became famous due to his empirical investigations into visual perception that profiled the human eye as a light-receiving organ.<sup>50</sup>

The Islamic-Christian concepts and the importance of the visual are equally applicable to textile material and to crystal or glass. The urge for visibility guarantees increased attention and significance to both materials, above all in processes of sacralization, which seemingly influenced the political events of the crusade and may have even triggered them. They provide crucial indications of a "thinking," which also raises Shawky's cabaret above the usual historical interpretations. The portrayal of the previously mentioned figure of Al Adid li-Din Allah, who was the last Fatimid caliph, in the last part of the trilogy (fig. 57e)—effectively staged as the unveiling and revealing of the glass marionette head—also suggests forms of ritual visioning, which were transmitted by Islamic sources. It is not only here that the importance of the close relationship of textiles and costumes to the object-like, mechanical-seeming glass figures is confirmed. Furthermore, the integration in Shawky's concept also provides direct references to those specific "archaic" rituals of the Christian veneration of reliques.<sup>51</sup> Here the Christian veneration of the remains that

45 Toussaint, *Kreuz und Knochen*, 89, 303.

46 Thomas Schlip, "Kleidung aus Seide in Frauengemeinschaften?," in *Seide im Früh- und Hochmittelalterlichen Frauenstift*, 59.

47 Klaus Gereon Beuckers, "Liturgische Ensembles in hochmittelalterlichen Kirchenschätzen: Bemerkungen anhand der Essener Osterliturgie und ihrer Schatzstücke," in ... das Heilige sichtbar machen – Domschätze in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft, ed. Ulrike

Wendland (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2010), 90–91.

48 Annemarie Stauffer, "Seide aus Byzanz im Westen," in *Seide im Früh- und Hochmittelalterlichen Frauenstift*, 26–27.

49 See Kurtze, *Durchsichtig oder durchlässig*, 138–39.

50 These investigations are extensively mentioned by Toussaint, *Kreuz und Knochen*, 92; and Kurtze, *Durchsichtig oder durchlässig*, 63–64.

51 Toussaint, 25–26.

are visible under glass seems now as strange as the human-animal hybrids developed by Shawky from African fetishistic references, especially as we know that both animistic practices coalesced numerous times in the early modern period.<sup>52</sup>

The relevance of the Crusades to Shawky's marionette theater is demonstrated first and foremost by the fact that the costumed marionettes—understood as material agents or reliques—are shown as the real protagonists of the historical cultural entanglement. This becomes particularly visible in the representation of the marionette figures in Knights Templars and crusaders (fig. 62), who are shown before and after the Battle of Hattin, the biggest military defeat of the crusaders: the transparent-glass figures, again rotating on the stage of history, are comparable to expensively covered crystals. The constellation of transparent, milky, and black glass, metallic cloths, and furs furthermore exposes a single, completely crystalline figure that is staged as a solitary precious stone without textile cover. At the end of the scene, however, Shawky shows the amorphous, blood-soaked piles of transparent bodies of Christians, defeated in the battle by Salah ad-Din; the crusaders appear like reliques enveloped in cloth.

### Conclusion: Cabaret Crusades as Reenactment II

In Shawky's stage play narrative concepts are clearly recognizable and thus illuminate historical events of the Crusades from a different perspective. This applies not only to the integration of Muslim actors, however. Rather, all the puppets are directed by another power, which reveals itself as the influence of the sacred. Its mobile agents—sacred materials such as crystal, glass, and textile—write even today in Western church treasure vaults the history of the Crusades, which tells of complex interactions, violent appropriations, and processes of exchange. Shawky's glass marionettes as material agents are comparable to the reliques. Indeed, they seem to take on and transfer their form and function. In their animistic or sacred appearance—as animal-human hybrids who recite the Classical Arabic of the Koran in festive garments and in their externally evoked artificial movement—the sumptuously dressed glass marionettes also activate the borders between the sacred and the profane.

It could be argued that with Shawky the reenvisioning of the material agents glass and textile by no means simply signifies the reenactment of a historically distant and, for us today, barely comprehensible historical event. The *Cabaret Crusades* resolves the contradiction between Christianity and Islam by making effects of sacralization visible as a common framework for these historical events. The textile medium, which has long been examined through Western standard iconographical methods only, provides important points of departure for recent transcultural methods in picture theory, revealing a violence that

had been for a long time concealed in the ecclesiastical treasures of the West. At last, resuming the advantages of Shawky's entangled vision of history, we are enabled to discern the transcultural agency of the sacred in Christian and Islamic cultural traditions. And moreover we may overcome the unilateral view being performed up to the present by Orientalism and even its critique.



Fig. 62  
Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa*, 2014,  
filmstills from the "Battle of Hattin" scene

<sup>52</sup> See Gabriele Genge and Angela Stercken, eds., "Being Abroad—An Introduction," in *Art History and Fetishism Abroad: Global Shiftings in Media and Methods* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 11–26.

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# Traveling Fashion Exoticism and Tropicalism

Alexandra Karentzos

Alexandra Karentzos

Fashion imagines the tropics as flamboyantly colored, wild, and lush nature, an exotic holiday paradise that makes use of exotic clichés. In this essay I will take a closer look at tropicalism and exoticism in fashion and art in Brazil to show how closely entwined they are with one another,<sup>1</sup> and will discuss how global, transcultural circulations of fashion lead to deconstruction and new contextualizations. To take this into account, James Clifford's concept of "traveling culture,"<sup>2</sup> which describes culture as an interplay of complex, dynamic processes and practices, embedded in an economy of signs, objects, and spaces, is a starting point from which I will consider fashion as "traveling fashion."

## Tropicality—Forms of Exoticism

From the outset, the idea of the tropics was considered to be a cultural construct.<sup>3</sup> Analogous to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, "tropicality" is described by David Arnold in *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze* (2005) as the conceptualization and representation of the tropics in the Western imagination and experience.<sup>4</sup> Like Orientalism, tropicality is part of a discourse of power that is closely interwoven with the history of colonialism. Mary Louise Pratt describes Alexander von Humboldt, who established the concept of the tropics, as an imperial traveler who mystified South America in his writings and saw it as having a "primal nature."<sup>5</sup> The human is made small compared to the dramatic, wild, and gigantic spectacle of nature.<sup>6</sup> This "reinvention of América" is bound up with systems of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> In *Kosmos – Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* (1845–62), Humboldt creates colorful scenes of the tropics as "an exotic nature of overwhelming size,"<sup>8</sup> and "a painting of nature."<sup>9</sup> The act of perceiving nature is described as an aesthetic pleasure:

<sup>1</sup> This essay is a revised version of "Wilde Mode: Exotismus und Tropicalismus," in *Wilde Dinge in Kunst und Design: Aspekte der Alterität seit 1800*, ed. Gerald Schröder and Christina Threuter (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Alfons Hug, "Die Tropen: Ansichten von der Mitte der Weltkugel," in *Die Tropen: Ansichten von der Mitte der Weltkugel*, ed. Alfons Hug, Peter Junge, and Viola König, exh. cat. Martin-Gropius-Bau (Berlin: Kerber Verlag, 2008), 14.

<sup>4</sup> David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape and*

*Science, 1800–1856* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); Hanna Büdenbender, "Wow, That's So Postcard! De-/Konstruktionen des kolonialen touristischen Blicks auf die Tropen in der zeitgenössischen Fotografie" (PhD diss., Technische Universität Darmstadt, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 123.

<sup>6</sup> Pratt, 118.

<sup>7</sup> Pratt, 109–40.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, *Kosmos: Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* (1845–1862), ed. Ottmar Ette, Oliver Lubrich (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2004), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Humboldt, 38.

"And what colors, the birds, the fish, even the crabs (sky blue and gold)! [...] I will be very happy here and that these impressions will often brighten me in the future."<sup>10</sup> Humboldt associated the tropics, intermeshed with animal and plant life, with intense and rich colors: from multicolored birds like parrots and hummingbirds to brightly colored flowers and fruits.

In his *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity* (2002), Victor Segalen identifies four main types of exoticism: 1) A geographical exoticism in which the geographical location is marked as "outside," indicated by the prefix "exo"; 2) A temporal exoticism that draws its power mainly from an idealized past and is geared toward the future; 3) An exoticism of the "human races"; and 4) A sexual exoticism that emphasizes the fundamental differences between genders.<sup>11</sup> The widespread image of Brazil plays with these registers. As Maria Claudia Bonadio has shown, this image of the tropics "as providing the space for a natural paradise"<sup>12</sup> was so potent that it was adopted even in Brazil and reflected on in a critical, ironic way in the art of the 1920s; however, as the nationalist politics of the Estado Novo (New State) took hold during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s, the view shifted—the exoticized image of Brazil was praised and promoted enthusiastically:<sup>13</sup> in this way, the notions associated with the tropics became part of Brazil's own national identity.<sup>14</sup>

## Cultural Anthropophagy

The concept of "cultural anthropophagy," which emerged in Brazil in the 1920s, is a potentially fruitful focus to reflect on colonialist power relations. Ideas of cannibalism and anthropophagy (the eating of human flesh) were employed in the colonialist undertaking to highlight the savage inhumanity of other cultures that were labeled "primitive."<sup>15</sup> Brazilian artists appropriated this theme, once used to legitimize colonial strategies of power, by metaphorically turning the idea of anthropophagy on its head. Thus, in his 1928 "Manifesto Antropófago," the writer Oswald de Andrade called for European influences to be devoured as a way of transforming them into an autonomous Brazilian identity.

A vision of a monstrous being with a distorted anatomy appears in the first edition of de Andrade's manifesto: Tarsila do Amaral's drawing of a cannibal, *Abaporú* (which means "man who eats" in the Tupí-Guaraní language).<sup>16</sup> Do Amaral described the subject as "a solitary, monstrous figure, with immense feet sitting on a green plain, one bent arm resting on its knee, the hand supporting the tiny featherweight head. In the foreground, a cactus bursting into an absurd flower."<sup>17</sup> While the clichés firmly attached to the tropical mentioned by do Amaral, at the same time, the hyperbolic monster makes nonsense of them. In the 1960s, the Tropicália movement adopted and recast this form of

cannibalism, giving it an ironic and anti-essentialist twist. It is revealing to relate this de-ontologizing conception to the theoretical constructs of cultural studies and constructivism prevalent today.

## The "Brazilian Look"—Self-Exoticization

Throughout the 1950s, fashion in Brazil was focused on what was happening in Europe: women looked mainly toward the fashion scene in Paris, while men wore more English-style clothing. This orientation is clearly discernible in the magazines of the time.<sup>18</sup> Samba singer and Hollywood film star Carmen Miranda had already begun to develop a "Brazilian style" in the 1940s, a style that synthesized exotic clichés, drawing on fruits and dazzling colors, and so reflected the "tourist gaze." As John Urry has elaborated, the tourist gaze entails subjecting cultural signs to the dictates of economic processes and commodification—national "characteristics" are marketed. Miranda is, so to speak, "tropicalized" herself. Tropicalization describes "the complex visual systems" through which Brazil was "imaged for tourist consumption and the social and political implications of these representations on actual physical space [...] and their inhabitants."<sup>19</sup> Brazilian culture, fashion, and music were entwined in the figure of Miranda. Highly stylized and richly orchestrated sambas in Rio de Janeiro that emerged in samba schools in working-class neighborhoods and favelas were adapted by white performers such as Miranda and Francisco Alves.<sup>20</sup> Miranda's exaggerated style of wearing big fruit hats

<sup>10</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, "An Wilhelm von Humboldt," in *Briefe aus Amerika, 1799–1804*, ed. Ulrike Moheit (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 42. See also Alfons Hug, "Farben der Tropen I," *Kunstforum International* 195 (2009): 52–53; and Viola König, "Farben der Tropen II," *Kunstforum International* 195 (2009): 54–59. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>11</sup> Victor Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). See also Maria Claudia Bonadio, "Brazilian Fashion and the 'Exotic,'" *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 59.

<sup>12</sup> Bonadio, "Brazilian Fashion and the 'Exotic,'" 60.

<sup>13</sup> Bonadio, 60.

<sup>14</sup> Bonadio, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Staden, *Brasilien: die wahrhaftige Historie der wilden, nackten, grimmigen Menschenfresser-Leute, 1548–1550*, ed. Gustav Faber (Stuttgart: Tübingen, Edition Erdmann Verlag, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Abaporú," last modified January 12, 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Abaporu>.

<sup>17</sup> Tarsila do Amaral, "Pau Brasil Painting and Antropofagia" (1939), in *Brasil: 1920–1950, da antropofagia a Brasília*, ed. Jorge Schwartz, exh. cat. Museu de Arte Brasileira (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Bonadio, "Brazilian Fashion and the 'Exotic,'" 61.

<sup>19</sup> Krista A. Thompson applies the term "tropicalization" to the Caribbean Islands in her book *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2006), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counter-culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 24–28.

became iconic, and through music and fashion she synthesized and transformed Afro-Brazilian popular culture. Thus, "she symbolically embodied the image of a 'mestiço' Brazil."<sup>21</sup>

Maria Claudia Bonadio, who has traced and analyzed the history of Brazilian fashion, emphasizes that the view of fashion in Brazil shifted in the 1950s.<sup>22</sup> Fashion is closely tied to art: the founding of the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) in 1947 brought with it a different perspective on fashion. The Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi, who moved to Brazil in 1946 and was internationally associated, created with her husband Pietro Maria Bardi the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea do Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (IAC), which included a design school, and staged various fashion shows between 1951 and 1953. The museum regarded "the arena of fashion as a truly artistic domain."<sup>23</sup> The theme of the first fashion show was about traditional and modern costumes. The 1953 show presented creations by Christian Dior and concluded with an outfit by Salvador Dalí, in collaboration with Dior, which was called the "costume for the year 2045." The outfit is now part of the museum's collection.

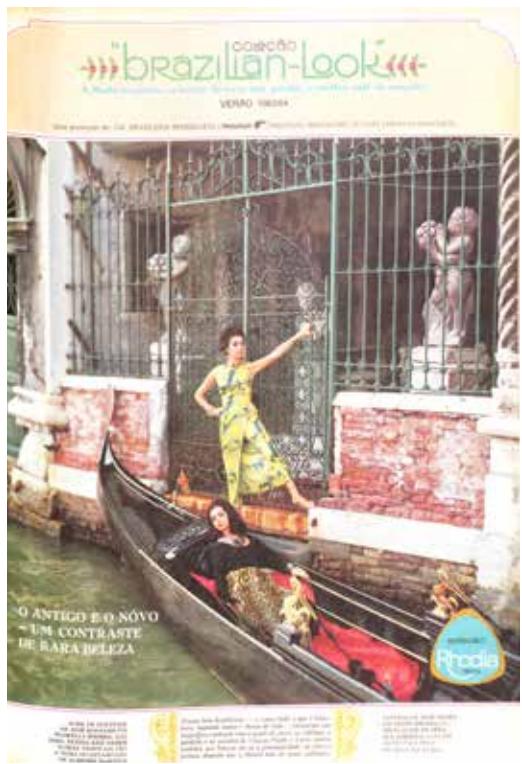


Fig. 63  
Aldemir Martins, "Brazilian Look,"  
collection for Rhodia, 1963

Bonadio shows that the question of what is Brazilian fashion becomes important, especially with the presentation of the *Coleção Moda Brasileira*, which took place in 1952 at the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea, as well as the establishment of the journal *Habitat*, also cofounded by Bo Bardi and Pietro Maria Bardi.<sup>24</sup> In a special issue devoted to fashion, the originality of Brazilian fashion is characterized as residing in how it appropriates handicrafts, which is also an important feature of Bo Bardi's own architectural and textile works.<sup>25</sup>

The French company Rhodia, a manufacturer of polyester and textile fibers, turned its attention to the brilliant visual world of the tropics by commissioning Brazilian artists to design fashion collections in the 1960s. The resulting collections were given names like "Café Collection," "Brazilian Primitive," "Brazilian Style," and "Brazilian Look."<sup>26</sup> In this campaign, imagery from air travel-associated, 1960s modernity is referenced. This is similar to Emilio Pucci's much-celebrated outfits that he designed for Braniff International Airways staff, in which colorful designs for female flight attendants included plastic "space bubble helmets."<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the "Brazilian Look" photo series published in the weekly magazine *Manchete* (1963) presented models dressed as Panair stewardesses at the airport, only to land directly in a gondola in Venice on page two of the tourist trip (fig. 63). The imagery of the advertising campaign conveys a Brazilian modernism, and at the same time the text describes the fabrics as authentically Brazilian. For instance, the article emphasized colors and forms that make Brazil seem more authentic and described the fur of a skirt as being from "a real jaguar from Bahia," once more directing focus to the "wild savagery" of nature.<sup>28</sup> In general, the construction of authenticity based on Western standards was supposed to raise the value of objects, a mechanism underlined by both Arjun Appadurai and James Clifford.<sup>29</sup> But constructions of authenticity

21 Marshall C. Eakin, *Becoming Brazilian: Race and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 111. See Dunn, 28.

22 Bonadio, "Brazilian Fashion and the 'Exotic,'" 66.

23 Bonadio, 63.

24 Bonadio, 62; Soraia Pauli Scarpa and Antonio Takao Kanamaru, "O Design Têxtil e de Moda no MASP: Entre os anos 1950 e 1953," 12º Colóquio de Moda—9ª Edição Internacional: 3º Congresso de Iniciação Científica em Design e Moda 2016, <http://www.coloquiomoda.com.br/anais/Coloquio%20de%20moda%20-%202016/COMUNICACAO-ORAL/CO-03-Cultura/CO-03-ODesignTextiledeModaNoMASP.pdf>.

25 "A Moda no Brasil," in *Habitat: Revista das Artes no Brasil* 7 (April–June 1952).

26 Bonadio, "Brazilian Fashion and the 'Exotic,'" 66.

27 Prudence Black, "Lines of Flight: The Female Flight Attendant Uniform," *Fashion Theory* 17, no. 2 (2013): 179–95. Thanks to Elke Gaugele for this reference.

28 "O Grande Desfile Brazilian Look," *Manchete* 595 (1963): 44.

29 See Arjun Appadurai, "Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 56–57; and Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 215, 228.

become extremely complex in the context of Brazil: clothing served as evidence for ethnic-coded apparel, but at the same time mirror the promises of a modern lifestyle evoked in 1960s by international fashion.<sup>30</sup> This ambivalence between "ethnic dress"—with connotations of unchanging primitiveness and tradition—and fashion, which stands for constant change and thus the dynamism of modernism,<sup>31</sup> is moreover manifest in the very travel destination chosen for the "Brazilian Look" campaign, Italy, which has been a prominent fashion location since the 1950s. The dresses themselves therefore appear as transcultural references that undermine fixed cultural boundaries. In the campaign, the yellow dress, with its large floral patterns, is reminiscent of a Chinese *cheongsam*, a long dress that is itself transcultural—the figure-hugging dress was not developed until the 1920s in Shanghai, the "Paris of the East." The figures, clothes, and objects are thus embedded in a complex field of historical, cultural, and economic references.

The recourse to authenticity and naturalness culminates in the Rhodia collection "Brazilian Primitive" from 1965, featuring exotic birds, feathers, and elements of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé. The dress on the left is printed with a bird motif by the artist Izabel Pons; on the right we see Candomblé-inspired motifs by Aldemir Martins. Covered in feathers, it recalls indigenous cult objects. The title of the collection establishes a connection between Brazilian fashion and primitiveness, thus expressing a clichéd view of exoticism. The colorful tropical bird feathers extend the exotic to the urban women who are wearing them. Primitiveness alludes to a primal state of humanity, and represents a new beginning, just like modern art is supposed to herald a new beginning. Primitivism is felt to be unconventional, for it represents a pre-rhetorical, irrational cultural stage. It is equated with the modern "starting point," a motif already circulating in the eighteenth century.<sup>32</sup>

### Tropicália: Anthropophagic Concepts between Art and Fashion

The Tropicália movement in 1960s and '70s Brazil utilizes the expressions of this imagination and its various stereotyping, rupturing their seeming coherency by literally cannibalizing them.<sup>33</sup> Tropicália embraced fields of art, music, theater, film, and fashion with notions of Brazilian identity, highlighting the difference between cliché and "authenticity." It refers back to Oswald de Andrade's provocative manifesto and its propagation of a cannibalistic appropriation of cultural influences in terms of a hybrid Brazilian identity.

Some of the artists who designed fabrics for Rhodia, including Hermelindo Fiamighi, were also active in Brazilian Concretista (Concrete art), which was

internationally connected with other constructivist artists, such as Max Bill. At the end of the 1950s, the Neoconcretists broke away to form a new movement, their members including Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, who were cofounders of Tropicália. In 1968 Rhodia incorporated the movement directly into its own marketing concept by publishing an article on the style of the Tropicália movement in the magazine *Jóia* entitled "O Tropicalismo é nosso ou Yes, nós



Fig. 64  
Tomoshige Kusuno, dresses for the Rhodia collection, 1968

<sup>30</sup> For more information on this modernist recourse to textile handicrafts and indigenous fashion is given in Miriam Oesterreich's ongoing postdoctoral research project that looks at art in Mexico since the 1920s. See Miriam Oesterreich, "Die anachronistische Moderne – Zu internationalen Verflechtungen mexikanischer Avantgarden (1920–50)" (Technische Universität Darmstadt, since 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Leslie W. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Alexandra Karentzos, *Kunstgöttinnen: Mythische Weiblichkeit zwischen Historismus und Secessionen* (Marburg: Jonas, 2005), 23.

<sup>33</sup> Alexandra Karentzos, "Incorporations of the Other—Exotic Objects, Tropicalism, and Anthropophagy," in *Art History and Fetishism Abroad: Global Shiftings in Media and Methods*, ed. Gabriele Genge and Angela Stercken (Bielefeld: transcript), 251–70.

temos banana,”<sup>34</sup> and by staging a fashion show entitled *Desfiles Rhodia Tropicália* (fig. 64).

Oiticica worked a great deal with textile fabrics and saw fashion as a mobile sculpture. His installation *Tropicália*, created for the exhibition “Nova Objetividade Brasileira” at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro in 1967 gave the Tropicalismo movement its name. The leftist group active in popular culture emerged out of resistance against Brazil’s military regime, which had seized power in 1964, and also in response of the cultural hegemony of the United States and Western Europe.<sup>35</sup> Not only were artists such as Clark or Lygia Pape part of the movement, but also musicians like Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, and the band Os Mutantes.

The title of Oiticica’s installation was used by Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso for their 1967 album *Tropicália ou Panis et Circensis*, which combined samba rhythms with electric guitar and became the theme song of the movement.<sup>36</sup> The ideas of the movement spread quickly to other fields such as theater, literature, film, and fashion and blurred the boundaries that often separated the genres: “Tropicália was an exemplary instance of cultural hybridity that dismantled binaries that maintained neat distinctions between high and low, traditional and modern, national and international cultural production.”<sup>37</sup>

In his installation, Oiticica combined “exotic” objects, such as simple wooden huts, reminiscent of Brazilian favelas, covered in colorfully printed fabrics, palm trees, sand, and real parrots. But on closer inspection the idyllic scene bursts: flowers are printed on fabrics, palm and rubber trees are planted in plastic pots, birds are in cages, and a noisy TV in the hut ruins the serenity. The exotic is shown domesticated, ready to be consumed. Through the extreme artificiality of the objects, the suggestion of a natural, pristine, and indigenous body is ironically exposed and disavowed. Oiticica contrasts the seemingly minimalistic monochrome tones of the huts with colorful prints featuring palm leaves and exotic flowers. These fabrics are associated with the “tropical” rather than with modernism. Written in one of the huts is the phrase, *A pureza é um mito* (“Pureness is a myth”)—and this is meant programmatically. The phantasm of the “pure” can allude to several things: first, it is directed against a modernist self-referential dictum immanent to art, namely, that of “pure seeing,” which is prominent in Minimalism;<sup>38</sup> second, the phrase challenges the de-contextualization of objects that occurs in gallery and museum spaces; and third, it undermines what is assumed to be culturally “authentic.” *Tropicália* was not only an expression of a constructed Brazilian culture but a rejection of European modernism as well as Minimalism, Conceptualism, and so forth.<sup>39</sup>

Postcolonial theories in particular have dealt with the fiction of cultural pureness. In the context of Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, *Tropicália* could

be read as a strategy of mimicry that appropriated the dominant classifications of the colonizers and thereby subverted them to reveal their constructions. Mimicry is a form of resistance that enables racist stereotypes to be satirized, reformulated, and transformed.<sup>40</sup> Such a theoretical concept is compatible to de Andrade’s anthropophagy—according to this the colonizer’s concepts of art are also appropriated. In his work, Oiticica explicitly refers to de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropófago.” As incorporation is conceived in terms of the act of devouring, it also implies the risk that what is consumed could end up being indigestible.



Fig. 65  
Hélio Oiticica, Nildo of Mangueira with  
Parangolé P4 Cape 1, 1968

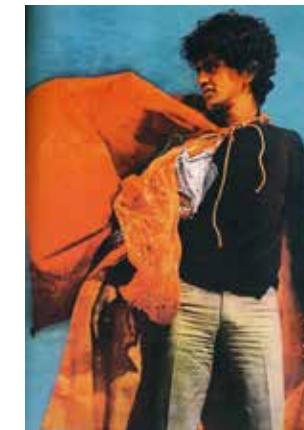


Fig. 66  
Singer and  
composer  
Caetano  
Veloso  
wearing the  
*Parangolé* P4  
Cape 1, 1968,  
Hélio Oiticica:  
P 04 *Parangolé*  
Cape 01, 1964

Different to his traversable sculpture *Tropicália* that absorbs the audience, Oiticica’s living sculptures, which he calls *Parangolés*, incorporate bodies (fig. 65).<sup>41</sup> Designed in 1965, his *Parangolés* are cape-like samba costumes made out of multicolored fabrics, plastic, and rubbish. *Parangolés* were worn by dancers from the Mangueira Samba School, for example, situated in

34 Maria Claudia Bonadio, “O fio sintético é um show! Moda, política e publicidade; Rhodia S. A. 1960–1970,” (PhD diss., Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2005), 214–28, <http://repositorio.unicamp.br/jspui/handle/REPOSIP/279891>.

35 Sabeth Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken: Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica* (Berlin: b\_books), 229.

36 Dunn, *Brutality Garden*, 8.

37 Dunn, 3.

38 Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken*, 264.

39 Buchmann, 263–64.

40 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 86–89.

41 *Parangolé* is “a slang term from Rio de Janeiro that refers to a range of events or states including idleness, a sudden agitation, an unexpected situation, or a dance party.” Anna Dezeuze, “Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics: Hélio Oiticica’s *Parangolés*,” *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004): 59.

Mangueira Hill, a Rio de Janeiro shanty town where Oiticica himself was part of the group of dancers. Furthermore, the musician Caetano Veloso also wore one of Oiticica's *Parangolés* in 1968 (fig. 66). These performances reflect not only a close entanglement between art and pop culture,<sup>42</sup> but also the political meanings associated with the *Parangolés*: used in the slum areas, they had slogans written on them like *Incorporo a revolta* (I incorporate revolt), *Estou Possuido* (I am possessed), and *Sexo e violência, é isso que me agrada* (Sex and violence, this is what I like). They were effectively turned into political banners. Through the movement of the dancers wearing them, the *Parangolés* become mobile sculptures.<sup>43</sup> Oiticica stated: "It is the incorporation of the body in the work, and the work in the body. I call it in-ception."<sup>44</sup>

When these carnivalesque bodies entered the museum in 1965, things became problematic. Oiticica presented the *Parangolés*, which were worn by dancers from Mangueira, to the public for the first time at the opening of "Opinão 65," an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro. This irruption of the poor into the bourgeois museum caused such a scandal that the director had them evicted.<sup>45</sup> The boundary between everyday culture and art, which Oiticica sought here to also shift onto the social level—and not just "quote"—disrupted in this case.

In contrast, the clothes by Rhodia could be shown in the museum, and, for example, when musicians involved in the Tropicália movement like Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, or Os Motantos performed at the fashion shows held in the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP),<sup>46</sup> while the museum collected numerous pieces of clothing by Rhodia.<sup>47</sup> In this understanding of fashion, social exclusion, popular culture, consumerism, and art go hand in hand. The trends and styles, the visual and verbal vocabulary established by the tropicalist counterculture, which fed back into the culture industries, begin to strike their own marketable pose, as described by Dick Hebdige.<sup>48</sup> In these examples, tropicalism appropriates patterns and colors encoded as being quintessentially Brazilian. This contrasts starkly to the anthropological concept of the Tropicália movement where a perceived image of Brazil and its culture was challenged and revealed to be a product of diverse and complex transcultural processes of exchange.

### Traveling Fashion: Fashion in Exchange Processes

In conclusion, traveling fashion is as a theoretical model that effectively conceptualizes the tensions described above. Drawing on James Clifford's idea of traveling culture, the concept of traveling fashion places fashion in the context of mobility and processuality of cultural practices, while it also critically considers the localizing strategies that underly the construction and repre-

sentation of cultures.<sup>49</sup> Fixations of culture operating, for instance with ethnic ascriptions and constructions of the "native," prove to be unstable—they are, as it were, set in motion and become blurred. According to Clifford, the point is "not simply to invert the strategies of cultural localization."<sup>50</sup> He does not deny that "there are no locales or homes, that everyone is—or should be—traveling, or cosmopolitan, or deterritorialized," but rather argues that we should "rethink cultures as sites of dwelling and travel" and to examine concrete histories, tactics, and everyday practices in this area of tension.<sup>51</sup> He writes: "The notion of 'travel' cannot possibly cover all the different displacements and interactions [...]. Yet it has brought me into these borderlands. I hang on to 'travel' as a term of cultural comparison precisely because of its historical taintedness, its associations with gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, documents, and the like."<sup>52</sup>

Clifford underlines the ambivalences of travel with reference to Claude Lévi-Strauss's travelogue *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) where, on the one hand, travel is conceptualized as "transience, superficiality, tourism, exile, and rootlessness" and, on the other, as "exploration, research, escape, transforming encounter."<sup>53</sup> *Tristes Tropiques* as an aesthetic-literary place of the travelogue formulates context-specific "truths," which are (co)constructed by processes of writing.<sup>54</sup> Clifford emphasizes that clothing is an element "in a taxonomy of observation

42 Dunn, *Brutality Garden*, 149.

43 Hélio Oiticica, "Notes on the Parangolé 1965," in *Hélio Oiticica*, ed. Guy Brett (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1992). Generally on the parangolés, see Anna Schober, "Hélio Oiticica's Parangolés: Body-Events, Participation in the Anti-Doxa of the Avant-Garde and Struggling Free From It," *theory@buffalo*, special issue, *Politics and Doxa* 9 (2004): 75–101.

44 Hélio Oiticica, in HO (film by Ivan Cardoso Brasil, 1979), 4:11 min. The film presents original footage of Oiticica and his collaborators manipulating works including the *Parangolés*, showing how he intended them to be worn and displayed, see <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/ho>.

45 Dezeuze, "Tactile Dematerialization," 65.

46 In June 1968 Rhodia S. A., Shell, Ford, and Willy supported the cultural festival *Momento 68* that featured performances by Caetano Veloso, Eliana Pitman, and Gilberto Gil. The parade toured various cities in Brazil, see Maria Claudia Bonadio, "Brazilian Fashion and the 'Exotic,'" 68.

47 These were presented in 2015–16 in the large exhibition "Arte na Moda: Coleção MASP Rhodia" in the MASP.

48 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), 93–95.

49 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 19; Alexandra Karentzos, "Traveling Fashion: Transkulturalität und Globalisierung/ Traveling Fashion: Transculturality and Globalization," *Querformat* 6 (2013): 10–18; and Rabine, *Global Circulation of African Fashion*.

50 Clifford, *Routes*, 105.

51 Clifford, 105.

52 Clifford, 39.

53 Clifford, 31.

54 Rainer Winter, "Ethnographie, Interpretation und Kritik: Aspekte der Methodologie der Cultural Studies," in *Die Werkzeugkiste der Cultural Studies: Perspektiven, Anschlüsse und Interventionen*, ed. Udo Göttsche, Lothar Mikos, and Rainer Winter (Bielefeld: transcript, 2001), 44.

made by scientific travelers, components of an emerging cultural explanation.<sup>55</sup> In particular, the concept of travel marks how the spatial aspects of fashion are closely interlinked with social distinctions of gender, ethnicity, class, privilege, and so forth, and puts forward the idea that boundaries should ultimately be thought of as open and displaceable. Zones of contact can occur through travel. Consequently, the focus of this approach is on the deconstructions and new contextualizations that arise from the transcultural circulation of fashion, that still remain a research desideratum.<sup>56</sup> By reading tropicalism through the prism of Clifford's concept, it turns out that tropicalism is not "typically Brazilian" or indeed "proto"—it is a product of an exchange processes, where fashion itself contributes to its construction. In the concept of traveling fashion, the disparate and contradictory positions on what should be seen as "tropical" or "Brazilian" do not dissolve; rather, these tropicalisms with their appeals and quotations, prove to be part of a fashion staging. The attempt to capture them in something Brazilian is ironically and critically reflected in the Tropicália movement in particular.

Drawing on Leslie W. Rabine's study on African fashion, "the meaning of the term [the authentic] becomes slippery indeed, especially when it travels across cultures, political structures and economic domains."<sup>57</sup> Fashion travels through different zones of meaning, shifting between stereotypes, colonial discourses, localizations, authentication strategies, and ironic refractions, all of which come together to create an entangled history of fashion.

55 Clifford, *Routes*, 73.

56 Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, and Carla Jones, eds., *Re-orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Rabine, *Global Circulation of African Fashion*; Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark, eds., *The Fabric*

of Cultures: *Fashion, Identity, and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2009); and Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward, eds., *The Global Denim* (Oxford: Berg, 2011).

57 Rabine, *Global Circulation of African Fashion*, 13.

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# The Production of African Wax Cloth in a Neoliberal Global Market

## Vlisco and the Processes of Imitation and Appropriation

Christine Delhaye

Christine Delhaye

In this essay,<sup>1</sup> I explore the various dimensions and the multi-directedness of appropriation and (re)appropriation that have been established through time and space by the Dutch company Vlisco.<sup>2</sup> The company, founded in 1846 in a small town in the south of the Netherlands, has been producing "African" wax prints for West and Central African markets for over a century. Wax print is the product of a long and complex history of economic and cultural cross-continental entanglements, and is an example of a complex process of cultural appropriation.

Cultural appropriation has occurred ever since the earliest histories of economic, religious, and/or military encounters. Yet in recent years these practices have sparked heated debates as they have become explicitly related to the exploitation of minority groups by dominant groups in the context of historically established structures of inequality. Cultural appropriation came into the spotlight in the 1990s when highlighted by the Advisory Committee for Racial Equality to the Canada Council administration. It sparked an intense national debate that was conducted in the Canadian public sphere.<sup>3</sup>

Ever since, the debate has spread only more globally and appropriation practices have increasingly caught academic attention. Within these debates, this essay aims to explore the various dimensions and the multi-directedness of the appropriative practices that have been enacted by Vlisco. From the 1990s onward, new Chinese players emerged on the African textile market pushing Vlisco to the margin. To survive the harsh competition, Vlisco decided to re-position itself into the high-end segment of the textile market. Of central concern in this essay is what the transformation of the company means in terms of practices of appropriation.

### Defining the Concept of Cultural Appropriation

In the book *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (1997), the editors Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao explore the issue of cultural appropriation by defining it as "the taking—from a culture that is not one's own—of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Rhoda Woets, the editors of this book, Monica Titton and Elke Gaugelé, and the anonymous peer-reviewer for comments on an earlier version of this essay. Special thanks to Vlisco (figs. 67, 68, 70), Helen Elands and ABC, Hyde (fig. 69) for the use of images.

<sup>2</sup> Denise N. Green and Susan B. Kaiser, eds., "Introduction: Fashion and Appropriation,"

special issue, *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2017): 145–49.

<sup>3</sup> Rosemary J. Coombe, "The Properties of Culture and the Possession of Identity: Postcolonial Struggle and the Legal Imagination," in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, ed. Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 74.

knowledge.<sup>4</sup> As uneven power relations are key to appropriation, the development of a framework within which the differential power and thus differential access to resources takes center stage is the focus of the book. Such a framework unveils the misrecognitions behind the justificatory declarations about freedom of imagination and the universality of human expression uttered by those who are unfavorable toward accusations about cultural appropriation from minority or colonized groups.<sup>5</sup> I support Ziff and Rao and with the many scholars who—in their footsteps—are trying to establish a framework that offers tools to colonized communities and indigenous people to enable them to contest the misuse of culture. However, the editors Denise Nicole Green and Susan B. Kaiser of *Fashion and Cultural Appropriation* (2017) also draw on the call by fashion scholar Minh-Ha T. Pham to conduct the debate in a quite different way. Pham rightly cautioned that there is a danger of reducing it to unproductive binaries such as the capitalist West and the so-called Third World.<sup>6</sup> According to Pham, such an approach blocks us from radically challenging “the ideas of the absolute power and authority of the West to control how the world sees, knows, and talks about fashion.”<sup>7</sup>

To fully explore the concept of cultural appropriation in the context of Vlisco’s history, the morally neutral interpretation of the concept by the philosopher James O. Young who defined cultural appropriation as “any use of something developed in one cultural context by someone who belongs to another culture” might be a more productive one to consider.<sup>8</sup> It remains of central importance to our understanding of appropriative practices to carefully analyze the power relations within which “uses” take place. Yet the advantage of Young’s approach is that power relations are not fixed in advance with the help of limited categories, but become the subject of empirical research. Admittedly, like Ziff and Rao, Young could be criticized for his essentialist take on culture because his definition suggests clear boundaries between one culture and the other. Indeed, academics may rightly be skeptical about essentialist approaches. The lawyer and anthropologist Rosemary J. Coombe nonetheless warns that abstract and universalizing criticisms of essentialism often appear as a threat to oppressed people whose identity, language, and culture have been denied. Drawing on the pragmatic stance of bell hooks, Coombe instead sees a recourse on “identity and culture” as a necessary means to position oneself in a political practice, rather than embracing it as a project of cultural essentialism.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, it has been argued that the discussion of cultural appropriation has been frequently narrowed down to its ethical and political aspects.<sup>10</sup> Without having the inclination to downplay these dimensions, other dimensions, such as aesthetic, religious, and affective as well as identity politics, are important aspects of circuits of appropriation that merit attention. The aim of this article is, namely, to explore the various dimensions and the multi-directedness of the circuit of appropriation and (re)appropriation that have

been enacted by the Dutch textile company Vlisco. Of central concern in this analysis is the question of what the radically modifying dynamics of contemporary capitalism mean in terms of Vlisco’s appropriative practices.

## Vlisco’s History and Dutch Colonialism

Having its roots in colonial trade and commercial networks, linking Asia, Europe, and Africa, cultural appropriation has always been and still is at the heart of Vlisco’s practice. Since the end of the sixteenth century, Dutch merchants regularly engaged in trade within Southeast Asia. In West Africa private traders as well as chartered companies, such as the Dutch West Indian Company (founded in 1621) and the British Royal African Company (founded in 1672), exchanged imported textiles for enslaved people who were then shipped to North America or the Caribbean. To reduce costs and be able to conquer (Portuguese and British) competitors, the States General (the governing body in the Netherlands) initiated and helped finance the formation of the Dutch East India Company, or VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie), in 1602—it has often been defined as the first global multinational company. This company was granted exclusive rights by the Dutch government to engage in trade with Asia. As the company was also empowered to make treaties, acquire land, build forts, and produce its own coins, the foundations for a further process of colonization were laid.<sup>11</sup> Indian fabrics were exchanged within intra-Asian trade and were imported to Europe, where some were sold

- 4 Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, eds., “Introduction to Cultural Appropriation: A Framework for Analysis,” in *Borrowed Power*, 1. This is the first part definition of the Writers’ Union of Canada that was approved in June 1992. The union’s definition continues: “And profiting at the expense of the people of that culture.” Ziff and Rao omitted the last part of the union’s definition as they are convinced that appropriation can occur in the absence of profit taking (see 24n1).
- 5 Denise Cuthbert, “Beg, Borrow or Steal: The Politics of Cultural Appropriation,” *Postcolonial Studies* 1 (1998): 258; and Ziff and Rao, “Introduction to Cultural Appropriation,” 5.
- 6 Green and Kaiser, “Introduction: Fashion and Appropriation,” 146.
- 7 Minh-Ha T. Pham, “Fashion’s Cultural-Appropriation Debate: Pointless,” *Atlantic*, May 15, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/05/cultural-appropriation-in-fashion-stop-talking-about-it/370826/>.
- 8 James O. Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 5.
- 9 Coombe, “Properties of Culture,” 86–89.
- 10 Pham, “Fashion’s Cultural-Appropriation Debate.” See also Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*.
- 11 Douglas A. Irwin, “Mercantilism as Strategic Trade Policy: The Anglo-Dutch Rivalry for the East Indian Trade,” *Journal of Political Economy* 99, no. 6 (1991): 1296–1314. See also Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, “Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago Around 1900 and the Imperialism Debate,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25, no. 1 (1994): 94–95. Only in 1866 did Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) formally become a colony of the Netherlands.

on the European market itself, and others were distributed to Western Africa and the Americas.<sup>12</sup>

Originating from India and China, batik cloth entered the Indonesian market around the thirteenth century where the batik technique was further developed and became a highly valued craft. Batik garments were mainly worn by the Indonesian upper classes and by the Javanese community on festive occasions only.<sup>13</sup> As Indonesia was perceived as an important sales market, several Dutch, British, and Swiss entrepreneurs set out to industrialize the labor-intensive manual batik process to introduce the wax cloth back into the Indonesian market at a much cheaper price. Jean Baptiste Theodore Prévinaire, who founded a cotton company in Haarlem in 1835, was the first to successfully develop a special printing machine. His successor trademarked the tool in 1854.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the 1860s, European import sales dropped considerably because the machine-printed cottons did not suit the taste of the Indonesian consumers and the local Indonesian industries regained market shares.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, many European manufacturers stopped producing imitation wax. The only company that continued and gradually improved the production of wax was Prévinaire's company, which was renamed Haarlemse Katoen Maatschappij (Haarlem cotton company) in 1875.<sup>16</sup> Given that the Indonesian market was no longer promising, the company had to explore new markets. With the help of a fellow Scottish trading agent Ebenezer Brown Fleming, the wax cloth was introduced on the Gold Coast on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, which had by then become a British colony.<sup>17</sup> The import of Dutch wax print in the 1880s went rather smoothly as the textile market and consumer demand had already been firmly established on the West Africa Coast and earlier imported printed cottons had become perceived as mundane.<sup>18</sup> Trying to adapt to the West African consumer taste, the production of wax cloth entered a new phase of various forms of appropriation. The first imported wax textiles were presumably still based on Javanese designs. Very soon the Haarlem designers incorporated patterns that—they hoped—would match the Gold Coast aesthetics. Attempts to reconstruct the process of adaptation suggest that the engravers—positioned at a “spatial and cultural distance”—had drawn on a diverse and eclectic visual repertoire including Indonesian and ancient Egyptian visual sources, West African proverbs, the Dutch countryside, Dutch art nouveau, and African primitivism, as well as designs that had been used before by the Manchester manufacturers who produced for the West African market.<sup>19</sup> In some cases, European textile producers were also copying patterns directly from African cloth.<sup>20</sup> Later on, ethnographic museums also became important spaces for Dutch designers.<sup>21</sup> And last but not least, missionaries, local merchants, and traders working on the spot contributed to the success of the Haarlem cotton company as they provided feedback to the company on samples that were sent ahead to test their market potential.<sup>22</sup> Feedback was of vital impor-

tance as a good sense of the complexity and fashionability of consumer demand by the producers was blocked by the prevailing nineteenth-century racialized stereotypical visions on the “primitiveness” of African taste and aesthetics.<sup>23</sup>

The local market women, “mammies” as they were called, played a crucial role in integrating the newly imported products into local consumption structures and practices.<sup>24</sup> Since the late nineteenth century, the women were key mediators, dominating the local-distribution networks of European textiles. Linking the coast with the hinterland, the women provided the markets with goods and operated simultaneously as marketing agents and as local tastemakers. They also named the fabrics, which added value and allowed the cloths to be more easily incorporated into local consumer practices.<sup>25</sup>

In line with Western corporate practices, Brown Fleming had registered the popular designs of the Haarlem cotton company from 1895 onward.<sup>26</sup> The consequence of trademarking designs is that Indonesian and African aesthetics and craft, which were all part of a collective culture, became defined as the

12 Chris Nierstrasz, *Rivalry for Trade in Tea and Textiles: The English and Dutch East India Companies (1700–1800)* (Houndsills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 9–12.

13 W. T. Kroese, *The Origin of the Wax Block Prints on the Coast of West Africa* (Hengelo: NV Uitgeverij Smit, 1976), 9–10; Tunde M. Akinwumi, “The ‘African Print’ Hoax: Machine Produced Textiles Jeopardize African Print Authenticity,” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 5 (2008): 181; Ellinoor Bergvelt, “Batik as an Example of Cultural Crossovers—Dutch East-Indies/Indonesia—the Netherlands—West-Africa (ca. 1840–1950)” (lecture, Wolfsonian-FIU Tenth Anniversary Workshop, Miami Beach, December 9, 2005), 4.

14 Helen Elands, “Dutch Wax Classics: The Designs Introduced by Ebenezer Brown Fleming 1890–1912 and Their Legacy,” in *African-Print Fashion Now! A Story of Taste, Globalization and Style* (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCL, 2017), 53.

15 Willem Ankersmit, “The Waxprint: Its Origin and Its Introduction on the Gold Coast” (master’s thesis, University of Leiden, 2010) 38–39, <http://www.ankersmit.info/master%20thesis%20W.Ankersmit%20Leiden%20Univ%20%20introduction%20of%20waxprint%20on%20the%20Gold%20Coast%202010.pdf>; Elands, “Dutch Wax Classics”; Elise

van Nederveen Meerkerk, “Challenging the De-industrialization Thesis: Gender and Indigenous Textile Production in Java under Dutch Colonial Rule, c. 1830–1920,” *Economic History Review* 70, vol. 4 (November 2017): 1219–43.

16 Elands, “Dutch Wax Classics,” 54.

17 Ankersmit, “Waxprint,” 46.

18 Elands, “Dutch Wax Classics,” 54; and Sylvanus, *Patterns in Circulation*, 59–61, 69–70.

19 Sylvanus, *Patterns in Circulation*, 64, 71. The quote “spatial and cultural distance” is from Christopher B. Steiner, “Another Image of Africa: Toward an Ethnohistory of European Cloth Marketed in West Africa, 1873–1960,” *Ethnohistory* 32, no. 2 (1985): 98.

20 Steiner, “Another Image of Africa,” 98.

21 Sylvanus, *Patterns in Circulation*, 64–65.

22 Sylvanus, 74.

23 Sylvanus, 68–69; and Steiner, “Another Image of Africa,” 97.

24 Nina Sylvanus, “The Fabric of Africanity: Tracing the Global Threads of Authenticity,” *Anthropological Theory* 7, no. 2 (2007): 209–11.

25 Sylvanus, *Patterns in Circulation*, 74–75; Sylvanus, “Fabric of Africanity, 209–10; and Ankersmit, “Waxprint,” 53.

26 Elands, “Dutch Wax Classics,” 55.

private property of European companies, to which the legal property holders gained the rights to control the use of the technique and the designs. Although the corporations may have become the legal proprietors, communities in West and Central Africa embraced the imported textiles as expressions of their own culture and as markers of Africanness.<sup>27</sup> In several West African countries, the cloth became a sign of individual as well as collective (religious, ethnic, gender) identity, assumed a commemorative function, served as a dowry, and as a cultural inheritance because of its aesthetic, emotional, and economic value.<sup>28</sup> After independence, various postcolonial African heads of state declared waxprint to be part of the "authentic," "traditional" African national costume.<sup>29</sup>

### Vlisco's Reconversion Strategies

Cheap imitation wax had been circulating in some West and Central African countries for years. From the 1990s onward, however, better-quality imitation wax from China entered several West and Central African markets in large amounts.<sup>30</sup> At the beginning of 2000, Vlisco realized it had to counter the steadily dropping sales. The company decided not to compete with the cheap cotton influx but instead to position itself prominently at the high end of the "African" textile market.<sup>31</sup> Besides its loyal customers, Vlisco had to attract new customers, such as young well-to-do urban Africans and Africans in the diaspora as well as non-African consumers. To do so the company implemented a package of repositioning strategies that was designed to transform Vlisco "from a textile company into a luxury fashion brand."<sup>32</sup> The common denominator of all these strategies was the gradual detachment on the level of aesthetics, narratives, and practices from their local West and Central African embeddedness. Instead, Vlisco tapped more and more explicitly into Western-oriented aesthetics, consumer narratives, and practices.<sup>33</sup> The restyled textile design and the highly aestheticized advertising campaigns, staged by renowned Dutch fashion stylists and shot by well-known photographers, all radiate an aesthetic that can be called "flamboyant chic" (fig. 67). They often tend to either downplay an "African" ethnicity or rather evoke a kind of generic "African" identity. The models depicted in the Vlisco ads—light-skinned, with mostly straightened hair—unmistakably fit into the global ideal of feminine beauty that is still dominated by the hegemonic Western standards of white femininity (fig. 68).<sup>34</sup> Recently, white models have also been featured more frequently in the Vlisco ads. The narratives presented on the company's website and in the look book refer to Western art, design, and art history as aesthetic languages that inspired Vlisco's designers. And while textile consumption has various meanings (ritual, memorial, social, individual, etc.) to Western and Central African customers,<sup>35</sup> Vlisco's narratives mainly refer to the Western consumer ideology that focuses on the "expressive self."<sup>36</sup> Vlisco prides itself in having its fabrics used in the designs of Jean-Paul Gaultier, John Galliano, and Dries van Noten. From 2012



Fig. 67  
Vlisco, collection "Splendeur", 2014



Fig. 68  
Vlisco, collection "Celebrate with Style", 2017

27 M. Amah Edoh, "Redrawing Power? Dutch Wax Cloth and the Politics of 'Good Design,'" *Journal of Design History* 29, no. 3 (2016): 258.

28 Edoh, "Redrawing Power?," 261; Jos Arts, *Vlisco* (Arnhem: ArtEZ Press, 2012), 53–53; Christine Delhaye and Rhoda Woets, "The Commodification of Ethnicity: and Vlisco Fabrics and Wax Cloth Fashion in Ghana," *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 87.

29 Delhaye and Woets, "Commodification of Ethnicity," 88; Charles Kabuya, "L'expérience Zaïroise de l'authenticité," *Réflexion du Jour*, May 4, 2014, <http://www.mbuze.com/lexperience-zairoise-de-lauthenticite-de-charles-kabuya/?v=796834e7a283>.

30 Arts, *Vlisco*, 17; and Sylvanus, "Chinese Devils, the Global Market, and the Declining Power of Togo's Nan-Benzes," *African Studies Review* 56, no.1 (2013): 65–80.

31 Arts, 117.

32 Vlisco, "Vlisco Batik-Branding," <http://wixxi.editme.com/Vlisco-Batikette>.

33 For a more in-depth analysis of the various reconversion strategies, see Delhaye and Woets, "Commodification of Ethnicity," 80–85.

34 Ashley Mears, "Size Zero High-end ethnic: Cultural Production and the Reproduction of Culture in Fashion Modeling," *Poetics* 38, no. 1 (2010): 39.

35 Delhaye and Woets, "Commodification of Ethnicity," 87.

36 Delhaye and Woets, 82–83.

onward, the company has even been re-appropriating the cloth as “Dutch design.”<sup>37</sup> This strategy signals a rearticulation of the Vlisco product that, according to the company, should be more suited to capture a larger market.

### Vlisco’s Protection Measures in the Age of Neoliberal Globalisation

Although Vlisco has gradually reframed its textiles and discourse within a Western perspective in order to appeal to a larger consumer market, this does not mean that the company disregards the specific “Africanness” of the brand altogether. Vlisco’s “rich heritage” and “unique story” are regularly mentioned as key features of the new fashionable brand. The unique story refers to the historical interconnectedness resulting in a unique production process combining “Indonesian batik, Dutch Design and African heritage.”<sup>38</sup> The fancy term “interconnectedness” that resonates with the neoliberal global consumer discourse and that profiles Vlisco as an innovative, international company, appeals to the open mind-set of urban cosmopolitan consumers. In fact, behind this term as well as behind Vlisco’s narratives of authenticity there is a complex history hidden of uneven power relations within colonial economies and modes of cultural appropriation.

Moreover, as the African textile market becomes more and more inhabited by new Chinese players, the manifold references to the authenticity of the fabrics by Vlisco is clearly part of a rhetorical strategy aimed at legitimizing the company’s (legal) protection measures. The new situation dubbed as “China-in-Africa” has changed power dynamics on a geopolitical level as well as within African countries. Concerning the textile trade, several factors have led to an implosion of the Western monopoly and have opened the door for Chinese investors and companies. In the late 1980s, international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank retreated from developing economics and pushed toward market reform based on the Washington Consensus. Freeing the market and reducing state interventions went with the devaluation of the West African CFA franc at the beginning of the 1990s. As a result of political crises and instabilities, European investors and companies abandoned the region, but the final blow to the well-established textile market in which the Dutch Wax print had played a key role was the cancellation of an international textile-trade agreement that had kept textiles outside of regulations by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2005. As a result, European textiles and Dutch Wax more specifically had become out of reach for many customers. This gave Chinese textile companies the opportunity to imitate (mainly Dutch) wax textiles and import them—once again with the collaboration of a new generation of female local traders—at a much lower price in the West and Central textile markets.<sup>39</sup>

Imitation is, according to Lara Kriegel part and parcel of imperialism, the success of which has ever since ignited fierce debates about copyright, originality, and piracy.<sup>40</sup> Vlisco, too, has been thriving because of its ability to imitate and appropriate design and craft (figs. 69–70). Ironically, Vlisco is now fighting against companies that are doing the same thing. Apart from fighting (legal) battles, in September 2014 Vlisco started a major brand-protection campaign in its African markets that was meant to persuade customers to assist with the battle against copycats.<sup>41</sup> During her research in Lomé, Togo, Nina Sylvanus



Fig. 69  
Design 13/0036, Vlisco  
(Ankersmit), 1912



Fig. 70  
Design Lino, ABC, 1906  
(after Indonesian design “Tambal Miring”)

found that consumers and legal bodies see copies quite differently. According to international property law, copies are technically pirates. For buyers, in contrast, products can be either authentic or inauthentic, real or fake. While brand ownership and intellectual property are key cornerstones of Western intellectual property laws, on the level of Togolese consumer practices they do not play a significant role. What is important to consumers is access to affordable high-quality goods, be they pirated or counterfeit. Some pirate copies become aesthetically and emotionally embraced by mainly young consumers, while others in contrast are seen as fake and therefore bad. According to local common sense:

<sup>37</sup> Danielle Bruggeman, “Vlisco: Made in Holland, Adorned in West Africa, (Re) appropriated as Dutch Design,” *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2017): 197–213.

<sup>38</sup> Vlisco, “Vlisco Group Inspires and Connects the World with the Design of African Print,” n.d., unpublished document received on March 28, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Sylvanus, “Chinese Devils,” 69–70; Sylvanus, *Patterns in Circulation*, 110–11; and Ebbe Prag, “Mama Benz in Trouble:

*Networks, the State, and Fashion Wars in the Beninese Textile Market*,” *African Studies Association* 56, no. 3 (2013): 101–21.

<sup>40</sup> Lara Kriegel, “Culture and the Copy: Calico, Capitalism, and Design Copyright in Early Victorian Britain,” *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 2 (2004): 234.

<sup>41</sup> Nina Sylvanus, “West Africans Ditch Dutch Waxprints for Chinese ‘Real’ Fakes,” *Huffington Post*, January 9, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-conversation-africa/west-africans-ditch-dutch\\_b\\_11812110.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-conversation-africa/west-africans-ditch-dutch_b_11812110.html).

"Good copies do not betray consumers, whereas bad or fake copies have the power to expose the unsavvy."<sup>42</sup> Consumers distinguish between good copies or faux ones, not by checking the markers—as proposed in Vlisco's brand-protection campaign—but by relying on their own procedures. According to Sylvanus, "Value is ascribed through the senses: by touching, smelling or even tasting the cloth."<sup>43</sup> Her analysis shows that companies may have the power to establish legal rights by defining originality and property in legal terms. In everyday life, however, consumers and traders use their own value systems to determine the value of a product, which may or may not agree with legal categories.

## Conclusion

The appropriative practices of Vlisco have resulted in a crosscultural product that developed from an amalgam of influences: originating from a Javanese technique; imitated, machine-produced, and designed by Vlisco; and amplified by contributions of West and Central African merchants and consumers and missionaries. West and Central African consumers have embraced these products to the extent that they have become deeply ingrained in their cultures and are seen as icons of "Africanness." Vlisco (and forerunners) has been registered as the legal owner of certain techniques and designs.

The above analysis makes clear that power relations are indeed key constituents of the dynamics of appropriative practices, but they are much more dispersed and multidirectional than authors such as Bruce and Rao suggest. While Vlisco has the power to use its aesthetic, discursive, and legal resources at its own discretion, the company ultimately reaches the limits of its own power as new economic players in the global market successfully circumvent their legal rights. The company's power is even more limited as customers and local traders collaborate or withdraw cooperation, establish and transform trade and consumer practices, and attach and alter meaning according to their own value systems. The idea of dominant groups yielding power over minority groups, who either assimilate or resist appropriative practices, is too simple an argument to catch the complexity of the empirical reality. To better understand and define the wide variety of contemporary appropriative practices in the domain of fashion from a postcolonial perspective, more research is needed at the micro level to uncover the multiple forms of agency and the various dimensions involved that are often disregarded when the focus is on large-scale economic and political structures. A historical approach is equally important because it aims to determine how contemporary practices have been shaped by pre-colonial, colonial, postcolonial, and neo-colonial parameters.

42 Sylvanus.  
43 Sylvanus.

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# Incommensurate T-shirts Art/Economy from Senegal to the United States

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## Incommensurate Spaces of Transcultural Fashion

The T-shirt as garment and the T-shirt as wearable art do not synchronize their fashion cycles. Nor do they fit into the same transcultural tale. The T-shirt follows the well-traced circulation of a garment so ubiquitously transnational that it has become the very synecdoche of globalized dress. But T-shirt art tells its transcultural tale in disparate voices. Young Dakarois artists create, within an inherited fashion system, cultural and linguistic codes, a mode of producing meanings and products, and “politico-economic logics” incommensurable with those of Western fashion discourse.<sup>1</sup>

## Incommensurate Messages

To explore this space, I propose to frame this essay not with a Western theorist, but with the words and images of Dakarois streetwear designer Poulo (Mohamadou El Amine Diallo) who will act as my theoretical guide. Consciously transcultural, Poulo posts on Facebook a photo of a young Dakaroise wearing a T-shirt from his “We Are Workerz” collection with the following text: “This shirt represents the state of the soul of Senegalese society racked by the system. But with his hustler spirit he always finds ways to racoller [i.e., recoller] the pieces and get up to attack again, with as weapons, work and spirituality.” [Poulo’s translation] #streetwearhipsterfashiontrend.<sup>2</sup>

Poulo takes care to make his work transcultural: “I mix Wolof, English and French, so that in every corner of the world, everyone can read the message.”<sup>3</sup> But he bases his transcultural nexus on specifically Senegalese assumptions that a society has a soul and that a T-shirt can represent it. Poulo portrays a society and his life as an artist with bitter-sweet ambivalence. In US society, artists and designers struggle within the all-permeating commodification of soulless consumer capitalism. In Senegal, consumer capitalism works at a distance. The neoliberal restructuring of capital in the 1980s devastated the economy, leaving the people materially and institutionally bereft, but marginalized, for better and for worse, from the developments of multinational corporations.<sup>4</sup> Poulo can feel immersed in a society that has a soul. He and his fellow artists effortlessly recognize that aesthetics and economics are inseparable. Implications of Poulo’s words and images introduce the worldview of the Dakar artists,

1 Regina A. Root, “Powerful Tools: Towards a Fashion Manifesto,” *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 123.

2 Mouhamadou El Amine Diallo (aka Poulo), Facebook, February 6, 2016.

3 Poulo, in discussion with the author, April 22, 2015.

4 See Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Youth and the City in the Global South* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); and Abdou Malick Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Urban Life in Four African Cities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

while also estranging some naturalized elements of the US T-shirt art world. On his T-shirt Poulo portrays a worker framed by the transnationally recognized icon of a triangular roadwork sign. The worker is a graffiti artist wearing a respirator mask. Dakarois artists must earn a living through their art, and hover on an insecure economic edge. But, the “We Are Workerz” T-shirt tells us that young artists refuse defeat. Things are always falling apart, but the workers/artists pick up the pieces. They plunge into creative fervor and rely on their *débrouillardise* (ingenuity to creatively overcome lack of material means). Recent writings have reduced this multivalent word to economic activity.<sup>5</sup> But young Dakarois also apply it to creating art and technology with a dire lack of resources. Leading graffiti artist Serigne Mansour Fall wrote on his Facebook page: “WITH FEW MEANS INSPIRATION MANAGES TO DO GREAT THINGS. [...] THAT’S AFRICAN INGENUITY.”<sup>6</sup>

Through *débrouillardise* as artistic ingenuity the artists have collectively built the largest, most vibrant graffiti-art movement in sub-Saharan Africa. In the economic scramble, the agile *débrouillard* is, as Poulo says, the “hustler.” He and other young artists redefine hustler (a word that has recently entered Senegalese youth slang) as a positive figure, one who navigates the treacherous economic realm with a combination of wily wits and hard work. Poulo, brilliant designer and charming hustler, knows all too well the triumphs and despairs of this life. Exceptional in the youth arts scene, he built a successful business within Dakar’s informal economy, or as the Senegalese call it *l’informel*.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 71  
Streetwear designer Poulo (Mohamadou El Amine Diallo) sets up his heat-film laser printer, 2015



Fig. 72  
Graffiti artist Kemp Ndao prepares a T-shirt for heat-film transfer on the press in Poulo's first atelier, 2012

By some stroke of hustler genius, in 2011 he managed to obtain the only heat-film transfer equipment in Senegal. He therefore became indispensable to the young artists who wanted to produce T-shirts. From his first closet-like atelier in an apartment building, Poulo ended up in a glass-front atelier opening on to a rare paved street. With fellow artists, he painted a multicolored floor-to-ceiling Nefertiti. Piles of truck tires, spatter-painted in neon colors, served as desk legs and seats. Poulo did heat-film transfer for clients in the hip-hop community and eventually for commercial companies and NGOs. A shrewd businessman, he was also generous with his graffiti-artist friends, helping them build their businesses. But in 2016, this hustler was cheated by a new business partner, with devastating results. He had to start from zero to rebuild his business. Poulo hints at his own story when he writes about his *Workerz* T-shirt.

His assistant, Nourou (Mohamadou Nourou Anwar Ndiaye), is just as exceptional within Dakar’s youth arts community, but from an opposite angle. When Poulo closed his atelier, Nourou went off on his own. Working ten to twelve hours a day designing heat-film transfer T-shirts for clients, Nourou seems like an unusually solitary figure in the midst of community. In the creative ferment of Poulo’s atelier, graffiti artists would gather and he would laser-cut their film (fig. 71). Then, true to the informal business ways of Dakar, the artists would use his heat press themselves (fig. 72). In this buzzing communal activity, Nourou was a steady, quiet presence. As much as Poulo impresses by his slight size, poetic eloquence, and expressive face, Nourou impresses by his great height and broad shoulder. His low voice, coming from deep within his large frame expresses reticence and a sense of melancholy. Where Poulo is mercurial and eloquent, Nourou is steady and gentle.

Both exemplify their artist community. Nourou calls his T-shirt brand Amine (French for the Arabic version of Amen). With this single word, he summarizes Poulo’s Facebook text. Nourou explains the meaning of Amine: “It goes with a certain logic, of, hmm, how to say it—of living well, living in harmony, living in peace. We need to live better, to live in peace, to live without suffering—if that can be done. [...] Well, that’s the whole concept.”<sup>8</sup> Like “We Are Workerz,” Amine represents the soul of Dakar society, but as the other side of a coin. Together, they exemplify T-shirt messages among the Dakar streetwear artists. Poulo’s text relates the rigors of actual daily life and his self-definition of artist as worker. Amine expresses the dream of a better future that inspires

5 Robert Neuwirth, *The Stealth of Nations: The Global Rise of the Informal Economy* (New York: Pantheon, 2011), Kindle.

6 Serigne Mansour Fall, Facebook, June 8, 2013.

7 In his book *Stealth of Nations*, Robert Neuwirth argues to “jettison the phrase

‘informal economy’” (p. 24), but the Senegalese use *l’informel*.

8 Nourou, in discussion with the author, March 3, 2017. Unless otherwise indicated, all further quotations by Nourou come from this interview.

the *débrouillardeurs* to keep fighting. Nourou, however, does not find a way to realize this future, let alone produce his Amine brand. He is too busy producing for clients.

He has become known as the undisputed master of heat-film transfer in the youth art scene. "Nourou does with heat-film what no one has ever done," says Serigne Mansour Fall.<sup>9</sup> Yet Nourou considers himself a painter and graffiti artist: "I prefer to paint on walls, because you have more space to express yourself just as you want. I love *grandeur*" (fig. 73). Where most artists in the graffiti movement scramble for rare small jobs, Nourou, too busy working



Fig. 73  
Graffiti artist Nourou (Mohamadou Nouroul Anwar Ndiaye) at a graffiti festival in Saint-Louis, Senegal, 2015

for clients to paint, says half hopefully, half sadly, "But whenever an opportunity comes when I can do it, I will do it." Despite many clients, Nourou, like most designers, does "not really" earn enough to live on.

Speaking within the ethos of Senegalese culture, where people consider it unseemly, immodest, and tempting the fates to talk about business or money,

Nourou is vague about his clients: "I have a few. I'll see if that grows in the future, but *alhamdoullilah*, I have some." He has many clients, but clearly lives a difficult life: "Well, you could say that I have a lot of work, but then life is expensive, and there's another factor that makes it difficult. To make a living here in Senegal, there is, so to speak, demand for your product, but the clients don't pay very much. In the end, you have a lot of clients, but they offer very little, and you have no choice but to sell at that price, you see." Nourou exemplifies the system in which the artists create T-shirt art, produce meaning, and engage in economic transactions. While earning very little, Nourou also supports his siblings. He rents the equipment he uses in an atelier housed in a dingy walk-up apartment building on a sandy lane. Nourou has access to a desktop computer with Illustrator software and shares the heat-film presses with other, as he calls them, "little *floquistes* like me."

Nourou and his fellow artists work in "one of the biggest informal economies in sub-Saharan Africa, generating [...] 97% of the jobs in Senegal."<sup>10</sup> When structural adjustment destroyed the economy, Senegalese people devised an economy that mixes capitalist practices with an age-old economy of reciprocal responsibility and collectivity. Senegalese professors Almany Konté and Mariama Ndong reject World Bank definitions of the informal economy as an "obstacle to sustained growth."<sup>11</sup> In fieldwork with informal-sector traders they do not assume the corporate worldview as natural. They step inside the worldview of the traders: "In the informal ICT sector in Senegal, ways of building and coordinating activities differ from all the theories put forward on organizing work in the economic system. Work organization [...] follow[s] norms of distributive logic based on the social factors and values such as hospitality, honesty and sharing [...]. They are based on Senegalese values [...], in contrast to the profit motive that prevails in the capitalist system."<sup>12</sup> I know older people with almost no formal education who have become wealthy in the informal economy. All transactions are in cash. Since the only contract is one's word, and since everyone knows everyone's affairs in this collective society, these traders must be scrupulously honest in their dealings with clients to maintain their business.

But scrambling in the hustler economy, the young artists find the ideals of respect, honesty, and communal sharing, all of which they strive to practice, are strained and threatened. When Nourou speaks of "suffering" and lack of

<sup>9</sup> Serigne Mansour Fall, in discussion with the author, February 27, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Almamy Konté and Mariama Ndong, "The Informal ICT Sector and Innovation Processes in Senegal" (working paper, UNU-MERIT, Maastricht, The Netherlands, 2012), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy Benjamin and Ahmadou Aly Mbaye, *The Informal Sector in Francophone Africa: Firm Size, Productivity and Institutions* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012), 11, Kindle.

<sup>12</sup> Konté and Ndong, 20, 22.

"harmony," he refers as much to the painful gap between deeply held values and untrustworthiness among his peers as to economic insecurity. Nourou explains this ambivalence: "When a client comes to me, he tells me he wants T-shirts in such and such a color with such and such a message. So I make an overall estimate and tell him the [price]. So he pays me half, and the next day I go downtown, buy plain T-shirts, and when I come back to the atelier I go right to designing it." Here is one way in which Nourou departs from capitalist practice. *L'informel* does not strictly measure value by labor time, as in the logic of capital. When Nourou goes downtown and buys the T-shirts, no one calculates this time into the price. This represents both his autonomy in contrast to the "densification" of labor in neoliberal capitalism, where "time becomes even more central as an instrument of oppression," but also the economic disadvantages of marginalized economies.<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 74  
Nourou, working at the atelier wearing his self-designed T-shirt inscribed with "RSPCT EVRYBDY / TRST NBDY / Build'Other," 2017



Fig. 75  
Nourou, at the atelier, separates the laser-cut design element from the sheet of heat-film, 2017



Fig. 76  
Nourou places a piece of heat-film design element on a T-shirt before pressing it, 2017



Although a client doesn't intentionally set out to scam the youth artists, they often confront the dilemma that the client doesn't pay. Nourou says, "If the client is a friend, I proceed trusting that he will pay me, but when I deliver, he doesn't have cash." Given the inherited value of modesty, artists must decide whether and how to take a stand. One day when I walked into the atelier, Nourou and a client (not a friend) were handling papers and the client handed over a stack of cash. Nourou was wearing a T-shirt of his own design that said in big, bold letters: "RSPCT EVRYBDY / TRST NBDY / Build'Other" (fig. 74).

Through this T-shirt Nourou expresses the historically unfolding contradiction between inherited, cherished values of a communitarian society and an urban economy imposed without protective formal institutions. The artists enter into transactions based on customs of trust even though they know they cannot trust the other. Thus, Poulo accepts a business partner who betrays him. Thus, his former assistant Nourou navigates between modesty and assertiveness by creating the above-mentioned T-shirt. This cryptic T-shirt expresses an entire world of shared discourse and contradiction in Dakar. "Build'Other" connotes this contradiction the artists are striving to work through. Through their T-shirt art and their collective graffiti projects, they desire to rebuild the ancestral communal relations of respect, trust, and sharing in the alien environment of the globalized city. Could Nourou's T-shirt be read and understood in the United States? The messages that Poulo and Nourou inscribe on T-shirts signify meanings outside of the upbeat market-capitalist discourse internalized as invisible nature in the United States. As a quintessentially transcultural garment, the art T-shirt does not translate from culture to culture with respect to social codes, systems of class, race and ethnicity, economic structures, aspirations, and interpersonal relations.

### Incommensurate Codes and Economies: The Threadless Community

No transcultural tale of the T-shirt would be complete without its American archetype, born as an undershirt in the US Navy uniform. The T-shirt, which Bonnie English evocatively calls a "blank canvas,"<sup>14</sup> has categories in the United States so vast as to defy summary.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, I will confine this discussion to an art T-shirt community that parallels that in Dakar. The most successful

<sup>13</sup> Trebor Scholz, *Uberworked and Underpaid* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), loc. 3693, Kindle.

<sup>14</sup> Bonnie English, *A Cultural History of Fashion in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berg, 2007), 9.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Elizabeth Cline, *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

art T-shirt company and community in the United States has been Threadless. But even as a parallel to Senegalese artists, Threadless artists produce T-shirts that constitute a different cultural and economic artifact. Although Threadless, founded in 2000, predates crowdsourcing and the extraction of enormous surplus value from unpaid digital labor, the company presaged all these developments of “platform capitalism.”<sup>16</sup>

Founder Jake Nickell describes Threadless as an “accidental business,” beginning in Chicago,<sup>17</sup> which grew into “a creative community that makes, supports, and buys great art.” He states: “Thousands of people worldwide submit their designs online, and our community picks the ones that get made into products.”<sup>18</sup> Contest winners receive royalties and a Threadless gift certificate (see [www.threadless.com](http://www.threadless.com)). In addition, any artist can open their own shop on the platform. In contrast to Nourou, who obviously struggles with expenses and financially risky undertakings, a Threadless artist can open an online shop with seemingly uttermost ease and no financial expense.

Yet this crowdsourcing model appropriates thousands of hours of unpaid material labor. Its social-media platform urges members to submit designs and “Win cash, prizes & fame!” Yet out of 415,139 submissions to the main contest, only two percent have won. Thousands of young designers spend, collectively, hundreds of thousands of hours creating designs that will not win. The more designs in a contest, the more buzz created and the more online traffic driven to the website. In Threadless forums, artists reinforce the community ethos of committing oneself to scoring T-shirts.

By doing the unpaid labor of scoring, recruiting others to score, and creating a buzz, the artists are producing a desire for the T-shirts. Threadless urges artists to obtain more votes for themselves by mobilizing their friends and followers from social-media sites. Artists energetically do the hard work of recruiting more Threadless customers and members. The company publicizes the shops of contest winners, but not the other artist shops. Here too, Threadless extracts surplus value from unpaid labor. Artists must do all the work of publicizing and advertising their own shop—and thereby the Threadless brand. The young artists, passionate about doing art, do not see themselves as workers. On a forum, Taz-pie reasserts the community norm: “How about you design something cos you love it, instead of for some monetary reward? there are people that have refined their craft here for YEARS without being printed.”<sup>19</sup>

## Incommensurate Transcultural Objects

The parallel between the two T-shirt stories reveals their incommensurabilities, inseparably aesthetic, cultural, and economic. Although capitalism is a global system, there is no universal “modern capitalist society.” It yields different structures, in this case *l'informel* in Senegal and the crowdsourcing, gig economy in the United States. As a researcher situated in these structures, I must follow different research methods. A study of T-shirt design in the United States and Europe brings information overload with endless books, articles, blogs, and websites on the topic. The Threadless site has an infinite number of artist’s shops, years of forum discussions, blogs, T-shirt contests, exhortations to participate, links to YouTube videos. Conversely, the mass of verbal expression is contained within a repetitive, standardly upbeat, semantically impoverished script. Forums allow only a rare glimpse of a person recognizing ambivalences and contradictions. In the case of the Threadless artists and owners, interviews would not have revealed any more, or any deeper, information than expressed in the masses of already-published interviews, speeches, and forums by and about the artists.

Senegal T-shirt art, lacking this mass of published material, requires ethnographic research. The artists pull my research into deeply personal emotional ties, into the highs and lows of their triumphs and trials. They have made me cross the line beyond research. Artists have embraced me in family joys and tragedies, conflicts and solidarities, of birth, marriage, and death through three generations. During this time, hustlers (in the conventionally defined sense) have approached me with every scam imaginable. The materially impoverished artists have situated me in the richness of their soulful society.

My different research methods used for the United States and Senegal converge with divergent modes of producing art T-shirts. The Threadless artists digitally send designs to a central location where these are digitally printed. In this disconnect between artist and medium, the artist can sell T-shirts without touching their material works in person. Where Poulo and Nourou represent the bittersweet soul of their society in their T-shirts, Threadless encloses T-shirts in the all-consuming positivity of Western marketing discourse. In the book *Threadless: Ten Years of T-shirts from the World's Most Inspiring Online*

<sup>16</sup> Scholz, *Uberworked and Underpaid*, loc. 1274. I am indebted to Monica Tilton and Elke Gaugele for suggesting this line of inquiry.

<sup>17</sup> Jake Nickell, *Threadless: Ten Years of T-shirts from the World's Most Inspiring Online Design Community* (New York: Abrams Image, 2010), 12

<sup>18</sup> Jake Nickell, email message to author, October 13, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Taz-pie, comment on *Threadless*, July 29, 2013, [https://www.threadless.com/forum/post/974964/how\\_much\\_is\\_the\\_pay\\_for\\_a\\_winning\\_design/](https://www.threadless.com/forum/post/974964/how_much_is_the_pay_for_a_winning_design/).

*Design Community* (2010), Karen Wong writes: "Equally noteworthy and less discussed has been [the Threadless] process of circumventing normal avenues of arbitrating aesthetics and allowing emerging artists, illustrators, and designers a platform to test their talent out of reach from art school/art industry politics. This democratic approach to decide what is good (a printed tee) has been handsomely rewarded with a vast online community, millions of dollars in profit, and thousands of fulfilled artists who have seen their work produced with prize money to boot."<sup>20</sup> This wholly filled discursive space leaves no room for contradictions, for dialectical negativity. According to the neoliberal self-understanding of Threadless, artists seemingly enjoy complete fulfillment, freedom, a sense of welcome, democracy, and financial wealth, all without risk or struggle. If we compare this noncontradictory totalizing discourse with Poulo's "We Are Workerz" T-shirt, other incompatibilities appear. The totalizing space of the Threadless discourse meshes a pride in making major money, albeit fantastical, while insisting that the T-shirt designers are artists, purely artists—"authentically" artists.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, Poulo insists that artists are workers.

Here is the core of the T-shirts as incommensurable artifacts. The Threadless artists, like their peers in Senegal, take enormous pleasure from creating art. Yet their work and their artworks are alienated, first because they are expropriated, and second because they are mystified. The entire discourse of Threadless constructs an edifice that suppresses the collective recognition, crystal clear to the Senegalese artists, that aesthetic and economic practices are inseparable.

As aesthetic artifacts, the T-shirt designs diverge accordingly. Threadless favors T-shirts that are witty, cute, with visual and verbal play. In West Africa, Senegalese, Togolese, Beninois, and Burkinabe create T-shirts that will inspire young people to, in the words of Togolese artist Sitou Matt Imagination, "make African culture move."<sup>22</sup> They favor imagery of classical beauty.

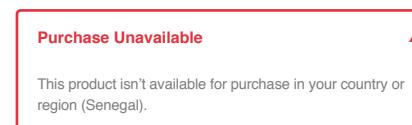
Modes of printing contribute to this aesthetic and economic divergence. Hand-painted, silk-screened and heat-transfer T-shirts do not exist on Threadless. The Threadless artists must create even their hand-drawings with an eye for what will look good within the aesthetic constraints of digital printing. The Dakar artists must contend with the absence of any digital T-shirt printer in Senegal. They cannot mass produce. In both communities, the artists face advantages and disadvantages. Obviously, Senegalese artists use methods that are economically disadvantageous. But these methods also mesh with fundamental cultural and aesthetic values that Senegalese have deeply cherished, and that young artists adapt to their overcrowded, traffic-choked city. They work not only in an informal economy but also in an artisanal economy.

## Incommensurate Production

The Dakar artists follow values that emerge from their own history of fashion as "the aesthetic."<sup>23</sup> Senegalese consumers across the generations strongly value handwork over factory-made goods: hand-dyed and/or handwoven cloth, tailor-made clothing, and embroidery. They especially value creativity and originality. Aïcha Touré, who hand-paints T-shirts says: "I really love collaborating with the craftspeople of Senegal because their skill and knowledge have no equal."<sup>24</sup> Artists are steeped in what Touré calls "the ancestral techniques" of production. But they must contend with a global economy that excludes them from the benefits of technological ease. They vacillate between their passion for artistic work and their discouragement about living, as Nourou says, a better life of peace and harmony.

Like many researchers in Senegal, I am deeply moved by the young people who create wonderful things with such a paucity of resources. A study of transcultural fashion inevitably becomes a study of global inequality and injustice. Of course, the artists do not regard themselves as unequal. They are proud of developing skills and knowledge, in creating art and technology that their Western counterparts do not have. Yet research is always colored by anxiety for the young artists' future in Senegal.

The lack of technological resources in West Africa is not just an incidental by-product of exclusion. It is a deliberate policy. For example, if you live in Senegal and you go to the Adobe site to purchase Creative Cloud, the software package that no designer can do without, you will receive the following message:



Artists and designers use pirated software, another example of ingenious *débrouillardise*. In this digital divide, the Senegalese artists are all the more sophisticated in using digital technology. In the introduction to his book *Manus X Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology* (2016), Andrew Bolton

<sup>20</sup> Karen Wong, cited in Nickell, *Threadless*, 177.

<sup>21</sup> Nickell, *Threadless*, 143.

<sup>22</sup> Sitou Matt Imagination, interview by the author, April 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Leslie W. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 27.

<sup>24</sup> Aïcha Touré, interview by the author, March 2, 2017.

writes, "Neither dictating nor determining the making of fashion, the hand and the machine work in combination."<sup>25</sup> Each Dakarois T-shirt artist combines digital, mechanical, and handwork in a unique way. Through these mixes, they make the T-shirt express both attachment to inherited values and the dire need to improvise without resources. Just as the Threadless artists create designs pre-dedicated to digital print, each Senegalese artist creates a style that takes best advantage of their chosen production method. Nourou, for instance, says: "I love doing design on Illustrator. I love doing graphic design, producing beautiful things. So I try to spend as much time as possible to make things perfect for when I place them on the T-shirt."

But the more Nourou expends creative energy in complex designs, the more time he must expend in doing the handwork with the transfer film and the press. This, he reluctantly admits, can "sometimes be sort of boring, well really boring." Nourou, like Poulo and Touré, is both the freely creative designer of exclusive garments as well as the repetitive worker. Through this double position, they can recognize the artist as worker.

For the mechanical work, Nourou must peel away each design element from the heat-film and hand press it (figs. 75–76). Making T-shirts for a sports-fan client, Nourou used three different colors of film and at least ten presses of the heat machine. He spent a half hour pressing the design on each T-shirt.

Nourou, as he works, exemplifies a historical problem in which the artisanal economy both serves and disserves the graffiti artists. In my fieldwork since 1995, I have seen tailors, dyers, and streetwear artists get carried away with the creative process and make the design much more intricate and difficult than the order requires. The client who is already underpaying Nourou, "has no idea" of the vision and work that went into the T-shirt.<sup>26</sup>

But Nourou knows. The unpaid portion of his work is not mystified, nor is it alienated to capital. This portion of the labor time and the T-shirt design remain, to Nourou's advantage and disadvantage, outside of commodification. Counter-intuitively, the Dakar artists can see themselves as workers and their unpaid labor as unpaid labor because the informal economy and the lack of mass production situate them both inside and outside capitalism. They see themselves as workers because they create this reserve of noncommodification in the finished product.

Nourou lacks access to mass production, but he has more control over his production machines and can push their limits. Using heat-film transfer out of necessity, Nourou turns the process into much more than a utilitarian tool. He turns it into its own art form. Nourou told me he was going to design a T-shirt for me "as a surprise." He gave it to me at a wedding celebration, where a

group of his fellow artists were gathered sitting on plastic chairs in the shade of a building. When I took the T-shirt out of its wrapping, the friends, themselves accomplished artists, actually gasped. A tight design of zig-zag bands and concentric circles in shades of blues, yellow, orange, and dark red, the T-shirt would have lost its visual wow factor if the same design had been digitally printed. The sharpness and relief of the film pieces, the intricacy of their placement, the stamp of the hand, the obvious difficulty of execution—all of this would have been lost in a digital print. This T-shirt belongs firmly to a Senegalese genealogy of design work that, as the son of a famous Soninke dyer told me in the 1990s, could only be made for love, not for sale. As with the super-fine embroidery-resist hand-dyed Soninke wedding *boubous*, one "cannot estimate the value" of Nourou's surprise T-shirt.

It is doubtless that Threadless artists design T-shirts as gifts outside of commodification. But Nourou's T-shirt is inimitable because he has spent years transforming the heat-film process into a unique, creative medium. He has accomplished this because the Dakar T-shirt artists must work within an artisanal fashion economy and without mass production. Together, *l'informel* and the artisanal economy immerse the artists in a long history that imbricates creativity and the reciprocal social responsibilities of gift exchange.

## Conclusion

Could the West African artists solve their economic insecurity by sending their designs to be digitally printed and mass-produced at a company like Threadless? I asked a member of the Dakar youth art scene temporarily residing in Los Angeles, Djibril Drame, a charming, effervescent, and proud-to-be-called hustler, is a pioneering photographer and blogger in Dakar. In Los Angeles, he cheerfully struggles to sell Senegalese fashions. He answered: "You're going to lose the interaction, and the hustling, and the struggling to get the fabric, to go to the tailors, to deal with the tailors, to get the things here. That's what I like. The tailors depend on the designers. They really need the young designers."<sup>27</sup> In Poulo's words, the T-shirts would lose their power to represent the soul of the society. Djibril sees this soul, with a kind of emotionally charged X-ray vision, inscribed in the Senegalese fashions and seeks, in the city that epitomizes mass-produced culture, to make readable their transcultural tale.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Bolton, *Manus x Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Nourou, in discussion with the author, February 27, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Djibril Drame, in discussion with the author, April 9, 2017.

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## Image Credits

### Image Credits

#### Fashion and Postcolonial Critique:

#### An Introduction

Elke Gaugele and Monica Titton

Fig. 1

Young women cutting and fitting clothing in class at Agricultural and Mechanical College, Greensboro, NC, 1899. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC; b/w film copy neg reproduction number: LC-USZ62-118917, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97510089/>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 2

Photograph of exhibit of the American Negroes at the Paris exposition, 1900. Taken from the *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 22, no. 130 (November 1900): 576. Library of Congress Washington, DC, reproduction number LC-DIG-ppmsc-04826 (digital file from original), LC-USZ62-132752 (b&w film copy neg.) <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001697152>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 3

"The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line," chart prepared by Du Bois for the "American Negro" exhibit at the 1900 Paris World Exposition to show the routes of the African slave trade and the economic and social progress of African Americans since emancipation. Drawing, ink, and watercolor on board, 710 x 560 mm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC; Digital ID: ppmsca 33863, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.33863>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 4

*Portrait* 1899, displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, half-length portrait, seated, facing right], Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC, Digital ID: (b&w film copy neg.) cph 3c24691, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c24691>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 5

*Portrait* 1899 displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, three-quarter length portrait,

seated with left arm over back of chair, facing front]. Gelatin silver photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington DC; Digital ID: (b/w film copy neg.) cph 3c24687, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c24687>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 6

*Portrait* 1899 displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, half-length portrait, facing slightly right 1899/1900]. Gelatin silver photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.; Digital ID: (b/w film copy neg.) cph 3c24796 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c24796>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 7

*Portrait* 1899/1900 displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit at the Paris International Exposition, 1900 [African American woman, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing slightly right 1899/1900], photographic print: gelatin silver. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.; Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-124722 (b/w film copy neg.) <http://cdn.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3c20000/3c24000/3c24700/3c24722v.jpg>. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Fig. 8

The Hidden Fashion Library, exhibition photo, staterooms Alte Post, Vienna, April 26–29, 2017. Gangart/Heinrich Pichler 2017. Courtesy of Gangart/Heinrich Pichler.

Fig. 9

Walé Oyéjidé, "After Migration," Ikeré Jones lookbook (Fall/Winter 2016/17). Walé Oyéjidé/Ikeré Jones 2016. Courtesy of Walé Oyéjidé.

**The Implementation of Western Culture in Austria: Colonial Concepts in Adolf Loos's Fashion Theory**  
Christian Kravagna

Figs. 10–13

Heinz Frank, performance as a commentary to Adolf Loos's "Zur Herrenmode" (1898), 1970. Photo: Gabriela Brandenstein. Courtesy of Gabriela Brandenstein.

Fig. 14

Adolf Loos, *Das Andere*, no. 1, 1903

Fig. 15

Adolf Loos, Advertisement for *Das Andere* no. 2, 1903

**La Revue du Monde Noir: Nos Enquêtes**  
**Louis Thomas Achille, Jean Baldoui,**  
**Marie-Magdeleine Carbet, Paulette Nardal,**  
**Rosario, and Clara W. Shepard**

Fig. 16  
*Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*, no. 2 (1931): 60.  
 Figs. 17–21  
*Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*, no. 3 (1932): 50–54.  
 Figs. 22–24  
*Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World*, no. 4 (1932): 50–52.  
 Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

#### (Re-)fashioning African Diasporic Masculinities

**Christine Checinska**  
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 Bust of Jean-Jacques Dessalines.  
 © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Michael Graham-Stewart Slavery Collection. Acquired with the assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Fig. 26  
 Portrait of General Jean-Jacques Dessalines. [Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Jacques 1er), fondateur de l'Indépendance d'Haïti] Rouzier, Sémaxen. *Dictionnaire géographique et administratif universel d'Haïti illustré ... ou Guide général en Haïti: avec gravures, illustrations, plans, cartes et vues dans le texte, et une carte coloriée de l'île d'Haïti. Paris: Imprimerie brevetée Charles Blot, 1891*, p. 89. Manioc, Bibliothèque numérique Caraïbe, Amazonie, Plateau des Guyanes. <http://www.manioc.org/Images/SCH130090118i>. Courtesy of Manioc, Bibliothèque numérique Caraïbe, Amazonie, Plateau des Guyanes.

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 © Hana Knižová and Sabrina Henry.

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**Gabriele Mentges**  
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 Servet Koçyiğit, *Golden Lining*, 2016. Taken from *212 Magazine* Issue II, Locality –

#### Image Credits

**Golden Lining** by Servet Koçyiğit, 2016. All images courtesy of 212 Magazine.  
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Burgo de Osma, fol.: 34v–35r, ill. quoted from John Williams, ed., *The Illustrated Beatus: A Corpus of the Illustrations of the Commentary on the Apocalypse*, vol. 1 (London 1994), 51, ill. 21. (DadaWeb, Universität zu Köln, Kunsthistorisches Institut)

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Relics textiles, 9th/10th century, polychromed silk samite, Ev. Church Community Bad Gandersheim, Inv-No. 396; ill. quoted from Christian Popp, "Reliquien im hochmittelalterlichen Weiheritus," in *Seide im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Frauenstift: Besitz – Bedeutung – Umnutzung*, ed. Thomas Schilp and Annemarie Stauffer, Essener Forschungen zum Frauenstift, vol. 11 (Essen: Klartext, 2013), 160, ills. 3–4.

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Fig. 60  
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Fig. 61  
 Theophanu Cross, 1039–1058, Cathedral Treasury of Essen, overall view and detail;

ill. quoted from Anne Kurtze, *Durchsichtig oder durchlässig. Zur Sichtbarkeit der Reliquien und Reliquiare des Essener Stiftsschatzes im Mittelalter*, Studien zur internationalen Architektur- und Kunstgeschichte, 148 (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2017) 142, ill. II.3.3.  
**Fig. 62**  
Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbalaa*, 2014. Four film stills from the "Battle of Hattin" scene. Courtesy of Wael Shawky and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg.

#### Traveling Fashion: Exoticism and Tropicalism Alexandra Karentzos

**Fig. 63**  
Aldemir Martins, "Brazilian Look," collection for Rhodia, collection Brazilian Look, 1963. Dress above: print with abstract floral pattern design by Aldemir Martins. In *Manchete* 1963 (595): 44–45.  
**Fig. 64**  
Izabel Pons, "Brazilian Primitive," collection for Rhodia, collection Brazilian Primitive, 1965. Left: dress by Izabel Pons, bird-patterned print; right: dress with symbols of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé by Aldemir Martin. In *Jóia* magazine, 1965.  
**Fig. 65**  
Hélio Oiticica, Nildo of Mangueira with *Parangolé* P4 Cape 1, 1967. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro. In *Tropicália: Die 60s in Brasilien*. Edited by Gerald Matt, Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, with Verlag für moderne Kunst, Nürnberg, 2010. Exhibition catalogue, p. 41.  
**Fig. 66**  
Singer and composer Caetano Veloso wearing the *Parangolé* P4 Cape 1, 1968, Hélio Oiticica: P 04 *Parangolé* Cape 01 1964. Photo: Andreas Valentim. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica. In *Hélio Oiticica. Das große Labyrinth*. Edited by Susanne Gaensheimer, Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, with Hatje Cantz, 2013. Exhibition catalogue, p. 99.

#### The Production of African Wax Cloth in a Neoliberal Global Market: Vlisco and the Processes of Imitation and Appropriation Christine Delhayé

**Fig. 67**  
Vlisco, collection "Splendeur", 2014, Photo: Vlisco. Photo: Fritz Kok. Courtesy of Vlisco.

**Fig. 68**  
Vlisco, collection "Celebrate with Style", 2017. Photo: Vlisco, Photography: Floor Knapen. Courtesy of Vlisco.  
**Fig. 69**  
Design 13/0036, Vlisco (Ankersmit), 1912. Photo: Vlisco. Courtesy of Vlisco.  
**Fig. 70**  
Design Lino, ABC 1906 (after Indonesian design "Tambal Miring"). Archive ABC (A RV-B110-2) Photo: Helen Elands. Courtesy of Helen Elands and ABC, Hyde.

#### Incommensurate T-shirts: Art/Economy from Senegal to the United States

##### Leslie Rabine

**Fig. 71**  
Streetwear designer Poulo (Mohamadou El Amine Diallo) sets up his heat-film laser printer in Dakar, Senegal, April 2015. Photo: Leslie Rabine.  
**Fig. 72**  
Graffiti artist Kemp Ndaa prepares a T-shirt for heat-film transfer on the press in Poulo's first atelier in Dakar, Senegal. February 2012. Photo: Leslie Rabine.  
**Fig. 73**  
Graffiti artist Nourou (Mohamadou Nourou Anwar Ndiaye) at a graffiti festival in Saint-Louis du Sénégal, December 2015. Photo: Leslie Rabine.  
**Fig. 74**  
Nourou, working at the atelier, has designed a T-shirt inscribed with "RSPCT EVRYBDY / TRST NBDY/ Build'Other," Dakar, Senegal, February 2017. Photo: Leslie Rabine.  
**Fig. 75**  
Nourou, at the atelier in Dakar, separates the laser-cut design element from the sheet of heat-film, March 2017. Photo: Leslie Rabine.  
**Fig. 76**  
Nourou places a piece of heat-film design element on a T-shirt before pressing it, March 2017. Photo: Leslie Rabine.

## Biographies

### Biographies

Louis Thomas Achille, Jean Baldouï, Marie-Magdeleine Carbet, Paulette Nardal, Rosario, and Clara W. Shepard were Parisian Afro-Martiniquais intellectuals who wrote for *La Revue du Monde Noir/Review of the Black World* (1931–32). As voices of the Pan-African movement they produced the intellectual coming-of-age of the Négritude movement.

Christine Checinska is an artist, designer, writer, and curator. Her writings focus on the relationship between cloth, culture, and race. The cultural exchanges that occur as a result of movement and migration, creating creolized cultural forms, are recurring themes. Her PhD was awarded by Goldsmiths, University of London in 2009. She is currently an associate researcher at VIAD, University of Johannesburg. In 2016 she delivered the TEDxTalk "Disobedient Dress: Fashion as Everyday Activism," and installed her solo exhibition "The Arrivants" at the FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg. Her publications include *Crafting Difference: Art, Cloth and the African Diasporas in Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

Christine Delhaye MW Dr. is a lecturer in Cultural Theory and Policy in the Cultural Studies program, Department of Arts, Religion and Culture at the University of Amsterdam. She teaches courses on the program Art and Culture in the Public Domain and Founders of Cultural Studies. Since 2012 she has been teaching on fashion history and theory. She is program chair of the MA Kunst en cultuur in het publieke domein. Her fields of research include cultural globalization and urban cultures, and fashion studies. Among others she has published: C. Delhaye and R. Woets, "The Commodification of Ethnicity: Vlisco Fabrics and Wax Cloth Fashion in Ghana," *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 2, no. 1, 77–97; C. Delhaye, S. Saharso and V. van de Ven (2014), "Immigrant Youths' Contribution to Urban Culture in Amsterdam," in N. Foner, J. Rath, J. W. Duyvendak and R. van Reekum eds., *Immigration and the New Urban Landscape*, New York: New York University Press, 287–309; Christine Delhaye, *Door consumptie tot individu. Modebladen in Nederland, 1880–1914* (Aksant, 2000).

Burcu Dogramaci is a professor at the Department of Art History at University of Munich. She received research scholarships from the German Research Institute (DFG) and the Aby M. Warburg Prize of the City of Hamburg, and was awarded the Kurt-Hartwig-Siemers Research Prize by the Hamburg Scientific Foundation (HWS). In 2016 she was awarded an ERC Consolidator Grant for her project "Relocating Modernism: Global Metropolises, Modern Art and Exile." Her research focuses on migration, contemporary and modern fashion, photography, sculpture, architecture, and design. Her publications include *Heimat: Eine künstlerische Spurensuche* (Böhlau Verlag, 2016), *Migration und künstlerische Produktion: Aktuelle Perspektiven* (transcript, 2013), and *Wechselbeziehungen: Mode, Malerei und Fotografie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Jonas, 2011).

Sonja Eismann lives in Berlin where she works as a journalist and cultural scientist. Eismann studied in Vienna, Mannheim, Dijon (France) and Santa Cruz (USA). In 1999 she cofounded the magazine *nylon – KunstStoff zu Feminismus und Populärkultur* and co-moderated a biweekly radio show in Vienna covering pop culture and feminism at Radio Orange 94.0. In addition, she worked as a freelancer for the Austrian youth radio station FM4. From 2002 to 2007 she was editor at the Cologne-based music magazine *Intro*, and from 2007 to 2008 she contributed to the research project "Grrrl Zines," under the guidance of Dr. Elke Zobl in Salzburg. In 2008 she cofounded *Missy Magazine*. In 2007 her anthology *Hot Topic: Popfeminismus heute* was published, she was coeditor of *Craftista: Handarbeit als Aktivismus* (2011), and her book *absolute Fashion* was published in 2012. Since 2007 she has taught at universities in Basel, Salzburg, and Paderborn, and at the universities of fine arts in Vienna, Linz, and Zurich. She writes for *Spex*, *taz*, *Jungle World*, and *konkret*, among others. She has participated in numerous workshops and lectures that focus on representation of gender in popular culture, Third-Wave feminism, gender sensitivities, (pop) journalistic writing, DIY culture, and fashion theory.

Elke Gaugele is a professor of Fashions and Styles at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She is director of the Austrian Center for Fashion Research (ACFFR), vice dean of the institute for education in the arts, and head of an innovative study program on Fashion and Styles that brings together conceptual art and design practices with critical studies in fashion and popular cultures. She holds a PhD in cultural anthropology and has worked as a curator, researcher, and lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London and at universities in Cologne, Frankfurt am Main, and Vienna, among others. Her recent work as international researcher and author focuses on the aesthetic politics and postcolonial approaches in fashion, textile and cultural theory, and on the history of science in fashion. Selected publications include *Critical Studies: Kultur- und Sozialtheorie im Kunstmfeld* (2016, coedited with Jens Kastner), *Aesthetic Politics in Fashion*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014.

Gabriele Genge is professor and chair of Art History and Art Theory at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. Her research focuses on visual culture from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, on art and ethnography, modernism, post-colonialism, sacrality, and migration. Recent research projects include "The Anachronic and the Present: Aesthetic Perception and Artistic Concepts of Temporality in the Black Atlantic." Recent publications include *Art History and Fetishism Abroad: Global Shiftings in Media and Methods* (transcript 2014); *Black Atlantic: Andere Geographien der Moderne* (Düsseldorf University Press, 2013), and *Artefakt Fetisch Skulptur: Aristide Maillol und die Beschreibung des Fremden in der Moderne* (Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009).

Birgit Haehnel is professor of Textile and Clothing Studies with a focus on culture and technology at University Osnabrück, Germany, a member of the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies (CePoG), University Trier, Germany, and also member of the working group Art Production and Art Theory in the Age of Global Migration of the Ulmer Verein für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften. She has published writing with a special focus on ethnicity, gender, postcolonialism, and critical

whiteness. Currently, she is also working on research projects on high-tech fashion and didactics of migration in textile studies. Her essay "War doch im Haushalt der Mutter alles in saubere weiße Wäsche gekleidet" was published in the journal *Kunst und Politik – Jahrbuch der Guernica-Gesellschaft*, in 2015.

Sabrina Henry is a creative director, stylist, and costume designer exploring the intangible cultural heritage of black communities in the global diaspora. Her work has been published in *Vogue* (Italy), *i-D*, *Tank*, and *Stylist*. In 2017 she was fashion curator of artistic programming at the Southbank Centre, London, working across disciplines including dance, visual arts, and music. Henry is currently developing a research project in Colombia looking at the traditions of dance, music, language, and folklore within the community of San Basilio de Palenque.

Helen Jennings is a London-based writer and consultant. She is cofounder and editorial director of *Natala*, a multimedia platform celebrating contemporary African visual arts, fashion, and culture, and the former editor of *Arise* magazine. She is author of the book *New African Fashion* (Prestel, 2011) and has written essays for a number of other books and journals. Jennings has contributed to global titles including the *Guardian*, *Harpers Bazaar*, *NKA*, *IAM*, *Lula*, *Dazed*, *iD*, *AnOther*, *Newsweek*, and the *Sunday Times*.

Alexandra Karentzos, PhD, is a professor of Fashion and Aesthetics at the Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany. She was previously a junior professor of art history at the University of Trier, and the assistant curator of the Alte Nationalgalerie and the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. In 2007 she was fellow at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA (Research group *No Laughing Matter. Visual Humor in Ideas of Race, Nationality, and Ethnicity*), and in 2011 she was fellow at the Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald. She is cofounder and board member at the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies (CePoG), Trier, and cofounder and editor of the contemporary art and culture magazine *Querformat*. Her research interests span the field of art, visual culture, and fashion

## Biographies

from the nineteenth century to the present day, with special focus on transculturality and globalization and issues revolving around the methodological reflection on these phenomena.

Hana Knížová is a Czech-born photographer. She moved to London to study for an MA in photography at the London College of Communication. Her personal work reflects an interest in the ambitious youth and consists mainly of conceptual personal portrait series often based around socially disadvantaged communities, such as her "Ridge Hotel Family Matters," photographs taken at the detention center Hamr na Jezeře. She uses unconventional models in her fashion imagery, as well as working with repetitiveness. Her work is regularly exhibited and she was awarded the John Kobal New Work Award in 2013 by the National Portrait Gallery.

Christian Kravagna is an art historian, critic, and curator. Since 2006 he has been the professor of Postcolonial Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. He is the author of *Transmoderne: Eine Kunstgeschichte des Kontakts* (b-books, 2017), coeditor of *Transcultural Modernisms* (Sternberg Press, 2013), and editor of *The Museum as Arena: Artists on Institutional Critique* (Buchhandlung Walther König, 2001), *Agenda: Perspektiven kritischer Kunst*, Vienna/Bozen 2000), and *Privileg Blick: Kritik der visuellen Kultur*, Berlin 1997. From 2005 to 2014, he was artistic director (with Hedwig Saxenhuber) of Kunstraum Lakeside in Klagenfurt. His most recently curated exhibition was "Ghosts of the Civil Dead," which took place at transit.sk, Bratislava, in 2016.

Gabriele Mentges is professor emerita of Cultural Anthropology of Textiles at the Technical University Dortmund, and has worked as a curator at the Museum for Popular Culture in the Württemberg State Museum. She studied ethnology and European ethnology, philosophy, and sociology at universities in Heidelberg, Hamburg, and Marburg, and has been a researcher at the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, as well as a research assistant at the Seminar für European Ethnology Kiel. Her research and writings focus on material cultures, European and non-

Western fashion history, fashion and cultural theories, and museum studies. She has led several international research projects, including, most recently, "Modernity of Traditions: On the Sustainability of the Uzbek Textile Heritage" (2013–15), which was carried out in collaboration with many Uzbek universities and research centers.

Birgit Mersmann is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Duisburg-Essen. She is the co-founder of the research network "Art Production and Art Theory in the Age of Global Migration" established in 2013. Research foci include image and media theory, visual cultures, modern and contemporary East Asian and Western art, global art history, art and migration, the history of Asian biennials, new museums in Asia, visual translation, interrelations between script and image, documentary photography, photobooks. Her recent monographs and edited books include *Kunsttopographien globaler Migration*, a thematic issue of the journal *kritische berichte* (Jonas, 2015); *Schriftkonik. Bildphänomene der Schrift in kultur- und medienkomparativer Perspektive* (Fink, 2015); *Schrift Macht Bild. Schriftkulturen in bildkritischer Perspektive* (Velbrück, 2011); *The Humanities between Global Integration and Cultural Diversity* (De Gruyter, 2016); *Transmission Image. Visual Translation and Cultural Agency* (CSP, 2009).

Heval Okçuoğlu is an Istanbul-based writer and editor. She has spent more than ten years in the publishing industry. Having gained experience from working on a number of art and culture publications, including *Bone Magazine* and *Istanbul Art News*, she is now the editor in chief of *212*, an international magazine based in Istanbul, which is distributed across four continents. As the first fully bilingual magazine of its kind in Turkey, the magazine aims to interrogate social, artistic, and cultural phenomena from the local region and worldwide through short fiction, long-form reportage, photo essays, and interviews. She has contributed to various international publishing platforms including *Brownbook*, *Dossier Journal*, *Freunde von Freunden*, and *Le Cool*.

Walé Oyéjidé Esq. is the creative director of Ikeré Jones. He is a writer, public speaker, lawyer, and a recording artist/producer. Oyéjidé's design work was part of the "Making Africa" contemporary design exhibition, which took place at the Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, the Kunsthal Rotterdam, and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. His work was featured in the "Creative Africa" exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. His work exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Fowler Museum, UCLA. He has given lectures on his work in Brazil, Ecuador, France, and Tanzania. His designs also appeared as part of the "Generation Africa" fashion show at Pitti Uomo 89 in Florence, in 2016.

Leslie W. Rabine is a professor emerita of women's studies and French at the University of California, Davis. She is the author of *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (Berg, 2002) and coauthor of *African-Print Fashion Now!* (Fowler, 2017), and has written several essays on graffiti artists, multimedia practices, and young fashion designers in Senegal.

Ruby Sircar is a senior artist at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, she holds a PhD in cultural studies and postcolonial studies, was a Jan van Eyck Research Fellow, and focuses her work on popular culture and intersectional and anti-colonial discourses. She currently works on South Asian masculinities as depicted in popular media narratives since the 1960s in Western media, cinema and television. Most of her work evolves in network and group settings; thus, she is part of the feminist group FO/GO Lab and was chairwoman of the Austrian Association of Women Artists.

Angela Stercken is an art historian, writer and curator. Her work focuses on art from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries and explores subjects such as the theory of image, the history of exhibition and the museum, the theory of art, space and technology, and contemporary conceptual and digital art in transcultural processes. Research projects about the history of exhibitions and museums led her to the Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, to art institutions, museums, and to the University of Duisburg-Essen, where she

undertook a deputy professorship for contemporary art history. Current research projects include: "The Anachronic and the Present: Aesthetic Perception and Artistic Concepts of Temporality in the *Black Atlantic*." Recent publications: "Otto Neurath Reloaded: Zeichen der Weltordnung – Medien kultureller Differenz" (2017), "Layering the Pictorial: Transmediality in the Work of Zelko Wiener" (2016), *Art History and Fetishism Abroad: Global Shiftings in Media and Methods* (Transcript-Verlag, 2014, coedited with Gabriele Genge), and "Places in South Africa—Images in Our Minds: Roger Ballen's Photographs of Different Places" (2010).

Monica Titton is a fashion scholar and culture critic who lives and works in Vienna. In 2015 she received her PhD in sociology from the University of Vienna. Titton currently works as a postdoctoral researcher at the Austrian Center for Fashion Research at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and as a lecturer in fashion history at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Her work develops a critical, sociological perspective at the intersections of fashion, culture, art, politics, and identity. She has written and published on collective narratives on self and identity on fashion blogs, on the construction of fashionable subjectivities in cosmopolitan, globalized, and urban contexts in street-style blogs, and essays on processes of the economization of art and fashion design, the subversion and affirmation of gender stereotypes in post-feminist media culture, and the conspicuous display of wealth in social media and reality TV. Concerns with criticism in fashion media, postcolonial critique, and the decolonization of fashion imagineries have become central to her most recent work. Her recent publications include: "Blogging the Female Self: Authorship, Self-Performance and Identity Politics in Fashion Blogs," in *Female Authorship and the Documentary Image* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), "Fashion Criticism Unravelled: A Sociological Critique of Criticism in Fashion Media," *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016), and "Fashionable Personae: Self-Identity and Enactments of Fashion Narratives in Fashion Blogs," *Fashion Theory* 19, no. 2 (2015).

Where notions of tradition and of the primitive have remained embedded in so many fashion industry imaginations, this postcolonial fashion critique provides a much-needed perspective. Each of the contributions develops and expands the work of key thinkers from W. E. B. Du Bois's visual sociology to Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic. *Fashion and Postcolonial Critique* will prove seminal for scholars in textile and design history, in fashion communications, and also in cultural studies and sociology.

**Angela McRobbie** (Goldsmiths, University of London)

The breadth of themes and approaches in this timely publication reflects the diversity of lives, cultures, practices, and geographies that characterize the concern of fashion and the postcolonial. It represents current international debates on fashion, style, textiles, consumption, production, and making in countries across the world. The editors have done sterling work in bringing such a rich range of contributors together that encourages new and established researchers to maintain sustained thinking on this subject. *Fashion and Postcolonial Critique* is an exemplary reminder that difference is indeed powerful.

**Carol Tulloch** (University of the Arts London)

With contributions by Louis Thomas Achille, Jean Baldouï, Marie-Magdeleine Carbet, Christine Checinska, Christine Delhaye, Burcu Dogramaci, Sonja Eismann, Elke Gaugele, Gabriele Genge, Birgit Haehnel, Sabrina Henry, Helen Jennings, Alexandra Karentzos, Hana Knížová, Christian Kravagna, Gabriele Mentges, Birgit Mersmann, Paulette Nardal, Heval Okçuoğlu, Walé Oyéjidé Esq., Leslie W. Rabine, Rosario, Clara W. Shepard, Ruby Sircar, Angela Stercken, Sølve Sundsbø, Monica Titton

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