



**Fast Fashion as a Contemporary Global Justice Problem:**

*Towards more justice in the 'fast fashion' industry*

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This thesis is dedicated to all those people who are negatively influenced by the fast fashion industry, especially those people who are continuously and slyly silenced and are left without a voice. I hope it will contribute to deeper awareness in their situation and to the sense that it is urgent to take action in order to change it.

## **Abstract**

Technological, economical, social and political developments have led to globalization of industry. One important, strongly globalized industrial branch is garment industry. A contemporary trend within this industry is to shorten lead-time and to offer new and low-cost products to the market as soon as possible. This concept, called *Fast Fashion*, has changed the consumers' mentality and buying behavior in the affluent countries on one hand and it has had severe consequences for the environment and working conditions for garment workers in the developing countries on the other hand. National and international law and regulations are insufficient and therefore incapable to control this worldwide process and to secure that it answers to universally accepted environmental and ethical standards and demands. This thesis examines the environmental and social problems, caused by *fast fashion*, from a global justice and ethical perspective. Solving these problems is a shared responsibility of consumers, garment industry and governments of the countries involved. This thesis proposes a *dialectic* approach for them to do so. The main conclusion is that a *critical self-reflection* by the various stakeholders on their vision and values is needed, in order to come to a paradigm-shift in policies, that will lead to morally and ethically sound ways of operating.

**Keywords:** global justice, garment industry, fast fashion, overconsumption, waste, pollution, exploitation, human- rights, profit-seeking, problem of many hands, attributive / social responsibility, dialectic approach, self-reflection, global and context dependent solutions, Thomas Pogge, Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt

## Introduction

This thesis is about global justice.

In a world in which technology has overcome distance, we are more *interconnected* than ever, and exceptionally aware of how our own actions affect other people (even if they're on the other side of the world). In an interconnected world people desire a form of justice that can be applied *globally*, on grounds of what unites people with each other and their environment. Such a justice requires values that incorporate sustainability and human rights.

A contemporary trend in global garment retailing called "*fast fashion*" is opposed to such values. Fast fashion refers to a concept of shortening lead-time and offering new and low-cost products on the market as soon as possible. It has changed the consumers' mentality and buying behavior in the affluent countries on one hand and it has had severe consequences for the environment and working conditions for garment workers in the developing countries on the other hand. National and international law and regulations are not sufficient and therefore not able to control this worldwide process and to secure that it answers to universally accepted environmental and ethical standards and demands.

In this thesis I will try to describe and consider the consequences and implications of the globalization of the garment industry, particularly from an ethical point of view. I will firstly explain how globalization relates to national and international law and justice. Many global justice theories embrace the idea of inalienable human rights. Much discussion is about whether human rights impose negative or positive duties on us, or maybe both. An important philosopher for the discussion on global justice, and for our purpose in the case of fast fashion (economic globalization), is Thomas Pogge. He claims that our current global order perpetuates global poverty on a mass scale and is therefore imposing harm on the poor, in violation of their rights.

This theory is relevant for the fast fashion industry, as I will argue in the second chapter. I will consider the development of the fast fashion and garment industry and its environmental and ethical implications. The negative effects of fast fashion and its criticism are subdivided in debates over global economic injustice,

global gender justice, global environmental issues and global health issues.

In the third chapter I will explore what responsibilities the different parties involved have in tackling the negative effects of fast fashion. The "problem of many hands", a distinction between "attributive" and "substantial" responsibility and theories about free will of Hannah Arendt and Immanuel Kant will be discussed.

My thesis ends by answering its key-question: *what recommendations can be done to prevent or counteract the undesirable consequences of globalization of the garment industry?* I will argue that cooperation among the different stakeholders is needed and that a first step towards possible solutions is a critical self-reflection on what visions and values they embrace, in order to come to a paradigm-shift that will result in ethically sound policies and ways of operating.

In order to answer the question, I have carried out a literature study. Existing literature about global justice and the fast fashion industry will be examined. In addition, however, non-academic sources like newspaper articles, websites and documentaries will be also used because fast fashion model is a contemporary trend and the big problems it imposes have only occurred in the past few years. I haven't had the opportunity to find any academic 'philosophical' articles on fast fashion. Looking at related subjects, for example exploitation and climate change, has inspired me to incorporate this subject into the global justice area. I hope that the thesis will contribute to debates over our current fashion system and will inspire other ethicists (or academics) to write about this topic. So that soon, we might work towards real solutions for the dilemmas that are imposed by this contemporary fast fashion system.

## Chapter 1: Global Justice

*“One hundred and fifty years ago, Karl Marx gave a one- sentence summary of his theory of history:*

*The hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist.*

*Today he would have added:*

*The jet plane, the telephone, and the Internet give you a global society with the transnational corporation and World Economic Forum.”*

Peter Singer<sup>1</sup>

The revolution of communications, as Singer puts it, has given rise to a global audience and this in turn created the need for an ethics that will serve “all those on the planet”. Due to economic globalization, states are more connected than ever, and business asks for a global ethical viewpoint. In this thesis, I will argue that the moral dilemmas that come from fast fashion (that belongs to the global garment industry) are dilemmas that fall within the realm of global justice. In this chapter, I will first explain what global justice means in (philosophical) debates and how fast fashion is connected to it.

### 1.1 Global Justice

As the study of justice has been concerned with what we owe each other, the question arises what obligations we might have in order to treat each other fairly in a range of domains, including distributive and recognitional matters. Since in the past 20 years there has been a market extension to the global sphere, globalization has entered the justice debate.<sup>2</sup>

There is a difference between international justice and global justice. Global justice takes individual human beings as primary concern, as it focuses on kinds of interactions that are not circumscribed by state membership like those of international justice are, and that are yet important in affecting fundamental interests of human

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<sup>1</sup> Singer, P. 2002, pg. 8

<sup>2</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 1



beings. In much international law, responsibility is allocated to a particular party, the state, because it presupposes the states systems and requires them to perform various actions to promote justice.<sup>3</sup> Asking what individuals owe each other may well have implications for states and their obligations, but a range of other agents and institutions may also have relevant justice obligations.<sup>4</sup> An example is the United Nation's (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which requires all participants of a society to participate in the preservation of human rights. Thus, a global justice theory tries to allocate responsibility over more parties, in order to find a justice that is universally applicable.

## 1.2 Global justice and human rights

Although not all global justice theories focus on human rights<sup>5</sup>, most of them do.<sup>6</sup> In my thesis, I will focus on how fast fashion considers people's human rights. Respecting human rights is an important requirement in much international law and human rights can be a key criterion in evaluating whether the international community considers governments legitimate. Global justice draws on a cosmopolitan idea that all people have equal moral worth that goes beyond state borders without ignoring the importance of local responsibilities (like voting for a regime that acknowledges universal human rights). The UN's UDHR promotes inherent dignity and "equal and inalienable rights for all members of the human family".<sup>7</sup> It is a highly influential account on what those inalienable rights should consist of and it often plays a significant role in real world debates about justice matters. It lists both positive and negative rights<sup>8</sup>. Much discussion is about whether human rights impose negative or positive duties on us, or maybe both. An important philosopher for the discussion of global justice, and for our purpose in the case of fast fashion, is Thomas

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<sup>3</sup> For example Labor Standards of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and WTO regulations that require the nations or states of the participating countries to decide in what cases their national law is insufficient. See: Brock, G. 2015, pg. 5

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> But for example on distributive justice (Rawls) or capabilities (Sen, Nussbaum)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pg. 16

<sup>7</sup> Assembly, U. G. (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. *UN General Assembly*, Preamble.

<sup>8</sup> Rights 3-20 address negative rights for they prohibit everyone (including the government) to violate those rights. Rights 21-29 address positive rights for they propose ambitions that every government should attempt to achieve. See: the United Nations' "Universal Declaration of Human Rights".

Pogge. He claims that our current global order perpetuates global poverty on a mass scale and is therefore imposing harm on the poor, in violation of their rights. While most philosophers focus on our positive duties, for example to rescue people from life-threatening poverty (Peter Singer, Henry Shue), Pogge argues that they might ignore the far more stringent negative duties that are into play, for example the duty to do no harm.<sup>9</sup>

### **1.3 John Rawls vs. Thomas Pogge**

Much discussion on global justice is influenced by John Rawls and his book *The Law of the Peoples*, a work on international relations. He argues for eight principles that should regulate international interactions of peoples (i.e. nations). According to Rawls, nations should honor a list of particular human rights and have duties to assist people in establishing institutions to enable people's self determination. An example of those international institutions is the UN. It is often said that Rawls claims that as long as all peoples have a set of institutions that enable citizens to lead decent lives, any global inequality that might remain is not morally troubling.<sup>10</sup> This is criticized by Pogge because he argues that the global advantaged can use their superior position to influence the rules that govern international institutions, such as trade practices, which can facilitate further opportunities for increased advantage. This threatens the other countries' admission to increased wealth and a better position on the market, which may impose poverty on them and their citizens. This will be more extensively dealt with in the next chapter.

Another opposition between Rawls and Pogge that is important for this thesis is in Rawls' claim that causes of wealth of a people can be traced back to the domestic institutions. For Pogge, in addition to local factors there are also international ones that play an important role in prospects for wellbeing. Examples are international borrowing privileges that allow governments to borrow money on behalf of the country, imposing an obligation on it to pay debt, and the international resource privilege that allows governments to do with their resources as they please, including selling them to whomever they choose and at what price. These international privileges encourage those "strongly motivated to hold office for material gain to take

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<sup>9</sup> Pogge, T. 2005, pg. 5

<sup>10</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 8

power by force or exercise it in oppressive ways that help reinforce oppressive governments' abilities to remain control".<sup>11</sup> This will decrease chances for developing countries' abilities to flourish. According to Pogge affluent countries have no interest to change this flaw in international policy for they greatly benefit from it. So, international policies have influence on (corrupt) domestic institutions, they keep them alive. However, he argues, if it would be secured that only sufficiently legitimate governments would be able to enjoy the privileges, the international community would remove an important obstacle developing countries face.<sup>12</sup> And the way the governments embrace human rights might be a strong indicator to judge whether a government is sufficiently legitimate or not.

#### **1.4 Global justice and fast fashion**

The question that arises now is how the dilemmas of fast fashion fall within this realm of global justice. Fast fashion companies are multinational companies that produce in several countries over the world. The emergence of the 'fast fashion' business model has led to overconsumption and excessive textile waste in the global north which has major environmental and social impacts, particularly on those at the bottom of the supply chain (in the global south).<sup>13</sup> Multinational fast fashion companies represent international law. International law requires an idea of a global justice and co-operation between several states to ensure that a global justice is retained. This means international law must be designed on an idea of equal entitlement of human rights (the idea of global justice). This said, fast fashion's dilemmas make up for global justice problems, because of the need for change in international law the fast fashion companies represent, on a basis of equal entitlement of human rights.

Fast fashion's dilemmas can be subdivided in debates over global economic injustice, global gender justice, global environmental issues and global health issues. In the next chapter, I will explain what negative effects are imposed by the fast fashion industry and how the dilemmas they create fall under the subdivisions of global justice that I have just mentioned.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pg.9

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Kozłowski, A., Bardecki, M. & Searcy, C. 2016, pg. 153

## Chapter 2: Fast Fashion and its moral implications

*“Here’s an incredible fact – I paid less than \$30 per item on average for each piece of clothing in my closet. Most of my shoes cost less than \$15 a pop. That clothes can be had for so little money is historically unprecedented.”*

Elizabeth L. Cline<sup>14</sup>

Although the fast fashion business model still is a very recent phenomenon in the fashion industry, we, residents of the global north, have become quite used to the fact that we can buy any piece of garment we like for whatever price we desire. We have become able to consume, to consume a lot. This recent occasion has its origins in the emergence of economic globalization.

### 2.1 A brief walk through history: the arising of Economic Globalization

Before I explain what fast fashion is, I think it’s important to briefly describe the historical context that has led to its existence. According to the mainstream story of Economic Globalization, it began when Great Britain (soon followed by the rest of Europe and North America) in the eighteenth century adopted liberal free market and free trade policies to promote world economic development.<sup>15</sup> The aim of these policies was to remove trading barriers by imposing duties, quota’s and protectionism mechanisms. A contemporary example is the World Trade Organization (WTO), with its purpose to ensure that trade flows smoothly. Removing barriers to trade enables the further spatial advance of capitalism along with its logic of *maximizing profitability*.<sup>16</sup> To avoid the rate of profit to fall in established markets, companies have to relocate factories and are thus inherently expansionist.<sup>17</sup> In the garment

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<sup>14</sup> Cline, E.L. 2012, pg. 3

<sup>15</sup> Brooks, G. 2015, pg. 39

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 42

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 44

industry for example, garment manufacturing moved from Europe to Asia because lower wage locations reduce the chance of a crisis (less profit) in the clothing sector. Consequently, democratic governments that negotiate for the liberalization of markets therefore play a key role in facilitating globalization.

For years, European states were able to hide behind protectionism and have benefitted from uneven terms of trade, especially in relation to China. In 2005, when the Multi Fiber Agreement (MFA)<sup>18</sup> expired, many barriers in garment imports were phased out. This resulted into a minor crisis in the clothing sector, referred to as ‘the bra- wars’<sup>19</sup>. European and United States manufacturers couldn’t compete with more efficient Asian producers that paid lower wages. This, and the already relaxed laws that were part of the market liberalization in the late 1990s and early 2000s resulted in an enormous change in clothing prices. They fell dramatically in the 2000s: 26,2 percent in Europe and 17.1 percent in the USA. Consumption increased enormously, in the UK by a third, leading to 2 million tons of clothing being consumed every year. Exports of Chinese clothing to the USA increased by 18 percent and EU by 21 percent a year between 2000 and 2007.<sup>20</sup> Garment manufacturing moved to Asia and, in addition, cheap clothing developed new modes of consumption. This is how the fast fashion trend exploded.

## **2.2 What is fast fashion?**

Fast fashion (hereafter FF) is a contemporary trend in global retailing that refers to the concept of shortening lead- time (production, distribution etc.) and offering new and low cost products to the market as soon as possible. In order to do so, the different parts of the manufacturing of a product are spread over different companies globally. Accordingly, multiple countries are involved in, for instance, the design, cotton growing, manufacturing, advertising and retail. Examples of FF retailers are Zara, H&M and C&A. Although the FF model only emerged in the late 1990’s, early 21<sup>st</sup> century, it already has been of such influence that it has contributed to shorter lead

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<sup>18</sup> The MFA governed the world trade in textiles and garments from 1974 through 2004, imposing quotas on the amount products developing countries could export to developed countries.

<sup>19</sup> Whereas 80 million items of Chinese made clothing were blocked at European ports.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pg. 68

times for apparel production and altered consumer's perception regarding the affordability of trendy apparel.<sup>21</sup>

Instead of seasonally, FF designers bring new styles into the store every two weeks, creating a sense of perishability and an urge for consumers to make purchases more frequently. In order to meet consumer demands accurately, the focus of FF is on forecasting and predicting trends in order to meet most of the mainstream consumers' preferences. The popularity of FF chains influenced traditional apparel retailers to re-evaluate their position in the market and to put more emphasis on trend forecasting, reducing their lead time and even by creating their own fast fashion brands.<sup>22</sup> Profit growth in the FF clothing sector is based on increasing consumption and thus buying FF is relentlessly encouraged. Fast fashion clothes are sold for a low price because the industry is very competitive and emerging, therefore it needs to sell more and more every day. Trends are never static and promote FF systems of provision. The effects on consumers have well been reported in a study on the motivations of young people to buy fast fashion done by Joy et al (2012). In it, a Canadian student stated: "I want to see new things and styles that can help me create and recreate my wardrobe and who I am. But I don't want to look like someone else—so the limited edition satisfies this need to be unique. When I see it on the catwalks or in magazines, I want it immediately."<sup>23</sup> The market is stimulating the consumption of clothes principally for the sake of appearance instead of its practical use value. This is seen in the fact that in the Global North fine used FF clothes that could be worn again are often disposed of.

### **2.3 Criticism on Fast Fashion and its negative impacts**

From the 90's onwards, the fashion industry experienced a public backlash due to a lack of social responsibility and accountability of factories located in developing nations.<sup>24</sup> The use of 'sweatshop labor' brought negative publicity. Over the past decade the eco-movement has increased suggesting a broader interest (of consumers) in more sustainability in the industry.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Choi, T.M. (Ed), 2013, pg. 9

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pg. 10

<sup>23</sup> Joy, A., Sherry Jr, J. F., Venkatesh, A., Wang, J., & Chan, R. 2012, pg. 282

<sup>24</sup> Kozłowski, A., Bardecki, M. & Searcy, C., 2012, pg. 18

<sup>25</sup> Joy, A., Sherry Jr, J. F., Venkatesh, A., Wang, J., & Chan, R. 2012, pg. 274

Consequently, FF has come under criticism. This criticism incredibly grew among a wide range of people (consumers) globally when the Rana Plaza collapse (2013) in Bangladesh, which killed 1130 people, became world news. It is difficult however to point out the exact negative impacts of FF for it isn't a transparent industry<sup>26</sup> and it's produced globally, from raw material production, to dyeing and finishing, to transport and consumption. In this section, I will cover most of the negative effects it produces and explain what ethical dilemmas arise from them. I will do so by defining FF's key- criticisms, outlining the negative effects of FF that support these criticisms, and then to subdivide them under bigger moral discussions.

Briefly summarized, FF's negative effects involve negative environmental impacts, exploitation, human rights violations (e.g. health risks for workers, bad working conditions, etc.) and stimulating a sentiment among consumers that clothes are disposable (and therefore stimulate overconsumption). It is a global industry that falls within a global economy. The issues it generates are sub- divisive under different global justice domains, that of global environmental issues, global health issues, global economic justice and global gender justice.

### **2.3.1 Global environment/ global health issues**

#### ***Criticism (1): "Overconsumption in fast fashion leads to excessive waste".***

I will start with overconsumption (or overproduction), because it is exactly this part of FF that has led to the large scale of the industry's negative effects. Apparel has been one of the few commodities in the past ten years of which the prices have actually dropped.<sup>27</sup> The supply exceeds the demand. This enabled consumers to buy more items for less money, which in turn increased the demand for clothes and has led to downward pressure on garment workers. Not able to keep up with the production, they produce clothes of an inferior quality, and clothes are often worn as few as ten times or less because they show wear marks and defects more rapidly. This and the stimulation of consumption by the industry that I have mentioned before are causing an immense disposability standard. According to the nonprofit Council for Textile Recycling, the U.S. alone wastes 85 percent of the textiles generated worldwide per

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pg. 275

<sup>27</sup> Choi, T.M. (Ed), 2013, pg. 10

year, that is 21 billion pounds of clothing waste per year. Between 1999 and 2009, the volume of clothing that consumers wasted grew by 40 percent.<sup>28</sup> According to the Environmental Protection Agency, textiles have one of the lowest recycling rates of any reusable material.

A large number of textiles end up in landfills worldwide. The synthetic and inorganic materials of clothes often prevent the textiles to degrade properly. Decomposing clothing releases methane, a harmful GHG and contributor to global warming. Moreover, the dyes and chemicals in the fabric can leach into the soil and toxicate both the surface and the groundwater.<sup>29</sup>

***Criticism (2): “Fast fashion is produced globally and in a highly unsustainable way, it’s polluting and endangers global health.”***

Throughout all stages of textile manufacturing, the aquatic, terrestrial, and atmospheric ecosystems experience lasting environmental harm. The production process of a single piece of garment happens globally, and is therefore shipped to different continents. Pollution of the shipping industry is often unregulated, because the sea is no countries’ territory. Thus it is difficult to realize international regulations, resulting in non- stop unregulated air and water pollution.<sup>30</sup>

About 40 percent of our clothes are made of cotton. Cotton is a very water reliant plant, with one T-shirt needing about 500 gallons of water. It’s very vulnerable and consumes 10 percent of the agricultural chemicals and 25 percent of the pesticides worldwide.<sup>31</sup> Several studies have shown that using cotton pesticides impose great health risks, especially on farmers and inhabitants of developing countries that are directly exposed to them. According to a recent publication by the US department of Agriculture prepared jointly for the FAO, UNEP and WHO, between 1% (26 million) and 3% (77 million) of agricultural workers worldwide suffer from acute pesticide poisoning.<sup>32</sup> Most of them have no resources to make use of medical treatment because they live in poverty.

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<sup>28</sup> Council for Textile, *The Facts about Textile Waste*: 2016  
<<http://www.wearonaterecycle.org/about/issue.html>>

<sup>29</sup> Laursen, S.E., Hansen, J., Drødahl, A., Hansen, O.C., Pommer, K., & Pedersen, E. 2003, (23) Also: Howarth, R. W., Santoro, R. & Ingraffea, A. 2011, pg 679-690

<sup>30</sup> Allwood, J. M., Laursen, S. E., de Rodriguez, C. M., & Bocken, N. M. 2006. Pg. 3

<sup>31</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 49

<sup>32</sup> EJF, 2007, *The Deadly Chemicals in Cotton*, Environmental Justice Foundation in collaboration with Pesticide Action Network UK, London, UK. ISBN No. 1-904523-10-2



Dyeing of textiles results in severe water pollution. This is best seen in Indonesia, home to the Citarum River. According to Greenpeace this river has been found to be the most polluted river in the world, causing harm to the aquatic life in it, wildlife around it and severe health risks for 5 million people depending on it. 68 percent of the industrial facilities around the river produce textiles, making up for hundreds of textile factories. Because of bad or almost no regulations regarding the textile production in Indonesia, clothing manufacturers dump all of their chemicals into the river.<sup>33</sup> The water pollution caused by the dyeing of our clothes doesn't end by the first time the clothes are dyed. Additionally, our daily use and washing of our clothes brings the chemical leftovers into the water again.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.3.2 Ethical considerations: global environment issues / global health issues**

That our planet is facing severe environmental challenges isn't new. The number of its inhabitants is increasing faster than ever, and the natural resources people need in order to survive are decreasing rapidly and are becoming scarce. The Brundtland report, a United Nations document on sustainability produced by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED1987) noted that there was "increasing evidence that the planetary systems vital to supporting life on earth were under strain".<sup>35</sup> There is evidence that continuing greenhouse gas emissions will imperil millions of lives (Singer 2003; Klein 2014). It is no longer controversial among the scientific community that anthropogenic climate change is real and a significant threat to the wellbeing of both current and future generations.<sup>36</sup>

#### The right of future generations

Here we come to our first ethical consideration: the right of future generations. We talk about the right to enjoy ecological capital in the future. The Brundtland report writes about this: its key question is whether it is equitable to sacrifice options for

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<sup>33</sup> Greenpeace, *Polluting Paradise*: 2016

<<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/detox/water/polluting-paradise/>>

<sup>34</sup> Allwood, J. M., Laursen, S. E., de Rodriguez, C. M., & Bocken, N. M. 2006. Pg. 47

<sup>35</sup> Brennan, A. & Lo, Y.S. 2015, pg. 42

<sup>36</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 29

future wellbeing in favor of supporting (luxurious) lifestyles enjoyed in developed countries. It argues that “the industrial world has already used much of the planet’s ecological capital. This inequality is the planet’s main ‘environmental’ problem; it is also its main ‘development’ problem” (WCED 1987, overview, paragraph 17). According to the report, overriding priority should be given to the essential needs of the global poor, and limitations should be imposed in order to meet these present and future needs. Thus, sustainable development entails that economic and social development is just if *all* people will be able to enjoy future wellbeing, regardless of their country. So what would this mean for FF? Overproduction results in depletion of the world’s ecological capital. The overconsumption that causes overproduction in FF results from the stimulation of a sentiment by the FF companies among consumers that clothes are disposable. Pursuing their luxury lifestyles, FF consumers contribute to a decrease in ecological capital and thus to a limitation of the possibilities to enjoy future wellbeing globally. Consequently –without being the causers of the problem – the global poor will suffer most for they don’t have the (financial) resources to cope with scarcity of ecological capital.<sup>37</sup>

Nations that have become wealthy through earlier industrialization still leave the biggest ecological footprints, or increase those of developing countries because of a demand for products. In other words, these nations still exploit less wealthy nations in order to maintain their own high maintenance lifestyles. Not all of them have equally contributed to environmental problems, and the ones that have most, will most likely feel it the least. The right to future wellbeing entails wellbeing, for every nation and without unfair disadvantages and boundaries. The question is, are the former industrialized nations prepared to take responsibility for their past and do they have a moral obligation to do so? The answer to this question will be explored further in the third chapter of this thesis.

### Global health

So the two polluting effects of the FF industry that directly affect people’s health are the use of pesticides in cotton growing and the dying of the clothes. The problem is, that the quantity of clothes that has to be produced, reduces many chances to change

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<sup>37</sup> Klein, N. 2014, pg. 5

this way of unsustainable and unhealthy producing. Producing clothes in countries with an extreme low wage often implies that the people that work for those wages have little chances to do other. They are poor, and in need for money, so it holds them trapped in a life that endangers their health. Being poor also leaves them more vulnerable for disease and less able to resist it because of poor living conditions related to poverty (e.g. a lack of clean water or energy sources, malnutrition, overcrowded houses, etc.). And they often don't have the resources to cure disease.<sup>38</sup>

According to Norman Daniels, "health inequalities among different social groups can be considered unjust when they result from an unjust distribution in factors that are socially controllable that affect population health".<sup>39</sup> So according to this definition, in the case of FF it is clear that an excessive difference in the distribution of wealth between the global north and south, causes injustice. A decrement of this gap would be a solution to the enormous health inequalities between the global north and south. Also, the health inequalities can be combatted if the companies would use other materials than cotton (that don't need as much pesticides) or if they would ensure stricter health regulations. Unfortunately, they choose not to do so, because this will mean either a reduced production, or investing in producing more sustainable and thus a lower rate of profit. So they keep on performing unjust behavior.

### Eco feminist ontology

Eco feminist ontology proposes a more holistic view when we talk about our relationship with the environment, for they take *selves* to be fundamentally *relational*.<sup>40</sup> For them, "relationships themselves, and not just the moral status of the relators in those relationships, have moral value and are subject to moral critique".<sup>41</sup> So it is not only us, the people, that have moral status, but is also our *relationship to* the people in the supply chain of our clothes and even maybe nature that provided the resources. Many of us forget that our clothes are first and foremost constructed out of these natural resources. What happens if we lose a certain connection to our products and what they come from?

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<sup>38</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Warren, K.J, 2015, pg. 25

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pg. 29

According to Hannah Arendt, losing a connection with our world (our earth) has led towards a changing self-identity of people. She argues that, due to modernity's modern technology and its production on a massive scale (the fact that everyone is able to consume everything), a sentiment has developed in which everything has become an object of production and consumption, of acquisition and exchange. This has resulted in a *rationality* regime: a decreasing difference between one's private and public life which makes it difficult for people to see a difference in their own opinions and those of others or institutions. All the values characteristic of the world of fabrication that existed before modernity (permanence, stability, and durability) as well as those characteristics of the world of action and speech (freedom, plurality, and solidarity) are sacrificed in favor of the values of life, productivity and abundance.<sup>42</sup> As sociologist Anthony Giddens argues, 'what is originally human becomes alien'.<sup>43</sup> According to him, individuals vest trust in others or abstract systems and recognize that they lack power to influence anything. In this same rationality regime, Arendt argues in "*the banality of evil*", the rise of Nazism and Stalinism was possible, as a result of the institutionalization of evil and terror.<sup>44</sup>

I think these views are interesting for this thesis, because they imply that the earth has an intrinsic value in itself, simply for being a part of *our* being, and we shouldn't alienate from it because it helps us to create a sense of what we come from, a reflective self-identity. Or in an eco-holism sense: we should see ourselves as part of a whole.<sup>45</sup> A lack of being in relation with our selves may result in causing people to be easily manipulated by for example FF advertising that pushes them to maintain unsustainable lifestyles that damages others: a contemporary case of the institutionalization of evil.

Arendt and Giddens talk about modernity in a broad sense. However, the consequences of modernity that they are talking about are seen in FF consumption. The FF industry is relentlessly promoting consumption because it raises profit. Zygmund Bauman, another prominent sociologist, argues that "individual needs for personal autonomy, self-definition, authentic life or personal perfection are all translated into the need to possess, and consume, market-offered goods (...) the gap between human needs and individual desires is produced by market domination; this

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<sup>42</sup> d'Entreves, M.P. 2014, pg. 9

<sup>43</sup> Giddens, A. 1991, pg. 191

<sup>44</sup> d'Entreves, M.P. 2014, pg. 9

<sup>45</sup> Lovelock, J. (2002). *Gaia: Gaia: A new look at life on earth*. Oxford Paperbacks. Chicago

gap is, at the same time, a condition of its reproduction”. According to him, it is a post-modern phenomenon in which we create temporary identities with multiple selves.<sup>46</sup> So the market routinely present modes of life to which everyone should aspire, according to Giddens: the lifestyles of the affluent are, in one form or another, made open to view and portrayed as worthy of emulation.<sup>47</sup> Individual identity is not static, so constant reimagining is needed. Hence, one way or another, we are all possessed by the consumption parade of modernity. So in the case of FF, by talking about relationships, awareness may be created and this might reduce a (over) consumption sentiment among consumers.

### **2.3.3 Global economic injustice and global gender justice**

***Criticism (3): “Developed countries exploit developing countries by uneven terms of trade (that derived from past colonial ties)”.***

According to Pogge, affluent countries impose a coercive global order on the poor that foreseeably and avoidably causes great harm. The way affluent countries still profit from past colonial relations in the garment industry is well described by Andrew Brooks in his book “*clothing poverty*”. As I have described in first section of this chapter, the FF industry emerged because of the development of economic globalization. European states have long hidden behind protectionism in trade policies and have long benefited from uneven terms of trade.<sup>48</sup>

The colonial projects of Europe were especially significant in the expansion of manufacturing because it brought new raw materials and markets under European control. The early colonial period introduced the cotton trade to Europe and so the cotton sector developed with British colonial expansion overseas. It established the Industrial Revolution in the North of England<sup>49</sup>, which led to increases of productivity, the demand was developed that led to the emerge of industrial capitalism.<sup>50</sup> Colonized territories were drawn into the service of industrial economies. Cotton was taken from the West Indies and it sold in Africa and North America. This led to a huge costumer base held in a near monopoly of Britain. Africa

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<sup>46</sup> Joy, A., Sherry Jr, J. F., Venkatesh, A., Wang, J., & Chan, R. 2012, pg. 276

<sup>47</sup> Giddens, A. 1991, pg. 196

<sup>48</sup> Brooks, A. 2015, pg. 40

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pg. 56

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pg. 55

and Asia were underdeveloped because local production declined in the face of competition and people were forced to supply raw materials. This resulted in the uneven development patterns of today. As Marx said about industrial modernity: “by ruining handicraft production in other countries, machinery forcibly converts them into fields for the supply of its raw materials (...) A new and international division of labor, a division suited to the requirements of the chief centers of modern industry springs up, and converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production, for supplying the other part which remains a chiefly industrial field.”<sup>51</sup> Because the local people were forced to work on the fields, and therefore local production declined, the locals had to buy the clothes produced elsewhere. This resulted in structural dependency.<sup>52</sup> Equal development between the global north and south had partially been blocked by the inherent patterns of capital accumulation established in the colonial period and enforced through measures as trade protectionism.

Nowadays, if clothes are being recycled, they are often sent back to the developing countries that produced them. This causes small local garment producers to vanish because of unfair competition and it creates dependency of developing countries on developed countries (and thus more poverty)<sup>53</sup>. This is another result of Europe’s colonial history.

***Criticism (4): “The relocation of factories by globalization of the garment industry has led to exploitation of garment workers in developing countries on a massive scale and is obstructing gender equality in those countries”.***

When the MFA expired, European and United States manufacturers couldn’t compete anymore with more efficient Asian producers that paid lower wages. This, and the already relaxed laws that were part of the market liberalization in the late 1990s and early 2000s resulted in an enormous change in clothing prices. To avoid the rate of profit to fall companies relocated their factories to lower wage countries. People working in the industry are often exploited (in the most general level, A exploits B when A takes unfair advantage of B), even though the exploitation is mutually

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pg. 61

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pg. 63

<sup>53</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 47

advantageous.<sup>54</sup> More than 60 percent of the world's clothing are manufactured in developing countries.<sup>55</sup> China is the world's leading producer and supplier of clothes, however, since the wage prices are increasing in China more companies moved their production to lower wage countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam, Pakistan and the Philippines.<sup>56</sup> Human rights regulations in these developing countries are often ambiguous or even lacking. Big amount FF clothing is therefore made in *sweatshops* where most of the international basic human rights set up by the United Nations (and signed by most countries in the Global North) are violated. According to the Clean Clothes Campaign, 85 % of garment workers in developing countries consist of females. Because of cultural traditions, girls often aren't allowed to go to school and are forced to work.<sup>57</sup> They work for wages too low to be able to live of, in 2002 even the highest wages met less than half of the basic survival requirements.<sup>58</sup> Mostly they work extreme long hours, working 12 hours or more per day isn't an exception while having a day off mostly is. There are constant reports of headaches, vomiting and other illnesses.<sup>59</sup> They are forced to work under life threatening conditions: they work in incendiary factories that are on risk to collapse because maintenance is too expensive.<sup>60</sup> When a survivor a day before the collapse of Rana Plaza asked if she could be excused to work that day because she felt unsafe the supervisor refused: "We had to keep working he told me. If we missed our deadline, the buyer would cancel the order and we would have to go hungry he said. (...) Rana's men shouted that all the workers should go inside and start working. Otherwise, we would be beaten with sticks, they said".<sup>61</sup> Managers often sabotage the creating of a labor union. Intimidation and sexual harassment are no exception. This eliminates any possibilities for better working conditions.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Wertheimer, A. & Zwolinski, M. 2015, pg. 7

<sup>55</sup> ILO/96/33

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 23

<sup>58</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 48

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pg. 47

<sup>60</sup> After the Rana Plaza collapse many major European retailers adopted the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh – a legally binding agreement between retail firms, unions, and government officials to pay the costs associated with ensuring fire safety and building integrity in the country's 5000 garment workers (Lu, 2013). Hence, this is not a global policy yet.

<sup>61</sup> Lu, C. 2013, pg. 63

<sup>62</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 49

### **2.3.4 Ethical considerations: global economic injustice and global gender justice**

Now the global character of the FF industry raises two dilemmas: because of unfair trade policies (dated out of past colonial ties), the chance of developing countries to get wealthier decreases. This leads to a continuation of poverty in those countries and results in forcing people to work under bad conditions (low wage) and will not encourage those countries' governments to actually change the situation because they are dependent of the profit generated by it.

#### Global economic injustice

Thomas Pogge argues that events of the past still result in exploitation of the global poor by the affluent countries and that this is morally wrong. How this is true for the FF industry I have set out handling Brooks. A clear example is the structural dependence it creates: countries can't produce their own garments because of the big amount of second-hand FF garments that come their way and damage the (weak) local market.

Developing countries don't have a chance of economic development and better living standards for their people. Some people thrive on the industry while most don't. The difference is very big: it could easily be less big because if the wealthier party would sacrifice just a little bit of their wealth, the less wealthy party's chances to develop would increase enormously. For example, in 2005, 44 percent of the world's population lived below the international poverty line and they together consumed about 1.3 percent of the global product. They needed 1 percent more to escape poverty. The high-income countries, about 20 percent of the world's population, had consumed 81 percent of the global product.<sup>63</sup> These facts, so it seems to me, do not allow for any excuse that the poverty problem, partly caused by the global FF industry, cannot easily be solved. Should former industrialized countries be held responsible for the continuation of these practices and do they have the responsibility to actively restore what the past has set in motion? In the third chapter I will dive deeper into this question of responsibility. For now I would like to add that when focusing on human rights (and so, why we shouldn't exploit other people), I think a good line of thinking is in Immanuel Kant's deontology. Our rational nature

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<sup>63</sup> Pogge, T. 2005, pg. 1



(and our ability to be responsible) is the only thing that counts in an end in itself. Being human, and possessing this rational nature, gives every human being a right not to be used as an end in itself. This rational nature gives us absolute freedom of choice. Accordingly, our motivations and actions can be evaluated. Kant argues that, in order to live morally, our actions have to be performed according to *categorical imperatives* – that of making a maxim into a universal law.<sup>64</sup> This would forbid exploitation of this kind because it would be illogical to want everyone to act so. People should therefore be responsible to try to change unjust relations that exploit other human beings.

### Global gender justice and basic human rights

Poverty is one of the most discussed subjects in global justice debates and the most devastating outcome of globalization. It can worsen the global poor's vulnerabilities so much that it has certain urgency. Also it is an easy indicator to measure injustice. Poverty takes away chances for people to enjoy human rights, for it won't provide them with their most basic needs. In a global justice perspective, all human beings are equal and have intrinsic value; they are therefore equally entitled to (at least some) basic human rights. To profit from countries where there are low wages because there exists severe poverty is unjust, when the party won't secure any a better development of that country by providing an increase in wealth. To contribute to developing countries' local economies can be a way to fight poverty. However, it seems to me that the global companies are not particularly aiming to do so: the bad working conditions that I have mentioned that still exist today are something companies profit from. Unfortunately, so is the gender inequality in those countries.

85 percent of the garment workers worldwide are women.<sup>65</sup> In general, poverty makes the lives of women and girls harder than their male counterparts.<sup>66</sup> Cultural perceptions of gender roles can often lead to practices that are highly endangering women and girl's most fundamental rights. In Bangladesh, women are seldom sent to school, for sending a son will offer a better chance on future

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<sup>64</sup> Johnson, R. 2014, pg. 13

<sup>65</sup> Schone kleren campagne, *Kledingindustrie: 2016*

<<http://www.schonekleren.nl/informatie/de-kledingindustrie/kledingindustrie>>

<sup>66</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 23

prosperity.<sup>67</sup> Most women are therefore forced to work, often in the sex industry. The garment industry is a far more appealing one: so these women often accept the low wage, the harassment, the sexual intimidation and the extensively long working hours. Because such a big amount of women in developing countries is able to work because of this industry, it would create a big chance to actually help these women to improve their lives.<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, there is still not much done to really improve the working conditions – for they raise profit. This is a big global wrong, created by a global market, imposed on developing countries’ garment workers. And I think it would be a legitimate justification of affluent countries’ governments to take action. In the next chapter, I will argue that, as long as governments aren’t coherent in how they see their own citizens and the way they see citizens of other states, they too are responsible for the injustices that are created by globalization. For, then, they should offer the right example to their citizens.

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<sup>67</sup> Morgan, A. (Director) & Ross, M. (Producer): *The True Cost*, 2015: Untold Creative, LLC.

<sup>68</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 57

## Chapter 3: Who is responsible?

*“I’m a Bangladesh worker in the garment industry. I’m outraged when a buyer comes to meet the company owner or the marketing team to negotiate over the price of his order. And when other countries slash prices, our buyer will look for the best deal. He could just think: “If Bangladesh supplies me with good quality garments, why not pay a fair price?”. But we’ve always been scorned, by everyone, not just a person in particular. It’s the final consumer who steals from me. What can I do about it? What can... How will we be happy? How?” – Mostafa, Bangladesh<sup>69</sup>*

It’s a stirring scene in a beautiful documentary. HUMAN is almost entirely composed of exclusive aerial footage and first- person stories of more than 2000 people in 60 countries. In volume 1 you will find Mostafa in the 48<sup>th</sup> minute. His eyes pierce through your soul, and so does the panic in his voice. This man is trapped, *how can he be happy?*, and he knows whom to blame: it’s the final consumer that steals from him. But what can he do about it? How can he possibly speak out to those consumers and point them at their responsibilities? The problem is, he can’t.

### 3.1 Why talk about responsibility?

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the FF imposes severe negative effects on people and the environment. I have described how globalization, which the industry is a part of, encourages poverty. Thus, human rights are potentially at risk. In my account of global justice, every person is worth to enjoy fundamental human rights. They impose negative and positive duties on us to ensure that they exist and are met. So, talking about responsibilities is necessary to determine what those duties should consist of. What we owe to each other, as individuals.

Most philosophers would argue that we have a positive duty to prevent harm from occurring if we can. For example, Singer’s “easy rescue case”: when it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening without having to sacrifice something comparable, it is wrong not to prevent the bad from occurring.<sup>70</sup> However, as I have described in the last chapter, developed countries impose a coercive global order on the poor that foreseeably and avoidably causes great harm. According to

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<sup>69</sup> HUMAN the movie VOL 1, 2015, 48:28

<sup>70</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 11

Pogge we have the negative duty to do no harm, and thus we have important responsibilities to reform the global order, such that it ceases to do so and instead secures human rights in a better way. This order is unjust when it foreseeably perpetuates large-scale human rights deficits that can reasonably be avoided were we to make quite feasible institutional modifications. Moreover: when we talk about justice, we need to talk about responsibility.

### **3.2 The problem of many hands: the responsibility of the consumer**

In chapter 2, I have illustrated that the FF industry creates some undesirable collective effects on the environment and human beings. The FF industry is very complex with a large number of individuals causally involved, with all of them contribute to just a small part in the whole. This phenomenon is often referred to as ‘the problem of many hands’ (hereafter, PMH). Van de Poel et al. maintain the following definition of the PMH: “the occurrence of a gap in the distribution of responsibility that may be considered morally problematic.”<sup>71</sup> This implies that there is no individual responsibility. I think it is reasonable to say that the PMH occurs for the individual consumer in FF, as I will explain in this section.

So what is the final consumer guilty of? According to Mostafa the final consumer *steals* from him. This might, literally, not be the case, however, to examine if the consumer is responsible for any of the collective effects there must be some kind of wrongdoing inflicted by him. Let’s say that the consumer contributes to the undesirable effects by consuming and disposing products that are not necessarily important to maintain a decent life, for they are luxury products. This way they maintain a luxury lifestyle that causes environmental harm and results in exploitation of others. The study of Joy et al. (2012) shows us that most FF consumers have some basic knowledge of climate change but no substantial knowledge of the negative effects of FF. It also shows that they still choose to buy FF, even if they are aware of its negative effects (as people still buy FF clothes after the collapse of Rana Plaza became world news). However, the dark side of FF is not (yet) a common paradigm – so the collective agreement exists that buying FF clothes is perfectly fine.

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<sup>71</sup> van de Poel, I., Fahlquist, J. N., Doorn, N., Zwart, S., & Royakkers, L. 2011, pg. 49

We first have to decide what kind of notion of responsibility can be used in the case of FF and its consumers. Following van de Poel et al. in their review of the PMH in relation to climate change, I think for FF the notion of responsibility that should be maintained is *moral responsibility* (i.e. attributive responsibility): responsibility that is attributed on moral grounds rather than law or rules.<sup>72</sup> The problem of many hands in most cases focuses on responsibility as *blameworthiness*, this is a backward looking form of responsibility because it holds someone responsible (blames someone) for something that has happened.<sup>73</sup> Capacity, causality, knowledge, freedom and wrongdoing are all conditions of responsibility as blameworthiness.<sup>74</sup> However, the PMH shows that these traditional conditions are distributed over many different individuals and none of them meet all the conditions. There is ‘a morally problematic gap in the distribution of responsibility among members of a collective’.<sup>75</sup> For example: even if someone has the capacity to act responsibly and even if consuming partly caused some negative effects (causality), then it could still be the case that one wasn’t aware of the negative effects (a lack of knowledge) and that there are no good alternatives (freedom). As long as those conditions (knowledge, freedom) are distributed over individuals in FF companies, consumers will not meet all of the conditions or even not most of them, and are therefore hard to be blamed.

A person might be morally responsible if there is a collective agreement in how to function in a sustainable way. However, the collective agreement over consumption in FF is missing. As we have seen in the first chapter, disposability is relentlessly encouraged in FF by advertising and marketing. Consumers are encouraged to buy more garments because of the low prices and the bad quality of the garments. This has created a sphere in which people find it collectively acceptable to buy a lot of clothes for a low price, and to dump the clothes that they don’t like anymore, often not being totally aware of the bad global consequences. As Pogge argues: “citizens of rich countries are, however, conditioned to downplay the severity and persistence of world poverty (...) that world poverty is an ongoing harm that we inflict seems completely incredible to most citizens of the affluent countries.”<sup>76</sup> There seems to be a (unconscious) collective acceptance of the unsustainable behavior they

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pg. 52

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pg. 53

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pg. 50

<sup>76</sup> Pogge, T. 2005, pg. 1

pursue. In the previous chapter, I have explained that Arendt, Giddens and Bauman argue that it is also the rise of modernity in its whole that has created a sentiment of consumption (it needs consumption to sustain itself). Adding to it the modernity phenomenon of renewing identities and lifestyles entails that a collective agreement isn't only created consciously, but also exists unconsciously under consumers. As long as there is a collective tolerance in over-consuming in the global north, buying a lot of clothes and quickly dispose them aren't unusual and wrong behaviors, and according to Sinnott - Armstrong people shouldn't be held responsible in these cases.<sup>77</sup> He argues that it would work counterproductive to blame people for usual but wrong behavior, because it erases the clear difference between excessive wrong behavior and usual (minor) wrong behavior. He states that: "we should distribute blame (and praise) so as to give incentives for the worst to get better".<sup>78</sup>

So far we have reviewed a backward looking responsibility for consumers but what about preventing harm in the future, what about forward looking responsibility? People do have a moral obligation, I assume, to strive for collective agreements that would effectively abate the occurrence of negative effects on the environment and other people. A lack of backward looking responsibility should therefore not mean that forward-looking responsibility should be absent. According to Miller "forward looking responsibility as obligation may depend on people's capacity to contribute to the solution of a problem or bring about a certain situation, but also on past causal contributions or backward looking moral responsibility".<sup>79</sup> I have shown that in the case of FF people don't have a backward looking moral responsibility. And because they don't have the capacity to contribute to the solution by themselves, they so don't have a forward-looking responsibility. Even if an individual wants to strive for collective agreements, in a democracy, this agreement depends on majority decision-making. It seems likely that, by the lack of knowledge and the existing consumption paradigm, the individual will be outnumbered by a majority who oppose an effective collective agreement.

Since the formation of the WTO, governments have been in a permanent hostage situation to the global economic system and "democracy is for sale to the

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<sup>77</sup> Sinnott Armstrong, W. 2005, pg. 298

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> van de Poel, I., Fahlquist, J. N., Doorn, N., Zwart, S., & Royakkers, L. 2010, pg. 65

highest bidder”.<sup>80</sup> Democratic governments negotiate for the liberalization of markets and therefore play a key role in facilitating globalization. This means that, imposing strict trade policies on global companies will endanger free trade and so damage democratic values. The Transnational Institute (TNI) in their report “*State of Power*” argue that there are diverse mechanisms of financial and political power within the contemporary global economy. The financial industry, they state, imposes instrumental, ideological and structural power on politics.<sup>81</sup> Even if individual consumers strive for collective action against the negative effects of FF, it is hard to get support of the government, given that Inditex (the multinational clothing company that owns FF chains like ZARA, Bershka, etc.) in 2015 had a profit rise of 156 percent to 2.9 billion euro’s and a sales increase of 15.4 percent to 20.9 billion dollars.<sup>82</sup> Inditex’s founder Amancio Ortega will become the richest man on earth in 2017.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the FF industry is a powerful player in the financial industry. Therefore, to come back at the definition of van de Poel et al. of the PMH, “the occurrence of a gap in the distribution of responsibility that may be considered morally problematic”, the lack of collective agreement on FF and thus a gap in the distribution of both backward and forward looking responsibility will allow for the PMH to occur in FF and therefore no consumer is morally responsible.

For eco-feminist ethicists however, the *relationships* themselves and not just the *relators* in those relationships have moral value and are subject to moral critique.<sup>84</sup> They believe that “unhealthy attitudes can become more and more entrenched and conditions spiral downward toward a truly wrecked state”.<sup>85</sup> Like for example, believing that it is generous, but not necessary to do something about the poverty. Maintaining the collective ignorance I have mentioned above (that it is collectively agreeable to over-consume) would be morally wrong, even if the PMH occurs. Our moral responsibility is to be critical and to be aware of our own context and the way we perceive the world and for example, fast fashion. Being aware of

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<sup>80</sup> Eaton, H. 2000, pg. 44

<sup>81</sup> Kalaitzake, M. *Political Capture by the Financial Industry*: TNI: 2015 pg. 17-27  
<[https://www.tni.org/files/download/tni\\_state-of-power-2015.pdf](https://www.tni.org/files/download/tni_state-of-power-2015.pdf)>

<sup>82</sup> Buis, A. *Inditex ziet winst in 2015 flink stijgen*: 2016  
<<https://fashionunited.nl/nieuws/business/inditex-ziet-winst-in-2015-flink-stijgen-dankzij-zara/2016030925801>>

<sup>83</sup> Hendriksz, V. *Amancio Ortgega wordt in 2017 de rijkste miljardair ter wereld*: 2015  
<<https://fashionunited.nl/nieuws/business/amancio-ortega-wordt-in-2017-de-rijkste-miljardair-ter-wereld/2015092324439>>

<sup>84</sup> Warren, K.J. 2015, pg. 26

<sup>85</sup> Cittenden, C. 2000, pg. 52

severe differences in wealth globally and still believing that you have the right to buy a lot of (FF) clothes to dispose of it quickly after, should be perceived as immoral behavior. Hence, consumers can contribute to moral behavior by reviewing their attitude towards consumption and what effects it has on the world. On a global level, Pogge would argue the same for governments of affluent countries. As long as some past (colonial) relationships, and the effects on developing countries that they still impose, are not acknowledged and actively restored by affluent governments, they will act globally unjust.

### **3.3 Thomas Pogge and global justice: the responsibility of governments**

We live in a globalized world and governments' decisions affect more people than just the people within their states. For example, the continuation of emitting greenhouse gas emissions will imperil millions of lives.<sup>86</sup> In a global village, someone else's poverty soon becomes one's own problem<sup>87</sup>. This means a new ethics that serves the planet is needed. For rich nations not to take a global ethically viewpoint will cause serious moral wrongs.

As I have mentioned before, poverty is one of the most discussed subjects in global justice debates and the most devastating outcome of globalization. It can worsen the global poor's vulnerabilities so much that it has certain urgency. Also it is an easy indicator to measure injustice. Poverty takes away chances for people to enjoy human rights, for it won't provide them with their most basic needs. In a global justice perspective, all human beings are equal and have intrinsic value; they are therefore equally entitled to (at least some) basic human rights.

In our moral debates concerning the need of our moral duties to help the global poor, most argue that our positive duties are quite stringent and sometimes demanding. Pogge takes a more radical stance in this debate, arguing that there are more stringent negative duties that are also in play, mainly the negative duties to do no harm.<sup>88</sup> According to him, affluent countries impose a coercive global order on the poor that foreseeably and avoidably causes great harm. Affluent countries therefore

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<sup>86</sup> Singer, P. 2002, pg.1

<sup>87</sup> It is said for example, that the Arab Spring was partly caused by discontent about food prices. The Arab Spring had ultimately lead to the big refugee crisis in Europe now.

<sup>88</sup> Pogge, T. 2015, pg. 5



have a responsibility to reform the global order so that it ceases to cause harm and instead secures better human rights. While most philosophers emphasize our *capacity to assist* with need satisfaction, Pogge emphasizes instead our *contributions* to the problem as grounding our duties.<sup>89</sup> So he states that: “a morally deeply tarnished history must not be allowed to result in radical inequality.”<sup>90</sup> I have described this ‘tarnished’ history in relation to the garment industry in the last chapter.

Following Pogge, in the case of global poverty, governments of affluent countries and their citizens are backward looking responsible and blameworthy. Also, with stating that we harm the global poor, he imposes two kinds of duties linked to the responsibility: negative and positive duties. Hence, as I have discussed above, in the case of FF I think the citizens (the consumers) are not fully responsible since the current (capitalistic) paradigm doesn’t inform them well enough about the consequences of their consumer behavior and the history of the still existing poverty. Therefore, without a collective agreement, no one can be expected to make responsible choices.

This is different for governments. Governments also have *substantial responsibility*. This means that they have a specific task or role that gives them certain responsibility. All through out history “the leader” (now the government) had a substantial responsibility to take care of its people and to provide them with a just and secure society in which they could live. That we still assign this task to our government is seen by the fact that we pay them taxes to provide us healthcare, education, etc. Globalization has led to mass politics, and so we have a democratic system that should enable all people to have a voice and to be heard. However, for people to decide democratically what is best for their society it is required that the state educates them well so they can legitimately express themselves. Governments should enable people to achieve collective agreements that are working towards justice (globally). Also, companies arise within societies. When a government fails to give good examples, they don’t fulfill their substantial responsibilities well. In the case of FF this means that, as long governments don’t educate people on what negative effects the FF industries impose on people globally and the environment (with for example, eco- labels), they are conducting substantial immoral action.

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<sup>89</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 12

<sup>90</sup> Pogge, T. 2015, pg. 3

In the case of attributive responsibility, governments fulfill most of the conditions for responsibility- as- blameworthiness. They play a key role in facilitating globalization as they negotiate liberalization of markets. Until 2005 with the MFA there still were strict trade regulations that restricted developing countries like China to enter the European and North American market. Governments in these countries willingly protected their markets, and thus supported unequal trade policies. This continues in the WTO negotiations through tariffs, quotas, anti-dumping duties, export credits and huge subsidies on domestic producers.<sup>91</sup> It therefore preserves great economic advantages that are unjust in view of the massive and avoidable deprivations it foreseeably produces.<sup>92</sup> Governments are violating their negative duty <<do not harm>> when they, in collaboration with the ruling cliques of many poor countries, coercively exclude the global poor from a proportional resource share and any equivalent substitute.<sup>93</sup> Also they fail according the general definition of ethical conduct “taking into account the rights and interests of all those who can reasonably claim to process them and making sure that they are included in your decisions”.

After the collapse of Rana Plaza, the Bangladesh government had produced a lengthy report detailing the many violations of existing rules, and recommending various measures of accountability and financial compensation and assistance to the victims and their families. The government also lifted restrictions on the ability of garment workers to unionize. These local and national efforts were supported by wider calls for accountability and responsibility from retail clothing firms and consumers worldwide.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, no international efforts to form a new forward-looking international policy have been seen. So it foreseeably perpetuates large- scale human rights deficits that could be easily avoided through feasible institutional modifications.

In a globalized setting, if equality is justified domestically, it should also be justified globally. However, this task is impossible on a global scale because of the unequal distribution between countries that still exists. I think therefore, following sufficiency movements, that a global policy, to be global just, should aim on sufficiency<sup>95</sup>: people in all countries should have a right to life sufficiently, claiming

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pg. 6

<sup>92</sup> Pogge, T. 2015, pg. 4

<sup>93</sup> Pogge, T. 2005, pg.4

<sup>94</sup> Lu, C. 2013, pg. 64

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

on their human rights, and governments globally should acknowledge this and try to develop international policies that work towards this global sufficiency. This also means that they should be critical towards the way they themselves create insufficiency that leads to severe poverty and environmental harm. Therefore, governments in affluent countries have, as long as they don't actively try to form agreements that reduce the negative effects of global trade (and thus also those of the FF industry), responsibility as blameworthiness and should therefore be responsible to pay for and face the consequences of the negative effects (of FF) that occur. They have a duty to prevent harm from occurring and while they don't, they also break their negative duty: to do no harm. What can we say about the FF companies that cause the consumers to over-consume and accumulate so much money that they can even get governments to restrict from their duties?

### **3.4 Business ethics: the responsibility of global companies**

Ethical conduct of companies falls within the realm of business ethics. Business ethics considers the relationship between businesses and consumers and businesses and their employees. It also involves the impact of globalization on the environment and society at large. Businesses can profit from behaving in a socially and environmentally responsible way because it will win trust of countries where they are (or want to be) located and also of people globally. However, if a company wants to put ethics into practice, it has to pass on the same standards all down the supply chain.

Consumers nowadays expect businesses to be socially (and environmentally) responsible. Hence, consumer action can be very effective, for if they refuse to buy a company's products, the company either has to change or go bankrupt. Negative media around a company's practices can be extremely helpful in changing its immoral practices, for a good reputation is important (on a highly competitive global market). An example in FF are the labor scandals of the mid- 1990s that have led to a response from the corporate sector in developing Corporate Social Responsibility policies (CSR). Also, after the Rana Plaza incident became world news, European retail companies, together with the Bangladesh government, designed new policies for Bangladesh in order to prevent the same incident to occur again.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

When we talk about moral conduct of a company, it's still people that execute the acts. So whenever a company conducts immoral behavior, harm is conducted by its people. People's actions are structured or mediated by their institutional context. Action therefore is *institutionally embedded* action. Institutional market-forces manipulate people's choices. For example, the force of competition manipulates people to buy the least expensive product. Business ethics separates from the idea that human agency is merely the outcome of institutional variables and that single individuals can make no difference. Accordingly, business ethics approaches businesses from a meso or micro level instead of a macro level. Morally wrong and reprehensible behavior arises in grey zones where ordinary people have to make ordinary choices.<sup>97</sup> Those people have a strong tendency to underestimate the risk and their power to change the course of things and they often overestimate their ability to change a structure or process at the very last minute, when things really go wrong. It happens to be relatively easy to place normal people in situations where they will ultimately decide to act immorally.<sup>98</sup> It is therefore the responsibility of the company to train its people in moral conduct. Companies ought to develop an ethical management program that develops an ethical code of conduct that people can refer to. This can happen with *coding*: when an entire company is made aware of the importance of morality, of establishing certain rules and of the ease with which these rules can be broken within an organization.<sup>99</sup> People should be encouraged to adopt a more ethical stance and their moral authority within the organization should be enhanced. Companies should therefore help their people to speak up to morally wrong conduct within the company. This is the organization of morality that leads companies towards ethical conduct. To come back to Kant, people are not allowed to be treated as means to an end, even if that end is profit. This means that people should be approached as people with a rational nature who have freedom of choice. If people are not being encouraged (by coding programs) to speak out (from their rational nature) they are being used as a means to an end. A company, that should endorse the necessity of trust, adherence of rules and keeping promises (e.g. contracts), can be held responsible for immoral action if they don't acknowledge peoples rational nature.

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<sup>97</sup> Dubbink, W. 2011, pg. 28

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pg. 29

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pg. 25

Lastly, in ethics, it is important that a difference is made between moral justification and moral excuse. Moral justification occurs when someone did a moral wrong thing, but was justified to do so. Moral excuse however, occurs when someone did a morally wrong thing, which is excusable considering the context, but remains wrong. There is a tendency in the corporate world to use moral excuse as moral justifications, for example during the big financial crises, a lot of bankers justified their moral behavior stating that “everyone was doing it”.<sup>100</sup> These excuses are morally insignificant, and so from it can’t follow that one is morally excused. Another example is that managers of companies often state that ‘the government did not ensure proper regulation’. What is, however, is what you should have known. Lastly, the difference between moral justification and moral excuse is the following: when a moral excuse situation occurs, the actor should not conduct the same behavior in the future again.

Having this said, I would like to go back to the responsibility of FF companies. Since the labor scandals of the mid- 1990’s<sup>101</sup> the response of the corporate sector has been a steady proliferation of corporate social responsibility (CSR).<sup>102</sup> CSR focuses the triple P: people, planet and profit. So while profit can be regenerated, ignoring the triple P would eventually leave a company worse off. However, CSR is less demanding than the well-considered and elaborate moral stances of business ethics. CSR imposes optional obligations, whereas ethics doesn’t know optional obligations.<sup>103</sup> From the Rana Plaza collapse on, no big efforts have been shown by the garment companies that produce in Bangladesh apart from the Accord on Fire and Building Safety (to pay the costs associated with ensuring fire safety). There is still the idea of optional obligations.

Companies are responsible to improve immoral conduct of the past and to prevent future immoral conduct from occurring again. As long as the FF companies don’t collaborate in trying to develop a code of conduct globally, they are responsible and thus guilty of the negative effects of FF in responsibility as blameworthiness and forward- looking responsibility to prevent bad things from happening. Inditex’s founder Amancio Ortega will become the richest man on earth in 2017, still a man like Mostafa speaks out to buyers that bargain for the lowest price. Businesses are

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pg. 30

<sup>101</sup> Lu, C. 2013, pg. 64

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Van Luijk, H. 2011, pg. 7

geared towards profit, not evil.<sup>104</sup> However, if their human conduct is evil because they gear towards profit, the companies are geared towards evil.

Here we see how the different stakeholders are intertwined with each other and what effect this has on their responsibility: consumers can't be held morally (attributive) responsible for their behavior due to a lack of collective agreement. The government however, is responsible because they don't ensure that there will be such a collective agreement. Also, companies are situated within societies so regulation within a society needs to be clear to them. However, companies have a moral obligation to prevent the immoral conduct to happen in the future (and that has happened in the past to occur again), but this can only happen if they adopt an ethical management program, a business ethics program that leaves no room for voluntary obligations. Nevertheless, they stick to CSR regulation that is voluntary. Therefore, companies are morally responsible, with a responsibility- as- blameworthiness and forward- looking responsibility. In the next chapter, taking into account these different responsibilities and how they are related to each other, I will consider (cooperative) possibilities to prevent or to reduce the negative effects imposed by the FF industry.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pg. 9

## **Chapter 4: Working towards justice in the fast fashion industry**

*“The question is not what circumstances have made of us. The question is what we make of what circumstances have made of us.” - Sartre*

Now we have come to the final chapter, where I will look at some possible steps in the direction of more justice in the FF industry. What are we going to do with what the circumstances – that are imposed on us by globalization – have made of us?

### **4.1 Working towards justice in fast fashion: in general**

The garment industry has served as ‘a stepping stone to development’ in many countries globally, and it still does so in many less developed and developing countries.<sup>105</sup> About 60 to 75 million people are employed in the textile, clothing and footwear sector worldwide (in 2000 only 20 million people were employed in the industry!), and their numbers are still growing.<sup>106</sup> If this industry would succeed in switching to a more ethical, fair and social way of operating that reduces environmental impact and promotes social equity, this could lead to large-scale beneficial effects for the developing countries involved. This underlines the importance to consider possibilities to change the present way of operating of the garment industry.

As multinational corporations, global clothing brands are extremely powerful in the garment industry and they thus have the power to create and introduce changes. As we have seen, the fast fashion model (and the enormous increase in clothing production as a resultant) is a phenomenon of recent years, and so is the whole idea of “business ethics”. In our current (and past) capitalist system there seems to be little room for “ethics”. Global justice asks and even demands us to enter a new “post-capitalistic” era. The garment industry (or: the FF industry) could work as a good example- case in trying to bring justice in globalization’s flaws.

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<sup>105</sup> Stotz, L. & Kane, G. *Facts on The Global Garment Industry*: 2015, pg. 1

<<https://www.cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/factsheets/general-factsheet-garment-industry-february-2015.pdf>>

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

What the parties that I have mentioned in this thesis, namely governments, businesses and consumers, seem to be missing is critical self- reflection and a long-term perceptive, and policy in which market forces and profit seeking are less central and less important than durability and social values. As Singer stated: a revolution in communication technology has led to a global audience. There are more stakeholders and thus there is a need for *new* collective agreements that expect and demand a global society that is motivated to strive for wellbeing of its citizens, durability and social justice, and that enables people to condemn and boycott those companies that don't fulfill their attributive moral responsibility.

In our society clothes embody more than just a cover for our physical bodies, they are also a measure of our status and our basic values and culture. A new fashion ethic is needed that will be about affirming more social and humane values and that strengthens our hope and aspirations for a different kind of world.<sup>107</sup>

When we strive towards more justice in the garment industry a future approach should be *dialectic*, it should be a cooperation of consumers, governments and businesses. Consumers have the power to force desirable values upon companies, governments have the power to set laws and regulations, to take fiscal measures and by doing so to force a more ethical way upon companies or they can help and support these companies to change their way of producing for example by means of subsidies. In my recommendations I will embrace this dialectic.

So what does (global) justice means in the FF industry? Our post- capitalistic era needs serious reflecting on the values we want to embrace as a global society. The FF dilemmas clearly show that there is a conflict between the value of (ever-growing) *profit* and the value of contemporary and future *human rights*. In line with this thesis, global justice would mean that more emphasis is placed on human rights than on financial and economical arguments. This means the FF companies, as multi- national companies, along with governments and consumers need to realize a transition from a focus on materialized profit to value creation and wellbeing for a global society.

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<sup>107</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 54



## 4.2 Working towards justice in fast fashion: consumers

Clothes are extremely important for people because they embody our social position. They are important for the way we experience and express our social status, our sexuality, age or ethnicity.<sup>108</sup> Clothes have become part of our *everyday aesthetics* that help us transcend the mundane.<sup>109</sup> They are an expression of creativity and are a vital part of the human experience.<sup>110</sup> A new fashion ethic should be about affirming social and human values. It would value reduction of environmental impact and promoting social equity through the fashioning of garments.<sup>111</sup> To stimulate and create such an ethic we should be critical towards what social and human values we ourselves embrace.

Kant argues that human beings shouldn't ever be used as means-to-an-end, for they possess a rational nature. This rational nature desires good will, and good will can't be developed if a person has no concern for non human- beings and the environment.<sup>112</sup> Thus, this implies that it is natural to humans to care about others, and it is our highest worth. It makes us human and it gives us free will. Arendt has warned us what will happen if that free will doesn't exist anymore: we can be manipulated in thinking that other's opinions are our own. We can think that actions that impose negative effects on others (and the environment) are rightful actions.<sup>113</sup> It is important to be aware of one's own values and what values, for example, FF companies' advertisements are imposing on you. A free will is a will that works according to one's own values.

There are two ways in which consumers contribute to the negative effects of FF: by over-consuming and by (quickly) disposing of their clothes. In a global society human rights are embraced. For that society to be just there needs to be collective agreement on values and actions that support human rights globally. For consumers this means that if they want to work according to their own values, they should be critical towards their consumption (that endangered human rights), taking into account that when buying clothes from multi- national companies, they stand into

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<sup>108</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 54

<sup>109</sup> Saito, Y. 2015, pg. 10

<sup>110</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 54

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 56

<sup>112</sup> Johnson, R. 2014, pg. 8

<sup>113</sup> In the "*Banality of Evil*" Hannah Arendt examines why many people that were involved in unethical conduct in the Second World War, thought they were doing the right thing, because they did "what was asked of them to do".

relation with people who produced them somewhere at the bottom of the supply chain. Demands of consumers have an effect on the conditions and the wages of workers thousands of miles away.<sup>114</sup> This means that, even when undesired, consumers impose effects on others by their consumption behavior. Being more critical then means to prefer quality to quantity, rejecting the reigning imperative of variety in clothes, striving for longevity and a more timeless design that moves away from fast moving trends.<sup>115</sup>

Brands respond to consumer demands and the most powerful tool consumers have is choosing where to spend their money. Of course, privileged middle- class consumers have more discretionary income, choice and ability to absorb costs – they can change their clothing purchases more quickly than those who earn a minimum wage.<sup>116</sup> Manufacturers and retailers are sensitive to the need to maintain their public image. If companies violate human rights, consumers with a free will have the power to criticize them and also to stimulate governments to look into those practices and condemn and correct them, using, for example, international human rights treaties as reference point.

A final point worth noting: I have described before that consumers can't be held attributively (morally) responsible, for this kind of responsibility exists of several conditions that are not within their reach (i.e. lack of a collective agreement, power to enable change). This cannot be said about governments and global companies in the garment industry. They can actually influence conditions for garment production and are therefore directly responsible for these conditions. There is no excuse for them why they should not take their responsibility to improve them.

### **4.3 Working towards justice in fast fashion: governments**

According to Pogge affluent states (e.g. governments) impose harm on others because of unfair development- advantages that resulted from the past. In a global society negative and positive duties should be applied globally. Thus, since governments have a stringent negative duty to not impose harm on others, they should critically look at

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<sup>114</sup> Stotz, L. & Kane, G. *Facts on The Global Garment Industry*: 2015, pg. 19

<<https://www.cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/factsheets/general-factsheet-garment-industry-february-2015.pdf>>

<sup>115</sup> Schor, J. B. 2002, pg. 54

<sup>116</sup> Brock, G. 2015, pg. 33

how contemporary politics are doing so. The garment industry is a *buyer driven* chain: this means that big retailers, marketers and traders drive the market (i.e. they determine where to produce, what to produce and at what prices).<sup>117</sup> As we have seen in the case of FF, this creates serious moral dilemmas: because FF companies are momentarily solely focused on financial performance, the negative effects of FF will only be reinforced. Democratic governments negotiate for the liberalization of markets (and they therefore play a key role in facilitating globalization).

To enable themselves to act morally, governments should be self-reflective about their values and economical policy. Is *market liberalization* of higher value than that of *human rights*? Governments have substantial and attributive responsibility; this means that they have the responsibility to look after their citizens' interest and welfare and they can be held morally responsible if not doing so. By emphasizing financial and economical interests and neglecting their people's welfare, they set a wrong example and stimulate consumers' behavior towards over-consuming and waste. It is therefore important that this critical self-reflection exists: people need coherent and plausible normative views on the function and purpose of our social practices and institutions; based on what is learnt from past trials and on failures and successes of past political struggles.<sup>118</sup> In about the last 15 years most of the (west)-European countries have shifted from a 'socially involved' policy and enhancing the welfare state to policies that give leeway to free market processes. This has led to the political protection of the financial industry since the global economic crash<sup>119</sup>, specifically in the policy-making domain of financial regulation.<sup>120</sup> This has had considerable effects on the way of operating of both governments and companies, on the mentality of governors and consumers, on the environment and the work/ living circumstances of people, especially in developing countries. The FF industry demonstrates this clearly.

This shift from protecting citizens and striving for a welfare state to a free market policy embodies a short-term vision. An exemplary statement is that of Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister, when he says: "*vision is like an elephant that stands*

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<sup>117</sup> Stotz, L. & Kane, G. *Facts on The Global Garment Industry*: 2015, pg. 5

<<https://www.cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/factsheets/general-factsheet-garment-industry-february-2015.pdf>>

<sup>118</sup> Lu, C. 2013, pg. 65

<sup>119</sup> In 2007

<sup>120</sup> Kalaitzake, M. *Political Capture by the Financial Industry*: TNI: 2015 pg. 17-27

<[https://www.tni.org/files/download/tni\\_state-of-power-2015.pdf](https://www.tni.org/files/download/tni_state-of-power-2015.pdf)>

*in your way and hinders your sight*".<sup>121</sup> He deliberately renounces a long term vision, which opens the way for short term thinking. Financial- economic considerations predominate, and long- term policy that focuses on durability and social values is impeded. This is a dead end street that will lead to ever- increasing growth and exploitation of the earth and its people. A government that is globally just should in a long-term vision and policy weaken the importance of market liberalization and focus on durability and welfare of their people. The agreements on controlling climate change and on international labor policies are already a step into the right way. However, the moral dilemmas that arose with the FF industry call for a more active and drastic international policy in the garment industry: by setting rules and regulations to avoid undesirable environmental consequences and working conditions, by taking fiscal measures (e.g. extra tax on cheap garment) to discourage thoughtless and unlimited buying and waste of clothes, by informing and educating consumers towards more ethical buying behavior, by boycotting or otherwise punishing garment producers who do not live up to the rules and by supporting developing countries to solve the local problems resulting from the garment industry. Their intentions and resolutions must no longer be non-binding, but should be part of their government policy and budget.

Just like companies will switch to more ethically inspired ways of operating when they open themselves for the opinion and criticism of their costumers, governments should encourage their citizens to speak out to them too. It might be worthwhile to create independent groups of people and centers of expertise that, in cooperation with government, will critically look at current events in the global garment industry and what political policies retain positive change. A group of “*avant-garde* political agents, who struggle for progressive political transformations in the garment industry and similar branches of (global) industry. Multi-disciplined groups with creative scientists, lawyers, philosophers and artists that study on the extension of existing knowledge and techniques and stimulate and initiate fresh experiments, in order to develop new perspectives, to ask unprecedented questions and to pave the way for development of alternative paradigms.<sup>122</sup> There are many summits on climate change or economical issues, the serious negative effects of

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<sup>121</sup> Korteweg, A. *Reportage: de liberaal Rutte verzet zich tegen visie*: 2013  
<<http://www.volkskrant.nl/politiek/reportage-de-liberaal-in-rutte-verzet-zich-tegen-visie~a3502974/>>

<sup>122</sup> Lu, C. 2013, pg. 65

globalization (of the garment industry) ask for summits about justice in the garment industry.

These groups could look at the effectiveness of existing international treaties that are meant to ensure good (future) environmental regulations and human rights in labor that function on a macro- level. The International Labor Organization (ILO) for instance, is suitable for recognition of fundamental minimum labor conditions, but it lacks an effective enforcement system. Human rights treaties do, but they are complex and expensive and therefore often not effective for those who need them.<sup>123</sup> Thus, they don't function on a meso- or micro level and can therefore be ineffective. These groups can work as mediators that decrease the gap between international governmental policy and local policy. Working together with governments these groups and centers of expertise could gather information from local NGO's and people working in the industry and from here they could organize summits and design suitable and ethically acceptable local and context driven policies. If governments would manage to join forces and would support funds and groups to investigate and advise on the effect of the FF industry, they would be one step closer in developing measures that will bring more justice.

#### **4.4 Working towards justice in fast fashion: companies**

In a post- capitalistic and just global world companies should integrate environmental and social matters with those of financial performance in their company policies. Current ways of companies to do so are CSR policies. However, a CSR approach is top- down, a company decides what issue it wants to address, for example contributing to education, healthcare or reducing pollution. But a study of Mara del Baldo and Paola Demartini shows that:

*“The international and national guidelines in CSR and sustainability are often both too “far” from the specific culture, needs and expectations of the numerous diverse local environments, as well as characterized by a lack of efficiency at the local area - and therefore there is a need for “contingent” and “situational” approaches in terms*

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<sup>123</sup> Stotz, L. & Kane, G. *Facts on The Global Garment Industry*: 2015, pg. 14  
<<https://www.cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/factsheets/general-factsheet-garment-industry-february-2015.pdf>>

*of instruments and actions. Thus territorial responsibility and the forms of local governance in which it is realized represent an effective response. Though developed at the meso levels, it is initiated by individual businesses (for and/or non-profit) and public institutions capable of creating CSR networks, departing from a strong social cohesion and common values”.*<sup>124</sup>

What the study implies is that there is a need for a more bottom- up approach, with the specific cultures’ needs and expectations in the center, and not those of the cooperation. To come back to Kant: people shouldn’t be used as a means to an end, even if that end is profit. Business ethics stress the importance of giving people within companies a voice, and to stimulate and help them to be critical. In a global character this means that also people at the end of the supply chain should be able to express their needs and criticism. Coding should therefore be applied globally, but for that to happen the wageworkers in the developing countries should first be enabled to express their voices. This way governments and companies can see what occurs, and is needed in the countries that are involved in the supply chain, both at the top and the bottom of the chain. I think that companies will have major advantages if they act more ethically, by holding local offices that employees can go to with their needs, suggestions and criticism (anonymously) that are run by locals and that can work together with local institutions. Companies should be more open to the idea of designing their CSR policies according to different countries’ needs if they really want to live up to those CSR policies. This approach seems expensive at first sight, but I think it will be more effective and cost- efficient eventually.

By closing their eyes for the needs of the developing countries they will maintain their profits at a short term, but eventually they will perish because of exhaustion of natural resources and because the growing consumers’ sense that a more ethical approach is necessary and that the present way of operating can no longer be tolerated.

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<sup>124</sup> del Baldo, M. & Demartini, P. 2012, pg. 4

#### **4.5 Working towards justice in fast fashion: a new approach**

It is time to come back to what I have said about a *dialectic* approach before. Working towards a more just FF system requires cooperation among consumers, governments and garment companies all together. What is missing among these parties is a certain self-criticism. Thus, working towards a just global society starts with the recognition that people should have a voice and possess a free will. It is important in a global world, with more stakeholders involved, to encourage people to speak out and think for themselves. It goes further than just an acknowledgement of people's rights *because* they are human: it will exactly empower that what ultimately *makes* them human. As I have proposed, governments can do so by developing and supporting a group of “*avant-garde* political agents”, who struggle for progressive political transformations in the garment industry and similar branches of (global) industry, and that are allowed to criticize and alarm governments when current political policies and existing treaties are hindering those progressive transformations. They can mediate between governments, companies and citizens, and therefore advise on policies that are designed from a *bottom-up* approach and might be more effective (and doing justice to a global “diverse” world). Different countries need different approaches. This network can advise governments in affluent countries how to invest in companies that are willing to change. It can help companies to encourage everyone in the supply chain to express their needs and criticism. And it can encourage consumers to express their values in their consumption and how to act accordingly.

## **Conclusion**

The globalization of garment industry has serious negative consequences for the countries involved in it. In the affluent countries it has led to a consumers' mentality and buying behavior that stimulates waste. In the developing countries it has resulted in severe pollution and very bad working conditions for the garment workers. There is no adequate international law and justice to stop or correct this and hardly any measures are taken to change this situation. From a moral and ethical point of view this situation is not acceptable and steps need to be taken to prevent and to counteract the negative consequences of the globalization of the garment industry.

All parties involved; nations, international communities, companies and consumers (though moderately), will have to accept and take their responsibility for improving the present situation. The main responsibility lies with nations, international communities and companies. Consumers are subtly manipulated and tempted to buy in such a degree, that they cannot be expected to contribute much to helping to solve the problem. Also, a 'collective agreement' is missing that would make them responsible to change their consumer behavior. However, I have argued from an eco- feminist perspective, being critical and being aware of the supply chain (and so the people whom they stand into relation to), is an expression of free will and thus of a valuable and unique human ability.

The international forums and national governments of the affluent countries will have to take measures to solve this global problem, by setting rules and regulations to avoid undesirable environmental consequences and working conditions, by taking fiscal measures (e.g. extra tax on cheap garment) to discourage thoughtless and unlimited buying and waste of clothes, by informing and educating consumers towards more ethical buying behavior, by boycotting or otherwise punishing garment producers who do not live up to the rules and by supporting developing countries to solve the local problems resulting from the garment industry. Their intentions and resolutions must no longer be non-binding, but should be part of their government policy and budget. The governments of the developing countries involved will have to be cooperative in applying the rules, fighting corruption, pollution and unacceptable working conditions for their people and to create attractive conditions for companies who are willing to produce garment in an ethical and durable manner.



Companies should make ethical behavior and durability part of their company policy. Being a part of society they can and should be advised in achieving this by governments and other relevant bodies and the ones who seriously and manifestly do so should be encouraged and favored by the governments of both affluent and developing countries and by the international non-governmental institutions involved. It is important that companies enable their workers to speak out to them, and ultimately to help them to conduct ethical behavior. In a global world this means that people all through the supply chain should be enabled and encouraged to express their needs and complaints. Holding local offices where workers can go to and that communicate with local authorities or institutions will be a step in the right direction.

As I have proposed in the last chapter of this thesis, a group of independent “*avant-garde* political agents” that is supported and subsidized by governments and companies can work as a mediator between governments, companies, workers and consumers. They will embody a dialectic way of designing new policy that will be more context- driven and locally appropriate.

Different countries need different approaches. This is also a valuable message globalization learns us: we live in a global “diverse” world, where people are equal in their unalienable human rights. People have different needs and therefore everyone should be enabled to have a voice. The fast fashion tendency has directed the garment industry into a dead end street. A more ethical approach of their industry is the only way out and would eventually be a benefit for everyone. A first step towards possible solutions is a critical self- reflection on what visions and values the stakeholders themselves embrace, in order to come to a paradigm-shift that will result in morally and ethically sound policies and ways of operating.

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