FAST FASHION'S HIDDEN CHAIN: FROM EXPLOITED ENVIRONMENT IN BANGLADESH TO WASTE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Fast fashion has established a worldwide chain of environmental unfairness whereby the Global North receives the rewards of over consumption whilst the ecological costs of production and wastes are transferred to the Global South. Despite the previous studies that explored the problems of industrial pollution in Bangladesh and the effect of second-hand garments to Africa and Latin America, there is little literature that links these two extremities of the fast-fashion cycle as one, systemic environmental detriment. The gap in this paper is that it asks the question: How do the Global North global fast-fashion model allow the Global North to externalise its environmental costs by manufacturing pollution of garments in Bangladesh and dumping of textile waste across the Global South? In this work, a qualitative approach based on secondary data of peer-reviewed articles, international environmental reports, and NGO research and waste-trade databases are used to prove that brands like H&M, Zara, and Shein choose Bangladesh as a mass production location because of the low environmental standards, where untreated dye effluents, heavy metals, chemical discharge, and microfibre pollution severely harm the rivers like Buriganga and Turag. These garments are sold as reused after brief use in Europe and North America, but most end up in nations such as Ghana, Kenya, Chile, Pakistan, and India in countries with fragile ecosystems, where they clog the market and release methane on decomposition, pollute the soil and groundwater, and are openly burnt, exacerbating the toxic air pollution. Such environmental hotspots as the Kantamanto Market of Ghana and the Atacama Desert of Chile reveal how waste colonialism is perpetuated in the frames of recycling and charity. With such mechanisms as Basel Convention and UNEP and UNCTAD systems, the problem of textile waste is still not properly controlled because of its loopholes and poor control. The paper finishes by stating that fast fashion is structurally exploitative and unsustainable in terms of environmental consequences, which demand more rigorous regulation of waste-trade, mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), transparent monitoring of textile movement, sustainable industrial standards, and better environmental regulation in developing countries.

Keywords: Fast fashion, waste colonialism, textile pollution, Bangladesh environment, Global South.

Introduction:

The Global North enjoys the benefits of consumption and the burdens of the environmental pollution by the Global South disproportionately distributed by the scheme of fast fashion. The brands of H&M, Zara, and Shein, fueled by trends that come and go and their short-life clothes, have put up transnational supply chains that depend significantly on cheap manufacturing centers like Bangladesh. This model of production has made it possible to produce in high volumes at a high cost of ecological degradation. The rivers of Bangladesh such as the Buriganga and the Turag have already become sinkholes of untreated textile effluents, toxic dyes, heavy metals and microfibres and now once-important water sources have become biologically dead ecosystems. The laxity in the enforcement of the regulations, the lack of ability to treat the effluents, and the laxity in enforcing the environmental regulations are giving corporations incentives to externalize their pollution to the powerless community.

However, it is not only at the point of production where the environmental injustice ceases. As soon as clothes lose their seasonal popularity in European and North American markets, which often is after just a few uses, they are corralled under the banner of the so-called recycling and humanitarian donation. But a large percentage of this second hand clothing that has been virtually exported is actually textile waste that cannot be reused or resold. Consequently, the dumping of old fast fashion fall in the hands of Ghana, Kenya, Chile, Pakistan, and India, among others. Landfills are swamped, rivers and soil are polluted with synthetic fibres remains and chemical refuse, waste disposal activities such as open burning emits poisonous gasses and greenhouse gases. Examples of such environmental hotspots include Kantamanto Market in Accra and the Atacama Desert in Chile which represents the horrific legacy of clothing waste.

Although the world has international regulatory mechanisms such as Basel Convention, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) projects and sustainable textile policies, the management of transboundary textile waste is full of loopholes. The exportation of wastes is being carried on under the name of reproducible goods whereby the western countries and the multinational retailers escape the jurisdiction of the law. The environmental laws of Bangladesh such as the industrial effluent compliance are weak in enforcement, corporate pressure and lack of adequate infrastructures.

This study explores the ways in which the fast fashion industry organizes a system of ecological inequality, in which sustainability discourse covers a chain of exploitation: production pollution in Bangladesh, and dumping of waste in the Global South. The research identifies the imperative need to increase global accountability, such as longer producer responsibility, waste-trade prohibitions, and more environmental protection based on climate justice, to reduce the frequency of current international governance failures and to address the lack of environmental regulations in Bangladesh. Finally, this paper contends that the model of fast fashion is unsustainable and it should undergo radical policy overhaul to break this devastating environmental cycle.

Literature review

Current literature on fast fashion records in details the environmental impact of fast fashion especially at the production phase in the manufacturing centres of the Global South like Bangladesh. The studies by Angel Ivy Mariam Anak Jimmy et al. (2025) and Salsabila Andi Jani & Sidik Jatmika (2022) show that because of mass production of garments aimed at Global North demand, a significant amount of water pollution, the release of chemical effluents, microfibres, and greenhouse gas emissions caused by poor implementation of environmental regulations is a primary consequence, even in the conditions of the formal legal frameworks. Empirical research of the textile industry of Bangladesh reveals multiple pollutions of rivers, including the Buriganga and Turag, due to industrial wastewater discharged untreated and toxic dyes (Jani & Jatmika, 2022). It is also scientifically proven that synthetic clothes are a significant source of microplastic pollutants, and De Falco et al. (2019) claimed that one of the principal sources of primary microplastics in the global water environment is the washing of synthetic clothes. Collectively, this literature corroborates the fact that the environmental degradation is structurally entrenched in the fast-fashion production paradigm, where minimisation of costs and high production rate, encourages the avoidance of regulatory issues and environmental non-compliance.

There is a parallel body of literature on the post-consumption part and the topic of how fast-fashion waste is being exported out of the Global North to play as second-hand clothing and recycling in the Global South. The works by Mensah (2023) and Kilbridge (2025) capture the information regarding the countries like Ghana receiving huge amounts of low-quality fast-fashion waste, and a substantial part of it turns into immediate landfill waste, where it is utilized

to cause flooding, open burning, and soil and air pollution. Similar case-based studies of Chile, India, and Pakistan demonstrate how the waste textiles brought there overwhelm local systems of waste-handling, driving environmental hotspots, like the Atacama Desert, and informal recycling clusters in South Asia (Kilbridge, 2025; Kabir et al., 2022). Researchers theorise this process as waste colonialism, meaning that environmental and economic costs are dumped on weaker economies via regulatory laxity and trade imbalances (Mensah, 2023; Quiroz, 2024). Although various global organizations, including the Basel Convention, UNEP evaluations, and UNCTAD reports, admit the environmental hazards of textile waste trade, the current literature reports constantly refer to the lack of compliance, non-binding responsibilities, and corporate non-liability to conduct as key governance failures (Peake and Kenner, 2020; Olivar Aponte et al., 2024). Nonetheless, the literature is still disjointed, as there is limited integrative analysis between production-stage pollution and waste-stage dumping as inter-related elements of one transnational environmental injustice- representing a definite research gap that is being addressed in the study.

In the literature, the notion is consistently formed that fast fashion has systemic environmental and labour damages at both production, consumption, and waste disposal phases, which is disproportionately impactful on countries of the Global South. The severe river pollution of untreated textile effluents in Bangladesh is recorded by the empirical studies which revealed that the excessive BOD, COD, dissolved metals, and toxic PFAS contamination was higher than the international thresholds (Munna, 2019; IPEN & ESDO, 2024). Raw material manufacturing, especially cotton farming, has a high cost of water and pesticides, and synthetic fabrics like polyester cause a marine microplastic crisis through microfiber leakage and bioaccumulation in food webs (International Science Council, 2024; Narisu, 2024; Greenpeace International, 2025). After consumption, the global second-hand clothing market outsources the waste of textiles to countries such as Ghana, where the close half of the imported clothes transform into toxic waste, and air, water, and soil become contaminated (Greenpeace Africa & Greenpeace Germany, 2024). Similar itemsParallel scholarship emphasizes harsh labour rights abuse in the fast fashion supply chains, such as unsafe working conditions, anti-union behaviors, gendered exploitation, and industrial tragedies such as the Tazreen Fashions fire in Bangladesh (Basirulla, 2024; Ain O Salish Kendra, 2012; Makhdum et al., 2024). Circular economy models, recycling, and extended producer responsibility have been suggested as the solutions, but current scientific studies note that there is a massive lack of bindable rules, scalability, and corporate responsibility (EPA, 2024; Dutt, 2024; Ellen MacArthur Foundation,

2023), which points to the necessity to develop binding law as an approach to address fast fashion as a single environmental and human rights problem.

Research Methodology

In this research, a qualitative research methodology has been adopted that is doctrinal and analytical in nature, and it explores the transnational environment impact of the fast fashion industry, especially concerning industrial pollution in Bangladesh, as well as the dumping of post-consumer textile waste in other developing nations. This research has been entirely reliant on secondary sources, as it is not possible, necessary, or feasible to conduct primary research on international frameworks, transnational waste, etc.

The doctrinal part of the approach entails a critical evaluation of international instruments such as the Basel Convention, guidelines by UNEP, reports by UNCTAD, and the rules of the WTO trade, to identify the scope, limitation, and enforceability of such regulations in regulating textile waste and harm to the environment. The domestic environment law of Bangladesh, which is Environmental Conservation Act, 1995, and Environment Conservation Rules, 1997, is scrutinized to identify its efficiency in regulating textile pollution.

The analytical part uses the technique of comparative case study analysis to track the life cycle of garments from the fast fashion sector. The case studies are carried out in Bangladesh (production phase), Ghana, Chile, India, and Pakistan (disposal phase). The reason for choosing the case studies is that there have been cases documented with serious pollution from textile waste in these nations. The sources used here are peer-reviewed journals, government publications, UN reports, investigative journalism, as well as reports from non-governmental organizations such as The OR Foundation and Centre for Science & Environment.

Additionally, it applies content analysis to the analysis of policy documents, sustainability reporting of transnational fashion giants, as well as international environment reviews with the aim of discovering tendencies within cost externalization, avoidance, as well as green-washing practices. Databases on waste trade, as well as UN statistics, are employed to back findings qualitively with a tendency perspective on cloth waste trade.

In conclusion, with this methodology, a systemic evaluation of fast fashion as an issue of environmental justice is made by connecting pollution at the production stage with waste

dumping at the post-consumption stage, while noting the failings of regulations and governance systems that result in pollution being displaced from the Global North to the Global South.

DISCUSSION

Transnational Chain of Environmental Destruction

Fast fashion has developed a network of global environmental destruction where the profits and consumer gains are centred on the Global North with the ecological misery and waste dumped onto the Global South. This transnational chain starts with the outsourcing of the production of garments to such countries as Bangladesh who are chosen due to low cost of labour, loose environmental regulations and an export-oriented economy. The high volume, fast model applied by multinational companies like H&M, Zara, and Shein requires constant production cycles, which results in the overuse of water, synthetic materials, dyes, and chemicals. The textile sector in Bangladesh alone releases millions of litres of the untreated industrial effluents into the large water bodies daily, polluting the Buriganga, Turag, and Shitalakhya rivers. Chromium, cadmium, and lead are some of the heavy metals that build up in water and soil leading to loss of biodiversity, killing of fish, and destruction of livelihood systems of the community which rely on such rivers. Garment factories that are coal-powered also pollute the air, which contributes to the already dangerous urban conditions of Bangladesh.

The following phase of this chain is experienced following the temporary phase of consumption in the western economies. Fast fashion products such as tooled to be worn out in a few wears are soon discarded as trash. In some way packaged as either recycling or donation of charity, Western countries export stupendous amounts of used clothing, some of which is non-recycleable textile waste, to the countries of the Global South. This is condoned in the pretext of second-hand markets, however statistics show that as much as 40 per cent of this imported-garments cannot be reused or resold. Therefore, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, India, and Chile have turned into the end point of a garbage pipeline covered by the discourse of reuse and circularity.

The next stage of this chain is observed after the temporary stage of consumption in the western economies. The fast fashion products like tooled to wear out in a few wears are disposed as trash within a short time. One way or another packed away as either recycling or giving it as donation to charity, Western countries sell off magnificent volumes of used textile clothing, some of which cannot be recycled, to the nations of the Global South. This is tolerated in its

name of second-hand markets but statistics reveal that up to 40 per cent of this imported-garments cannot be reused or resold. Hence, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, India, and Chile have become the final destination of a garbage pipeline that is handled by the rhetoric of reuse and circularity.

Accordingly, fast fashion is considered a network of waste colonialism, in which the Global South countries not only have to endure the garbage of production, but also serve as informal landfills to the waste of the Northern consumers. The structure is not broken since the expenses are externalized both geographically and politically to countries that have less influence in the world economy. This transnational chain is thus not a mere by-product of globalization, but a deliberate economic structure that favors corporate profit and Western consumption at the cost of environmental justice and ecological integrity in the Global South.

Waste Colonialism and the Global South as a Dumping Ground

Waste colonialism is the act in which Global North nations dump their post-consumer textile waste in the Global South in the pretext of reuse or donation or recycling. What makes this trade sound as a charitable and sustainable one, the truth of the matter is that poor-quality, synthetic fast-fashion clothing is shipped by the volumes much higher than the Global South markets can absorb, which turn into an environmental hot spot. The case studies below explain the negative impact of this transnational waste pipeline on ecosystems and communities.

1. **Kantamanto Market, Accra (Ghana)**

Kantamanto Market in Accra is a large second-hand clothing marketplace in the world, and it receives an estimated 15 million used clothes weekly (EU, UK, North America) (OR Foundation, 2022)[1]. Though they are also known as second-hand goods, research shows that almost 40 percent of these imports are unusable textile waste that cannot be reused or recycles mostly due to low-quality fast-fashion fabrics and synthetic blends (BBC Africa Eye, 2021)[2]. This disposed waste submerges already weak waste management in Accra, including informal dumps, blockage of drainage networks, and open burning emitting toxic emissions, heavy metals, and microplastics into the nearby communities (UNDP Ghana, 2021)[3]. Investigations

[1] The OR Foundation, *Dead White Man's Clothes: Global Fashion Waste in Ghana* (2022)
[2] BBC Africa Eye, *Ghana's Toxic Fashion Waste*, *BBC News* (Nov. 8, 2021)
[3] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Ghana, *Waste Management and Urban Flooding in Accra* (2021)

by the OR Foundation track the movement of discarded cloths into the Odaw River and Korle Lagoon that directly enter the urban floods and cause some of the most chronic environmental hotspots. The informal labor force of Kantamanto (kayayei head porters, textile sorters, community recyclers) face the majority of health consequences, including working with contaminated dust and inhaling smoke as well as encountering chemically treated fibers in their everyday activities (OR Foundation, 2022)[4]. The case demonstrates how the Global North system of fast-fashion consumption externalizes its ecological evils on the disadvantaged people in Ghana and Kantamanto is therefore an evident example of waste colonialism reinforced by the global textile business.

2. Atacama Desert, Iquique (Chile)

One of the most graphic images of the world-wide cosmetic waste in the fast-fashion industry has been the Atacama Desert in northern Chile, which receives an estimated 59,000 tons of used and unsold clothing each year through the Iquique Free Zone (ZOFRI), with the majority of it being of the United States, Europe, and Asia (Al Jazeera, 2021)[5]. Although some of these clothes are resold, it has been found that the other large share are dumped by illegal dumping in the desert as low-quality synthetic materials, including polyester, nylon, and acrylic, cannot be recycled or even processed safely (Reuters, 2021)[6]. As a result, massive piles of unwanted clothing cover the desert landscape, and the deliberate burning of textile piles releases hazardous smoke that contains chemical additives, dyes, and microfibers. According to the UNEP Textile Pollution Report (2021)[7], these dumpsites are also the source of significant soil pollution, hazardous dye dissipation, and methane gas emissions, which essentially turn the Atacama into a massive textile cemetery. The Atacama continues to be one of the biggest recycling sites in the world in terms of textile dumping despite the Chilean government realizing the scope of the problem due to a lack of strict regulations and waste-tracking programs (Al Jazeera, 2021; UNEP, 2021).[8]

3. Panipat Recycling Hub (India)

According to the Centre of Science and Environment (CSE, 2020), thousands of tons of post-

[4] The OR Foundation, *Environmental Impact of Global Second-Hand Clothing Trade in Accra* (2022)
[5] Al Jazeera, *Chile's Atacama Desert Becomes Dumping Ground for World's Fast Fashion*, AL JAZEERA (Nov. 12, 2021)
[6] Reuters, *Mountains of Discarded Clothes Choke Chile's Desert*, REUTERS (Nov. 11, 2021)
[7] United Nations Env't Programme, *Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain* (2021)
[8] Al Jazeera, supra note 5; United Nations Env't Programme, supra note 7.

consumption textile waste are shipped to Panipat, Haryana, the so-called Textile Recycling Capital of the World, each month from the US, UK, and EU[9]. The city turns this waste into inferior yarn, but the recycling process is mostly disorganized, poorly regulated, and highly polluting. When workers handle and shred synthetic clothing, microfibers, hazardous dyes, and particulate matter are released into the environment (Down To Earth, 2019)[10]. The field studies carried out by CSE show that the groundwater is heavily contaminated by dye effluent released by recycling clusters, and the wastes that are not used up in the garment industry are regularly burnt in open dump yards, and the resulting smoke is toxic as it contains volatile chemicals. Statistics collected by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB, 2021) [11]show that the vast majority of clothes imported to Panipat are made of low-quality polyester mixtures and mixed fibres, which are energy-consuming, inefficient, and harmful to the environment to recycle. Informal workers, women in the workforce, and impoverished residential settlements in the industrial zones are disproportionately affected by the ecological stress of such a system, which includes dust, contaminated air, contaminated groundwater, and hazardous working conditions. In order to further centralize the structural injustices of modern waste colonialism, Panipat demonstrates how the Global North's textile waste crisis is transferred to populations in the Global South under the guise of reusing waste materials.

4. Karachi & Lahore Informal Recycling Sector (Pakistan)

The rising pattern of Pakistan as an Australia, UK and EU destination by textile waste post-consumers is one trend where the nation has taken in a lot of waste in the guise of charity in the form of goods or re-usable second-hand clothes[12]. The Pak-EPA (2020) studies show that most of these incoming imports are in fact discarded as waste or downcycled. [13]In Karachi industrial area particularly the landhi, korangi regions, discarded synthetic clothing in large quantities is shredded into stuffing material under the Karachi industrial area, where the leachate is harming the soil and waterways. Pak-EPA and UNCTAD (2020) reported that Karachi waste-processing centers of textile waste contain extremely high amounts of azo dyes, chromium, lead, and formaldehyde in their wastewater that contaminate the drainage facilities and agricultural plots within the Karachi periphery.[14] In recycling centres in Lahore, informal

[9] Centre for Science & Environment, *Downcycling of Textile Waste in Panipat* (2020)
[10] Down To Earth, *India's Textile Recycling Hub Is Choking on Imported Waste* (2019)
[11] Central Pollution Control Board, *Assessment of Environmental Impact of Textile Waste Recycling* (2021)
[12] See *Pakistan Emerging as Global Hub for Textile Waste Imports*, Guardian (May 2022)
[13] Pak. Env't Prot. Agency, *Assessment of Imported Second-Hand Textile Goods* (2020)
[14] Pak. Env't Prot. Agency & U.N. Conf. on Trade & Dev. (UNCTAD), Textile Waste, Chemical Pollution and

workers often burn polyester-based clothing to recover metal zippers and buttons, which releases thick poisons and microplastics into domestic areas- an environmental threat that has been widely reported by The Guardian in their 2022 waste colonialism investigation in Pakistan. There is lax border security, absence of environmental examination, and loopholes in importation laws in Pakistan give the European and North American exporters the opportunity to directly dispose of the waste of textiles into the nation without the classification of it as a hazardous product[15]. Thus, Pakistan is a uncontrolled dumping nation, which takes the polluting effects, health hazards as well as economic cost of clearing textile waste, which is produced in the Global North.

5. Philippines - Illegal Waste Shipments

The Philippines has several times received illegally shipped textile-waste, falsely labeled as either a recycling or donationable used textile, including shipments of Canadian origin, South Korean, and Hong Kong, a trend that has been recorded in the 2020 report by the Basel Action Network on the South East Asian waste trade[16]. According to reports issued by the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR, 2020), it was common to have non-reusable garments, plastic-coated fabrics, chemically contaminated textiles, and synthetic materials in these containers and no possibility of recycling or safe processing. A part of this waste is then smuggled into the country where it is either discarded in the impoverished parts of the city in the night or burnt in informal dumpsites to clear space in the port warehouses exposing the community to toxic fumes and microplastics. Whereas such shipments are against the Basel Convention, there has been a laxity in enforcing this rule because of loopholes that categorize used clothing as non-hazardous so that the exporters can pass the waste as donations. Although the Philippine government has been effective in reclaiming some of the illegal shipment, Rappler (2021) investigative report indicates that informal thrift markets and black-market waste traders still take in bulk shipments of low-grade textile waste exposing the vulnerable communities to toxic smoke, contaminated dust, and chemical residue[17]. This constant stream of false textile waste makes the Philippines another first-line casualty of waste colonialism, having to deal with the post-consumer fast-fashion crisis of the Global North.

Trade Flows in Pakistan (2020)

[15] Hannah Ellis-Petersen, *How Pakistan Became a Dumping Ground for the World's Fast Fashion Waste*, Guardian (May 6, 2022)

[16] Basel Action Network, *South-East Asia's Waste Trade Crisis* (2020)

[17] Rambo Talabong, *PH Still Flooded with Illegal Textile Waste Despite Crackdowns*, Rappler (July 14, 2021)

International Regulatory Framework

The global legal system of fast-fashion waste disposal is not quite complete and capable enough to mitigate the transboundary environmental injustice of the Global South. Despite being the sole international legal device to control global cross-border waste flows, Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary movements of Hazardous Wastes (1989) is a limited tool to tackle cross-border waste flows due to the fact that textile waste is not classified as a "hazardous-wastes", and Global North exporters can transport post-consumer fast-fashion waste under the name of second-hand clothing. These loopholes together with lax enforcement and lack of clarity in the classification allow the continued export of non-recyclable textile waste to African, South Asian, and Latin American countries. International organizations like UNEP and UNCTAD offer guidelines and environmental evaluation and policy advice, but their systems are not binding, do not provide mandatory system by which states or companies can mitigate the dumping of textile wastes. The WTO trade provisions, particularly facilitating free trade and deterring importation quotas, also restrict the options of the Global South nations of prohibiting or restricting the importation of second-hand clothes, even in cases where this will overload their garbage collection systems. The second major regulatory issue is the lack of binding international liability of multinational fashion company, which means that corporations such as H&M, Zara, and Shein can shift the cost of environmental pollution to producer and waste-destination nations at will. The Transboundary waste flow further caters due to poor customs reporting, "mis-labeling" of the textile shipments, the lack of strong port inspection systems, and globally implementing digital tracking allowing the exporters to cover the waste under the guise of donations or recyclables. These regulatory weaknesses, together with others, continue to create waste colonialism by causing a legal transfer of fast-fashion pollution between the Global North and the Global South.

1. Basel Convention: Scope and Loopholes

The movement of the hazardous waste is regulated under the Basel Convention (1989) however, the convention does not apply to the fast-fashion pollution because the post-consumer textile waste product was not regarded as a hazardous waste item in the provisions of the Convention. This is the reason Global North exporters can identify the goods of low quality, chemically dyed and not recycled clothes as the second-hand clothing and create a loophole in the waste dumping. The Convention is self reporting and this implies that it is the exporting

nations who determine how they label the textiles- therefore intentional mislabeling and low responsibility. The enforcement is a spotty one on the borders and with no enforceable inspection or penalty the Global South gets thousands of tonnes of textile waste every and every week under the legal umbrella of giving charity or resale products.

2. Role of UNEP, UNCTAD, and WTO

International agencies like UNEP and UNCTAD are also involved in monitoring and provision of environmental analysis and policies but their authority is very low as they are only given recommendations which are not binding but advisory. The UNEP sees textile pollution as an emerging threat to world, however, it has no power to compel the states or businesses to meet the targets of waste reduction. UNCTAD is able to provide trade statistics and warning on waste colonialism but not to restrict the international waste flows. To complicate the matter even further, the WTO trade regulation, which is specifically encouraging free trade in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) frowns on importation bans on second-hand goods even in cases where such imports will saturate the domestic waste disposal systems. The Global South countries that are attempting to restrict the importation of the textiles waste risk being retaliated and they are likely to be dumped more under the name of market accessibility and affordability by the consumers.

The international institutions that are involved in this include UNEP and UNCTAD, which are also involved in monitoring, environmental analysis and policy provision but their authority is low because they offer recommendations that are not binding but advisory in nature. According to UNEP, textile pollution can be regarded as a new global threat but has no power to compel the states and companies to meet the waste-reduction goals. UNCTAD is capable of providing trade statistics and warning signs on waste colonialism but not restricting international waste flows. To compound this situation, the WTO trade regulation, especially the one which is favouring free trade under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), discourages the importation of second-hand goods, even when the local waste disposal facilities will be overwhelmed by the imports. Majority of the Global South countries struggling to restrict importation of textile waste run the risk of trade retaliation and they are likely to be dumped further under the pretext of convenience and affordability by consumers to the market.

Challenges in Monitoring Transboundary Waste Movement

1. Mislabeling Waste as “Reused,” “Recycled,” or “Donation Goods”

One of the greatest problems when it comes to controlling the global waste movements is the deliberate mislabeling of the waste setups. The exporters and those engaged in the trade tend to classify low quality waste of textile as a second-hand clothing, reusable goods or as a donation. This will help them to escape stricter environmental norms by the Basel Convention. In fact, most of these types of garments cannot be recycled, wore, or are in a highly degraded state and are going to landfills or open dumping grounds in the Global South. Mislabeling does not only misrepresent the true extent of waste dumping but it also transfers the expense and negative impacts of dumping, even to recipient countries.

2. Weak Customs Inspections in Ports of the Global South

Nations that receive the benefit lack the infrastructure, trained staff or advanced technology to help fully track the containers entering the country. Congestion, understaffing and pressure on customs agencies to become corrupt are usually eminent and this has led to the low inspection of the shipments that are labeled used textile. As a result of this, unsafe wastes containing textile, chemically contaminated garments, or non-recycleable synthetic wastes find their way to these countries undetected. Weak inspection regimes, in their turn, allow this overflow of waste between the rich and the poor countries to further disrupt their weak waste-managing apparatus.

3. Absence of a Universal Digital Tracking System for Textile Waste Shipments

Unlike dangerous chemicals and electronic waste where a tracking system is used, a similar digital tracking system for textiles waste does not exist. Currently, no standard structure has been established for keeping records related to where textiles actually come from, sorting, and where they go. It is characterized by a high degree ofOpacity. The countries that export this waste also offer pathways for directing the waste through several transit countries (like Dubai, Singapore, and Malaysia) such that their actual countries of origin remain unknown and unpublished. Agencies across the globe are finding it extremely difficult traces of illicit shipments and responsibilities associated with things such as textiles waste when digital tracking techniques, such as blockchain, are not involved.

4. Informal Waste Traders Exploiting Regulatory Blind Spots

Within the market of second-hand clothes, there is a vast number of unregistered and makeshift

sellers operating within this market. These businessmen exploit loopholes created by customs rules, ambiguity of national law, and lax port control. As these businessmen operate in fragmented supply channels, small brokers, cash transactions, and undetected sorting warehouses, it becomes extremely difficult to trace and monitor. These illegal sellers always mix compatible used clothes with enormous amounts of incompatible textile waste and sell through mixed textile bales. As a result, dumping under the guise of trading and making them almost impossible to control by law.

Domestic Environmental Governance in Bangladesh

The Bangladesh government has also come up with organized legal system to regulate industrial pollution and environmental pollution in particular the textile and garment industry and the effects of the legal system are still low in reality. The principal environmental protection law is the Bangladesh Environmental Conservation Act, 1995 (ECA) which empowers the department of environment (DoE) to regulate, control and minimize the pollution caused by the industrial activities.[18] Under the red category, according to the Act, textile and dyeing plants are to be included since their high potential to pollute the environment puts them in the bracket of industries which are expected to receive environmental clearance certificates. Besides the Act, there is the Environmental Conservation Rules, 1997 (ECR) that provides the standards of wastewater discharge, air emission, noise pollution and solid waste management including mandatory compliance to effluent quality parameters of the industries releasing waste water into rivers and water bodies.

The presence of Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs) in textile, dyeing and washing plants is one of the biggest regulations in this framework. The paper based ETPs are mandatory in nature such that the untreated industrial effluents that characterize with dyes, heavy metals, salts and even toxic chemicals are not discharged into rivers such as Buriganga, Turag, Shitalakhya and Balu. However, in reality there has been low compliance rate with the ETP requirements. Most of the studies and government audit reports show that the majority of the factories only use the ETPs a couple of times during the inspection or when under load to reduce the costs or neglect the ETPs and dispose the untreated wastewater to the nearby water bodies particularly at night. The adverse effect of this regulatory blindness has been excessive pollution of rivers, loss of aquatic biodiversity and ground water sources in the area of industrial clusters like Savar,

[18] Bangladesh Environmental Conservation Act, No. 1 of 1995 (Bangl.)

Gazipur and Narayanganj.

The governance of the environment in Bangladesh is also a failure because of the weaknesses in the institution. The department of environment has been characterized by systematic under-investment, absence of trained inspectors, inadequacy of labs and limits on jurisdictions. Corruption is normally followed by selective enforcement or slow action against the pollutant industries after being influenced by political pressure and economic influence of the powerful exporters in the garment industry. ECA punitive measures primarily fines and temporary shutdowns are not very punitive and cannot also be a good deterrent to the massive environmental malpractices by the export-driven industries.

Furthermore, the global pressure of global supply chains exerts a lot of pressure on the regulatory capacity of Bangladesh. The fast-fashion labels used by international companies require low production prices, low turnaround, and large-scale production, which puts pressure on manufacturers to compromise on environmental standards. As multinational brands sell their claims of sustainability at the retail store, the environmental price of manufacturing is externalised on the ecosystems of Bangladesh, where the enforcement of the regulations is weak. Consequently, the environmental laws, even though sufficient in theory, are systematically eroded by global economic asymmetries, which makes global environmental degradation a continued issue of a deep-rooted quality of the fast-fashion supply chain.

Findings and Critical Analysis

1. Externalisation of Environmental Costs by the Fast-Fashion Industry

This research study concludes that the fast-fashion model systematically transfers its environmental expenses to the Global South both in the production and disposal phases. During the manufacturing process, Western fashion brands subcontract mass production of clothes to other nations such as Bangladesh where environmental policies are not strictly followed because of poor application of environmental-protective rules, Western fashion manufacturers emit untreated effluents, improper dyes, heavy metals, and microfibres into the rivers and the soil. When the garment no longer has a market value in the Global North due to minimal wear, they are then sold to the developing countries as second-hand clothes, and a large percentage of them turns into unmanageable textile waste. This twofold externalisation allows the corporations and consumers in the developed world to consume low cost fashion without

bearing the implications of the environment of overproduction and over-consumption.

2. Structural Inequalities Reinforcing North–South Environmental Exploitation

The study unveils that fast fashion is based on—and consolidates structural inequalities that already exist between the Global North and the Global South. The developing nations are placed in a position where they are both sources of production that require resources and as well as absorbers of waste but have no economic and regulatory power to turn down such demands. Due to trade asymmetries, reliance on export revenue, and unequal bargaining power, such countries as Bangladesh, Ghana, Chile, India, and Pakistan have to put up with activities that harm the environment. These disparities are an indicator of environmental injustice, whereby ecological damage is unequally imposed on the groups that have the least contribution to the ecological pattern of global consumption. Fast-fashion supply chain is therefore more akin to the colonial economic system and the extraction process of resources is substituted with pollution transfer and dumping of wastes.

3. Regulatory Failure at Domestic and International Levels

The paper identifies substantial regulatory breakdown in the national and international levels. Bangladesh has environmental laws, which require effluent treatment and control of pollution, but these are not enforced because of the institutional bottlenecks, economic pressures, and the lack of penalties. Regulatory measures like the Basel Convention do not do their job internationally to control the flow of textile waste as there are loopholes in the classification of waste, the guidelines are not binding and the monitoring of the same is weak. This lack of binding responsibility on multinational fashion companies only contributes to this failure, whereby the brands end up, literally, externalising the environmental damage by not being held accountable by the law. These deficiencies combined with others produce a vacuum in governance where environmental degradation is an approved cost of the global trade.

4. Critique of Consumerist Culture and the Linear Fashion Model

The fundamental cause of the crisis of fast-fashion is a linear consumption model; produce, consume, discard which is propelled by aggressive marketing, low prices, and high turnover of trends in the Global North. This paper concludes that the consumerist culture has normalized the disposability of clothes, making them operationally useless after a few uses. The recycling

and resale provisions are simply unable to handle the huge quantity of waste generated particularly after the low quality and man-made composition of the fast-fashion clothes. As a result, the aspect of transfer of wastes is largely addressed by the argument of sustainability by resale and recycling. The damage to the environment will rather be displaced rather than eliminated without a radical reform of the systems of circular fashion and low consumption.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthening the Basel Convention Through Expanded Definitions and Enforceable Sanctions**

The Basel Convention must be made much stronger to respond to the realities of the fast-fashion waste. Rather than being condoned under the category of second-hand clothing, the particular waste that needs to be reclassified as either hazardous or controlled waste (placed under the latter) is textile waste with a particular focus on low-quality, synthetic-based, and chemically treated clothing. To prevent the habit of deliberate mis-labeling of reusable clothing by the exporting countries, there has to be clear, consistent definitions that distinguish between them and waste. The Convention should also have stronger enforcement that includes mandatory inspections, fines on false declarations, and the liability of both the states that export and the individual actors. The Basel Convention will remain a lax mechanism of regulation that attracts dumping of waste in the name of trade without the backing of strict penalties.

2. **Mandatory Global Adoption of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**

There should be the creation of an internationally binding Extended Producer Responsibility regime which will ensure that the fashion brands are responsible of the full product life cycle of their products. The multinational companies are required by law under an EPR regime to fund and control the collection, recycling, and safe disposal of the textile waste produced by the product, no matter where it finds its way. This would place the burden on the Global South countries on the producers and retailers who gain out of overproduction. Mandatory EPR would also discourage low quality and non-recyclable garments as the environmental costs would be internalised in the business models.

3. **Legal Accountability of Multinational Corporations Across the Entire Supply Chain**

In order to hold multinational fashion companies legally accountable, international

environmental law must go beyond voluntary corporate sustainability pledges. Businesses should be held accountable for environmental harm resulting from waste export and disposal as well as pollution during the manufacturing process. International agreements that mandate environmental impact reporting, supply-chain transparency, and liability for transboundary environmental harm can accomplish this. International environmental tribunals, extraterritorial jurisdiction, and civil liability regimes are examples of mechanisms that could be vital in preventing corporations from avoiding accountability by conducting business internationally.

4. Incentivising a Circular Textile Economy and Ethical Supply Chains

A circular textile economy that puts durability, repair, reuse, and true recycling ahead of disposability should be actively promoted by governments and international organizations. The fashion industry can move away from its linear "take-make-dispose" model with the use of policy tools like eco-design standards, material restrictions on synthetic fibers, tax incentives for sustainable production, and penalties for overproduction. Environmental performance benchmarks should be incorporated into ethical supply-chain certification systems to guarantee that sustainability claims are genuine reductions in waste and pollution rather than greenwashing motivated by marketing.

5. Capacity-Building for Environmental Monitoring in Global South Nations

Lastly, improving the institutional and technical capacity of the Global South nations that currently bear the environmental burden of fast fashion is necessary for effective regulation. This entails making investments in digital tracking systems for textile shipments, laboratory testing facilities, trained environmental inspectors, and infrastructure for customs inspections. These initiatives should be supported by international financial and technical assistance as part of shared but distinct responsibility, especially from exporting countries and multinational corporations. Improved monitoring capabilities would enable developing nations to enforce domestic environmental regulations, reject the import of illicit waste, and prevent local ecosystems from turning into permanent landfills.

Conclusion

This study establishes the fact that the fast fashion industry has a chain of destruction that is transnational and advantages the Global North with its affordable, disposable fashion, and the

Global South with the environmental price of creating and disposing of textiles. It cites a case study of industrial pollution in Bangladesh and dumping of post-consumer textile waste in Ghana, Chile, India, and Pakistan to establish the fact that waste recycling is being socialized in a systematic fashion through unregulation, trade imbalances, and unaccountability by industry. The study establishes that the present-day nature of the transnational treatment of textile waste through conventions like Basel Convention is not effective, and a phenomenon of waste colonialism has taken place.

The discussion also goes further to state that to make real changes, there must be a paradigm shift of the profit fast fashion system to a justice-based fashion economy which emphasizes on sustainability rather than consumerism.

The wastes generated from our take, make, dispose approach of produce, consume, discard are environmentally unsustainable, resulting in the most impoverished regions, such as the Global South, bearing the effect of destruction brought on by fast fashion, which in a way is a result of colonial-style taking with a revised, modern trade system.

Finally, the paper highlights the importance of global unity, in the context of implementing environmental justice, to address the fast fashion menace. The problem of pollution has no boundary, but is a usual burden of producers, consumers, corporations and even nations themselves. Stricter regulations at a global scale, in terms of waste and increased ability to implement these regulations in developing countries are necessary to bring a stop to this vicious circle of pollution and dumping. The adoption of non-economic, or more precisely environmental justice, solution to the fast fashion is essential to make sure that Global South becomes not just a sacrifice zone of the Global North.

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