Os Direitos Humanos e as linguagens da dignidade: debates e perspectivas.

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SUMÁRIO

DO WE WEAR FASHION OR IS FASHION WEARING US OUT? – INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT, GLOBALISATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Rita Alcaire[*]

1. Introduction

To set off the discussion, let me say this: I adore fashion. I love fashion as a form of art, as a creative industry, as a form of self-expression and self-creation, as a form of collective identity, contestation and as a political statement. This is one of the reasons why, once I started earning my own money and making shopping choices, I soon became a conscientious and critical consumer. It means that I noticed the rapid increase in the number of shopping spaces (such as shopping malls), the great number of multinational retail companies establishing themselves in Portugal (and across Europe). At the same time, I attested the presence of dozens of low-price small stores with shopping articles "made in China", the decrease in prices and the repetitions in clothing shapes, patterns and colours in different stores and fashion seasons. A closer look at the labels revealed that made in Portugal or European Union became a rarity while most garments were made in countries like India, Cambodia, Vietnam, Pakistan, China and Bangladesh. It appeared that centuries of the fashion creative heritage and knowledge got reversed, providing standardised clothing and

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style, as well as emptying fashion of its (possible) social and political meanings.

Lured by the affordable pricing and the possibility of buying a great amount of knockoffs,-what we call 'fast-fashion'–, consumers seemed to overlook that this mass-production and the consumerism craze, have a severe impact on the lives of people around the globe, on the environment and, most of all, on the workers who make the garments and thus constitute the vulnerable elements in the supply chain.

The situation in contemporary fashion has displaced the type of working conditions condemned in the western societies of the 20th century, to cities and countries in Asia where labour is cheap. Retailers, designers, brands and consumers have a responsibility in this. Yet this reality is changing: consumers are becoming more aware of the places of where clothes are being manufactured, of the people who make them, as well as of their human, social and economic costs. As a result, consumers and fashion-lovers take action, in ways accessible to them (e.g. by filing reports on violations of human rights to the authorities and/or by boycotting products from countries where those violations take place). Garment industry workers in some of the producer countries are also starting to fight for their rights, encouraged by activists, trade unions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who lead or join the cause[1].

Even though there are many actors and opposing forces involved in this issue, I wish to address the garment industry from three particular points of view: 1) from the workers' perspective, 2) from the perspective of multinational

1 Such is the case of The Clean Clothes Campaign (http://www.cleanclothes.org/), The Ethical Trading Initiative (http://www.ethicaltrade.org/), The Fair Wear Foundation (http://www.fairwear.org/), The Workers Rights Consortium (http://www.workersrights.org/) and many others.

corporations, and 3) from the consumers' point of view. First, in the section 'Looking into the past for the clues on how to dress forward' I am going to make a brief overview of the change in the paradigm: how have the clothes transformed from being a precious commodity to being massively produced and consumed. Then in the section 'Made in Bangladesh' I discuss Bangladesh as a case study to speak about the working conditions of those who labour behind the labels[2] and how they take action to produce change. In the section 'Those on the label' I emphasize the responsibilities of multinational retail brands and other parties involved, using the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility. In the section 'Those who wear the labels' I focus on the idea of 'engaged consumers' as key players in the construction of an ethically informed 'perfect wardrobe'.

Along the way, I wish to acknowledge the good as well as the bad from the perspective of all these characters in this story, so that I can then think of the possibility(ies) of a fashion future, more sustainable, green and which takes ethics, as well as aesthetics and capital into account.

2. Looking into the past for the clues of how to dress forward

Throughout the recorded history, items of clothing have been almost always expensive, hard to come by and therefore

2 Labour behind the label' is also the name of a network of organisations that "supports garment workers' efforts worldwide to improve their working conditions, through awareness raising, information provision and encouraging international solidarity between workers and consumers." (www.labourbehindthelabel.org/about-us). Members of this network include trade unions and their branches, consumer organisations, campaign groups and charities that work together to raise public awareness, pressure companies, support workers and lobby governments and policy makers to bring about change.

highly valued[3]. Acquiring them was out of reach for most of the population: in the history of some societies clothes were so valuable that they were used as a currency[4].

With the Industrial Revolution of the 1900s, factory-made, store-bought clothes became increasingly available. The United Kingdom (as well as other western countries) experienced a rapid and increasing growth in the garment industry, whose model was then disseminated through the ever expanding British Empire to other parts of the world.

Well into the twentieth century, clothes were costly so that they were mended, cared for and turned countless times. Most population had few outfits (one working/daily outfit and a more formal attire) and wore them out until they became threadbare (Cline, 2012).

But it wasn't until the end of World War II that clothing had become more accessible to most people, in great part owing to the trade liberalisation in Europe and Asia. This meant a removal or decrease of restrictions on the free exchange of different goods between nations. The trade liberalisation included the elimination or reduction of duties

3 There are even records of garments being left as inheritance to family members and close friends after death, for they were the most prized possessions. In Portugal, the historical records of the poverty alleviation religious institutions, such as the *Misericórdias* and *Venerável Ordem Terceira*, attest that people who donated to these organizations handed clothing items down to friends, relatives and to the poor (Lopes, 2001).

4 The use of clothes as currency has been recorded in various times in history and in different parts of the world. For example, in countries of the Silk Route, this precious natural fabric was used as a trade currency along the route (Xinrun, 2010). In Japan, after the shortage of cooper in the mid-10th century, coin circulation was suspended, and rice, silk and clothes – that maintained a stable value – were used as substitute for the coins. Historical records from the Bank of Japan Currency Museum reveal that data (http://www.imes.boj.or.jp/cm/english/history/7C/). These products gained commodity money status, as they became stable criteria to evaluate the value of various goods.

and surcharges and other requirements. This promoted a free trade between countries, but most of all, as Thomas Friedman (2005) and others state, it was a way to industrialise economies of some Asian countries, while preventing the spread of communism over from China, Korea and the Soviet Union, and winning people over to democracy. So these authors are inclined to consider it to be a political rather than an economic decision. Eventually, the economy trend prevailed over the political one, as the nations from the global South wanted to put this business model at work in their countries. It resulted in the creation of numerous working places, and the West required more inexpensive produce. By the time the international trade had become more open in the 1960s, the garment industry then crossed borders and migrated to where labour was the cheapest and where the regulations were less restrictive or inexistent.

In the 1990s, the global clothing corporations and retail chains took hold of Europe and North America's fashion retailing business and spread thousands of stores in a great number of countries. But clothes still maintained highly-priced (in relation to an average income), which made buyers go shopping seasonally, twice a year.

The low price we pay for clothing at the present time is historically unprecedented. The cost of other commodities and services has soared – including education, healthcare, housing, gas and electricity – yet the average price of clothing has plummeted in recent decades. Apart from becoming affordable to the average shopper, clothes have undergone a total makeover, where they no longer imply some inherent compromise in style and quality, but are inspired in the latest runway trends. Thus buying on a budget has nowadays changed and shaped the entire concept of the apparel industry, and is presently seen as chic, practical and democratic. If we were to use a fashion jargon: fast-fashion is now 'a must have'.

Every year, around eighty billion garments are produced

worldwide (Siegle, 2011). As is well known in economics, lower prices stimulate consumption and at the current rate, northern western countries (such as the United States, but also several in Europe) are both buying and throwing away millions of garments a year.

Despite being based on the laws of supply-and-demand, the consequences of this change lay beyond the economy. There are also environmental consequences: buying a great number of outfits and treating it as they were disposable (and we are mainly talking about non-recyclable goods) places an added weight on the environment by increasing the levels of air pollution and groundwater contamination, uses up raw materials and destroys natural resources, and is unsustainable. The social consequences include the total disregard for human rights; the economical ones mean that we spend much more money under the illusion of low prices. And finally, the political consequences are brought about by the change – we favour, amongst other things, neoliberal politics and reinforce or condemn regimes that rule in the countries where we buy from.

It is important to note that due to the severe austerity measures over the last few years resulting in the high unemployment rates, stagnant or even diminishing wages, and also in the increase in individual and national debts, consumers have become more cautious and somehow more engaged and informed about the products they buy. Among other things they are more knowledgeable of who are the people behind the labels they purchase.

3. Made in Bangladesh': Those behind the label

> From producer to consumer there is a long chain of players in the industry, made up of workers, labour sharks, factories, subcontractors, unions, governments, buying houses, middle men, middle men for the middle men, nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), importers, exporters, brands,

> department stores, and you and me. Each takes a cut. Some play by the rules; some don't. Exploitation can occur at any level, except one – the workers aren't in a position to exploit anyone. (Timmerman, 2012: 8)

In April 2013, the horrific collapse of an eight-storey building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, was widely aired in the media, and alerted corporations, activists and consumers about the working conditions of the garment industry labourers. The Rana Plaza building, as it was known, housed an estimated 6.000 workers divided into three separate textile factories. The collapse took the lives of approximately 1.100 workers, hundreds were injured, and a great number of families distraught[5].

After the rescuing teams had retrieved the bodies of the mortal victims, labour rights activists groups entered the ruins to find several labels of well-known retail brands, such as Benetton, Mango and Primark. So that was one of the locations where the mentioned companies had outsourced their textile manufacture to. Less than six months before, in November 2012, a fire had destroyed another textile factory (Tazreen Fashion) in the same district, killing over one hundred people.

Why should I choose to discuss the case of Bangladesh, and not of other countries like Cambodia, Honduras, India, Pakistan or China? First of all, because the labour in Bangladesh is probably the cheapest in the world, whereby a great percentage of child labour (children under the age of 15)

5 This incident was subject to great media attention from newspapers, television networks and the internet. Here are just a few examples: *The Independent* (UK), April 28, 2013 http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/dead-and-alive-the-rubble-of-bangladesh-factory-collapse-gives-up-its-victims-8591238.html; *The Huffington Post* (USA), May 6, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/05/02/primark-boycott-bangladesh_n_3201576.html

is used. Besides this, the country does not have many natural resources to support the industries that operate in its territory (unlike China, for example), and works as an outsourcing territory for multinationals. Also, surprisingly, NGOs and activists for labour rights have been seen to fight not against but in favour of the child labour (which will be discussed further in this section). Finally even though most of the clothing sold in retail stores in Portugal is made in Bangladesh, until the recent large scale work accidents that deserved much scrutiny of the media[6], Bangladesh did not mean much to a Portuguese customer. It was just another name on the label. Compared to that of China, it was an untold story.

As just mentioned, Bangladesh offers the cheapest labour force in the world. Cheaper than China. In this country, the textile industry represents 76 percent of the annual export of about eight billion American dollars (Timmerman, 2012) and is expected to grow at least twice in less than a decade.

The first time that the western world got word on the labour conditions of the Bangladeshi workers has been the news report on American national television. In 1992, the NBC show 'Dateline' aired footage from inside a textile manufacture, featuring a Walmart production line where children as young as seven were operating heavy machinery and trimming clothing[7]. In their comments for those images and accusations of child labour and severe violations of human rights, Walmart directors argued that the people in Bangladesh were extremely malnourished anyway, so that the individuals from the footage, which looked like seven year old children, were actually adult Bangladeshi whose growth had been stunted (Timmerman, 2012).

6 http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/sustainable-fashion-blog/primark-label-cry-help-bangladesh-women-factories

7 http://www.nbcnews.com/id/8243331/ns/dateline_nbc/t/human-cost-behind-bargain-shopping/#.U-CXZfldWa8

After this news story, the label ‘Made in Bangladesh’ became a synonym of 'child labour' – first in the United States and then in several other countries. Out of concern for the rights of children workers, the United States, as a nation, took action by boycotting the clothing made in that country. As a result, the Bangladeshi children and other textile industry workers joined in the protest organised by NGOs advocating the human rights *against* the American boycott. As a group, they stated that children and their parents did not want to lose their jobs, for they helped support their families, which was the most important thing for them (Timmerman, 2012).

Two years later, in 1994, the Bangladesh Textile Manufacturers and Exporters Association, under the pressure of the boycott and the damaged image of the ‘Made in Bangladesh’ label, ordered the factories under their power to let go all the children workers under the age of 14 without any material compensation. The local NGOs and labour unions protested this decision as out-of-work children flooded the streets of Dhaka. Responding to the crisis, the United States and the Bangladeshi government joined the efforts, along with international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), to fund schools for the displaced child workers until they were of working age. However, that never managed to put an end to the child labour in the country. It did nothing else but pushed these labourers away from the textile industry and into other industrial contexts albeit slightly raised the age requirement for young workers in the textile industry.

The high rates of child labour continued. According to the 2002/2003 National Child Labour Survey[8] conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 93 percent of working children were employed in the informal sector in Bangladesh,

8 The document can be found at www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=746

such as selling items to tourists in the streets, but also working in wielding shops or brick factories. Children continue making clothes for customers in Europe and in the United States, and about 4,9 million children of 5-14 years old hold other types of jobs.

Kelsey Timmerman, the author of *Where am I wearing?* (2012) discusses this idea with one of his informants in Bangladesh who pointed out to him that had the children the author saw at an underwear factory in Dhaka not worked there, they would have tried to gain money somewhere else, including doing things even more dangerous, harder and for less pay than working at the factory.

I would like to highlight that I do not condone child labour and the violation of children's rights, but the contestation of Bangladeshi NGOs, children and their parents for their right to work, calls for an urgent intercultural debate. It seems that it was not long ago that manufacturers in the 19th century England, industries preferred women and children workers for their abundance, cheap wages paid to them, and their docile temperament.

As cruel as it might sound to our western way of understanding – because child labour is a cultural and emotionally charged subject –, it is true the children workers in Bangladesh expressed their contentment for having a job, even when paid the equivalent of about 50 Euros a month. And they do not want the rest of the world population to boycott the products that they make as a way of protesting their working conditions. What they would like, and what they are beginning to fight for, is to work less hours a day and days a week, for better payment (more adequate living wages, considering their circumstances), and improve the safety conditions at work. In Bangladesh, the family and the community may mean a lot, but being able to provide for the family and close ones is even more important. It is a matter of honour. Considering this, an argument can be made that factories in Bangladesh that employ

children are doing good and westerners that call for the end of child labour are actually the ones who are doing them harm. The difficult question to discuss is the fact that not having children make clothes does not eliminate the reality that many children in Bangladesh must work, but it seems to help eliminate the North's responsibility in the matter.

The working conditions in Bangladesh's textile industry reflect the living conditions of the country where at least two million people are involved in the textile production.

Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute and Advisor, on issues concerning the Millennium Goals, to Ban Ki-Moon – the United Nations General Secretary – believes that the garment industry in Bangladesh and other developing countries constitutes an opportunity to become part of the 'global economic ladder'. In his book *The End of Poverty*, he states as follows:

> Not only is the garment sector fueling Bangladesh's economic growth of more than 5 percent per year in recent years, but it is also raising the consciousness and power of women in a society that was long brazenly biased against women's chances in life. As part of a more general and dramatic process of change throughout Bangladeshi society, this change and others give Bangladesh the opportunity in the next few years to put itself on a secure path of long-term economic growth. (2005: 13)

In Bangladesh, women who have jobs are likely to have fewer children. Missing work while pregnant, having a baby, or caring for a new-born is, in a sense, expensive. Therefore, working women have fewer children to feed, clothe and keep healthy on more income. Sachs writes that in 1975 the average number of children a woman had in her lifetime in Bangladesh was 6.6. Today this number is 3.1. Educating and employing women is then considered by some authors, like Sachs, to be one of the best ways to reduce the poverty.

Another well-known personality who has taken interest in Bangladesh and on the development of the women's plight is a Nobel Prize laureate Muhammad Yunnus[9]. In 1983, he founded the Grameen Bank which gives microcredit loans to people who were unable to secure a loan from other banks. To get a loan from his bank, a woman must find other women to form a small group. If she does not pay back her loan, it puts the other women in her group at risk regarding the future loans. In such a way the group provides a supporting network and a guarantee that loans are paid back. If a borrower cannot pay back the loan, she gives a poor impression on the other members of the group. There is no collateral damage as in the west, but rather social and communal consequences.

Data shows that about 98 percent of the Grameen Bank loans are paid back by a network of over seven million borrowers[10]. A first-time loan might be only of the equivalent to five euros. That is all it takes to set Bangladeshi women on their way to empowerment, and to allow them to imagine a future life for their children.

4. The brands and Corporate Social Responsibility: those on the label

Most companies in the North, especially in the United States, have developed codes of conduct for outsourcing their products abroad. Some align themselves with monitoring agencies and labour rights groups to do so. Labour rights

9 Muhammad Yunnus is an economist better known as 'the banker of the poor'. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, for the creation and implementation of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh in 1983, "fueled by the belief that credit is a fundamental human right. His objective was to help poor people escape from poverty by providing loans on terms suitable to them and by teaching them a few sound financial principles so they could help themselves." (http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-bio.html)

10 http://www.grameen-info.org/grameen-bank-at-a-glance/

activists and trade unions make companies accountable for their codes of conduct and use government regulations to make sure that workers' rights are respected in their supply chains, that employees are guaranteed safe working conditions and paid wages which allow a dignified life. If basic workers' rights are not met, these individuals or organizations pressure the company to take action and make changes.

In the last few years, several binding agreements have been signed, such as the United Nations Global Compact[11], with thousands of companies endorsing its principles, including those on human rights and labour standards (Amis *et al*., 2005). The International Labour Organization's Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy[12], which focuses on labour rights, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises[13], have also contributed to the creation of momentum for corporate action.

In June 2011, John Ruggie, United Nations Special Representative on Business and Human Rights, presented a set of *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework*[14] to the United Nations Human Rights Council . Building on his "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, released in 2008, the Principles outline the state's

11 "The UN Global Compact is a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. By doing so, business, as a primary driver of globalization, can help ensure that markets, commerce, technology and finance advance in ways that benefit economies and societies everywhere." (http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/)

12 Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---multi/documents/publication/wcms_094386.pdf

13 Available at http://www.oecd.org/corporate/mne/

14 Available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

duty to protect human rights, the corporation's responsibility to respect them, and the need for access to remedy. On June 16, in an unprecedented step, the UN Human Rights Council unanimously endorsed the Principles.

Most recently, in June 2014, the United Nations adopted what is considered to be an historic resolution[15] which opens the ways to closely monitor the observance of human rights by multinationals across the globe. As a result of this voting in Geneva, the United Nations pledged to form a working group with the governments of different nations to create a legal framework that effectively commits states to monitor compliance with human rights. The idea is to create a binding treaty for all multinationals, so they can not violate human rights in countries where it has been ratified. An unprecedented process of negotiation has been set in motion/has begun. Before that, there were only standards for the protection of the interests of investors, such as the free trade agreements, but there were no binding international regulations with legal consequences for multinational corporations.

It is worthy of mention that the decision was not unanimous. It has caused quite a stir in the media, especially in blogs and across social networks. The votes distributed as follows: 20 votes in favour, 14 against and 13 abstentions. Countries like China, Russia, Cuba, India, and Venezuela voted in favour; whereas Germany, France and the United Kingdom (some of the major European Union economic powers), along with the United States of America, voted against. The former happen to be the countries that host the most powerful international companies with factories in the countries of the global South; protested and boycotted products from India and Bangladesh against the appalling working conditions, and also some of the countries that promoted projects for better working

15 A/HRC/26/L.22/Rev.1 whose draft is available at http://business-humanrights.org/en/binding-treaty

conditions and safety measures in impoverished countries. It seems like a paradox, which I will return to later.

The rights ensured by this UN Resolution include, among other things, the guarantee of decent working conditions in different countries, contributing to level wages and safety conditions of workers in India or Bangladesh with the ones of employees in western states, but also to combat soil and water pollution, as well as to disallow mistreatment and persecution of human rights defenders in the field. In total, more than 610 organizations from 95 countries have demanded the approval of this particular resolution of the United Nations, originally presented by Ecuador and South Africa, which opens new avenues for the important cause.

5. Consumers and the 'perfect wardrobe': those wearing the labels

If western consumers buy the garments made in specific countries, they would be contributing to an industry that depends on the labourers whose wages and quality of life would be unacceptable to western countries. But if they did not, the labourers might lose their jobs and find other ones that might be even more dangerous and poorly paid.

Consumers in the world are dismayed with the fashion industry because of its revealed links to enslavement, oppression and a cycle of waste and pollution. In this awareness process, several factors are to be taken into consideration, yet with caution. This would be the case regarding interventions of some activists and some sustainable development projects created in the west with the aim of promoting sustainable economic growth, the empowerment of vulnerable sectors of the population in different countries and communities while also aligning themselves with The

Millennium Development Goals[16]

If we were to analyse them thoroughly, these proposals seem (albeit unwillingly) to reinforce and perpetuate colonial relationships endured over centuries between the global North and the South. The ideas at the root of these projects stem from the western 'developed' countries as well as the responsibility over intellectual and creative work, while the manufacturing labour (under the North's models and conditions) is still from the South. Besides this, the recent denial of representatives from these countries to ratify agreements to sanction the perpetration of human rights violations in other countries (where they seek labour from) adds fuel to the fire.

Consumers then have to align themselves with NGOs in their cause for making ethical choices: to buy national products rather than items manufactured in countries and by companies that violate human rights; to look for fair trade materials and unclutter their wardrobes.

6. Concluding remarks

The ugly reality is that we will not stop consuming. Money is valued more than ethics in the global market, and it will probably continue like that until companies, activists, and consumers start asking the questions about the origin of that money.

16 Such is the case of Fashion 4 Development (http://www.fashion4development.com/), that defines its mission in this way, in the project site: "F4D is a global awareness platform that goes beyond fashion and seeks to unite diplomacy, media, business and the creative industries to enact sustainable change. Utilizing fashion as a platform, F4D has successfully united organizations and people alike, to create awareness and improve the livelihood of societies at large in support of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and "Every Woman Every Child" the initiative spearheaded by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon."

Should we be more ashamed that our clothes are made by adults and children who are badly paid, work countless hours in poor safety conditions, or that we live in a world where child labour is often necessary for survival?

I myself have no answer to this question, nor do I believe that there could be one easy (or possible) answer. What I wish to do is draw attention to the crucial role of the consumer: individual decisions are not too small and too insignificant to have any influence over the *status quo*. Given the depletion of natural resources and unprecedented pressure of the mass-production across the planet, it is high time for individual and collective actors to act wisely.

It is also important to go back to the work of John Ruskin and his reflections on the 19th century political economy. Being known as an art critic, Ruskin's views on the economy of his time were relatively unappreciated but remain relevant for the international trade questions and fast fashion consumerism we have been discussing throughout this article. In Ruskin's discussion on how merchants should provide for the nation and his argument that market actors have social responsibilities, in addition to his call for responsible consumption, there is a clear parallel with the concept (and the demand for) of Corporate Social Responsibility.

> For Ruskin (using modern terms), the corporation should value the interest of all stakeholders, not merely the shareholding owning or company managers. As well as providing products that are socially useful, the good market actor should ensure that the 'soul' of the work force is well attended to. (May, 2010: 199)

This proposal was not focused on employment, but rather on the welfare of all contributing to production, thus emphasizing personal responsibility through consumption choices. This reinforces the connections between the increase

of consumerism, the fast-fashion supply chain, activism and labour rights, and the rise of Corporate Social Responsibility.

As the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility continues to grow in importance and significance, so too should the concept of 'Consumer Social and Ethical Responsibility' (CSER) – an idea that I wish to suggest, based on the same social and ethical considerations that John Ruskin had reflected upon. What I mean by CSER is that engaged customers should be made aware of the responsibility that goes beyond the simple acquisition of goods and which incorporates ethical values and responds to the social environment. Just like we tend to make healthy choices in food and other aspects of lifestyle, so we should do in fashion. Apart from making choices, we should also take action to ensure the viability of sustainability measures in the long term.

As consumers we can go shopping with a keener eye for ecological materials, prioritizing sustainable fibres, be aware of alternative designers and labels that make sure that they leave a low environmental footprint and value social justice concepts such as fair-trade.

It can be an individual project or a collective one, by making friends, families, and others with whom we interact on a regular basis, to become aware of our choices and the reasons behind them, and by this way integrate the human rights into our shopping decisions and other lifestyle choices.

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