

An Ecofeminist Analysis of the Ready-made Garment Industry in Bangladesh

2019

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AN ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE READY-MADE GARMENT
INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Humanities and Cultural Studies
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida

Spring Term
2019

Thesis Chair: Shelley Park, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry and its harsh working conditions have been the center of intense scrutiny for the past decade, especially following the massive death tolls of the Tazreen Fashions factory fire in 2012 and the Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013. While lauded by many for its tremendous contributions to the Bangladeshi economy and its employment of primarily women, the garment industry is responsible for causing harm both to the women who work there and the local environment. Women workers are physically and verbally abused in the workplace for little pay, while the factories emit pollutants that contaminate the drinking water in surrounding areas and destroy crops. The global North, while being the main destination for exports from Bangladesh, refuses to intervene in a meaningful way to help the people who supply cheap goods for them, even in spite of highly publicized agreements to help improve factory safety, like the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

This paper will examine the Bangladeshi garment industry using an ecofeminist lens. Doing so helps to illustrate the various power relations involving gender, capitalism, and the environment that characterize the industry. These axes of power, all stemming from the same mindset of superiority, reinforce one another both ideologically and materially. Seeing how these different issues – including harassment, pollution, crop loss, and forced displacement – are connected will help to determine how to best solve each of these individual issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe so much to so many people for being able to complete this project. During my four years at UCF I have been surrounded by great professors who saw potential in me where I saw none. I would like to thank Dr. Bruce Janz for his insightful advice, and Dr. Shelley Park for her continual kindness and constructive comments, which have improved my writing tremendously. I am grateful as well for the support of Dr. Christian Ravela, who consistently supported me over the past two years in my academic endeavors, and encouraged me to embark on this journey in the first place.

For supporting me during the drastic ups and downs of my personal life, I would like to thank my mother, father, sister, and brother for their love and their faith in me. I would also like to thank Tommy, for showing me how strong I can be in the face of adversity.

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INTRODUCTION – TRAGEDY IN BANGLADESH

Rarely does even the most discontent American associate the drudgery of working life with the risk of death. But in urban Bangladesh, this is an ever-present reality. Those in the leather industry, not provided any sort of safety gear, walk barefoot through tanneries and have their skin submerged in chemicals (Burke, “Bangladesh factory tragedy”). Policemen murder union organizers and labor rights advocates (Mosk et al.). And in the nation’s garment factories, so crucial to the Bangladeshi economy, conditions can become even more brutal. These factories have a history laced with tragedy and disaster of record-breaking scale (Paul, “Protests rage”).

Among the most fatal of these incidents occurred on Saturday, November 24th, 2012, when a fire engulfed the Tazreen Fashions factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh, killing 112 of the people employed there and injuring 200 more (Farid Ahmed, “At least 117 killed”; Dhooze 390; Manik & Yardley, “Garment Workers Stage”). The factory, which had opened 4 years earlier, manufactured clothing for brands associated with Disney, Sears, and Walmart, among others (Dhooze 387; Manik & Yardley, “Garment Workers Stage”). Tazreen Fashions was approved to have only three floors, but it instead had eight, with a ninth floor under construction at the time of the fire (Dhooze 388). Despite all of the effort put into adding floors to the factory, it was never given fire exits or sprinklers (389). The factory did have fire alarms that were triggered when the fire began, however, supervisors instructed workers *not* to leave their stations and to continue working, claiming that the alarms were only part of a drill (S. Ahmed, “Fate sealed”; Dhooze 390; Tipu). It wasn’t long before it became evident that this was not the case. The fire spread rapidly due to the storage of flammable fabrics and yarns in a non-fireproofed space, as

well as the storage of materials in factory passageways, which made it difficult even for firefighters to navigate the building (Farid Ahmed, “At least 117 killed”).

Escape was incredibly difficult. The factory had only three stairways, all of which led to the first floor of the interior, where the fire had originated (S. Ahmed, “Fate sealed”). On this floor, there was a single exit which happened to be locked. Those in the lower stories of the factory couldn’t escape even through windows, as they were all barred (Dhooge 389). Workers on the higher stories shattered windows and flung themselves out, hoping to land on a neighboring rooftop (S. Ahmed, “Fate sealed”, “Over 100 feared dead”; Bergman & Rashid). The approximately 10% of the workers that perished that day died a variety of horrific deaths, which ranged from being burned alive, choking on toxic fumes from the ignited clothing dyes, or falling from windows several stories high (Manik & Yardley, “Garment Workers Stage”). The majority of the deceased were women (Farid Ahmed, “At least 117 killed”).

The Tazreen Fashions fire was among the worst industrial disasters in Bangladeshi history when it occurred (Bergman & Rashid; Paul, “Protests rage”). But the 112 deaths it caused were entirely preventable. With the money invested into giving the factory its illegal addition of six floors, safety measures such as more fire extinguishers, sprinklers, exits, and staircases could easily have been added instead. As for the complete absence of fire exits, factory owner Delowar Hossain claimed he was never aware that his factory needed any (Caleca 293). Yet it is certain that people were aware of the unsatisfactory conditions of the factory for over a year before the Tazreen fire occurred. In May of 2011, and again in December 2011, inspectors hired by Walmart, one of the most high-profile customers of the factory, labeled the state of the factory as poor (Caleca 293). However, Walmart never withdrew their business or put forth any demands

for change. When the government of Bangladesh proposed a plan in April of 2011 that would have retailers help fund factory improvements, Walmart rejected it, claiming that it wasn't "financially feasible" (Dhooge 390).

The following weekend saw city-wide protest among garment workers demanding better factory conditions. Factories throughout Dhaka closed down as grieving workers marched through the streets in frustration. They were met with police backlash in the form of teargas (Paul, "Protests rage"). That week saw the arrests of three Tazreen officials on account of negligence. Whether or not justice for the injured workers followed is a different story. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) claimed it would compensate workers who sustained injuries in the accident. However, many of these workers were being forced to give portions of their promised money to the very union workers who were supposed to be helping them (Sakhawat). The blocking of compensation continued for years after the Tazreen fire.

From all of the factors that contributed to the massive death toll of the disaster, it seems abundantly clear that its root cause was negligence and disregard for the well-being of the factory workers. The factory owner and the corporations that sourced from it, such as Walmart, had months beforehand acknowledged the various factors that allowed the fire to happen. Yet no changes were ever made, suggesting that low production costs mattered more than worker safety. A detailed outline of all of the factory's shortcomings can be found in both mainstream Western media outlets and local Bangladeshi news publications, as well as firsthand accounts from survivors and loved ones of the deceased. Multiple news publications point to the family of 18-year-old Munni Akhter, who was working on the fourth floor of the factory and was unable to be

found after the fire (Farid Ahmed, “At least 117 killed”; Bergman & Rashid). Another interviewee, Kalpona Akter, the head of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) and a former factory worker herself, who dedicates her time to informing garment workers of their rights and how to obtain them (Manik & Yardley, “Garment Workers”).

Interpretations by Bangladeshi government officials were vastly different, however. Evidence pointed to the fire being sparked by a short circuit, according to the Fire Chief, who cast the fire as an unfortunate accident (Bergman & Rashid). Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina suggested that the fire was the result of sabotage. Amidst her condolences to the workers and families affected, Hasina suggested that certain individuals had started the fire purposely as a way of undermining the country’s garment industry as a whole (Manik & Yardley, “Garment Workers Stage”). She pointed to the alleged footage of a flame emerging in a given spot just after a woman had walked past it, asserting that the fire was a “pre-planned” act (“Ensure safety;” Paul, “Protests rage”). Finance Minister A.M.A. Muhith suggested that the supposed saboteurs were also the ones to lock the doors of the factory (“Ensure safety”). Yet, only two days after the Tazreen fire, another fire erupted at a nearby factory in Savar which also happened to have its exit locked when workers tried escaping (“Fire sparks violence”). The aftermath of the Savar incident sparked a riot in which garment workers vandalized company cars and clashed with security forces.

Even if there were truth to Hasina’s statements, the source of the fire is of no relevance to the factory conditions which allowed it to spread so rapidly and destroy so many lives. Were Hasina’s allegations meant to suggest that the fire itself was anomalous, that argument doesn’t hold up either. Between 2006 and 2012, over 500 Bangladeshi workers perished in factory fires

(Manik & Yardley, “Garment Workers Stage”; Paul, “Protests rage”). Within the same week of the Tazreen incident, an explosion at a garment factory in Bangladesh’s second-largest city of Chittagong caused a stampede injuring over 50 garment workers (Paul, “Protests rage”). And just two days after the devastating fire, another fire erupted at a building housing three garment factories in a different area of Dhaka (Manik & Yardley, “Garment Workers Stage”). Neither fire claimed any lives, but their occurrences reinforce the idea that Tazreen was no isolated incident. Nonetheless, the Bangladeshi government attributed these subsequent fires to sabotage as well (Paul, “Protests rage”). Despite the international attention and outcry surrounding the Tazreen Fashions fire, factory conditions did not improve. Prime Minister Hasina’s initial response, other than a national day of mourning, was a call for factory owners to “pay a little more attention to” training workers to handle workplace emergencies (“Ensure safety”). Outrage died down, and life resumed as usual until April 24th, 2013 when, exactly six months after the Tazreen fire and only seven miles away, the Rana Plaza garment factory building in Savar collapsed. The incident took 1127 lives, approximately ten times the death toll of Tazreen, and is, as of this writing, the worst garment industry disaster of all time (Nittle; Westerman).

In the year 2012, Bangladesh also saw a disaster of an entirely different kind: massive flooding throughout the southeastern part of the nation, which inundated 12% of the country’s landmass (A. Ahmed, “100 dead”). Like Tazreen, the floods claimed the lives of over 100 Bangladeshis who drowned, were electrocuted, and hit by landslides (“Bangladesh calls off rescue”). Another 200,000 were left stranded on higher ground, unable to obtain resources from towns. Fragile homes in shantytowns around Chittagong were destroyed entirely. Natural disasters occur annually during the wet season, but in 2012 the death tolls were particularly high.

And yet they were hardly the worst Bangladesh has seen. In 1998, more than half of Bangladesh's landmass was flooded; over 400 died and hundreds of thousands of hectares of cropland were destroyed ("Bangladesh floods rise again"). In 2004, floods took the lives of over 300 Bangladeshis, with 2/3 of the nation's landmass underwater ("Bangladesh flood crisis worsens"). 2007 flooding took the lives of over 1000, many of whom were children (S. George). And more recently, in 2017, another hundred were killed and 8.5 million affected, with villagers from the islands of the Jamuna River describing the torrential rains as "the worst in living memory" (S. George).

In this thesis, I discuss the dynamics behind these two strains of disaster in Bangladesh, and how they are intimately tied to one another. I will examine in more depth the nature of Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry, and the various factors and parties that shape it, from an ecofeminist perspective. Utilizing such a lens is crucial because it takes into consideration the vast array of variables – environmental, social, and historical – which lead women to garment work and continuously put them in danger. It also illuminates how the workings of the industry as a whole rely on the simultaneous devaluation of women and of nature. I will also demonstrate how the exploitation of female labor in the global South and the degradation of the environment are each a cause and a result of the other.

Structure of Thesis

Section 1 of this thesis begins with an introduction to how media in the global North has portrayed the various disasters and human rights violations that have plagued garment workers in Bangladesh. I will then point to the details that are missing from these narratives, and how

neoliberal conceptions of capitalism explicitly obscure these details. Specifically, I question the silence surrounding environmental degradation in conversations of workers' rights in the global South.

In Section 2 I provide an overview of ecofeminist theory, beginning with scholarship concerning the conceptual links between women and nature, and then moving on to the work of materialist ecofeminists who look to the material connections between the mistreatment of women and of the environment in the global South. I examine the linkages between women and nature that fuel this simultaneous degradation using Val Plumwood's work on dualisms: logic frameworks that allow for certain groups to assert their superiority and justify their domination of others. I then discuss the scholarly work that has focused on how rural women of the global South have disproportionately carried the burden of environmental damage and climate change. This literature review provides the necessary background for discussions of the challenges facing urban women in the global South – challenges that have not been receiving the attention they warrant.

Section 3 moves to the specific conditions of the Bangladeshi ready-made garment industry, including the characteristics of its workers and the environment in which they are made to work. Employing Plumwood's "Master Model" to this context, I examine the power relations that characterize the workings of the global garment industry. I detail in five subsections the intersecting axes of power between male/female, factory owner/factory worker, global North/global South, colonizer/colonized, and reason/nature that are operative in the processes of garment production and distribution.

In Section 4, building upon the information presented in the preceding sections, I lay out the ways in which the issues of environmental degradation and worker exploitation in the garment industry are mutually reinforcing, and contest the idea that the industry's workers are in their given positions solely by choice.

In Section 5, I examine how the application of an ecofeminist perspective to the ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh alters the ways that people understand the industry and those involved in it. I look at how expanding the narrative surrounding garment industry tragedies to encompass gender, nature, and global capitalism has the potential to change how governments, corporations, and activists approach labor rights and environmental policy.

I conclude that the export-oriented manufacturing economy in Bangladesh is characterized by neo-colonial ideals and relationships of androcentric male superiority, which intersect with the destruction of nature and the exploitation of women within the global South. Utilizing the evidence put forth in each section of the paper, I suggest that the state of the economy in Bangladesh is misrepresented as a country in the global South “developing” or bettering itself. The recent tragedies in Bangladesh demonstrate the imperialist tendencies of globalization, wherein those at the very bottom – young, impoverished, and uneducated women and girls of the global South – are exploited, as is nature itself, for the ultimate benefit of corporations and consumers from the global North.

SECTION 1 – BANGLADESH AS SEEN BY THE NORTH

Bangladesh's history has been marred by tragedy and industrial disaster, and the nation continues to draw global attention and scrutiny today. The sweatshops on which its economy depends have drawn the ire of people in the Global North and South, both of whom find the conditions the workers face to be horrendous. In the days following the Tazreen Fashions fire, Northern international news outlets gave continuous coverage of the aftermath. One such outlet was the *New York Times*, where journalists Julfikar Ali Manik and Jim Yardley covered the protests in Bangladesh that occurred in the aftermath of the fire. One of their articles from this time recounts eyewitnesses' descriptions of a "desperate scene, as workers leapt from the upper floors of the factory, trying to land on nearby rooftops and escape the smoke and flames" ("Garment Workers Stage"). The journalists do not lighten the weight of the tragedy, nor excuse the major global brands who sourced from Tazreen; the very first paragraph of the article states that the factory produced "clothing from brands sold at global retailers like Walmart," and makes known to its readers from the global North that the fire occurred during the creation of products meant for them, thereby establishing a connection between the readers and the fire victims. The *Times* later quotes Kalpona Akter of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity, a local labor organization, who explicitly states that "international, Western brands have a lot of responsibility for these fire issues." Manik and Yardley even point to the past industrial accidents that Bangladesh has seen:

"Bangladesh's garment industry has also attracted rising international and domestic criticism over a poor fire safety record, low wages and policies that restrict labor organizing inside factories. The Clean Clothes Campaign, a European group that opposes sweatshops, said that more than 500 Bangladeshi laborers had died in factory fires since 2006."

Similar media reactions surfaced after the Rana Plaza collapse. BBC gave extensive coverage of the event and its aftermath, with one article by Emily Young specifying that Northern corporations and brands who source from these factories should be held accountable (“Bangladesh textile workers’ deaths ‘avoidable’”). Young interviews members of labor and human rights organizations; she quotes Sam Mahers of Labour Behind the Label, who states that in Bangladesh many garment factory buildings “are a death trap, often with no proper escape routes. So while this incident is shocking it is not surprising.” Young later quotes Edward Hertzmann of *Sourcing Journal*, a garment industry magazine, who asserts that “the burden is on companies to change the way they operate.” And, as in *the New York Times* article covering Tazreen, major brands who sourced from the factory are named, specifically Walmart, Primark, and Loblaws. Industrial disasters notwithstanding, Young also points to how the garment factories in Bangladesh must meet tough deadlines, leading to harsh conditions for factory workers, the majority of whom are women. With death counts as high as those of Tazreen and Rana, it is nearly impossible for even the most well-to-do onlooker not to feel outraged by these tragedies.

Northern consumers, news outlets, and corporations will condemn such tragedies as unacceptable and heartbreaking. However, the North often misses the geopolitical power relations between North and South that allow for the garment industry in Bangladesh to be as dangerous and difficult to bear as it is. A reoccurrence in Northern media coverage of Bangladesh’s RMG industry is the narrative that an industry which is low-paid, fast-paced, and oppressive is a “natural part of development” (Gillespie; Myerson). As put by social historian Lex Heerma van Voss, Bangladesh is merely passing through its “t-shirt phase,” and will in time

move on to more skilled labor (Dhooge 403). News articles portray Bangladeshi garment workers, and other South Asian garment workers for that matter, as receiving upward mobility from their participation in the industrial workforce, making higher wages than they would have otherwise (Kristof & WuDunn). The feminization of garment work contributes to this idea, as it pushes the idea that women are gaining independence from their male relatives and being “empowered” by their jobs. After all, this is how people conceptualized female empowerment during the women’s rights movements of the twentieth century in North America and Europe. But simply assuming that what applies to life in one part of the world will apply to another can be misleading. Such an assumption, as will be demonstrated later on, clouds much of the North’s perception of the South; Northerners look to their own history of development and point to how the Industrial Revolution and its rapid increase in economic productivity allowed them to become world powers. This picture of development in the North obscures many Northern women’s experiences regarding work – not all women experience work as liberating, as noted by Northern women of color like bell hooks. Nonetheless, this perspective dominates discussions of economic development. When people from the North see industry grow in the global South, they view it as a sign of those Southern countries attaining prosperity themselves. Viewing these situations with a “development lens” such as this one misses the multiple factors that contribute to Bangladeshi women’s participation in the garment industry workforce, factors which make employment in the industry not a mere life decision, but a necessity. Instead of being independent bread-winners, the women in the RMG industry in the global South can more accurately be described as impoverished young women supplementing the income of their other

family members, or school-aged girls with no option for receiving higher education (Asadullah & Wahhaj; Kabeer & Mahmud; Khanna).

And yet, those attempting to advance the development narrative will find ways to circumvent these realities. This is observable in a *New York Times Magazine* article by journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, entitled “Two Cheers for Sweatshops.” The authors paint the proliferation of sweatshops throughout Asia as a positive sign of Asia’s development. The article starts with snippets of an interview with Mongkol Lantlakorn, a laborer from Thailand. Lantlakorn discusses his 15-year old daughter Darin and her experiences working in a Bangkok garment factory. He tells the interviewers about the danger of the work:

“‘Twice the needles went right through her hands. But the managers bandaged up her hands, and both times she got better again and went back to work.’

‘How terrible,’ we murmured sympathetically.

Mongkol looked up, puzzled. ‘It’s good pay,’ he said. ‘I hope she can keep that job.’”

Despite the terrors Darin faces, her father is pleased with her job because of the relatively high wages she receives – \$2 a day for a nine-hour shift. Although the authors are at first taken aback by the conditions Darin works in, the encounter leads them to realize that Lantlakorn “simply had a different perspective... when it came to what constituted desirable work.” The authors go on to use the Lantlakorn interview as part of a larger argument that sweatshop labor is important for poverty alleviation in developing countries. They acknowledge the controversy surrounding sweatshops, conceding:

“This is not to praise sweatshops. Some managers are brutal in the way they house workers in firetraps, expose children to dangerous chemicals, deny bathroom breaks, demand sexual favors, force people to work double shifts or dismiss anyone who tries to organize a union. Agitation for improved safety conditions can be helpful, just as it was in 19th-century Europe. But Asian workers would be aghast at the idea of American

consumers boycotting certain toys or clothing in protest. The simplest way to help the poorest Asians would be to buy more from sweatshops, not less.”

After systematically listing the horrors found in garment factories employing young Asian women, Kristof and WuDunn warn that for consumers to withdraw business from corporations that contract labor from South Asia would be far worse. Indeed, it can be beneficial for developing economies to receive outsourced jobs; the “Four Dragons” in East Asia are an oft-cited example of how involvement in the international economy can make nations more prosperous.¹ Kristof and WuDunn themselves praise countries like Taiwan and South Korea, two of the four dragons, for having “accepted sweatshops as the price of development.” In the eyes of the authors, these abuses of the workforce are “a clear sign of the industrial revolution that is beginning to reshape Asia.” They draw a direct comparison between the Asia of today and the Europe and North America of the 19th century. Thus, the human rights violations that are reprehensible by modern standards – and that would be deemed unacceptable if they occurred in the North – suddenly become acceptable when they befall contemporary people in a part of the world not yet considered modern. The authors demonstrate a willingness to allow these injustices to occur against other humans for the sake of South Asian society eventually reaching proximity to that of the modern North.

Kristof and WuDunn view the Thai people they encounter, like Lantlakorn, with a neocolonial lens. They portray Lantlakorn in a manner bordering on primitivism, describing him as “a sinewy, bare-chested laborer” who is “getting by on beetles.” Their implication is that such a person, who doesn’t cover his torso and eats bugs, not only would, but *should* be happy for his

¹ For more on the Four Dragons, see Ezra F. Vogel, *The Four Little Dragons*, Harvard University Press, 1991

daughter to take on grueling labor for the sake of attaining the Northern image of “modernity!” Kristof and WuDunn take this perception of sweatshops with them in their travels to other cities throughout Asia, such as Dongguan, China. They reflect on their first trip to Dongguan, during which they reported on the grim working conditions in the local factories, where people were made to work 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. The authors confess that “it sounded pretty dreadful, and it was,” yet immediately dismiss their horror to marvel at how Dongguan had changed in the years since their first visit. They gleefully describe how the once poor region now holds “video arcades and computer schools to cater to workers with rising incomes.” The modern luxuries of technology in Dongguan make the authors accepting of the difficulties faced by the local workers whose labor financed these changes.

Whether or not these Northern amenities are truly improving quality of life for people in Asia, people of the North cannot simply excuse the human rights violations that accompany them. Their convenient dismissal of these injustices is apparent in how they describe the Sweatshop Belt countries as “the most vibrant parts of Asia... from China and South Korea to Malaysia, Indonesia, and even Bangladesh and India.” Their praise of Bangladesh’s “vibrancy” is especially ironic given the workplace tragedies and blatant exploitation of young women that continues to occur there, even nearly two decades after the article was first published.

As the article makes its way through numerous examples of how sweatshops apparently alleviate hardship in South and East Asia, it dismisses how desperation and the necessity for survival motivate the young women they meet who take up factory work. The authors at one point look to a Cambodian woman named Nhem Yen, who moved her large family to an area affected by a malaria outbreak with the hopes of selling the wood from the local trees. She, her

five children, and two orphaned grandchildren had a single mosquito net to protect themselves from contracting the illness. The article asserts that were Nhem Yen's family located near a factory of some sort, she "would have leapt at the opportunity to work in it, to earn enough to buy a net big enough to cover all her children." And perhaps she would if it meant that she could better care for her family. But the way the article frames it is as though by placing brutal sweatshops in the global South, the global North is essentially doing the world a favor, instead of ruthlessly exploiting Southern labor for lower production costs. Such a perspective bears a disturbing resemblance to that of the "White Man's Burden," in its insistence that (White) people of the global North have a responsibility to intervene in the affairs of other countries and dominate the people there in order to "civilize" them. But the authors' viewpoint is entirely misguided. It is obvious that an unemployed woman raising a family would "leap" at the chance to get a job and prevent more of her loved ones from dying. It is certain that a man like Lantlakorn would prefer to see his daughter making a living, instead of remaining unemployed and going hungry. Any employment will appear "desirable" when it is a means of avoiding an early death. Women and girls like Darin and Nhem Yen prefer factory jobs because they are better than any of the alternatives available to them – namely, starving or perishing from disease. Working in a factory is agreeing to take on numerous abuses to avoid destitution. The mere fact that girls as young as Darin elect garment work over continuing their education is a testament to how the immediate need to make enough money to survive drives people to take on these sorts of occupations – there isn't much room for choice, and even when there is, the available options are often similarly undesirable. To use her father's own words: "there are rumors that her factory

might close. I hope that doesn't happen. I don't know what she would do then" (Kristof & WuDunn).

The *New York Times* article feigns sympathy for the garment workers it discusses by describing the hardships they face while excusing dangerous factory conditions, simply because they are better than no work at all. In reality, there is no reason at all that women should have to work six or seven days a week, from sunrise to sunset, to make enough money to eat. It isn't truly necessary for school-age girls to sustain workplace injuries with no opportunities for rest. Because even though awful factory conditions are relative improvements upon the possible alternatives, the reality is that people from the global North would never tolerate these conditions for their own neighbors and family members. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire that occurred in 1911 in New York City, for instance, sparked outrage which led to major work reforms and a push for unionization, the effects of which have carried on to today, whereas 100 years later, the Tazreen Fashions Fire, a markedly similar tragedy, is forgotten by the North within a matter of months.² Similarly, while in countries like the United States activists lobby for a sustainable minimum wage that will allow workers a fair quality of life, and publicly attack abusers who prey on American women in the workplace, one can find far worse incarnations of these issues to be acceptable when they are in the global South. None of the work outsourced by Northern corporations to the South *needs* to be sweatshop labor; people just allow it to be so.

Journalists and scholars who look to Bangladesh see overwhelmingly positive changes while dismissing the horrors that accompany these same changes. This is demonstrated in a news piece by Dan Kopf for *Quartz*, in which he asserts (rather boldly) that, at this point in history,

² Dhooze offers an in-depth comparison of the responses to the Triangle Shirtwaist and Tazreen fires

Bangladesh “is one of the world’s happiest economic stories.” The article discusses how Bangladesh has grown rapidly in the past several decades, which Kopf attributes largely to its garment industry. Kopf points to various statistics, such as the Asian Development Bank’s finding that “Bangladesh’s economy grew by 7.1% in 2016, the fastest expansion in 30 years;” as well as how the country’s garment industry grew by more than 10% in that same year. Throughout, he compares these statistics to those of other South Asian countries acclaimed for their growth, with a focus on India, which is significantly wealthier than Bangladesh. At one point he states:

“Bangladesh’s rapid growth wouldn’t be so exciting if it didn’t reach the poor. A recent World Bank report found that between 2005 and 2010, average incomes for the poorest 40% of households grew 0.5% faster than for the country as a whole. By comparison, in India the poorest 40% of households did worse than the national average over a similar period.”

Kopf later points to how Bangladesh surpasses India when it comes to life expectancy and gender equality (although he doesn’t elaborate on how “gender equality” is being gauged). He even compares the two nations with his provocative headline: “One of the world’s happiest economic stories comes from South Asia, but not India.” These comparisons are meant to be illustrative of how social and economic conditions in Bangladesh have changed for the better, but they do not relay how these numerical changes translate to social change. What does it look like for poorer households’ incomes to grow 0.5% faster than other households? How do these changes manifest in daily life? 0.5% is a rather tiny change, and the incomes in question are already very low by international standards. To see the impact a 0.5% increase in incomes would have, it helps to examine a hypothetical example: Bangladesh’s gross national income (GNI) was \$530 USD in 2005, and let us say that the national income grew by 50% over the next 5 years,

making for a GNI of \$795 USD in 2010. Let us assume that incomes grew 0.5% faster during the same period for all households, as opposed to only the poorest 40%. This would leave us with an annual GNI per capita of \$797.65, making for a difference of \$2.65 USD *over five years*. To put this into perspective, \$2.65 is less than half of what it would cost for the average person in Bangladesh to purchase a box of antibiotics (“Cost of Living”). We can assume that the actual increase in income for the poorest 40% of households in Bangladesh would be much lower, as their income beginning in 2005 would be below the national average of \$530.

Additionally, Kopf’s comparison of India and Bangladesh is not so positive when one looks at the larger picture. For Bangladesh as a whole, gross national income per capita increased from \$530 to \$780 USD in the period from 2005-2010, making for an overall growth in income

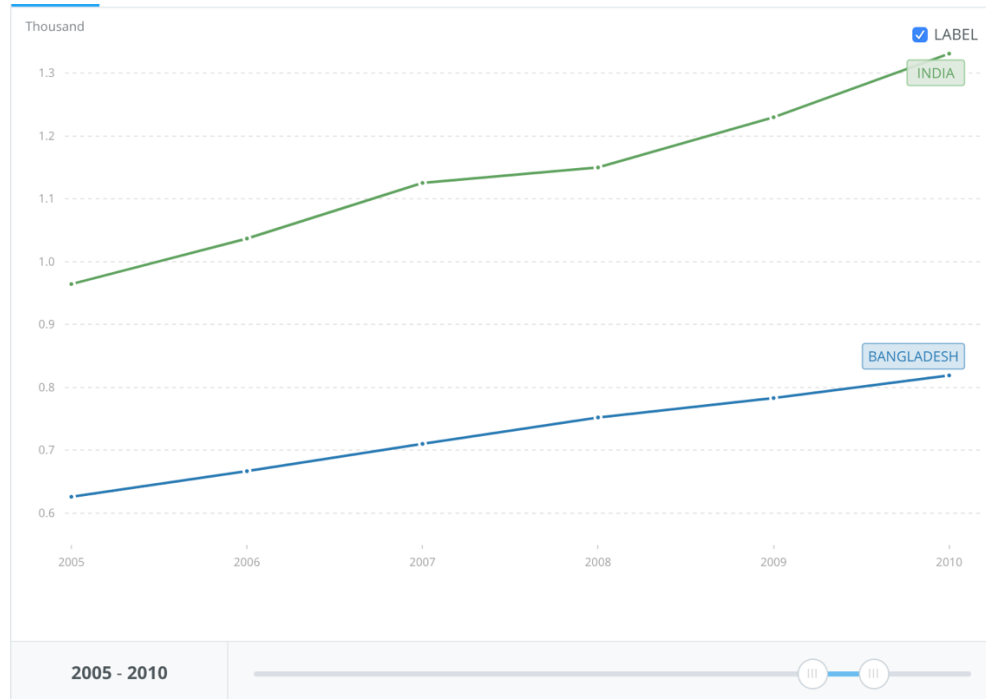


Figure 1: GNI per capita of India and Bangladesh between the years 2005-2010.
From data.worldbank.org

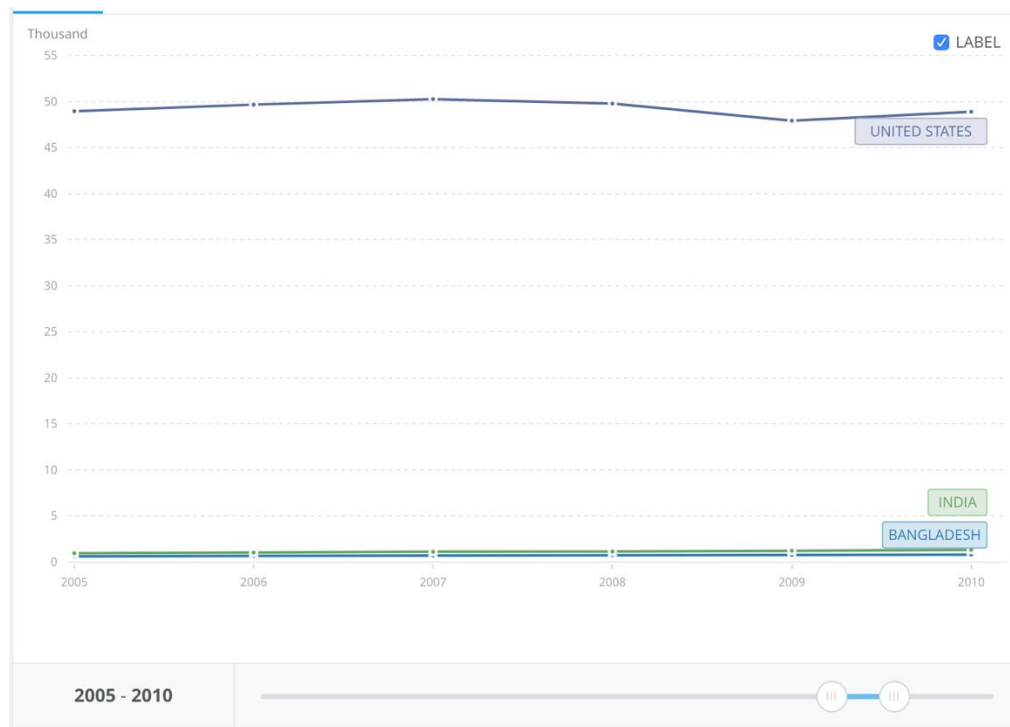


Figure 2: Statistics from Figure 1 with added data for the GNI per capita of the USA during the same period
From data.worldbank.org

of 47.17%. Alternatively, India’s GNI per capita during this same period grew from \$700 to \$1220 USD, meaning that its income grew by 74.29% (see Figure 1). Thus, while Kopf declines to mention just how much slower the growth of poorer households’ incomes is in comparison to the national average for India, average Indian incomes are still rising over 25% faster than in Bangladesh. Kopf’s meaningless comparison of Bangladesh to India never establishes what living conditions are like in India either. Kopf concludes his article with a final statement about how Bangladesh’s growth can be sustained:

“[Yale economist] Mushfiq’s biggest concern is a repeat of the Rana Plaza disaster, in which a garment factory outside of Dhaka collapsed in 2013 and killed over 1,100 workers. Worker safety must be a top priority of the government, he says, not just for the sake of saving lives but also *to make sure that the industry avoids international boycotts over working conditions, which would devastate the economy.*” (emphasis mine)

This is the only time that the slew of tragedies that have befallen garment workers get any mention in the article. Mushfiq (and in turn Kopf) preaches that the Bangladeshi government must take workers' safety seriously if it wants its economy to continue to grow, while "saving lives" seems an afterthought, indicating that there are much larger things at stake than worker welfare. The 1100 deaths of the Rana Plaza collapse are portrayed not as a human rights tragedy, but as a hindrance to Bangladesh's economic development, an unfortunate obstacle to nationwide prosperity. Kopf's assertion that another disaster like Rana has the potential to "devastate the economy" is odd as well, given that, even with all of the international controversy surrounding its garment industry, Bangladesh has never seen a significant boycott of its clothing. Since the 2013 Rana Plaza incident, Bangladesh's rate of GDP growth has not been adversely affected at all, but has actually increased steadily from 6% in 2013 to 7.28% in 2017 ("GDP growth").

Similar attitudes are expressed in an opinion piece by Kaushik Basu of Cornell University and the Brookings Institute, who, like Kopf, points to an abundance of positive changes in Bangladesh and none of those changes' negative consequences. He uses the same approach of supplying the reader with numerous statistical comparisons between Bangladesh and other South Asian countries. For instance, Basu marvels at how Bangladesh's annual GDP growth is 2.5% greater than that of Pakistan; as well as how in 2017, 34.1% of Bangladeshis made digital transactions, a number significantly higher than the average of 27.8% for South Asians. Unlike Kopf, Basu actually acknowledges how Bangladesh surpassing India in GDP growth is attributable at least in part to India's recent economic slowdown. But even then, his emphasis on statistics regarding economic growth still communicates very little about how life

for Bangladeshis is changing, and whether or not these changes are improvements. At one point Basu states:

“These efforts have translated into improvements in children’s health and education, such that Bangladeshis’ average life expectancy is now 72 years, compared to 68 years for Indians and 66 years for Pakistanis.”

Improvements in life expectancy and overall health are indicators which at last provide evidence of an improvement in quality of life in Bangladesh as a whole. However, Basu’s way of framing this point conceals as much as it reveals. Basu might have said that Bangladesh’s average life expectancy is now at the worldwide average, which is a commendable achievement (World Health Organization). But to state instead that Bangladeshis are simply living longer than Indians and Pakistanis is an odd statement, as it demonstrates only that the people of Bangladesh are better off in this respect than their neighbors. Basu claims that these statistics demonstrate how Bangladesh has been “giving women a greater voice,” even though an increase in life expectancy has no direct correlation to women’s rights. The female empowerment angle is the same one taken by Kopf, in which he attempts to demonstrate female liberation without explaining in what ways the lives of women in Bangladesh have improved.

Basu credits much of Bangladesh’s economic progress to its garment sector, as does Kopf. He claims that this growth is thanks to lax labor laws in Bangladesh which have made clothing production there cheaper than in other countries. In doing so, he quite literally applauds Bangladesh for its government’s ability to cut corners when it comes to worker welfare and workplace safety. Only once does he mention issues of factory safety within the industry:

“...though Bangladesh still needs much stronger regulation to protect workers from occupational hazards, the absence of a law that *explicitly curtails labor-market flexibility* has been a boon for job creation and manufacturing success.” (emphasis mine)

Basu here is representing labor standards as something which should only be applied in moderation. He clearly emphasizes the importance of “job creation and manufacturing success” in Bangladesh over the immediate well-being of the individuals responsible for this “success.” The article presents the enforcement of labor laws not as a necessary component to protecting workers’ rights, but as burden which makes the labor market less flexible and in turn curtails economic development. Just like Kristof & WuDunn, Basu establishes that the continuance of sweatshops, as the “price of development,” is worth more than garment workers’ well-being.

In looking at how this development lens distorts how people in the global North view life for people in the global South, one can see an overarching tendency to make comparisons: between garment workers and non-garment workers, between Bangladesh and the rest of South Asia, and between Bangladesh and the countries of the global North. All the workplace hazards, abuse, injuries, and long hours faced by Bangladeshi garment workers are minimized with assertions that the women in the garment industry are better off being exploited by corporations than they were in an imagined past where the only options were to become child brides or waste away. Whether or not this is the case, it is no excuse for the unacceptable conditions women in the garment industry are forced to work in, nor for the entirely avoidable tragedies that have plagued the industry for the past several years. Providing women with opportunities for employment is certainly a way to increase their economic and social status and promote financial independence, but doing so does not *require* that the work itself be dehumanizing and dangerous. The presumed necessity of dehumanizing work and the minimizing of its deadliness is facilitated by comparing Bangladesh to other countries that are classified as “developing.” This comparison creates a narrative wherein Bangladesh is better off than other countries where living conditions

may still be incredibly unjust, in turn minimizing the issues faced in each one of these countries. The argument that a given country “has it much worse than Bangladesh” entirely dismisses the issues affecting Bangladesh. Moreover, praising Bangladesh for surpassing other “developing” nations does no service to those nations being compared to Bangladesh.

Lastly, the use of the development lens to make comparisons between Bangladesh and countries of the global North threatens to erase human rights violations altogether. While contrasting Bangladesh with other countries in the global South minimizes Bangladeshi suffering, comparing Bangladesh with countries in the global North redirects our focus from human suffering to capital accumulation. A significant amount of time is spent measuring Bangladesh’s developmental success by the number of Western luxuries they have, ignoring how these luxuries are accompanied by country-wide suffering. Kristof and WuDunn gush over the “video arcades” emerging in Dongguan, China, while Basu marvels at how in 2017 “among Bangladeshi adults with bank accounts, 34.1 percent made digital transactions.” Technological development and the availability of leisure activities are important, but they aren’t necessarily shared by all members of a region; many in those same areas suffer inhumane treatment in exchange for bare necessities. Looking at how the conveniences of life in the global North are popping up throughout the global South is fruitless unless those amenities are benefitting those who are the worst off, and not just the upper classes. Comparisons of Bangladeshi garment workers with workers in the global North, like comparisons between workers in Bangladesh and workers throughout the global South, bolster the development lens and allow for Northern onlookers to deny responsibility for the tragedies in the South, by making consumers and corporations in the North appear as the South’s “white saviors.”

The global North's denial and dismissal of the violent realities that befall the people of Bangladesh are exemplified by North America and Europe's insufficient responses to the Rana Plaza disaster. In response to the international outrage at Rana's massive death toll, two initiatives were put in place to quell the protests of angry consumers and distraught garment workers: the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, and the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. The Alliance is comprised primarily of American corporations, including Walmart, Target, Gap, Kohl's, and Macy's, whereas the Accord mostly includes European brands. While the Accord covers nearly triple the number of factories that are associated with the Alliance, both operate in similar ways – member corporations contribute funds to be used for financing improvements in Bangladeshi garment factories and facilitating regular factory inspections. However, the progress that each organization reports is questionable: the Alliance expired in 2018, and while the Accord has been renewed until 2021, many major problems remain within Alliance- and Accord- affiliated factories that continue to endanger workers. In the remainder of this section, I examine in greater detail the nature of the Accord in particular, what improvements it has made, as well as its various shortcomings in how it is composed and how it responds to certain issues. These safety concerns which remain, while prevalent, are hardly acknowledged by media of the global North, due to the dwindling amount of outrage and attention being paid to Bangladesh after the Alliance and Accord formed. This sparse media coverage, when accompanied by false notions of what constitutes progress and development, allow the threats endangering the garment workers in Bangladesh to go unchecked.

The Accord

Signed on May 15th, 2013, in the wake of the Rana Plaza collapse, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh was created to rectify the dangers and injustices that had been affecting the garment industry, and to promote “a safe and sustainable Bangladeshi Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry in which no worker needs to fear fires, building collapses, or other accidents that could be prevented with reasonable health and safety measures” (1). The signatories consisted of over 170 clothing companies from around the world, as well as ten workers’ unions and four NGO witnesses, including the Clean Clothes Campaign. Among the corporations who signed onto the Accord are major brands H&M, Zara, and Primark (“Official Signatories”). As of August 2018, there are 1690 Bangladeshi factories covered under the Accord who source clothing to these companies (“Accord Public Disclosure Report,” 2018). In contrast, the total amount of garment factories in Bangladesh is over 4,300 (“BGMEA at a Glance”). The Accord aims to have each signatory pay an annual fee to fund health and safety improvements in the factories from which they source their products. It has had successes – by its conclusion in April 2018, the Accord achieved approximately 84% of its required fixes (“Progress”). Specifically, it has updated the wiring and cables in 82% of its factories, implemented engineering assessments in 59%, and added Lightning Protection Systems to 72%. In other avenues, the Accord has been making slower progress, and at times it appears that the signatories exaggerated the actual extent of their achievements; in 2015, an assessment of the factories employed by the Accord signatories saw that the 61% of H&M’s most highly-rated factories still did not have proper fire exits that met Accord standards (Bain, “Most of H&M’s”).

The Accord’s claims to progress seem especially questionable when one looks to its monthly Public Disclosure Statements, which systematically list each factory affiliated with the

Accord, its address, the phone number to contact, as well as its size and the number of floors and buildings that comprise it. The lists from the August 2018 Statement, even over five years after the initial signing of the Accord, are missing leagues of information. Some factories, such as ABM Fashions Ltd, have no information regarding the number of floors (1). Others have their cities given, but no specific address, like Jinnat Fashion Ltd., whose location is listed only as “Saradaganj, Kashimpur” (14). Certain factories don’t even have a postal code listed, with South East Textiles and Norban Comtex Ltd. being just two of many (20, 26). These gaps in factory information, which have persisted for over half a decade, imply that many of these factories are not inspected thoroughly, if at all. For how can a workplace inspection occur if the exact location of said workplace is unknown? How can one be certain that each factory’s structural integrity is assured, when so many factories list no information on their number of stories? And how can one know that there is even a basic level of communication between the Accord corporations and their associated factories, when some, like Newage Apparels Ltd., don’t even list a phone number (20)?

The first major garment industry fatality in Bangladesh to follow Rana Plaza occurred at an Accord-affiliated factory (Bain, “Two factory disasters”). On July 3rd, 2017, a boiler exploded at Multifabs Ltd., a four-story factory in the Gazipur district of Dhaka (Akand & Sakhawat). A worker at the factory, Shariful Islam, recalls the events leading up to the explosion that evening: “the safety bulb gave a signal and we heard some strange noise coming from the boiler. As we ran out, the authorities and the boiler operator said it was nothing. Shortly after that, there was a blast.” The explosion killed 11 people and injured over 50 others (Akand). The boiler in question was defective; it had a faulty safety device which the factory had repaired partially to allow the

boiler to continue operating. The boiler's license had expired weeks before the accident, and the factory did not apply to renew the license until July 3rd, just hours before the explosion. The lack of care taken to ensure that the boiler was functioning properly, and management's dismissal of the final warning signs before the explosion, form a disturbing parallel with the circumstances of the Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza disasters. Like the two large-scale tragedies that preceded it, the boiler explosion at Multifabs Ltd. was completely preventable. In Bangladesh, all boilers must be inspected every six months, and have their licenses renewed each year (Ovi). However, for the over 5,000 boilers in the country, there are only ten certified inspectors in the Office of the Chief Inspector of Boilers, four of which do not even make regular trips. As a result of this huge disparity in qualified workers in the department, these inspectors can only hold inspections on a priority basis, examining the oldest boilers before newer ones. Older boilers are riskier to operate because they typically lack safety devices. But the boiler that was involved in the July 3rd explosion was not terribly old – its license had only recently expired, and it was modern enough to have a safety device intact, even if it was faulty. This implies that even if the factory management had applied for a license renewal in a more timely manner, it might have been a long while before the inspection could ever take place. When news broke about the explosion, the Accord responded on its official website, expressing its condolences and stating that it would “evaluate whether it can expand its inspection program to include boilers” (“Accord statement on boiler explosion”). It is frustrating to think that none of the Accord's signatory companies had thought to pay attention to boilers in factories until a fatal incident occurred. However, there is no guarantee that the explosion at Multifabs would have been prevented by such attention.

Multifabs Ltd. is one of the many Accord factories that, as of this writing, still does not have their address or postal code listed anywhere on the Accord's Public Disclosure Statements (19).

In addition to these problems with its scope and consistency, the Accord is wrought with more serious issues regarding accountability. The Accord holds that it is the signatories' responsibility to negotiate with their suppliers to "ensure that it is financially feasible for the factories to maintain safe workplaces" (6). This condition is meant to ensure that Bangladeshi factories are financially supported by signatories as they pursue the improvements and repairs required of them. However, it does nothing to lay a groundwork for *how* this monetary support is to be carried out. Corporate signatories and unions will work together to set standards without ever consulting the owners of the factories in question to determine if the changes required are affordable or can be realistically carried out within a given time frame. This dilemma is a frequent occurrence; according to a study conducted by the International Labor Organization, even if the Accord factories were to receive loans and other resources to supplement signatory funding, they would collectively be about half a billion short of the funds necessary to carry out all required repairs (Bain, "The international effort"). Factory owners who cannot afford to meet Accord demands may be blacklisted by corporate signatories and lose their business relationship. In contrast, corporate signatories of the Accord cannot be removed from the contract or otherwise reprimanded.

The 2013 Accord expired in mid-2018, and a proposal for the Accord to be extended to the years 2018-2021 has gone into effect. However, only slightly over half of the companies who signed on to the original Accord have signed onto the 2018 extension, with Abercrombie & Fitch and Ikea being among the more notable ones to opt out (Nittle; Safi). When asked, Ikea stated

that they had their own program for ensuring safety in their factories, but they did not make public their plan for improvements nor the results of their inspections (Safi). Bangladeshi officials resisted renewal of the Accord as well, asserting that the nation was ready to monitor its own industry without international intervention. However, it has already become clear that non-Accord factories have made significantly fewer strides toward safety, which makes it questionable whether an end to the Accord will mean a reversal of the progress made in the last five years. Evidence of this is in the stark drop in the rate of unionization since the Rana disaster. While the year and a half immediately after the collapse of Rana Plaza saw the launch of around 230 unions, the government began suppressing union formation again in 2015, by which time the outrage surrounding the Rana disaster fell out of the public eye (Nittle). Now that the international criticism of the Bangladeshi garment industry has subsided, discussion of the country's RMG industry as it stands today is incredibly limited in Northern media outlets. And with the relative lack of outrage from Northern consumers in 2018, in comparison to that of 2013, the Bangladeshi government and corporations have much less incentive to continue with improvements. Meanwhile, factory owners who cannot otherwise afford to make repairs to their buildings without financial support from their clients and the government are in danger of losing their clientele and means of survival.

The situation surrounding wages in Bangladesh post-Rana is equally ambiguous. Since Rana, there has been a sharp increase in wages by approximately 77%, from \$38 to \$68 a month (Burke, "Bangladesh garment workers"; Nittle). A major victory for garment workers, this sudden wage spike, which occurred in 2013 in a jarring move by Prime Minister Hasina to gain popular support, has never adjusted for inflation since then. Today, these wages sit far below the

poverty line set by the World Bank; Bangladesh was classified as a lower-middle income economy for the 2019 fiscal year, meaning its gross national income per capita is between \$996 and \$3895 (“World Bank Country and Lending Groups”). The poverty line for lower-middle income countries is at \$3.20 a day, or approximately \$96 a month (Weller). Assuming that garment workers in Bangladesh had access to benefits like paid sick days and maternity leave and that the women in the industry didn’t have families to support, their \$68 monthly wage still would not bring them close to surpassing the poverty line.

Moreover, for everything that has improved in these factories – infrastructure, wiring, wages, etc. – there has been no talk about remedying *environmental* issues related to the factories, neither within the standards set by the Accord signatories nor among Northern critics of the Bangladeshi garment industry. When a garment worker clocks out of the factory, she, along with her family, has numerous other issues to face. Living in shantytowns throughout urban Bangladesh, garment workers are smothered by pollution, from the air they breathe to the water they drink. From the RMG factories to the entirely unregulated leather tanneries, drinking water in urban cities like Dhaka is severely tainted, tinted with the colors of clothing dyes and animal runoff (Maurice; Yardley). The industrial workers of Dhaka suffer under the chemicals and pollutants expelled from the same factories where they are abused, harassed, and underpaid. The North at its most well-intentioned consistently ignores the dangers of pollution that come with unregulated factories, as well as how greatly pollution can impact factory workers’ lives. Environmental degradation, as will be discussed later, is an important factor in driving rural Bangladeshis into the cities (Kabeer & Mahmud). Abuse of the environment and abuse of female garment workers go hand in hand throughout the nation, yet discussions of Bangladesh’s

environmental issues and its industrial issues hardly occur in tandem. This lack of recognition, again, can be at least partially attributed to the Northern development framework. The global North conceives of “progress” as involvement in the international economy. Thus, the North interprets women who take up garment work as overcoming discrimination and gaining agency in their lives. As discussed earlier, this is a very limited and narrow conception of how women in Southern countries like Bangladesh are affected by garment work.

The implications of the development framework carry on far beyond the dismissal of workplace safety issues – the framework also contributes to the prioritization of industrial development and job production over the preservation of the natural environment. The North finds value in economic production by women, but it simultaneously undervalues the importance of their reproductive roles – both with regards to caring for the family and interaction with nature. The forgotten link between the issues of labor, gender, and the environment resurfaces when one shifts from using a development lens to an ecofeminist lens to help make sense of the garment industry in Bangladesh.

SECTION 2 – ECOFEMINISM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecofeminism examines the simultaneous and interlocking oppressions of women and the natural world, and the ideological and material links that connect them. The term originated from French feminist thinker Francois d'Eaubonne, when in 1974 she called for an *ecofeminisme* in her analysis of how the exploitation of women's reproductive labor was related to resource scarcity and environmental degradation (Chircop 138). It subsequently gained traction as an academic discipline during the latter part of the 20th century, alongside the feminist, environmental, and anti-nuclear movements that were happening throughout the global North (Oksala; Phillips; Salman). Karen Warren, one of the North's foremost ecofeminist theorists, holds that ecofeminism, as broad as it is, is held together by four main tenets: that the oppression of women and nature are connected, that one must understand these connections to understand the problems of female and environmental exploitation as a whole, that feminism needs to account for environmental factors, and that environmental activism needs to account for feminist perspectives (Warren).

Ecofeminists have pointed out the various ways that the concepts of "woman" and "nature" have been linked to one another in the cultural imagination. To begin with, nature is highly feminized. The environment is constantly referred to in feminine terms – whether a nation or landmass is given the pronoun "she", or else the environment as a whole is lauded as "Mother Earth," that which is considered natural is also inherently considered feminine. "Plowing" soil has been symbolic of sexual intercourse since biblical times, and the destruction of the environment has been referred to as "rape of the Earth," as in the title on the 1939 book on soil erosion by author G.V. Jacks (Labovitz). In languages that use gendered nouns, the word for

“nature” is constantly feminine, as is the case with German (*die Natur*), Spanish (*la naturaleza*), and Arabic (*tabi'ea*).

At the same time, women are conceived of as inherently closer to nature than men, in that both female humans and the non-human environment share a conceptual tie with emotion, passion, and intuition (Rountree). Women and nature are given the roles of nurturing providers, who bear fruits and are responsible for life itself (Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation*). While this conception of nature occupies one essentialist view of womanhood and naturality, there is also a more forwardly negative one: that of the impassioned, enraged, uncontrollable and monstrous woman. Both of the two are characterized as lacking reason – they act on impulse and instinct, abandoning rationality in impassioned and sometimes even destructive throes. One could look to the image of the “Mama Bear,” who fiercely protects her young to the point of killing; to the regular referencing of wild animals with female gender pronouns; or else to the myriad of animal-related insults intended specifically for women – such as “bitch” and “cow” – that label women as nuisances and beings who can be used at will. Together women and the environment are defined as inherently lesser than men *because* of these associations with emotion and sexuality, which in turn justify female exploitation.

Ecofeminists note that reason and logic are considered the qualities of man, an assertion which has been used to justify the placement of men in greater positions of power, from being the head of the household to the head of state. Women across cultures are confined to the home to care for their offspring, and because of this “natural propensity” to nurture, they are barred from taking on familial and extrafamilial roles that would give them the same economic and decision-making agency as their husbands. Ecofeminist theorists of the global North make sense

of these ideological parallels between woman, nature and emotion, and between man, culture and reason, using a framework of *dualisms*. A dualism functions like a binary in that those on either side are labeled as irrevocably different from the other – each side has something that the other lacks. However, when speaking in terms of dualisms, one side of the binary is deemed superior to the other *because* of those differences (Plumwood). So, in the case of the gender dualism between men and women, women are inferior to men because they are said to lack reason, while men possess it. When speaking on the various binaries promoted by hegemonic masculinity, ecofeminist Greta Gaard points to queer theorist Eve Sedgwick, who asserts that with binary divisions, the superior component defines its normality through emphasizing its differences from the lesser “other” (Gaard, “Queer Ecofeminism”). Here, the “other” are women, the essentialist depictions of whom allow for “man” to be defined as he is because of the rational qualities that are supposedly unique to his sex.

With their binary composition, dualisms greatly oversimplify the entities they encompass. Ecofeminists note that, because of this very limited way of making sense of its surroundings, Western society has divided up the world in a way which drastically limits how people understand concepts like gender, and what it means to be male or female. It follows that items that lie on the bottom half of different dualisms, with their shared inferiority, end up becoming conceptually linked to each other. Similarities are drawn between these different lesser entities, as differences between superior and inferior concepts are emphasized. This is the case with the dualisms of male/female and with reason/emotion. Reason is considered superior to emotion, and because it is superior, it is a quality of man, who is the superior of the two sexes. When it comes to the environment, Western culture often looks to nature as the inferior “other” to society and

culture (Merchant; Plumwood). In her book, *The Death of Nature*, historian of science Carolyn Merchant traces how this devaluation of nature came to fruition. Prior to the Scientific Revolution, the environment was taken to be a complex organism, and thus tampering or harming the world was discouraged. As humanism began to take hold, this conception of nature shifted to one where nature does not exist for itself as an independent being, but as a pool of resources at humanity's disposal. While humans had always recognized the bounty made available by the environment, from rich foods and lush plants to an abundance of knowledge, it was during the Scientific Revolution that dualism began to take hold; nature then became inferior and subservient to humans. The environment was slotted into the bottom half of a dualism between nature and society. Merchant points to the prominent example of the English philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon, one of the key figures during the Scientific Revolution. In developing his scientific method of inquiry, Bacon (cited in Merchant) emphasizes that "the new man of science must not think that the 'inquisition of nature is in any part interdicted or forbidden'" (169). He likens the examination of nature to the interrogation of convicted criminals, using language that is undeniably sexual: "as a man's disposition is never well known or proved till he be crossed... so nature exhibits herself more clearly under the trials and vexations of [mechanical] art than when left to herself" (169). For the sake of discovery, Bacon advocates for scientists to have nature's secrets beaten out of it, as opposed to taking only what it gives freely.

Ecofeminist Directions

When nature is viewed merely as a tool for mankind to exploit, and women become associated with nature, it reinforces a view of women as subordinate to men. However, this shared devaluation extends beyond only women and the environment. Dualisms can be used to describe how people in the global North have conceived much of the world around them: it can explain the relationships between colonizing and indigenous peoples, human and animal populations, reason and emotion, and the mind and body. Thus, it is from these basic tenets that ecofeminist theory has branched out in a variety of directions.

One early direction was *spiritual ecofeminism*. People involved in the projects of environmentalism and feminism have at times turned to alternative forms of spirituality, either from ancient Western societies or from Asian and African traditions, to make sense of their relationships to nature, themselves, and the rest of humanity. There is an endeavor to reaffirm the sacredness of nature, which spiritual ecofeminists claim used to be a part of Western society before the spread of the Abrahamic religions (Tøllefsen). In looking to figures like the goddess and the witch, women seek to instill a respect of womanhood and of the environment that they feel was present in the matriarchal cultures of old. Contemporary Northern goddess worship, in particular, is a form of alternative spirituality that exists amicably with the aims of ecofeminism. When goddess worship saw a resurgence in North America in the 1970s, it was seen as a way to help protect the planet and privilege nature (Reuther). Additionally, goddess worship practitioners hold that the demise of the goddess as a figure of veneration is what brought the demise of women's position in society (Rountree). Consider, for example, American activist Starhawk: an environmentalist and feminist, Starhawk turned to Wicca as a way of reconciling her beliefs about herself and the planet with the Jewish tradition in which she was raised

(Starhawk & Connor). Starhawk's theory builds upon the ecofeminist theory of dualisms; core to her beliefs is that men and women have the same capacities, but patriarchal culture has split them so that they seem entirely different. This dualist mode of thinking estranges men from women and humans from the Earth, allowing humanity to behave destructively toward the Earth. Overall, spiritual ecofeminists seek alternatives to dualism-based philosophies which devalue women and nature by collapsing these dualisms where they exist in people's spiritual practices (Rountree).

Another ecofeminist direction has been *vegetarian ecofeminism*. Located at a crossroads between women's rights and animal rights activism, vegetarian ecofeminism looks specifically to the ideological separation of humans from the rest of the animal kingdom, which permits animal exploitation. As part of nature, people value animals as resources for their own use, whether as transportation or as sources of food and furs. To humanity, animals exist to be utilized. To justify this idea, humans deny that animals may possess reason or be conscious of their own existence.³ While people typically no longer accept the older Cartesian assertion that animals are solely automata, a similar attitude remains – people believe that animals have brains, but not complex minds like our own. When justifying human consumption of other animals, people will claim that animals are not capable of processing their own deaths, and so it is not morally unjust to kill them. Accompanying the idea that animals are absent of minds is the feminization of the animal kingdom. Carol Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat* centers on this tendency, evident in how both the female and animal body are objectified and marketed for the consumption of men, often

³ See Bilewicz et al. and Ruby & Heine for studies examining the assumptions humans make about animals intended for consumption compared to those who are not traditionally consumed

with overlapping vocabulary and imagery. Meat consumption, hunting, and the domination of the animal kingdom have been associated with masculinity in Western culture for centuries, just as the domination and possession of women are thought to bolster masculinity (Adams; Willard). Consequently, Western culture holds that both women and animals exist to be used. On factory farms, livestock like cows and chickens have their reproductive abilities exploited. The case is the same for human women who have suffered sexual abuse. Vegetarian ecofeminists hold that animal liberation is a key component to women's liberation, as the abuse of each is maintained by the same patriarchal mindsets that label each as meant for (male) human use. Therefore, if the domination of one exists, the domination of the other can never be fully resolved (Gaard, "Vegetarian Ecofeminism").

Taking a slightly different direction are ecofeminists working at an intersection with queer theory. *Queer ecofeminism* uses the idea of the dualistic relations between man and woman, and man and nature, in order to better understand how the world defines "femininity" and "masculinity," as well as how to challenge those interpretations. In looking to how our interactions with nature affect gender identity, this strain of ecofeminism examines the human-environment relationship and how it pertains to cultural notions of gender and sexuality. It holds that homophobia and heterosexism are also issues which are pertinent to ecofeminism, and how human interactions with the environment and nature-based language can be used to justify these forms of discrimination (Gaard, "Queer Ecofeminism"; Mortimer-Sandilands). For instance, Greta Gaard, in her essay "Towards a Queer Ecofeminism," mentions how, in the Christian tradition, homosexuality has been associated with sexual excess. She states that "the erotic (a particularly perverse erotic) is projected onto queer sexuality to such a degree that this quality is

seen as the only salient feature of queer identities” (118). The Christian demonization of eroticism demonstrates, in turn, a desire to suppress sensuality and emotional expression, to instead be replaced with decency, rationality, and self-control. In addition to Gaard, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands has examined how in the global North, and the United States in particular, people’s relationship with nature changed to fit changing gender roles. The emergence of national parks starting in the late nineteenth century made nature into an “escape” from loud and polluted life in the cities. These parks became a destination for the elite to enjoy outdoor recreational activities in a setting supposedly untainted by urban development. Nature began to be used to reinforce heterosexism in American society. As the economy began seeing more female involvement, and more women started earning incomes of their own, men could no longer define their masculinity by their positions as bread-winners for the household. According to Mortimer-Sandilands, men shifted to using outdoor activities, like hunting, to reassert their virility. Additionally, Mortimer-Sandilands has pointed to how visiting national parks has particular racial and class implications as well. She asserts that the desire to return to the “purity” of the countryside was in part the result of affluent white families wanting to escape the racially and culturally diverse cities and their “corrupting influences” (12).

Given ecofeminism’s dedication to environmentalist causes, it is perhaps unsurprising that a *Marxist ecofeminism* has developed which is critical of globalization and international capitalism. Unlike the traditional Marxist, however, ecofeminists working within Marxism have a commitment to making issues of gender and the environment a focus, instead of a mere addition to studies of economics and class dynamics (Mies, “Women and Work”). With this economic perspective, ecofeminists examine the relations between the roles of women and

nature in the global market, and how each has their labor and resources systematically exploited (Oksala). Of particular note is the work of Maria Mies, who looks to women's economic roles in the global South, both in the home and in industry. She points to how the jobs normally reserved for women in developing countries – such as child-rearing, maintaining the household, and subsistence farming – are all considered free labor (“Women and Work” 476). It is never compensated, nor does it get factored into a nation's GDP; hence, it is not considered “productive.” Mies', in her critique, notes how women's tasks are reserved for them due to their associations with nature, whereas nature itself is considered a “free resource” that can be robbed without consequence (*Patriarchy and Accumulation*; “Women and Work”). With regards to economics, women and nature are both devalued similarly so that they may be taken from and exploited.

Several critics have accused ecofeminism of propagating essentialist conceptions of women and reinforcing the very stereotypes that allow for their oppression (Gaard, “Ecofeminism Revisited”; Phillips). But this is a very shallow interpretation of ecofeminist work. To combat oppressive mindsets like racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism mandates that one acknowledges the various attitudes and associations which allow for these forms of inequality to exist. Ecofeminists look to how women, indigenous peoples, and nature have been grouped together across time and cultures, and then use those wide-spread associations as a point of departure for combatting discrimination against these groups.

Ecofeminism holds that the oppressions of each of these groups are tightly interwoven, justified by an overall attitude that allows for the destruction and exploitation of specific groups labeled as “inferior.” In philosopher Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, she

describes the dualistic structure of traditional Western thought as central to what she calls the “master model” (23). In this model, various dualisms map on to each other and become associated with one another, and their individual subordinations become connected. The way people conceptualize these different entities across dualisms gives them all shared implied characteristics, which Plumwood refers to as “linking postulates” (45). This bridges together sexism with racism, racism with homophobia, homophobia with environmental degradation, and so on, bolstering an overall “logic of domination” that turns these devalued entities into targets of oppression. An example of how these different forms of discrimination reinforce one another can be seen through examining the interactions of colonizing peoples with indigenous societies.

The logic of domination has made colonizers feel as though their domination over indigenous peoples is not only acceptable, but warranted. For instance, in the Americas, European settlers would label Native Americans as beastly and unrestrained, and use the Americans’ apparent lack of comparable mental faculties as justification for dominating them (Kohn & Reddy). But the subordination of Native Americans was, as with non-human animals, bolstered by their feminization as well. Spanish colonizers frowned upon Native American hair and dress, their tolerance of homosexuality, and their respect for the *nadlee* members of their community, whose gender identity lay outside of the male-female binary (Gaard, “Queer Ecofeminism”). The Native Americans’ “barbaric” practices were used as evidence that European intervention was necessary to “deliver” them. The Europeans imposed Christianity on the Native Americans, which forbade them from behaving in non-heteronormative ways. Alongside the introduction of the settlers’ faith came cruelty and the theft of Indigenous land and resources. Christianity held that “the ‘fruits of any conquest could only be legitimate if the war

that won them had been just” (cited in Gaard 126, “Queer Ecofeminism”). Thus, using the guise of a religious mission combatting supposed evils, the Europeans were able to carry on with their conquest of the New World.

The British colonization of India follows a similar course. The British conception of the Indians was an unsavory one, which cast them as cruel and barbaric. In the words of 18th-century British missionary Charles Grant, Indians, specifically those from Bengal, “exhibit human nature in a very degraded, humiliating state” (cited in Mill 323). But the overall attitude of the British towards Indians is perhaps most exemplified by Scottish historian James Mill in his 1817 book *The History of British India*. The work has been considered by some to be “the single most important source of British Indophobia” (Trautmann 117). The book was successful enough to earn Mill a job with the East India Company in London for his supposed expertise, despite him never actually having visited India. Mill’s description of Indians reads like an impassioned rant, with his distaste for the people entirely unconcealed in his writing. In Book II, Mill dedicates ten chapters to describing the Hindu people, outlining their history and then their religion, culture, and daily life. A great many pages are spent listing heavily generalized comments on the physical attributes of the Indians. Scrutinizing their “physical form” as if they were livestock, he writes:

“Their make is slender and delicate. Their shapes, in general, are fine... The muscular strength, however, of the Hindus, is small... their stature is in general considerably below the European standard; though such inferiority is more remarkable in the south, and diminishes as you advance toward the north.” (Mill 311).

He goes on to describe their apparent laziness, claiming that “few pains, to the Hindu, are equal to that of bodily exertion,” which he attributes in part to the hot Indian climate (313). He sees in their daily life “a state of barbarity and rudeness which implies, perhaps, a weakness of

mind too great to be capable of perceiving... the benefits of labour” (314). In addition to their apparent sloth and stupidity, the Indians’ supposed vices are extended to their hospitality, hygiene, gambling, and cruelty to others. Mill, interestingly enough, denounces the Indians for treating animals better than their fellow man, just before making his list of dehumanizing claims (307).

Gender and gender relations within India are a major point Mill uses to demonize Indian society and label it as underdeveloped. He begins:

“The condition of women is one of the most remarkable circumstances in the manner of nations, and one of the most decisive criteria of the stage of society at which they have arrived. Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people, they are exalted. In the barbarian, the passion of sex is a brutal impulse, which infuses no tenderness; and his undisciplined nature leads him to abuse his power over every creature that is weaker than himself.” (293).

Mill then follows this with an elaboration on the “habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women” (295). He notes that the women are denied independence throughout their life and always under male protection. They are constantly secluded and confined to the home, and “an almost unlimited power of rejection or divorce appears to be reserved to the husband” (297). Yet it should be noted that at the time of Mill’s writing, and for an extensive period of time afterward, many countries in Europe had outlawed divorce altogether, including Ireland, Italy, and Spain (Rheinstein). The very things he denounces are not at all uncommon in the global North during his time, but he nonetheless uses them as evidence of India’s backwardness. His argument can be likened to the contemporary narratives around women in the global South today, where exploitation of women in the form of unsafe and grueling labor is seen as a remedy to alternative careers as sex workers or entering into marriage at early ages.

Mill's dehumanizing descriptions of Indian society, which incorporate references to both animality and unrestrained sexuality, reflect an overall attitude of superiority which justified British occupation of the region, which could have the effect of civilizing them. The Indian subcontinent was plundered for natural resources under British rule, as will be discussed further in the following section (Bose; Mukherjee).

Gender and Environment in the Global South

The dualistic organization of concepts in modern thought, while seemingly abstract, has very real material consequences. Specifically, as concepts lying on the lower half of dualisms are all connected to nature and each other, the harming of the environment harms them in turn. One can see how this is so by looking to the roles assigned to women. In contemporary times, women's duties in society are typically more involved with the environment, which, like themselves, is labeled as a "provider". This isn't so visible today in the global North, where far more consumption occurs than production, as it is visible in the global South. These responsibilities include the gathering and harvesting of food and water (Pandey). As a result, environmental disturbances tend to affect women more immediately. When climate change makes weather less predictable, women in the rural South are forced to adapt and undergo additional strain. For instance, a woman in a subsistence agricultural society may be given the role of bringing water to her community. When changes to the environment occur which make the planet warmer, and droughts become more powerful and frequent, these women will be forced to travel further to fetch water, as well as carry more at a time to make the most of these elongated trips. But the gendered nature of agricultural work in the South is often ignored, or else

hidden. While women generate half of the world's food and work 2/3 of the world's working hours, they only ever earn 10% of the world's income (23). This trend has persisted for a long time – according to a 1995 United Nations report, women's reported labor force participation was only 10% in Bangladesh. However, when rural women were interviewed about their daily responsibilities, which included caring for livestock and harvesting food, it was found that women's actual rate of participation in the economy was around 63% (Federici). Women's contributions to agriculture are often made invisible through labeling women as “helpers” or “assistants” to the male members of their community. Their help is not considered to be “work”, but an informal contribution which is required nonetheless, whether they get fairly compensated for it or not.

The global South, as with nature itself, has been slotted into the role of “producer”, providing everything from food to clothing to gadgets for consumers in the global North. There is an argument to be made that there exists a dualism between the North and the South, wherein the North exploits resources and labor from the South for its own gain. In doing so, the South is harmed alongside the environment. Ecofeminist and scientist Vandana Shiva details how Northern corporations have taken advantage of the independent farmers in her native country of India. The farmers there have become indebted to the North by being made to pay for expensive, genetically modified cash crops, which were sold to them with the intention of getting them involved in the global economy and releasing them from poverty (Shiva, “How to Grow Poverty”, “Poverty and Globalization”, “Violence of Globalization”). But while these farmers provide much food for the North, they find themselves even deeper in poverty. The introduction of these new high-yield crops to the local environment also means a loss in genetic diversity and,

in turn, a loss of the crops' natural resistance to pests and disease. These crops require heavy pesticide use to survive until harvest, and the farmers and their communities are left to deal with the adverse health effects of pesticide exposure.

The plight of the Indian farmers bears many parallels to that of the farmers in Africa during the latter half of the twentieth century, the time when Wangari Maathai began the Kenyan Green Belt Movement. While the North attempted to extract non-renewable resources from the African landscape, they also implemented "agricultural development projects" on the continent, wherein farmers planted cash crops to be exported to the North (Hunt; Pandey). However, the projects targeted primarily African men, leaving women as unpaid "helpers." In response to this, Dr. Wangari Maathai began a movement of women who to this day have planted millions of trees and who teach others how to care for these plants and for themselves.

From the African example, one can see how when the North exploits and harms the South, not everyone is affected in the same ways. Within the South there are other hierarchies, wherein those on top are able to benefit from the exploitation of the environment and of their fellow citizens. This is seen in Central and South America as well. Take Colombia, the largest exporters of cut flowers to the United States (Ferm). The majority of female flower workers, who harvest flowers to be shipped off in bouquets to the North, suffer long hours of repetitive work and constant bending, which puts a great deal of stress on their bodies. The heavy use of pesticides causes them to become ill and face reproductive health issues. They are denied the benefits they are entitled to under local labor laws, and are frequently fired when pregnant instead of granted maternity leave. However, forming unions is next to impossible for these women. Employees have been fired and blacklisted for allegedly taking part in union activity.

Colombia has even been named the most dangerous nation for trade unionists, with many of the country's activists having been murdered for attempting to defend their rights (W. George; Lieberman).

The connections between exploitation of the environment and the oppression of women in the rural South are especially potent. Yet similar issues extend to those living in the *urban* South as well. When poverty and living conditions in rural areas are too dire, and simply traveling further or working longer hours is not an option to combat the consequences of climate change, rural-urban migration ensues. Such is the case in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which in the past several decades has seen a massive influx of internal migration (Fauzia Ahmed; Smith). These migrants live in squatter settlements and take on jobs in construction, transportation, and manufacturing. Once a predominantly male phenomenon, rural-urban migration is being undertaken by more and more women, specifically since the rise in prominence of the Bangladeshi garment industry (Afsar). In spite of the more even gender distribution of migrants, however, the inequalities that plague women in the rural South are being replicated in the cities. These women continue to be devalued, the harm they face from environmental degradation being just as dire as in the countryside.

SECTION 3 – THE RMG INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH

Much of Bangladesh's growth in the last several decades can be attributed to its garment industry. The ready-made garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh accounts for 15% of its GDP and 80% of the nation's exports, making the tiny state the largest exporter of garments in the world after China (Ali et al.; Caleca; Heath & Mobarak; Khanna). Despite controversy after controversy, the industry continues to grow (Dhooge). Wages for industrial workers in Bangladesh are the lowest in the world, making the nation attractive to corporations seeking to reduce the cost of manufacturing their clothing (Yunus & Yamagata).

Prior to 1978, the nation had no more than nine RMG factories, but that changed with the intervention of Korean company Daewoo. Daewoo had turned to Bangladesh as a way to evade the quotas put in place by the 1974 Multifibre Arrangement, or MFA (Caleca; Kabeer & Mahmud; Yunus & Yamagata). The Arrangement was created in 1974 in order to control the rapid growth of the industry, and made it so that the growth of the export-oriented textile and garment industries in developing countries was capped at only 6% per year (Kabeer & Mahmud; Mottaleb & Sonobe). Importing countries also had the right to impose quotas on specific countries that exceeded the allowed growth rate (Kabeer & Mahmud). While this affected the more heavily industrialized garment-producing countries in Asia, like South Korea and Japan, it made other, less export-oriented countries more competitive on a global scale, including Bangladesh. Bangladesh and its modest garment industry were not included in this agreement until 1986, after which it still had far more generous quotas than its competitors (Mottaleb & Sonobe). Realizing the potential of working with Bangladesh to evade their own quotas, in 1978 the South Korean company Daewoo began a collaboration with the local Bangladeshi

corporation Dosh Garments Ltd. (Kabeer & Mahmud; Yunus & Yamagata). Daewoo brought 130 trainees from Bangladesh to their factory in Korea for 6 months to train them in garment production and marketing (Kabeer & Mahmud; Yunus & Yamagata). Nearly all of these trainees, upon returning to Bangladesh, went on to run their own factories with their newly acquired knowledge, their relationship to South Korea already established (Mottaleb & Sonobe). Daewoo was able to have Bangladesh manufacture its products locally, thereby avoiding MFA quotas.

As the garment industry grew, the Bangladeshi government made sure not to intervene by allowing manufacturers to import the necessary materials and technologies freely (Yunus & Yamagata). At the same time, the government implemented Export-processing Zones (EPZs) to attract more investors from the North. EPZs are specific industrial zones with special policies and minimal regulations meant to make foreign investment more attractive. In the case of the Bangladesh EPZs, union activity was restricted within their borders, and minimum wages were not legally enforceable (Khanna). Yet, even outside the jurisdictions of the EPZs, safety violations were addressed very mildly, if at all. This lack of regulation within Bangladesh allowed the industry to expand even more rapidly. However, beginning in 1994, the MFA phased out, coming to a complete end in 2005 (Mottaleb & Sonobe). Since then, Bangladesh has had to fight harder to keep its industry as competitive as it was under the old export-quota system. It has done this by keeping wages at starvation levels, and by keeping its workforce compliant.

In the present, one can see the consequences of this uninhibited industrial growth on both the people and the environment of Bangladesh. This section will illustrate how, while the country has grown wealthier, it has also become more polluted, and its people live in continually dire situations ranging from dangerous working conditions and harassment to improper housing and

medical care. The neglect of human and non-human life for the sake of industrial expansion is a result of neocolonial tendencies which favor some lives over others, and that value rapid economic expansion over sustainable growth. What Val Plumwood calls a “logic of colonization” manifests itself in numerous ways throughout the Bangladeshi RMG industry. These can be visualized as different *axes of power* that employ hierarchical dualisms based on gender, labor, globalization, colonization, and the environment.

The Gender Axis

The most immediately apparent of the various power relationships comprising the garment industry is that between *male* and *female* Bangladeshis. Women have been favored for garment work throughout the industrial development period of many countries such as the United Kingdom, for their supposedly more dexterous, nimble fingers (Khanna; Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation*). The young female workforce was also seen as especially passive, vulnerable, and easy to manipulate (Mies); modern-day Bangladesh is no exception to this historical tendency. Female Bangladeshis are held to be more “docile,” and thus are made to work longer hours for less compensation (Fauzia Ahmed; Akhter et al.). Additionally, the RMG industry in Bangladesh is thought to be a more “respectable” occupation for women than alternative industrial jobs, like technology manufacturing (Khanna; Siddiqi). As a result, the garment industry is made up overwhelmingly of female workers, who comprise approximately 80% of its workforce. It is the largest employer of women in Bangladesh within the manufacturing sector (Fauzia Ahmed; Ali et al.; Khanna). Female garment workers constantly face physical abuse and verbal harassment by their supervisors, who belittle and chastise them if

they don't work fast enough or complain of the straining workplace conditions (Akhter et al.; Hodal; Khanna; Siddiqi).

The physical toll of garment work is immense: hours on end of repetitive, fast-paced work, for six days a week, if not more (Akhter et al.; Ali et al.; Heath & Mobarak; Yunus & Yamagata). Shifts can sometimes last from sunrise to sunset – for factories that operate on a daily quota basis, workers are prevented from leaving until they accomplish their daily required workload (Akhter et al.). There are factories that have been found making employees work 19.5-hour days (Caleca). Head of the Bangladesh Center for Workers' Solidarity, Kalpona Akter, recalls sleeping on the factory floor during her days as a garment worker (Mosk et al.). The brutal conditions and lack of factory safety measures make garment workers especially vulnerable to physical ailments. A survey by Ali et al. of 90 female garment workers across 30 Dhaka factories found that 70% of respondents reported frequent headaches; 46.7% reported gastritis, and approximately a third each experienced earache, chest pain, and skin disease (454). These daily stressors are met with apathy from supervisors, and workers have very few resources to turn to for medical help or treatment. Available treatments are limited, and physicians often appear indifferent to patients' concerns (Akhter et al.; Yunus & Yamagata).

In addition to physical stressors, these women deal with immense mental strains. In a 2017 study by Sadika Akhter et al. on the mental health of Bangladeshi garment workers, 20 women employed at multiple factories were interviewed about their struggles at work. The study detailed the various factors that weighed on these women, which extended far beyond the physically strenuous nature of their work. Most of these women were from impoverished rural areas who came to the cities to support their families. All of these women had children, but most

were living away from them, keeping their children instead with grandparents or other family members. The distance from their children is painful, and the minimal amount of time the workers get off from work makes visiting their children a rare occurrence. The women feel guilt at being away from their children, giving them the feeling that their life is meaningless or not worth living. A quote from one of the authors' participants states:

“I suffer from constant pain in my heart. I always miss my child, as my child is part of my body. I feel constant pain in my mind and my heart burns. I do not have anybody to share my pain. I feel very empty inside me. Life has no meaning to me. Rather, I feel that I should die when I see children with their parents.” (575)

As could be surmised by the quality of medical treatment to which these garment workers have access, there is no counseling available to assist them with emotional hurdles.

The garment industry does have men in its workforce. However, women make approximately 73% of what their male coworkers make (Smith 14). They also find themselves in positions of lesser power or influence, as supervisory roles are dominated by men (Akhter et al.; Labowitz & Baumann-Pauly). Given that women in the industry occupy a lower standing than men, they are at greater risk of sexual harassment (Fauzia Ahmed; Ali et al.; Hodal). There appears to be a trend of explicitly gender-based abuses by the primarily male management towards the predominantly female labor. For instance, garment workers may be attacked using sexually-charged insults like “whore,” and their desperate positions make them vulnerable to threats and acts of sexual abuse (Siddiqi 168). The survey by Ali et al. found that a horrific 27.8% of the respondents had been raped by male colleagues while in the factory (455).

Despite these discriminatory practices, Bangladeshi women in need of work don't have many other options outside of the garment industry. Ready-made garment manufacturing is considered to be “unskilled” labor relative to other industries like technological manufacturing.

Since women typically receive significantly less education than men, those women living in the urban areas of Bangladesh will find garment work the most immediately available option (Kabeer & Mahmud; Khanna; Siddiqi). In fact, the demand for workers in the garment industry may be giving women an incentive to end their schooling prematurely. Heath & Mobarak's 2014 study examined how the presence of the RMG industry was changing the course of life for women in Bangladesh. They collected data from 1305 households across 60 villages and found that, while young girls living near factories were more likely to continue their education, older children in their late teens were incentivized to drop out and start earning money to support themselves and their families (6). Many women in the garment industry work in order to help their families' financial situations (Afsar; Ahmed; Kabeer & Mahmud). The 2008 Ali et al. study found that 71.1% of respondents were working to support their families (450). While their pursuit of careers has given many Bangladeshi women more decision-making power within their households (Fauzia Ahmed; Ali et al.), they still remain very much subordinate both in and outside the factories.

The Labor Axis

For garment factory *workers* in Bangladesh to assert their rights to factory *owners* can be difficult and even dangerous. Protesting has been met with police violence, as was seen in the aftermath of the Tazreen Fashions factory fire. In 2009, Bangladesh was among the most under-unionized countries in Asia (Siddiqi). The formation of labor unions has been continually suppressed by the government, as 10% of Bangladesh's lawmakers have stakes in the garment industry, either as factory owners or investors (Caleca; Hussein). Although there was a brief rise

in unionization following the Rana Plaza collapse and the drafting of the Bangladesh Accord, recent years have seen this rate plateau, and government resistance take hold once more (Nittle). Prior to 2013, the year of the Rana disaster, the number of applications for union registration was negligible, at merely twelve (see Figure 2). 158 applications were submitted in 2013, with applications peaking at nearly 400 in 2014. However, the following year, the number of applicants dropped to 150, with the number of applications *rejected* being almost identical. The years that followed have seen union formation attempts on a steady decline.

Throughout the twentieth century, Bangladesh consistently repressed union activity. While the 1960s saw a strong labor union movement, it had progressively declined in strength by the 1980s due to several factors. One of these was the affiliation of unions with different political parties during the 1970s, which prevented them from working alongside one another (Khanna).

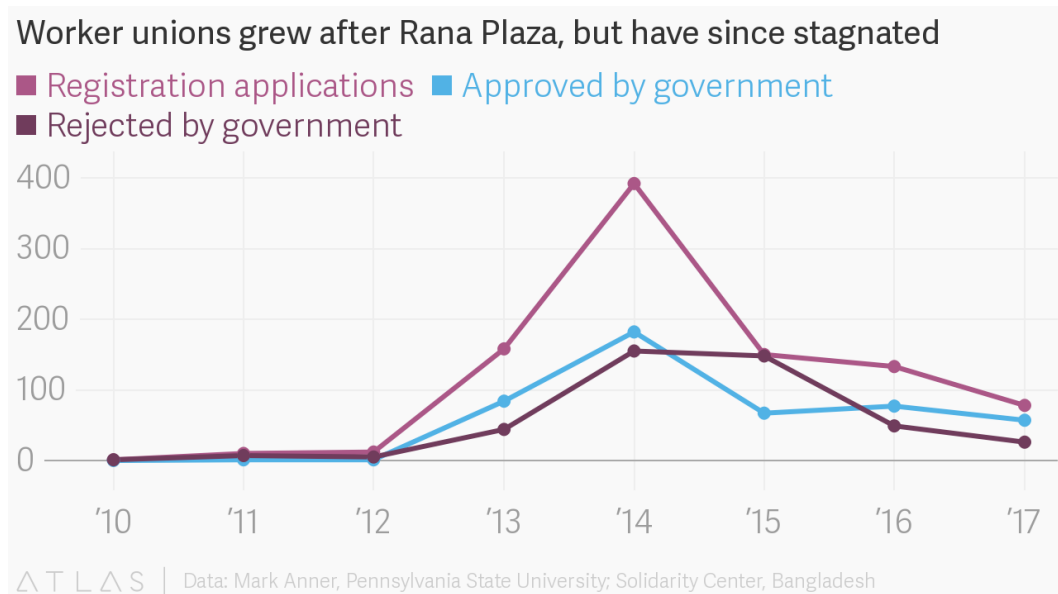


Figure 3: Rate of unionization in Bangladesh since 2010.
 From Marc Bain, "Two factory disasters a century apart show how globalization has sapped labor's power," *Quartz*, 2018)

Additionally, the creation of the aforementioned EPZs, which were meant to attract more foreign investment from countries of the global North, were exempt from review by national labor legislation (Fauzia Ahmed; Siddiqi). The US mandated that Bangladesh impose stricter regulations in EPZs in the early 1990s, in response to the prevalence of workers' rights violations; however, the decision to do so angered Japanese and Korean investors, who threatened to withdraw their business from Bangladesh if they allowed union activity. In 2004, The Bangladesh EPZ Workers' Association and Industrial Relations Act was put in place to lessen international pressures over worker welfare, but the Association still didn't have the same level of organizational rights as labor unions. Other legislation, like the Bangladesh Labor Act of 2006, has since been put in place to prevent retaliation against the garment industry. The 2006 Act was created with the intention of preventing activity in factories with known safety violations (Caleca). Evidently, the Act wasn't able to prevent tragedies like Tazreen and Rana. Moreover, the Bangladesh Labor Act was amended in 2013 with provisions that explicitly made unionization more difficult. These provisions allow law enforcement to suppress protests that are "prejudicial to the national interest," a vague term which can be twisted in order to silence dissension (Caleca 303). These were also accompanied by the creation of an Industrial Police force of 3000 officers, which collects information regarding unrest and unionization in order to prevent worker protests before they begin.

Today, Bangladeshi officials continue to label unions as disruptive to the economy and "national interests," as if workers' demands for safety and sustenance are unreasonable (Caleca 303). Labor activists are constantly being arrested, laid off, and beaten. For instance, during protests for higher garment work wages in December 2016, fourteen labor activists were

arrested, and another 1500 workers were either suspended or had their employment terminated entirely (Greenhouse). The consequences that unions and community organizers face for acting out can be severe, as in the case of Aminul Islam. Islam was one of the three founders of the Bangladesh Center for Workers' Solidarity (BCWS), an NGO which seeks to empower garment workers by helping them identify what their rights are, and what steps they must take to acquire those rights (Ackerly). The organization also doubles as a daycare for the children of garment workers, as well as a place for workers to obtain medical attention from volunteer nurses. On April 4, 2012, Islam disappeared. His body was found two days later with evidence of severe torture (Mosk et al.). When he was last seen, Islam had left from BCWS early with the sense that authorities were watching him. If this were the case, it wouldn't have been the first time for Islam. Two years prior, Aminul Islam told peers that he had been abducted and beaten by authorities, who demanded that he write a letter claiming that members of BCWS had been involved in disruptive activity ("Bangladesh: 5 Years On"). The truth surrounding his murder has yet to be realized, and Bangladeshi law enforcement has been accused of brushing his case aside.

The mistreatment of employees and failure to maintain safe working conditions demonstrates a devaluation of workers by factory owners. Frequently, the well-being and basic needs of low-level factory workers are disregarded entirely. As put by Mushrefa Mishu, the president of the Garment Workers' Unity Forum, suppliers "can't think of the workers as their working partners. The mentality of the colonial era still exists" (Hussein)

The Globalization Axis

As made evident by the cases of the Indian, African, and Colombian farmers, those in the *global South* are often taken advantage of by the *global North*. These cases serve as evidence of the exploitation of producers and laborers in the global South for the profit and convenience of the global North. This is clear from how consumers in the North have reacted to the reoccurring industrial tragedies within Bangladesh. The Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 made international headlines and drew a significant amount of scrutiny to the country's garment industry. The continuous news coverage made people in the North aware of the dangerous conditions and worker abuse that occurs in Bangladesh to facilitate the production of inexpensive clothing for their consumption. While some consumers and organizations in the North, such as the United Students Against Sweatshops in the United States and international human rights organizations like the Clean Clothes Campaign, have expressed outrage, the overall response on part of consumers has been minimal (Elliott & Freeman). Section 1 of this thesis discussed the efforts being made by corporations via the Bangladesh Accord, and the ways in which these efforts have been effective and ineffective. It also examined the media reaction to the Tazreen and Rana Plaza tragedies, which tended to frame the horrific nature of garment work in Bangladesh as a natural part of the country's development. As a result, the coverage of the tragedies has had no adverse effect on consumers' willingness to buy from at-fault brands. Since the Rana collapse, H&M, the largest purchaser of garments from Bangladesh at the time, has seen a continual growth in their earnings: for the first quarter of 2012, encompassing the months of December 2011 to February 2012, just before the Tazreen Fashions fire, H&M's net sales were at over 27 billion Swedish krona (SEK), just under 3 billion USD (Hennes & Mauritz, "Three-month report", 2013). The following quarter, which ended after May, saw net sales at 31 billion SEK (Hennes & Mauritz,

“Six-month report”, 2013). Similarly, in 2013, the year of the Rana Plaza collapse, net sales were at 128 billion SEK, 8 billion SEK more than that of the preceding year’s 120 billion SEK (Hennes & Mauritz, “Full-year report”, 2013). For all the negative press coverage that surrounded H&M following each industrial disaster, its growth has remained steady, and has been maintained to this day (Hennes & Mauritz, “Full-year report”, 2017).

Even when Northern corporations attempt to make improvements to industrial safety, as was the case with the Accord, blame and responsibility are redirected to the Bangladeshi factory owners. Since most of the corporations that manufacture in Bangladesh contract with local factories instead of acquiring their own, it makes it easy for them to deny liability for safety and health violations. Corporations instead defer the responsibility of improving factory conditions to individual factory owners. Yet these improvements are incredibly costly (Caleca). To improve factory conditions would require the owners to raise prices, but for them to do so would mandate that the corporations sourcing from these factories reduce their profit margins and upset their investors and shareholders. Bangladesh’s competitiveness in the global market has been reliant on offering Northern countries the lowest possible production costs. Therefore, to increase these prices would put factories at risk of losing their corporate clientele and would endanger the country’s economy overall (Smith). This problem lies not only within Bangladesh, but the entire global South – each of the nations needs to compete with one another for the North’s business by working longer and faster for less compensation, leading to a “race to the bottom” in which each must cut corners to make their country the most appealing to Northern corporations (Smith 91).

The Colonization Axis

History has played a role in this widespread devaluation of the global South by the global North. The exploitation of Bangladesh's human resources today is the legacy of its colonial past as part of the British Raj, a period which involved similar exploitation of the people and natural resources of Bengal. Bengal came under the control of the British crown in 1757, and for the next century, the region's agrarian export sector grew rapidly as the British used the land to produce crops such as jute and rice (Bose). In turn, Bengal imported manufactured goods made in Great Britain. In the two-year span of 1769-1771, one-third of the Bengali population succumbed to famine, making for a death toll of around 10 million (Mukherjee). Britain made no efforts to provide relief, nor did it ever formally acknowledge or report on the massive famine. Bengal would continue to see famines while under British rule, including in 1783 and the period of 1873-74. One of the larger famines occurred during World War II. The 1943 famine, and the reaction of the British metropole, are illustrative of how the North takes advantage of the South's resources while paying no mind to the sustenance of the environment or human life. In Section 2, it was shown how the British animalized and othered the people of India during the era of the British Raj. The 1943 famine demonstrates how that devaluation of Indian life continued into the 20th century, leading to the obliteration of one tenth of the population of Bengal (Mukherjee 141).

Leading up to the 1943 famine, the Bengali jute market was beginning to weaken in the face of the Depression. Jute, a major cash crop for Bengalis at the time, was crucial because the population of Bengal had expanded significantly during the early 20th century, making it so that subsistence farming was insufficient for survival (Bose). Many jute farmers were left in debt after this price drop, and were forced to sell their crops at greatly deflated prices (Mukherjee).

With the advent of the war, the price of rice increased drastically – from August 1939 to September 1941, the cost of rice grew 69% (Bose 87). Then, in March of 1942, Japan invaded the neighboring British colony of Burma, and Britain's loss of all the resources from the region caused the price of rice to soar even higher. Before the Japanese invasion, Burma had eclipsed Bengal with regards to rice production, with Bengal even having imported rice *from* Burma. The fall of Burma sent over 600,000 Indian migrants on an exodus back to India. The brutal trek took at least 80,000 lives. Passing British troops paid no attention to the devastated migrants (Mukherjee). Bengal was met with further misfortune when in October of 1942, a cyclone wiped out the harvest of Aman rice.

The British, fearful that Japan would move through Burma and seize Bengal, began restricting movement between Indian provinces and redirecting water traffic from Bengali ports (Bose; Mukherjee). This restricted imports and made food for the Bengalis even less accessible. The British war effort also brought about unequal redistribution of resources. The British provided more food to those whose labor was essential to the British military, such as miners and construction workers, leaving agrarian workers at a great disadvantage (Mukherjee). The need for military supplies also led to a simultaneous "cloth famine" throughout Bengal. The British seized most of the available fabric to clothe soldiers, as well as to create supplies like blankets and parachutes. As a result, clothing was scarce in Bengal, and many were left wearing scraps, if anything at all, during the winter months.

The British continually exploited Bengal for cheap resources and labor. With no regard to the lives they were endangering, the British manipulated Bengali policies and supplies to help them achieve their own political ends. While the British Raj ended decades ago in 1947, the

exploitation of the region and people of Bengal, now Bangladesh, certainly has not. Just as the plunder of Bengali resources greatly helped fuel Britain's own industrial revolution and military might, the North continues to utilize the labor and resources in Bangladesh and throughout the South altogether (Khandker; Sengupta; Tong). The North remains reliant on the South for nearly everything it consumes, from food to clothing to technology, and it takes advantage of Southerner's desperation for work in order to manufacture goods as cheaply as possible. Yet the North frames its involvement in the South as though it is doing the people there a favor by providing them "super-crops" and a plethora of jobs. This denial of dependency is a component of what Val Plumwood terms the "logic of colonization" – the various ways in which a dominating power justifies their superiority over those they control (Plumwood 47). Britain's colonial reign in Bengal may be over, but the logic of colonization still determines interactions between the global North and global South.

The Environmental Axis

Last is the dualism between *reason* and *nature*. The past two sections of this thesis have discussed how the global North sources the majority of its consumer goods from the global South, and how the North relies on cheap labor in the South to turn a profit on those goods. This was evidenced by the example of the introduction of cash crops engineered in the North for use in the South. Introducing cash crops into the South not only took advantage of vulnerable farmers by launching them into debt, but also damaged the natural environment through deforestation, the use of pesticides, and the disruption of biodiversity. This relationship is not

predicated solely on agricultural resources like food, but manufactured goods as well, the production of which can have similarly dire consequences for the environment in the South.

The logic of globalization and economic growth relies on the continuous process of industrialization, urbanization, and high-efficiency farming, as well as the destruction of the environment to make these processes possible. Corporations and other proponents of globalization will argue that the degradation of the environment is a small price to pay for industrial expansion, and assert that a focus on nature is one which will only hamper growth (Dhooge; Gillespie). However, this conceptualization of economic development only considers production resulting from human activity, such as manufacturing, and effectively ignores all the resources provided by the natural environment. The food, materials, and other resources brought about by local flora, genetically diverse and hardy enough to withstand insects without pesticides, are brushed aside as less efficient. The concern with mere efficiency and maximization of profits in the short term prefers economic reason to the care and preservation of nature. This not only adversely affects the environment, but also those who have come to be associated with it – women, the impoverished, and those residing in the global South – in turn reinforcing the idea that they lack common sense or reason.

While the environmental axis encompasses an overall devaluation of nature, the privileging of industrial development over the wellbeing of the environment and those closest to it is especially noticeable within Bangladesh, specifically with regards to the garment industry. The industry is responsible for incredible amounts of pollution which endanger the nation's most vulnerable. The next section will demonstrate in detail how the RMG industry's growth has been bolstered by environmental degradation, while also contributing to the destruction of the local

environment. This disturbance of the environment not only coincides with the suffering of working-class women in Bangladesh – it also helps prolong and fuel the causes of that suffering.

SECTION 4 – COMPOUNDING COMPLICATIONS: THE CYCLE OF WORKER EXPLOITATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

The residents of Bangladesh are no strangers to the destructive power of nature. But while they have learned to adapt to the various complications brought on by flooding and heavy rains – such as displacement, landslides, and crop destruction – climate change is affecting the livelihoods of people throughout Bangladesh by making these disasters more frequent and less predictable. Due to its low elevation, its location in rain-prone South Asia, and the widespread poverty among its people, Bangladesh is considered to be one of the nations most vulnerable to climate change in the world (“Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina”; Hassani-Mahmooui & Parris). Additionally, the role women play in Bangladeshi society places them in significant danger from changes in climate and weather patterns.

One can see how lives in Bangladesh are being altered based on responses to the 2012 floods in certain parts of the nation. The floods, which killed over 100 and destroyed thousands of homes also took cropland with them (Renton). A 2013 article in the Guardian describes the plight of Bangladeshi mother Majeda Begum in the aftermath of the 2012 floods. She and her two children of five and two had lost everything when a flood swept away her home, food, and all of her possessions, save for a single goat. The floods took all of the family’s crops, causing her husband to migrate to a non-affected area to work as an agricultural laborer for the rice harvest. With no food of her own and no money to spare, Majeda and her children were left in a constant state of hunger, and she could no longer afford for her children to attend school.

Majeda’s family is accustomed to floods, as they are a regular part of life in Bangladesh. The Brahmaputra River, whose islands are home to Majeda and her community, can swell from

its usual ten kilometers to up to 100 kilometers during floods (Renton). Farmers in the rural areas of the state actually rely on moderate amounts of flooding to bring nutrient-rich mud to their lands, and it is the monsoon season that allows the Aman rice crop, the most common in Bangladesh, to flourish (Amin et al.; Renton). However, in 2012, the Brahmaputra Islands were hit with three floods in quick succession, something the residents of the islands never could have anticipated. The rapid changes occurring to the natural weather cycles in Bangladesh are projected to continue as climate change worsens, with the major negative impacts being increased temperature, rainfall, and flooding (Hassani-Mahmooui & Parris).

Bangladesh's Vulnerability to Environmental Disaster

Bangladesh has various characteristics which together make the nation especially vulnerable to complications caused by climate change. The nation is at an incredibly low elevation, with two thirds of its landmass lying at less than five meters above sea level (Renton). In addition to that, the country is among the world's most densely populated (Caleca 281; Yunus & Yamagata). The person to land ratio in Bangladesh is the tenth highest in the world, with 1,265 people per square kilometer ("Population density"). These factors, combined with the nation's constant battles with monsoons, foreshadow potentially tragic impacts of an increasing global climate.

Bangladesh faces environmental disaster on a yearly basis with the arrival of the monsoon seasons. Approximately every three years, however, Bangladesh sees an especially powerful cyclone (Mallick et al.). The floods brought on by these cyclones are estimated to kill hundreds to thousands of Bangladeshis each year, who perish as a result of snakebites, disease,

water contamination, drowning, lightning strikes, and mudslides (“Bangladesh calls off rescue”). With global temperatures escalating, floods are projected to become more frequent and more devastating. Climate change will not only contribute to global sea level rise as a whole, endangering the low-lying deltaic plains of Bangladesh – it is also set to contribute to expanding rivers as snow-capped areas like the nearby Himalayas begin to melt, and send greater flows into neighboring bodies of water (Renton). In addition to this, further environmental disruption in South Asia, such as deforestation in Nepal and the building of dams in Indian rivers, is reducing the amount of protection Bangladeshis have from flooding, by clearing natural barriers in the land and disrupting the regular flow of rivers.

Climate change makes weather patterns less predictable. As seen in the case of Majeda Begum, where three floods hit her community in quick succession without warning, changes to global climate are altering the regular weather patterns that Bangladeshis are accustomed to. This will make the preparations for and recovery from disasters far more difficult than they currently are. The immense force of the floods takes the delicate housing structures of rural Bangladeshis swiftly, and their lives even more so. Additionally, families have a great amount of difficulty preparing even for expected floods, because the system for providing warnings about floods is so poor (Mallick et al.). Mallick et al. conducted a study of Bangladeshi families’ methods of adaptation to flood disasters, surveying 1555 cyclone-affected households in the districts of Khulna, Bagerhat, and Satkhira to determine how they prepared for and responded to the 2007 Cyclone Sidr and the 2009 Cyclone Aila. They found that 78% of respondents received a warning about the hurricane approximately 6 hours before it struck their area (11). That leaves them six hours to protect their supplies, gather up their families and possessions, and evacuate to

higher ground. But even then, the warnings were seen to be rather ineffective in that they contained a fair deal of climate-related jargon as opposed to communicating the situation in lay terminology. Amin et al. posited that this practice disadvantages those with less education. With the ever-growing frequency of these floods, it is certain that Bangladeshi families will undergo greater struggles in order to survive environmental tragedy.

More dangerous to Bangladesh than the loss of peoples' homes is the loss of their food. In Majeda Begum's community, the most common crop, Aman rice, was killed by excess water in the fields from the heavy flooding. However, Aman is considered to be a relatively hardy crop (Amin et al.). A 2015 study by Md. Ruhul Amin et al. tested the effects of climate change on three of Bangladesh's most important rice crops: the Aman, Aus, and Boro varieties. Aman in particular grows during the monsoon season, with farmers planting it from June-August and harvesting it from November-December. But even Aman rice is vulnerable to extreme weather. Amin and his colleagues' study suggested that the factors that would have the greatest impact on rice cultivation in Bangladesh were increasing temperatures and rainfall levels – two of the changes projected to occur in Bangladesh in a separate study by Hassani-Mahmooei and Parris (764). There is reason to believe that the increasing rainfall and flood patterns have already taken a toll on the crop – whereas Aman comprised 57% of the crops in the Bangladeshi agricultural industry from 1980-81, this percentage had fallen to 40% by 2005-06 (Amin et al. 900). In other parts of Bangladesh, particularly the northwest, the opposite extreme is damaging rice crops – drought (Black et al.). Because rice is generally very sensitive to higher temperatures, farmers who are not living in flood-prone areas will still struggle in the face of climbing global temperatures.

Even with normal weather patterns, the food situation in Bangladesh is volatile. On the islands of Brahmaputra, part of the seasonal cycle is the monga season, or mora kartik – the “months of death and disaster” (Renton). This period, immediately before the yearly harvest, marks the time when the food from the previous year has run out, and jobs as laborers are difficult to come by. This annual burden is cyclical, which allows people to prepare themselves for it and for the government and other organizations to ready aid. But if the end of mora kartik is dependent on a plentiful harvest, then the endangerment of the harvest by excessive rains has incredibly dangerous potential.

Because the livelihood of over 60% of those in Bangladesh is reliant on agriculture, disruption of the regular harvest endangers the economy as a whole. To combat this, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Bangladesh distribute loans for families to re-grow their businesses. A 2017 survey of 1,555 Bangladeshi households in the districts of Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira showed that around 80% of respondents had taken out micro-loans from NGOs (Mallick et al. 13). Alternatively, scores of farming families have been branching out into other industries as a way to mitigate the negative effects of climate change on growing crops and rearing livestock. Many who have lost their land to flooding enter the fishing and aquaculture industries as a way of adapting to the excess freshwater (Haq; Mallick; Mallick et al.). However, such survival strategies are endangered in coastal regions, which face inundation from saline water due to sea-level rise brought on by global warming (Saroar & Routray). An interviewee from Mallick et al.’s study demonstrated the potential negative consequences of both of these adaptation strategies. The man interviewed had originally been a rice farmer, and then in the 1990s shifted to shrimp farming. He slowly lost money in the endeavor, and took out a loan from

an NGO just before Cyclone Aila in 2009. When Aila hit, it took all of the fish along with it, leaving the man with no way of paying off his debt. The man and his family decided to move into the city of Khulna, where he landed a job pulling a rickshaw.

Many coastal residents choose to migrate to urban areas for more secure employment after environmental tragedy. As disasters become more frequent and more powerful, it will become increasingly difficult for Bangladeshis living in rural areas to adapt to food and economic insecurity. Damage to the environment will make it so that those who directly depend on it to make their living will face immediate hardship. This will contribute to the already present trend of rural-urban migration in the state. Intranational migration has been a constant in Bangladesh's history since the eighteenth century (Hassani-Mahmooui & Parris). This migration has been at various moments the result of forced displacement, a hunt for better employment, or an escape from environmental calamities like floods and droughts. In recent times, this migration has usually been undertaken by the landless and the poor, in the form of rural-urban migration (Afsar; Mallick). On an annual basis, 36% of the poor households in northwestern Bangladesh undergo migration when the region's lean period hits (Mallick). As climate change worsens, it has been projected that 32% of Bangladesh's landmass will be submerged by the 2080s (Mallick). Increased flooding and water levels will force more and more small-scale farmers to lose their land to the water, and thus look to the cities for more secure, year-round employment. A survey by Mallick et al. saw that 34% of households had sent at least one member into the city, with people from lower-income families being the most likely to leave their original homes (13). These migrants take on a variety of jobs in the cities, from transportation jobs, such as driving a bus or pulling a rickshaw; to working in ports; to manufacturing. Migrants typically

send home regular remittances to their families to mediate the climate-related struggles being faced in the rural areas (Afsar; Mallick). In a 2013 study, Mallick found that 78% of survey respondents with migrant family members received regular monthly remittances (14). Internal migrants in the cities face discrimination from urban residents, and typically are forced to live in “squatter” settlements made of cheap, scrap materials (Afsar 5; Black et al.). Those living in squatter settlements and slums are thought to account for 86% of the urban migrant population (Black et al. 442). Houses in such settlements are very fragile and weak. Moreover, the settlements are often located in more disaster-vulnerable areas, such as floodplains (Black et al.). While the migrants typically find higher incomes in the cities than they would have earned as rural laborers (Afsar; Hassani-Mahmooei & Parris), their quality of life remains poor, and the threats of violent, weather-related deaths continue to plague them and their families.

The long-present trend of rural-urban migration in Bangladesh had been a predominantly male phenomenon for a long time (Afsar). However, since the late 20th century, the gender ratio of male-female migrants is beginning to balance out as more and more women head into the cities for work (Black et al.). One of the factors driving this surge in female migrants is the demand for female labor created by the growth of the ready-made garment industry. While these young women have been labeled by Northern onlookers as “empowered” by their independence and access to income (Fauzia Ahmed; Gillespie; Haider; Kristoff & WuDunn), this narrative grossly misrepresents the actual circumstances women are facing, and ignores the influence that environmental tragedy has on pushing women to the cities. In a 2004 paper by Kabeer & Mahmud, the authors pointed to studies evidencing that women were more likely than men to come to the cities from landless households (148). In the 2017 Sadikha Akhter study discussed

earlier in Section 3, most of the female interviewees came from rural areas to mediate poverty. These women send home remittances for their children and other relatives back home. While work in the garment industry does give women some more leverage in household financial decisions (Fauzia Ahmed), the money they are earning doesn't solely belong to them, but is used to keep their families in rural towns afloat. Some women are forced to hand over their income to male relatives, such as husbands or brothers (Fauzia Ahmed). Although their domestic role is morphing slightly to allow them to work outside the home, it is still very much a domestic role, with little agency or choice. Northern discussion of "female liberation" also neglects to consider the exploitation and abuses that women face when they arrive in the cities, both inside and outside of the workplace.

Pollution by the Garment Industry

Environmental disruption and disaster exacerbate issues of gender and class. Poorer families are more likely to be displaced when tragedy strikes, and this displacement is a specific factor that pushes women to take up exploitative, taxing garment industry jobs. Climate change and environmental degradation are huge contributors to the frequency, power, and overall impact natural disasters like monsoons and seasonal flooding have on the lives of Bangladeshis. However, the garment industry itself also contributes enormously to environmental degradation. Garment factories produce vast amounts of untreated wastewater filled with chemical dyes, and this waste often ends up filtered into sources of freshwater (Yardley). The wastewater given off by garment factories is composed of drastically variable pHs, and contains toxins like oil, grease, ammonia, sulfide, and lead (Hossain et al.; Sultana et al.). The average wastewater temperature

for the factories surrounding Dhaka was around 50 degrees Celsius, or approximately 122 degrees Fahrenheit, but temperatures have been recorded as high as 65 degrees Celsius (149 degrees Fahrenheit) (Hossain et al., 2018; Sultana et al.). These toxins, and the incredibly high temperatures that accompany them, put the aquatic ecosystem in urban freshwater bodies at great risk from loss of oxygen (Islam et al., 2015).

A 2009 study by Mahfuza S. Sultana et al. looks at the characteristics of textile factory effluents in the Dhaka-Naryaganj-Demra (DND) Embankment. Of the 242 factories situated along the Embankment, 80% are textile factories (67). Among the area's garment factories, under 2% were found to have appropriate plans in place to treat wastewater prior to dumping it, whereas 80% lacked a treatment plant completely (66). This compromises the urban poor's ability to access clean drinking water. Around 75% of people living in the slums of Bangladesh get their water from public taps, and the lack of regulation regarding the dumping of waste puts this population at risk (Afsar). Wastes from garment factories contribute to an increase in nitrate concentration in the local water bodies – the concentrations found in the DND Embankment were at approximately ten times the industry standard (Sultana et al. 76). Excessive nitrate in the water can lead to diseases in humans such as methemoglobinemia, a potentially fatal blood disorder that disrupts the delivery of oxygen to body tissues. Other pollutants found, like fluoride and nitrite, are known to be carcinogenic in high doses (*Guidelines for Drinking-Water Quality*). The dyes found in the embankment also put local residents at risk of ulcers, irritation of the respiratory tract, dermatitis, and nausea. Further complications posed by consumption of the polluted water include skin sores, dysentery, hepatitis, cholera, and ultimately death (Hossain et al.).

Even those who don't ingest the chemical-ridden waters are affected by them. The fumes given off by the chemical dyes in the local water bodies are rancid, giving those living near them headaches and dizziness (Yardley). A *New York Times* article by Jim Yardley details the effects of the polluted waters on local residents, and specifically schoolchildren, in Savar, the same Dhaka district that saw the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013. The Genda primary school was surrounded by ten dyeing plants, amongst other factories, within a few-hundred-mile radius. The canal behind the school is the final destination of a wastewater drainage pump, making the students the first to feel the immediate effects of the effluent pollution. The children reported feeling dizzy, light-headed, and nauseous, as well as having trouble concentrating in class. Several had fainted. Eleven-year-old Golam Rabbi, the top third-grade student at Genda at the time, had passed out while in school and had trouble breathing on breezy days when the fumes were carried into the classrooms. Rabbi's mother Hasina Begum, whose husband died in the Rana Plaza collapse, held hope that giving her children an education would provide them with a better life than her own. But their ability to receive an education is compromised by the grossly polluted environment that surrounds them.

In the case of the factories along the canal in Savar, it was found that many had purposely evaded treating their wastewater to lower operating costs. Inspections undertaken in 2011 under then-Environmental Minister Munir Chowdhury found that one plant, Anlima Yarn Dyeing, had a fully functional treatment plant which it voluntarily never used in order to save money. Chowdhury imposed numerous fines for the violations his team found, but he was soon transferred to a different area of the government. When asked by Yardley, even the mayor of Savar at the time, Mohammed Abdul Kader, claimed to be essentially powerless when facing the

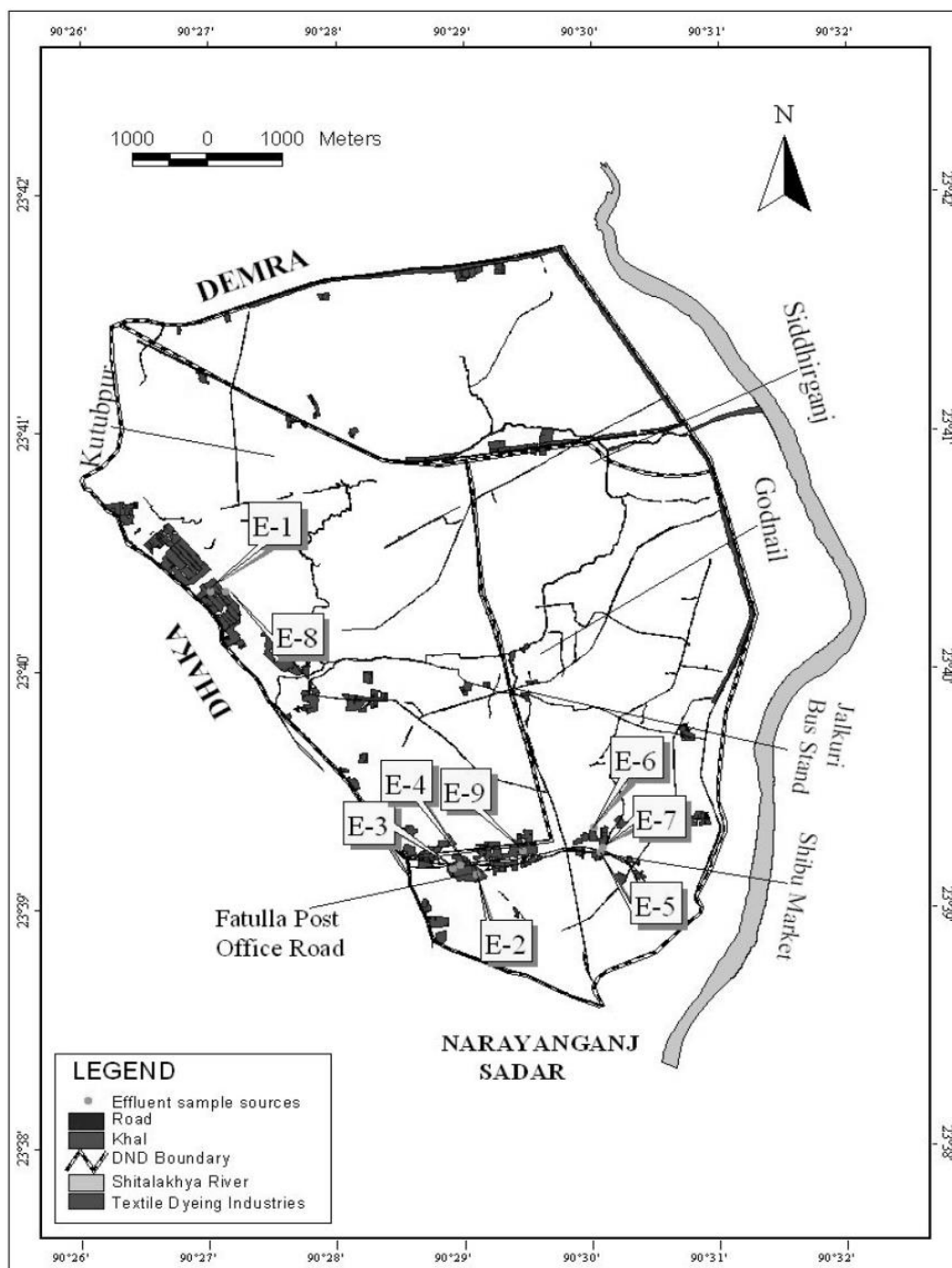


Figure 4: Map of DND Embankment
Includes factories and locations from which water samples were taken for Sultana et al. study. Map from Sultana et al, p. 68.

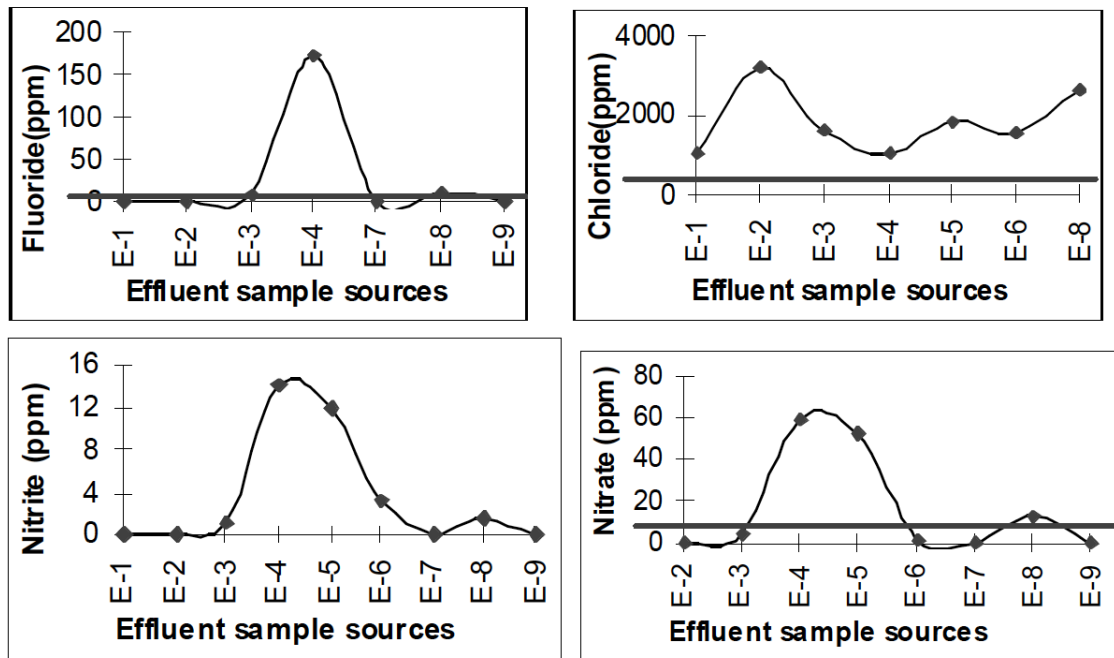


Figure 5: Concentrations of various pollutants in different areas of DND Embankment. The solid black line represents the recommended limit for these pollutants according to the Bangladesh Department of Environment. Charts from Sultana et al., p.76.

factory owners. He is unable to refuse the construction of a new factory or enforce penalties against them for irresponsible environmental practices.

In addition to producing massive amounts of wastewater, the garment industry is also at fault for over-pumping groundwater. The garment industry uses mass amounts of freshwater, much of which comes from groundwater sources. In the last fifty years, groundwater levels have dropped by 200 feet, and continue to decline at a rate of about nine feet per year. One issue the industry's consumption of groundwater poses is an increase in the salinity of the remaining water (Hossain et al.; Islam et al.). The spike in salt concentration in the water can damage the aquatic ecosystem, as noted previously. It can also cause heart issues, dysentery, and issues with menstruation in humans.

The problem of increasing salinity from over-pumping is accompanied by an even greater danger – increased arsenic contamination (Roberts). Arsenic naturally occurs in shallow groundwater in Bangladesh, and so residents will source their water from deeper levels to obtain water safe for drinking. City pumps taking water from deep in the ground induce the fast transport of contaminants from shallower depths into the deeper areas where rural residents obtain their water, thus pushing toxins into people's wells. Dhaka pumps groundwater both for residential use and to power industries like the garment industry. Those living on the outskirts of the city suffer in turn. Arsenic is a carcinogen that lacks an odor, color, or taste – so while those within Dhaka dealing with garment factory wastewater pollution can see the dyes coloring the canals, and smell the fumes in the breeze, those on the periphery of the city losing their clean water to the factories have no way of knowing if the water they drink at any given moment is poisoning them or not.

While those living in the very rural areas of Bangladesh face food insecurity from droughts and floods, those in and around the cities are forced to battle crop and food loss at the hands of pollution. In Savar, coconut trees have become barren (Yardley). Nearby cropland, when faced with the typical flooding necessary for the cultivation of certain crops, is seeing polluted, colored water making its way into fields, destroying rice paddies. In addition to this, the chemicals and high temperatures from wastewater, as well as the increased salinity from groundwater pumping, both pose enormous threats to the aquatic life in freshwater bodies throughout the cities of Bangladesh. Making the freshwater bodies inhabitable for animals takes away yet another potential food source for residents.

When the issues of urban pollution are combined with the dangers brought on by climate change, the potential outcomes are even more troubling. The production of wastewater itself is thought to contribute to regional climate change (Hossain et al.). High-temperature effluents, when evaporated, get exchanged with the local atmosphere, and can raise overall temperatures as a result. Higher temperatures can increase instances of flooding, and increased flooding has the potential to transport toxins from polluted waterways farther and farther distances. The garment industry's contribution to climate change also has the long-term effect of making the disasters that Bangladesh struggles with on a yearly basis – cyclones and monsoons – deadlier and progressively more difficult to predict and prepare for.

Cyclical Calamity

The conditions throughout the entire state of Bangladesh, from the drought-prone northwest, to the industrial heart of Dhaka, to the low-lying, coastal city of Chittagong in the southeast, are all likely to become far worse with the progression of climate change. As a result, the social issues that accompany these environmental problems will be greatly affected as well. The increasing incidences of environmental tragedy from flooding, cyclones, and monsoon rains will damage the livelihoods of those working in agriculture and the fishing industry. The storms and floods will not only become more powerful and affect the people and their land more brutally, but they will also make it ever-harder for Bangladeshis to prepare for them as their occurrence becomes less and less predictable. Those who are poorer are especially disadvantaged. Warnings often aren't accessible to them, as they have less access to public broadcasting, and more difficulty reaching shelters than their wealthier counterparts (Mallick et

al.). Those who have less will be the most likely to be reduced to nothing in the face of a devastating storm or flood. With approximately 31.5% of Bangladesh residing below the poverty line set by the World Bank, the implications of this are immense. To mediate the damages brought on by natural disasters, many of those in the devastated rural areas will either need to migrate into cities for year-round employment, or else send family members into the cities to work and supplement their families' volatile incomes. The poor, who are most likely to be hurt by natural disasters, comprise the majority of these rural-urban migrants (Mallick). The cities hold the promise of steady, year-round employment, but given the lower education levels of rural migrants, they typically must take up jobs in "unskilled" fields such as transportation and manufacturing. Because union formation is so suppressed in Bangladeshi cities like Dhaka, the migrants are subject to exploitation by their bosses if they want to remain employed. Protests and

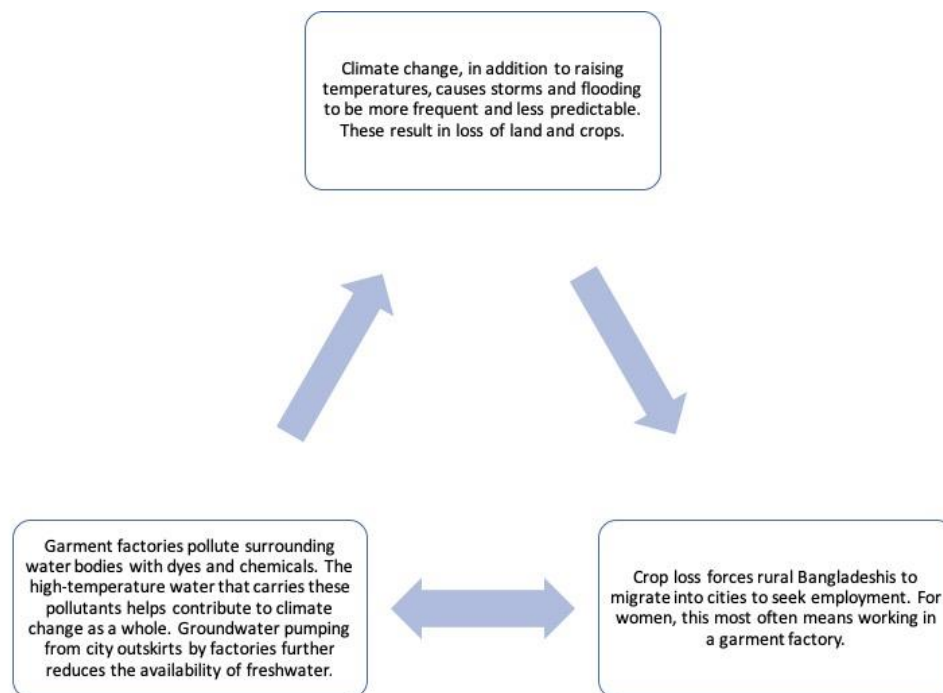


Figure 6: Flow chart illustrating how the environmental issues affecting the garment industry are compounding.

attempts at assembling unions pose the risk of endangering workers, who in the past have faced retaliation from law enforcement. As seen in the Yardley article covering textile factory pollution in Savar, even outside of citizens' working lives, their well-being is placed second to the will of factory owners and the companies that source from them.

Employers and people in positions of power in Bangladesh, in expanding their holdings and businesses, not only take advantage of the people they employ, but completely abuse the environment while taking from it in great amounts. The textile industry in particular takes enormous amounts of groundwater from aquifers outside of the cities, essentially stealing the local population's clean water. The wastewater produced once these garments are manufactured gets sent back into the local freshwater supply, putting those who rely on them for drinking water in danger of poisoning and an array of short- and long-term health issues, if not death. The toxic effluents placed into these bodies of water also pose great risks to the flora and fauna that live there. They destroy crops and local plants, like the coconut trees, and poison fish populations. The damaging effects on the local environment in turn harm the human population further by decimating their sources of food. These issues are the very ones which push urban Bangladeshis into exploitative city jobs in the first place. Additionally, while environmental problems compound in Bangladesh, corporations in the global North that rely on Bangladesh for the production of cheap consumer goods will continue to selectively ignore the consequences their business has on the people in the South who make it a possibility.

The current state of the garment industry and the environment in Bangladesh is the result of hierarchies between factory owners and workers, between the global North and the South, and between economic reason and the natural environment, where the latter in each pairing is

severely devalued and exploited. But how does the dynamic between these three axes of power affect women specifically? For one, women living in rural Bangladesh are in a position where they are especially vulnerable to natural disasters. When faced with impending environmental disaster, such as a cyclone, women have fewer opportunities to reach shelters (Mallick et al.). Their responsibilities over preserving natural resources owned by the family, such as food and fuel, mean that their duties of preparing for a large storm prevent them from always reaching a shelter in time. In addition to this, women are responsible for caring and providing for other family members, especially children and the elderly. To evacuate while assuring the safe journey of numerous family members weaker than oneself can rule out the prospect of going to a shelter altogether. The consequences of woman's social expectations on their vulnerability to natural disasters are evidenced by the death toll of the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh, of which 90% of victims were female (Gaard, 2015). The reasons for this wildly disproportionate gender ratio stem from women's duties over the home. Because women are expected to remain confined to the home, their opportunities to be warned about the cyclone, such as through word of mouth or public broadcasting, are far less than those of men. Additionally, as women are expected to be the last to leave for shelters, if at all, they are most likely to travel alone or with children and elder family members, putting them at risk of sexual assault during their trek to the shelters. This can discourage them from leaving altogether. The devastating 2012 floods also demonstrated the consequences of families choosing to stay in their homes instead of seeking shelter or higher ground, when houses crumbled atop the people sleeping inside them (Renton).

After storms have passed and arable lands are destroyed, families are left to decide how they will survive and earn a living. As mentioned before, this often involves sending family

members into cities for year-round employment, and is becoming more and more common among women. Women are more likely to become *temporary migrants* (migrants who still have family members in their place of origin), and so are more likely to be in a position of providing for their rurally-based families via remittances (Joarder & Miller). Women, with their generally lower levels of education, are relegated to “unskilled” occupations, of which the largest in Bangladesh is the growing RMG industry. The garment industry, with its cutthroat conditions and unsympathetic management, is one of the only options available for a landless, devastated young woman to feed her family members. With a growing urban female labor force, these workers, already so vulnerable to exploitation for their gender, are in danger of being taken advantage of even further if there are more and more displaced, job-seeking migrant women. A larger availability of desperate women workers means that there will be less incentive for factory owners and the Northern corporations who depend on them to improve factory conditions and environmental regulations in the garment industry. The displaced garment workers, victims of environmental calamity, are destined to deal with the same issues of flooding and food insecurity in the cities as they did in the countryside, combined with new issues of workplace abuse. But even worse, they become a part of the problems, such as pollution and groundwater pumping, which contribute to the environmental degradation which put them in their precarious positions to begin with.

CONCLUSION – CONNECTING GENDER, CAPITALISM, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

To understand the garment industry, and the impacts it has on Bangladesh and the world as a whole, it is paramount not to obscure its full complexity. When looking at the economic dimensions of the industry, one gets only a fraction of the story. Rather, a complete understanding of how the ready-made garment industry is affecting the world requires that we consider gender, environment, and capitalism simultaneously. A neoliberal framing of the industry prioritizes efficiency over sustainability and sees the Bangladeshi economy as “growing,” while ignoring the destruction of local food sources and the devastation that drives workers into the industry in the first place. This limiting outlook was exemplified by Dan Kopf and Kaushik Basu in Section 1, who lauded the economic growth of the economy while ignoring the devastation that made it possible. Additionally, neoliberal feminist perspectives label the increasing rate of female participation in the workforce as “empowering,” disregarding both the gender-specific abuses they face, as well as the harsh realities that drive them into the cities. The fact that garment workers often come from landless households, or else have lost all of their food to environmental disaster, is ignored, as is the likelihood that the money these women earn in the cities isn’t truly their own, but is sent home as remittances to support struggling family members in rural areas. And while Northern eyes may view the growing RMG industry as a viable alternative to waning agricultural potential in rural areas, they don’t look at the numerous ways in which the garment industry contributes to environmental degradation which in turn damages the livelihoods of agricultural workers, such as groundwater pumping and wastewater pollution. As environmental conditions in Bangladesh worsen, and more and more migrants are driven

from rural villages to urban centers, the growing workforce of poor migrants will decrease economic incentives to improve conditions in the industry, both with regards to worker safety and environmental protection measures.

Applying an ecofeminist framework to analyze the Bangladeshi RMG industry simultaneously challenges proponents of the neoliberal conception of development, as well as offers new ways for activists to make lasting and effective impacts on the lives of workers in Bangladesh. Such a framework demonstrates that at the core of the labor issues in the South are long-standing relations of power which disadvantage working-class Bangladeshi women. It shows that the life-threatening danger, unbearable physical strain, and constant abuse that garment workers face is not merely a natural part of economic development or female empowerment, but a direct result of the devaluation of these women's lives. Whereas someone of a neoliberal mindset may dismiss this hardship as a necessary rite of passage on the path to prosperity, an ecofeminist analysis demonstrates that such an attitude is in part a continuation of a historical disregard for the well-being of people in the South, and in part a projection of Northern ideas of development onto an entirely different place and time. Trying to view economic development in the South in terms of the North, be that in the form of trying to identify other countries' "Industrial Revolutions" or defining modernity in terms of Northern luxuries, is insufficient and obscures contemporary, culture-specific issues. Similarly, viewing female empowerment in the South as it is commonly viewed by liberal feminists in the North, as the product of employment and financial independence, brushes aside completely issues of workplace safety and environmental displacement. Additionally, applying ecofeminism, and highlighting the various factors that make the garment industry the way that it is, emphasizes the

responsibility the global North has in remedying the problems garment workers face. It makes evident not only the North's reliance on the South for resources and labor, but the very real influence Northern corporations have on the lives of every garment worker. Northern intervention, in the form of measures like the Accord, if done correctly and diligently, could bring enormous positive change for the people of Bangladesh.

The ecofeminist framework also illuminates new ways of solving related problems that were once seen as entirely distinct from one another. Pointing to the connections between women's rights, worker's rights, and the preservation of nature has great potential to unite human rights causes which were once seen as separate from one another. Namely, it shows how issues of sexism can never be fully resolved without addressing issues of capitalism, racism, or environmental degradation. A commitment to mediating pollution and environmental disaster in Bangladesh that doesn't account for the effects of international capitalism is destined to miss many facets of the problem, such as the myriad impacts garment factories have on the local environment. It also overlooks how women are especially vulnerable to climate change and natural disaster. Likewise, to address labor rights without paying mind to environmental factors would be similarly misguided. Given how influential natural disasters are in making women choose garment work, it is imperative to know how environmental issues help create the urban labor pool in the first place. One must also look to how the operation of the garment industry in its current state harms the environment even further, and how damaging the local environment will adversely affect garment workers and their families, regardless of whether issues of abuse and compensation get addressed. Speaking of environmentalism without bringing gender into the conversation, and vice versa, will only ensure that these forms of mistreatment continue.

By looking to where different issues within Bangladesh coincide with others, it can help unite activists across causes, and thus make change a more real possibility. In political scientist Brooke Ackerly's *Just Responsibility*, she promotes "connected activism" as a vital approach to resolving human rights issues (189). In advocating for human rights for all, it is advantageous for those confronting issues of different kinds to realize the connections between their causes and using each other as support. For instance, in her discussion of the work being done by the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS), she notes how BCWS, like many other labor organizations, emphasizes how the lack of certain rights means the endangerment of other rights. For instance, the right for workers to organize into unions is a major component of workers' right to a safe workplace and a living wage. Thinking back to the case of the textile effluents polluting the Savar canal, one can see a similar connection – the right for each child in the Genda primary school to receive an education is hampered by the denial of the citizens' right to a safe, clean living environment (Yardley). Because garment factories were dumping dyed wastewater into the public canal, it prevented the local residents from exercising their right to a source of clean drinking water, and also became an obstacle for children trying to obtain an education, as they were nauseated and choked by the fumes from the polluted canal.

Ackerly holds that "connected activism transforms power inequalities by building political community, working across differences, and attempting to transform adversaries into allies" (199), implying that for those attempting to overcome power inequalities of different kinds, simply acknowledging the existence and the validity of others going through comparable struggles helps to prevent hierarchies amongst different issues. Neoliberal development advocates may insist that the development of the Bangladeshi economy is most important for its

people, even if it means damaging the local environment, while others might argue that preservation of the environment is paramount to increased participation in the global economy. Finding connections between these environmental and economic issues prevents people from seeing their interests as opposed to each other's. Rather, different groups are able to see how the things they want are connected and that each cause is crucial for the success of the other. Connected activism even illuminates different ways of approaching a problem that each side may not have been cognizant of individually.

One can see the tendency for hierarchies to form amongst different issues in the attitudes of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed. Sheikh Hasina has been lauded for playing an active role in combatting climate change in the nation. Recognizing the increasingly dire situation being faced by her people due to ever-climbing global temperatures, Hasina has put forth numerous plans and allocated millions of dollars to alleviate these burdens ("Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina"). She began the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan in 2009, notable for being the first such initiative to be started by a developing country. She also made Bangladesh the first country to ever establish a Climate Change Trust Fund. In 2011, she had the nation's constitution amended to ensure that environmental protections were legally mandated. With regards to financing these plans, Bangladesh spends 1% of its GDP on initiatives to alleviate climate change (Bashar). In 2015, she was awarded the Champions of the Earth award by the United Nations.

However, Hasina has remained notably silent regarding the issues facing her country's garment industry. Even during times of severe tragedy in the industry, like during the Tazreen Fashions fire and the Rana Plaza collapse, Hasina managed to shift blame to unidentified

saboteurs and sometimes even to the workers themselves, rather than acknowledging the widespread injustices and abuses that occur within the garment factories throughout Bangladesh. After the Tazreen fire, Hasina made a public statement in which she attributed the fire to individuals trying to “sabotage” the country’s entire garment industry, without acknowledging that the building that housed the factory was entirely insufficient to withstand a fire (Manik & Yardley, “Bangladesh Finds Gross Negligence”). Her government continuously allows garment factories to shun safety codes, and allows more new factories to be made in this faulty manner. When faced with protests, her police forces responded with violence (Paul, “Protests rage”). And in a 2017 public statement where she actually addresses the issues of garment worker welfare in her country, she immediately follows a reprimand to factory owners with a remark to workers that they “ensure that the company that provides for [their] food and shelter runs well” (“Hasina asks garment factory owners”). She points to unrest in the workplace and warns garment workers not to “give in to the provocations of outsiders to cause workplace troubles,” making specific reference to NGOs lobbying for worker rights. She tells workers specifically to maintain distance from NGOs and protesters, and that the government has their best interests in mind. If I’ve accomplished anything in writing this thesis, the reader will know that this certainly isn’t the case.

Sheikh Hasina is well aware that environmental issues have a tremendous impact on issues of human rights (Bashar). Thus, it would be beneficial for the Bangladeshi government to view the problems surrounding the garment industry as ones that play a role in the state of the environment and of the people of Bangladesh. Whether or not environmental conditions in Bangladesh improve will in part depend on how the garment industry develops. Imposing more

strict regulations on garment factory wastewater dumping, and actually enforcing those regulations, will keep at bay the more immediate effects of pollution, such as stomach and skin conditions, which harm the women who work there. With regards to more long-term goals, preventing the increase in local climate change requires that the garment factories treat their wastewater prior to dumping it, so as to avoid increases in local temperatures from the exchange of heat between the atmosphere and hot effluents in the water. Additionally, looking to the garment industry's environmental effects would draw attention to those living on the outskirts of major cities who are suffering from water contamination as a result of groundwater pumping from the factories. For Hasina to make policing garment factories a part of her environmental agenda means not only that the women being directly affected by them will be under protection, but it will also bring the injustices of the garment industry as a whole to the government's attention. When factory owners and corporations are placed under tighter scrutiny in relation to the environment, the voices of garment workers can be more easily heard by the government, meaning a greater potential to incite positive change.

Examining the Bangladeshi ready-made garment industry using an ecofeminist lens brings to light a reality that is leagues apart from how the industry is typically perceived. It makes clear that the growth of the industry in Bangladesh, a supposedly positive phenomenon, is built upon a foundation of intersecting axes of power which allow for the simultaneous devaluation and abuses of women, laborers, the global South, and the environment. Looking to the disparities in power which bolster the expanding garment industry in Bangladesh shows how surmounting problems resulting from one uneven relationship, such as those between men and women and the global North and South, means fighting the other simultaneous injustices that

accompany it. By seeing how each issue – those of gender, class, neo-colonialism, and the environment – connect to and reinforce one another, people are able to see more effective ways to combat the attitudes that lay at the heart of them all.

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