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INTRODUCTION: EUROPE AND THE PEOPLE WITHOUT FASHION

We have been taught, inside the classroom and outside of it, that there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and civilization independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. Many of us even grew up believing that this West has a genealogy, according to which ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution.

ERIC R. WOLF

Eric Wolf penned the above quotation about the discipline of history in his landmark book *Europe and the People Without History* (1982: 5). An anthropologist by training, Wolf's objective was to marry anthropology, sociology, and political economy with history to develop an account of global interconnectedness. He objected to the then dominant privileging of the West in chronicles of human history. Wolf claimed in the new preface to the 1997 reprint that "human societies and cultures would not be properly understood until we learned to visualize them in their mutual interrelationships and interdependences in space and time" (Wolf [1982] 1997: x). Wolf's book could just as easily have been written about fashion history. Indeed, the genealogy of fashion in locations around the globe shows "mutual interrelationships and interdependences in space and time" just as in the discipline of history.

The argument for a global history of fashion

It is the central contention of this book that the history of fashion should be understood as a global cultural phenomenon. Two problems have prevented such an understanding to date: first, the oft-repeated claim that fashion did not exist before the late medieval period, and second, the assumption that it did not exist outside the West. An adjunct issue is the focus on elite dress, to the exclusion of folk dress and the everyday dress of common people in Europe and elsewhere from fashion history.

Returning to *Europe and the People Without History*, we point out that Wolf recognized the problem of linking the advance of civilization to the rise of capitalism; the emergence of market economies in medieval Europe serves as a common explanation for European dominance. Wolf framed his critique on a time line that began in 1400, a century after Marco Polo; his father, Niccolo; and his uncle Maffeo returned from their travels across Asia, when China had the largest naval fleet in the world and when Europe embraced a market economy that gave rise to wealthy merchants who rivaled kings and queens in sartorial display. Wolf briefly traced the development of the social science disciplines, citing history's propensity to focus on the achievements of dominant political entities and anthropology's concentration on the study of present-day cultures while ignoring the history of those cultures. Wolf was intent on starting in 1400 because that is when Europe began expanding outside of its geographical boundaries, and because through expansion Europeans began encountering societies that had complex cultures and long histories. He argued that these histories should not be ignored. That is why he chose the title *Europe and the People Without History*.

Many scholars in the academy heard Wolf's cry. As globalization advanced in the 1990s, attention shifted beyond the borders of Euro-America, mostly to the East, with the rise of China and India as powerful economic forces. Another anthropologist, Jack Goody, also critiqued the Western-centric framing of history. In 2006, twenty-four years after Wolf's book appeared, he titled his own book *The Theft of History* (2006), echoing Wolf's assessment of the history discipline. Goody countered accepted interpretations of fashion and declared that he suspected that "we could trace it [fashion] earlier and probably everywhere" (265).

In the last decades of the twentieth century, scholars began to question the hegemony of Western Europe in the history of dress. Cynthia Jasper and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins focused on teaching; they suggested more accurate naming of costume history courses (e.g., "Heritage of Western Dress") and including assignments that introduced influences from other cultures (Jasper and

Roach-Higgins 1987). Suzanne Baizerman et al. argued for a more holistic approach to the study of dress after observing the discourse surrounding Eurocentrism in the disciplines of anthropology, art history, and folklore (Baizerman, Eicher, and Cerny 1993). Brydon and Niessen's *Consuming Fashion: Adorning the Transnational Body* (1998) challenged the class, race, and economic dichotomies embedded within fashion theory. The edited book introduced new views into fashion systems. In the new millennium, anthropologists Jane Schneider (2006a) and Karen Hansen (2004) criticized the dominance of Western fashion in dress studies. Schneider argued that the history of the dress of courtly societies in non-Western countries demonstrated the same fundamental elements of fashion—changing styles and elitism—as did the court fashions of Europe, an argument we took to heart in developing the case studies for this book. In the twenty-first century, globalization has created what Hansen terms a "new world in dress" (Hansen 2004: 372). Australian Jennifer Craik raised the globalization issue in her two books on fashion (Craik 1994, 2009). Craik argued that the term "fashion" needs revision, that fashion systems operate globally, and that non-Western dress has its own fashion system. Robert Ross (2008) and Margaret Maynard (2004) examined colonialism's effects on the dress of the colonized. Historian Beverly Lemire, who has published extensively on textiles and early modern dress, edited a collection of essays that explore fashion as a powerful force in politics and society (2010). Finally, Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil addressed fashion and history in their introductory essay and selection of extracts for *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives* (2010). As Riello and McNeil note in their introductory essay, "If we wish to understand fashion beyond Europe, we must refrain from thinking that this has suddenly emerged in the last few decades as the result of globalization and the growth of new middle classes" (2010: 4), thus directing the fashion history field to critically assess embedded assumptions. These scholars helped to form the basic assumptions for this book.

Sandra Niessen was one of the first to reimagine fashion history as global. In *Re-Orienting Fashion* (2003: 243), she expounded upon the problems inherent in separating the dress of the West from other dress systems and also the assignment of fashion only to Europe and its diaspora. Niessen discussed the boundaries built into the study of dress and fashion, one of which is Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism refers to a conception of the world that focuses on European cultures while giving little attention to other geographical areas, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is a subset of ethnocentrism, which can be described as viewing other cultures through the lens of one's own culture; often with the "other" assessed as lacking the attributes that the viewer, attached to their own culture, perceives as superior. In reference to dress history, Eurocentrism means that the dress practices of Europe and the ancient Mediterranean cultures that contributed to European civilization are the only dress histories that matter.

The ten-volume Berg *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* (2010) went a long way to rectify that neglect as did Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil's *The Fashion History Reader*. General editor Joanne Eicher and her team of volume editors selected contributing authors for their research expertise, some of whom are world-renowned experts on their topics (Eicher 2016).

This book is an extension of that perspective. We advance the argument to consider the *history* of fashion—not just contemporary fashion—as a phenomenon that happened in many locales around the world. Fashion, as applied to dress, is commonly described as changing forms of dress that are adopted by a group of people at a certain time and place (Welters and Lillethun 2011). This definition is not time or place specific, yet fashion has long been conceptualized as the product and domain of Western capitalism. The widely accepted premise is that fashion did not exist before the fourteenth century and that it developed in European courts with the rise of market economies. In this conception, fashion spread to the rest of the world through the expansion of Euro-American power. This is a major fallacy in dress and fashion studies. While some scholars of contemporary fashion have embraced a more pluralistic view, dress *historians* have been slow to envision or accord importance to fashion outside the West.

We contend that fashion existed in Europe before the mid-fourteenth century and in cultures outside the West prior to modern times. Adjunct to this view we argue that European folk dress also developed in the fashion sphere and should be included in the history of fashion. While selected examples and case studies (of varying detail) are provided to illustrate our points, this book is not intended to be comprehensive of *all* cultures across time and space. We have chosen examples from both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres as well as from prehistory to the twenty-first century. In doing so, we highlight several great ancient civilizations that are ignored in costume history textbooks (e.g., China, India, Meso- and South America). It is hoped that this work will inspire new, inclusive fashion histories that incorporate cultures beyond the West and before the rise of capitalism in Europe. While some recent authors extend the discussion of dress history beyond Europe and America, such as Daniel Hill (2011) and Robert Ross (2008), they do not contextualize changing dress practices as “fashion.” This book proposes that changing dress practices should be interpreted as fashion.

The conceptualization of fashion's birth in fourteenth-century Europe gained credence in the cultural studies field when Fernand Braudel, a non-dress specialist, published his three-volume tome *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*. Braudel, a French historian, was responding to the growing interest in social history. Published in French, then translated to English in 1981, his work reached a wide academic audience interested in the emerging field of cultural studies.

He devoted twenty-three pages to “costume and fashion,” a subject that had previously been ignored by historians in academia. He distinguished between “costume” and “fashion” based on the pace of change in dress. In Braudel's eyes, costume refers to the clothing of Europe's peasants, Peruvian Indians, and sub-Saharan Africans, whereas fashion applies only to Europe's elite. He described costume as a manifestation of stable societies, whereas dress remained the same for generations, even centuries. Yet, in apparent contradiction, he stated that costume the world over was “subject to incessant change” (Braudel 1981: 311).

He made the clear claim that fashion began in Europe as a way for the elite to distinguish themselves from those lower than them on the social scale. He stated that this change occurred around 1350 when men's tunics suddenly became shorter. He went on: “One could say that fashion began here. For after this, ways of dressing became subject to change in Europe” (Braudel 1981: 317). He supported his claim by emphasizing the rapidity of changing forms of dress, which he contrasted with the “changelessness” in the courtly costumes of India, Japan, China, and the Islamic countries as well as the poor in Europe. He deliberately excluded the changing tastes in fabrics that characterize court dress in Eastern countries. His argument centered on tailoring, or “fashioning,” clothes to the body, which ignored body modifications and hairstyling, as well as changing tastes in textiles. These elements are hallmarks of fashion change in Eastern cultures, such as India, Japan, and China. In fact, every culture manipulates these features of dress and appearance. His Eurocentric narrative possesses the two problems outlined earlier and that bear repeating: first, the claim that fashion did not exist before 1350, and second, that fashion did not exist outside the Euro-American zone. Dress historians subsequently fixed on the mid-fourteenth century as the “birth of fashion,” and it appears in many texts since the 1980s. A few scholars and historians have countered Braudel on these views, including Antonia Finnane (2008: 6), a well-known sinologist, historian Beverly Lemire (2010: 11), and Jack Goody (2006: 263–4).

The long-standing structure of “costume” history classes perpetuated this Eurocentric approach to the study of fashion history. In the early twentieth century, the typical narrative began with the dress of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome and progressed through European historical periods to the French Republic (Fales 1911). This structure has not changed fundamentally since then. British, French, and German authors wrote the early costume history books following the art history model. Gradually, textbooks were published for use in colleges and universities. All of these books traced the history of dress as it reflects Western civilizations. Although some recent publications and museum exhibitions explore the influence of other cultures, such as China, on Western dress, the notion of a fashion system—that is, a process of innovation in dress

and appearance practices, and diffusion to others—operating independently of Western influence is almost nonexistent in the museum world.

Some authors have looked to the history of fashion in Asian cultures. Toby Slade, writing about Japan, hoped to “demonstrate that there are other modernities, and different fashion histories beyond the canon of European and American dress narratives, which dominate nearly all interpretations of the practices, styles, institutions and hermeneutic structures of clothing in the modern age” (Slade 2009: 1). Antonia Finnane, in her book *Changing Clothes in China*, claims that “the fact remains that little is known in the English-speaking world about changes in material culture in non-Western societies” (Finnane 2008: 8). The volume of essays edited by Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones—*Re-Orienting Fashion*—critically reframed the perceptions of Asian fashion systems in tribal, urban, diasporic, and local contexts.

Excluding the rest of the world from fashion

Eric Wolf, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, understood the consequences of studying only the West. His work acknowledged both the “people who claim history as their own and the people to whom history has been denied,” allowing them to “emerge as participants in the same historical trajectory” (Wolf 1982: 23). We apply this approach to fashion history. To deny peoples outside the West the possibility of being agents in a fashion system is reductive and Eurocentric. Baizerman, Eicher, and Cerny made this observation in 1993, expressing the need for a new model to study dress in the modern, globally connected world. As mentioned above, it was Sandra Niessen who first brought the notion of the West/Rest to fashion in her essay “Afterward: Reorienting Fashion Theory” (2003). In fact, she used the phrase “Europe and the People without Fashion” as one of her subheadings. The construction of a divide among people based on having or not having fashion may appear ridiculous at face value, but setting the “having” or “not having” of fashion as a cultural marker has allowed for the construction of otherness with a very wide scope (Niessen 2003). If the others are seen as outside the fashion system, then they are viewed as people without change/progress, taste/style, preferences/dislikes, and so on. Those said not to have fashion are denied the basic human impulse to decorate the body. The ability to purposefully decorate the body distinguishes *Homo sapiens* and *Neanderthals* from apes according to Gillian Morriss-Kay (2010), a professor of anatomy who also specializes in developmental psychology and cultural anthropology. She traced the cognitive shift in human prehistory leading to art creation, positing that body painting was “likely to have been an important precursor to the creation of

art separate from the body” and that making a strand of shell beads indicates “recognition of a symbolic importance in the wearing” (2010: 161).

Craik claimed that “fashion is *not* exclusively the domain of modern culture and its pre-occupation with individualism, class, civilization, and consumerism” (Craik 2009: 19). As she explained,

Fashionable impulses (constantly changing clothing codes and stylistic registers) occur in non-Western and non-modern societies too. Yet the perception (and the myth) has been that non-Western cultures have stable and unchanging clothing codes (called costume or customary dress), a perception perhaps driven by the “snapshot” (or synchronic) approach to ethnographic case studies as well as the desire to emphasize the difference between “us” (civilized individuals) and “them” (pre-civilized groups). (Craik 2009: 19–20)

Craik coined the phrase “the fashion impulse” (2009), a term we find to be an apt one that we use when describing the attire, and change to it, of non-Western and preindustrial cultures worldwide. We apply the phrase “the fashion impulse” to societies in which a fashion system is in place.

We argue that it is time to reconceptualize the history of fashion. Western fashion is only one dress system to consider. Courtly fashion in China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, India, the Middle East, and Mesoamerica are just as important to understand in today’s global world as European courtly fashion because it is part of human history; ditto goes for preindustrial and tribal dress across the world. Dress has never been static in any culture; the desire to use the human body to express a host of changing meanings, what Craik terms the “fashion impulse,” has been present in societies since time immemorial. Our call for reconceptualizing fashion history extends to the way we teach the subject at colleges and universities as well as the way dress is exhibited in museums.

To summarize, we emphasize three points that will be expanded upon in the following chapters. First, it is our belief that fashion history as currently conceptualized is Eurocentric. Second, the paradigm around fashion scholarship is shifting. We argue, as do some others, that it is a fallacy to define fashion as exclusive to post-1350 Europe and its diaspora. Third, the problem of exclusion can be resolved by reconceptualizing fashion history as a global phenomenon.

The remainder of the book is divided into two parts. Part 1, Understanding Fashion and its History, consists of chapters 2–4, which address the terminology, theory, and historiography of fashion. Readers who are already familiar with fashion scholarship on these subjects may wish to start with Part 2, which consists of case studies presented in chapters 5–9.

We note that dress histories of many areas of the world are not available in English, and for these we relied on entries in the aforementioned Berg *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*. Additionally, international experts authored many entries based on decades spent researching dress and fashion in specific locales, and their entries represented their most recent analysis of dress. We incorporated information from a few selected entries into our case studies.

Chapter 2 elucidates the terminology surrounding the study of fashion. Definitions and contexts from a variety of vantage points in usage by fashion/ dress historians and cultural historians are dissected. We illuminate terms often conflated with fashion such as "costume" and "dress." We explain why we prefer the term "fashion" during a time of change in the terminology; we note that the terms themselves seem to be subject to fashion.

In Chapter 3, fashion systems are explained through theories generated by Western scholars. We explicate key theoretical developments in dress and fashion scholarship in chronological order to help readers comprehend how historical context shapes fashion scholarship.

Chapter 4 illuminates the historiography of published scholarship on dress history, primarily in English. It reviews salient literature from the earliest costume books illustrated with engraved images to the present day's abundance of fashion titles. It traces the rise of Eurocentrism in the study of dress history and the recognition in the 1980s of Eurocentrism as a problem in the study of dress. We look at how the old costume history became the new fashion history. The development of the field of cultural studies as it affects the study of fashion undergoes examination. We recognize the scholarship of authors who have been influential for the new fashion history and discuss the state of fashion history discourse at a threshold moment.

Part 2 presents case studies of fashion beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of those normally included in standard histories of fashion. We selected locations to feature examples from around the globe, and from the earliest time periods evidencing self-decoration to our current period of globalized fashion. We stress that this book is not a global history of fashion and that it is not universal in its coverage. Instead, we feature examples from our own research; for example, Linda Walters conducted ethnographic research in Greece and Latvia, and has analyzed archaeological textiles of New England native peoples; Abby Lillethun's dissertation on batik includes Indonesia and West Africa, and she researches Bronze Age dress. We read widely on world dress, focusing on studies that incorporated the notion of fashion into their analyses, and our reading influenced our case selections. Some cases are brief in comparison to others. We illustrate the potential for further study of what has formerly been called "traditional dress" as part of a fashion system.

In Chapter 5, we give detail to the argument to include indigenous cultures in the fashion sphere. We reinforce the position that the impulse to decorate

the body is a universal human behavior, and as such it extends to small-scale, nonindustrial cultures where fashion can occur (Cannon 1998). In light of the universal human behavior to decorate the self, we incorporate Jennifer Craik's notion of the "fashion impulse" in considering the dress practices of indigenous cultures, including prehistory (2009). Because sources of information on the dress of indigenous cultures are extremely limited until contact with Europeans, the chapter discusses what can be deciphered through archaeology. The cultures discussed include a group from Paleolithic France, the Narragansett tribe of southern New England and other cultures across the Canadian fur-trade region, and from Meso- and South America. We include the effects of colonization, an outside influence rather than an internal dynamic.

Chapter 6 considers early trade networks in terms of their contributions to changing styles of dress in the Eastern Hemisphere. We believe that responses to innovations by ancient world consumers should be interpreted as fashionable behavior. A lively trade network between Mediterranean cultures began as early as the Bronze Age, which allowed for exchange of both materials and styles for dress. Trade expanded north, east, south, and west in ancient Eurasia. Examples of the trade in fashionable items and the trade's effects from the Bronze Age to the eighteenth century include precious and semiprecious materials for jewelry, silk patterned textiles, evolving taste in textiles, and cross-cultural exchange of styles such as tailored garments. The Byzantine, Persian, and Ottoman Empires are highlighted. An example is made of the kebaya of Indonesia, which developed in the context of international trade.

Chapter 7 examines fashion systems in East, South, and Southeast Asia. The changing fashions of the courts of selected Asian cultures enlighten understanding of fashion outside the West prior to the current century. The examples are drawn from the dress histories of China, Korea, Japan, India, and Indonesia. While dress forms remained stable for long periods of time in many Asian societies, the textiles that comprised the outfits went in and out of fashion as did trims, embellishments, and hairstyles. Acknowledging that dress embraces all aspects of appearance, changing tastes in cosmetics are included.

Chapter 8 explores alternative fashion histories in Europe and America, that is to say, prior to the so-called birth of fashion in mid-fourteenth-century Europe, and beyond the court system. We contend that the date of the origin of fashion is not fixed to one time and region. We question the exclusion of folk dress from standard costume and fashion histories.

Chapter 9 extends discussions initiated earlier in the book about the spread of Western fashion from the Age of Exploration to the present, and of so-called non-Western influences on Western fashion. One type of fashion change occurred when the colonizers' styles gradually displaced indigenous dress, although locales responded individually to the introduction of European fashions in fabrics and garment styles. The Pacific region, most notably Hawai'i, serves

as an example. Other examples are drawn from sub-Saharan Africa. In the later twentieth century, few areas of the globe had not been introduced to Western fashion, and in the desire to be modern, youth everywhere created their own fashion microsystems. We propose that there is no "West" in terms of fashion anymore, either in contemporary fashion change or in the overarching history of fashion. At the same time, we recognize the influence of the local on fashion systems.

In Chapter 10, we offer concluding remarks. We summarize the major points and call on others to write new, inclusive fashion histories.

Each chapter begins with a quotation that emphasizes the chapter's main points. Some of these are drawn from primary sources, while others come from research or secondary sources key to our argument.

Books in the *Dress, Body, Culture* series are generally illustrated in black and white. Further, the number of illustrations is limited to fifty. While all publications on such a visual subject as dress and fashion would be served by plentiful color images, the cost becomes an issue for a series that aims to advance the discourse on dress and culture through publication of many innovative viewpoints. This book incorporates just enough images to support its points.

Likewise, we did not conduct exhaustive reviews of literature for all of the geographic areas we discuss in this book. We concentrated, where possible, on those scholars who address fashion in history. We crossed disciplinary boundaries, but with the recent expansion of disciplines interested in fashion and its history, we may have missed some important new works. We apologize to any scholars we neglected to include in this book, which is intended as an argument to consider dress systems throughout the world as emblematic of the fashion process. Critical to the development of our ideas were scholarly conferences as well as museum exhibitions and catalogs. We look forward to continued discussion in the future.