



CALL FOR PAPERS

Journal of Global Slavery
Special Issue: Fashion and Slavery

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Without an analysis of enslavement at the very centre of its operation, can the study of fashion, ever really be critical? Can it contemplate how fashion commodities, communication, and experience actually contribute to our cultural life?

This Special Issue of the *Journal of Global Slavery*, guest edited by Royce Mahawatte and in collaboration with the Bonn Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), places enslavement and other examples of ‘asymmetric dependencies’ at the centre of how fashion industries, fashion cultures, and fashioned embodiment are understood. The term ‘asymmetric dependency’ is ‘the ability of one actor to control the actions and the access to resources of another’ and it acknowledges the full range of unequal labour relations across history that have supported fashion systems.¹ The role of enslavement (and the subsequent denial of it); indentured labour arrangements; unpaid work; zero-hour contracts; punitive contracts (albeit relatively high-earning ones), and sweatshop labour deserve a place in our analysis. Unequal arrangements are essential, both historically, and in the present day, to the existence of fashion systems, and perhaps even essential to the idea of ‘being fashionable’ itself. Whether on the body, or on the page or screen, one of the main features of fashion discourse is to obscure the legacy of the enslaved, and often racialised, labour that bring fashioned products into being.

The transatlantic slave trade, however, was the bedrock of western fashion systems, from providing the raw materials, outside the national boundary, to the very financing of these industries, within them, during and after abolition. Enslavement has also been used to code fashion communication. The language of asymmetric dependency often became a part of fashion registers: references to the trope of ‘the slave’ are extensive. The phrase ‘slave to fashion’, often used in relation to women consumers, is a common cliché in fashion media of the nineteenth century. ‘Mameluke sleeves’, ‘slave-girl earrings’ described styles in period editorial. Many scholars have been reluctant to look at the close relationships between fashion

1. Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler and, Stephan Conermann, ‘On Asymmetrical Dependency: Concept Paper 2021’ (Bonn Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies, 2021); Coleman, James S. 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Hirschman, Albert O. 1970. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

discourses and the shadow of enslavement, inadvertently making the study of fashion into the ‘academic’ armature of the obfuscation found in the fashion system itself.

There have been some advances in this area though, often to be found outside of the traditional study of fashion, and there are some notable advances. Monica Miller’s *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the styling of Black diasporic identity* (2009), Sarah Marcketti and Elena Karpova’s *The Dangers of Fashion: Towards Ethical and Sustainable Solutions* (2020). But there is room for further development.

We ask scholars from Social Sciences, Cultural, Historical (Ancient and Modern), Literary, Media, Legal, and studies of fashion to explore the contention that there is an intrinsic connection between fashion systems and asymmetric dependencies, and that this link is obscured by the type of storytelling that takes place in fashion media and culture. We are particularly interested in including work from less represented disciplines: Ancient, Byzantine History, and Legal Studies.

For this Special Issue, we invite submissions of 6,000 word papers on any relevant period of history or on contemporary sources and situations. 500-1,000 word reviews of relevant scholarly publications or cultural work are also of interest.

Topics can be on, but are not restricted to:

Fashion (Critical) Studies and Dependency Studies: ways of thinking about fashion and enslavement

Methods for investigating fashion systems and forms of dependency.

Fashion production and asymmetric dependencies; intensified labour and fashion.

Geographies of enslavement, trafficking, and fashion culture.

White supremacy, labour, and fashion cultures.

‘Elite slavery’, modelling, punitive contracts, and the control of embodiment

‘Free’ labour, internships/ work experience/ exploitation. Fashion industries and asymmetries of power.

Storytelling, representation, fashion media and the enslaved body. How dress and fashion are communicated to avoid associations with asymmetrical dependency.

Enslavement as a fashion fantasy.

Fashion, race discourse, and forms of asymmetric dependency.

Dress laws and enslavement.

The construction of gender/variance in relation to fashion, dress, and asymmetrical dependencies.

Enslaved people as fashion accessories/fashionable entourages.

Fashioned embodiment and asymmetrical dependencies in sex work.

Servant cultures and the role of dress, fashion, and embodiment.

Creative, community, national, and regional responses to legacies of enslavement connected to fashioned embodiment or fashion production or communication.

We are particularly interested in scholarly work that explores clearly defined and contextualised instances of asymmetric dependency (as opposed to generalised or decontextualised fashion images/communication about enslavement etc). BCDSS referee the submissions and will offer translation support where necessary. Articles to be published in this *JGS*’s special issue must not consist of previously published scholarly work.

Please send a 250 word abstract and a 100 word biog to Dr Royce Mahawatte, r.mahawatte@csm.arts.ac.uk by 10 May 2023 (deadline for final article submission 30 December 2023). This address can also be used for any enquires.