



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Craik, Jennifer](#) & Jansen, M. Angela
(2015)
Constructing national fashion identities [Editorial].
International Journal of Fashion Studies, 2(1), pp. 3-8.

This file was downloaded from: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/98300/>

© Copyright 2015 Intellect Ltd

Jennifer Craik and M. Angela Jansen have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

Notice: *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

https://doi.org/10.1386/ifs.2.1.3_2

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FASHION STUDIES

SPECIAL ISSUE: CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH FASHION

GUEST EDITORS: Angela Jansen and Jennifer Craik

EDITORIAL

Letter from the editors.

This special issue of the *International Journal of Fashion Studies* features selected papers from the 2nd Non-Western Fashion Conference held in London in 2013. The theme of the conference was ‘Constructing National Identity through Fashion’ and brought together scholars from diverse academic and national contexts to address the lack of attention to the analysis of contemporary dress practices in non-Western or non-Euro-American fashion systems. Underpinning this theme was the widely held assumption that fashion exists only in the West for the West although largely relying on non-Western places for its production, and increasingly, consumption. In this framework, dress practices in non-Western contexts are categorized as traditional, customary, literal markers of status and collective membership, and – above all - unchanging. Accordingly, prevailing theoretical and conceptual frameworks to understand the phenomenon of fashion reproduce this assumption that Fashion = Western modernity and epitomises the practice of conspicuous consumption in societies obsessed with the presentation of self and individual identity in capitalist and industrialised societies.

Yet, this theoretical straightjacket ignores the galloping pace of global fashion and the emergence of fashion systems in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Oceania and Africa whose dynamics are transforming the perception, industry and consumption trends within fashion. The conference explored a wide range of fashion contexts within these emerging fashion sites that are transforming traditional models of production, circulation, consumption and representation. In particular, participants focused on the construction of national identity in fashion and the roles of so-called ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ in this process.

Fashion designers are increasingly branding their national heritage/tradition as a successful marketing tool, while simultaneously reinventing/modernizing it. On the one hand, in a globalizing world, it allows them to differentiate themselves on a highly competitive international fashion market, while on the other hand, on a national level, it seems to make them successful as a result of a general revaluation of national culture as a counter reaction to increasing foreign cultural influences. However, when non-Western designers use their cultural heritage as a source of inspiration, it is considered ‘traditional identity’ whereas when Western fashion designers brand their cultural heritage, it is considered ‘fashion identity.’

The seven papers in this issue canvas key issues in a number of contexts. **Katalin Medvedev** uses an in-depth case study of Project Wisdom from the Forest to argue that initiatives that are entailed in this Cambodian venture to guarantee sustainable fashion production could be adopted in other fashion peripheries as a way to encourage the development of fashion industries in socially responsible models that incorporate indigenous textiles practices and crafts. **Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas** and **Babette Radclyffe-Thomas** investigate the

emergence of a modern fashion system in Shanghai which blends the importation of Western and global fashion with the development of distinctively Chinese codes of representation with local fashion brands, stars, media and subcultures. While a new phenomenon in some respects, this trend also recycles an updated version of earlier incarnations of 'the sexy Shanghai modern girl'. In a similar vein, **Tim Lindgren** argues that success for fashion designers in Shanghai has depended on their incorporation of a global aesthetic that resonates internationally while embodying a design ethos rooted in Chinese philosophy that appeals locally.

In the context of a niche player in global fashion, Amanda Smith and Angela Finn argue that building a successful fashion industry in New Zealand depends on developing new methods of manufacturing and uses of technology coupled with innovative design that are more appropriate to the local culture and environment. They advocate following the example of other New Zealand industries in that focus on high end, distinctive products targeted to niche markets.

Looking at the state of fashion in Africa, **Christine Delhaye and Rhoda Woets** explore the resurgence of traditional methods of textile production within contemporary fashion in Ghana, while **Jean Borgatti** presents a detailed case study of Nigerian designer Ade Bakare whose unique Yoruba textile designs have achieved widespread success that has made him the 'go to' designer for 'fashionistas' in both London and Lagos.

Confronting one of the most controversial issues about contemporary non-Western Fashion, **Rivital Madar** analyses reactions to veiling by Muslim women in Israel arguing that Israel's self-perception as a Western country with a Jewish majority has problematised veiling practices and other forms of 'covering up' in dress as a sign of displaying a religious (not just Muslim) identity as opposed to the secular appearance cherished in Israel as the symbol of a modern state and global player.

Finally, **Lipi Begum and Rohit Dasgupta** speculate about the implications of the growth of an obsessively fashion-conscious identity among the 'youth bulge' in South Asia which accounts for a quarter of young people globally. In contrast to ageing populations elsewhere and especially in Europe and the Americas, South Asia is experiencing the burgeoning of a cashed up and sartorially confident demographic whose interest in fashion and spending power will only increase over time.

The papers in this issue reflect the growing interest in the field of non-Western fashion and confirmed by the establishment of the Non-Western Fashion conference as a biennial event, the 3rd of which was held in Hong Kong in 2014 on the theme of The Global Politics of Fashion. As an emerging field of scholarship, there is a growing web of case studies and site-specific analyses that are calling for new theoretical frameworks and parameters of interrogation. Rather than being constrained by a Western set of eyes and catchcry of modernity/postmodernity, scholars are experimenting with alternative paradigms and new concepts. As guest, editors, we trust that the publication of these articles will contribute to

this quest for innovative approaches and the acknowledgement of the topic of non-Western fashion as a significant field for future academic attention.

Angela Jansen

London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London, England

Jennifer Craik

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

(992 words)