

ARTICLE

Africa Fashion Futures: Creative economies, global networks and local development

Lauren England¹  | Eka Ikpe² | Roberta Comunian¹ | Ananya Jahanara Kabir³

¹Department of Culture, Media & Creative Industries, King's College London, London, UK

²African Leadership Centre, King's College London, London, UK

³Department of English Language & Literature, King's College London, London, UK

Correspondence

Lauren England, Department of Culture, Media & Creative Industries, King's College London, London, UK.

Email: lauren.England@kcl.ac.uk

Funding information

King's College London

Abstract

This article reviews existing literature and approaches to the current study of fashion and economic development to rethink the interconnection between creative producers and global production and trade networks in relation to sustainable local development. Focusing on the work of independent fashion designers on the African continent, we first consider their positioning as cultural (micro) entrepreneurs and drivers of economic development. Next, we discuss the wider relationship with the global markets and value chains which impact their work and local context. We conclude with a call for further interdisciplinary research that takes fashion designers as a key point from which to engage critically with global value chains beyond prioritising the lead firm in the global North, so as to position African fashion designers as micro-entrepreneurs with potential for value creation and as leading smaller local or national markets with concomitant international reach.

KEYWORDS

Africa, creative economy, entrepreneurship, fashion, global networks, local development, value

1 | INTRODUCTION

This article reviews existing literature on and approaches to the study of fashion and economic development to rethink critically the interconnection between creative producers, global production and trade networks, and local development. It belongs to a wider research project, *Africa Fashion Futures*, which explores the cultural and economic dimen-

sions of fashion in Africa through the work of fashion designers in Lagos and Nairobi. Starting with the work of fashion designers on the African continent, we bring together literature on creative economy development agendas (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2018; HIVOS, 2016), fashion designers as creative entrepreneurs (Langevang, 2017) and studies of global value chains (GVCs; Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003) to explicate the economic and spatial dimensions of contemporary fashion in Africa.

We begin by examining literature positioning the fashion industry and fashion designers as cultural agents (Rovine, 2015, 2009) and drivers of economic development (HIVOS, 2016), in their home cities and regions as well as internationally (Langevang, 2017). We then consider the challenges faced by fashion entrepreneurs in connecting with global markets and exchanges (Hansen, 2014; Mangieri, 2006), specifically GVCs for their attentiveness to how firms and localities interact, organise, and are governed below and outside of global North networks (Gibbon & Ponte, 2005) and how positioning can change over time (Humphrey & Schmitz, 2002).

In conclusion, we call for further interdisciplinary research on fashion designers not just in terms of garment production, but as creatives, cultural producers, and centres for value creation; so as to mobilise their critical engagement with GVCs beyond prioritising the lead firm¹ in the global North (as with Global Production Networks [GPNs]). By paying attention to domestic, regional and continental dynamics that also connect with global structures, we extend debate on lead firms beyond global North actors.

2 | FASHION DESIGNERS AS CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS IN AFRICA

Studies of fashion designers as entrepreneurs and their relationship to geographical context have predominantly addressed global North or Westernised contexts (McRobbie, 2016), Australia (Heim et al., 2021; Tuite, 2019), New Zealand (Larner et al., 2007), and Canada (Brydges, 2018). Research on fashion entrepreneurs in the global South – including China (Ferrero-Regis & Lindgren, 2012), Hong Kong (Skov, 2002) and Bangladesh (Khan, 2019), as well in Africa (Jennings, 2011; Langevang, 2017; Pather, 2015) – reflect wider attempts to de-Westernise studies of creative labour (Alacovska & Gill, 2019), questioning who can be ‘creative’ (and accrue associated economic value) in fashion as a globalised creative industry (Khan, 2019). This fashion entrepreneurship literature, focused on designers and brands largely working independently for domestic and international markets, rather than large global corporations, contributes to our understanding of the national contexts and global connections influencing creative entrepreneurship (at the micro and small and medium-sized enterprise [SME] level), economic development and innovation. We present this literature as most relevant to the African context (HIVOS, 2016; Langevang, 2017).

Despite the dominance of China and Bangladesh (McKinsey and Business of Fashion, 2019), there is increased global awareness of growing fashion and garment production in Africa (Berg et al., 2015; Manson, 2014). The Africa-sited global fashion industry's market value is estimated at \$1.3 trillion (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2019a); the developing fashion industry (including textiles and apparel sectors) is positioned as potentially accelerating economic growth and industrialisation, building new trade and export options and GVCs, and enhancing regional and global integration (Jiménez-Zarco et al., 2019). However, compared to other creative industries emergent continent-wide, including film (Lobato, 2010) and music (Pratt, 2008), fashion has received relatively little policy attention. As wages rise in Asia (AfDB, 2018), initiatives have tended to focus on enhancing productivity and capitalising on cheaper labour in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)'s textiles and apparel sector, primarily associated with producing basic clothing items in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) (Kobia et al., 2017). There is, nevertheless, increased interest in fashion designers as cultural and creative entrepreneurs engaging with higher value activities in the fashion value chain (HIVOS, 2016).

Fashion entrepreneurs contribute to Africa's creative industries through tradeable cultural and creative products and services that support economic development (Langevang, 2017; UNCTAD, 2010). Because the emerging fashion industry is a site where ‘personal, cultural and socioeconomic development converge’ (Langevang, 2017, p. 893), they are also crucial in defining and redefining cultural heritage (Allman, 2004; Rovine, 2015). For Jennings (2011, p. 14) developing African fashion industries are most impacted by ‘basing socially responsible production on the conti-

ment' through, for example, creating jobs for local artisans and supporting farming communities. This convergence is particularly important when considering alternative, more inclusive, ethical and sustainable visions for value chains beyond the typical global North dominant model, and to developmental objectives connected to the creative economy (UNCTAD, 2010). For example, designers and brands can provide fair employment and support sustainable income sources for local artisans and farmers, use locally sourced materials produced through sustainable farming methods, and reduce the environmental impact of their supply chains and production processes through local sourcing, recycling and so on (Ericsson & Brooks, 2014; Moreno-Gavara & Jiménez-Zarco, 2019).

Designers are not isolated workers, but deeply interconnected with creative and non-creative professions (Cunningham, 2011) supporting production and retail across the creative economy. In the African context, designers' reliance on tailors to construct their garments (Hansen, 2019) enhances the contribution of both professions to domestic and global manufacturing and retail (HIVOS, 2016). The value of connections between fashion entrepreneurs and marketing, finance and other professionals within the fashion design field (Vallone, 2008) highlights the role of intermediaries in providing business support to the sector (Comunian et al., 2022).

Following the rapid expansion of digital technologies (especially mobile) across Africa (James, 2009), a growing use of global social media and e-commerce platforms among designers (Jennings, 2011) alongside wider growth of 'electronic mass media, international travel and transnational migration' (Gott & Loughran, 2010, p. 2) enables African designers to produce an 'African style' for global markets (Rovine, 2009), and African and diaspora audiences to disseminate African fashion globally (Jennings, 2011). The increasing presence of African designers and African styles at international fashion weeks and other events confirms interaction on the global stage, alongside interest in developing previously underexploited local and regional markets by promoting 'African fashion for African people' (AfDB, 2018, p. 5).

Important questions arise regarding connections between fashion designers and the processes of designing and making integral to garment production, including their relationships with actors at different stages in the production process and along global, domestic and regional value chains (Hivos, 2016). Such interactions indicate that African designers operate within GVCs, albeit at a different (lower and less profitable) level than would typically be acknowledged in GVC literature, as we elaborate later.

2.1 | Challenges for fashion entrepreneurs in Africa

Scholarship acknowledges tensions between hoped-for economic development and empowerment (especially for women) through fashion entrepreneurship (Moreno-Gavara & Jiménez-Zarco, 2019) and global forces which perpetuate workforce precarity and hierarchical perceptions of cultural value (Khan, 2019). The consequent economic and labour environments limit creative entrepreneurship's transformative potential (Langevang, 2017). Literature charts several challenges to developing sustainable enterprises at local, national and regional levels, including: accessing training and resources; working in informal, fluctuating economic markets (Hansen, 2019; Langevang, 2017; Pather, 2015); privileging basic skills development in the EPZ over fashion design education and training (England et al., 2021); 'volatile shifts in the global economy [including...] competition from online players and decreasing foot traffic, and the speed of changing consumer preferences' (McKinsey and Business of Fashion, 2016, p. 18); the informal structure and operation of local fashion markets (Hansen, 2019; HIVOS, 2016). However, the ways in which fashion designers move between and engage with these multiscale levels remains unexplored.

Africa-specific economic, logistic, social and political challenges for the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that form 90% of African fashion businesses (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2019a, 2019b) have been identified: difficulty in accessing capital within largely informal economies (Hansen, 2019) for start-ups, scaling up production and bulk-buying materials/equipment (Fianu & Zentey, 2000); lack of legal clarity, financial resources, government support, and formal unified representation (Fianu & Zentey, 2000; Jennings, 2011) around intellectual property and copyright; limited availability of skilled labour (Pather, 2015), graduate employment opportunities (Muhammad

et al., 2018), and provision and access to formal fashion design education with relevant curricula (England et al., 2021; Jennings, 2011; Miho, 2013). The lack of equipment and limited local industrial capabilities (AfDB, 2019b; Fianu & Zentey, 2000) complicate production of small orders that meet international quality standards, timeframes and price points (Jennings, 2011). These challenges coexist within broader financial and industrial contexts: fluctuating foreign currency and foreign exchange rates, high taxes, tariffs and licensing fees, high transport and shipping costs combined with international competition and import/export regulations (AfDB, 2019a; Jennings, 2011; Pather, 2015); and unreliable or irregular energy, Internet, communication and transport provision and infrastructure to support business activities, currency fluctuations, economic recession, high labour costs, limited access to technology, raw materials, funding and support services (Fianu & Zentey, 2000; Pather, 2015).

Such challenges impact capacity building and scaling up production within the fashion industry, and the distribution of the industry and supporting infrastructure beyond urban clusters (i.e., education/training facilities, availability of materials, production facilities and skilled labour). Irregular access to technology and reliable Internet services also inhibits the competitive development of African markets given the emergence of 'digitally mediated fashion creation, distribution, and representation' (Crewe, 2013, p. 762) globally, and its facilitation of sustainable fashion (Scaturro, 2008). Designers thus face overall challenges in navigating economic divisions in the continent's consumer markets – a very small wealthy elite and a growing middle class with purchasing power, but a large poor population with limited means (Hansen, 2019). Brooks (2018) highlights the uneven distribution of benefits and opportunities associated with economic growth across the continent and critiques the positioning of a 'middle-class consumer' as being internationally transferrable (see also Melber, 2016). Understanding the different consumer markets for fashion (locally, nationally and globally) is key to understanding fashion designers' capacity for market development.

Trade discussions and the development of value chains for the textiles and clothing sector are also prominent and sensitive areas for negotiation, particularly with respect to expanding regional value chains, continental free trade agreements, preferential tariffs and rules of origin (Kobia et al., 2017; Morris, 2006; Phelps et al., 2009; Staritz et al., 2017; UNCTAD, 2019). Both international trade agreements such as The Multifibre Arrangement (withdrawn in 2005)² and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (USA), and policies initiated by developing countries, including those limiting foreign exchange (forex) resources on textile imports or bans or heavy taxation on fashion and textiles imports (Botti, 2019; Jennings, 2011) impact domestic production, imports, market capacity, and local, regional and continental trade (Frederick & Gereffi, 2009). International trade agreements have enhanced market access, and subsequently employment and poverty reduction for qualifying SSA countries (Morris, 2006; Portugal-Perez, 2008; Staritz et al., 2017). However, a historical 'prevalence of developed-country protectionism' (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003, p. 5) alongside wider de-industrialisation, economic downturn, the marketisation of public services and declining infrastructure eroded the viability of the African textiles industry (Brooks & Simon, 2012; Ericsson & Brooks, 2014). The volume of imports and the second-hand market, together with perceptions of quality divergence between local and international products also challenge the growth and sustainability of local fashion production (Brooks & Simon, 2012). These conclusions reflect scholarly tendencies to fit analyses of contemporary trade to the historical pattern of unequal exchange rooted in the continent's colonial legacy, whereby Africa exports raw materials to the global economy and imports high(er) value products from the global North and increasingly other developing economies (Taylor, 2016). The Covid-19 crisis has reinforced these structural and geographical inequalities – although most significantly for high volume garment producing Asian nations – an outcome seen as reflecting the industry's 'natural order' that 'relies on a contrast between the 'first' and 'third' worlds' (Khan & Richards, 2021, p. 434).

The overall inability to address structural foundations of inequality and poverty (Khan, 2019) makes creative economy discourse around these challenges impact significantly entrepreneurial activity. In contrast, we want to ask why, so far, African designers and brands have not typically been thought of as potential lead firms in the fashion industry. The current GVC (and GPN) approach to lead firms (in the fashion industry and beyond) represents, to us, an exclusionary economic determinism; it gives inadequate consideration to micro-enterprises who nevertheless engage with main parts of the (apparel) value chain: raw material supply; component networks; production networks; export channels; and marketing networks (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003) and can leverage and control of resources that de-

note lead firm behaviour, albeit at a different scale. It also risks masking and devaluing innovation and wider cultural and social value generated by these smaller actors operating in the periphery.

3 | FASHION DESIGNERS, GLOBAL NETWORKS AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Assessing the work of African fashion designers in relation to local development necessitates an understanding of their relationship with global networks of production and value construction within the fashion and textile industry (Khan, 2019). Fashion's global remit encourages scholarly engagement with the interaction between networks of value and production on international, regional, and national levels (Whitfield et al., 2020), particularly through its connection with the textiles and clothing industry as a first-stage development in light-manufacturing as part of industrialisation (UNCTAD, 2019).

Global value chains and GPNs participate in an interdisciplinary discourse around international trade, international business, politics, power and innovation and their interface with industrial transformations and uneven development (Coe & Yeung, 2019; Neilson et al., 2014). While supply chains or production networks are common frameworks for analysing the fashion industry, our review focuses on the position and role of African designers in value chains vis-a-vis those in the global North. The value chain approach, useful within studies on apparel production in developing economies (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003; Gopura et al., 2019) aids analysis of the influence (direct or indirect) of globalisation, especially the intersection of global power and geographical structures on the economic development of fashion designers (Godart, 2014). Value chain perspectives increasingly illuminate studies on ethical, sustainable and local fashion production and markets (Jiménez-Zarco et al., 2019; Pal, 2014; Pal et al., 2016; Rinaldi & Testa, 2015).

Through GVCs we can explore global interconnections of linkages between the production, distribution and consumption of products in and from Africa (Tallontire et al., 2005) and question 'how local firms can participate as well as upgrade and capture value in the context of asymmetric power relations between buyers and suppliers in apparel global value chains' (Whitfield & Staritz, 2021, p. 3) (see also Bair & Werner, 2011). This approach prioritises consideration of the *value* of African creative products over *volume* (of labour and product), and its optimal increase.

3.1 | Fashion designers and value chains in Africa

Global value chain is a frequently used analytical framework for literature on the apparel industry, that, while recognising its limitations with regard to specificity of dynamics and actors (Coe & Yeung, 2019), also overcomes them through particular attention to lead firms as an entry point to analysis (Coe & Yeung, 2015, 2019). For us, GVC is a useful framework, enabling assessment of fashion designers as creatives, innovators and cultural producers beyond mere apparel production and the concomitant significance of value creation. The framework's attentiveness to production linkages is pivotal to discussions on fashion as a context for industrial development using domestic primary products/raw materials in Africa (Raei et al., 2019), especially with the advent of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Our key locale of interest, the global South, is currently limited by an overarching focus on lead firms located in the global North. Yet the GVC framework encourages consideration of how lead firms recalibrate their relationships with firms in developing contexts due to growth and transition in some global South contexts (Gereffi, 2014). Such approaches mesh with our critical interest in reimagining how lead firms can participate in more complex South-South exchanges.

The academic literature on textiles and apparel value chains applies Hirschman's (1958) theory of backward linkages to garment industries and the production of textiles and related materials, including agricultural production of raw materials in Africa, with added emphasis on production for the global economy (Morris, 2006; Phelps et al., 2009; Staritz et al., 2017). Gereffi and Memedovic (2003) associate both backward and forward linkages in the apparel industry with high levels of industry employment and identify five main parts to the value chain: raw material supply;

component networks; production networks; export channels; and marketing networks. Value is added and jobs created at each stage of the value chain with global interaction present throughout.

Fashion value chains are prominent examples of buyer-driven chains (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003). Here key decisions about activities and actors in the chain are made by lead firms, often large retailers or brand-name (typically Western) companies who do not own any manufacturing facilities (i.e., H&M, Primark, Zara etc.) but retain control over higher value activities such as design, marketing and distribution (Jiménez-Zarco et al., 2019). Both tangible profits and control over 'the intangible, symbolic value of fashion, and thus the brand value' (Gopura et al., 2019, p. 467) (see also Weller, 2007) are thereby located outside of manufacturing nations which remain remote from the end-consumer (Aspers, 2010). While outsourcing of design activities to supplier firms (Palpacuer et al., 2005) is increasing, outsourcing is often limited to lower-value manufacturing activities (Botti, 2019; Whitfield et al., 2020) by pre-existing transnational production networks, international mistrust, and uncertainty in financial systems. To develop a more diverse, sustainable and ethical fashion industry, we must understand and address these challenges and opportunities posed by GVC participation and how African nations can avoid being restricted to providing labour intensive, lower value linkage activities that perpetuate exploitative models and extend colonial legacies of unequal exchange. For Selwyn (2015), the GVC structure alludes to the scope for developing country firms to upgrade along the value chain while ignoring the global lead firms' control and dominance of innovation across the world system. Herein lies a challenge for fashion designers as cultural producers and innovators from below.

The need to examine lead firms in Africa within GVC and GPN analysis has been raised (Krishnan, 2018; Oqubay, 2016) and a case made for reconceptualising elements of GVC and GPN, including lead firms, on account of multi-layered public and private governance regimes and simultaneous multiple roles (lead and supplier) for firms serving local, regional and global consumer markets (Horner & Nadvi, 2018). Pasquali et al. (2020) and Goger et al. (2014) offer scope for considering lead firms from below in value chain analysis of South-South exchanges, which are outstripping North-South exchanges especially in the apparel subsector. What is also distinctive about this regional pivot is the attention to smaller batches as well as a higher fashion content and greater complexity and intermediation between smaller assembly operations (Goger et al., 2014; Pasquali et al., 2020). This shows the scope for creativity, innovation, sustainability and associated value retention on design and brand by designers within this context.

Within GVC structures, fashion designers can provide 'creative, commercial, technical and leadership skills' that act as a source of competitive advantage and contribute to industrial upgrading (Gopura et al., 2016, p. 103). Rather than being limited to the 'design' segment of the fashion value chain, we suggest that fashion designers working as micro-entrepreneurs or establishing small to medium companies (HIVOS, 2016; Jennings, 2011; Langevang, 2017) can connect across multiple levels of the value chain. By designing, producing and retailing a range of products, including custom designs/made-to-measure, small batch or mass-produced garments and accessories in local, national, regional, continental or even international markets facilitated by physical and online retail platforms, Africa's fashion designers connect with the design (their own), raw materials (i.e., cotton), production (of textiles and garments), logistics/export networks (for transport and production of materials/textiles and finished garments for retail), marketing (of brand and designs/products) and sales/distribution (of designs and garments both physically and online) components of the value chain. As discussed earlier, fashion designers as creative entrepreneurs are also interconnected with creative and non-creative professions in the creative economy that support production and retail across the sector (i.e., artisans and tailors, textiles manufacturers, retailers, marketers and other professionals) (Hansen, 2019; HIVOS, 2016; Vallone, 2008). In this way, fashion designers on the continent can become dominant players (Pasquali et al., 2020) in a market – especially domestic and/or regional markets in Africa where they service a growing 'middle class' (Brooks, 2018; Melber, 2016) as well as global markets (especially through diaspora networks – Jennings, 2011) – and generate both economic, cultural and social value (AfDB, 2019a; Jennings, 2011). Horner and Nadvi (2018, p. 227) also suggest that domestic and regional markets are shown to provide more scope for functional upgrading in 'design, marketing and branding', further highlighting the potential for fashion designers in local development.

We therefore argue for applying the lens of lead firms to South-based domestic fashion designers and brands (particularly those with a high-profile who generate significant sales – Pasquali et al., 2020), as they 'control access

to major resources (such as product design, new technologies, brand names or consumer demand)' (Gereffi & Medvedovic, 2003, p. 8). Those that 'source from and supply to international markets that cross substantial geographical boundaries' (Horner & Nadvi, 2018, p. 222) participate in GVCs. We consciously break with the common understanding of lead firms that cannot accommodate domestic designers and with the GVC framework – in its current manifestation – that does not fit fashion designers in the global South at the level (micro-enterprise/SME and predominantly domestic markets) in which they typically operate and the different types of value (cultural, social and economic) generated. Thus, development literature passes over those working below the global North lead firms, at the micro level and independent of international brands. They nevertheless connect backwards and forwards from the local to the global level through sourcing raw materials (e.g., textiles from China but also Dutch Wax fabric from Europe) (Hansen, 2019), outsourcing production (HIVOS, 2016) and engaging with international markets increasingly facilitated by global marketing and e-commerce platforms (Jennings, 2011).

An adapted GVC lens that considers end markets beyond the global North while integrating activities across at least two continents (Barrientos et al., 2016) (i.e., South-South and even South-North, in addition to North-South and North-North chains and trade networks – Horner & Murphy, 2018) could elevate the conceptualising of GVC (Horner & Nadvi, 2018). Further research that examines that the work of fashion designers within such structures, could, therefore, better explicate how low-income countries can transition from lower value Cut, Make, Trims (CMT) assembly and Original Equipment Manufacturing to higher value Original Design Manufacturing (ODM) and Original Brand Manufacturing (OBM), to experience exporting's economic benefits (Gopura et al., 2016). Thus value adding pathways impact the integration of fashion designers in the Fibre to Fashion (F2F) value chain – 'an end-to-end apparel offering, from growing or producing the raw materials (often cotton) to assembling, finishing, and shipping the garment' (HIVOS, 2016, p. 23). However, in many SSA countries, efforts to boost labour intensive (employment generating) but low value-adding operations such as CMT,³ are offset by limited attention to developing higher value activities such as ODM and OBM⁴ (Staritz, 2012); an imbalance that has led scholars to overlook designers as potential lead firms in Africa's fashion industries.

4 | AFRICA FASHION FUTURES – DESIGNERS LEADING FROM BELOW

Having addressed the growing acknowledgement of the role of fashion designers in the creative economy and the industry's potential to support economic development, and having reviewed the literature highlighting challenges and opportunities facing both designers and the wider industry, we note a lacuna in scholarly debates on fashion value chains in Africa: the position and role of domestic fashion designers and their connections within and across different networks, particularly those unaffiliated with international companies. As such, 'local designers and small operators are left out of the emerging F2F value-chain' (HIVOS, 2016, p. 23). We further note a disconnect between the literature on fashion designers as entrepreneurs operating within specific global structures and systems, and the national and transnational policies which influence their work.

Despite calls to integrate design into the development of National Value Chains (HIVOS, 2016), it remains unclear how African fashion designers located across the continent connect with and are impacted by their relationships with producers, manufacturers, suppliers and intermediary organisations working at local, national, regional and global scales, and how they may act as lead firms. Some African nations, specifically Mauritius and South Africa (and also emerging in Ethiopia), that focus more on high value addition ODM and OBM activities involving stronger integration of designers both upstream and downstream (HIVOS, 2016, Staritz, 2012), present an opportunity to probe their work and relationship with GVCs while rethinking lead firms in the periphery and from below, particularly small-scale actors and entrepreneurs who contribute to local development while acting as cultural agents, and are thus relevant for fashion as well as wider (creative) industries.

Fashion designers are global South actors and cultural agents. Their absence from the debate so far limits their usefulness for investigations into how nascent lead firms control and access resources and generate profit in the glob-

al context. Thus, prioritising a core-periphery structure intrinsically privileges international global North actors and occludes – inadvertently or otherwise – the scholarly and applied potential of local, national and regional dynamics and their interconnections. Excluding designers from Africa's fashion value chain also undermines the representation (and possibly preservation) of different cultural traditions, themes and designs within African fashion production. We, therefore, call for further research that deepens our understanding of systems and structures (i.e., trade policies) that can challenge (rather than perpetuate) unequal exchanges rooted in colonial legacies, by investigating the organisation of alternative forms of value, such as cultural and social value.

As African nations manoeuvre themselves out of the lower rungs of the value chain as sites of mass production (with associated exploitation and ethical implications) (Khan, 2019) we need the tools to understand the role of designers within sustainable creative economies, and the policies and infrastructure required to support them. We call for interdisciplinary research taking fashion designers as a key point from which to engage critically with GVCs, that extends the discussion beyond prioritising the lead firm and end markets in the global North (Horner & Nadvi, 2018), to activities between Southern continents (Horner & Murphy, 2018) whereby value can be generated in and for the global South. We thus emphasise looking from below at fashion designers as creatives and cultural producers with potential to be dominant actors (Pasquali et al., 2020) in national, regional and GVCs, leading aspects of domestic, regional and international markets and generating value, particularly through design, marketing and branding activities (Horner & Nadvi, 2018). We advocate expanding the debates on lead firms beyond global North actors by utilising the lens to examine domestic, regional and continental dynamics and its relationship to the global.

We see African designers, especially those working within priority development areas such as AfCFTA (HIVOS, 2016; UNCTAD, 2019) as the starting point for analysing forward and backward linkages across the fashion value chain in connection with GVCs, including global power relations (Khan, 2019), and their development of national, regional, and continental value chains. Through fashion designers, we can examine how local actors disrupt existing patterns and ask whether fashion (and other) export channels and marketing networks are also dominated by African actors and the extent to which African designers are able to complete value chains domestically. We note significant opportunities to investigate the development and growth of intra-continental, regional and national trade (UNCTAD, 2019) and the relationship of African fashion designers with localised supply and value chains, including their current engagement with local resources (i.e., revived factories) and markets, their development of more localised production and retail/distribution opportunities, and the impact thereof on their designs, production processes and market access (domestic, regional and international). With the continent-wide focus on developing domestic capacity and intracontinental trade, and with increased recognition of the creative economy, including the fashion industry, as a growth and employment driver (AfDB, 2018), research that seeks to understand how fashion designers can support local development through the creation of value added products that draw from and represent Africa's rich cultural heritage and diversity will be increasingly important for both policy and practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thank King's College London for their support for the Africa Fashion Futures project through the King's Together Seed Fund.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to report.

ORCID

Lauren England  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4016-2923>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Lead firms are small, medium or large firms operating in formal and informal economies which have a significant number of commercial linkages (forwards or backwards) with MSMEs. They include buyers, traders, input suppliers, exporters and processors and training providers and others. Lead firms are often associated with value adding activities, innovation and international market engagement (USAID, 2008, p. 1).
- ² An international trade agreement limiting the import of textiles and clothing into (developing) countries where high volumes of imports were damaging domestic industries (WTO, n.d.). The withdrawal is positioned as 'wiping out' apparel manufacturing industries as exports fell while imports from Asia into African markets increased (Ayoki, 2017).
- ³ 'The labor-intensive part of apparel manufacturing, meaning the factories cut the fabric, sew the pieces together, and add any trims and packaging. They do not have responsibility for design or materials' (HIVOS, 2016, p. 23).
- ⁴ In Original Design Manufacturing supplying firms provide design services to buyers, in Original Brand Manufacturing firms also own the brand (Whitfield et al., 2020).

REFERENCES

- African Development Bank. (2018). *Investing in the creative industries: Fashionomics* [Online]. AfDB Available from <https://fashionomicsafrica.org/modules/fashionom/public/storage/e26974459de6a88b752e017fa19eb9d257f9c4021535996686.pdf>
- African Development Bank. (2019a). *Investing in the creative industries: The role of the African fashion value chain in creating jobs and inclusive growth* [Online]. AfDB. Available from <https://fashionomicsafrica.org/modules/fashionom/public/storage/31ce926b0c6cb2686112b9dc99ab2d9e22dce6011551269075.pdf>
- African Development Bank. (2019b). *Report on the feasibility study for the development of the online fashionomics platform*. AfDB. Available from <https://fashionomicsafrica.org/modules/fashionom/public/storage/fa37c4caf7259ab25a093fc5d-3632062f077af581551268899.pdf>
- Alacovska, A., & Gill, R. (2019). De-westernizing creative labour studies: The informality of creative work from an ex-centric perspective. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(2), 195–212.
- Allman, J. (Ed.). (2004). *Fashioning Africa: Power and the politics of dress*. Indiana University Press.
- Aspers, P. (2010). *Orderly fashion: A sociology of markets*. Princeton University Press.
- Ayoki, M. (2017). *The impact of multi-fibre agreement phase-out on Sub-Saharan Africa's textiles and clothing exports*. IPRA Working Paper 57. Institute of Policy Research and Analysis.
- Bair, J., & Werner, M. (2011). Commodity chains and the uneven geographies of global capitalism: A disarticulations perspective. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 43(5), 988–997.
- Barrientos, S., Gereffi, G., & Pickles, J. (2016). New dynamics of upgrading in global value chains: Shifting terrain for suppliers and workers in the global south. *Environment and Planning A*, 48(7), 1214–1219.
- Berg, A., Hedrich, S., & Russo, B. (2015). *East Africa: The next hub for apparel sourcing?* [Online]. McKinsey. Retrieved January 9, 2020, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/east-africa-the-next-hub-for-apparel-sourcing>
- Botti, R. (2019). Fashion sector outsourcing to African countries: Taking advantage of low-cost labor? In C. Moreno-Gavara, & A. I. Jiménez-Zarco (Eds.), *Sustainable fashion: Empowering African women entrepreneurs in the fashion industry*, (pp. 5–35). Palgrave.
- Brooks, A. (2018). Was Africa rising? Narratives of development success and failure among the Mozambican middle class. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 6(4), 447–467.
- Brooks, A., & Simon, D. (2012). Unravelling the relationships between used-clothing imports and the decline of African clothing industries. *Development and Change*, 43(6), 1265–1290.
- Brydges, T. (2018). 'Made in Canada': Local production networks in the Canadian fashion industry. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 62(2), 238–249.
- Coe, N. M., & Yeung, H. W. C. (2015). *Global production networks: Theorizing economic development in an interconnected world*. Oxford University Press.
- Coe, N. M., & Yeung, H. W. C. (2019). Global production networks: Mapping recent conceptual developments. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 19(4), 775–801.
- Comunian, R., England, L., & Hracz, B. (2022). Cultural intermediaries revisited: Lessons from Cape Town, Lagos & Nairobi. In T. Brydges, T. Haisch, A. Hauge, B. Hracz, J. Jansson, & J. Sjöholm (Eds.), *Culture, creativity & economy* (pp. 109–123). Routledge.
- Crewe, L. (2013). When virtual and material worlds collide: Democratic fashion in the digital age. *Environment and Planning A*, 45(4), 760–780.
- Cunningham, S. (2011). Developments in measuring the 'creative' workforce. *Cultural Trends*, 20(1), 25–40.

- England, L., Mosomi, O., Comunian, R., & Hrac, B. J. (2021). Fashion designers and education in Nairobi: Challenges and opportunities. In R. Comunian, B. J. Hrac, & L. England (Eds.), *Higher education and policy for creative economies in Africa, developing creative economies* (pp. 44–59). Routledge.
- Ericsson, A., & Brooks, A. (2014). Mima-te and the development of sustainable fashion. In K. Fletcher, & M. Tham (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of sustainability and fashion* (p. 1985). Routledge.
- Ferrero-Regis, T., & Lindgren, T. (2012). Branding 'created in China': The rise of Chinese fashion designers. *Fashion Practice*, 4(1), 71–94.
- Fianu, D. A., & Zentey, E. A. (2000). Problems of large-scale fashion designers in Accra, Ghana. *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics*, 24(2), 128–136.
- Frederick, S., & Gereffi, G. (2009). Protectionism in textiles and apparel. In S. J. Evenett, B. M. Hoekman, & O. Cattaneo (Eds.), *Effective crisis response and openness: Implications for the trading system* (pp. 321–344). CEPR.
- Gereffi, G. (2014). Global value chains in a post-Washington Consensus world. *Review of International Political Economy*, 21(1), 9–37.
- Gereffi, G., & Memedovic, O. (2003). *The global apparel value chain: What prospects for upgrading by developing countries* (pp. 1–40). United Nations Industrial Development Organization.
- Gibbon, P., & Ponte, S. (2005). *Trading down: Africa, value chains, and the global economy*. Temple University Press.
- Godart, F. (2014). The power structure of the fashion industry: Fashion capitals, globalization and creativity. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 1(1), 39–55.
- Goger, A., Hull, A., Barrientos, S., Gereffi, G., & Godfrey, S. (2014). *Capturing the Gains in Africa: Making the most of global value chain participation*. Duke Center on Globalization, Governance & Competitiveness at the Social Science Research Institute.
- Gopura, S., Payne, A., & Buys, L. (2016). Industrial upgrading in the apparel value chain and the role of designer in the transition: Comparative analysis of Sri Lanka and Hong Kong. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 4(4), 103–112.
- Gopura, S., Payne, A., & Buys, L. (2019). The fashion designer's evolving role in the apparel value chain: Perspectives from Sri Lankan designers. *Fashion Practice*, 11(2), 175–196.
- Gott, S., & Loughran, K. (Eds.). (2010). *Contemporary African fashion*. Indiana University Press.
- Hansen, K. T. (2014). The second-hand clothing market in Africa and its influence on local fashions. *DRESSTUDY*, 64.
- Hansen, K. T. (2019). 'Not African enough?' Global dynamics and local contestations over dress practice and fashion design in Zambia. *ZoneModa Journal*, 9(2), 1–15. <https://zmj.unibo.it/article/view/9965/10147>
- Heim, H., Ferrero-Regis, T., & Payne, A. (2021). Independent fashion designers in the elusive fashion city. *Urban Studies*, 58(10), 2004–2022.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1958). *The strategy of economic development*. Yale University Press.
- HIVOS. (2016). *The Kenyan Textile and Fashion Industry: The role of fashion designers and small tailors in the fiber to fashion value chain*. HIVOS East Africa Office.
- Horner, R., & Murphy, J. T. (2018). South–north and South–south production networks: Diverging socio-spatial practices of Indian pharmaceutical firms. *Global Networks*, 18(2), 326–351.
- Horner, R., & Nadvi, K. (2018). Global value chains and the rise of the global South: Unpacking twenty-first century polycentric trade. *Global Networks*, 18(2), 207–237.
- Humphrey, J., & Schmitz, H. (2002). How does insertion in global value chains affect upgrading in industrial clusters? *Regional Studies*, 36(9), 1017–1027.
- James, J. (2009). Leapfrogging in mobile telephony: A measure for comparing country performance. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 76(7), 991–998.
- Jennings, H. (2011). *New African fashion*. Prestel.
- Jiménez-Zarco, A. I., Moreno-Gavara, C., & Njomkap, J. C. S. (2019). Sustainability in global value-chain management: The source of competitive advantage in the fashion sector. In C. Moreno-Gavara, & A. I. Jiménez-Zarco (Eds.), *Sustainable fashion*, (pp. 37–76). Palgrave.
- Khan, R. (2019). 'Be creative' in Bangladesh? Mobility, empowerment and precarity in ethical fashion enterprise. *Cultural Studies*, 33(6), 1029–1049.
- Khan, R., & Richards, H. (2021). Fashion in 'crisis': Consumer activism and brand (ir)responsibility in lockdown. *Cultural Studies*, 35(2–3), 432–443.
- Kobia, C., Sang, P., Muhammad, A., Khoza, L., & Lee, J. (2017). *Addressing gaps between textiles and apparel curriculum and the industry in Kenya*. Paper presented at the International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference.
- Krishnan, A. (2018). The origin and expansion of regional value chains: The case of Kenyan horticulture. *Global Networks*, 18(2), 238–263.
- Langevang, T. (2017). Fashioning the future: Entrepreneurship in Africa's emerging fashion industry. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 29(4), 893–910.
- Larner, W., Molloy, M., & Goodrum, A. (2007). Globalization, cultural economy, and not-so-global cities: The New Zealand designer fashion industry. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 25(3), 381–400.

- Lobato, R. (2010). Creative industries and informal economies: Lessons from Nollywood. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13(4), 337–354.
- Mangieri, T. (2006). African cloth, export production, and secondhand clothing in Kenya. In L. Labrianidis (Ed.), *The moving frontier: The changing geography of production in labour intensive industries* (pp. 301–318). Ashgate.
- Manson, K. (2014, December 2). Textiles sector in Kenya gears up to take a larger share of world market. *Financial Times* [Online]. Retrieved January 9, 2020, from <https://www.ft.com/content/75b7273e-6040-11e4-88d1-00144feabdc0>
- McKinsey and Business of Fashion. (2016). *The state of fashion 2017* [Online]. McKinsey. Available from <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Retail/Our%20Insights/The%20state%20of%20fashion/The-state-of-fashion-2017-McK-BoF-report.pdf>
- McKinsey and Business of Fashion. (2019). *The state of fashion 2020* [Online]. McKinsey. Available from <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Retail/Our%20Insights/The%20state%20of%20fashion%202020%20Navigating%20uncertainty/The-State-of-Fashion-2020-final.aspx>
- McRobbie, A. (2016). *Be creative: Making a living in the new culture industries*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Melber, H. (2016). *The rise of Africa's middle class: Myths, realities and critical engagements*. Zed Books.
- Mihyo, P. B. (2013). University-industry linkage and knowledge creation in Eastern and Southern Africa: Some prospects and challenges. *Africa Review*, 5(1), 43–60.
- Moreno-Gavara, C., & Jiménez-Zarco, A. I. (Eds.). (2019). *Sustainable fashion: Empowering African women entrepreneurs in the fashion industry*. Palgrave.
- Morris, M. (2006). China's dominance of global clothing and textiles: Is preferential trade access an answer for Sub-Saharan Africa? *IDS Bulletin*, 37(1), 89–97.
- Muhammad, A., Kobia, C., Khoza, L., & Davis, J. A. (2018). Developing and evaluating sustainable tools to positively impact apparel focused entrepreneurs' through academic programs incubator centers in southern Africa. *International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings*, 111. https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/itaa_proceedings/2018/presentations/111
- Neilson, J., Pritchard, B., & Yeung, H. W. C. (2014). Global value chains and global production networks in the changing international political economy: An introduction. *Review of International Political Economy*, 21(1), 1–8.
- Oqubay, A. (2016). *Made in Africa: Industrial policy in Ethiopia*. Oxford University Press.
- Pal, R. (2014). Sustainable business development through designing approaches for fashion value chains. In S. Muthu (Ed.), *Roadmap to sustainable textiles and clothing. Textile science and clothing technology* (pp. 227–261). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-110-7_9
- Pal, R., Larsson, J., Mattila, H., & Honkala, M. (2016). Local fashion value chains: Success factors and competitive advantages. In *90th Textile Institute World Conference*, 25–28 April, Poznan, Poland (pp. 631–638).
- Palpacuer, F., Gibbon, P., & Thomsen, L. (2005). New challenges for developing country suppliers in global clothing chains: A comparative European perspective'. *World Development*, 33(3), 409–430.
- Pasquali, G., Godfrey, S., & Nadvi, K. (2020). Understanding regional value chains through the interaction of public and private governance: Insights from Southern Africa's apparel sector. *Journal of International Business Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-020-00071-9>
- Pather, A. (2015). Entrepreneurship and regional development: Case of fashion industry growth in South Africa. *Entrepreneurship and sustainability Issues*, 3(1), 56–65.
- Phelps, N. A., Stillwell, J. C., & Wanjiru, R. (2009). Broken chain? AGOA and foreign direct investment in the Kenyan clothing industry. *World Development*, 37(2), 314–325.
- Portugal-Perez, A. (2008). *The costs of rules of origin in apparel: African preferential exports to the United States and the European Union*. UNCTAD.
- Pratt, A. C. (2008). The music industry and its potential role in local economic development. In D. Barrowclough, & Z. Kozul-Wright (Eds.), *Creative industries and developing countries: Voice, choice and economic growth* (pp. 130–145). Routledge.
- Raei, M. F., Ignatenko, A., & Mircheva, M. (2019). *Global value chains: What are the benefits and why do countries participate?* International Monetary Fund Working Paper. WP/19/18.
- Rinaldi, F. R., & Testa, S. (2015). *The responsible fashion company: Integrating ethics and aesthetics in the value chain*. Greenleaf Publishing.
- Rovine, V. L. (2009). Viewing Africa through fashion. *Fashion Theory*, 13(2), 133–139.
- Rovine, V. L. (2015). *African fashion, global style: Histories, innovations, and ideas you can wear*. Indiana University Press.
- Scaturro, S. (2008). Eco-tech fashion: Rationalizing technology in sustainable fashion. *Fashion Theory*, 12(4), 469–488. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174108X346940>
- Selwyn, B. (2015). Commodity chains, creative destruction and global inequality: A class analysis. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 15(2), 253–274.
- Skov, L. (2002). Hong Kong fashion designers as cultural intermediaries: Out of global garment production. *Cultural Studies*, 16(4), 553–569.

- Staritz, C. (2012). *Apparel exports – still a path for industrial development? Dynamics in apparel global value chains and implications for low-income countries*. Working Paper, No. 34. Austrian Foundation for Development Research.
- Staritz, C., Morris, M., & Plank, L. (2017). Clothing value chains and Sub-Saharan Africa: Global exports, regional dynamics and industrial development outcomes. In J. Keane & R. Baimbill-Johnson (Eds.), *Future fragmentation processes: Effectively engaging with the ascendancy of global value chains* (pp. 123–132). Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Tallontire, A., Dolan, C., Smith, S., & Barrientos, S. (2005). Reaching the marginalised? Gender value chains and ethical trade in African horticulture. *Development in Practice*, 15(3–4), 559–571.
- Taylor, I. (2016). Dependency redux: Why Africa is not rising. *Review of African Political Economy*, 43(147), 8–25.
- Tuite, A. (2019). What is independent fashion? An Australian perspective. *Fashion Practice*, 11(1), 5–25.
- UNCTAD. (2010). *Creative economy report 2010: Creative economy – A feasible development option*. UNCTAD.
- UNCTAD. (2019). *The economic development in Africa report 2019: Made in Africa – Rules of origin for enhanced intra-African trade*. UNCTAD.
- USAID. (2008). *Working with lead firms within the value chain approach*. United States Agency for International Development.
- Vallone, A. M. (2008). *A study of the success and failure of apparel entrepreneurs* [PhD Thesis, Alabama University].
- Weller, S. (2007). Fashion as viscous knowledge: fashion's role in shaping trans-national garment production. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 7(1), 39–66.
- Whitfield, L., & Staritz, C. (2021). Local supplier firms in Madagascar's apparel export industry: Upgrading paths, transnational social relations and regional production networks. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 53(4), 763–784.
- Whitfield, L., Staritz, C., & Morris, M. (2020). Global value chains, industrial policy and economic upgrading in Ethiopia's apparel sector. *Development and Change*, 51(4), 1018–1043.
- World Trade Organisation. (n.d.). *Textiles: Back in the mainstream* [Online]. WTO. Retrieved from https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/agrm5_e.htm

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Lauren England is a Lecturer in Creative Economies in the Department for Culture, Media and Creative Industries at King's College London. She is interested in creative enterprise and education with a focus on craft and sustainable development in both global North and global South contexts. She has published research on creative economy development in Africa, the evolution of craft skills and craft/design entrepreneurship and higher education. She is currently researching the impact of Covid-19 on creative economies.

Eka Ikpe is a Senior Lecturer in Development Economics in Africa at the African Leadership Centre, King's College London. She researches socio-economic transformation processes and outcomes across themes including industrial development and structural transformation, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Her research has been funded by the EPSRC-GCRF, ESRC, Carnegie Corporation of New York and the International Development Research Centre.

Roberta Comunian is Reader in Creative Economy at the Department for Culture, Media and Creative Industries at King's College London (UK). She is interested in cultural and creative work and creative higher education. She has published extensively on the role of creative and cultural industries in local development. She has coordinated two Arts and Humanities Research Council international research networks and is currently involved in the H2020 EU funded project DISCE: Developing inclusive and sustainable creative economies.

Ananya Jahanara Kabir is a Professor of English Literature at King's College London. She researches the intersection of the written text with other forms of cultural expression within acts of collective memorialisation and forgetting. For her innovative work in the Humanities, she received the Infosys Humanities Prize (2018), awarded by the Infosys Science Foundation, India, and the Humboldt Forschungspreis (Humboldt Prize, 2018), awarded by the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung, Germany.

How to cite this article: England, L., Ikpe, E., Comunian, R., & Kabir, A. J. (2021). Africa Fashion Futures: Creative economies, global networks and local development. *Geography Compass*, 15(9), e12589. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12589>