Fashion, the Ultimate Illusion: Buying In to the Ideology of Ethical Brands

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Abstract

This research examines how the idea of ‘ethical’ fashion perpetuates an exploitative system. This research examines the way ethical fashion brands use the skills and time of garment workers, and relabels commodities to expand and create further investment opportunities to generate profit. This practice is based on capitalist mechanisms that are unethical in the way they exploit workers. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s (1972) theory of the culture industry is used to argue that the fashion industry finds new ways to continue its domination and control of artisans and garment workers by commodifying the culture and crafts of marginalised communities. This commodification and appropriation is framed as an honourable practice but, in reality, it alienates indigenous cultures. Propaganda is spread by advertising collaborations with celebrities to enforce a hegemonic ideology through a philanthropic mask to elevate fair trade fashion in consumer society. Ciara Cremin’s (2011) theory of the culture of crisis industry and guilt fetishism is used to argue that fashion uses crisis to generate panic, anxiety and feelings of guilt in consumers to manipulate consumer behaviour and stimulate the fetishisation of ethically labelled garments. Consumers are sold on the promise that poverty, exploitation and social and ecological problems will be positively changed through their consumption habits. This sedates the critical questioning of the fashion industry and offers consumers a convenient solution that enables them to continue to feed their consumerist desires, while reducing their feelings of guilt associated with ecological and social harms.

Keywords: fair trade, ethical fashion, logic of capital, the culture industry, cultural appropriation, repressive tolerance, the culture of crisis industry, guilt fetishism, desire, ideology.
Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: Maral Salmanpour
Acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude goes to my father and my mother for their love and for passing on the knowledge of the traditions and customs of my people. This journey would not be possible without their support and inspiration. I would like to give special thanks to my siblings who have supported me and for the intellectual duels we shared, which have been a source of growth for me over the years. My immense gratitude to the eldest of my two brothers for recovering all my lost data for this thesis. I would like to express my great appreciation to my partner for supporting me both academically and emotionally during my research journey. I am very appreciative to him for being there to motivate me through hard times and giving me confidence and encouragement. I would like to thank Dr Ciara Cremin for her research, which has been incredibly influential to me and has given me insight into the logic and ideology of fair trade. I am deeply grateful to Cremin for this valuable and enlightening information. I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Fleur Palmer for her great support and patients. It was a real privilege and an honour to have her as a supervisor.
Personal Statement

Allow me to pause and emphasize this general rule: Success always calls for greater generosity—though most people, lost in the darkness of their own egos, treat it as an occasion for greater greed. (Xenophon, 2006, p. 90)

It is a growing trend in fashion to avoid pausing and thinking about this “general rule”—that to be fair means everyone receives equal portions and that we are generous with the wealth we earn. Instead, we are lost in our desire to look good and be successful, famous and known for altruistic acts. We are lost in our egos and use moral ideas for greed—to gain more money and material possessions, such as clothes. I studied traditional Persian crafts and Fine Arts in Iran, where I gained knowledge about ancient practices. As part of this study, I completed papers in sociology which helped me to develop a critical perspective on social issues. In New Zealand, I completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) majoring in fashion design. During this time, I practised and researched fair trade and sustainable fashion. However, during my undergraduate, I faced ideological opposition from people within the fashion industry, academia and other proponents of sustainable fashion when I questioned the veracity of the fashion industry’s new trade movements that purported to be fair and ethical. While completing my final-year project for my BFA, I researched with the aim of revealing how the fashion industry uses ethical and fair trade principals. I was persuaded by my lecturers not to argue against the industry or to critique the production and consumption of fair trade. Instead, I conducted research into sustainable fashion to try to understand more deeply these practices and the reasons for this new trend. We were encouraged by our lecturers to compete to be the most ethical and sustainable designers in the department. Through this, I achieved recognition and rewards for ethical and sustainable practice in my design and research, and had my work published in Apparel Magazine NZ. I witnessed students who
claimed they ethically sourced materials and crafts from communities in marginalised nations to incorporate them into their design with no evidence as to how it was ethical, other than that it fit the ideological agenda. This further influenced my original question: how could this make the fashion industry fair and ethical? My question was not answered through my own practice or by seeing and researching similar projects. This left me disheartened, knowing that such practices would not change the social and environmental issues created by the industry. This led me to the realisation that such projects benefit an industry by masking the reality of production. The fashion industry has developed a conveniently comforting solution to keep us consuming, manifested as fair fashion. As academics, designers and students, we must take a more critical approach when examining fashion. We must critique the implications of interweaving ethics, culture and capital. Solutions to social and environmental issues cannot be opportunities to continue generating excess profit. We must not simply pacify our concerns around these issues to feel comfortable with the continuation of producing and consuming. Fair fashion has become so financially beneficial to the industry that there is a demand for ethical designers. This has stimulated changes within institutions, such as universities. Fashion design lecturers and students implement ethical and fair practices in their research and design, but we must also critique the exploitative face behind this righteous mask. Ethical concealment will not stop the reality of the fashion industry.
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Introduction

I was first introduced to fair trade and ethical fashion in 2013. Being Persian and coming from a region in Iran with cultural ties and a history connected to the production of textiles and natural dyeing, I felt these practices resonate within me. The tradition of rug making is an art form that creates more than a rug—it holds a spirit that is tied and woven into every knot and tells a story in the patterns that are brought to life through the colours produced from that land’s natural elements. When we sit on one of these rugs and run our hands along the patterns, we connect to our land and culture. I began to perform these traditions and to source natural materials from my home city of Tabriz to use in my undergraduate practice and research. However, I felt conflicted because I could see the possibility of cultural misrepresentation through such practices. I feel these practices have become less about celebrating the traditions of marginalised cultures and their crafts, and more about modifying them into a desirable commodity with little compensation for the traditional owners. In Western society, there is a fantasy propagated of a philanthropic modern-day Silk Road, which attacks customs and crafts that belong to cultures that hold deep meaning for those who identify with them. This is just like the past, when treasures from the East were taken to the West to be sold and traded by social elites to increase their wealth and sustain their luxurious lifestyles. These same practices are now echoed in modern fair trade and ethical fashion, which takes traditional skills and crafts and incorporates them into fashion under the guise of being fair, primarily to increase desirability. This is the infiltrating spirit of capital, which enters a cultural space and exploits certain cultures for their commodifiable qualities. Ethical fashion is yet to address the spirit of capital that haunts the industry, which instead disguises exploitation as fair. In my research, I found cultural theorist Angela McRobbie’s views particularly
enlightening. She found that fashion “sometimes lets itself down and colludes in its own trivialization” (McRobbie, 2002, p. 55).

Thus, it appears necessary to apply some critique to ethical and fair trade fashion, as it requires deeper analysis. This research attempts to fill this gap by questioning how we, as citizens and consumers, can describe fashion as fair and ethical when it is based on a system that results in ongoing inequality and a disproportionate distribution of profit under the pretence of fairness. Design practices have not been incorporated to examine these issues. Rather, I use theorists from different disciplines such as sociology, psychology and philosophy in conjunction with relevant examples.

Fair and ethical fashion is built upon a tortured foundation—that is, the logic of capital. In Chapter 1, I argue that the fashion industry promotes fair trade and sustainable practices within a complex structure in which alienation is interwoven with an extensive and multilayered supply chain. Karl Marx’s theory of dominant ideology argues that these ruling class mantras of cultural and social values are effective because of capitalism’s complexity and because the full logic of capital is not visible (Marx & Engels, 1970). I argue that the ruling class sustains their privatised capitalist companies and controls the means of production and distribution (Harvey, 2010b) because they are deemed legitimate and justified by calling each fair and sustainable (Cremin, 2011; Žižek, 2008). The lifeblood of these ruling class companies is the cheap labour they use, which, too, prevails among global fair trade labelled fashion companies monopolising the market. Like any standard label, these companies trade with specialised artisans and garment workers from impoverished countries who form an essential component to their trade. However, many are forced to remain static in their production methods to appease these fair trade conglomerates. Thus, I argue that this ruling class cannot successfully de-fetishise their companies, as their entire system is itself a fetishistic illusion that takes ownership of workers’ products. The social relations of employees and consumers remain
obscured because consumers measure and express artisans’ value and use-value with money, which results in their exploitation and alienation. Money then masks consumers’ social relations, as they do not buy directly from artisans, but from a store using capital, which obscures artisans’ skills and labour. Consumers social relations are equally hidden from those who make their clothes, as artisans neither know who wears the goods they produce and consumers neither see nor understand the supply chain.

I also argue that supposed fair trade companies repress consumers, whose social lives are anchored to these new and unnecessary commodities. The false satisfaction gained from such garments blinds people from recognising their embedded economic inequalities, and the pleasure and freedom consumers feel as a result of their consumption is irrational, as they (as well as workers) become bound to a system that links morality to consumption to immunise each from its alienating nature. Thus, morality and consumption cannot truthfully coexist because the supply chain and social relations involved are, themselves, mechanisms of capitalistic production.

Artisans from rural communities then become a source of wealth for companies that offer microloans to start micro-businesses to which they also eventually become bound. Here, fair trade companies claim to raise workers’ wages and to provide pattern-making training and education. However, in doing so, they reflect the spirit of neoliberalism, which only ensures the unequal global distribution of wealth and resources. Essentially, this is an illogical practice, as it weakens workers in developing countries who do not recognise themselves as equal partners with fashion companies. Therefore, by consuming and producing under the veneer of being ethical, we are neither addressing nor revealing the uneven development and embedded inequalities within global fashion.

The current state of ethical fashion allows the industry to operate as an imperialist wolf in philanthropic clothing. Cultures that are marginalised through exploitation now
have their crafts and practices taken and homogenised by ethical fashion. This creates desires among consumers for appropriated commodities that carry cultural signifiers, which highlight their social power to others. In Chapter 2, by interpreting Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1972) theory of the culture industry, I argue that the fashion industry uses propaganda, politics and economics to persuade consumers to perform in constant states of consumption. They do this by promoting obedience to justify the ideology of consumption; thus, such passive reciprocal acceptance has turned consumers into cultural dupes. The paradox of the ruling class in ethical fashion is that they have created a form of capitalism that occupies two opposing forces—humanitarianism and business. Essentially, the fashion industry mass-produces and distributes both cultural crafts and art to cultivate false psychological needs, which then supports the myth that consuming fair trade fashion preserves the cultural heritage of impoverished nations. As such, consumers’ sense of individuality becomes repressed and the idea of one’s ‘self’ deteriorates into a pseudo form upon experiencing constant states of material seduction to enjoy entirely fabricated fashion trends. Socially responsible, honourable and seemingly transparent slogans are primarily used to lure consumers into accepting the commodification of marginalised communities, which dually enables the concealment of these exploitative systems.

I explore how such cultural crises and rural communities are intertwined with fashion through celebrity philanthropy. Essentially, the fashion industry enforces the hegemony of the ruling class and attempts to present fair trade consumption and production as popular and trendy. Consumers then buy into this ethical disguise because they feel it permits them to live up to such highly regarded values. Simultaneously, consumers believe they have the power to affect the living standards of poor nations because they are manipulated into believing the industry’s production can be trusted.
Consumers are then thrown into a complicated social system in which everything has been chosen and prescribed for them.

In Chapter 3, I interpret the work of Ciara Cremin and Slavoj Žižek. I argue that ecological and social catastrophes build capital and create new investment opportunities for the fashion industry, which then deliberately induce fear, anxiety and insecurity among consumers through emotionally charged appeals, such as confronting imagery. However, I discover that such consumption is a form of social passivity, or ‘pseudo-activity’. Essentially, these ethical ideas are imposed upon consumers to induce within them an unending desire to constantly appear to others as though their activities are unique and responsible. This facade then sparks their aspirations to constantly reshape and rework their appearance to elevate their social status and, thus, build cultural capital.

Essentially, clothing’s materials may be fabric but their logos carry meaning. In this sense, ethical consumption stops consumers from critiquing their beliefs to ensure they passively follow such symbols without hesitation. The false religiosiy of ethical and sustainable fashion enables the industry to earn surplus profit because people gain pleasure from intense worship and desire. However, consumers can never escape this cycle. The fact is, every time they purchase a so-called ethical item, they take from nature and create more waste.

Essentially, the deception of the fashion industry distracts people from understanding themselves and their political reality. They know they are heading towards disaster but continue to justify their enjoyment with fantasised reasoning that says they are merely doing their best to help.
Chapter 1: The Logic of Capital in Fashion

1.1 Introduction and Overview

This chapter examines privatised fashion companies that are known as fair and sustainable. The findings argue that they enforce ruling class ideologies upon their production chains, which perpetuates a monopolisation of the industry to accumulate profit. Essentially, this ruling class dominates the working class but blames consumers for the social and environmental degradation they create. The reason the fashion industry is efficient is because it trades with offshore labourers from countries where poverty is prevalent. These impoverished nations are at the centre of commodity production because the Western world fetishises both their products and workers. Essentially, despite being labelled as ethical, these production and distribution models are controlled by companies that exploit the skills and labour time of garment workers.

As consumers do not directly buy from artisans but from shops, this process obscures social relations, thus, alienating workers from both their crafts and the production process to which they contribute. Ethical fashion companies then measure these cultural commodities with money and seize control of workers’ skills in exchange for minimal wages. This process equally threatens the local bond artisans share with their crafts, as they become monopolised by Western control. Thus, the fashion industry cannot then be considered fair when it does not address these inequalities in their system, which, as a result of globalisation, obscures and broadens the gap between each sector through unequal economic trade. Ultimately, artisans can never achieve true empowerment. To survive, they must rely on fashion companies to provide them with resources, such as microloans and education, which, ironically, keeps them bound to the industry.

Often, fair trade companies eventually claim that workers’ wages have risen thanks to fair trade codes of conduct, which supposedly create opportunities for
economically disadvantaged people, improve transparency, provide fair wages and
gender equity, eradicate child labour and improve working conditions (Minney, 2016, p. 12). They are able to do this because their business models often incorporate neoliberal ideologies to justify the exploitative use of cheap labour and developing nations’ products. This chapter also criticises the paradox of the ruling class through Karl Marx’s theory of dominant ideology; the logic of capital is then used to argue that fashion elites misrepresent the point of origin of their goods. It is important to also explain the origins of how fair trade and sustainable practices have developed in the industry.

The global, capital-focused fashion industry dominates the trade of clothing and textiles, which, in turn, produces cultural materials that encourage social inequality in developing countries (Brooks, 2015, p. 228; Smith, 1984; Wolf, 1982) where workers are alienated by the industry’s fast production methods (Rocamora & Smelik, 2016). Although sustainable and fair trade fashion practices are touted as a solution, the issues generated through fast fashion production and consumption create social and environmental devastation throughout the developing world. However, advocates of sustainable and fair trade fashion instead suggest that they create social capitalism by appropriating the cultural and historical skill sets of those from developing nations (Brown, 2010; Minney, 2011). This then encourages consumer demand for ethical and sustainable fashion commodities—a practice that is now incorporated in all levels of the fashion industry, from small designers to global fashion conglomerates.

For example, Safia Minney (2010, 2017)—an activist and pioneer of the fair trade fashion movement and owner of fair trade label People Tree—suggests using manual skills such as handweaving, embroidery, natural dyeing and organic cotton farming from impoverished nations (like India and Bangladesh), as it promotes the livelihood of artisans and subsistence farmers, alleviates poverty and increases workers’ representation. People Tree facilitates these communities with resources to promote
environmentally responsible initiatives that celebrate transparency and encourage labourers to work in their villages, thus, reducing pollution and global warming (Minney, 2011, pp. 34–128). Through this, Minney (2016) aims “to see an enlightened capitalism” (p. 7).

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), trade unions and non-government organisations (NGOs) also suggest that workers are free from exploitation and instead gain autonomy through this type of production (Minney, 2017, p. 20). They claim fair trade positions organic production at the centre of business. In addition, researchers have found that people buy fair trade products because they are marketed with values that differ from mainstream brands (Griffiths, 2015; Janvry, McIntosh & Sadoulet, 2010). However, it is unreasonable to claim that one universal code of conduct for organic and fair trade production can be established for and applied to several compliant countries (70 in total) (Moberg, 2005; Utting-Chamorro, 2005) with different climates, ecologies and crops. Dictating how these nations operate and produce garments is illogical because:

it doesn’t make sense to globalise one … political ideology and impose it on cultures and peoples where historical and cultural experiences differ sharply. This so-called globalisation approach of telling other people in other countries and culture that ‘my way is the best, and yours is not’ just represents ignorance. (Brahm, 2007, p. 80)

In addition, barring farmers from using herbicides under fair trade principles forces them to perform intense physical work under extreme weather conditions (Moberg, 2005; Utting-Chamorro, 2005).

NGOs’ claims that sustainable production is an ‘appropriate’ and liberating system is deceptive; instead, many want labourers from impoverished nations to earn less and remain in poverty while Western corporations prosper (Hewett, 2005). This parallels notions that companies routinely conceal certain cultural issues, such as gender inequality
in India (Batra & Reio, 2016; Minney, 2017), by proclaiming that ethical and sustainable fashion liberates people (particularly women) from adversity without tangible evidence. The idea of ‘sustainable’ development is fraught, as it sustains poverty and inequality and undermines indigenous cultures in poor countries (Limi, Runyan & Andersen, 2017). Rather, “the best way to eradicate poverty is to strive to transform undeveloped countries into developed ones as life is about more than mere survival” (Limi et al., 2017, para. 14).

Žižek (2009) argues that these emergent global classes in capitalism parallel philosopher Georg Hegel’s belief that history automatically repeats itself. Žižek (2009) states, “Hegel remarks that all great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice … the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce” (p. 1). This describes capitalism as a system in which production continues spontaneously, thus, creating socially and ecologically exploitative crises that otherwise appear as pure. These global classes are paradoxical in that their members, who embrace sustainability, attempt to solve a problem they create by representing themselves as part humanitarian, part business. They claim their production protects and supports the environment, humanity and art, and combats disease in developing nations. Žižek (2009, p. 14) affirms that those who preach a need to create an economy that produces goods to satisfy workers’ needs are missing capitalism’s primary purpose, which is to self-propel and self-augment financial circulation; thus, the paradox of capitalism is that society “cannot throw out the dirty water of financial speculation while keeping the healthy baby of real economy” (Žižek, 2009, pp. 15). Basically, fair trade companies embrace this by selling commodities using false political motivations of humanitarianism.

Concern increases when noting companies using ecology for neo-colonialist ideological mystifications, such as the economic growth in Third World countries (i.e., India, Brazil and China), to rationalise the continued use of cheap labour to consumers. Moreover, companies justify their exploitation under capitalism by encouraging
consumers to buy green products and recycle. Žižek (2008) argues that inducing fear into ecology allows global capitalism to function “as a new opium for the masses replacing declining religion” (pp. 440). Therefore, the notion of sustainability as a hegemonic and ideologically driven practice is that any change under capitalism is “only a change for the worse” (Žižek, 2008, pp. 441). Through this process, consumers are led to feel that capitalism is the answer to global suffering. Ethically driven consumption provides consumers with a pleasant illusion that their consumption can reduce global suffering, but it also sedates criticism to capitalism itself. Regardless of action, it will endure and embed itself in fashion’s emerging ‘ethical’ brands and continue profiting from oblivious consumers who will not question such production because humanity is supposedly receiving aid in return.

1.2 Dominant Ideology

The ideology of the ruling class is in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over means of mental production. So, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling class ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.

(Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 64)

Marx’s (1906) argument that ruling classes impose dominant ideologies of culture to subordinate the working class for everyone’s benefit creates a false consciousness among people because it is oppressive and designates the masses as ignorant dupes of the system (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 45; Murdock & Golding, 1977). This directly supports claims that fashion is the agent of capitalism’s false consciousness (Benjamin, 2006, p. 182). As human behaviour is equally embedded within social contexts and reflective of
dominant (and accepted) ideologies, of which fashion is primarily concerned (Sellerberg, 1994, p. 59; Simmel, 1950, pp. 338–344), fashion becomes part of this aesthetic realisation that must constantly transform to sustain its own existence within an endless social cycle that governs humanity itself (Canto-Mila, 2005, p. 31; McNeil, 2009, pp. xxvi–xxvii).

Fair trade and sustainable fashion can be understood as a monopolised industry for the ruling class to reinforce unequal power relations and to exploit consumers and impoverished labourers for wealth. These problematic ideologies have been imposed upon artisans and garment workers with little marketplace access or influence to repress them under Western control. Companies, like People Tree, that promote ethical values to improve marginalised communities do this to attain self-fulfilment through their production. Likewise, sustainable fashion brand Komodo (2017), which produces its clothes in Kathmandu, Bali and India, proposes it empowers its impoverished workers through their labour. However, this “freedom without opportunity is a devil’s gift, and the refusal to provide such opportunities is criminal” (Chomsky, 1999, p. 91). Thus, so-called ethical fashion industries transforming impoverished nations’ raw materials into commodities under the pretence that they are free is a supposed “devil’s gift”, which is being reclaimed and controlled for falsely beneficial commercial interests. These hegemonic ‘ethical’ ideologies that offer freedom—which, according to Marcuse (2002), includes economic freedom and “freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living” (p. 4)—cannot be realised through production methods and fashion trends because each gains value by and through human capital.

Production is justified through a belief that labour prevents workers’ poverty and increases their autonomy. Instead, they operate within an unequal system that maintains class inequalities and subordination, and reinforces conglomerates’ political power to consumers. For example, Marieke Eyskoot, author and sustainable fashion lifestyle
expert, wrote, “I don’t want sustainable fashion to be seen as something ‘different’, but as a normal part of fashion” (Minney, 2016, p. 151). However, Gramsci (1971) emphasises these ethics are “an act in such a way that your conduct can become a norm for all men in similar conditions” (p. 702); therefore, the immediate conditions in which people operate, regardless of their complexity, become the general condition of life. These moral ideologies enforced by ethical brands allow production in developing countries to continue under a veneer of sustainable and ethical practice as a norm, which is actually repressive.

Supporters of fair trade instead suggest it is a non-capitalist economic system (Audebrand & Pauchant, 2009; Gendron, Bisaillon & Rance, 2009; McMurtry, 2009; Reed, 2009; VanderHoff Boersma, 2009). Fashion commentator and activist Carry Franklin proposes that “fashion has the power to embolden the women who buy and the women who make. Your power is in your ability, as a consumer, to choose” (Minney, 2016, pp. 70–71); Alexander Clauss, owner of ethical label SOULID, also asserts, “we can only change the fashion industry through the consumers” (Minney, 2016, p. 177). Countering this perspective, Hoskins (2014) emphasises that people need to overthrow the capitalist system instead of blaming consumers for the overproduction of false needs and the ideology that empowerment starts from individual action. This encourages consumers to believe that fashion promotes freedom of expression and liberation when, in fact, it favours the ruling class. Hoskins (2014) also argues it is impossible to produce ethical clothes without exploiting labourers and degrading the environment under capitalism and “by our individual consumption” (p. 183); creating clothing is an inherently harmful practice to the environment, despite attempts to manage and justify the effects of consumption itself (The Royal Society, 2012). Brooks (2015) supports this notion and argues that it is dishonest to label fashion as sustainable while inflicting irreversible environmental destruction for capital purposes, which can neither be
reconciled nor preserved by consumption. Similarly, Griffiths (2012, 2015) states that fair trade cannot declare itself an anti-capitalist movement because it is built on capitalist modes of production supported by Third World labour. Therefore, claiming to produce ‘ethical’ fashion reforms and reshapes capitalism itself; the production methods of its workers remain hidden and consumers are left to invest in an oppressive system built under the logic of capital.

1.3 Logic of Capital: Value and Use-value

Marx (1906, pp. 503–505) stated that the circulation of capital is based on endless accumulation and a competitive market that monopolises the private ownership of products, resources and money. Capitalism produces according to market demands; competition in the market leads to continual reinvention and new investments to survive and, thus, accumulate more capital. This mode of production can be sustained because it is deemed as legitimate. This is because labourers in a capitalist system do not have rights over their production; they must sell their labour to those with money, power and the means of production (Marx, 1967, pp. 794–795). Therefore, under the logic of capitalism, individuals’ use-value (skill) and value (labour time) are materialised into commodities for production. This is a societal norm because people perceive commodities as possessing a use-value that provides purpose and satisfaction (Fine, 1975; Harvey, 2010a, 2010b, 2014; McGuigan, 2009; Reiman, 1987; Wayne, 2012). In this context, “a society without capitalism would necessarily be a society without the fashion industry” (Hoskins, 2014, p. 182).

Thus, the fashion industry emphasises a duty to innovate to grow otherwise it becomes tedious. For example, Gosia Piatek, founder and creative director of fair trade brand Kowtow (2017a) proposes that her company:

only use[s] sustainably sourced trims. Our buttons are made in Italy from recycled hemp. Our denim tacks and sliders are nickel-free made in a SA8000-
certified factory in Germany. Our garments are made at SA8000-certified organisations in India … SA8000 helps ensure that the workers at our production facilities receive guaranteed minimum wage. (paras. 6–9)

However, Minney (2016) found that “the social accountability certification standards SA8000, which encourages factories to develop, maintain and apply socially acceptable practices in the workplace, has repeatedly been found to be inadequate” (p. 13). She also notes that SA8000 certification lacks transparency and accountability to amend issues related to factory safety; no true partnership between fashion companies and their suppliers exists to improve workers’ lives (Minney, 2016, p. 13). However, brands that claim their production is transparent because they are fair trade only divulge a small part of their supply chain, which is otherwise largely based on standardised capitalist modes of global production. According to Marx’s theory of value, their source of value and use-value is driven by labour power that generates a surplus, which is realised in the form of marketplace price (Bair, 2009). As many ethical and fair trade companies do not account for their entire supply chains, consumers are duped to believe that their production avoids the same methods used by their mainstream counterparts (Bair, 2009; Burgum, 2011; Ponte, Richey & Baab, 2009; Repo & Yrjölä, 2011). Harvey (2014) asserts that no-one would survive if the market traded and produced under moral motivations; instead, the transformation of labourers’ use-value and value to produce materials is crucial to capital’s existence (p. 60).

Ambassador for sustainable agency Strawberry Earth Academy Thekla Reuten suggests that “sustainable brands should try to find new ways to beat the system” (Minney, 2016, p. 65). Minney attempts to do just this at People Tree, stating, “we get our design inspiration from the incredible designs and traditional craft skills in the places that we produce. We also look at the market, what our customer likes, as well as major fashion trends too” (The True Cost, 2018, para. 6). In practice, her suggestions reflect the
logic of capital based on a competitive system that only seeks to accumulate profit through the private ownership of fashion commodities (including workers, artisans, weavers and cotton farmers) and to compete with other companies. Therefore, workers cannot be empowered because the origins of fair trade and ethically branded businesses are largely based on capitalising the ‘authentic’ qualities brought to their brand through its workers. In this regard, impoverished nations are themselves used as another use-value to attract politically and morally conscious consumers to wear supposedly ethical clothing. People Tree’s and Kowtow’s productions maintain this system because their brand is also legitimised by sustainable pretences. This enables the fashion industry to continue production by commodifying workers’ and artisans’ labour and time to produce new values with higher worth than the cost required to recompense their labour. Evidently, producers and artisans do not possess the rights to the fabrics and garments they create, so they must sell their skills to companies able to buy their labour. This form of production is a norm in the fashion industry, which further highlights how both Kowtow’s and People Tree’s commodities and production methods fail to differ from standard capitalist methods.

These social projects deceive both consumers and workers from the reality of their production. Harvey (2010b) reinforces this notion, stating, “we can’t dress in conscience and honor … clothes do not come to us that way, they come to us through human labour process and commodity exchange” (p. 60). Thus, true representations of value and use-value in ethical fashion production are suppressed because, according to Harvey (2010b), the essence of capital requires the distribution of labourers’ use-values and values for profit, or ‘exchange value’.

1.4 Exchange Value

Human agents drive commodity exchange and labour. A labourer’s use-value and value generate money for capital, as they are tangible expressions to regulate exchange.
Therefore, nothing can be deemed a value after it is financially exchanged because a commodity’s local bond to its source and values (its labourers) is exploited through the exchange process. This means human labour becomes a measurable and profitable commodity for capitalism (Harvey, 2014; Marx, 1906, 1995; McGuigan, 2009; Žižek, 1991a). Cremin (2011) supported this notion, claiming that capital’s continuation and profit is completely dependent on labourers’ use-values. In this context, value is labour time realised in the exchange of commodities, which are produced offsite (in Third World countries) to generate profit (Cremin, 2011, p. 153). Supporters of fair trade fashion, like Minney (2011), perpetuate a belief among consumers that their individual consumer action can improve the quality of marginalised people’s lives. She claims that fair trade is “the biggest proof of the Butterfly Effect, where individual good deeds and actions change the face of society, the relationship we have with each other and the way we do business” (Minney, 2011, p. 46), which is largely deceptive. Cremin (2011) proved just this:

Ethical consumption does not exist. If torture contravenes an established ethical principle then torture for whatever reason cannot be ethically justified. The same goes for ethical consumption. One cannot be an ethical consumer when the form of consumption relies on the exploitation of one class by another. (p. 132)

Therefore, ethical consumers cannot claim utmost morality because the commodities they support are manufactured by and through the exploitation of labourers’ values.

Brands advertising fair trade qualities are solely intending to invite more consumption. This form of pro-humanitarian production is exploited to create new products and markets. Capitalist systems can change the market by absorbing demands and using them as ideological apparatuses that enable the circulation of capital without disrupting consumers’ lives. The ideology of ethical consumption embeds itself in consumers’ consciences, thus, making it easier to deny the practice is motivated by and
intended for profit (Cremin, 2012, pp. 124–128). Therefore, as Harvey (2014, p. 43) asserts, this is a bourgeoisie mode of production generated by the rise of money acting as the primary measure of value and use-value.

1.5 Money as a Measure of Value

Using money to value commodities causes labour to become controlled within capitalist production. Labour time is crucial to commodity production. Its sole purpose is to sell in exchange for more capital (Harvey, 2010b, 2017; Marx, 1973). Cremin (2012, p. 36) explains this using Marx’s ‘M-C-M’ formula, which is a continuous cycle of production in which money (M) is invested by companies to buy raw materials and labour to create commodities (C), which consumers then buy for money (M) to be regained and filtered back into production. The second M is the profit generated from labourers’ use-values and values, and the surplus values gained from commodities; these enable companies to circulate and globally expand their production. Therefore, governments are likely to become hostile towards labour strikes because this disrupts the cycle and prevents capital from being generated (Cremin, 2012). In this sense, it is clear that People Tree and Kowtow (or any other ethical label) can neither operate nor circulate large amounts of clothes, garment workers or artisans around the world without capital.

The social realities of those who produce fashion items are largely hidden in this cycle. Generally, people do not buy directly from artisans. Instead clothing is bought in shops, which obscures artisans’ skills and the labour time invested in production. The money generated from this cycle continually circulates; artisans exchange their power and labour to make fashion that is sold in the market, which produces more money. This circulation creates profit from workers’ manual labour and time, which enables fashion companies to expand their production. Evidently, removing labourers from this cycle means companies and production cannot survive. Thus, the true motivation for fair trade advocates like Bruce Crowther (who founded the Fair Trade Towns campaign) to partner
with governments, NGOs, local councils and schools and start humanitarian companies (such as Oxfam and Garstang), which promote social justice and fair trade (Minney, 2016, p. 44), is to prevent workers’ strikes and to claim fair wages and good working conditions; hence, labour persists in Third World countries and production remains in motion.

Merryn Leslie, the owner of 69b Boutique in London, also sells sustainable brands from various countries. Leslie maintains her business is transparent because she sells labels such as Aspiga (apparel crafted by artisans in Africa), Toms (for every shoe bought, a pair is donated to an impoverished child), authentic Greek sandals handcrafted by artisans in Greece, O My Bag from Amsterdam (bags and accessories produced in India) and both Kowtow and People Tree merchandise (Minney, 2016, p. 189). Jo Wood, model and entrepreneur, also explains that the artisans making handwoven fabric for People Tree may be “thousands of miles away from you and me, but the distance is reduced to nothing when we’re wearing the fabric she just weaved” (Minney, 2011, p. 71). However, Bair (2009) challenges this simplified overview. He argues that both values and use-values are elusive in fair trade production because companies often do not disclose the entire supply chain from design to consumption. Therefore, its production processes, labourers’ social relations and conditions, and supply methods are, too, based on hegemonic structures of globalisation, which, thus, fuel mass commodity production and legitimise its continuation (Bair, 2009; Hartwick, 1998; Harvey, 2010b; Hudson & Hudson, 2003; Leslie & Reimer, 1999).

Wearing these material commodities can neither reduce consumers’ distance with workers and artisans; this relationship is still based on capital and globalisation, which, nevertheless, muddies a product’s origins. For example, Toms’s ‘One for One’ initiative and pledge to source fair trade and organic cotton as material for shoe production (Minney, 2016), as well as outdoor clothing brand Patagonia’s (2011, para. 2) promotion of fair labour prices and advertising campaign telling consumers “don’t buy this jacket”,
are each acts of paradoxical ethics. Both associate themselves with poverty to reassure consumers that consumption is fine, as long as it aids a humanitarian cause. However, these same commodities are still created through global labour sourced where garment workers’, artisans’ and labourers’ relations are entwined in production. Yet, separating them from these processes, to which they are so deeply entwined, results in their alienation. Therefore, developing nations endure this dilemma or risk facing economic discord and exploitation at the helms of an industry that relies on their labour.

1.6 Division of Labour

Capital accumulates wealth through the division of labour, which is rooted in monopoly power. Each segment in society, from skilled to unskilled wage-based labourers, manufacturers, farmers, sellers and, finally, consumers, is organised to sustain and generate profit in an increasingly competitive market. Here, capital is efficient because it trades with specialised labourers from offshore (and often developing) countries rife with poverty. Therefore, impoverished nations have become the central force of industrial value and use-value production by which the West gains the majority of its wealth (Fine, 1975; Harvey, 2003, 2014; Meszaros, 2009; Wayne, 2012).

Evidently, producing and consuming under ethical labels does not address or aid the uneven development and embedded inequalities within the fashion industry. Nothing can be deemed fair trade when the essential structure of these companies is based on the global division of labour to establish profit. In return, artisans are disempowered from their means of production and their traditional skills are appropriated as marketing tools used to differentiate a fair trade label’s commodities from other brands. By monopolising the labour power of impoverished nations, workers become alienated by their position in the production chain because they are forced to remain static and appease these fair trade companies. Evidently, this is why companies facing financial crises move their
production to countries where labour and production costs are cheaper (Brooks, 2015; Marx, 1973; Meszaros, 2009).

Importantly, most consumers generally oppose unethical working conditions. This allows fashion companies with an ethical focus to thrive. For example, movements against sweatshops or the Clean Clothes Campaign and Labour Behind the Label (2018), which are hinged on providing more rights and opportunities for underprivileged workers, are, in actuality, not operating solely in their interest; however, they do suggest that consumers have the power to change the fashion industry (Minney, 2016, p. 201). In relation to Toms’s (2018) ‘One for One’ initiative, it becomes evident that “every company with a powerful brand is attempting to develop a relationship with consumers that resonates so completely with their sense of self” (Klein, 2002, p. 149). The initiative’s supposed responsible capitalism means consumers buy into a belief that continued consumption equates to ethical benefits. Toms have transitioned from ethical business to cultural movement through its use of local and, thus, ‘authentic’ people for its production. It differentiates itself in the market by and through associating with poverty and charity, and consumers are convinced they can actively participate in altruistic acts through such consumption.

This type of ‘moral’ consumption reflects the fetishist characteristics of ethical consumption (Brooks, 2015). ‘Enlightened’ and ‘responsible’ capitalism offers no effective solution or aid because the nature of the industry is inherently based on exploiting these efforts for commercial gain. The entire concept of labour division relies on objectifying labourers’ values as a by-product of commodity fetishism. Thus, money is the object of fetish for both capitalism and its perpetual state of wealth production, which leads to impoverished workers in result (Harvey, 2014, pp. 19–20).
1.7 Commodity Fetishism

Commodity fetishism is inseparable from commodity production. Marx (1995) claimed that commodity fetishism reveals the hidden structures of both labour division and society under capitalism, by which social relations are acquired through product purchase and exchange. The delusion of commodity fetishism is that consumers no longer care about the usefulness of products, but rather fetishise them as objects to display social power, which is further expressed through money (Baudrillard, 1993; Billig, 1999; Dittmar, 1992; Harvey, 2014; Marx, 1967; Tylor, 2016; Wayne, 2012). Harvey (2014) asserted that the market is a fetishist illusion in which money and commodities mask the true actors involved in an entire supply chain:

It is all very well to insist on ‘good’ face-to-face relations … but what is the point of that if we are totally indifferent to all those whom we do not know and can never know, but play a vital role providing us our daily bread? These issues are sometime brought to our attention: by ‘fair trade’ movement, for example, which tries to articulate a moral standard for the world of commodity exchange, and anti-poverty movement, which seeks to mobilize charitable contributions for distant others. But even these usually fail to challenge the social relations that produce and sustain the conditions of global inequality: wealth for the charitable donors and poverty for everyone else. (p. 41)

This parallels Cremin’s (2011) claims that “the commodity, once celebrated, has now lost something of its shine. Instead of the mantra ‘greed is good’ there are numerous ‘talking heads’, organic intellectuals-raising concerns about the material effects of the system on people and the planet” (p. 144).

Further, Bair (2009) states that ethical and fair trade brand markers encourage consumers to fetishise labelled commodities, and Low and Davenport (2006) also argue “dominant forces of discourses of fair trade are … assimilation, and appropriation or
‘clean-wash’” (p. 1)—this movement maintains their hegemonic character. Žižek (2009) believes that commodity fetishism is deeply rooted in consumerism because products are utilised as objects to gain power and join into social ‘groups’. This creates short-lived self-esteem in consumers, which leads them to continually reinvent their social identity to stay relevant and, thus, continue consuming. Žižek (2009) argues that this form of self-gratifying and fetishistic consumption enables consumers to accept the act as a standard social practice, which allows it to become a universal and hegemonic ideological norm.

Part of this commodity fetishism derives from consumers being exposed to only high-fashion images that convey symbolically loaded meanings of social worth and prestige (Rocamora & Smelik, 2016). Fashion and social theorists recognise that certain cultural objects, such as clothes and fashion, represent and define social worth and status (Baudrillard, 1993; Fischer, 2001, p. 4; Foster, Clark & York, 2010, p. 392). Fashion companies promulgate commodity fetishism by creating a symbiotic relationship between consumers and ethical branding; essentially, individuals believe they will gain power and elevate their social status by consuming ethical branding, fair trade and organic fashion. However, the fantasy of social power promised by commodity fetishism is deceptive; these labels and fashion houses cannot de-fetishise their commodities by using positive labels, as they are still produced through impoverished labour sources.

Matthias Rau, owner of fair trade fashion brand Zundstoff, notes that “people buying our products are mostly attracted by the fair and organic background” (Minney, 2016, p. 175). This parallels Minney’s (2016) claim that eco-fashion can “express our values with a line-up of truly sustainable, Fair Trade and ethically produced products” (p. 159). Similarly, Atsuko Watanabe, owner of Tokyo-based brand Kagure and advocate of organic living, claims that fair trade clothes expose people to environmental and social issues, such as refugees (Minney, 2016, p. 199). Yoshihiro Nishi also sells fair trade products to encourage consumers to “choose environmentally friendly products that are
also people friendly” and to “give consumers the chance to see the faces of the individual producers” (Minney, 2016, p. 202). Evidently, each ethical stance aims to frame commodities as Carry Somers, founder and director of fair trade hat brand Pachacuti, does for the Fashion Revolution movement. She explains that fair trade “provides a platform for best-practice initiatives from across the supply chain. Everything from Fair-Trade, which focuses on the cotton farmers at the beginning of the supply chain, to the designers finding creative ways to reduce waste” (Minney, 2016, p. 26). Essentially, the movement attempts to overtly demonstrate the origin of its products.

However, Varul (2008) argues that ethical and fair trade companies that try to bring morality and consumption together is contradictory. By commoditising an impoverished nation’s labour, fair trade attempts to unsuccessfully adjust its relations in a capitalist system that is inherently based on inequality (Varul, 2008). After all, money buys labour power at the exchange level of production, which is then exploited as a commodity to generate products sold globally at inflated prices that exceed what a company initially paid for that labour; thus, a surplus is created through this exploitation (Fine, 1975). In addition, Gunderson (2014, p. 110) argues that capitalism is inherently harmful and unethical because ethical consumerism operates as a new layer of commodity fetishism that masks the harms of capitalism, which, ironically, convinces its consumers can be rehabilitated. Gunderson (2014) and Heartfield (2008) also argue that green consumption from charity shops and farmers’ markets are new approaches through which affluent classes can engage in to symbolically communicate their humanitarianism. However, these alternatives have questionable effects on society when used as forms of social elevation and as markers of financial wealth (Gunderson, 2014; Heartfield, 2008).

Žižek (2014) states that individuals’ organic consumption has led them into specific lifestyles “rather than living their lives” (para. 1). Companies have commoditised organic consumption, which is primarily aimed at helping consumers achieve a “healthy
ecological lifestyle” (Žižek, 2014, para. 5), by encouraging them to believe that purchasing organically labelled commodities is part of the experience itself. This parallels Žižek’s (2014) references to Michel Foucault, whose “notion of turning one’s self itself into a work of art gets an unexpected confirmation: I buy … my spiritual enlightenment by way of enrolling in the courses on transcendental meditation” (para. 7). Evidently, this form of anti-consumerism also relies upon buying fashion commodities not only for their utility and symbolic status, but also for their attached experiences.

The fetish factor attached to these commodities is still derived from artisan labour, which cannot be separated from fair trade products. Žižek (2009) reinforces the idea that consumers should not think that organic consumption is empowering and restorative because it is an act primarily intended for pleasure. Nevertheless, it sedates consumers’ sentiments that fashion is destructive and exploitative and becomes a celebrated act that assists rural areas, alleviates poverty and refuses to contribute to polluting the environment. The fashion industry then takes these values and experiences and sells it back to consumers in a dishonest way.

Often, consumers attracted to labels touting ethical or fair trade initiatives are oblivious to the labour power and distribution involved in production. Thus, this attraction derives from fetishising specific labels associated with poverty and authenticity; they are symbolic commodities intended to celebrate consumption because it seemingly empowers healthy and organic lifestyle for consumers, for artisans and for the earth. These ideologies enable consumers to believe they are part of an ethical fashion community while, in actuality, they are locked within a cycle of consumption that is necessary to craft these ethical identities. However, imposing ideas of transparency (such as through Somers’ Fashion Revolution initiative, which attempts to answer “who made my clothes?” (Minney, 2016, p. 84)) and trying to de-fetishise production is illogical for fair trade labels. In fact, most artisans do not know who wears their products and
consumers can neither see nor know the entire supply chain of their clothing. However, they do know that their relationship with these products is based on materials and exchange. Thus, it is consumers who fetishise commodities based on the limited insight that companies offer on the farmers and artisans involved in production chains.

As Rebecca Ballard, public interest lawyer and founder of ethical fashion brand Maven Women, states, “our dollar votes” (Minney, 2017, p. 155); this implies that money holds power in society. Further, as Brahm (2009) states, the “market ideology of capitalism has failed to build a meaningful society. Cultural heritage is easily destroyed. The Chinese Communist Party feels now that people must have money, which does not fulfil human beings” (p. 74). In this sense, ethical consumption encourages a lopsided class system because these brands are often more expensive than others (Hoskins, 2014). These hegemonic ideologies repress consumers because money becomes the integral factor that provides them both symbolic wealth and happiness, and a false belief they are buying legitimate contact with artisans. As Meszaros (2009) argues people’s lives should not revolve around consumption and brand markers, it becomes clear that the fashion industry provides this fetishistic illusion that consumption controls society itself—in this context, ethical fashion commodities determine the fate of both the rich and the poor.

1.8 A New Form of Control

Marcuse (2002) argues that industrial society is repressive because the wealth created from production is based on unnecessary exploitation, social labour and consumption. Social life is driven by the production of new commodities for which their irrational consumption becomes a rational act. Marcuse (2002) explains that this is due to individuals having been “indoctrinated and manipulated” (p. 9). Instead, these needs and gratifications repress both consumers’ and labourers’ individuality because they support greed and injustice. The hegemonic ideology anchored in consumerism necessitates fetishistic consumption by manipulating people through commodities, ideologies and
established values to promote this conformist behaviour; thus, this creates false satisfaction and blinds consumers from the reality of their actions (Marcuse, 2002). Consumers then experience a sense of pseudo-freedom. They are so bound to this system that any discussion or promotion of alternative policies are reduced and removed from view (Marcuse, 2002). This parallels Foucault’s notion of biopolitics, which explores a system of learning in relation to prisoners. Consumers experience a penal-type form of regulation, in that companies control their speech, their bodies and their social behaviours to regulate their power and exert their control over consumers’ bodies (Foucault, 1991a, 1991b, 2001). These are hierarchical techniques used to separate the normal (or socially acceptable) body from the abnormal body, as conveyed through one’s clothing (Warwick & Cavallaro, 1998). Fashion is a system in which subjectivity occurs on consumers’ bodies; essentially, it is a powerful tool of social regulation (Dussel, 2004, p. 86). Therefore, the body can be considered a site of social control upon which fashion determines its social, cultural and economic worth (Entwistle, 1997, 2000, 2009; Entwistle & Wilson, 2001; Jhally, 1990).

Framing biopolitics as a power understood to shape individuals’ social lives parallels the politics of organic, fair trade and sustainable fashion. These companies impose demands on consumers’ bodies to reveal their social roles through symbolic narratives attained by consumption. To do this, they must constantly inspire false needs in consumers by promoting conformist behaviours, such as consuming supposed ethical products to pursue an organic lifestyle. However, this pursuit is fraught because consumers are only submitting to social and commercial obedience.

Minney (2016) states that “we need to start by educating ourselves; buying local and less; buying used and upcycled; and buying from the independent ethical fashion brands that are the main drives of an agenda for a responsible fashion industry” (p. 13). However, constant consumption is repressive because its motivations are irrational and
controlled by ethical labels, which are fetishised commodities of local and ‘authentic’ produce. These values, which establish themselves as ethically prosperous markers in society signified through the clothed body, promote a false consciousness in consumers to conform to ‘fair’ and ‘good’ standards set by the fashion industry. Therefore, workers and consumers alike gain a sense of pseudo-freedom; each are bound to their commodities to gain ‘freedom’ in pursuit of better lifestyles, whether socially, financially or politically.

1.9 The Labour Process and Production of Surplus Value

Overington (2007) argues that fair trade companies use ethical causes, such as lifting the Third World out of poverty, to ease the guilt of their deceptive practices, which are otherwise primed to generate surplus value. This means that any commodity produced by labour power is a surplus for its owners. Capital circulates and over-supplies hidden values of commodities to sell in the market to create surplus values (Marx, 1906, 1967; Wood, 2002). However, surplus value in capital is like war based on robbery and trade based on stealing from other countries (Harvey, 2017). Thus, the cheating in capital is masked because labourers are paid according to their ‘fair’ market value while creating commodities that will generate a surplus for its serving company. Harvey (2014) states that:

this ‘fairness’ rests on the conceit that labourers have an individualised private property right over the labour power they are capable of furnishing to capital as a commodity (a commodity which has the use value to capital of being able to produce value and surplus value) and that they are ‘free’ to dispose of that labour power to whomsoever they like. (p. 169)

By transforming use-values into commodity form, workers’ labour power becomes alienated because the money used to exchange their efforts and create commodities has no use-value other than for acquiring alternative products; further alienation occurs when labourers pass the ownership of their use-value to another
individual (or company) (Clarke, 1991, 1994; Harvey, 2003; Heinrich, 2012; Marx, 1906; Smart, 2003). Consequently, every service fulfilled by artisans’ and workers’ labour power (or use-value) in this circumstance is commodified to create surplus profits. The fair trade fashion industry can survive on this commodification because it has colonised impoverished nations’ farming and garment industries by selling their crafts and values to other companies and consumers as part of its ethos. However, as artisans transfer their skills to these companies, they become oppressed because their labour becomes a commodity under the control of commercial ownership.

1.10 Surplus Value = Surplus Enjoyment

Cremin (2012) explains that the accumulation of surplus profits is based on the Lacanian notion of surplus enjoyment: “the self-exploitation of libidinal drives: and excess of desire, a jouissance or pleasure” (p. 37). Cremin (2012) claims consumers feel dissatisfied and frustrated because they cannot properly express their identity and, thus, constantly seek objects to reduce this discontent. This “lack” (Cremin, 2012, p. 38) that consumers feel is the missing factor in the “objet petit a” or “the unattainable object of desire” (2012, p. 38) that Lacan contends, which can never be achieved. Essentially, surplus enjoyment is greed, which is relentless, and surplus value is its objet petit a, which constantly stimulates self-indulgence to fuel capital and establish profit. Thus, consumers are fundamental to keep capital in motion, as their discontent compels remedial consumption, which perpetuates capitalism (Cremin, 2012). Žižek (1991a) supports the notion that surplus value is an “ideological myth” that exploits the “you can, because you should” (p. 109) ethos of surplus enjoyment, which conjoins commodities to satisfaction to boost capitalist production. Therefore, profit is the objet petit a that can never be satisfied for fashion companies and the desire that also encourages companies to seek cheaper international labour to produce their commodities and create this ‘ethical’ brand identity.
Evidently, consumers’ inherent discontent with themselves compels a need to satisfy; hence, the promises offered by ethical labels lead them to consume and, thus, create an improved and more wholesome identity for themselves. In return, consumers help generate profit for these fashion companies, which stimulates production. Surplus profit demonstrates how fair trade fashion justifies its exploitative system and how consumers justify their consumption by reframing tokenism as ethical and selfless.

There are countless fashion organisations and figures campaigning for this type of self-serving eco-consumerism. For example, sustainable fashion company Komodo (2017) encourages trends in which “customers look for more green and ethical fashion” and Crowther (of the Fair Trade Towns campaign) has created 1,600 fair trade towns where retailers, communities, schools and universities unite to promote fair trade food, crafts and clothes (Minney, 2016, pp. 44–45). Goldsmith (2017) states that “green is definitely the new black” (para. 3), so it is customary to avoid buying from companies that produce in sweatshop factories. Vivienne Westwood, activist, fashion designer and supporter of ethical and fair trade fashion, also tells consumers to “buy less [and] choose well” (Brown, 2010, p. 192), which echoes ethical fashion blogger Anoushka Robyn’s sentiments to “go for quality over quantity” (Minney, 2016, p. 88). Fellow activist and author of *Eco Fashion*, Sass Brown, too suggests that consumers look for fair trade and organic markers when buying clothes, as well as query who and where garments are made, to minimise social and environmental hazards (Brown, 2010). Even Hazelbrook Public School in New South Wales offers fair trade school uniforms to promote sustainability and to empower children in developing nations (Oriti, 2016).

1.10.1 Premium Prices

Capital is also a concern for fair trade workers. Minney (2017) believes that donations can help eradicate sweatshops and child labour in developing countries. Fletcher and Grose (2012), Kowtow (2017b) and People Tree suggest that by paying
premium prices for ethical fashion, consumers can help establish fair wages for labourers and artisans, and ensures producers benefit from acceptable working conditions that facilitate their families access to education and health care (Minney, 2011). However, Brooks (2015) contests this:

The value assigned to Fairtrade labour is a small premium above the market rate, but often covers subsistence plus the basic cost of health care and education. Capitalist social relations are complicated; they include divers cultural perceptions of value, but the salient point is that they are modified and not transformed by Fairtrade networks. (p. 207)

Thus, the life span of products is limited because they are simply tokenistic gestures birthed from an industry “driven by the logic of the market” (Brooks, 2015, p. 228). Although fair trade signifies ethical branding, it is based in an unevenly developed marketplace of exchange between workers and companies (Wright, 2004). Therefore, buying ‘environmentally friendly’ and supposedly premium commodities to help workers is merely a fashion trend that does not provide additional charitable functions (Monbiot, 2007). As director of WORLDwrite, a charity committed to global equality, Ceri Dingle states:

environmentalism has already taken its toll on the developing world denying people the chance to have the development that allows us a comfortable life in the West. It is a top down philosophy that provided a pretty good justification for leaving the developing world as it is. Poor, with just the basics. Sustainable development or ‘sustainababble’ enshrines the low horizon of a fearful, risk averse Western society that hates its own achievements, that can’t deliver for existitng [sic] generations and uses those not born yet as a justification to go backwards. It has disastrous consequence for people now and promises worse for the future. (Hewett, 2012, para. 3)
Davidson and Wilson (2018) highlight that fair trade encourages consumers to be socially responsible, ensures products are ethically sourced and invites communities to be involved in humanitarian movements, such as Fair Trade Towns; however, they emphasise these as manipulative qualities intended to emotionally persuade consumers to conform to such values solely to stimulate consumption (Davidson & Wilson, 2018). Monbiot (2007) supports this notion, arguing that the primary demand of environmentalism, which suggests consumers minimise their consumption and look for quality over quantity, is deceptive and self-serving:

Green consumerism is becoming a pox on the planet … a substitute for current spending, rather than a supplement to it … The middle classes rebrand their lives, congratulate themselves on going green, and carry on buying and flying as much as before. It is easy to picture a situation in which the whole world religiously buys green products and its carbon emissions continue to soar … Ethical shopping is in danger of becoming another signifier of social status. (paras. 5–11)

As Hobbes (2015) argues, protesting humanitarian issues, such as sweatshops and child labour, through ethical consumption and donation is useless: NGOs urging consumers to take action against companies establish false rules that serve back into their industry, and the workers producing these ethical commodities are suppressed and denied proper wages and decent working conditions. As Griffiths (2014) states, the creation of phenomena such as fair trade cities, which involve the collaborative powers of government and education, has allowed the ethical sector to monopolise both consumers and the fashion industry.

1.10.2 Recycling and Resisting

Satomi Harada, owner of Ethical Penelope in Nagoya, Japan (a fair trade town with 2,500 fair trade vendors), suggests that ethical fashion should use recycled materials,
since they inflict less environmental effects (Minney, 2016). However, Lury (2004) contends that recycled clothing has transformed the developing world into a dumping ground, thus, undermining its local clothing market. The idea of recycling clothes does seem an elegant route for capitalism to endorse a culture of consuming discarded commodities; in this circumstance, recycled fashion is repurposed from already processed materials. However, as Hoskins (2014) states, “being sold the idea that whatever we do is OK because we can just recycle products when we are done is actually quite dangerous” (p. 195). This is because ethical trade embodies a logic of inequalities for which recycling is only a partial solution (Eagleton, 2002, p. 69). Further, people wear second-hand and homemade clothes to defy capitalist fashion; however, these materials are still the product of systemic production. Regardless of the condition in which clothing appears, consumers are still operating and consuming in and for a system they cannot deny. Therefore, the fashion industry should neither claim that it produces clothing as a democratised activity, which actually seeks only profit. Instead, Brooks (2015) argues that wearing second-hand clothing is insulting to those in poverty who wear them out of necessity rather than personal choice.

This idea of recycling and reinvention is not satisfactory. Instead, the industry needs proper resistance and intervention. It is proposed that consumer-boycotts suggest to fashion companies that unsustainable and unethical practices should be avoided (Birch, 2012, p. 201; McCosker, 2016). Lee, Motion and Conroy (2009, pp. 169–180) argue that boycotting is only a temporary hold-up of consumption that still enables capitalism to continue producing with little improvement.

Documents such as the United Kingdom’s corporate social responsibility strategy have been established to pressure consumers, governments and NGOs to support companies that are properly representing their social and environmental effects (Fletcher & Grose, 2012, p. 45). Charlotte van Waes and Marieke Vinck, founders of Dutch ethical
fashion brand Charlie+Mary, support such demands, stating that “local and central government should promote best business practice and make bad business unacceptable” (Minney, 2016, p. 181). Further, Westwood reinforces the idea that fashion needs to involve government to legislate labour and environmental regulations (Fletcher, 2008, p. 104). However, government involvement in ethical practices forges the notion that fashion companies, which are largely controlled by the state and ruling classes, will be privatised (Luxemburg, 2007, p. 65); therefore, intervention favours corporation. Companies will be able to avoid legal regulation and continue running the same destructive economic system. Thus, just as Harvey (2010a) states:

> at the end of the day it matters not one whit whether we are well intentioned and ethically inclined or self-indulgently greedy and competitively destructive. The logic of endless capitalist accumulation and of endless growth is always with us. (p. 277)

### 1.11 Alienation: Separating Artisans from Their Products

As capitalism is based on globalisation—a process centred on producing and sourcing raw materials and commodities from remote international zones to sell around the world—the social relations involved in these production chains are often hidden (Bakshi, 2011; Blyton & Jenkins, 2007; Clarke, 1991). According to the current logic of capital, artisans in these chains become alienated because they bear no ownership over the products they create. Instead, they must exchange their commodities for food and other necessities, which forges their dependence on the system in return. Evidently, capitalism’s isolating conditions are specifically constructed to ensure that such separation is achieved (Bieler & Morton, 2003; Harvey, 2014; Merrill, 2014; Meszaros, 1995; Weber, 2005).

Braverman (1998) suggests that although we must tolerate capitalism’s mechanisms, we also need to receive a wage to survive. Fashion designer Nimish Shah,
who works with NGO Khamir making handwoven textiles from India, states that “the weavers who work from home ensures that production, weaving and shipping run smoothly” (Fletcher, 2008, p. 160). Many artisans are women, so working from home ensures they can look after their children while gaining a living wage to support their family (Minney, 2017, p. 20). This, as Minney (2017) states, “covers their basic needs, including adequate food, shelter, education, clothing and healthcare” (p. 44). However, Chomsky condemns wage labour as a new slavery system, claiming that even if companies pay workers fairly, refrain from abuse, donate to charities and help the poor, commodities are still being produced under repressive conditions (Chomsky’s Philosophy, 2015). Essentially, labourers themselves are also treated as a commodity that companies rent for their labour power, which is deeply offensive and an “intolerable infringement on human rights” (Chomsky’s Philosophy, 2015). In this sense, working for wages is the same as slavery because humans are born to live and create autonomously; when an individual works and produces under the control of others (a company), they are dehumanised (Chomsky’s Philosophy, 2015).

Cremin (2015) also states that modern capitalism births another form of alienation affecting artisans creating their own products not under the control of an employer. An artist must still concern themselves with how best to market their creations, but under alternative pressures, such as the need to secure employment. Thus, the concern today lies with the privatisation of companies and the involvement of government, which imposes an organised market on society for non-economic ends (Polanyi, 2001; Žižek, 2008).

Therefore, Minney’s (2017, p. 6) claims that fair trade fashion brings democracy into fashion—as paying a little more for clothing is the right thing to do to help elevate workers’ living wage—is conflicting because, according to Chomsky, society cannot gain freedom under capitalist modes of production, as it relies on the transferral of individuals’
values in commercial ownership (trustylimbs, 2017). According to Hoskins (2014), the fashion industry is a destructive system that cannot be labelled as ethical, in production and in relation to working wages, just because it charges consumers higher prices. Essentially, this only generates more profit for a company that makes its commodities in rural areas with artisans who are prepared to sell their labour for little pay. As fashion companies continue to buy raw materials from and produce garments in several international countries to then distribute for global consumption—all within a highly obscured production chain in which labourers’ social relations are concealed—consumers will continue to believe that buying ethical and fair trade clothing aids a worthy cause.

The Trade Alternative Reform Action (TARA) Project (2018) in New Delhi, India (which provides jewellery and crafts for People Tree) affirms that their initiative “provides support to the artisans to construct [and] develop their workshops” (para. 5). While this is positive, they are still pressured by market forces that dictate the specifications of their crafts’ survival in a highly competitive fashion industry. As ethical fashion company Purple Impression (2018b) state, “by adding a face and a name to every piece we make, we take you on a journey across the globe” (para. 5). However, ethical consumption has achieved the opposite, alienating labourers and manipulating consumers to each become bound to fashion products made by invisible people-power from detached parts of the world. This parallels Marcuse’s (2002, p. 5) claims that these commodities are intended to make people recognise their own soul in their possessions. Here, alienation also spreads into the domains of leisure through consumption (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 44–47). Fashion companies introduce the public to commodities to which they can form bonds; these connections then link consumers to companies whose products they enjoy. Thus, the link between satisfaction and consumption forms to continue the cycle (including the repetition of labourer alienation) once more.
Minney (2016) attempts to offer a solution, advocating that “conscious consumption slows down fast fashion. By joining the Slow Fashion movement, [consumers] can help the fashion industry to slow down” (pp. 5–7) and, thus, increase awareness to its systematic structures. However, Thorpe (2016) instead likens the movement to “watching a car crash in slow motion, with the driver aware of disaster ahead but ploughing on regardless” (p. 132). Cremin (2011) supports this notion, stating “the more capitalism develops, the more it saps the original source of all wealth: the soil and the labourer” (p. 323). She argues the essential problem in capitalist production is overproduction and the use of labourers to accumulate profit; thus, the idea of ‘fair’ (whether of wage or working condition) is incompatible with the logic of capital. Instead of slowing down or ignoring the movement, capitalism begs a new business model.

1.12 Human Capital

Microloans are a scheme that provides capital to help low-income earners expand their business or become entrepreneurs. These loans must be paid back with low interest and are recycled back into workers’ communities to circulate in their nations’ economies (World Vision, n.d.). The growth of micro-enterprises in the fashion industry also creates more marketplace competition (Siswanto & Shafira Novarena, 2016). Sustainably Chic (2017) suggested companies like ethical fashion brand Fernweh offer microloans for local female labourers to create fashion with their individual crafts. Sustainable fashion brand True Ethic also guarantees that “each purchase [consumers] make helps empower women through providing education” (Sustainably Chic, 2017, para. 15) and VEERAH, a sustainable female footwear brand, provides 10 paid hours per month for employees to take “self-improvement courses” (Sustainably Chic, 2017, para. 7).

Anthropologist Jason Hickel (2015) argues that providing microloans to impoverished nations is not a solution. In fact, it “adds to their poverty and undermines [workers] by saddling them with unsustainable debt” (Hickel, 2015, para. 1). He argues
the foundation of microfinancing is “built on foundations of sand” (Para. 2) because charging labourers interest means companies are not required to provide evidence that microfinancing has a positive affect on their circumstance (Hickel, 2015); instead, interest adds additional debt to impoverished nations. The concept, once known as loansharking (the lending of money at an exorbitant rate of interest), shrouds itself in ethical slogans in disguise as a humanitarian activity. This has become a socially acceptable tool to accumulate profit and resources from impoverished regions.

Microfinancing offers the wealthy promises to eradicate poverty without any cost or threat to economic power while doubling as an effective mechanism for political control. This lays the responsibility on the impoverished to lift themselves out of poverty by taking such loans; thus, failure to recompense interest rates is at labourers’ own fault (Hickel, 2015).

Adam Smith labelled this concept “human capital” (Spengler, 1977, p. 32). In relation to fair trade, it contends that capital offers education plans, apprenticeships and loans to workers by which labourers become a highly productive force. In actuality, they become bound to the system because they now incur loan repayments. Smith argues that by providing workers these opportunities, capital can purchase productive labour and claim it as its own resource (Becker, 1994; Bowles & Gintis, 1975). According to Marx (1906, pp. 503–505), the problem with human capital is its exploitative nature, which encourages the circulation of capital through increased labour demands. Therefore, Fernweh’s microloans for local women, VEERAH’s education courses and Minney’s (2010) efforts to teach artisans how to make patterns are intended to scalp and refine artisans’ traditional skills and transform them into productive labour forces to create fashion commodities appropriated for Western consumers. Evidently, offering lends to these artisans, regardless of whether they propose zero or low-interest fees, ensures they remain bound to the fashion industry until they repay virtually unattainable loans.
1.13 Neoliberalism

Ecological design consultant Kate Fletcher suggests that the benefit of sustainable and fair trade fashion is that the “textile and garment manufacturing industry brings positive benefits, [and] generates wealth and employment—as many as million jobs worldwide” (Fletcher & Grose, 2012, pp. 41–42). This supports a neoliberal view that claims the industry creates beneficial opportunities for developing nations to participate in foreign markets when, in reality, it has generated poverty and inequality (Davis, 2006, p. 23).

Chomsky (1999) asserts that neoliberal capitalism is based on the hierarchical subordination of impoverished peoples. It is an inherently totalitarian system in which corporations at the top of a hierarchy authorise decisions, leaving those at the bottom to rent and sell their labour in exchange for minimal compensation (Chomsky, 1999, p. 57). Under neoliberalism, people’s lives become a performance of practiced principles and roles according to the laws of the free market (Barry, Osborne & Rose, 2005). This system creates informal sectors of the economy and labour by forcing developing countries to open their market to foreign capital. These countries have become vulnerable and have privatised their industries and state institutions due to competition stimulated by a saturated market. Therefore, this ‘entrepreneurialism’ that microloans inspire in developing nations is actually a necessity to survive.

Neoliberalism also claims that workers’ poor circumstances have risen from the “absolute general law of capital accumulation” (Agosin & Tussie, 1993, p. 25; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005, p. 363), which has allowed their wages to increase (Agosin & Tussie, 1993; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). Cremin (2011, p. 330) refutes this, stating that neoliberalism’s claims to improve workers’ jobs by training them and offering them valuable experiences actually readies them to enter in and produce for a competitive
market; this essentially ensures that the global distribution of wealth and resources remains centralised.

For example, Simone Cipriani, creator of the Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI), affirms his humanitarianism is “not charity, just work” (Rothe, 2015, para. 1). Its parent company the International Trade Centre (ITC) and its Poor Communities Trade Program (PCTP) branch each claims to help African crafters by connecting them to international fashion designers. This ensures that even the poorest nations’ people can enter the fashion industries’ value chain as a producer; it also enables designers to ethically source their materials (Rothe, 2015). This ideology reflects neoliberal views that individual designers want to source ethically and, thus, impose their power through their commercial practices by exploiting and dominating people’s social lives.

Another example is Vivienne Westwood’s collaboration with the ITC in 2010 to create the Handmade with Love in Nairobi collection. This was intended to reduce poverty by providing trade opportunities for micro-producers and marginalised communities in the developing world; it also aimed to promote gender equality and empower African women. This initiative was assumed to enable fashion companies and distributors to source products from these communities according to good conduct (Ethical Fashion Initiative, n.d.). A designer from London was even sent to Nairobi to teach community members how to use the special equipment necessary to produce clothing. Westwood claims the project “gives people control over their lives” (Lidbury, 2011, para. 4). However, she controlled the entire production. The African workers were unable to design and market their own handcrafts; therefore, they were still barred an opportunity to make direct contact with international consumers. Thus, Westwood’s and Didienne’s claims that fair trade fashion can save the world (Fashion Revolution, 2018; Lidbury, 2011) are unreasoned because these workers are still not recognised as equal partners in production and, therefore, remain alienated labourers under globalisation.
Vivienne Westwood’s (Press, 2016a) support for sustainable fashion and claims to “buy less, choose well, make it last” and not spend “just for the sake of it” are supposed agents for “social change, to convent, educate and liberate” (p. 301). She even uses this slogan above the door of her Paris shop to which Press (2016b) criticised, “it doesn’t change the fact that it’s still a flash new Paris shop”, which is still “in [the] business of selling” (para. 55).

Westwood received more reproach from Press (2016a), who framed her as “snotty, elitist and right wing” and “a purveyor of scandalously over-priced shite” accused of “lecturing people from millionaires’ row [while] selling her clothes for big bucks”; she also called her a “total hypocrite” for making a “flipping great wodge of cash out of commercialising punk” and a “depraved capitalist pig for daring to make frivolous clothes in the first place. Vive saying poor people should eat less didn’t help. The only way to avoid charges of hypocrisy is to stop selling fashion altogether” (pp. 302–303). Goldsmith (2017) supported these remarks, claiming Westwood does not make her brand eco-friendly, as most of her garments are made with polyvinyl chloride and petroleum, which creates mass pollution.

Certainly, fashion companies must turn to unlikely sources for salvation, whether by consumers’ demands to practice ethically or by other market forces (Minney, 2011). However, regardless of their intention, they still promote a destructive neoliberal approach that obscures their methods of production and a privatisation of business that encourages more fashion companies to delegate business through free trade.

1.14 The Effects of Free Trade on Remote Producers

Free trade is the process of exchange between two nations; for example, a domestic exporter from a developing country can sell their products to foreign importers for capital gain (Chang, 2007; Shaikh, 1996). The value of these commodities sold by exporters from impoverished nations is generally low, which allows foreign importers to
buy ample stock. However, private companies’ investments in impoverished resources are unethical because their products are typically manufactured under harsh poverty. Essentially, as labour laws become privatised in this process, labourers’ rights begin to erode (Ross, 2004, pp. 151–155). In turn, the more capitalism becomes structured and benefits from a free market, the greater the class inequalities (Chang, 2007; Fiennes, 2012; Jameson, 1991; Mitchell, 2005; Shaw, Newholm & Dickinson, 2006).

Free trade removes barriers such as subsidies and taxes that are imposed to favour local producers, thus, making the production and transaction of clothing an easier process for the fashion industry. Indeed, as wages in developing regions are a fraction of those in developed nations (Brooks, 2015), companies operating under fair trade principles are exploiting a freer market to produce more capital.

Westwood, Minney and other brands that suggest they are empowering micro-producers by providing loans, skills, education and codes of conducts (such as gender equality) to marginalised communities are instead exploiting free trade to access rural markets. These premiums are offered to manipulate their workers to become privatised entrepreneurs and to open their communities to fair trade fashion giants, which buy domestic crafts from impoverished domestic exporters (such as Africa and India) and sell them to international consumers at exorbitant rates. Further, the social premium that fair trade claims it is paying farmers acts as a bribe to force their cooperation and adopt the fair trade standards they preach (Valkila, 2009). This produces a cycle that justifies and legitimises companies’ production: consumers are led to believe artisans are paid ‘fairly’ because their wage has risen under ethical fair trade code of conducts, companies continue to benefit from exploiting artisans’ skills and encouraging them to operate as microbusinesses and, thus, developing nations remain poor and ripe for exploitation.

Brands such as Ethical Penelope, which sells People Tree’s fair trade chocolate (Minney, 2016, p. 201), and Gunther Sesselmann’s Fashion & More, which offers
consumers “Fair Trade coffee” while they shop (Minney, 2016, p. 171), that contribute to such causes are not helping to reduce poverty because farmers’ situations still remain unchanged (Clougherty, 2008). The premiums consumers pay for products such as fair trade coffee and chocolate are regulated by big corporations instead of Third World farmers; the ethical principles joined to these commodities are merely commercial tools of persuasion to generate higher profit margins (Bowbrick, 2014, pp. 223–252; Thatcher, 2014). Often, too, fair trade companies ask remote farmers to sell their products for less than their worth; if they refuse, they buy from other farmers (Raynolds, 2009; Valkila, Haaparanta & Niemi, 2010). However, if global market prices change against an importer’s favour, they cannot honour their contracts with farmers; therefore, they receive no pay (Raynolds, 2009; Utting, 2009; Valkila, 2009). Farmers also typically receive less than minimum wage (Weitzman, 2006).

Weitzman (2006) also found that the schools and health clinics being built in developing countries are, as farmers argue, not actually generated by fair trade support. Its standards require families to work instead of hiring professional labour; if they employ workers, they lose their certifications (Berndt, 2007). In turn, this has increased death rates among poor farmers because they cannot afford to financially cooperate with fair trade standards (Griffiths, 2009); as such, they must continue to drink from the cup of poverty (Gresser & Tickell, 2002).

Organic production costs more than regular farming because it creates lower yields. However, there is no evidence that these farmers gain more profit. Thus, they remain struggling against a lifestyle and in conditions Western figures insist are sustainable (worldwrite, 2011b). Griffiths (2012) describes this farming system as increasingly opaque. For example, when attempting to source organic materials, such as fair trade cotton, he states:
how much extra does one pay for a dress made with Fairtrade cotton? How much Fairtrade cotton is in the dress? How much of the extra goes to the exporter? Even if I had been able to find an explanation of Fairtrade cotton on the Fairtrade website, I could not have made the calculation. (Griffiths, 2012, p. 6)

According to Cremin (2011) capitalism will always ensure that production remains a system driven by social and ecological exploitation; it is impossible for corporations to be built on political ethics and values because their sole aim is to continuously generate profit.

1.15 Capitalism with New Clothes

Overall, this form of ethical capitalism seeks to obtain profit while encouraging consumers to be socially and ecologically responsible. However, it mainly wants consumers to create strategies to improve the use-value for increased exchange values and commercial profit. Corporations that claim to use ethical capitalism, while still controlling their workforces for capital gain, are driven by leftist liberal ideologies, which do not offer market alternatives and reject that labour is the principal source fuelling the system. It asserts that labourers express their identities through their work and takes advantage of cultural intolerance, climate change threats and corruption facing developing nations, which it funnels into profitable production (Cremin, 2011).

Therefore, the industry rallies consumers to be socially and ecologically responsible for humanitarian problems they, themselves, have created by their own doing. Asking consumers to protest unethical companies by investing in fair trade helps attach symbolic labels, such as ‘ethical’, ‘sustainable’ and ‘fair trade’, to their business, thus, enabling more production. This leftist libertarianism feeds into the problem by encouraging artisans to express their identity and to preserve their traditions through
commodities; these displays are then commercially repurposed to demonstrate a company’s edge.

It is for irrational claims like Minney’s (for example, that People Tree creates employment for subgroup embroiderers and weavers (Jarman & Nally, 2012) that prove fair trade as an intensely complex industry in which social relations can be easily hidden. This sentiment is echoed within the industry; for example, Hutta Heeg, fashion designer and owner of ethical label Ichwarendindl (Minney, 2016, p. 166), suggests the problem with fast fashion is that there is no connection between consumers and producers. However, this cannot be established until more left-leaning liberal fashion companies fairly recognise and reward the impoverished nations’ artisans, workers, farmers, sources and skills involved in their production chains. Thus, instead of modifying the system, consumers need to overthrow the industry’s alienating and deceptive ways, which places commercial profit at the forefront of business.

1.16 Chapter Summary

Privatised fashion companies impose their ideologies and cultural values of fair trade to exploit consumers and to subordinate labourers in developing nations. The production methods used in sustainable and fair trade fashion companies are no different, as both are primed to generate wealth through artisans’ time and labour power. This labour power is an effective source of production because many companies operate from countries where employees are cheaper. Workers’ crafts and power are measured by capital, but they are barred from directly trading with consumers, thus, leading to alienation and exploitation.

The fashion industry is based on a division of labour that alienates workers from their means of production and undermines their power and value in the market. The fashion industry persuades consumers to purchase clothing they are led to believe will give them positive social power. Supposedly fair trade corporations, NGOs and trade
unions encourage consumers to be socially responsible through their consumption and ask artisans to be environmentally aware when creating commodities. These initiatives allow companies to repress and control the social lives of consumers and labourers, as each must passively accept these false ideologies, which bind them to the fashion industry.

Fair trade fashion companies demonstrate a neoliberal ethos based on free trade. This is particularly promulgated through claims that workers’ wages have risen. In addition, by offering labourers microloans and educational programs, many are forced to remain bound by the system, as they are unable to free themselves financially. These companies base their entire production and consumption chains on structures that ensure workers receive no direct contact with Western consumers and, thus, are alienated entirely.

The next chapter argues that through cultural appropriation the fashion industry manipulates, dominates and misrepresents elements of other cultures. Fair trade and sustainable fashion companies justify this production and consumption by using traditional crafts and by using celebrities to promote charity work. I demonstrate how ‘ethically’ labelled companies endorse their goods using marketing strategies that cultivate the false belief that through fair trade consumption the planet and its inhabitants can be saved. Part of this propaganda involves using linguistic concealment to hide exploitation and commodification.
Chapter 2: Mass Deception in Ethical Consumption

2.1 Introduction and Overview

This chapter explores how ‘ethical’ fashion labels use propaganda and persuasion to craft their philosophies and exert political and economic control. The fashion industry justifies commodification by creating false promises that responsible consumption achieves social good and positive personal growth. Realistically, garments cannot possess authentic social meaning and consumers cannot achieve individualism when fashion is mass-followed and mass-produced.

The fashion industry alienates its workers and avoids criticism by constantly modifying its mission to maintain social and cultural dominance. It generates false ideologies by labelling itself as ethical, only to celebrate its wealth and ownership of capital and labour. In this sense, fashion sedates consumers and ensures impoverished people become reliant on the industry through its supposed humanitarianism.

The chapter also explores how fair trade and sustainable companies use slogans to offer ideas of freedom, equality, social responsibility and transparency to consumers, which prevents objections to its consumption. In this way, the industry conceals its production processes to maintain classism through legitimising the commodification, appropriation and mass production of impoverished countries’ cultures and crafts. Claims that commodifying and consuming the creations of workers will assist rural communities further canonises ethical fashion. Realistically, the ruling classes enslave consumers and workers alike by exploiting social and cultural crises.

Involving popular figures such as celebrities enables fair trade consumers to become engaged in otherwise passive and ineffective activities. In turn, poverty is simplified and funnelled into profitable endeavours that actively suppress the same hardships used to generate unequal wealth distribution. Consumers’ and workers’
subsequent tolerance of these ideologies then promotes the exact behaviour that enables such companies to strengthen and grow.

2.2 The Culture Industry

Clothing becomes fashion through catwalks and through the various signs, visual images and symbolic insignia incorporated in its subsequent advertising (Berger, 2008). Barthes (1990a, 1990b, 1994, 2006) claims that fashion is translated into words, signs, gestures, objects and images through the clothes found in magazines, which further dictate cultural trends. Bourdieu (1996) found that cultural agents of fashion, such as buyers, journalists, stylists and photographers, decide its social status. Bourdieu also emphasises that fashion is not pure art; rather, it is constructed from a combination of art and economics (Rocamora & Smelik, 2016). According to Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), the culture industry’s aim is to produce a form of culture that is standardised so it can reliably turn profit. The culture industry mass-produces and commodifies art and culture through the media to strengthen capitalist systems of consumption and exchange. The culture industry has enslaved people by classifying, labelling and dividing them, and by inducing false needs, which only the mass market can satisfy (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997). Essentially, this is a propaganda technique used to absorb people into the mechanisms of society and pressure them to constantly buy anew or suffer dissatisfaction. This method has transformed consumers into what Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) termed “cultural dupes” (pp. 349–365). As they continued, “the truth that they are just business is made into an ideology … to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 121). Indeed, Adorno (1982) and Horkheimer rejected Walter Benjamin’s (1969, p. 224) optimistic claim that art in the culture industry enables communities to raise their political consciousness.

Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry theory also connects to ethical fashion, particularly in relation to how the internet has also changed the fashion industry by
enabling direct digital communication between brands and consumers (Meszaros, 1995). Fashion media functions as an influential communicative tool that then assigns different definitions of fashion to elevate its status. An example of this is the Good On You app, an ethical shopping smartphone application designed to offer a range of ethical brands to consumers. The app allows shoppers to search for a brand or browse by category to view the details of the people, planet and animals involved in a commodity’s production (Good On You, 2017). One of its fair trade fashion brands, Hackwith Design House, claims that it is “vital that fair fashion [is] accessible to everyone” (The Good Trade, 2017, para. 1). However, as Habermas (1989) argues, public opinions and debates are organised to influence the public by promoting manipulative consumption. According to Adorno (2008), such companies achieve this by promoting obedient modes of thought and behaviour through the cultural industry, which is a central agent of contemporary capitalism. Therefore, such apps and privatised companies enable fashion to control consumers through political appeals, which, in turn, only eradicate individuality and freedom and encourage gratuitous consumption. Indeed, based on Adorno and Horkheimer’s argument, this is a tool to enable the commodification of art and culture from developing nations.

Conversely, customers, like Elena Wewer, who use the app believe it provides “the tools to shop sustainably and make a difference with [one’s] purchasing power” (Apple, 2018). However, such proclamations only justify the ideology of consumption, as bound by supposedly conscious brands otherwise hinged on deception. Such apps also promote conformity, which is then harnessed to ensure consumers cannot escape from these cycles of consumption.

Fashion figures and proponents of fair trade fashion such as Merryn Leslie, Dean Newcombe and Jutta Heeg, as well as ethical label Ichwareindirndl, each propose that buying and wearing sustainable, ethical and fair trade enables consumers to create and
follow their own personal style and, therefore, express their authentic selves (Minney, 2016, pp. 166–193). However, the fashion industry distributes uncertainty because fashion itself relies on constant change and production. Therefore, this process promulgates individuality and conformity, which, in turn, alienates both consumers and workers and, as Adorno (1991a, p. 387) described, creates pseudo-individualities.

2.3 Pseudo-Individuality

It is suggested that fashion produces more than mere clothing; it loads attire with social purpose and aesthetic worth, which then becomes fashion through a process of imitation (Loschek, 2009). Finkelstein (2007, p. 211) suggests that fashion is used to create a socially meaningful system, which is dictated by such regalia. However, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) argue that the culture industry manipulates individuality by mass distributing socially oppressive products, which deceive the public into believing it possesses otherwise false freedoms of choice; hence, pseudo-individualities are formed.

Indeed, commodities are not necessities. Rather, people are socially motivated to consume to attain social acceptance and to integrate into society (Adorno, 1991b, p. 387, 2008; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997). Therefore, as Adorno (1991a) explains, pseudo-individuality is achieved by and through capitalism, which manipulates consumers by offering ethical fashion commodities that supposedly provide new and improved lifestyles of unique distinction. Marcuse’s (2002) views parallel Adorno and Horkheimer’s, in that such false beliefs surrounding the morality and individuality gained through ethical consumption ultimately work against consumers’ favour to imprison them within capitalism. In result, consumers’ sense of individuality begins to erode, as they become increasingly dependent on these seemingly ethically and sustainably labelled brands to dictate social acceptance, told through their mode of dress.

These methods are reflected in the efforts of various ethical brands and designers. For example, Vivienne Westwood claims that:
the whole idea of machinery is that people have more time for leisure and culture, and yet that isn’t at all what’s happened. The opposite has happened—the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. It’s a very nice social atmosphere when people sit and work together. It’s so fascinating that making clothing through Fair Trade can do this. (Fletcher, 2008, p. 104)

The EFI (2018), a UN fashion project that aims to support struggling artisans through collaborations (which include labels such as Noir Tribe, Karen Walker and Westwood), launched RISEMAP to highlight the manufacturing processes behind fashion production and to trace the supply chains of fashion companies. Self-described “social capitalism” brand Krochet Kids (2018) also further emphasises that it provides “life-changing job opportunities to women in need” by “introduc[ing] [consumers] to the woman who made [their] product and invite [them] to visit her online profile to learn more about her” (para. 2), and organic and fair trade label Indigenous (2018) offers technical training to artisans to work from home, loans to buy sewing machines and a pledge to build an education system and public health for impoverished communities. Indigenous (2018) suggests its fair trade principles create opportunities for socially and economically marginalised producers and raise public awareness. Ethical fashion advocates like Minney (2016) would view these examples as positive efforts that celebrate rather than conceal humanity:

Twenty years ago, those of us who argued that the ‘Invisible Hand’ described by economist Adam Smith could not work because of imperfect information, will now watch as a new decade celebrates transparency and provides information to help us with our choices. (p. 7)

Indeed, Smith’s theory describes the hidden market forces that stimulate supply and demand and their subsequent beneficial outcomes that arise from individuals’ self-interested actions, which themselves are otherwise unintentional (Khalil, 2000).
However, Žižek (2008) concurs, framing these acts as those that embody the violence of late capitalism, as led by entrepreneurial “liberal communists” (p. 14), who defy opposition to global capitalism and deny alternatives to the model: “their claim is that we can have the global capitalist cake, i.e., thrive as profitable entrepreneurs, and eat it, too, endorse the anti-capitalist causes of social responsibility and ecological concern” (p. 14).

2.4 Liberal Communism

In keeping with Smith’s theory, Žižek (2008) claims that liberal communist corporations’ “dogma is a new, postmodernised version of Adam Smith’s invisible hand: the market and social responsibility are not opposites, but can be reunited for mutual benefit” (p. 15). Their ideologies reflect leftist principles (Žižek, 2008, pp. 13–16), which oppose hierarchical authority, to instead promote flexibility, incorporate culture and knowledge to defy industrial production, preserve social responsibility and engage in transparent and collaborative processes with both employees and customers to achieve humanitarian ends. Such aims also include abolishing social, cultural and political segregation, establishing equal pay between genders and races, and advocating for environmental preservation. However, these ideologies are hypocritical because they encourage acts that rely on deceptive promises and instead divert charitable funds, supposedly intended for health care and education, into commercial corporations.

Evidently, the elite liberal communists driving ethical fashion are those who also finance such culturally and democratically positive pursuits with little intent for practical change. They are, as Žižek (2008) describes:

the exemplary figures of evil today are not consumers who pollute the environment and live in a violent world of disintegrating social links, but those who, while fully engaged in creating conditions for such universal devastation
Companies who align themselves to humanitarian causes and incorporate moral slogans endorsing democratised ideologies instead aim to profit from the artisanal crafts and labour power of those they falsely support. Their system is effective for various reasons. Evidently, these artisans will not question their commodification, as they are convinced they serve fair trade and morally just corporations that offer honest pay, technical training and opportunities to work as a community. Conversely, consumers who wear and buy organically, ethically and fairly produced clothing are led to believe their consumption is equally remedial.

Fashion writers like Minney (2011, 2016, 2017), Fletcher (2008) and Brown (2010), who explore the effects of social and environmental devastation, endeavour to campaign for ethical fashion as a solution to such global crises. However, these fashion books are arguably largely advertorial. For example, Minney’s *Naked Fashion: The New Sustainable Fashion Revolution* explores ethical brands such as Kowtow, Epona and People Tree, and *Slow Fashion: Aesthetic Meets Ethics* spruiks Soulid, Eigen, Zundstoff and DearGoods, among others. The essential problem is that they do not question the real causes of social and cultural crises when discussing their trade. Instead, they blame consumers’ greed while simultaneously reassuring them that they possess the power to change the fashion industry through smarter consumption. Their lack of addressing social and cultural issues fosters this cycle of false consumer needs, which then feeds these global traumas.

### 2.5 Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism

Cultural logic involves the application of logical principles that reference particular cultural settings, as driven by neoliberal ideological components, which (in this sense) enable companies to commodify and celebrate certain cultural forms (Enfield,
Jameson (1991, p. 13) claims an essential aspect of postmodernism is developing a system in which culture is institutionalised; this parallels Marcuse’s (2002, p. 57) notions on art as a form, which once subverted and criticised, that has since transformed into a mass-produced commodity for entertainment and indoctrination.

The cultural logic surrounding the commodification of art and culture in the fashion industry manifests as an ethical and sustainable practice. Ethical brands embrace the idea that their expertise dictates discussions around social and environmental crises. However, this process of supposed cultural learning is enforced to legitimise their domination of indigenous communities’ cultural crafts by embracing the belief that preserving tradition, culture and craft only occurs through fair fashion. Through this, the fashion industry encourages poverty and inequality among workers and further colonises their artstries, values and traditions (Brooks, 2015).

2.5.1 Cultural Appropriation: Commodification of Cultural Flow

Fashion theorists argue clothes are used to maintain new social and cultural identities (Buckridge, 2004, p. 86; McDowell, 1994, p. 28). However, this process of taking and modifying for the purpose of benefiting the industry means cultural appropriation is embedded in the logic of production. Essentially, it involves the theft, manipulation and domination of cultures, including traditions, land, history, identities and sacred objects and artefacts (Williams, 1983), and their subsequent commodification for commercial purpose. Appropriating art and culture for mass consumption threatens cultures’ distinctive features (Brummett, 2004; Cohen, 2012; Cuthbert, 2010; Maltby, 1989; Polak, 2011; Roemer, 2012; Tsosie, 2002) and alienates communities from their own traditions (both culturally and increasingly financially), as they gradually become absorbed into mass culture (MacDonald, 1953). This commodification revalues culture and assigns it new meaning; this is typically distinguished by price, or exchange-value (Cremin, 2011). Indeed, in mass culture, brands that reproduce cultural materials are
perceived as honourable because they seemingly promote its authentic roots to consumers.

Examples of this include sustainable clothing label Symbology (2018a, 2018b), which creates its garments in developing countries such as India and the West Bank. According to its owner Marissa Heyl, Symbology’s textiles have distinguished status and a cultural affiliation with the Indian village where they are produced (TEDxTalks, 2012); indeed, the label endorses its production as that which helps record the nations’ histories and mark their cultural identities (TEDxTalks, 2012). She suggests that incorporating traditional identities and cultural art forms such as hand-loomed textiles, block prints, natural indigo dye and embroidery can preserve, celebrate and honour these living arts, which bear meaning for its artisans (TEDxTalks, 2012). As a result of Symbology’s collaboration with impoverished artisans, workers’ poverty is supposedly alleviated. Heyl claims that the “clothes we wear tells how we treat the world” (TEDxTalks, 2012) and that buying their crafts promotes human rights is an example of how fashion democratises artisans and commercialises their labour by integrating their crafts into the marketplace (Symbology, 2018b).

These false sentiments are echoed by fellow sustainable proponents such as Eva Urbanova, owner of sustainable and fair trade labelled fashion company NILA, who claims she is “empowering the communities in the so-called developing world to maintain and develop their traditional craft” (Minney, 2016, p. 178). Further, fashion project Taller Flora also enlists indigenous communities from Mexico to create traditional handmade garments and textiles, which are based on ancient artisanal crafts. Its creator Carla Fernandez proposes that “only contemporary design will prevent the extinction of craftsmanship” and, in particular, the “extinction of the Mexican textile tradition” (Brown, 2010, p. 48).
However, these attitudes on cultural appropriation for fashion’s sake are not universal. For example, Brahm (2009) argues:

having adopted a Western—almost American—value standard of conspicuous consumption as a measure of human worth, it had become a country where human values were being smothered by greed and where corruption was perpetuated by the desire to accumulate brand-name goods … we have attempted to meld other cultures into one plastic culture that has little depth and stands for nothing at all. (pp. 73–74)

In this sense, Symbology, Eva Urbanova and Taller Flora are imposing dominant Western measures that decide the cultural and monetary value of indigenous people and their crafts. To suggest, as Fernandez does, that only contemporary design can prevent cultural extinction is to reassign its value as one that is dependent on and wholly determined by profit. This cultural colonisation subjugates entire communities beneath a philanthropic guise that instead reflects the cultural logic of late capitalism.

Indeed, indigenous people, who otherwise bear true ownership over their cultures and crafts, feel oppressed when designers poach their traditions for Western enjoyment. Native American fashion blogger Adrienne K explained that the misuse of cultural artefacts for fashion is deeply offensive: “[it] feels like one more thing non-Natives can take from us—like our land, our moccasins, our headdresses, our beading, our religions, our names, our culture wasn’t enough?” (Verbos, Henry & Peredo, 2017, p. 16). Evidently, the “overarching essence of cultural appropriation is misappropriation” (Verbos et al., 2017, p. 18).

Therefore, it appears the fashion industry attempts to expand its markets by appropriating elements of any available (or perhaps vulnerable) global culture, only for rural communities to inevitably fall victim to the system. Commercialising developing nations’ art and culture sheds each of their authenticity in service of the West’s superficial
needs. Indeed, this is, as Marcuse (2007) claims, an illusory practice that realises itself only “by remaining illusion and by creating illusions” (p. 116). In actuality, it destroys the morality and integrity of certain cultures by appropriating sacred forms of craft, power and skill for capital and, thus, introduces more financial instability and social–cultural crises in impoverished communities.

2.5.2 Aestheticising Social Logic

Artist Renzo Martens argues only the privileged West revels in the struggle, starvation and crisis of the Third World (Fd Riksutstallningar/Swedish Exhibition Agency, 2015). He claims such misery will persist solely because it performs so well in capitalism’s favour (Ersoy, 2011). Instead, artisans and people in developing nations should preserve their skills and traditions and resist outsourcing their crafts to corporations (Walker Art Center, 2015) because, in Kapoor’s (2013, pp. 65–67) view, their labour and suffering is appropriated to serve colonialist fantasies designed to strip workers’ powers (Žižek, 1999, p. 216).

Cremin (2011) deems this “aestheticising the social logic” (p. 182), which argues that such ethical practices (such as buying fair trade) serve only political and commercial functions to satisfy Western anxieties. For example, she states that projects and galleries that produce art concerning social crises (such as poverty) appropriate suffering as a beautiful art form. Celebrating poverty as such denies it the opportunity to properly rehabilitate (Cremin, 2011, p. 172).

Therefore, such cultural issues are aestheticised as fashionable elements to add use-value to commodities and to promote the notion that appropriation and commodification are rather noble acts. Parallel to this appropriation concerns how racism is postured and paraded as ‘multiculturalism’ in Western countries to claim commodification as a culturally respectful act, which simultaneously distances one from the “Other” (Žižek, 2000, p. 361). Indeed, this ensures workers remain subjected under
capitalism and that ethical consumers and corporations can still ‘care’ about their struggles, but through disconnected and distanced acts, like fashion consumption. Evidently, popular culture prevails hegemonic ideology through institutions’ involvement in various modes of cultural production and consumption (Strinati, 2004).

2.6 Popular Culture and Celebrity Power

Part of promoting such optimistic consumer promises relies on the industry’s use of popular culture to create new products and trends (Storey, 2009). Essentially, popular culture is commercialised folk culture (Delaney & Madigan, 2016; Petracca & Sorapure, 2012), which is deliberately geared to serve public interests. However, its underlying ideological purpose is to indoctrinate individuals and to control their values to, therefore, accept and adhere to specific modes of thought and behaviour. One way this is achieved is through celebrity endorsement. In positions of power, celebrities offer a channel through which certain ideas can be globally communicated (Bennett, 2009; Fiske, 1989, 2011). According to Žižek (1991b), popular culture is a fantasy that conjoins individuals to material enjoyments, which then binds them to the ideological processes that support global capital (Dean, 2006). For Žižek (2006b), ideology dictates our behaviours and practices and determines rational thought; in this sense, each is instead rooted in non-rational and libidinal drives decreed by enjoyment.

Evidently, the fashion industry has long recognised the link between psychology and ideology and how popular culture can influence consumers’ habits. Incorporating celebrities to endorse ethical and fair trade labels is, thus, crucial to this equation. For example, People Tree’s collaboration with actress Emma Watson, to create handmade ethical fashion for under 24s, enables a proposition that fair trade fashion is both essential to her ethos (Minney, 2011, p. 110) and is required in the global quest to alleviate poverty. Evidently, this endorsement declares its importance to consumers beyond the realms of fair trade and seeps into the margins of mainstream culture (Holmes, 2009).
Such humanitarian spirits are instead viewed as destructive capitalist endeavours in disguise (Mackey & Sisodia, 2013). Minney’s advocacy for cultural and institutional collaboration to promote fair and sustainable fashion encourages the fantasy that ethical consumption is both trendy and helpful when, instead, it is irrational and destructive to foreign peoples and cultures, and the environment in which production occurs. Moreover, such collaborative work with NGOs claims to help reduce social crises, such as the human trafficking of women through re-educating them into better employment and liberating them from slavery and poverty. However, despite these efforts—which see women trained to work within the fashion industry, thus, positioning NGOs as heroes among consumers—these anti-trafficking policies have been proven to inflict more harm than good. Indeed, there are NGOs working with government institutions within Cambodia that put pressure on women to accept re-education or face lengthy imprisonment (VICE, 2014); left with little option, many are sent to work in Cambodia’s exploitative industry. Often, workers are neither allowed to leave while training for these NGOs and do not receive any wage for their labour (VICE, 2014). Eventually, many of these women claim to prefer sex work than continue suffering in the garment industry (VICE, 2014).

Žižek’s notion of interpassivity—the act of being passive among interactivity—is of particular significance when noting celebrity humanitarianism. The term itself relates to consumption in that “interpassivity is delegated ‘passivity’—in the sense of delegated pleasure, or delegated consumption. Interpassive people are those who want to delegate their pleasures or their consumptions” (Pfaller, 2003, para. 6). Essentially, involving celebrities in ethical fashion imposes a dual effect on consumers. In being led to believe their involvement and donations can establish real effects on impoverished nations, consumption is, thus, a disconnected (or interpassive) act of humanitarianism in which consumers ‘help’, but only from afar. The hypocrisy of involving celebrities in this façade emerges as one of “fetishistic disavowal” (Žižek, 1989, p. 30), which means that...
such expressions of compassion enable a sort of reconciliation of narcissism and privilege that consumers and corporations unequally bear over the impoverished people they claim to support.

Cremin (2011) argues that this philanthropic ideology is built on leftist logic to gain profit from the struggles (of food, shelter, exploitation, human rights and poverty) of the symbolic ‘Other’. For example, the social project ‘2 Euro T-Shirt’ saw a vending machine in Berlin offer cheap shirts to the public on the condition that a short video be played explaining where and how they were made prior to a purchase (Fashion Revolution, 2015). Consumers were shown confronting images of workers alongside facts that state, for example, many earn as little as 13 cents an hour. Consumers are then given the option to buy or donate their money to help eliminate exploitation and poverty among these effected garment workers (Fashion Revolution, 2015). The leftist approach that Cremin notes is evident here. Using such highly stylised images of suffering and then demanding people give monetary offerings to figuratively atone their greed is part of this interpassive morality that ethical fashion promotes. Indeed, as Žižek (2010) claims:

when we are shown scenes of starving children in Africa, with a call for us to do something to help them, the underlying ideological message is something like:

‘Don’t think, don’t politicise, forget about the true cause of their poverty, just act, contribute money, so that you will not have to think!’ (p. 4)

Another facet of interpassivity as conducted through celebrity power is that their fame is used to naturalise the accumulation of profit in charitable fashion. Countless examples of this strategy include, but are certainly not limited to, organic label Bondiwear’s collaboration with Victoria Beckham, who proclaims that “sustainable style is now truly in the mainstream” (Amy, 2017, para. 12), Richard Branson’s collaboration with Vivienne Westwood in 2014 to produce a range of Virgin Atlantic uniforms made with recycled plastics—as sustainability is indeed vital to his ethos—and Bono’s fair
trade and eco-friendly clothing brand Edun, which is produced in developing nations (Amy, 2017). In particular, Bono is described as “striving to make humanitarian efforts on an economic level” (Hot Press Newsdesk, 2005, para. 7); however, “consumers can support his cause by purchasing pieces from the Edun line in Saks stores and U2 concert venues” (Hot Press Newsdesk, 2005, para. 7). Evidently, these supposedly charitable attempts are equally profitable pursuits. As such, capital is gained, but it does not guarantee that human and ecological degradation equally benefits. The only plausible way to establish tangible difference is if anti-accumulation politics are instead enforced (Harvey, 2014; Mackey & Sisodia, 2013).

Žižek frames this form of celebrity philanthropy as one intended to create ethical and sustainable programs that conceal the true mechanisms of market logic (rowansforclass, 2011); therefore, both profit and recognition (for celebrity and for brand) can be generated, and inequalities (which support this power hierarchy) can remain firmly intact. In turn, the token celebrity humanitarian improves their own reputation and further helps legitimise the neoliberal capitalist system under which it serves, thus, enabling and mystifying the underside of its reigning global order (Kapoor, 2013; Pfaller, 2003).

2.7 Ideology of Hegemony

Gramsci’s (1971) notion of cultural hegemony is based on Marx’s concept of false consciousness, which is generated by ruling class beliefs that shape social thought. Gramsci (1971) argued that society is dominated by prevailing ideologies, assumptions and values, as dictated by ruling institutions, policies and social orders; this helps foster the social norms that form the bases of civilisation (Ransome, 1992). People within these social spheres are absorbed within such mechanisms and, thus, unconsciously abide by their hegemonic rules. Essentially, this cycle helps perpetuate their dominance (Gramsci, 1971; Ransome, 1992).
In this sense, ‘ethical’ fashion harnesses the power of NGOs and popular cultural figures (such as celebrities) to enforce hegemonic rules and to manipulate social, economic and political systems through philanthropic veneers. In turn, garment workers become subordinated beneath these supposed rules by proxy of poverty and circumstance, and consumers buying into these industries, thus, fulfil their duties as members who serve a ‘rightful’ social purpose.

It is for brands such as Fazl Socks, which claims that 50 per cent of consumers’ purchases “is donated to orphanages”, thus, “helping provide orphaned and destitute children in India with food, shelter, education, and clothing” (Sustainably Chic, 2017, para. 16), Happy Ladies’ claims that 10 per cent of every purchase “is donated to plant trees” (para. 12) and True Ethic’s pledge to provide “the basic need of clean water” and alleviate poverty “through well paid and consistent employment” (para. 15), which each feeds into this grand ideology that frames fair trade as a universally positive act that, therefore, dictates hegemonic ideologies of morality. In this sense, such rules would dictate that, as Ethical Penelope’s Harada suggests, fair trade makes people “feel good” because it is deemed “good”, according to society (Minney, 2016, p. 201).

However, Žižek (2009, p. 55) argues that this embodies the new spirit of capitalism, which presents itself as a libertarian system to steer away from socialism. This is because this supposed ‘new spirit’ forms an economic system that is based on social and cultural concepts that justify the nature of what is known as cultural capital.

2.8 Cultural Capital

Žižek (2009) argues that cultural capital introduces a new order to consumers to seek commodities that will offer them both satisfaction and meaningful life experiences, which elevate their social being. Often, consumers signify their rebellion against exploitation, among other social pursuits, by buying ethical commodities. This is precisely what cultural capital embodies: “it’s not just what you’re buying, it’s what
you’re buying into” (Žižek, 2009, p. 53). The exemplary case of cultural capital concerns Starbucks, which, as Žižek (2009) found when analysing their advertising campaigns, celebrates their so-called fair trade coffee by emphasising that:

when you buy Starbucks, whether you realise it or not, you’re buying into something bigger than a cup of coffee, you’re buying into a coffee ethic. Through our Starbucks Shared Planet program, we purchase more Fair-Trade coffee than any company in the world, ensuring that the farmers who grow the beans receive a fair price for ensuring for their hard work. And, we invest in and improve coffee-growing practices and communities around the globe. It’s good coffee karma … Oh, and a little bit of the price of a cup of Starbucks coffee helps furnish the place with comfy chairs, good music, and the right atmosphere to dream, work and chat in. We all need a cup of coffee from a company that cares. No wonder it tastes so good. (p. 53)

Here, Žižek argues that consumers want to improve their selves through their consumption, or, in this case, by purchasing ethical and fair trade products to demonstrate their compassion for and awareness of global crises (DjBubbleGoose 2011; FORA.tv, 2011). Žižek framed this form of egotistical consumption as an act of reassurance that dupes consumers into believing they are “doing something for Mother Earth” (O!szanowski, 2014).

Evidently, fashionable acts of cultural capital require consumers to buy their ethics. The surplus gained from the typically elevated prices of fair trade fashion supposedly pays for the social and ecological factors it strives to represent; this, too, provides the basis for which consumers themselves use to integrate themselves into socially elite communities. Evidently, an equal part of ethical fashion’s allure is not physical but symbolic. Consumers are also buying a membership into a select group of cultural elites who conform to a larger ideology founded on false morals and ethics.
Indeed, they seek redemption for their consumption and, therefore, must fulfil a series of costly ethical duties to properly gain cultural capital. However, as part of this effort relies on their purchases, they inevitably remain shallow consumers simply buying into a dishonest ideology that convinces them their consumption is an act of protest against an unfair industry, which, itself, is guilty of exploitation.

For example, eco concept label BrandMission claims that “people love the opportunity to talk about the clothes, about water issues, animal rights … They don’t just want to buy the clothes” (Minney, 2016, p. 182) when visiting their store. As Sayers (2007) found, “all ideas are social and historical products. All ideas are, in this sense, ideological. Critical ideas—just like uncritical ones—arise from and reflect social reality” (p. 108). Evidently, regardless of one’s engagements, all interactions and acts of consumption are encouraged by or are a reflection of social happenings.

Cremin (2011, p. 71) argues that people also engage in such acts because they naturally respond to the symptoms of capitalism. Consumers’ compulsion to buy is one such ‘symptom’ whose cure can manifest as charity, recycling and ethical shopping—pseudo-acts that validate these otherwise wasteful exploits. Žižek (2014) viewed these solutions as meaningless acts, which, in the past, were once meaningful; now, consumers no longer debate real global and ecological issues but rather passively accept global capitalism and its abusive systems. Hence, when consuming ethical and, thus, discussing its relevant issues, consumers’ critiques are only superficial and are primarily prompted as a response to the symptoms the industry compels. Therefore, this form of consumption is a pseudo-act that allows consumers to offset their consumerism without guilt.

Thus, when movements such as Fashion Revolution (De Castro, 2016), which suggests consumers “donate [and] be a part of this movement and help us keep going from strength to strength” to make fashion “better” (para. 22), and charities such as Tearfund NZ (2017b), which claims it can reduce human trafficking, exploitation and
poverty through the fashion industry, they effectively feed this perception that consumption is both admirable and should be encouraged.

2.9 Humanising Charity

Žižek (2009) argues that charity is a veneer that hides hideous starvation and the poverty that surrounds capitalist production. He asserts that institutions use charity as a liberating remedy for global crises, which, in actuality, does not cure a figurative disease but merely prolongs its suffering (Žižek, 2009). Indeed, charity can instead be viewed as a by-product of disease, which naturally arises. Charity associations will create commodities that represent themselves as socially responsible and ethical causes when, instead, they delegate only a portion of their profit, which effectively sustains, not cures, poverty (Basil, Ridgway & Basil, 2006; Donini, 2002, p. 261). This is precisely why Žižek (2009) declares charity an evil phenomenon that harmfully humanises capitalism; it offers tolerance and welfare and an incentive to give back to the poor, while simultaneously using such suffering for capital gain (O'szanowski 2014; rowansforclass, 2011).

Žižek (2010) uses Oscar Wilde’s (1900) interpretation of charity as “not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty” (p. 6) to critique the ideology of charity. Indeed, its impracticality derives from its opacity. Typically, as Wilde (1900) proclaims, such organisations do not allow the effected to understand their own suffering; instead, they use their deeds to portray themselves as saviours without proper elucidation:

The worst slave owners were those that were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the core of the system being realised by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplate it. In the present state of things … the people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good. (Wilde, 1900, pp. 7–8)
Essentially, charity can be viewed as a propaganda tool contaminated by Western ideology and popular culture. It is a marketing ploy that is rationalised by celebrity endorsement and altruistic claims of aid, which is used to convince the masses that supporting charity and, thus, reducing poverty is both a norm and an inherent social responsibility. Meanwhile, these institutional figures speak for the oppressed and act as a witness on behalf of the effected. This ensures they remain disempowered and passive—as the ‘Other’ (Borrell, 2012; Kapoor, 2013) whose interests are controlled and commercialised as products for sale.

Consumers involve themselves in charity because it is easier to sympathise with impoverished people through tokenistic acts, such as consumption and donation. Despite the evident strains of poverty and exploitation in the fashion industry, consumers signify their moral responsibilities by buying sustainable and fair trade commodities. However, as these funds directly contribute to the accumulation and sustenance of industry capital, which keeps such brands and production afloat, consumers, thus, enable these capitalist corporations to continue working under fair trade veneers. This cycle sees consumers continue to engage in fetishistic consumption that disavows global crises. Such gluttonous behaviour can only be quelled by donation, which instead rewards their narcissism, and the cycle continues once more.

Corporations also attempt to repair their own damages when buying into ethical crises. Historically, the fashion industry strives to balance the working class (or garment workers) and the ruling class (the companies themselves) to convince the public that consuming and giving to charity can establish change and equalise the social factors contained in this structure. However, simply tolerating this configuration to avoid disturbing its balance only contributes to engaging in what Marcuse deemed as “repressive tolerance” (Wolff, Moore & Marcuse, 1969, p. 82).
2.10 Advocacy of Confrontation Politics: Repressive Tolerance

Marcuse argues that tolerance in the past was practiced among liberals to gain freedom and respect in society (Wolff et al., 1969). However, modern tolerance is instead a compulsory behaviour individuals are enforced to uphold, particularly to comply with the established systems and associated rules that dictate society. This form of passive tolerance is used to ensure that certain ideologies, opinions and politics are preserved without defiance and attention to their true social effects (Wolff et al., 1969). Individuals should instead resist such passivity because neutrality only feeds hegemony. Essentially, it destroys opportunities for change and ensures that certain social groups remain isolated and unable to find themselves (Wolff et al., 1969, pp. 83–108).

Cremin (2011) asserts that tolerating such political and established rules implemented by leftist liberal ideologies, which are hinged on expanding consumer society, ensures individuals remain systematically oppressed:

>The left on both sides of the Atlantic has proved to be tongue-tied, embarrassed, unable to state simple economic truths, unable to name and confront the powers that oppress the working class. It has left the field wide open to rightwing demagogues. (p. 164)

Indeed, this closely parallels Žižek’s claims that “the failure of directly political solutions such as the social-democratic welfare state or various socialist projects [is] ‘tolerance’ [which] has become their post-political ersatz” (FORA.tv, 2011).

Advocacy of this form of repressive tolerance among artisans and workers in fair trade fashion is evident and is particularly reflected both in Minney’s proposition that joining fair trade can empower economically marginalised farmers—she “believe[s] the secrets of sustainability and well-being in society lie with the farmers and workers in the developing world—with the people” (The True Cost, 2018, para. 3)—and in Brown’s (2010) assertion that “social capitalism is the outgrowth from non-governmental
organisations … around the world that use the cultural and historic skill sets of communities in developing nations as a means of building sustainable employment” (p. 15). However, each of these policies directly promotes passive tolerance because fashion companies endeavour to capitalise workers’ impoverished circumstances to serve their own interests. Indeed, workers’ subservience to accept commercial exploitation derives from their comparative lack of power. Ethical fashion companies controlling these processes suppress alternatives to labour within these communities and force employees to tolerate their exploitation, which, evidently, keeps them perpetually bound by their struggles. Essentially, impoverished labourers are routinely coerced to believe their labour efforts will eventually alleviate their suffering. Therefore, the survival of these communities becomes entirely determined by ‘sustainable’ and ‘ethical’ fashion itself.

As is the case for India, in particular, which opened its markets to Western investment because the export gained through its textile and garment industry has become a primary mechanism geared to its nation’s survival (Crinis & Vicker, 2017; Kar, 2015).

Conversely, tolerating labour exploitation in conditions of crisis can reap more rewards than wholly denying its grip. The reality of poverty expounds the importance of gaining employment, irrespective of its quality of wage and condition. For example, when the World Fair Trade Organization (2017) and brands such as Kate Sylvester suggest that joining the fair trade movement and auditing fashion supply chains will help stop child labour (Strang, 2015), their seemingly noble pursuits instead foster harmful results. Ceasing child labour in impoverished countries denies employment opportunities for individuals to earn a wage, however small, to support their families. Griffiths (2012) and Dingle also argue that stopping child labour is neither fair nor logical, particularly when a supposed fair trade company does not provide adequate wages to ensure workers can sustain their own and their families’ lives (worldwrite, 2011a). Dingle’s notion that the problem instead stems from modern ethics, which, as she argues, is one that is no longer
established on moral principles, clarifies how such labour is actually beneficial when done correctly (worldwrite, 2011a). Recalling Socrates’ declaration to “do as would you would be done by” (worldwrite, 2011a) is precisely where Western corporations falter. Indeed, many do not treat Third World beings equally to their First World peers. Policing vulnerable nations by imposing seemingly helpful codes and principles, such as those barring child labour, is Third-Worldism, which abrogates and denies sovereignty and declares that such individuals cannot be trusted to treat child labourers without strict behavioural guidelines (worldwrite, 2011a). In turn, these supposedly fair principles only further harm impoverished children’s lives by denying them employment and compensation altogether (worldwrite, 2011a).

Realistically, Ward (2014) argued it appears that “banning child labour may do more harm than good” (para. 1); rather, the “most realistic solution to protect child workers is to create better working conditions” (para. 6). Typically, the labour involved in fair trade production is physically demanding. For products to qualify as organic and environmentally friendly, they must be manufactured by hand and often within taxing settings (Lim et al., 2017). Therefore, companies and consumers alike must recognise that children who are wholly denied work in textile factories must then seek employment in lower paying sectors, which often involve unsafe working conditions and criminal activity (Dupont, 2010; Harrison, 2005). Conversely, fair trade companies and NGOs claiming to help the poor by imposing such liberal rules disregard the necessities of those they control. Indeed, locals and subsistence farmers in these areas often wish to reject these conditions altogether (worldwrite, 2011b).

Cremin (2011) argues that organic intellectuals—a Gramscian term describing intellectuals more concerned with the practical over academic application of education in relation to everyday living—create social anxiety by emphasising the consequences of global crises (such as climate change and capitalism) to manipulate dominant ideologies.
Indeed, fair trade proponents like Vivienne Westwood certainly suggest the public can “reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by making individual lifestyle changes by their consumption”, such as “buying fair trade [and] handwoven fabric”, to lift “millions of families … out of poverty and … reduce global warming by using people’s hands and physical energy to produce clothes” (Minney, 2011, p. 128). Evidently, her proclamations reflect this organic intellectualism that induces the compulsion that fast and immediate action is only one purchase away. Cremin (2011, p. 175) further claims that history and ethics have always been disparate because civilisation is built on revolution and reactionary violence. Wolff et al. (1969) support this notion, arguing that ruling classes are historically oppressive and, thus, change requires society to recognise and demand revolution and political consciousness. In turn, the public must instead resist passive tolerance, distinguish between wrong and right, and actively oppose false ideologies (Wolff et al., 1969, pp. 108–109), such as those that are tactlessly opposed to child labour. Modern fashion companies would then strive to suppress such revolts to ensure workers cannot clearly form these delineations of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Through its hegemonic rule, fashion, therefore, aims to contain all within its false morals to insure the welfare of only its commodities.

2.11 Politics of Recognition and Power

The politics of recognition describes the struggle that individuals have with “normative entities” (Brown, 2006, p. 176). Fraser (2000) describes recognising and repurposing individual identity into a collective form by dominating other cultures to reclaim them anew. This reclamation process subordinates individuals to exist beneath a repressive system of communitarianism that promotes intolerance and conformism. Hobson (2003, p. 24) argues that the politics of identity recognition requires the attainment of authority by dominating control over disempowered cultures to conform to foreign values. This form of cultural imperialism forces individuals to assume foreign
identities that are not their own, but are instead branded upon their body by external authorities (Wolff et al., 1969). Indeed, as Cremin (2011) states, “recognition always returns to the question of who does the recognising and according to whose criterion recognition is gained” (p. 154). Thus, this politics of recognition in both economic and cultural settings is inescapable when an oppressor (a company, in this sense) and the oppressed (a worker) exists. The cruelest aspect of this configuration is that it smooths and simplifies minority identities, which permits their continued exploitation. Essentially, its purpose “is to impose a single, drastically simplified group-identity which denies the complexity of people’s lives” (Hobson, 2003, p. 26).

Crafting specific and collective cultural identities by poaching both labour power and traditional crafts from developing nations has also prevented Western audiences from recognising such economic inequalities. This simplifies workers’ struggles and reduces their affiliation and identification to that which propels ‘ethical’ fashion. Consumers are also offered a collective identity that endows them with a different sense of false freedom. Indeed, they have more autonomy than workers, but their pass into this identity, which is branded as an elitist insider group that looks and acts with moral superiority, requires their unwavering consumption. In this sense, fashion companies also police consumers’ identities and ultimately rule that certain identities are preferred over their own.

2.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the fashion industry through a cultural lens to justify why production conducts itself under an ethical guise. It found that fair trade offers consumers pseudo-identities and -individualities, which are based on ecological and social change and personal improvement. Much of this manipulation relies on seducing the public to passively enjoy consumption, both to perpetuate specific ideologies and to serve in capitalism’s favour. Part of this effort is achieved by endorsing and adopting democratised notions that claim developing nations will gain freedom and empowerment
through socially responsible and transparent fashion. However, this is implemented solely to enslave consumers and workers to support fashion’s false moralism. Tactics to legitimise ethical commodification include the cultural and racial appropriation of developing nation’s cultures, poverty and crafts under the ideological mask of philanthropy, which beautifies and profits from global suffering.

Another tactic is celebrity endorsement, which is used to transfer ethical fashion into an accessible product of mainstream culture. These methods force workers into repressive systems that tolerate the poaching of identity and traditional crafts, and further justify foreign intervention for exploitation. Consumers are then led to engage in obsessive activities to gain allegiance with elite social communities. Essentially, they become inextricably bound by the passive impositions of social and ecological change that ethical fashion procures. In this view, ethical fashion is paradoxical, as it campaigns for humanity while profiting from developing nations’ crafts, cultures and misery.

The next chapter examines how ethical labels exploit crisis by using stylised images of poverty to force responsibility onto consumers. Crisis is used in ethical fashion to manipulate consumer behaviour and accumulate profit from the problems of impoverished nations. The works of Harvey (2014), Klein (2008), Cremin (2011) and Žižek (2009) will be used to analyse how ecological and social catastrophes build capital and create new investment opportunities. They will also highlight how companies sell commodities using emotional appeals of fear and anxiety and, likewise, how consumers consume fair trade to represent their own social superiority.
Chapter 3: Buying and Selling Crises Through the Myth of Ethical Fashion

3.1 Introduction and Overview

This chapter examines how social and ecological crises are used by fair and sustainable fashion brands to manipulate consumer behaviour. Essentially, these companies promote their profitable and capitalist modes of production as a solution to crisis by generating fear among consumers. This emotional manipulation, in turn, spurs the guilt necessary to reroute and generate profit for the ethical and fair trade sectors.

Essentially, consumers are encouraged to fetishise commodities that carry ethical labels to appear as moral beings. As such objectification occurs, companies turn this fetishisation process into profit, partly by exploiting consumers’ emotional attachment to ethical duties. This guilt then heightens when consumers do not purchase such commodities. Thus, this chapter clarifies how the media uses ideological apparatuses to convince consumers they are unique by participating in fair shopping when they, in actuality, are at the helm of capitalist forces.

Lacan’s ideology of the ‘real’ will be used to discuss how symbolism is transmitted through language. Essentially, it explores how the ideology of ethical fashion consumption is based on belief and enjoyment, which is reinforced by social norms. However, this consumption becomes obscured due to a belief that such enjoyment is acceptable because it serves a higher moral purpose. This informs how brands function as contemporary totems in modern capitalism, as they represent false virtue and become objects of worship. However, these notions of ethical responsibility are a fabrication. Rather, ethical and moral norms are merely hegemonic ideological opinions, interwoven into practices of labelled possession to exhibit the illusion of concern.
This chapter then discusses how consumers continue to engage in fraudulent practices despite their awareness of the ideological and social realities in which they are embedded. Essentially, consumers know that consumption and production processes create social inequality, but they choose to accept that alternatives such as ethical fashion can remedy the situation.

3.2 Environmental Effects of Fashion

Harman (2009, p. 81) cited that Marx and Engels warned of capitalism’s social and environmental destruction. However, ethical fashion proponents instead perceive themselves as a solution rather than a cause to such devastation. For example, both environmental journalist Lucy Siegle and founder of the Ethical Fashion Forum (EFF) and CEO of Mysource Tamsin Lejenue suggest that fair trade fashion can eliminate crises such as global warming (Fletcher, 2008). Stella McCartney also proposes that “clothes must be designed differently, worn for longer and recycled as much as possible to stop the global fashion industry consuming a quarter of the world’s annual carbon budget by 2050” (Laville, 2017, para. 2). The Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s (2017) A New Textiles Economy report also claims companies and consumers are currently not doing enough to reduce global climate issues. The fashion industry is one of the world’s largest consumer industries, creating EUR 1.5 trillion profit annually. Over 50 per cent of its labourers are not paid the minimum wage, particularly in countries such as India, and approximately six in every 100 workers are injured each year. The report claims that reducing the rate of injured workers to 2.5 out of every 100 employees will save the fashion industry EUR 32 billion each year (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017).

Further, the fashion industry consumes 79 billion cubic meters of water, which is expected to increase 50 per cent by 2030 (Eder-Hansen et al., 2017), and more than 18,000 textiles, including clothing, are discarded into waste and recycling streams (Eder-Hansen et al., 2017). Evidently, this is partly because consumers are approximated to only
wear their clothes between 7–10 times, which has decreased 36 per cent over a 15-year period (Eder-Hansen et al., 2017). Indeed, these statistics suggest that if the fashion industry continues to outsource its production processes to the Third World, it will not only deplete earth’s natural resources but also contribute to climate change, thus, producing excess pollution and contributing to ecological devastation. Indeed, as Žižek (2009) declares, it appears that under capitalism, “mother earth does not exist” (p. 21).

However, Cremin (2011) argues the ecological devastation of capitalist production is determined and “factored against the preservation of … social relations to calculate how much devastation is tolerable to the economy” (p. 294). Cremin (2011) cites an example in which Marcuse likened calculating the amount of death after a nuclear attack uses a “similar rationalisation of insanity” (p. 314) to gauge the effects of climate change on the global economy and its ecosystem. Further, Marcuse (2002, p. 119) notes the frameworks of empirical research on capitalism are partial and incomplete and, thus, remain inadequate to calculate its true effects. Typically, empirical research eases repression and mystifies the reality of certain crises. When applied skilfully, the right facts can even reframe issues in one’s favour and help integrate the masses into particular systems of thought, which then lead to hegemonic servitude (Marcuse, 2002, pp. 107–119). Indeed, climate change debates often consider its effects through a Western lens that disregards the Third World to overlook all that damages its claims (Cremin, 2011).

This concept of rationalising insanity parallels the fashion industry’s aforementioned social and ecological research. Essentially, collecting such data, which both observe the levels of destruction caused by constant production and conjure estimates to alleviate these conditions, ultimately serves to gauge the acceptable levels in which exploitation can still occur without incurring irreparable damage that threatens production.
Part of this deceptive scrutiny is currently incorporated in many ethical labels’ production methods. For example, Tearfund NZ (2017a) states it launched “the Ethical Fashion Guide Aotearoa New Zealand to help [consumers] make informed choices when purchasing clothing. When [consumers] support brands with a high ethical rating [they] are voting for safe, fair working conditions”. Fashion brands are listed with a grading from A–F, which is determined by various factors that assess whether companies pay workers appropriate living wages, promote the establishment of unions, publicly audit their suppliers and monitor their subcontractors, and measure whether they suitably enforce codes of conduct to govern workers’ human rights (Hart, Watson & Sheard, 2017, p. 3). Currently, Adidas is graded A–, H&M B+, Karen Walker B– and Kowtow A (Hart et al., 2017).

3.3 Crisis Finds New Forms of Capitalism

However, Klein (2008) argues that companies profit during such crisis by exploiting effected communities’ lands and cultures under false pretences of aid and rescue. Žižek (2009) paralleled Klein’s notions, which found that capitalism applies social and ecological catastrophe to reinvigorate and introduce new opportunities to accumulate profit for ruling classes. The aim is to prepare the public to accept certain recommended but otherwise irrational behaviours, such as consumption, which, in turn, threatens others’ lives. Žižek (2009, pp. 21–97) argues that while eco-capitalism accepts that it exploits developing nations, it still imposes hegemonic ideologies and uses crisis to ask consumers to be socially responsible by engaging in ‘better’ consumption and production choices.

Harvey (2014) states “crises are essential to the reproduction of capitalism. It is during crises that the instabilities of capitalism are confronted, reshaped and re-engineered to create a new version of what capitalism is about” (p. 17). Evidently, this notion highlights how “crisis can foster new ideologies and shape institutions,
organisational forms, technologies, political allegiances and processes of social relation; indeed, it can shake the very core of one’s perception of the world” (Harvey, 2014, p. 17).

Political leaders and organic intellectuals, such as those within ethical fashion, already introduce crisis to their agenda to legitimise their given methods (such as Third World clothing production). However, it can also fuel more than mere reinforcement; in fact, it can create new fantasies and motives to conceal capitalism rather than expose and overthrow the system (Bieler & Morton, 2003; Bloom, 2016; Cleaver, 1992; Cox, 1987; Ruggies, 1982). Evidently, as Žižek (2012) states, within this configuration:

the main victim of the ongoing crisis is not capitalism, which appears to be evolving into an even more pervasive and pernicious form, but democracy not to mention the left, whose inability to offer a viable global alternative has again been rendered visible to all. It was the left that was effectively caught with its pants down. It is almost as if this crisis were staged to demonstrate that the only solution to a failure of capitalism is more capitalism. (p. 57)

Thus, politically left fashion figures, in particular, are able to further deny alternative solutions to economic and political crises and instead moved towards newer iterations of capitalism, such as eco-capitalism. This new form of ‘eco’ fashion production approaches capitalism less harshly. It no longer disagrees with production; rather, it celebrates it by promoting social responsibility through collaboration, transparency and environmental respect. Thus, crisis among developing nations becomes the new ethos of global fashion, which insists production continues, as more devastation only furthers its cause.

The industry registers crisis and creates more symptoms to neutralise its ideologies through increased emotional appeals. Even revealing crisis among its own garment workers induces promises of both change and security—neither of which would actually cease or transpire if continued. Subsequent expressions of consumer solidarity,
apparently through sustainable consumption, only indulge the senses without disrupting or asking for substantial social change. Evidently, also constantly lacking feasible alternatives to capitalism helps feed this cycle (Žižek, 2009, p. 16).

Ultimately, the industry’s incessant push to consume (though ethically) to ensure social and ecological survival (Brown, 2010, p. 17) is, as Žižek states in his documentary *The Perverts Guide to Ideology* (2012), useless and damaging, as any such duties, despite one’s good intentions, are inherently perverted by capitalism’s natural drive to expand and establish profit through exploitative means. Instead, capitalism is entirely part of this crisis; it does not offer solutions or alternatives to global issues because it is one itself (Crellin, 2015). Indeed, as Jameson (2003) expresses, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (p. 73).

### 3.4 Reconfiguring the Harsh Reality of Fashion

Monitoring the welfare of workers and the standards of exploitative production according to rather negligible parameters achieves little, if any, practical improvement. In observing the true effects of such blase management, filmmaker Andrew Morgan explores the people who make clothes for the world in his documentary *The True Cost* (2016). In it, Morgan reveals images of exploited garment workers living in slums alongside piles of clothing dumped into landfills. Many of these workers are pictured working in unsafe conditions, such as barefoot in garment and leather factories. Any protests against these conditions often result in violent ends; for example, an incident in Cambodia saw protestors shot by police and left to lie in pools of their own blood. The documentary also focuses on the Rana Plaza collapse, a major garment factory collapse in Bangladesh in 2013, and offered countless examples of the devastating effects of fashion production in the Third World—it opens with a shocking recount of a major factory fire, which killed 112 workers. Essentially, *The True Cost* frames itself as the
“untold story” in which death is but a risk for “garment workers … paying the price for cheap clothing” (Movieclips Indie, 2015).

Documenting such confronting images certainly earned the film much critical praise. Abigail and Lavinia Bakker, owners of vegan ethical fashion brand Geitenwollenwinkel, stated “The True Cost movie cleverly showed how government, politics and corporations undermine human rights and our environment and why it is so tough to control and make fashion ethical” (Minney, 2016, p. 184). It is suggested that the Rana Plaza tragedy even sparked the Fashion Revolution movement, which seeks to promote transparency, sustainability and ethics in the fashion industry (Gush, 2016). Its founder Carry Somers proposed that “each year, Fashion Revolution … will keep the most vulnerable in the supply chain in the public eye and challenge the industry to do better” (Minney, 2016, p. 26). Also, proponents such as Minney (2016, p. 24) found The True Cost informs consumers on the issues plaguing the fashion industry and, thus, suggests it makes fair trade a more attractive choice. Reuten of the Strawberry Earth Academy too suggests “spreading the word [for] films like The True Cost create[s] awareness” and suggests “new ways of consuming” (Minney, 2016, p. 65).

However, the admiration surrounding such humanitarian acts (such as Morgan’s documentary) always seems to return to consumption, thus, feeding back into its commercial ends. According to Dingle, such advocacy is simply not grounded on morality; rather, it is a well-funded business geared to reassure Western guilt and gain capital (worldwrite, 2011a). She also states that as long as these labels fulfil a draconian list of conditions to gain a fair trade stamp of approval, business can continue unabated (worldwrite, 2011a). Fair trade ultimately sustains poverty because it establishes hegemonic rules (supposedly geared to prevent industrialisation), uses pesticides and promotes organic production, yet, treats developing nations as nothing more than farms for labour and produce (worldwrite, 2011a).
According to Dutch artist Renzo Martens (Ersoy, 2011; Fd Riksutstallningar/Ex Swedish Exhibition Agency, 2015), the so-called economically developed countries, corporations, multinational NGOs and predominately white aid workers have not only colonised developing nations’ lands, resources and workers, but have also commodified their poverty, death and social crises for profit. Impoverished lives are instead utilised as mere opportunities to persuade consumers that they possess the power to improve these living standards within poor nations (Jones & Sanyal, 2015; TV2Africa, 2010).

Thus, it is important to consider Barthes’ notion of semiotics here. His theory explained that signs, such as images and words, denote the form of a ‘signifier’, which creates meaning, or a ‘signified’ object, which conveys a purpose or a concept that transforms objects into meaning (Barthes, 1977, 1987). Essentially, images and words can possess several meanings based on various social and cultural factors, the context in which they appear and a receiver who interprets such material (Barthes, 1987). Thus, signs are created according to social and cultural values and beliefs (Saussure, 1983, p. 73) that alter how certain objects are perceived in dominant ideologies (Hall, 1993).

Realistically, such ethical rallies rather forge parallels with Marcuse’s (2002, pp. 84–91) notion on language, which suggests that buzzwords such as equality, freedom and democracy are used as persuasive tools to perpetuate inequality and repression and to manipulate society. Marcuse’s notion of one-dimensional language argues that such fixed images and linguistic forms smooth social contradictions and shape public thought, thus, reducing people’s abilities to think critically and develop deeper meanings (Kellner, 1984, p. 270). Primarily, images are used as social bonding mechanisms (Berger, 2011, p. 32; Cohen, 2012), particularly in fair trade fashion, to induce anxiety and guilt among consumers while simultaneously persuading them to involve themselves in ethical and sustainable fashion movements, as told through highly stylised linguistic and visual efforts that denote both morality and gratification. Essentially, the industry aims to
manifest itself in the appropriation and commodification of cultural images and crisis to provide escapist fantasies that convince consumers they are not only missing something from their lives but also that their participation, in this form of consumption, is noble. In reality, these images instead help eliminate any critical debates concerned with the garment industry.

Evidently, crisis is not a barrier for capitalism, especially for ethical fashion, because it enables the system to extend and perpetuate production through new commodities. Žižek (2009) argues companies using crisis to offer consumers new lifestyles through fear and anxiety is a populist strategy called “pseudo-activity” (p. 61). In particular, Cremin (2011, p. 269) argues that climate change discourse provides good business. For example, populist ‘democratic’ groups demanding resolutions to environmental issues frame climate change as a global threat with significant effects on impoverished nations, as caused by businesses’, nations’ and individuals’ failure to reduce their carbon footprint. However, these attitudes primarily ensure that wealth is funneled top-down and that social and cultural inequality continues to provide use as political weapons that encourage these same ethical pursuits or pseudo-activities (Cremin, 2011). This is precisely why Žižek (2006b) declares ethical consumption to be worse than total inactivity: “the threat today is not passivity, but pseudo-activity, the urge to ‘be active’, to ‘participate’, to mask the Nothingness of what goes on” (p. 237).

Therefore, consumers’ responsible consumption is instead a form of social passivity, or ‘pseudo-activity’, because their protests against global and social issues through consumption is motivated by insincere intentions swayed by industry direction. This compulsion is a form of obedience to the ruling class, which, as Harman (2009) cites in view of Marx and Engels, feeds a tireless system: “capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (p.
Indeed, the more consumers buy ethical fashion to quell their pseudo-ethics, the more it supports a boundless industry.

### 3.5 Selling the Culture of Crisis Industry

Cremin (2011) argues that such movements are part of the culture of crisis industry. Essentially, this leftist liberal tactic uses crisis to induce anxiety and force responsibility upon consumers to seek social and ecological redemption through ethical consumption. Cremin (2011, p. 162) cites the documentary series *Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts* (which follows high-profile NGO campaigns in developing countries battling child labour, poverty and climate change devastation) as one such tactic that is used to prompt viewers to reconfigure their buying actions. In this case, the culture of crisis industry improves certain companies’ reputations by measuring the extent of their relief efforts. For example, the documentary judges a selection of companies according to which is most socially and environmentally responsible by the products they manufacture. Essentially, each endeavours to frame themselves with the most morally superior social values to boost their rank in the market and in viewers’ eyes (Cremin, 2012). In this sense, ethics has a specific exchange-value determined by the distribution of emotion: the worse poverty, environmental devastation, violence and deprivation are depicted, the more capitalism appears to prevail as the leading force against such global crises of social injustice (Cremin, 2011).

Moreover, using crisis as propaganda for advertising has effectively destroyed social movements, justified wars and has diverted public attention away from important social issues (Chomsky, 2011; Goldman, 1992; Potter, 1954). For example, displaying confronting images of Africans in grievously poor conditions in television adverts achieves a sort of pornographic effect upon viewers who are forced to incur guilt and responsibility for such conditions. In actuality, using images of crisis encourages such exploits to gather charity and increase corporate wealth (Scheerlinck, 2009), thus,
perpetuating global misery in turn (Bruce, 2016; Chouliaraki, 2006a, 2006b; Epstein, 1994; Klein, 2008, pp. 26–36; McFall, 2004; Slovic, 2007). Essentially, leaving “the poor vulnerable to natural disasters” (Ben-Ami, 2005, para. 1) is instead a prosperous outcome for ethical fashion to commodify social and ecological disasters.

Giroux (1994) also claims advertising regularly includes images of political violence, natural catastrophe and environmental disaster to authenticate a company’s social values. In spite of these efforts, corporations typically have no interest to repair or restore order in effected countries, primarily because their wage labour is so low; indeed, as Varul (2008) noted, fair trade companies would not endanger their privileged positions by increasing labourers’ pay. Therefore, these images are applied in fashion similarly as fashion is itself: forward-thinking. However, in this case, ecological movements are used to signal that if consumers are truly concerned for the future of fashion and the Third World, they must conform to the principles of this fair trade system. Yet, this is a highly irrational organism that relies on constant reinvention and on reinforcing promises for the future, which, evidently, leads consumers to engage in incessant and unending consumption.

This is reflected in the hyper-positive ethos espoused by numerous fair trade fashion proponents. For example, Minney (2016) states that she “love[s] the People Tree shop because it is completely guilt-free place to come and buy something—you know that every purchase will help someone support their families and their livelihoods and their community” (p. 90), which echoes blogger and ethical fashion advocate Fritha Strickland, who explained that she “call[s] [ethical fashion] guilt-free shopping” (Minney, 2016, p. 92). Fellow fair trade fashion proponent Matthew Gordon supports this notion, explaining, “I know how badly some garment workers are treated, and I don’t want to be responsible for giving them an even harder life” (Minney, 2016, p. 153). His message to consumers was to “be an individual: it will make you feel good” (Minney,
— a sentiment that reiterates teen eco-activist Elizabeth Farrell (better known as Glacier Girl) who advises that ethical fashion can supposedly save the world:

Fashion can say so much, what do you want your fashion to say about you? That you support the poor treatment and abuse of people and their human rights? Don’t limit the potential of what you can communicate through fashion by opting for unethical clothing. (Gamble, 2016, para. 11)

However, Žižek (2014) concurs with these proclamations:

There is something deceptively reassuring in our readiness to assume the guilt for the threats to our environment: we like to be guilty since, if we are guilty, it all depends on us. We pull the strings of the catastrophe, so we can also save ourselves simply by changing our lives. What is really hard for us (at least in the West) to accept is that we are reduced to the role of a passive observer who sits and watches what our fate will be. To avoid this impotence, we engage in frantic, obsessive activities, recycling old paper, buying organic food, whatever, just so that we can be sure that we are doing something, making our individual contribution. (paras. 7–8)

He continued, explaining that such consumption is not just about buying physical products; it is an act loaded with meaning and an attempt to show “our caring selves and our global awareness and participate in a large collective project” (Žižek, 2014, para. 8). Indeed, consuming these commodities knowingly does not radically change one’s life (rowansforclass, 2011; Žižek, 2014).

In his essay on recycling, Campbell Jones (2010) also argues that the spirit of Max Weber’s Protestant ethic—a moral and religious code in which labour and discipline are viewed as prosperous practices—parallels today’s experience of consumption. Essentially, consumers are permanently compelled to respond to social and ecological threats by recycling and buying fair trade and organic goods, which possess superior
ideological and symbolical meanings, as it is their inherent moral obligation. Jones (2010, p. 35) argued that consumers engage such products to defer their responsibility of such crises. Indeed, their behaviours are spurred by ethical dilemmas (concerning the environment and bioethics, among other issues) to reason consumption in an attempt to exercise self-control (Chatzidakis, 2014; Pykett et al., 2010; Zupancic, 2000). However, these catastrophes to which they respond are primarily a product of the industry itself, in which its own guilt is transferred onto consumers to instead treat its problems through more consumption (Campbell, 2010). As Renata Salecl (2004) argues, this cycle is oppressive and creates moral anxieties in consumers. Evidently, the slogan of moralism is no longer “just do it!” but rather “no matter what you do, you will do it wrong … [I]t is better to follow our advice and try it again” (Salecl, 2004, p. 50).

3.6 Psychoanalysing Guilt in Capitalism and Advertising

Thus, it is evident that guilt is intrinsic to ethical fashion. Guilt is a concept that combines “fault, accusation, blame, plea, shame … remorse … apology, punishment, revenge, forgiveness, reparation [and] reconciliation” (Singh, 1996, p. 5). However, a Freudian view of guilt instead exposes how individuals use ethics and morals to guide their culpable behaviours. Freud (2002) used this method to analyse consumers’ obsessive efforts to control their irrepressible desires (Westerink, 2009). His fundamental view of human beings is that they are constantly conflicted with themselves to change and improve their lives, of which consumption has historically attempted to appease (Thompson, 2004).

The nature of this conflict is related to how individuals live, behave and think. Freud framed this psychological structure into three categories: the id, the ego and the superego (Phillips & Freud, 2006, p. 36). The id is governed by pleasure principles and demands. However, this force becomes threatened by fear. Thus, the ego compels one to then find the least dangerous forms of satisfaction to fulfil the id’s desires; hence, it
attempts to do so under morally just circumstances to provide reason for such gluttony (Phillips & Freud, 2006, p. 224). The superego is then influenced by external factors, such as tradition and accepted social ideas, to continue performing according to moral principle, while simultaneously obtaining pleasure (Phillips & Freud, 2006, pp. 36–43). This internal effort is geared to avoid guilt, which is an unbearable side effect to morally ambiguous practices such as consumption; however, as Lasch (1984, p. 228) affirmed, consumers must inevitably suffer guilt because their behaviour is inherently contradictory. It is ethical fashion’s insistence to incorporate the Other’s suffering to induce this internal process and, thus, trigger guilt when failure to consume fair trade is not met. Consumers must then exchange this shame for moral betterment; they do this by buying labelled brands that carry ecological and ethical signifiers to confirm themselves as socially conscious people. For example, Divine, a fair trade chocolate brand, is marketed with slogans such as “eat poverty history” and “not so guilty pleasure” (Cremin, 2011, pp. 220–233). Evidently, associating the physical action of consumption, to “eat” and indulge to relinquish poverty, bypasses the guilt incurred through consumption while simultaneously quenching consumers’ desire to spend.

This is precisely why Benjamin (2002) claims that “capitalism is probably the first instance of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement” (p. 288; Bullock & Jannings, 2004, p. 288). A primary component of this process occurs through advertising, which often employs psychology (Chomsky, 2011) and reflects traditional cultural attitudes and patterns of consumption to stabilise and enable industry survival (Messaris, 1997). Cremin (2015) states consumers are “libidinally, materiality and ideologically bound to capitalist process of which [they] are only dimly aware” (p. 1). Indeed, the fashion industry similarly applies such stimulating content, particularly that which exploits social and environmental crises among the garment industry, as a psychological tool to prompt a reaction and, in this case, implant guilt into consumers’ unconscious minds.
In particular, such images of environmental degradation force consumers to assume responsibility for their deeds and the enjoyment that accompanies the action. As Freud noted, consumers’ remorse surfaces when they are believed to commit or contemplate a moral violation, which defies these internalised standards of what is deemed appropriate behaviour (Chatzidakis, 2014, p. 3; Freud, 1961, p. 134; Westerink, 2009). However, combatting these crises with supposed alternatives, as offered by ethical fashion, which depicts workers and artisans in superior conditions, thus, supplants the notion that fair trade is a morally prosperous endeavour that consumers not only feel obliged by their superego to participate in but also that which allows them to reconfigure their consumption habits and instead engage in seemingly guilt-free practices, which actively helps the poor.

In actuality, these persuasive images fill consumers with false and dangerous notions that enable the industry to control consumers’ beliefs and ultimately accept as pure fact. This then promotes mass conformity to dominant issues, particularly those concerning politics and culture, to distract consumers from critiquing meanings behind and beyond labelled commodities; it also helps eradicate individuality and freedom to establish specific modes of thought and behaviour.

This type of consumption parallels the therapeutic ethos that department stores often promote (Arnould, 2006; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Jackson Lears, 1983) to rid consumers of their guilt and anxiety and instead stimulate pleasure upon consumption. It then clarifies how capitalism deconstructs consumers’ engagements with certain cultural objects, such as clothing. Indeed, fashion is both a cultural and emotional manipulator; the ideology driving ethical consumption attempts to quell doubt and apprehension to mask its true intentions and, therefore, maintain production and consumption afloat.

For example, Ranciere (2009) argues that the media industries’ use of fashion models in advertising (who often signify social and cultural superiority), untinged by pain
or indignation, is not effective to promote a response from consumers. Instead, he draws upon fashion photographer Olivierio Toscani, who famously shot an image of a naked anorexic woman for Milan Fashion Week in 2007. His use of such provocative and socially conscious imagery to aid consumerist ends serves an equally political function that prompts a reaction:

For the image to produce its political effect, the spectator must be convinced that [they are] guilty of sharing in the prosperity rooted in imperialist exploitation of the world. And [they] must further feel guilty about being there and doing nothing; about viewing these images of pain and death, rather than struggling against the powers responsible for it. In short, [they] must already be feeling guilty about viewing the image that is to create the feeling of guilt. (Ranciere, 2009, p. 85)

This forges clear parallels to the ethical fashion industry’s portrayal of Third World nations enduring poor social and ecological conditions. Such depictions are used in advertising and in documentaries (such as The True Cost) to supposedly acknowledge global crises and, thus, force consumers to rebuke their suffering through smarter spending. Indeed, this also delimits workers and rural communities in impoverished nations, who become further colonised by their hardships for commercial ends. Primarily, such exposure instead helps foster a complex social system in which meaning and ideology is prescribed and consumers’ attitudes and emotional reactions to such depictions of poverty and crises bind them and workers alike to hegemonic systems that define what is and is not moral. Consequently, consumers then filter their concerns to which brand, clothing or socially acceptable product they should consume to superficially fulfil these ethical quandaries.

Evidently, it appears a fundamental aspect of the fashion industry is to soothe and simultaneously ignite anxiety and insecurity, which, according to Douglas (1982),
enables consumers to pursue superficial happiness through guilt-free measures. In reality, the paradox of consuming fair trade and sustainable fashion is that these commodities will never ease guilt because, according to Lacan (1977, pp. 75–81), their desires are generated in what he deemed the mirror stage, which consults the apparent gaps in Freud’s (2002) analysis of how ego is formed.

3.7 The Mirror Stage: Alienation in the Imaginary

Identity is formed from patterns of social control, which are constructed independently and according to one’s surroundings (Goffman, 1961, p. 168). Often, fashion is used as a tool to build one’s self-image (Orbach, 2009, p. 92). It also promotes insecurity (Barnard, 1996, p. 144) to stimulate the desire to constantly seek reinvention (Foster et al., 2010, p. 394; Gough-Yates, 2003, p. 10). Individuals use it to communicate through their mode of dress (Goffman, 1959, pp. 23–24) and are often compelled to manage their appearance to secure their cooperation among social spheres, thus, avoiding shame, humiliation and embarrassment through aesthetic conformity (Scheff, 2014).

Lacan’s (1949) mirror stage expounds the point at which one obtains and constructs their initial sense of identity and the concept of ‘I’ upon recognising themself in the mirror (Evans, 1997). However, this stage can be confronting, as sometimes the face reflected in a mirror does not echo one’s innermost desires. Consequently, one can then develop narcissism (Lacan, 1977, p. 17) because the only way to decipher and display these desires is by and through external stimuli, such as consumption (Brown, 2008). Indeed, such objects rely upon dominant sets of normative values that control the construction of subjective identity; in this sense, consumers implicitly ask for ideological approval within this process of crafting their own identity (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). However, Lacan described subjectivity as a concept in which people believe they are individuals when, in reality, their identity has been constructed by a variation of dominant social institutions, ideologies and languages (Ţiţek, 1991b, p. 49; Zuern, 1988, p. 2).
This notion clarifies how the ethical fashion industry promotes certain stylised ideas (whether conveyed through verbal or visual means, such as through images of impoverished workers) to encourage the idea that consumers not only control their identity construction but also that they dictate their own subjective beliefs, which are otherwise totally dictated by hegemonic external forces. In this sense, fashion has preyed upon the delicate mirror stage of human development, both for consumers and labourers alike, and this has alienated each to perceive themself in alternative and arguably more liberated manners when instead they are vessels that serve capitalism’s needs for total social, cultural and political control.

As such, consumers buy labelled fashion to not only physically reshape their appearance to convey what they believe are their innermost desires, but also to gain permission to the aforementioned unique and socially superior spheres the industry so dictates. However, and perhaps most importantly, the industry also ensures that this goal is eternally unattainable. This is achieved by constantly reconfiguring styles, ideas and imposed moral beliefs upon consumers to, thus, maintain their plight for social and personal acceptance in perpetual motion. Consequently, their self-esteem further dwindles, thus, pressuring their id to seek a new objet petit a to reinvent their identity.

3.8 Desire of the Other

Evidently, consumers’ appearance will never truly represent their imagined self because, as based on the logic of desire, which is discovered and founded in fantasy (Azari, 2008), consumerism ensures that this is never an achievable goal (Brown, 2008). It is now important to reconsider Lacan’s objet petit a (the unattainable cause of desire) to understand human desire. It is a force that constantly seeks jouissance, or pleasure (Lewis, 2005), and is encouraged by a mix between fantasy and lack and, thus, appears most when one experiences emptiness (Homer, 2005). Žižek argues that commodities directly fulfil this response, thus, compelling consumers to obtain material objects: the
objet petit a (Orwell, 2013). As Žižek (1991a) states, “the subject’s desire is the desire of the Other” (p. 109)—a feeling spurred by lack—which ensures that it is unachievable and is something that is simply not and will never be theirs. Thus, consumers remain in a state of incomplete wholeness (Žižek, 1991b).

In particular, Žižek used the example of Coca-Cola in The Perverts Guide to Ideology (2012) to simplify the logic of lack. He argues that the product is never a simple commodity purchased to fulfil one purpose—that is, to drink. Rather, consumers are obliged to desire and enjoy the idea of obtaining specific commodities, like Coca-Cola, when instead they desire ‘desire’ itself. In this case, the paradox of Coca-Cola is that the more one drinks, the more they feel thirsty. Figuratively, this parallels the objet petit a in that it, like all products, will never wholly satisfy consumers because the thirst, or jouissance, can neither be quenched. Consequently, consumers then purchase more commodities in retaliation, which, thus, leads consumers to endure this endless cycle of guilt in turn.

Ethical and fair trade companies particularly engage these unconscious desires (Packard, 1957; Williamson, 1978) by constantly reinventing their marketing strategies to hold consumers’ attention (Goldman, 1992) and by constantly promising idealised fantasies through aspirational commodities (Berger, 1972; Berger, 2011). Indeed, as Bauman (2007) and Glickman (1999) argue, the desire of consumption in consumer society must remain seductive, ungratified and perpetuated. This process of dissatisfaction that stretches “between popular beliefs and the realities of consumer’s lives is a necessary condition of a properly functioning society of consumers” (Bauman, 2007, p. 47). Hence, the fashion industry equally preys on these eternal human desires, which are increasingly premised on the idea that their commodities serve a greater ethical and social purpose, to relinquish the accompaniment of consumer guilt.
For example, Cremin (2011) argues that humans are “all held responsible for the survival of others, all guilty and all in need of products and services we can offload our guilt onto” (p. 200). This parallels Žižek (1997), who claimed that:

by surrendering my innermost content, including my dreams and anxieties, to the Other, a space opens up in which I am free to breathe: when the Other laughs for me, I am free to take a rest; when the Other is sacrificed instead of me, I am free to go on living with the awareness that I did atone for my guilt, and so on.

(p. 109)

According to Žižek (1997), this signifies ‘interpassivity’, which explains that the ‘Other’ (in this case, those in developing nations) enjoys their poverty on behalf of consumers. Therefore, they function as a mechanism in which to not only transfer the guilt associated in their exploitation, but also to achieve and attain satisfaction and self-improvement once more.

Indeed, ethical fashion can then become worshipped as a practice that both relieves the dreaded mundane and the guilt that accompanies consumption. However, it goes further because it combines consumers’ regular desires with moral desires and proposes that more consumption equals more social responsibility. Thus, the objet petit a is ethics, but one that is falsely produced through exploitative practices, both of others’ cultures and of consumers’ lack and desire to attain enjoyment.

However, it remains clear that ethical fashion still lacks proper moral codes of conduct. Companies must respond by producing new ethical content to compensate for a lack of authentic ethical action. To maintain corporate existence, consumers’ desires for objects—which is, in this case, equally one of enjoyment and morality (to balance the guilt inherited from consumption)—must also be perpetually lacking to create demand. The supreme lore of capitalism is that total satisfaction and pleasure from fetishised commodities should never be gained. Therefore, the new content that labels create to
remain on pace with consumers’ growing desires must also not fully satisfy this gap and must, thus, not be completely ethical. Consequently, consumers feel frustrated by their insatiable desires, as labels continue to encourage and influence their superego by enticing them with images and false promises of gratification.

3.9 The Oedipal Complex

One’s desire for labelled fashion is also deeply rooted in Freud’s Oedipal complex. Traditionally, this concept derives from Greek mythology, which tells of Oedipus who killed his father out of jealousy because he desired his mother.

Freud believed that inner conflict naturally forms within the psychosexual development of a child because they inevitably develop an erotic attachment to their parent of opposite sex; however, this desire is then repressed and substituted by fetishised objects (Phillips & Freud, 2006). He theorised that such jealousy—the immoral incestual desire—must be sublimated in fear of it being discovered (Phillips & Freud, 2006). As the myth dictates, the child’s father will castrate him in retaliation. Thus, the sexual fetish must be reimagined and transferred to the object fetish instead.

Steele (1996) claims that women apply this same fetishistic behaviour to fashion to express their power. The “phallic women” (Steele, 1996, p. 153) feels she can challenge dominant masculinity by signifying her own masculinity through her consumption. Indeed, this aforementioned desire to reform the body (Flugel, 1930) entwines with his notion. However, in fashion, clothing has two major historical purposes: to sexualise the body and to cover the flesh (Benjamin, 1999, p. 8). Freud viewed them as the former, but as additional and equally symbolic features of the human body; for example, he viewed cravats as a phallic symbol of masculine wealth and power (Freud & Brill, 1913).

Cremin (2011) echoes Freud’s interpretation, further explaining that the boy in the Oedipal myth who fears castration and, thus, physical loss then transfers his prospective lack into ulterior objects to regain lost satisfaction:
The fetish signals both the acknowledgment of and vulnerability to castration (symbolically referring to a loss of power rather than a literal penis) and a denial of and triumph over castration through the discovery of a lost object. Money has a similar appeal in becoming the fetishised object of exchange arousing a desire for an enterprise. In Freud’s example, the fetish is surplus to normal psychosexual behaviour. In other words, the fetish is the condition by which money obtains a symbolic value for capital to circulate and is not regarded a perverse fixation. (p. 191)

Cremin (2011) further argues that companies respond to this lack by creating commodities that carry these missing symbolic values. Indeed, this equally applies when reversed. For example, when consumers threaten to reject certain labels that do not trade and produce according to the moral principles they crave for reassurance, brands must then learn how to communicate accordingly to prevent this potential financial ‘castration’ (Cremin, 2011, p. 165). They also increasingly demand transparency in this fetishisation process to ensure that their ancillary enjoyment is not also tainted by immoral means.

For example, Walmart CEO Mike Duke states that:

customers … want information about the entire lifecycle of a product so that they can feel good about buying it. They want to know that the materials in the products are safe … that it was made well … and that it was produced in a responsible way. (Cremin, 2011, p. 187)

Duke’s acknowledgment of such desires demonstrates how companies increasingly attempt to serve consumers’ moral interests and, thus, nurture their superego, which, as mentioned, wants them to act ethically.

Brands are increasingly reshaping their production to assure consumers that castration is an unnecessary solution to curb their fetishised desires. In particular, ethical brands encompass this demand by outwardly proposing that and praising consumers who
know where and how their products are made. For example, Natalie Grillon, who co-founded Project JUST (which promotes conscious consumption), explains that:

just to have a brand name isn’t enough. You’re supposed to talk about what your process is and how your product is made. You’re supposed to tell us about the people who make it. [Consumers] love to meet the people who are behind the brand. (Minney, 2016, p. 164)

Owner of ethical fashion label Noir Peter Ingwersen echoes this sentiment, claiming “consumers buy Noir because … they know that some corporate responsibility associated with it … may justify people’s spending, knowing that a certain amount will go back to the people who helped to pick the cotton” (Black, 2008, p. 36).

The Oedipal complex reflects this compulsion for moral satisfaction, in that it seeks to achieve pleasure while simultaneously avoiding guilt for such desires by transferring them to more prosperous avenues, like ethical shopping. Likewise, promoting transparent production feeds this response and, subsequently, disarms the threat of consumers’ castration, thus, enabling their inherent fetishisation to continue, but only by and through ethical alternatives. Thus, consumers buying fair trade fashion can continue to indulge their senses, ridding capitalism of their feared departure and sustaining the consumption cycle firmly in motion.

3.10 Interpellation as Subjectivity

Importantly, the ability to connect with consumers, whether to entice or prevent specific actions, requires direct communication. As such, ethical brands increasingly rely on Louis Althusser’s (2014) notion of interpellation or “hailing” (p. 191). This process explains how one identifies with and responds to specific social and cultural factors, which then determine their self-recognition within society (Althusser, 2014).

Notably, Althusser’s example of a police officer hailing a person by shouting at them, to which they naturally respond, materialises this process. According to him, when
an individual answers such an exclamation, they acknowledge their position as a legitimate social actor responsible for a prompted action (Althusser, 2014, pp. 164–174). Importantly, this recognition also explains how individuals are not unique (Sharma & Gupta, 2006) but are instead submissive to a system that dominates and defines identity (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997, pp. 120–167).

Indeed, ethical fashion employs this same tactic, calling upon consumers to act against the poverty and crisis it so exploits by and through the social and moral dilemmas it attaches to consumers’ roles as upright social actors. Naturally, they accept and respond to these demands to fulfil this duty, giving charity and buying fair fashion at the helms of interpellation. In being hailed by these companies to act with moral regard, consumers’ passive submission fulfils a dual role: not only do they come to believe that consumption satisfies their inherent social obligations, but also they simultaneously empower the industry by allowing it to assign specific identities to consumers, defining their social positions and obligations and, thus, enabling the normalisation of their repression as mere requirements of social citizenship.

This structure enables fashion to forge the imaginary ideals and relationships consumers share among themselves and with those who make their clothing. Evidently, corporations recognise that deluding consumers to feel they are privileged social saviours who possess the supposed power to enforce change and improve workers’ conditions facilitates their allegiance without fear of defiance. Indeed, submission to such interpellation is essentially submission to an invisible order that is sustained by false freedoms that are dictated from above. In this sense, fashion provides the ultimate illusion of choice and morality: consumers act, seemingly upon their own will, to enjoy ethical products in an attempt to satisfy themselves and the world, as it is their inherent and objective social duty.
Therefore, interpellation allows consumers to experience enjoyment as a by-product of virtuous consumption. Simultaneously, they also lose sight of the concealed ideologies tangled within this symbolic system of semiotics and consumerism, which, therefore, prevents them from understanding and critiquing the reality of their duties.

One tactic fashion companies use to directly address (or interpellate) consumers is by incorporating them in their slogans (Jhally, 1990). For example, ethical fashion brand Purple Impression (2018a) “want[s] you to build a connection with your pieces” (para. 1). It attempts to appear as though specifically communicating to an individual consumer to convince them that they alone are unique; this frames fashion commodities as special objects that possess equally special meanings. Another tactic involves mimetic desire, which, as Girard (1991) found, involves the consumption (or action, more generally) of particular products to emulate other, perhaps more aspirational, figures’ (like celebrities) supposed desires. For example, blogger Cara Bartlett’s proclamation that she “love[s] Emma Watson’s elegant style, and commitment to sustainable brands” because “she always looks so effortlessly chic, and you can tell she’s really passionate about ethical fashion” (Minney, 2016, p. 91) reflects this mimetic, and likely false, desire induced by others’ consumption. Indeed, fashion is largely geared to promoting conformity; however, ethical fashion is instead additionally focused on differentiation and crafting superficial representations of deeper, more moral internal meanings. Yet, each is equally constructed on imitation and inciting supposedly normative values. As such, desire can be viewed as the id that forces individuals to consume fashion commodities that are based on highly crafted beliefs (whether fair trade or otherwise) to control individuality by moulding personal ideologies to align with those established by labels, celebrities or any such powerful conspirator.

Consequently, consumers become so preoccupied by attaining their desires that they become wholly unaware that they are instead imitating Others’ (in this case,
celebrities) desires and not acting upon their own will. Evidently, it appears the fashion industry has established a consumer culture that survives on manipulating, indoctrinating and promoting false consciousness to avoid any deferment to its fraught system. Rather, the imagined desire for such commodities stimulates great discontent and frustration among consumers, as they fruitlessly consume to no end while inadvertently satisfying companies’ *jouissance* (profit).

In addition, Marcuse argues that the needs, aspirations and ideologies those above aim to shape (Kellner, 1984) are then promoted by consumers themselves, as they are willed to serve their interpellated obligations (Becker & Murphy, 1988, p. 105). For example, the Trade Alternative Reform Action (TARA) Project (2014), which promotes growth for economically disadvantaged artisans and craftsmen in Dehli, proposes that consumers:

- use [its] web app and be a Fair Trade Person
- share [their] photos on all [their] social media channels using hashtags #FairTrade and #WFTDay
- organise a World Fair Trade Day event in [their] community and publicise [their] event on [its] website
- help [them] spread the word of Fair Trade by following [its] social media channels: Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn and YouTube.

This demonstrates how such companies relay their efforts onto consumers to advertise their claims and promulgate their practices by and through civilian campaigning. Indeed, Žižek explained that this form of grassroots advertising encapsulates this interpellation process Althusser described:

> Better to do nothing than to engage in localized acts whose ultimate function is to make the system run more smoothly. The threat today is not passivity, but pseudo-activity, the urge to ‘be active’, to ‘participate’, to mask the Nothingness
of what goes on. People intervene all the time, ‘doing something’; academics participate in meaningless ‘debates,’ etc.; but the truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw from it all. (Hamza, 2015, p. 229)

Evidently, engaging consumers in activities they believe contributes towards a responsible social cause instead provides the fashion industry with an active vehicle to accumulate profit. When consumers buy a piece of fair and sustainable clothing, they too buy into a belief system that is created to justify and rationalise the market, which they unconsciously obey.

As Žižek (2000, p. 204) concurs, interpellating consumers to fulfil these ethical duties is a subtle method to naturalise and reduce defiance against capitalism. Indeed, the doctrine of leftist liberal social logic in ethical fashion does not seek to explain the oppression and ecological destruction it permits; rather, the lifeblood of capitalism is founded on its own exploitation (Badiou, 2005), which is interwoven throughout an extensive and multilayered supply chain that is concealed and then carried by such rallies of action to ignite moral compulsions and set consumption in motion.

3.11 The Ideology of Real

Clothing is a symbolic expression of social, cultural and political capital (Williams, 1982, p. 111) deeply embedded with meaning (Steiner, 2010, p. 147). However, this meaning that we feel fashion expresses about us is not real. This is reasoned by Lacan’s (1981, p. 280) concept of the symbolic, the real and the imaginary, which originates in the mirror stage and controls subjectivity. According to Žižek, the concept of the ‘real’ is based on signification and is constantly burdened by inconsistency, which maintains imperfection (Vighi & Feldner, 2007, p. 51). In Lacanian theory, the ‘real’ resists representation and cannot be symbolised because it precedes all else (Lacan, 1981); it is pre-mirror, pre-imaginary and pre-symbolic. Thus, once it is represented and made conscious, it loses its ‘reality’. As such, social ideology attempts to obscure the
'real’ to cover such imperfections, whether spurred by lack, contradiction or otherwise. However, Žižek (1989, pp. 45–49) argues that ‘real’ does exist in and is based on symbolic order, as everyone is interpellated in some form and, therefore, cannot escape ideology (Vighi & Feldner, 2007, p. 51). This symbolic order is generated by signifiers and language (Lacan, 1981, p. 279) and comprises social meanings and assumptions, such as societal norms and values, which are employed to forge fixed meanings in life. Indeed, these meanings also create the same fantasies that frame wider social relations, meanings and structures, which constitute the ‘reality’ of social life (Žižek, 1989, p. 35).

As the ‘real’ is pre-ideological or non-ideological, it operates entirely on symbolism; essentially, there is no ‘real’ without the symbolic (Žižek, 1999, p. 17). In Žižek’s (1989) terms, it is “a void, an emptiness in a symbolic structure marking some central impossibility” (pp. 172–173).

Several theorists have also attempted to unpack the ‘real’ in social ideology. Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault (2009) believe that individuals form it through desire, which then influences how meanings are assigned in social life. Similarly, Habermas (1984) contends that ‘real’ is created through communication and social relations. Ricoeur (1981) went further, arguing that it is defined by what social actors think and feel when interpreting meanings, which they invest in their own social reality to form ideology. In other words, humans develop their own interpretation of a shared social reality without drawing on cultural codes that are ideologically pre-constituted and developed beyond their conscious. Ricoeur (1981, p. 227) claims that one’s understanding of society is inherently partial and fragmented because the knowledge they possess about their position and relation within it is conditioned by their sense of social belonging, which is simultaneously influenced by various historical, social, racial and cultural factors that are otherwise evident and non-transparent to all.
Therefore, for ethical fashion, its industry’s system operates by associating specific symbols (comprised of a network of signifiers and signified) to social and cultural images (which are largely exploitative) to ignite consumers’ desires. Indeed, these become the emotive markers that will eventually become unconsciously linked to ethical fashion itself. In this sense, the industry converts such symbolic value to use-value that can persuade and induce a favourable mythology around its commodities’ purpose and potential. Evidently, this is because consumers and companies alike want to symbolise that they care; hence, while garments may just be fabric, their attached symbology carries powerful meaning.

Unsurprisingly, Žižek (2009, p. 63) explains that this process is fraught because consumers will inevitably favour certain ideologies over others because they wish to follow the symbolic values in which they are vested. Thus, the symbolic structure of ethical fashion operates by ensuring the subjects (consumers) of its ideology associate and involve themselves with the contended beliefs and fantasies it espouses, which suggest a ‘reality’ but does not actually embody or provide it in return. Instead, ethical fashion’s ideology of ‘real’ is constructed to support the reality of capital, despite contending that its symbolic order is hinged on authenticity. Thus, as crises and exploitation instead comprise the actual ‘real’ of its ethos—which, evidently, cannot be eliminated or ‘fulfilled’—its subjects (consumers) must, upon realisation, instead attempt to obscure the true reality of their actions and the industry in which they participate by adding more false symbols to further conceal and redefine ‘reality’ as they wish to know.

Therefore, ethical fashion is a false reality that is only made ‘real’ by and through false symbolic value that enables and legitimises consumers’ subsequent compulsion to engage such causes. Essentially, this process pacifies consumers from confronting the true reality that such labelled materials instead threaten society (Kelly, 2012). This is why branding and marketing exists; it not only distributes but also manufactures symbols and
forge new ideologies for monetary gain (Bourdieu, 1986). Indeed, the market has constructed a “symbolic structure of the world in which we are all today invited to live”, which is comprised of “cultural images and fantasies” that “can become a real active force … [that] circulates in the fantastic and the abstract” (Jones, 2013, pp. 4–6) to redefine how and what the ‘real’ really means. Essentially, it is this power of fantasy that instead enables it to overcome any resistance from internal or external forces, such as reason or reality. This is precisely why Žižek (1997) claims that the notion of reason in consumption is problematic. Indeed, fantasy masks social reality, but reason should then instinctively interfere to dispel the myth (Žižek, 1997, p. 127). He argues that reason allows one to traverse the “plague of fantasies” (p, 1), which enables the ‘real’ or the ‘pre-symbolic real’ (p. 10) and subsequent critique of fantasy to naturally form. However, reason will always fail in situations in which consumerist ideology (particularly ones that are hinged on moral promises) is concerned, as it constantly seeks to maintain the power of fantasy by promulgating formidable notions of humanitarianism; indeed, this allows it to expand beyond the realms of which reason cannot contain (Žižek, 2000, p. 35).

3.12 Ideology Based on Crafted Beliefs

Overall it appears that, as Žižek (1989, p. 8) argues, ideology is entirely based on belief and enjoyment, which are created through such powerful symbols and are reinforced by hegemonic social commands (McGowan, 2004). However, ethical ideologies and beliefs, in particular, blind consumers because they are largely fetishistic illusions of fantasy intended to regulate social reality (Žižek, 2001). Thus, enjoyment (or jouissance) is produced at a social and symbolic level to gain pleasure (Dean, 2006, p. 4), which, as Žižek (1989, pp. 30–38, 2006a) claims, arises from social customs and rituals that bind consumers to a prevailing social order to which they become unconsciously loyal.
Ultimately, Marx and Engels (1970, pp. 47–64) believe that ideology operates to prevent people from developing an adequate understanding of their circumstances. They argue that humans are inevitably bound by ideology because they are unconscious to the social processes that condition their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Marx & Engels, 1970). These processes are also driven by economic forces that govern the meanings one invests back into these same social processes (Marx & Engels, 1970, pp. 47–64). This parallels Žižek’s (2000) interpretation of post-politics, part of which argues that ideology has become meaningless but still effective when it is invisible. Consequently, consumers’ ideology of ethical consumption then becomes wholly premised on the enjoyment derived from the act itself because the industry’s imperceptible ideological forces repress any instance of challenge or critical thought to ensure that focus is firmly kept on the relief that consumption provides.

3.12.1 Critiquing Ethical Ideology

Žižek (1991b, p.1) argues that ethical and moral goods touted as powerful totems are essentially ideological weapons created by systematic forces. Consumers should never blindly accept such norms because they are imagined acts that serve to rationalise the injustices of capitalism (Porter, 2006, pp. 72–85). Such supposed “ethical responsibility” (Žižek, 1991b, p. 1) is intentionally passive to avoid the possibility of raising public awareness to a level that would upset the market and threaten profitability. Susser (1996, pp. 165–181) argues that the notion of ethical and moral responsibility itself is highly controversial and its meanings are complicated, as it is mediated through troubling discourses and “essentially contestable” (Freeden, 1996, pp. 165–181) concepts.

For example, ethical brand Sustainably Chic (2017) vends sustainable label NINTAANZI with propositions that “each NINTAANZI necklace is made fairly by indigenous Ashaninka artisan women, and 20 per cent of sales are donated directly to
programs helping the environment, sanitation, education, children and women well-being in disadvantaged communities in Peru” (para. 11). Organic brand Marc Skid also claims that its sustainable underwear “saves the world” and that its products are “made with organic pima cotton … and the elastic band keeps one plastic bottle out of the landfill. These underwear truly ‘marc’ everything off our conscious list” (Sustainably Chic, 2017, para. 4). Evidently, both promises foster this ideological orthodoxy that:

claims [its] products … are sourced ‘justly’ and that purchasing fair trade products brings economic benefits for the poor. Whilst it is clear that fair trade might bring some benefits to particular groups, whether it brings significant net benefits to the poor in general is questionable. Moreover, the claim that fair trade transactions are more ‘just’ cannot be substantiated. (Booth & Whetstone, 2007, p. 1)

Indeed, as Booth and Whetstone (2007) continue, the majority of several ethical brands’ net income might instead be spent on promoting itself than on donating to aid the global crises it contends to support. Consequently, such ethical ideology reveals itself as nothing more than a marketing tactic that promotes false liberation and instils utmost self-deception. Rather, buying and justifying these consumption habits through faux ethics is a cynical response mechanism to that which motivates consumers’ false consciousness.

3.12.2 Cynical Reasoning

Overall, it appears that, as Žižek (1999) found, cynical reasoning explains how a subject (or consumer engaging in ethical consumption) behaves in certain manners, despite being aware of the reality that surrounds a given action:

They know very well what they are doing but still, they are doing it. One knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it. (p. 312)
Indeed, being told that this consumption provides social and ecological relief masks the emptiness of the action. However, despite this knowledge, consumers are still intrinsically aware, whether consciously or unconsciously, that their efforts are shallow acts of false morality. Yet, they still choose to participate as such and as though their consumption and industry production will solve these crises because, evidently, the enjoyment gained from the fantasy not only reasons but also outweighs the surrounding grim reality.

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored crisis among the garment industry and how it is used to foster new ideologies. It enables consumers to portray themselves as rescuing workers from exploitation and poverty to make profit and to maintain production for poor nations. The fashion industry depicts crisis to persuade consumers to buy fair-trade labelled commodities by suggesting they are helping impoverished communities. Companies fill consumers with anxiety about social and ecological issues and convince them to purchase ethical fashion. This is a form of social passivity, or a ‘pseudo-activity’, which enables consumers to demonstrate that their activities are unique and that they are responsible global citizens.

Consumers obey and are passive towards these systems that shackle them to commodities, and this essentially masks the fashion industry’s exploitative structure. The fact is that consumption will never be enough to aid such crises under this configuration, thus, implying that guilt is both unavoidable and eternal beneath capitalism.

Consumers then suffer self-alienation because fair trade fashion pressures them to constantly feel they must live up to their ideal moral self; therefore, many reshape their external appearance in the hope of achieving this task. However, they can never truly express themselves as socially responsible people because they always find their opinions, feelings and sense of self is missing from the clothes they wear. Consumers
then suffer at the helms of emotional manipulation, believing that the more they consume, the more they can help these communities and, thus, identify as socially responsible consumers. Yet, this feeling of lack can never be satiated, as the fashion industry constantly creates to ensure satisfaction and pleasure from fetishised cultural commodities are never fully gained.

Essentially, this form of ethical consumption prevents consumers from thinking critically about how dominant social and cultural beliefs are constructed by social elites. In this sense, fashion becomes the ultimate illusion. Signifying commodities as fair trade and sustainable does not repeal their inflicted oppression and devastation. Instead, this makes consumers support an ideological system driven by global crisis.
Conclusion

This research argues that the ruling class have enforced their ideological and cultural values upon artisans to support capitalist modes of production. In Chapter 1, I argued that ethical fashion companies are not different from other fashion brands, as they, too, are based on the private ownership of products and workers, who are the lifeblood of the industry and are forced to remain static in their production. Companies reinforce this unequal relationship by using the skills and time of workers, and by paying them unfair wages that are alienating and exploitative. As a result, artisans and workers cannot achieve freedom. They are not empowered by making fashion for fair trade companies because Western corporations and values dominate their creativity and production lines, thus, denying them access to the market.

There is an element of mystery in fair trade and sustainable fashion, in that artisans’ skill and time is concealed because consumers purchase their goods in stores. As such, they cannot consider these forms of consumption and production as honourable practices when they express their value using monetary exchange. These hegemonic ideologies repress consumers’ relations with the people who make their clothes, as money masks this relationship and because purchases are not made directly between each entity. Thus, consumers’ relationships with workers are based on globalisation, which makes it difficult to trace how goods are made and distributed in the first place.

Evidently, it appears capitalism is inherently harmful by which ethical consumption adds a new layer of commodity fetishism. In turn, consumers do not challenge this structure because they are convinced that smart shopping will eventually reduce its harms. Further, perpetual consumption will inevitably control consumers’ social lives because companies promote conformist behaviours and brainwash consumers into believing that owning their garments provides social, cultural and political freedom.
This false consciousness leads consumers to fetishise commodities, thus, ensuring they become bound to the fashion system. Fair trade companies then counter this guilt by attempting to symbolise their brands care through offering microloans, education and training to workers. However, this only benefits the ruling class once more, as it riddles the poor with added debt.

Chapter 2 focused on the culture industry, which modifies its appearance to maintain domination overs artisans and workers. However, as found, commodifying and appropriating the cultures and crafts of developing nations is dishonourable and only undermines indigenous cultures to sustain widespread poverty and inequality. The industry then justifies this ideology by contending that their clothing offers individuality; it tells consumers that wearing fair trade and being socially responsible provides originality and new forms of identity. However, fashion commodities instead oppress consumers, as the products they are compelled to buy are merely mass-produced and distributed globally, much like any standardised garment.

By incorporating slogans such as ‘transparent’, ‘socially responsible’ and ‘equality’, fashion companies also defy any opposition to their production and the commodification of developing nations’ values. Essentially, this propaganda perpetuates an unequal system and hides alienation in the market; it also endorses democratic ideas to advertise their brands as fair. Companies then deliberately collaborate with celebrities to claim that fair trade in fashion is popular and trendy using a philanthropic veneer. This manipulates fashion’s political and economic systems to justify and propagate hegemonic ideologies, and to hide their ‘dirty’ underside. Ultimately, then, artisans’ struggles continue, as consumers remain passive and society remains unwilling and unable to properly recognise the economic inequality of others when assuming these new crafted identities.
Chapter 3 examined the social and ecological crises ethical fashion companies use to manipulate consumer behaviour, which then occurs within their unconscious minds. Its purpose is to induce guilt for their consumption, which then alters their shopping habits. After generating this fear, ‘ethical’ fashion companies swoop in to offer a convenient solution, which, therefore, provides the fashion industry with an opportunity to earn profit. The media then functions as the ideological apparatus that convinces consumers purchasing fair fashion provides them unique and morally superior identities.

Evidently, the ideology of ethical consumption provides consumers with a scapegoat for their enjoyment because they feel it serves a higher moral purpose. However, their enjoyment of fair fashion is instead based on the commodification of impoverished cultures under the banner of ethical practice. This reduces consumers’ anxieties, thus, permitting them to continue feeding their consumerist desires. Evidently, poverty and inequality is instead sustained, as each constitutes the central life force of social and cultural practices like capitalism, which cannot be fixed through added consumption—despite how ‘fair trade’ or ‘ethical’.
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