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Bangladesh and the Fast Fashion Industry: Injustices in the East & Profits in the West

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Abstract

Every day, all around the world, people wake up and get dressed. However, people fail to realize the adverse effects clothing has on the world. This paper will explain the rapidly expanding fast fashion industry's detrimental effects on people and the environment. Two unsustainable cycles exist within the fast fashion industry; profits in the West that drive injustices in the East. The country of Bangladesh illustrates injustices in the East through corruption, labor violations, and a negative environmental impact. Increased trade liberalization and increased production from retailers drive profits in the West. This paper will analyze the fast-fashion industry through peer-reviewed journals, articles, and books. This paper seeks to draw a conclusion about fast fashion's effects on the world and how to proceed. Who is to blame for injustices in the East and profits in the West?

¹ Sharma, Nidhi. 2020. "Slowing Down Fast Fashion." *Chemical Engineering Progress*, 05, 5-7. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/slowing-down-fast-fashion/docview/2440493266/se-2>.

² Sharma, Nidhi. 2020. "Slowing Down Fast Fashion." *Chemical Engineering Progress*, 05, 5-7. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/slowing-down-fast-fashion/docview/2440493266/se-2>.

Introduction

Walking into a favorite clothing store, the options feel limitless. Racks of merchandise line the walls, any article of clothing in every color and style imaginable. What has given way to what seems like an endless supply of clothing at such affordable prices? In the past, there have been two to four seasons of clothing, aligning with the four seasons of our calendars. Now, there are fifty-two, one for each week of the year. Retailers have shifted to a model of keeping clothes on the rack for four to six weeks, then marking them down to make way for new items.¹ This phenomenon is known as "fast fashion."

The fast fashion industry draws inspiration from upscale fashion designers, turning runway styles into inexpensive, trendy clothing, produced quickly and in mass quantities.² Most products produced by the fast fashion industry are of extremely low quality and sold at cheap prices. Generally speaking, a fast fashion retailer combines two techniques: quick response and enhanced design. Quick response capitalizes on short production and distribution lead times, while enhanced design techniques enable retailers to sell highly fashionable "trendy" product designs.³

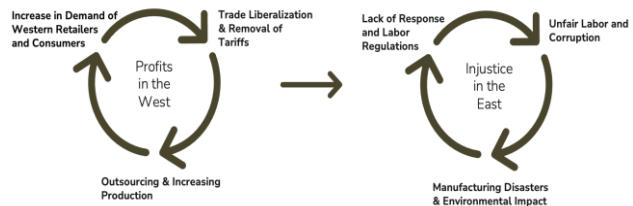
The fast fashion industry is both a labor and resource-intensive industry, with a long supply chain. This influences the economic, social, and environmental impact of the industry in both the east and the west.

³ Cachon, Gérard P., and Robert Swinney. 2011. "The Value of Fast Fashion: Quick Response, Enhanced Design, and Strategic Consumer Behavior." *Management Science* 57 (4): 778–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25835736>.

The fashion supply chain is characterized by labor-intensive manufacturing, a long supply chain, and a relatively high degree of environmental pollution.⁴ In recent years, the clothing and textile industry has seen an increase and outsourcing of production. Retailers have outsourced to places like India, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh, where fewer protections for workers are mandated. Garment workers in these countries are paid significantly below the U.S. minimum wage and often work in poor and even dangerous conditions.⁵

This increase in production and outsourcing has been attributed to increased trade liberalization of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO has incentivized Western retailers to outsource production by deregulating textile and apparel (TA) manufacturing and eliminating TA quotas on exports. This has allowed retailers to increase production without accounting for its effects. This deregulation has enabled corruption, labor abuses, and environmental decay. This paper will expand on Bangladesh as an illustration of these effects.

Bangladesh properly illustrates the relationship between injustices in the west and consumption in the east for two reasons. First, it is a leader in clothing and textile exports and relies on an export-based economy. The majority of Bangladesh's exports come from its clothing and textile industry. Second, Bangladesh has received increased attention following the April 2013 Rana Plaza Factory accident. This disaster is a culmination of the deregulation of trade liberalization, Western retailers' corporate greed, human rights violations, and the



environmental impact of the fast-fashion industry. All of these will be discussed in this paper.

It is imperative to discuss the effects of fast fashion because it is something that a person encounters every day. Consumers wear and shop at retailers contributing to the negative effects of increased production, which is driven by factors of trade liberalization and shifts in consumer demand. Fast fashion affects not only Bangladesh but also consumers in the West. There is a link between fast fashion and consumers' habits, emotions, and behaviors. Fashion is important because it is deeply personal. Retailers capitalize on consumers' relationships to their clothing; how it makes them feel and how it relates to their identity. The effects of fast fashion exist within a complex cycle of profits driving injustices. Figure 1 reflects this relationship and will be referenced throughout this paper.

Literature Review

Key themes in research surround the increased production in the fast fashion industry as it relates to emerging economies, specifically Southeast Asia. Many scholars like Taplin, Peake, and Kenner, Paton, Manik and Yardley, and Al Mahmoud have focused on Bangladesh. Bangladesh illustrates the pros and cons of an emerging,

⁴ Cai, Ya-Jun, and Tsan-Ming Choi. 2020. "A United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Perspective for Sustainable Textile and Apparel Supply Chain Management." *Transportation Research. Part E, Logistics and Transportation Review* 141: 102010–102010. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2020.102010>.

⁵ Sharma, Nidhi. 2020. "Slowing Down Fast Fashion." *Chemical Engineering Progress*, 05, 5-7. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/slowing-down-fast-fashion/docview/2440493266/se-2>.

export-led economy. There has been literature discussing whether or not the working conditions in Bangladesh are poor. However, following the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse, the consensus is that the regulations, or lack thereof, within the TA industry are something to be aware of. There has been literature assessing the effectiveness of institutions and regulations put into place following the Rana Plaza event, some of which will be addressed in this paper.

Within the topic of increased production in the fast fashion industry, there is a focus on the liberalization of trade. Specifically, how liberalization has allowed Western retailers to offshore labor production to developing countries. The fashion industry offshoring labor production to developing countries has introduced new ways of growth, as labor is the largest cost in clothing manufacturing.⁶ This new business model of fast fashion prioritizes the western consumer over the eastern worker. This business model exists within an institutional framework that perpetuates eastern exploitation.⁷ Taplin's research specifically explains how the increased liberalization of trade has allowed this acceleration to take place, with no accountability for the effect on people, labor, and the environment. This liberalization of trade has allowed emerging economies to benefit from an export-led

growth strategy. This paper will elaborate on the institutional framework that has allowed injustices to occur in eastern countries.

Fast-fashion retailers have shifted production to emerging economies. Studies within this area of research have attributed the acceleration of production to a shift in consumer demands. Some claim that consumers now have become accustomed to inexpensive goods and high consumption habits. This area of research also attributes the increase in consumption to a growing middle class worldwide. There is a growing middle class in both developed and developing countries that has sustained the low-price trend-led model of fast fashion.⁸ This paper will discuss the link between consumers and their clothes: how and why they consume the way that they do.

Another school of thought is the relationship between the consumer and the retailer. Western retailers have responded to an increase in demand from consumers and rely on manufacturers to be more responsive to cost, quality, and speed of delivery.⁹ Retailers are now more accustomed to fast deliveries and quick turnaround times, which also allows them to sell more, at lower prices. Industry research also focuses on consumerism. Specifically, addressing the cause and effect between the increase in production and an increase in consumer trends. This paper will expand on this relationship between consumers and

⁶ Hoang, Tien Nguyen, Duc Le Doan Minh, Minh Ho Thien Thong, and Mai Nguyen Phuong. 2021. "Enhancing Sustainability in the Contemporary Model of CSR: A Case of Fast Fashion Industry in Developing Countries." *Social Responsibility Journal* 17 (4): 578-591. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-03-2019-0108>.

<https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/enhancing-sustainability-contemporary-model-csr/docview/2531474323/se-2>.

⁷ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition &*

Change 18 (3): 246-64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁸ Peters, Greg, Mengyu Li, and Manfred Lenzen. 2021. "The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry." *Cleaner Production* 295: 126390. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107>.

⁹ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246-64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

retailers. This paper will answer the question of who is the most to blame, using fast fashion retailer Zara as an example.

A large area of study within the field is the effects of this mode of production on the environment, and the growing concerns that accompany it. Retailers and consumers alike have grown aware of the negative effects that fast fashion and the clothing industry have on the environment. The statistical analysis of this fact is disputed within the field, with general research supporting that the effect of fast fashion on the environment is negative. Fast fashion is a resource-intensive industry. Fast fashion uses an immense amount of water and pollutants through the process of producing, manufacturing, and delivering throughout the supply chain.

There is growing concern about how the industry affects labor and quality of life. Due to the acceleration of production, more workers have been hired, and the quality of working conditions has diminished. An increase in production has resulted in workers being underpaid and exposed to unsafe working conditions.¹⁰ Working facilities in developing countries, like Bangladesh, are not regulated as closely. This allows for corruption and unjust labor practices to occur. This paper will explore these violations and explain their detriment.

This paper will specifically discuss the cause and effect of fast fashion on

people and their environment. It will use Bangladesh as an example and provide insight into why. Bangladesh illustrates the issues with the fast fashion industry because it is a leading emerging economy whose economy heavily relies on its exports of clothing and textiles.

The Current State of the Garment Industry in Bangladesh

The garment industry has been associated with scales of labor exploitation, abuse, and industrial disasters for centuries.¹¹ Throughout history, the pressures of remaining competitive and expecting fast production have resulted in crises. In 1911, Americans watched in horror as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory burned to flames. The employees of the factory, many of whom perished in the fire, worked long hours at low wages. 146 workers were lost, most of them young immigrant women.¹² The fire symbolized the helplessness of these workers. In the face of danger, they had little control and the law abandoned them.¹³ This disaster prompted American legislation to improve factory safety standards.¹⁴ What might seem like a thing of the past, unsafe working conditions, low wages, and corporate greed at the cost of laborers, are very much still prevalent in

¹⁰ Hoang, Tien Nguyen, Duc Le Doan Minh, Minh Ho Thien Thong, and Mai Nguyen Phuong. 2021. "Enhancing Sustainability in the Contemporary Model of CSR: A Case of Fast Fashion Industry in Developing Countries." *Social Responsibility Journal* 17 (4): 578-591. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-03-2019-0108>.

¹¹ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. "'Slaves to Fashion' in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?" *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175-98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

¹² McEvoy, Arthur F. 1995. "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911: Social Change, Industrial

Accidents, and the Evolution of Common-Sense Causality." *Law & Social Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (1995): 621-51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/828955>.

¹³ McEvoy, Arthur F. 1995. "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911: Social Change, Industrial Accidents, and the Evolution of Common-Sense Causality." *Law & Social Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (1995): 621-51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/828955>.

¹⁴ Hobson, John. 2013. "To die for? The health and safety of fast fashion." *Occupational Medicine*, Volume 63, Issue 5, July 2013, Pages 317-319, <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqt079>

emerging economies in Asia, such as Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a country located in South Asia with a population of 166.3 million people.¹⁵ Bangladesh is currently an UN-classified LDC, Least Developed Country.¹⁶ LDCs are low-income countries confronted with severe structural impediments to sustainable development. These countries are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets. However, Bangladesh is one of the more successful LDCs and is scheduled to graduate from the status in 2026.¹⁷ A contributor to Bangladesh's success and its graduation from LDC status is its growing export-led economy. Most of the South Asian LDCs have benefited significantly from a strong export performance that has been fueled by the high preferential margins from tariffs and favorable rules of origin available for the LDCs under various unilateral

initiatives.¹⁸ Bangladesh depends on an export-led economy, specifically clothing and textile manufacturing. Bangladesh is the world's second-largest producer and exporter of fast fashion, after only China.¹⁹ Bangladesh boasts a \$20 billion garment industry and employs an estimated 4 million workers in 4500 factories.²⁰ The majority of the industry exists in urban areas, in the cities of Dhaka and Chittagong, in purpose-built factories and residential buildings.²¹ A number of the factories are located in Bangladesh's eight Export Processing Zones (EPZs), special zones which provide financial incentives for foreign investors.²² Garment exports account for 80% of Bangladesh's total exports, up a quarter in 2010.²³ As of 2021, this figure is up to 90%.²⁴ In roughly the last decade, Bangladesh has embraced the garment assembly as a form of export-led growth, relying on a large population of low-wage workers (Siddiqi 2004). Bangladesh's

¹⁵ World Bank. 2021. "Population, Total - Bangladesh." *Data*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=BD>.

¹⁶ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. "'Slaves to Fashion' in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?" *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

¹⁷ UN. 2022. "Least Developed Countries (Ldcs) | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." United Nations, *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category.html>.

¹⁸ UN, World Trade Organization. 2021. "Impact of LDC Graduation on the Textile and Clothing Sector." *Enhanced Integrated Framework: Trade for LDC Development*, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/Garment-Study-Trade-WTO.pdf>

¹⁹ Bradsher, K. 2013. "After Bangladesh, seeking new sources", *New York Times*, May 16, 2013. p. B1 and 6.

²⁰ Al-Mahmoud, S.Z., Passariello, C. and Rana, P. 2013. "The global garment trail: from Bangladesh to a mall near you", *Wall Street Journal*, 4-5 May, p.

A1, 11. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324766604578460833869722240>

²¹ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. "'Slaves to Fashion' in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?" *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

²² Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. "'Slaves to Fashion' in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?" *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

²³ Al-Mahmoud, S.Z., Passariello, C. and Rana, P. 2013. "The global garment trail: from Bangladesh to a mall near you", *Wall Street Journal*, 4-5 May, p. A1, 11.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324766604578460833869722240>

²⁴ UN, World Trade Organization. 2021. "Impact of LDC Graduation on the Textile and Clothing Sector." *Enhanced Integrated Framework: Trade for LDC Development*, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/Garment-Study-Trade-WTO.pdf>

growing export-based clothing and textile industry has put immense pressure on domestic manufacturing facilities. The pressure on Bangladesh factories to meet the demands of Western retailers has caused notable disasters.

The most notable disaster was the 2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza factory. Located in the Savar district of Greater Dhaka, Bangladesh, the Rana Plaza factory was an eight-story commercial building that manufactured clothing. This factory manufactured clothing for major fast fashion brands including Spanish brand Mango, British chain Primark, Dutch retailer C&A, Italian brand Benetton, and US-based Walmart. Cracks in the structure of the building Rana Plaza were discovered just days before the collapse, and the lower levels of the building were closed immediately.²⁵ However, the top levels of the building remained open and employees were instructed to work the next day.²⁶ Some employees were absent, but others showed up to work, ignoring the life-threatening conditions due to heavy reliance on their wages.²⁷ In the collapse, 1136 people died and 2,525 were seriously

injured.²⁸ The high death toll made Rana Plaza the world's most fatal industrial accident since the Bhopal disaster of India in 1984.²⁹

Prior to Rana Plaza, Western companies like Primark and Mango depended on their own monitoring practices or the word of owners to monitor manufacturing facilities in Bangladesh.³⁰ The lack of effective regulation resulted in accidental deaths and ill-treatment being commonplace. There have been repeated building collapses in Bangladesh, but fire is a greater hazard in clothing factories. Since 2005, at least 1800 garment workers have been killed in factory fires and building collapses in Bangladesh alone. In September 2012, two fires on the same day in separate garment factories killed more than 300 workers in Pakistan.³¹ In November 2012, a fire at a fast fashion factory, Tazreen Fashions, killed 112 workers.³² Less than a month after the Rana Plaza incident, three people died and six were injured when a floor piled with material collapsed in a sneaker factory in Cambodia (Taplin 2014). Several compliance issues are routinely ignored by factory owners including a lack

²⁵ Land, Anna, and Rimi Zakaria. 2019. "Rana Plaza Collapse, Its Aftermath, and Future Implications for Sustainability". *London: SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Cases Originals*.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526479679>.

²⁶ Manik, J. A. , & Yardley, J. (2013, April 24). Scores dead in Bangladesh building collapse. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/25/world/asia/bangladesh-building-collapse.html?smid=fb-nytimes&WT.z_sma=WO_BBC_20130424&_r=0

²⁷ Land, Anna, and Rimi Zakaria. 2019. "Rana Plaza Collapse, Its Aftermath, and Future Implications for Sustainability". *London: SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Cases Originals*.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526479679>.

²⁸ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. "'Slaves to Fashion' in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?" *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175–98.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

²⁹ Hobson, John. 2013. "To die for? The health and safety of fast fashion." *Occupational Medicine*, Volume 63, Issue 5, July 2013, Pages 317–319, <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqt079>

³⁰ Paton, Elizabeth. 2020. "Bangladesh, a Fashion Hub, Grapples With Factory Safety." *New York Times*, March 2, 2020, A9(L). *Gale In Context: Environmental Studies* (accessed October 25, 2022). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A615885177/GRNR?u=a04fu&sid=bookmark-GRNR&xid=337c2bb5>.

³¹ Hobson, John. 2013. "To die for? The health and safety of fast fashion." *Occupational Medicine*, Volume 63, Issue 5, July 2013, Pages 317–319, <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqt079>

³² Shiina, Yo. "Two Years since Rana Plaza: Why the Accord and the Alliance Are All the More Relevant." *Rights Wire Leitner Center*, 15 July 2015, <https://rightswireblog.org/2015/07/15/two-years-since-rana-plaza-why-the-accord-and-alliance-are-all-the-more-relevant/>.

of fire exits, adequate toilet facilities, and adequate ventilation.³³ It was not until the backlash and the uproar of the Rana Plaza disaster that Western companies and institutions came together to attempt to find a solution. The Rana Plaza collapse, and other disasters like it, were entirely preventable and a direct result of nonexistent regulations.

Efforts to Address Injustices: **The Accord and The Alliance**

After the Rana Plaza collapse, Western brands came together to reach two agreements to increase safety within factories and prevent any future disasters. These agreements were signed in 2013 and called *The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh* and *The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety*, nicknamed the Accord and the Alliance, respectively. The Accord and the Alliance are examples of voluntary regulatory initiatives: brands voluntarily took an initiative to affect change.

The Accord is known as the “European” initiative that legally bound roughly 190 European brands and

institutions. The Accord is a tripartite initiative involving labor unions, NGOs, and Western retailers.³⁴ Six Bangladeshi labor unions and four global labor unions joined the accord.³⁵ European brands that joined the Accord included H&M, Mango, and Benetton. The legally binding nature of the Accord allowed signatory firms to be held legally accountable in their home countries for breaches of its terms. Signatories were expected to set prices at a level that allowed suppliers to make fire and safety-related repairs when necessary to operate safely. Signatories were required to disclose subcontractor facilities in Bangladesh, fund building safety and fire inspections of those facilities, and develop action plans to remediate health and safety issues.³⁶ The Accord pursued a “labor-negotiation” approach, insisting that compensation should be negotiated between employers and workers, that workers should be enabled to pursue their own interests, and that employers, rather than brands, should be made to take responsibility.³⁷

The Alliance was signed in 2013 by 26 North American companies such as J.C. Penny, Walmart, Gap, and Target.³⁸ A smaller group of companies based in America joined the Alliance, which was a

³³ Taplin, Ian M. 2014. "Who is to Blame?: A Re-Examination of Fast Fashion After the 2013 Factory Disaster in Bangladesh." *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 10 (1): 72-83. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-09-2013-0035>. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/who-is-blame/docview/1510643364/se-2>.

³⁴ Ahlquist, John S., and Layna Mosley. "Firm participation in voluntary regulatory initiatives: The Accord, Alliance, and US garment importers from Bangladesh." *The Review of International Organizations* 16, no. 2 (2021): 317-343.

³⁵ Shiina, Yo. "Two Years since Rana Plaza: Why the Accord and the Alliance Are All the More Relevant." *Rights Wire Leitner Center*, 15 July 2015. <https://rightswireblog.org/2015/07/15/two-years-since-rana-plaza-why-the-accord-and-alliance-are-all-the-more-relevant/>.

³⁶ Ahlquist, John S., and Layna Mosley. "Firm participation in voluntary regulatory initiatives: The Accord, Alliance, and US garment importers from Bangladesh." *The Review of International Organizations* 16, no. 2 (2021): 317-343.

³⁷ Donaghey, Jimmy, and Juliane Reinecke. 2018. "When Industrial Democracy Meets Corporate Social Responsibility — A Comparison of the Bangladesh Accord and Alliance as Responses to the Rana Plaza Disaster." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 56 (1): 14–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12242>.

³⁸ Paton, Elizabeth. 2020. "Bangladesh, a Fashion Hub, Grapples With Factory Safety." *New York Times*, March 2, 2020, A9(L). *Gale In Context: Environmental Studies* (accessed October 25, 2022). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A615885177/GRNR?u=a04fu&sid=bookmark-GRNR&xid=337c2bb5>.

less constraining version of the Accord. The Alliance did not create legal obligations for its signatories, did not make its inspection reports public, and did not prevent participating firms from setting lower prices for suppliers.³⁹ The Alliance pursued a “brand-benevolence” approach, relying not on workers to pursue their interests but on brands to act benevolently on the behalf of workers.⁴⁰

Though the legality and enforcement of the agreements differed, there were similarities between the two. Both agreements were signed for five-year terms. Both agreements bound foreign brands to disclose supplier factories publicly in hopes that public transparency would incentivize improving working conditions.⁴¹ Both agreements sought to provide workers with some kind of voice and improve the regulation of fast fashion factories. The Accord and Alliance both aimed to establish Organizational Safety and Health (OSH) committees with elected worker representatives, in line with Bangladesh Labour Law and in recognition of the need

to create an internal, workplace-based mechanism to address safety concerns.⁴²

Despite its efforts, the effectiveness of the Alliance and Accord is still widely debated. An oversight board for the Accord reported that 85% of safety issues have been remediated in the 1,631 active factories it was overseeing, and a similar group ensuring compliance with the Alliance reported that 88% of problems have been resolved in 666 active factories. However, the percentage of complete remediation is very low in comparison: only 8% of Accord factories and 50% of Alliance factories have resolved all issues.⁴³ Complete remediation encompasses regularly conducting inspections and implementing effective safety measures.⁴⁴ This data indicates that there is more to be done. The biggest challenge, in terms of the longer-term situation in Bangladesh, concerns the expiration date of both initiatives.⁴⁵ Upon the ending of the Alliance and Accord, in 2018 and 2022 respectively, the Bangladeshi government will assume oversight of regulation.⁴⁶ This oversight by the Bangladeshi government is what allowed

³⁹ Ahlquist, John S., and Layna Mosley. "Firm participation in voluntary regulatory initiatives: The Accord, Alliance, and US garment importers from Bangladesh." *The Review of International Organizations* 16, no. 2 (2021): 317-343.

⁴⁰ Donaghey, Jimmy, and Juliane Reinecke. 2018. "When Industrial Democracy Meets Corporate Social Responsibility — A Comparison of the Bangladesh Accord and Alliance as Responses to the Rana Plaza Disaster." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 56 (1): 14–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12242>.

⁴¹ Paton, Elizabeth. 2020. "Bangladesh, a Fashion Hub, Grapples With Factory Safety." *New York Times*, March 2, 2020, A9(L). *Gale In Context: Environmental Studies* (accessed October 25, 2022). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A615885177/GRNR?u=a04fu&sid=bookmark-GRNR&xid=337c2bb5>.

⁴² Donaghey, Jimmy, and Juliane Reinecke. 2018. "When Industrial Democracy Meets Corporate Social Responsibility — A Comparison of the Bangladesh Accord and Alliance as Responses to the Rana Plaza

Disaster." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 56 (1): 14–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12242>.

⁴³ Land, Anna, and Rimi Zakaria. 2019. "Rana Plaza Collapse, Its Aftermath, and Future Implications for Sustainability". *London: SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Cases Originals*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526479679>.

⁴⁴ Barrett, P. , Baumann- Pauly, D., & Gu, A. 2018. "Five years after Rana Plaza: The way forward" Retrieved from <https://www.stern.nyu.edu/experience-stern/faculty-research/five-years-after-rana-plaza-way-forward#>

⁴⁵ Ahlquist, John S., and Layna Mosley. "Firm participation in voluntary regulatory initiatives: The Accord, Alliance, and US garment importers from Bangladesh." *The Review of International Organizations* 16, no. 2 (2021): 317-343.

⁴⁶ Barrett, P. , Baumann- Pauly, D., & Gu, A. 2018. "Five years after Rana Plaza: The way forward" Retrieved from <https://www.stern.nyu.edu/experience-stern/faculty-research/five-years-after-rana-plaza-way-forward#>

various crises to occur originally. The Bangladeshi government's ineffective regulation of factories has a likelihood to persist and once again grow to extremes. Factory owners might be hesitant to address worker safety issues, given fewer pressures from global brands and the Bangladeshi government.⁴⁷ Complete remediation in factories is inhibited by the Bangladeshi government's lack of transparency, price pressures, and limited production capacity.

The effectiveness of the Accord and the Alliance is evident in the fact that to date, there has been no other major industrial accident in Bangladesh factories since Rana Plaza. This is despite the fact that serious safety issues have been identified in almost all factories. While there have been some improvements as a result of the Accord and the Alliance, governance efforts need to go beyond the five-year time horizon to continue to address institutional constraints and effectively strengthen worker voices.⁴⁸ The Accord and the Alliance were two efforts that lacked longevity and institutional change. Despite the widespread attention that the deadliest garment industry accident in recent history has received and numerous attempts to improve regulations, employees continue to work in life-threatening conditions.

⁴⁷ Ahlquist, John S., and Layna Mosley. "Firm participation in voluntary regulatory initiatives: The Accord, Alliance, and US garment importers from Bangladesh." *The Review of International Organizations* 16, no. 2 (2021): 317-343.

⁴⁸ Donaghey, Jimmy, and Juliane Reinecke. 2018. "When Industrial Democracy Meets Corporate Social Responsibility — A Comparison of the Bangladesh Accord and Alliance as Responses to the Rana Plaza Disaster." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 56 (1): 14-42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12242>.

⁴⁹ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. "'Slaves to Fashion' in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?" *European Labour Law Journal* 11

Challenges of Factory Workers: Corruptive and Unjust Labor Practices

In addition to employees working in factories that lack proper regulations, they are also subject to corrupt and unjust labor practices. Bangladesh is home to widespread corruption, which is present in its clothing and textile manufacturing industry. Bangladesh ranks 149 out of 180 in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index of 2018. Corruption manifests in different forms; this includes the bribery of union registrations and the intermingling of factory owners and government representatives.⁴⁹ Trade unions are available in only 3% of factories and most of them are found to be controlled by concerned factory owners, crippled with poor leadership and political yes-men. There have been allegations that factories have started cutting wages, imposing unattainable targets, and setting up four hours of overtime or more instead of two hours through issuing circulars by the government.⁵⁰ This corruption extends to the unregulated informal economy of Bangladesh, which accounts for 87% of the workforce. In the clothing and textile industry, the informal economy consists of subcontracted tasks, such as the embroidery of garments.⁵¹

Unjust labor practices exist within Bangladesh's clothing and textile factories.

(2): 175-98.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

⁵⁰ Transparency International Bangladesh. 2018. 'Good Governance in RMG Sector: Progress and Challenges' *Transparency International*, (8) <www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/images/2018/report/rmg/RMG_Follow_up_Ex_Sum_English_Final_2018.pdf>

⁵¹ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. "'Slaves to Fashion' in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?" *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175-98.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

Manufacturing goods in the clothing and textile industry is labor-intensive. Hence, competitive success for manufacturers has been achieved through cost-minimization strategies that generally revolve around the search for low-wage labor.⁵² Labor is often outsourced to places like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and India, where fewer protections for laborers are mandated.⁵³ A 2001 report by the National Labor Committee indicated that 85% of apparel workers were young women between 16 to 25, who work 12 to 14-hour days, seven days a week with occasional mandatory 20-hour shifts.⁵⁴ Bangladesh offers the lowest labor costs in the world, with a minimum wage for garment factory workers set at roughly USD 64 a month.⁵⁵ Thus, Bangladesh is a favorable location for manufacturing for companies wanting to pay less to produce more. With cheaper labor, companies have the costs to increase production. However, these wages are barely sufficient for workers to earn a living wage. A managing director of the Mohammadi Group, one of the largest manufacturers in Bangladesh urged Western companies: “the plea is just to give us 15–20 cents more per piece so that we can make

ends meet. We don’t need prescriptions, guidelines, or counseling. We just need a few extra cents”.⁵⁶ However, when workers try to have a voice in standing up for injustice, it is not well received. Protests, that have increased in reaction to these labor violations, are not well received. For example, in January 2019, a strike that was an effort to increase the minimum wage was met by water cannons and tear gas. In December 2016, in Ashulia, Dhaka, thousands of workers went on strike, which resulted in the arrests of workers’ rights activists and the dismissal of workers.⁵⁷

Countries with forced, unregulated labor are more likely to have insufficient labor law frameworks.⁵⁸ Corruptive and unjust labor practices are thus ingrained in the garment supply chain, which connects garment workers in countries like Bangladesh to brands, retailers, and consumers in Europe and the US. Western retailers are not only outsourcing production, but also perpetuating pollution and labor exploitation that is “necessary” to keep costs low.⁵⁹

⁵² Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. “Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself.” *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁵³ Sharma, Nidhi. 2020. “Slowing Down Fast Fashion.” *Chemical Engineering Progress*, 05, 5-7. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/slowing-down-fast-fashion/docview/2440493266/se-2>.

⁵⁴ National Labor Committee (NLC) (2001), “Bangladesh: ending the race to the bottom”, December, *National Labor Committee*, available at: www.nlcnet.org

⁵⁵ Barrett, P. , Baumann- Pauly, D., & Gu, A. 2018. “Five years after Rana Plaza: The way forward” Retrieved from

<https://www.stern.nyu.edu/experience-stern/faculty-research/five-years-after-rana-plaza-way-forward#>

⁵⁶ Land, Anna, and Rimi Zakaria. 2019. “Rana Plaza Collapse, Its Aftermath, and Future Implications for

Sustainability”. *London: SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Cases Originals*.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526479679>.

⁵⁷ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. “‘Slaves to Fashion’ in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?” *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175–98.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

⁵⁸ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. “‘Slaves to Fashion’ in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?” *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175–98.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

⁵⁹ Sinkovics, Noemi, Samia Ferdous Hoque, and Rudolf R Sinkovics. 2016. “Rana Plaza Collapse Aftermath: Are CSR Compliance and Auditing Pressures Effective?” *Accounting Auditing & Accountability Journal* 29 (4): 617–49.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-07-2015-2141>.

Environmental Impact

In addition to corrupt and unjust labor practices, fast fashion negatively impacts the environment. Fast fashion leaves a pollution footprint, with each step of the clothing life cycle generating potential environmental and occupational hazards.⁶⁰ The fast fashion industry is negatively impacting the environment through pollution, the use of resources, and unsustainable consumption. The estimate of the greenhouse gas emissions of the fashion industry is roughly 1.3 Gt/year, which is at the high end of the range in published EEIOA studies (Peters, Li, and Lenzen 2021).

The current economic growth in Bangladesh's garment industry is a result of a highly polluting manufacturing process that would not otherwise be legal in any other developed country.⁶¹ The textile industry brings serious pollution to the environment. 17% to 20% of water pollution from industrial consumption is created by the dyeing and treatment process in the textile and apparel industry. The textile dyeing process produces 72 toxic

chemicals.⁶² If not properly disposed of, these chemicals can infiltrate bodies of water. The rivers of Bangladesh, and other countries in South Asia, are riddled with pollutants, caused by human intervention.⁶³ Colorful rivers and streams often show up in towns of these countries, where apparel factories fail to invest in clean technology for wastewater treatment.⁶⁴ Two of the crucial issues for the textile and clothing industry are the need to reduce both the amount of wastewater discharged after many processes such as dyeing and finishing, as well as the chemical load this wastewater carries.⁶⁵

The textile industry uses many natural resources. This includes fabrics (cotton, linen, wool), energy (electricity), and water.⁶⁶ There are major challenges that need to be addressed in the supply chain, namely the massive input resource demands.⁶⁷ For example, cotton, the primary material input source, grows using a significant amount of water, pesticides, and fertilizer (Hoang et al. 2021). Similarly, the creation of man-made resources can negatively affect the environment. For example, polyester, the most widely used

⁶⁰ Claudio, Luz. 2007. "Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 115 (9): A448–A454.

<https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.115-a449>.

⁶¹ Sinkovics, Noemi, Samia Ferdous Hoque, and Rudolf R Sinkovics. 2016. "Rana Plaza Collapse Aftermath: Are CSR Compliance and Auditing Pressures Effective?" *Accounting Auditing & Accountability Journal* 29 (4): 617–49. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-07-2015-2141>.

⁶² Cai, Ya-Jun, and Tsan-Ming Choi. 2020. "A United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Perspective for Sustainable Textile and Apparel Supply Chain Management." *Transportation Research. Part E, Logistics and Transportation Review* 141: 102010–102010. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2020.102010>.

⁶³ Hasan, Md. Khalid, Abrar Shahriar, and Kudrat Ullah Jim. 2019. "Water Pollution in Bangladesh and Its Impact on Public Health." *Heliyon* 5 (8): e02145–e02145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e02145>.

⁶⁴ Cai, Ya-Jun, and Tsan-Ming Choi. 2020. "A United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Perspective for Sustainable Textile and Apparel Supply Chain Management." *Transportation Research. Part E, Logistics*

and Transportation Review 141: 102010–102010. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2020.102010>.

⁶⁵ Commission of the European Communities. 2003. *Evolution of trade in textile and clothing worldwide: Trade figures and structural data*. SEC (2003) 1349, Brussels. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0649:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁶⁶ Cai, Ya-Jun, and Tsan-Ming Choi. 2020. "A United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Perspective for Sustainable Textile and Apparel Supply Chain Management." *Transportation Research. Part E, Logistics and Transportation Review* 141: 102010–102010. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2020.102010>.

⁶⁷ Hoang, Tien Nguyen, Duc Le Doan Minh, Minh Ho Thien Thong, and Mai Nguyen Phuong. 2021. "Enhancing Sustainability in the Contemporary Model of CSR: A Case of Fast Fashion Industry in Developing Countries." *Social Responsibility Journal* 17 (4): 578–591. [doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-03-2019-0108](https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-03-2019-0108).

<https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/enhancing-sustainability-contemporary-model-csr/docview/2531474323/se-2>.

manufactured fiber, is made from petroleum. A rise in production within the fashion industry has doubled the demand for man-made fibers in the last 15 years.⁶⁸

The overconsumption enabled by the fast fashion industry has a negative environmental impact. In 2015, consumers used 47% more clothing per capita compared to the year 2000.⁶⁹ The average American throws away 81 pounds of clothing annually, of which only 12 percent can be recycled, with the rest going to landfills and taking up to 200 years to decompose.⁷⁰ In the UK, there was consumption of 26.7 kilograms of new clothing per head, and 235 million items of clothing were sent to landfills in 2018 alone.⁷¹ The clothing and textile industry has reached a level that is vast and uncontrollable. In a climate emergency, this excessive use of material must be quickly curtailed.⁷² There is no process to properly dispose of the fashion waste that quickly accumulates. Only one-fifth of clothing donated to charities is directly used or sold in their thrift stores. The rest is shipped back to developing countries in 100-pound bales to be sold. American exports of clothing have more than tripled, to nearly 7 billion pounds per year.⁷³ Small entrepreneurs will purchase these bales to resell at their local

markets. What is not resold ends up in landfills.

Bangladesh's fast fashion manufacturing process is characterized by a lack of proper manufacturing regulations, corrupt business practices, labor violations, and a negative impact on the environment. The Rana Plaza disaster was only a symptom of the cycle of injustice in the East that continues to persist. The following paragraphs will describe the driving factors from the West that contribute to the injustices in Bangladesh that persist today. The liberalization of trade, a shift to outsourcing production, and a shift in consumer behavior are contributing factors.

Increased Trade Liberalization

Driving factors from the western world have perpetuated modern-day injustices in Bangladesh. The first driving factor is increased trade liberalization, as it relates to outsource-driven economies and the clothing and textile industry. The costs and benefits of trade liberalization are widely debated topics. These paragraphs will focus on the history of trade liberalization and reference global institutions as the institutional framework

⁶⁸ Claudio, Luz. 2007. "Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 115 (9): A448–A454. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.115-a449>.

⁶⁹ Peters, Greg, Mengyu Li, and Manfred Lenzen. 2021. "The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry." *Cleaner Production* 295: 126390. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107>.

⁷⁰ Clement, Nathalie. 2021. "Tearing at the Seams: How Fast Fashion is Destroying our Planet." *McGill International Review*, Mar 21. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/tearing-at-seams-how-fast-fashion-is-destroying/docview/2507568370/se-2>.

⁷¹ Peake, Katrina, and Jeff Kenner. 2020. "'Slaves to Fashion' in Bangladesh and the EU: Promoting Decent Work?" *European Labour Law Journal* 11 (2): 175–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2031952520911064>.

⁷² Peters, Greg, Mengyu Li, and Manfred Lenzen. 2021. "The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry." *Cleaner Production* 295: 126390. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107>.

⁷³ Claudio, Luz. 2007. "Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 115 (9): A448–A454. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.115-a449>.

that affects and supports the emerging economy of Bangladesh.

Trade liberalization is loosely defined as a move towards freer trade through the reduction of tariffs and other barriers; it is generally seen as the primary driving force behind globalization.⁷⁴ Increased globalization has given rise to liberalization in the areas of trade and finance.⁷⁵ Increased trade liberalization began long before injustices in Bangladesh. Increased economic interdependence began post-World War II in an effort to prevent future conflict. In 1947, The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was created. The world trading system has benefited from eight rounds of multilateral trade liberalization, as well as unilateral and regional liberalization. The eighth round of liberalization, the Uruguay Round, was completed in 1994 and led to the establishment of the World Trade Organization to help administer the growing body of multilateral trade agreements.⁷⁶ Around the same time, the US and EU signed preferential regional trade agreements containing tariff exemptions. The US signed the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act (CBTPA) in 2000, which both provide duty-

free access, giving these regions a competitive advantage over others.⁷⁷ The EU accords preferential access to Eastern European countries and countries in the Mediterranean rim. Their agreements include the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, Africa Caribbean Pacific (ACP) Trade Agreement, and the Everything But Arms (EBA) Initiative, with at least 49 developed countries (Prasad and Sonali 2005). In 1993, the European Union (EU) was established, allowing for economic, political, and social integration in Western Europe. These agreements and institutions gave way to the existence of preferential trade agreements, with a general trend towards freer trade in apparel, specifically.⁷⁸ The WTO is a key player in the development of liberal trade.

The institutional framework that is specific to the clothing and textile industry includes the Multi Fibre Agreement and the Agreement on Textile Clothing. The Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA) was established in 1974 and ended in 2005. The MFA closely regulated imports and exports of textile and clothing products. Many textile and clothing exports from developing countries to industrialized countries were subject to specific quotas. The phasing out of the MFA represented a starting point for an automatic liberalization process.⁷⁹ The phase-out of the

⁷⁴ Lee, E. (2005). Trade liberalization and employment.

https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=m-578_8o08wC&oi=fnd&pg=PA106&dq=trade+liberalization&ots=LNbwB5Hyiq&sig=AvDA9jtBeNtr4tuE0E46nQjzDA#v=onepage&q=trade%20liberalization&f=false

⁷⁵ Bhattacharyya, Rajib, ed. 2019. *The Gains and Pains of Financial Integration and Trade Liberalization: Lessons from Emerging Economies*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited. Accessed November 26, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷⁶ IMF. 2001. "Global Trade Liberalization and the Developing Countries -- an IMF Issues Brief." *International Monetary Fund*,

<https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2001/110801.htm>.

⁷⁷ Datta, Anusua, and Mikhail Kouliavtsev. 2020. "The End of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement and the Pattern of US Apparel Trade: A Gravity Model Analysis." *Journal of Economic Studies* (Bradford) 47 (3): 695–710. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JES-05-2018-0179>.

⁷⁸ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁷⁹ Prasad, A., and Sonali. Jain-Chandra. 2005. "Impact on India of Trade Liberalization in the

MFA occurred in four parts. It began in January of 1995 with the elimination of quotas on at least 16% of 1990's import volume of textiles and apparel. In 1998, there was an elimination of quotas on another 17% of imports. In 2002, the elimination of another 18%, and finally in 2005, the elimination of the remaining 49%. Thus, quotas associated with the Multi-Fibre Agreement ceased to exist on January 1, 2005. This resulted in fears from developed countries that their apparel industry would suffer further from the low-wage competition (they did) in Asia and especially China. With the phasing out of the MFA, despite the US and EU negotiating new import quotas, production had shifted from Mexico to Asia, specifically to China and Bangladesh. For example, China went from being responsible for 4% of clothing exports in 1980 to 25% in 2013.⁸⁰

The WTO's Agreement on Textile and Clothing came into effect, upon the ending of the MFA, on January 1, 2005. This provided for the removal of the quotas that previously existed under the MFA. This allowed the liberalization and elimination of quotas on textiles and apparel imported from WTO member countries. The Commission of the European Communities predicted two effects of the ATC. First, the ATC was expected to impact major exporting countries, which resulted in a large growth of clothing export-led economies.⁸¹ Quota-imposing countries – the US, EU, and

Canada – were expected to experience gains in welfare, despite a decline in production of textile and clothing production, through reduced consumer prices and increased efficiency following enhanced specialization. For the US, the welfare impact of this regulation was expected to be \$7.3 billion. Second, the Commission predicted in 2005 that this would lead to increased competitive pressures for major producers like China, India, and Pakistan. As a result of increased competition and the disappearance of quotas, it was estimated that China's prices for apparel would decline on average by 53% between 2001 and June 2004, according to the American Textiles Manufacturers Institute.⁸²

These two predictions came to fruition, turning into the largest challenge facing the worldwide textile and clothing industry. First, the ATC resulted in the growth of export-led economies and an increase in imports in quota-imposing countries. Trade data from the Office of Textile and Apparel (OTEXA), for example, shows that between 2004 and 2005 US apparel imports from China and India jumped by 41 percent and 26 percent, respectively. The removal of binding quotas at the beginning of the ATC led to a 1.72 percent growth in imports of previously quota-constrained products.⁸³ Second, the ATC resulted in increased competition, lower prices of goods, and welfare losses for quota-imposed countries. In 2002, when

Textiles and Clothing Sector." *Washington: International Monetary Fund.*

⁸⁰ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁸¹ Commission of the European Communities. 2003. *Evolution of trade in textile and clothing worldwide: Trade figures and structural data*. SEC (2003) 1349, Brussels. <https://eur->

lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0649:FIN:EN:PDF

⁸² Prasad, A., and Sonali. Jain-Chandra. 2005. "Impact on India of Trade Liberalization in the Textiles and Clothing Sector." *Washington: International Monetary Fund.*

⁸³ Datta, Anusua, and Mikhail Kouliavtsev. 2020. "The End of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement and the Pattern of US Apparel Trade: A Gravity Model Analysis." *Journal of Economic Studies* (Bradford) 47 (3): 695–710. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JES-05-2018-0179>.

quotas under the third phase of integration were lifted, prices of apparel fell by an average of 34%.⁸⁴ This data is a direct result of increased competition and the disappearance of the MFA quotas. Asian countries, like Bangladesh, have used this liberalization of the textile and clothing industry to stimulate an export-led economy. As of 2013, Vietnam exports \$13 billion worth of clothes and employs 1.5 million workers; Cambodia exports \$5 billion worth of clothes and employs 615,000 workers.⁸⁵ Bangladesh boasts a \$20 billion garment industry.

Bangladesh is both an emerging and export-led economy. Bangladesh, and other Asian countries like Vietnam, and Cambodia, focus primarily on garment exporting and enjoy preferential access to Western markets via the new absence of quotas.⁸⁶ For these economies – like Bangladesh – the effects of trade liberalization depend on the following. Overall, the deterioration of the terms of trade will result in an economic welfare loss.⁸⁷ These countries, which are highly dependent on textile and clothing exports, will therefore be particularly vulnerable to changes in international trade systems.⁸⁸ The textile and clothing industry has seen radical transformations over the last few years due to a combination of technological changes,

shifts in production costs, and the emergence of increased competition internationally; trade liberalization has perpetuated these changes.

Exporters will also experience an increase in efficiency as trade liberalization increases. The textile and clothing industry employs semiskilled and unskilled labor, providing developing countries with a comparative advantage. In addition to labor costs, fast and flexible production has become increasingly important to quota-imposing, developed countries. Mass retailers in developed countries, especially the United States, require flexibility and a fast turnaround, which has led to increased competitive pressures both from the West and between exporting countries.⁸⁹ Moreover, the institutional framework that has removed quotas has incentivized Western companies to increase production in Eastern countries.

Shift to Outsourcing and Increased Production

There has been a noticeable shift from apparel manufacturing being domestically produced in Western countries to outsourcing to Asia, particularly China and Bangladesh.⁹⁰ Outsourcing and

⁸⁴ Prasad, A., and Sonali. Jain-Chandra. 2005. “Impact on India of Trade Liberalization in the Textiles and Clothing Sector.” *Washington: International Monetary Fund*.

⁸⁵ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. “Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself.” *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁸⁶ Commission of the European Communities. 2003. *Evolution of trade in textile and clothing worldwide: Trade figures and structural data*. SEC (2003) 1349, Brussels. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0649:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁸⁷ Prasad, A., and Sonali. Jain-Chandra. 2005. “Impact on India of Trade Liberalization in the Textiles and Clothing Sector.” *Washington: International Monetary Fund*.

⁸⁸ Commission of the European Communities. 2003. *Evolution of trade in textile and clothing worldwide: Trade figures and structural data*. SEC (2003) 1349, Brussels. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0649:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁸⁹ Prasad, A., and Sonali. Jain-Chandra. 2005. “Impact on India of Trade Liberalization in the Textiles and Clothing Sector.” *Washington: International Monetary Fund*.

⁹⁰ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. “Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry

increasing production of textile and apparel products are largely attributed to the increase in trade liberalization. The opportunity to outsource manufacturing has allowed Western retailers to produce more, without being subjected to quotas and high tariffs under the now-nonexistent MFA. Western retailers that sell inexpensive goods have profited from this increased liberalization of the retail sector; reduced tariffs and limited regulations on where and how manufacturing can be produced have kept production costs for most garments low.⁹¹ Western retailers benefit from outsourced and increased production through low labor costs and low production costs. Low costs have allowed retailers to produce more and sell clothing at lower prices for consumers.

The textile and apparel industry is categorized by a long supply chain. The interaction of all the components of the supply chain takes place in countries with different priorities, cultural values, and methods of communication and making decisions.⁹² Thus, Western retailers look for ways to cut costs and shorten their supply chain. The highest cost element of the fast fashion supply chain is the cost of labor.

Continues to Re-Invent Itself.” *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁹¹ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. “Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself.” *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁹² Karpova, Elena, Grace I. Kunz, and Myrna B. Garner. 2021. *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel Industry* Bloomsbury Publishing USA. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3tYyEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=evolution+of+trade+in+textile+and+clothing+worldwide:&ots=eLJ SAA-hv8&sig=DflesX4skijztMW3w-Gbl48CXek#v=onepage&q=evolution%20of%20trad e%20in%20textile%20and%20clothing%20worldwid e%3A&f=false>

⁹³ Datta, Anusua, and Mikhail Kouliavtsev. 2020. “The End of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement and the

Therefore, having access to cheap labor in third-world countries is more profitable for firms than domestic production. The cost of transporting goods from Asia to Europe or the US is low and not an area of concern. Countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan are significant apparel exporters because the distance estimate is largely insignificant.⁹³ Low-wage labor accounts for a higher proportion of production costs and therefore trumps any amount of distance the products would have to travel.

The low costs that exist by shifting to outsourcing allow Western retailers to increase production. This enables a model of providing high volumes of clothing in short distribution times. Clothing manufacturing shifted from domestic to global as textile and apparel retailers sought merchandise that would satisfy customers and generate high profits to sustain their business.⁹⁴ By producing more, retailers provide more options to their consumers. These consumers have grown accustomed to an abundance of clothing and textile options. Increased production enables retailers to sell faster; retailers are able to more closely match the supply and demand of consumers.⁹⁵

Pattern of US Apparel Trade: A Gravity Model Analysis.” *Journal of Economic Studies* (Bradford) 47 (3): 695–710. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JES-05-2018-0179>.

⁹⁴ Karpova, Elena, Grace I. Kunz, and Myrna B. Garner. 2021. *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel Industry* Bloomsbury Publishing USA. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3tYyEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=evolution+of+trade+in+textile+and+clothing+worldwide:&ots=eLJ SAA-hv8&sig=DflesX4skijztMW3w-Gbl48CXek#v=onepage&q=evolution%20of%20trad e%20in%20textile%20and%20clothing%20worldwid e%3A&f=false>

⁹⁵ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. “Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself.” *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

Retailers can not only produce more goods to be sold, but technology allows them to closely monitor customers' purchases, predict what consumers will buy, and expedite merchandise quickly. Retailers can closely match the supply and demand of consumers through technology. The low-cost, high-production model that has been adopted by major retailers allows them to satisfy consumers' changing tastes and better regulate preferences through technology.⁹⁶ Increased technology has allowed retailers to facilitate frequent inventory monitoring and replenishment. Expedited distribution methods allowed these retailers to produce high volumes of clothing in short amounts of time.⁹⁷ More and more production has shifted overseas to newly industrialized countries, like Bangladesh, because of the pressure that has been placed on low prices and shortening supply chain cycles.⁹⁸ This model is perpetuated by the consumer's role in consumption within the fast fashion industry.

Increased Consumption and Identity

Increased production has allowed for more low-cost options within the clothing and textile industry. Western retailers'

increased production and consumer behavior are related. There is a direct relationship between the prevalence of low-cost production and consumer attitudes toward apparel consumption.⁹⁹ The availability of low-cost clothing through the fast fashion industry has promoted a culture of consumption. Fast fashion retailers have capitalized on consumers' desire to create an identity, keep up with trends, and meet social inclusion needs through consumption.

First, it is imperative to understand the significance of consumption. In many product categories, consumption is influenced by the human desire to express meanings about oneself and create an identity.¹⁰⁰ This is amplified regarding clothing, which is always on display. Consumers use products to construct and express desired identities and people infer aspects about others based on these products.¹⁰¹ Consumers create and project their respective identities through clothing. Moreover, people may diverge from certain products to avoid others making an undesired identity inference about them. People will buy certain products to signal desired characteristics and inclusion in social groups.¹⁰² Wearing all black can

⁹⁶ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁹⁷ Karpova, Elena, Grace I. Kunz, and Myrna B. Garner. 2021. *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel Industry* Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3tYyEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=evolution+of+trade+in+textile+and+clothing+worldwide:&ots=eLJSAAhv8&sig=DflesX4skijztMW3w-Gbl48CXek#v=onepage&q=evolution%20of%20trade%20in%20textile%20and%20clothing%20worldwide%3A&f=false>

⁹⁸ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

⁹⁹ McNeill, Lisa, and Rebecca Moore. 2015. "Sustainable Fashion Consumption and the Fast Fashion Conundrum: Fashionable Consumers and Attitudes to Sustainability in Clothing Choice." *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 39 (3): 212–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12169>.

¹⁰⁰ Berger, Jonah, and Chip Heath. 2007. "Where Consumers Diverge from Others: Identity Signaling and Product Domains." *The Journal of Consumer Research* 34 (2): 121–34. <https://doi.org/10.1086/519142>.

¹⁰¹ Belk, Russell W. 1988. "Possessions and the Extended Self." *The Journal of Consumer Research* 15 (2): 139–68. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209154>.

¹⁰² Berger, Jonah, and Chip Heath. 2007. "Where Consumers Diverge from Others: Identity Signaling and Product Domains." *The Journal of Consumer Research* 34 (2): 121–34. <https://doi.org/10.1086/519142>.

signal being goth or wearing a sports jersey can signal being an athlete. Fast fashion retailers have capitalized on consumers' desire for a greater individual expression to further stimulate demand.¹⁰³ Similarly, fast fashion retailers have capitalized on consumers' desire to keep up with trends. A key element of the fast fashion industry is the quick response and enhanced design techniques fast fashion retailers possess. Quick response and enhanced design techniques enable retailers to sell "trendy" product designs.¹⁰⁴ The availability of merchandise in the fast fashion model gives consumers a greater desire to craft the identity of their choosing, resulting in increased consumption.

Second, it is necessary to address that the demographics of consumers have shifted. Over the past decades, a growing middle class has emerged. More people have the financial means to create a fashioned identity, with an increase in discretionary spending.¹⁰⁵ Not only is there more clothing available to be consumed, but there is also a growing demographic of people consuming. Growing disposable income across classes coupled with a greater range of identities and affinities has shifted consumer behavior. Luxury, expensive fashion used to be just that, a luxury. Because of fast fashion, more

consumers have the means to consume cheap and styled clothing. Third, not only do consumers have greater means and desire to consume, they want to do so immediately. Consumers today are accustomed to immediate gratification; they want things fast.¹⁰⁶ This results in lower-quality garments. By accelerating the rate at which new collections are designed and produced, and by constructing cheap and fragile garments, fast fashion makes clothing repair unnecessary. Barely used garments are soon thrown away or accumulated in wardrobes in wealthy countries.¹⁰⁷

Overall, an increase in production and an increase in consumer demand are codependent. Eliminating one would result in the decline of the other. Fast fashion retailers have profited from consumers' demand for trendy goods at low prices. However, fast fashion has liberated or disconnected consumers' buying habits from their physical needs.¹⁰⁸ An example of a Western retailer that illustrates this phenomenon is a leader in the fast fashion industry, Zara.

Zara: Waste Couture?

Fast fashion retailers, such as Zara, are the result of trade liberalization,

¹⁰³ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

¹⁰⁴ Cachon, Gérard P., and Robert Swinney. 2011. "The Value of Fast Fashion: Quick Response, Enhanced Design, and Strategic Consumer Behavior." *Management Science* 57 (4): 778–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25835736>.

¹⁰⁵ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

¹⁰⁶ Sharma, Nidhi. 2020. "Slowing Down Fast Fashion." *Chemical Engineering Progress*, 05, 5-7.

<https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/slowing-down-fast-fashion/docview/2440493266/se-2>.

¹⁰⁷ Peters, Greg, Mengyu Li, and Manfred Lenzen. 2021. "The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry." *Cleaner Production* 295: 126390. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107>.

¹⁰⁸ Peters, Greg, Mengyu Li, and Manfred Lenzen. 2021. "The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry." *Cleaner Production* 295: 126390. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107>.

increased production, and identity-based consumption. Fast fashion has quickened its pace and lowered its costs, leading to today's industry, which runs on about 52 micro-seasons a year.¹⁰⁹ Led by retailers like Zara in the late 1990s, European and American companies took the opportunity to outsource production to low-wage countries in Asia, like Bangladesh, enabling the fast-fashion model.¹¹⁰ Inditex, Zara's parent company is the second largest fashion company in the world, operating over 2,700 stores in over sixty countries, and is valued at \$24 billion.¹¹¹ As Inditex has grown, more companies have replicated its profitable business model. In 2021, the fast fashion giant Zara reported net sales of 19.5 million euros, up from 14.1 million euros a year earlier.¹¹² Zara has profited from deregulation, as it continues to see growth year to year.

Higher production means more options for style-hungry consumers. Zara has the capacity to bombard modern consumers with new collections and styles nearly every week.¹¹³ By delivering a large number of varied clothing, and reacting

quickly to new trends, companies better match their consumer's demands.¹¹⁴ UBS Analyst spoke to this by stating, "fashion trends can be much more important than commodity costs".¹¹⁵ Fast fashion firms have dramatically shortened design-to-shelf lead times, so such firms can observe and replicate trends, practically in real time. Adopting enhanced design techniques, and offering trendy clothing, results in consumers' willingness to purchase the merchandise.¹¹⁶ By fast fashion retailers keeping up with trends, they will gain profits and retain customers.

In the fast-fashion model, retailers like Zara have the platform and audience needed to gain profits. Fashion magazines and online bloggers fuel the demand by creating a desire for new "must haves" for each season.¹¹⁷ Technological advancements and the prevalence of social media gives retailers access to market to more consumers and keep up with their individual preferences. Social media allows retailers like Zara to watch trends evolve in real time; allowing them to release new lines within weeks.¹¹⁸ A key to the fast fashion market is

¹⁰⁹ Sharma, Nidhi. 2020. "Slowing Down Fast Fashion." *Chemical Engineering Progress*, 05, 5-7. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/slowing-down-fast-fashion/docview/2440493266/se-2>.

¹¹⁰ Peters, Greg, Mengyu Li, and Manfred Lenzen. 2021. "The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry." *Cleaner Production* 295: 126390. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>.<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107>.

¹¹¹ Crofton, S., & Dopico, L. (2007). Zara-Inditex and the growth of fast fashion. *Essays in Economic & Business History*, 25, 41-54.

¹¹² Statista. 2021. "Inditex: Net Sales Worldwide by Brand 2021." Statista, 26 Oct. 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/456505/sales-inditex-group-worldwide-by-format/>.

¹¹³ Sharma, Nidhi. 2020. "Slowing Down Fast Fashion." *Chemical Engineering Progress*, 05, 5-7. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/slowing-down-fast-fashion/docview/2440493266/se-2>.

¹¹⁴ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246-64. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

¹¹⁵ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. "Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself." *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246-64. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

¹¹⁶ Cachon, Gérard P., and Robert Swinney. 2011. "The Value of Fast Fashion: Quick Response, Enhanced Design, and Strategic Consumer Behavior." *Management Science* 57 (4): 778-95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25835736>.

¹¹⁷ Claudio, Luz. 2007. "Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 115 (9): A448-A454. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.115-a449>.

¹¹⁸ Clement, Nathalie. 2021. "Tearing at the Seams: How Fast Fashion is Destroying our Planet." *McGill International Review*, Mar 21. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/tearing-at-seams-how-fast-fashion-is-destroying/docview/2507568370/se-2>.

selling knockoff designs at lower prices, which allows customers to dress stylishly and craft an identity, without the lofty price tag. These styles have become so disposable in the mind of consumers that this model has been nicknamed “waste couture”.¹¹⁹

Consumers have grown accustomed to the model of buying, wearing, and discarding. The low price tags and poor quality of fast fashion clothing deter consumers from taking care of their clothing. The mere nature of fast fashion prohibits it from being environmentally sustainable. Or has it?

A new trend amongst fast fashion retailers has been releasing “eco-friendly” brand lines. Zara and H&M have been accused of “greenwashing” through their lines, which are called Join Life and Conscious, respectively. These eco-conscious tags are applied to products with at least 50% sustainably sourced material, but the lines only make up 3% of clothing products H&M sells.¹²⁰ This indicates there is much more these brands can be doing. People who have a genuine need for fast fashion products are less concerned about environmental impact or do not see a connection between fast fashion and sustainability. The “environmental needs” of the fast fashion industry are at risk of being ignored by consumers, which increases the possibility of false green marketing by fast

fashion companies.¹²¹ By brands providing their customers with eco-conscious lines, consumers become complacent. Brands are merely adopting the language of sustainability, without affecting long-lasting sustainability initiatives or institutional change. These eco-conscious lines, coupled with donation boxes reinforce customers’ mindset that clothing is designed to be discarded, keeping individuals focused on the next purchase.¹²² These product lines are band-aid solutions to keep consumers just satisfied enough to keep coming back. While a rational brand is in pursuit of profits, there is a line that must be drawn. There are tangible steps that consumers and brands alike can take to improve both the cycle of injustice in the east and profits in the west.

Implications & Findings: Who is to Blame?

This paper has identified two existing cycles of production and consumption. In the East, there is a cycle of injustice that is unsustainable. The manufacturing of the clothing and textile industry has enabled unfair labor practices, corruption, and environmental disasters in Bangladesh. In the West, there is a cycle of profits and consumption that is

¹¹⁹ Neumann, Hannah L., Luisa M. Martinez, and Luis F. Martinez. 2021. "Sustainability Efforts in the Fast Fashion Industry: Consumer Perception, Trust and Purchase Intention." *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal* 12 (3) (05): 571-590. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/SAMPJ-11-2019-0405>.

<https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/sustainability-efforts-fast-fashion-industry/docview/2524925194/se-2>.

¹²⁰ Clement, Nathalie. 2021. "Tearing at the Seams: How Fast Fashion is Destroying our Planet." *McGill International Review*, Mar 21. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/tearing-at-seams-how-fast-fashion-is-destroying/docview/2507568370/se-2>.

¹²¹ Lu, Xiaoqian, Tong Sheng, Xiaolan Zhou, Chaohai Shen, and Bingquan Fang. 2022. "How Does Young Consumers' Greenwashing Perception Impact Their Green Purchase Intention in the Fast Fashion Industry? An Analysis from the Perspective of Perceived Risk Theory." *Sustainability. Basel, Switzerland*. 14 (13473): 13473–. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013473>.

¹²² Clement, Nathalie. 2021. "Tearing at the Seams: How Fast Fashion is Destroying our Planet." *McGill International Review*, Mar 21. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/tearing-at-seams-how-fast-fashion-is-destroying/docview/2507568370/se-2>.

unsustainable. Trade liberalization has allowed Western retailers to increase and outsource production, through the removal of quotas. Western retailers have capitalized on consumers' desire to craft an identity, a growing middle class, and a desire for instant gratification. Leaders in the fast fashion industry, such as Zara and H&M, illustrate the fast fashion model and promote a culture of consumption. The existence of injustices in the east and profits in the west raises the question: who is responsible? Actors contributing to these cycles include the Bangladeshi government, Western retailers, the institutional framework that governs international trade, and Western consumers.

The Bangladeshi government facilitates a relaxed regulatory environment and incentivizes factory owners to participate in the fast fashion industry. Bangladeshi factory owners are not necessarily demonstrating hubris by engaging in this growing industry but are rather in pursuit of rational self-interest to maximize profits while minimizing costs. These factory owners are often recruited by local politicians, who are looking for ways to increase their tax base and promote employment.¹²³ Bangladeshi politicians are concerned that increasing regulation will raise prices and drive production to rival

Asian countries, such as China, Cambodia, or Vietnam. The issue of “blame” thus rests on the corruption ingrained in the Bangladeshi government.

Western retailers benefit the most from trade liberalization and increased production. According to the UN, the global population will reach 8.5 billion by 2030, and the consumption of the fashion industry will skyrocket from 62 million tons to 102 million tons.¹²⁴ More than half of the top twenty fashion retailers are located in Europe, eight are in the United States, and one is in Asia. This demonstrates the magnitude and complexity of the role of countries, companies, and people worldwide, that are involved in the textile and apparel industry.¹²⁵ Fast fashion brands such as H&M, Zara, GAP, SHEIN, etc. are aware of the limited functional life design of clothing, as it is the core of their business operations¹²⁶. Through their commercial interests of improving supply chain efficiency and cutting costs, they are a detrimental actor in enabling the cycles of injustices.

It is the institutional framework that allows both the Bangladeshi government and Western retailers to profit from the injustices in Bangladesh. The WTO's deregulation of the textile and clothing industry has allowed for a level of

¹²³ Taplin, Ian Malcolm. 2014. “Global Commodity Chains and Fast Fashion: How the Apparel Industry Continues to Re-Invent Itself.” *Competition & Change* 18 (3): 246–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1179/1024529414Z.00000000059>.

¹²⁴ Lu, Xiaoqian, Tong Sheng, Xiaolan Zhou, Chaohai Shen, and Bingquan Fang. 2022. “How Does Young Consumers' Greenwashing Perception Impact Their Green Purchase Intention in the Fast Fashion Industry? An Analysis from the Perspective of Perceived Risk Theory.” *Sustainability. Basel, Switzerland*. 14 (13473): 13473–.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013473>.

¹²⁵ Karpova, Elena, Grace I. Kunz, and Myrna B. Garner. 2021. *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel Industry* Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3tYyEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=evolution+of+trade+in+textile+and+clothing+worldwide:&ots=eLJSAA-hv8&sig=DfilesX4skijztMW3w-Gbl48CXek#v=onepage&q=evolution%20of%20trade%20in%20textile%20and%20clothing%20worldwide%3A&f=false>

¹²⁶ Lu, Xiaoqian, Tong Sheng, Xiaolan Zhou, Chaohai Shen, and Bingquan Fang. 2022. “How Does Young Consumers' Greenwashing Perception Impact Their Green Purchase Intention in the Fast Fashion Industry? An Analysis from the Perspective of Perceived Risk Theory.” *Sustainability. Basel, Switzerland*. 14 (13473): 13473–.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013473>.

production that harms Bangladeshi garment workers. By removing quotas that previously existed under the MFA, Asian countries have embraced the export-led growth of the fast fashion industry.¹²⁷ However, countries like Bangladesh have allowed low-wage workers, corruptive practices, and a polluting manufacturing process that would otherwise be illegal in developed countries. Less pressure to remain competitive within the industry would allow for proper regulation. A more robust institutional framework, like the reimplementing of the MFA, would alleviate competitive pressures.

Lastly, it is necessary to assess the role of the consumer. The consumer plays a large role in the fast fashion supply chain. The supply chain begins and ends with the consumer; demand for textile and apparel products drives the industry.¹²⁸ Specifically, the supply chain responds to the demand from female consumers in the West. The largest demographic of fast fashion consumers are young females, aged 20-25 in Western countries. Women in the west tend to buy much more clothing and discard it more often than men; the world supply of

used women's clothing is at least seven times that of men's.¹²⁹ The consumption from Western countries is significant. It is estimated that if 80% of the population of emerging economies were to achieve the same clothing-consumption levels as the West by 2025, the environmental footprint of the apparel industry increases by 150%.¹³⁰ The average American buys more than sixty new pieces of clothing annually.¹³¹ Though consumers are not all fully aware of this impact, it is clear that they are an actor contributing to fast fashion and the perpetuation of injustices in the East. This behavior is not sustainable. The future of the fashion industry lies in the action that Western retailers, global institutions, and consumers will take.

Conclusion: What Can Be Done?

The "Fashion Paradox" is a term researchers have coined to explain that the economic importance of the fast fashion industry globally has protected it somewhat from criticism of its inherent obsolescence and waste.¹³² The garment industry in

¹²⁷ Siddiqi, H. 2004. "The Ready Made Garment Industry of Bangladesh," *The University Press*, Limited, Dhaka.

¹²⁸ Karpova, Elena, Grace I. Kunz, and Myrna B. Garner. 2021. *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel Industry* Bloomsbury Publishing USA. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3tYyEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=evolution+of+trade+in+textile+and+clothing+worldwide:&ots=eLJSAA-hv8&sig=DfilesX4skijztMW3w-Gbl48CXek#v=onepage&q=evolution%20of%20trade%20in%20textile%20and%20clothing%20worldwide%3A&f=false>

¹²⁹ Claudio, Luz. 2007. "Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 115 (9): A448–A454. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.115-a449>.

¹³⁰ Hoang, Tien Nguyen, Duc Le Doan Minh, Minh Ho Thien Thong, and Mai Nguyen Phuong. 2021. "Enhancing Sustainability in the Contemporary Model of CSR: A Case of Fast Fashion Industry in

Developing Countries." *Social Responsibility Journal* 17 (4): 578-591. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-03-2019-0108>.

<https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/enhancing-sustainability-contemporary-model-csr/docview/2531474323/se-2>.

¹³¹ Clement, Nathalie. 2021. "Tearing at the Seams: How Fast Fashion is Destroying our Planet." *McGill International Review*, Mar 21.

<https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/tearing-at-seams-how-fast-fashion-is-destroying/docview/2507568370/se-2>.

¹³² McNeill, Lisa, and Rebecca Moore. 2015. "Sustainable Fashion Consumption and the Fast Fashion Conundrum: Fashionable Consumers and Attitudes to Sustainability in Clothing Choice." *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 39 (3): 212–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12169>.

Bangladesh illustrates this paradox. The garment industry is both a heavy contributor to the country's economic development and is seen as a potential obstacle to its future development.¹³³ The existence of this paradox slows industry-wide movement towards a more sustainable model of production. The fashion paradox is the single largest obstacle facing the clothing and textile industry in Bangladesh and the world. Remediating the fashion paradox largely depends on the future actions of Western retailers, global institutions, and consumers.

The foundation of a successful business relies on understanding how target consumers make choices, how much they want to buy, how much they will spend, and when. However, one of the outcomes in the pursuit of corporate profits is the immensity of textile waste by both manufacturers and consumers.¹³⁴ It has long been argued that the very nature of the fast fashion industry prohibits it from being sustainable, frequently being labeled as “waste couture”.¹³⁵ A primary challenge facing the

longevity of fast fashion is incorporating social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability into the supply chains. By doing so, these priorities have the power to reduce the waste of resources, improve the health and comfort of populations, and improve the welfare of people around the world. Businesses can holistically evaluate their current practices and make more sustainable choices through the application of the Sustainability Matrix for Textile-Based Product Lifestyle.¹³⁶

Eliminating the unnecessary size of the fashion industry will require engagement from industry, governments, and the non-government sector to try and influence consumers to buy fewer but better clothes.¹³⁷ This engagement involves retailers emphasizing ethically producing good quality products. While many apparel companies were quick to jump on the train of fast fashion to increase sales, some refuse to follow the trend and instead promote the longevity of their products, such as Eileen Fisher, Patagonia, and Vaude.¹³⁸ However, a reduction in consumption does not have a

¹³³ Sinkovics, Noemi, Samia Ferdous Hoque, and Rudolf R Sinkovics. 2016. “Rana Plaza Collapse Aftermath: Are CSR Compliance and Auditing Pressures Effective?” *Accounting Auditing & Accountability Journal* 29 (4): 617–49. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-07-2015-2141>.

¹³⁴ Karpova, Elena, Grace I. Kunz, and Myrna B. Garner. 2021. *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel Industry* Bloomsbury Publishing USA. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3tYyEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=evolution+of+trade+in+textile+and+clothing+worldwide:&ots=eLJSAA-hv8&sig=DflesX4skijztMW3w-Gbl48CXek#v=onepage&q=evolution%20of%20trade%20in%20textile%20and%20clothing%20worldwide%3A&f=false>

¹³⁵ Neumann, Hannah L., Luisa M. Martinez, and Luis F. Martinez. 2021. “Sustainability Efforts in the Fast Fashion Industry: Consumer Perception, Trust and Purchase Intention.” *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal* 12 (3) (05): 571-590. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/SAMPJ-11-2019-0405>. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/sustainability-efforts-fast-fashion-industry/docview/2524925194/se-2>.

¹³⁶ Karpova, Elena, Grace I. Kunz, and Myrna B. Garner. 2021. *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel*

Industry Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3tYyEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=evolution+of+trade+in+textile+and+clothing+worldwide:&ots=eLJSAA-hv8&sig=DflesX4skijztMW3w-Gbl48CXek#v=onepage&q=evolution%20of%20trade%20in%20textile%20and%20clothing%20worldwide%3A&f=false>

¹³⁷ Peters, Greg, Mengyu Li, and Manfred Lenzen. 2021. “The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry.” *Cleaner Production* 295: 126390. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107>.

¹³⁸ Karpova, Elena, Grace I. Kunz, and Myrna B. Garner. 2021. *Going Global: The Textile and Apparel Industry* Bloomsbury Publishing USA. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3tYyEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=evolution+of+trade+in+textile+and+clothing+worldwide:&ots=eLJSAA-hv8&sig=DflesX4skijztMW3w-Gbl48CXek#v=onepage&q=evolution%20of%20trade%20in%20textile%20and%20clothing%20worldwide%3A&f=false>

linear relationship with profits. Industry must be able to justify higher prices for some garments by returning to the better quality and durability of garments made before the era of fast fashion. A redirection of the workforce to less damaging and better-paid employment should be a focus moving forward.¹³⁹

Efforts are being made on the side of the consumer for more sustainable consumption. There is a rise in the “slow fashion” movement. Created out of response to fast fashion, slow fashion asks consumers to question established practices and views; it draws awareness to the economic models that underpin fashion production and consumption. There is a growing consumer base becoming more aware of the detriments of the fast fashion industry. Thrift shopping and clothing resale sites have grown in popularity. The current state of the industry, coupled with contemporary concerns for environmental well-being, as well as recent economic trends leaving families and individuals at financial risk, presents a platform that supports the potential for consumer change.¹⁴⁰ Consumers have a role to play in change, but ultimately are not the primary actor inhibiting change.

Tackling the fashion paradox requires us to divert focus from the consumers’ practices and instead towards the behavior of fast fashion. Fast fashion companies need to be held accountable for their unethical and unsustainable practices, particularly regarding the consumption of resources and increasing quantities of

clothing produced. Fast fashion companies and the global institutions that have allowed their expansion are the most to blame. Fashion companies need to be curbed by institutions and governments at the national and international levels through concrete, enforceable policies.¹⁴¹

This paper has examined two existing cycles: profits in the west and injustices in the east. The cycle of prioritizing profits in the west has perpetuated a cycle of injustice in the East. The future of Bangladesh and other export-dependent countries relies on a shift towards a more regulated institutional framework and a redefinition of Western consumption habits.

¹³⁹ Peters, Greg, Mengyu Li, and Manfred Lenzen. 2021. "The Need to Decelerate Fast Fashion in a Hot Climate - A Global Sustainability Perspective on the Garment Industry." *Cleaner Production* 295: 126390. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107>.

¹⁴⁰ McNeill, Lisa, and Rebecca Moore. 2015. "Sustainable Fashion Consumption and the Fast Fashion Conundrum: Fashionable Consumers and

Attitudes to Sustainability in Clothing Choice." *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 39 (3): 212–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12169>.

¹⁴¹ Clement, Nathalie. 2021. "Tearing at the Seams: How Fast Fashion is Destroying our Planet." *McGill International Review*, Mar 21. <https://libdb.fairfield.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/tearing-at-seams-how-fast-fashion-is-destroying/docview/2507568370/se-2>.

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