

The Palgrave Handbook of Fashion and Politics

Edited by
Karen M. Kedrowski · Candice D. Ortbals · Lori Poloni-Staudinger · J. Cherie Strachan

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We dedicate this book to fashionistas everywhere who through their sartorial choices speak their truths and change their worlds. We hope future researchers pick up the threads of the research started in this volume and weave their own studies and stories.

Lori dedicates this book to her children, Hannah and Liam, and her husband Reinhold.

Karen dedicates this book to her children, Suzanne and Jonathan, and her late husband Tim.

Cherie dedicates this book to her son Gus and her husband Dwayne.

Candice dedicates this book to her children, Etta and Marian, and her husband James.

Preface

This book was born from a shared love of fashion among four political scientists who research and write in the area of gender and politics. It began with discussions in Spring of 2021 just after the doldrums of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns about the ways in which fashion, sartorial choice, and media comments on public figures' dress was a theme that lay just under the surface of much of the work we did. The media (social and conventional) had been commenting about Jill Biden's tights, and we were discussing the layers of politics, patriarchy, and ageism inherent in the conversation around Dr. Biden's tights on a Zoom call. As women academics in male-dominated spaces, we had personal experience with thinking intentionally about dress as a way to communicate our positionality in the academy and in our discipline. We saw time and again how domains coded as "female," such as fashion, were understudied and ignored in the academy. We knew we wanted to take on a fun project; we knew we wanted to think big; and we knew the book we wanted did not exist on the market. So, how were we going to fill this gap and comment on the multitude of intersections we saw between fashion and politics?

The idea of creating an edited volume rather than producing a book on our own stemmed from the fact that we wanted to have a broad reach, both theoretically and geographically. We wanted the challenge of editing a large and diverse volume. At the time, we were naïve of the full magnitude of this challenge. We are all also at a point in our careers where we wanted to open space to hear from scholars at various career stages from various types of institutions all over the world. Thus, we put together a paper for the American Political Science Association conference in 2021. Much of this work can be found in the introductory chapter to the book. At the conference, which was virtual due to the pandemic, we announced the plan for the book. During the fall of 2021, we put out a call through our various networks and on social media and the response was overwhelming! It seems we had tapped into an

interest in the academic community beyond what we expected, validating our belief that this was an understudied topic ignored by our discipline. We made a decision early on to not confine authors to a formulaic structure, confined theoretical or methodological approaches, or geographic region. We hoped to get an eclectic set of chapters that could be in conversation with each other but also stand on their own. The work of the authors speaks to this success. We accepted as many chapters as we could into the book, resulting in thirty-two chapter book, with contributions from forty-two unique authors from across the globe. Three years after our initial conversations, during the confines of the COVID-19 pandemic, this book has been published. We hope that you enjoy reading the chapters, finding connections, and discovering new authors as we did during the creation of this project.

Ames, USA — Karen M. Kedrowski
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Acknowledgments

We first want to acknowledge the many authors who contributed to this volume. We could not have done this without you. Our largest thanks, however, go to Laura McCann, a doctoral student in the School of Government and Public Policy at University of Arizona. Laura served as editorial assistant on this book during its nearly two years in the making. She kept us organized, kept us on schedule, and carried a heavy load of correspondence with authors. Lori, in particular, owes Laura a debt of gratitude. I would not have been able to uphold my contributions to the book without you. The publication of this book is as much your achievement as it is all of ours. Thank you. We also want to thank the publishing and acquisition team at Palgrave. You have been a pleasure to work with. Lori would like to thank Kaitlin Conrad, special assistant to the dean, for holding meeting seekers at bay so that I could have time to write. Thanks as well to my associate dean team, Amy Kimme Hea, Jane Zavisca, and Jeannine Relly, for being amazing colleagues and support systems as I balanced my administrative role during the writing of this book as well as my coeditors. Women supporting women in higher education is a gift. Karen would like to thank her amazing coeditors, with whom she shared ice cream, support, and many laughs. Beyond the coeditors and contributing authors, Cherie would like to thank her new colleagues in University of Akron's political science department and at the Bliss Institute for creating such a welcoming, supportive environment. In particular, I would like to thank Kim Haverkamp for coordinating the Bliss Institute's events and day-to-day activities, which frees up my time for research and writing. I also appreciate the time my students—Wan Yu and Krista Nisly—spent reviewing chapters and providing feedback. Candice would like to thank Hannah Maniscalo who helped her brainstorm cases for the first paper about fashion and politics that the coeditors presented at the American Political Science Association meeting in 2021. Hannah had just finished her first undergraduate year of college but her background research for the paper was on par with research done by someone much more advanced. I cannot stress how much she impresses me as a person and a scholar.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Handbook

Karen M. Kedrowski, Candice D. Ortbals, Lori Poloni-Staudinger, and J. Cherie Strachan

1.1 Introduction

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg's dissent collars. Candidate Hillary Clinton's pantsuits. Secretary Madeline Albright's lapel pins and Speaker Nancy Pelosi's mace brooch. Vice President Kamala Harris's pearls and Chuck Taylor sneakers. Democratic women in the US House wearing white (for suffrage) or black (in solidarity with sexual assault survivors) at State of the Union addresses. First Lady Jill Biden's inaugural evening dress, embroidered with the official flowers from each state and US territory. Violetta Chamorro's white outfits that connote the Virgin Mary and call attention to her widowhood (Haase 2012). Sanaa Marin's biker jacket. Angela Merkel's blazer. Phyllis

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Schlafly's STOP Era activists who lobbied wearing pink dresses or frilly aprons (Solomon 1983).

In all of these cases, the women's sartorial choices also carried political messages; yet few scholarly works debate the meaning and impact of such messages. Indeed, in analyses of news coverage of women candidates, most scholars note that women are less likely to be covered by the media. When they are, there is less coverage of their issue positions and more on their appearance and viability (Kahn 1996; Bystrom et al. 2004; O'Neill et al. 2015). Regarding appearance, women face what scholars call a "double-bind" (Jamieson 1997; Mandell 2015). Those who try to establish credibility by eschewing traditionally feminine clothing are accused of being too masculine and unlikable, yet those who embrace clothing styles and colors typically associated with women risk being dismissed as frivolous.

While we agree that a candidate's issue positions are more important than her appearance, we also recognize that the attention paid to women politicians' appearance and clothing is an opportunity to make political statements through them. In this book, we consider gender to be a process that motivates the actions and opinions of many political actors (Beckwith 2005), and we believe that our understandings of race and gender are influenced by power structures and are influenced by the same. Therefore, as political actors employ fashion and as a political statement of values and policies, they construct gender and exert political agency, thereby "framing" their own lives and leadership (Ortbals and Poloni-Staudinger 2016); however, at the same time, existing gender (and race) hierarchies are framing and reconstituting their identities in diverse ways.

Therefore, we ask how do political actors and the public frame the fashion choices of people in politics and how do politicians themselves use fashion to claim personal and political agency? We pay particular although not exclusive attention to women and gender minorities. We answer this question by providing an extensive literature review that develops a theoretical framework for political scientists to gauge how gender, power, and politics is constructed by way of fashion and by introducing our readers to the themes and topics covered in this volume. In doing so, we begin a new debate in political science about fashion by drawing on fashion studies that have begun to research the "unprecedented politicization of fashion in a global political climate" (Gaugele and Titton 2019, 615). Political scientists have not explored political dress in detail even though political theorists such as Marx, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Veblen (as summarized by Vinkin 2019), and more recently Miller (2005) and Brown and Lemi (2021), have all critiqued fashion. For reasons that will become clear by the end of this volume, however, we think the time is ripe for political scientists to join the vibrant conversations underway in women and gender studies, history, art history, communication, and fashion to explore the issues of power, leadership, and authority embedded in the interplay of fashion, dress, and politics.

1.2 Constructing Gender, Power, and Politics through Fashion

1.2.1 Definitions

Henry Delgado (2018, n.p.) defines "fashion" as "when a society at large agrees to a style, aesthetic or cultural sensibility for a period of time." Political dress, by contrast, is the adoption of a particular costume as a political statement, often salient for a shorter duration. By this definition, women wearing trousers is a *fashion* while a group of Hillary Clinton supporters wearing pantsuits is *political dress*. Sullivan (2019) further expands this definition by discussing "style," whereby one adapts the current fashion into an act of self-expression. For example, the fashion for men may be the business suit but one's *style* may mean that one skips the tie. We will use Delgado's definitions as we use these terms.

1.2.2 Fashion and Social Movement Activism

Sartorial choices and social conventions have long had political connotations. In medieval and modern Europe, clothing choices were a designation of social class. The clothing of the aristocracy and the royalty was made of fine fabrics and covered with elaborate decorations, which signaled their social station. The ruling class's attire may carry on it overt symbols of their political authority, such as Elisabeth von Osterreich's coronation gown when she was crowned Queen of Hungary (Bartlett 2019, 18) or Louis XIV's red, high heeled shoes, that were, by law, restricted to members of his court (Ford 2021, 236). The clergy and religious nuns were identifiable by their robes, habits, and distinctive headgear. Commoners, by contrast, were recognizable by their modest, homespun, dull attire (Ford 2021).

Similarly, military attire also communicates power and authority. Soldiers and warriors can be identified, variously, by their protective equipment, weapons, body decorations, and clothing. Their uniforms not only identify their group membership, they are further decorated with symbols that denote their rank (and thus their power) and achievements. Thus, when wearing their uniforms, soldiers physically embody the power of the state. The power of uniforms is so alluring that other groups may adopt pseudo-military garb. Consider, for example, Garibaldi's red shirts, members of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party during Hitler's rise, or the Ku Klux Klan. More benign examples include uniformed marching bands and the Boy Scouts, with their badges, ranks, and kerchiefs. Other uniforms that are not militaristic in nature but do connote group membership include sports teams and the Black Panther Party, which adopted natural hairstyles along with their distinctive black pants, shirts, boots, leather jackets, and berets (Tulloch 2019).

More broadly speaking, Joshua Miller (2005) argues that fashions can undermine or reinforce democratic norms and traditions. In the first case,

garb may undermine democracy when clothing and luxury goods are used to denote social class, power, and arrogance. In the latter case, when clothing choices connote group membership and community spirit, fashion can reinforce democratic norms and traditions.

Miller's concept is easily illustrated in social movements, many of which have adopted particular political dress as a means to foster group identity. But what kind of group identity? One option is respectability. For instance, between 1900 and 1920, the women's suffrage movement adopted the upper middle-class fashions of the day. Aside from being respectable, this choice also ensured that participation was open to most women since they did not have a particular uniform. Rather, they adopted white, a color that was less expensive than colored dresses, and when marching stood out against the drably attired crowds (Rabinovitch-Fox 2014, 2020). Similarly, many civil rights demonstrators used the strategy of respectability by dressing in their Sunday best for sit-ins and other demonstrations. In so doing, they sought to win sympathy for their cause by demonstrating they were dignified, peaceful, respectable, and moral—and thus deserving of their civil rights (Ford 2013). Likewise, the marchers in the "Unite the Right" rally held in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 opted for polo shirts and khakis, button downs, and nondescript jeans to "blend in" (Feldman 2017). The strategy of "dressing up" for protest can backfire, however. When women garment workers struck for higher wages in 1909 in New York City and Gaston County, North Carolina, they dressed nicely, often wearing the shirtwaist blouses they themselves sewed. They looked so prosperous that the press often concluded the strikers just wanted higher wages so they could buy more clothes and baubles (Clemente 2006).

A contrasting social movement strategy is to reject the dress of those who hold power. During the French Revolution, the revolutionaries called themselves the *san coulottes,* signifying their rejection of the knee-length pants of the aristocracy in favor of the longer, loose fitting *pantalons* of the commoners (Ford 2021, 84–86). In 1960s Mississippi, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activists wore denim overalls to identify with the poor sharecroppers and farm workers they were trying to organize and register to vote. The overalls also were durable, easy to wash and dry, and had lots of pockets for literature, money, and the like. Moreover, by eschewing the "Sunday best" paradigm, Black women activists could adopt natural hairstyles and avoid the time and expense of straightening and styling. Finally, the denim overalls provided some protection against sexual assault by "desexualizing" the Black women's bodies (Ford 2013). In the same era, white youth dressed as hippies, epitomizing the counter-culture and their anti-establishment position, even though few African Americans donned such attire (Koizumi 2020). Similarly, second wave feminists of the 1970s rejected the traditional, feminine appearance of their mothers to embrace a more gender-neutral appearance (Hillman 2013). One dimension of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was to reject Western clothing and to adopt the simple suit popularized by Chairman Mao. Western dress was considered so counter-revolutionary that

Wang Guangmei, an intellectual and wife of a high-ranking party leader who became estranged from Mao, was publicly humiliated by being forced to wear a Western style dress she owned, complete with high heels, silk stockings, and a "pearl" necklace made of ping pong balls (Lim 2019). A recent study of youth in Italy found that left-leaning activists were more likely to adopt a particular style of dress to denote their collective identity and social position while clothing for right-leaning activists lacked political overtones (Genova 2020).

Another means to create this group identity is through the use of color without a specific uniform, *a la* the suffragists. Contemporary examples include the use of colored ribbons to raise awareness or show solidarity with those touched by disease or a cause: red for AIDS, pink for breast cancer, blue for prostate cancer or solidarity with Israel, for example (Kedrowski and Sarow 2007). More recently, survivors of sexual abuse by Dr. Larry Nasser at Michigan State adopted teal as their color (Center for Survivors, n.d.). In 2018, celebrity women attending the Oscars wore black gowns in solidarity with sexual assault survivors and to raise money and awareness for #Time's Up (Fredette 2018). Of course, any number of groups and organizations use the American flag motif and/or the colors of red, white, and blue to connote their patriotism. In recent years, red has also come to symbolize the Republican Party and blue the Democratic Party. Finally, the rainbow is a symbol of the lesbian and gay pride, with the colors of pink, baby blue, black, and brown sometimes added to connote solidary with trans people and racial minority groups.

Some anti-colonial movements also used clothes as a political strategy. For instance, Mohandas Gandhi famously dressed in Indian cotton and promoted the homebased industries for clothing production. This was a means to preserve culture and to be independent from the colonial government (Sharma and Bhaduri 2019). Benjamin Franklin advocated wearing homespun dress as a "dress of honesty" (Ford 2021, 83–84). In post-independence Nigeria, parliamentarians rejected the Western suits of their former colonizers in favor of, first, Khaki military uniforms, and later, the *agabada*, or flowing men's robe, a form of local "origin dress" (Osiebe 2020).

Other social movement strategies that especially involve women include the boycott and substituting homemade clothes and crafts instead. For instance, Cokie Roberts relates how colonial women supported the American Revolution by making and wearing homespun clothes rather than buying finished products from Europe. They even changed the social norms around mourning by skipping the imported black silk in favor of their existing wardrobes and homemade fabrics. The women also sewed shirts for Washington's poorly clad troops and embroidered their names on the collars so the troops would know of their contributions (Hawley 2019; Roberts 2005; Sapelly 2019). Immediately prior to World War II, many American women boycotted silk stockings imported from Japan to protest the abuses of the military regime there (Glickman 2005). More recently, social movement activists concerned

about the environment and the current, neo-liberal, globalized marketplace have taken to sewing or crafting their attire; wearing their clothes for longer periods of time and mending as needed; purchasing second-hand clothes; repurposing their clothes for use in quilts or other crafts; or trading clothes as a means of free exchange. This is a means to lessen one's impact on the environment and/or avoid participation in the exploitation of workers in faraway factories (Horton 2018; Lisberg Jenson and Elahi 2017; Bush 2019).

One of the most famous examples of the intersection of color, "craftivism" (see Ortbals 2013), media savvy, and feminine group identity is the pussy hat. After Donald Trump's election in 2016, women worldwide demonstrated on the day after the inauguration in 2017, with some 500,000 participating in the Washington, DC protest. As part of this effort, Jayna Zweiman and Krista Suh founded the "Pussyhat Project." They designed a simple, knitted pink hat with stylized ears. The purpose of the project was to make a statement against the President's recorded statement that he liked to attack women by touching their genitalia. Zweiman and Suh hoped that the recorded aerial shots of the Women's March would show not only a huge crowd, but a sea of pink hats. They succeeded, although the Pussyhat Project was later criticized for being Euro-centric, since Black women do not have pink genitalia, and as trans-exclusionary, since trans women do not necessarily have "pussies" at all (Bruder 2019; Earnest and Leslie 2017; Gökariksel and Smith 2017; Janigo et al. 2017; Larabee 2017; Strachan et al. 2019).

Many of these examples fit under Delagdo's broad umbrella of "political dressing." Other examples include wearing denim on Denim Day (Denim Day, n.d.) to protest sexual assault, sporting Make American Great Again caps or any type of political t-shirt, button, sticker, or other attire.

1.2.3 The Fashion Police

Another area in which power intersects with clothing and fashion has to do with laws and rules that dictate how one may or may not dress.

One recurring theme is the social discomfort associated with cross-dressing, especially the (less powerful) women who want to dress as (more powerful) men. An early example, of course, is Joan of Arc (*Jeanne d'Arc)*, who wore men's clothing in her crusade and at her trial, even though her attire was considered scandalously revealing (Ford 2021, 68–72). Cross dressing was illegal in many cities in Europe starting in the fourteenth century and this convention was brought to the United States as well. In fact, it was one of the barriers fashion reformers faced when advocating for women to wear pants (Ford 2021, 71–75; Ping 2018).

In eighteenth-century Europe and the United States, women's attire, as dictated by laws and social customs, led to physical injury and disfigurement. Respectable eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women wore a corset and a floor-length dress. A distant cousin of the modern brassiere, the corset slimmed the torso and supported the breasts. It was often cinched tightly

to create a fashionably small waist and hourglass figure. However, in so doing, corsets displaced the internal organs, distorted the rib cage, and could lead to atrophied back and abdominal muscles. The corsets also constricted breathing, which made women prone to fainting and reinforced the stereotype of women's frailty. Below the corset, women's skirts were long and held out to fullness with multiple petticoats and crinolines. The total weight of the dress and undergarments might be as much as 15 pounds; this weight rested on women's hips and caused back problems. In addition, the dresses interfered with walking, housework, and chores and were difficult to keep clean when walking through mud, puddles, or dusty roads. Moreover, they were dangerous. They could easily catch fire or become entangled in wagon or carriage wheels (Ping 2018).

The nineteenth-century dress reform movement began in 1850 when Elizabeth Smith Miller, in a moment of frustration, chopped off her dress just below the knee and added Turkish trousers (loose fitting pants that tied around the ankle) underneath. She wore this outfit to visit her cousin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in Seneca Falls, New York. Stanton was envious of her cousin, who was able to climb stairs while carrying a lamp and a baby without tripping because she did not need to hold up her skirts. Stanton quickly adopted the outfit and shared it with other women's rights activists. The ensemble's name, "bloomers," came from suffragist Amelia Bloomer, who promoted the outfit in her newsletter, *The Lily*. The leading suffragists of the day adopted bloomers and made dress reform part of their women's rights agenda. Suffragists eventually abandoned bloomers because of the ridicule they endured when wearing the outfit in public. They were also concerned that the controversy over the dress and trousers was distracting from the broader women's rights agenda or that women could be arrested for wearing men's attire (Ford 2021; Ping 2018). Interestingly, Rabinovitch-Fox (2014, 2020) argues that suffrage parades were possible because fashion reform eventually led to the longer, straighter skirt of the 1900s, which made walking long distances easier.

While cross-dressing is no longer illegal in the United States, cultural norms that reinforce binary gender roles still make it difficult for members of the LGBTQ community who are nonbinary or whose gender identity and preferred gender expression violate ongoing expectations that men will present as masculine and women as feminine. And some areas legislate against drag story hour and other such events as being a negative influence on children. Further, there are laws in other countries that dictate what women might, and might not, wear, especially clothing with religious significance. For instance, Saudi women are expected to wear the abaya, a long black robe and head covering, even though some women are currently experimenting with other, equally modest, attire. Foreign women are not required to wear the abaya but must dress "modestly" by wearing shirts with sleeves and have their knees covered (Abdulaziz 2019; Skirka 2019). In Iran, women are required to wear the hijab (headscarf) (Begum 2019) and in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule, women were forced to wear burqas, long flowing robes that cover women

from head to toe with only a slit or mesh around the eyes (Hoodfar and Tajali 2021). After the Taliban retook the country in 2021, we saw women once again don burqas.

In contrast, France famously banned wearing the hijab entirely in 2010 and in 2016, several cities on the French Mediterranean coast banned the "burkini," a modest swimsuit that covers the body and head. The French justified these laws by stating that they were symbols of women's oppression and ran contrary to the French tradition of secular rule (Bowe et al. 2019; Winter 2008). The Canadian province of Quebec followed in 2017 by prohibiting anyone who wears face coverings from receiving public services, a law that clearly targets the *niqab*. This law was overturned a few months later (Paperny 2018). However, in 2019, Quebec passed a law prohibiting any public employee from wearing religious headgear, justified on the same grounds. In 2021, this ban was upheld by the provincial court (Coletta 2021; Kester-D'Amours 2019). In 2014, the Australian province of New South Wales considered a law banning the burqa, arguing that women terrorists could hide explosives under their flowing robes (Barker 2014). Lest one think that the United States is immune to such regulation, until 2011, Oregon had a state law in effect that prohibited public school teachers from wearing religious head coverings or other garb while in school. Pennsylvania's law still stands (Freedom Forum Institute, n.d.; Hammond 2010).

Another way that the state controls women's bodies is through decency laws. All 50 states have some form of public indecency law, although the laws and definitions vary. Nonetheless, those states that prohibit showing the breast, nipple, or areola caused headaches for breastfeeding rights advocates before all states had passed breastfeeding rights legislation (Kedrowski and Lipscomb 2008). In addition, the Federal Communications Commission defines bans the portrayal of "sexual or execratory organs or activities" through the licensed broadcast media (FCC, n.d.).

An especially common form of "fashion police" is school dress codes. While in the wake of *Tinker v. Des Moines,* schools cannot ban political speech, they do regulate students' clothing choices in many ways. At times, the dress codes go as far to mandate uniforms. In other cases, dress codes specify regulations on length of skirts and shorts, cleavage, color (to ban gang colors), showing underwear or mandating belts, and more. Too often, as Robert Ford (2021, 244–247) writes, school dress codes are unevenly enforced, with girls, especially Black girls, subject to discipline for dress code violations far more than boys. The idea is to protect the young boys from distraction by sexually suggestive clothing. Similarly, hairstyles have been policed as well, with Black children facing being disciplined for their curly hair being "unkempt" or being required to cut their dreadlocks in order to compete in sports (Brown and Lemi 2021).

The 2021 Tokyo Olympics has highlighted another form of dress code: the uniform requirements for women in various sports. The German gymnastics team competed in unitards that covered their legs to the ankle to protest

the sexualization of women's bodies implied in the traditional leotard (Wright and McCluskey 2021). Male gymnasts, by contrast, wear long pants or shorts. Shortly before the Olympics began, the Norwegian women's handball team was fined $1700 by the European Handball Association's Disciplinary Commission for wearing shorts similar to what the men's team wears, rather than bikini bottoms (Radnofsky 2021), and the women's beach volleyball players often wear skimpy bikinis compared to the long shorts and tank tops the men wear (Hincks 2021). At the same time, British Para-Olympian high jumper Olivia Breen was chastised by a British official for wearing briefs that were too revealing, even though they covered more of her body than many other women's uniforms (Hincks 2021).

1.2.4 Professional Attire

Political leaders are expected to don business attire for most of their official activities. This raises the question: what is business attire and how did it evolve? The contemporary men's business suit evolved in the late eighteenth century, as a product of a variety of social and political forces. The backlash against the elaborate men's fashions of the European aristocracy and royalty began in the eighteenth century with the "Great Masculine Renunciation." One force behind this fashion trend was the Protestant Reformation, which eschewed the rituals and wealth of Catholicism and the elaborate attire of its clerics. A second force was the Enlightenment, which emphasized equality and liberty. By contrast, the plain suit was a symbol of liberty against the elaborate attire of the ruling aristocracy. Moreover, after the Scottish rebellion of 1745, wearing kilts and tartans was outlawed (Ford 2021). Over time, Western men's fashions ended up settling upon the simple dark suit, only slightly different from the men's business suit of today. Certainly, the cuts, fabrics, colors, and necktie widths and types (i.e., long tie, bow tie, string tie or bolo, etc.) have varied over time. Nonetheless, the result is that in today's American politics, men have a certain uniform: a dark suit with a light-colored shirt; a colored, but not too flashy, necktie; a flag lapel pin; and dark, low-heeled dress shoes.

According to fashion expert Tim Gunn, "Washington subscribes to a uniform" (as quoted in Rosholm 2009, 17). To conform, men need to "remember three specific elements… it's silhouette, it's proportion, it's fit" (Rosholm 2009, 18). Political men can make small deviations from this uniform, but probably not so much that they are considered ill attired. Yet there is no shortage of examples of perceived fashion *faux-pas* that led to questions, comments, raised eyebrows, controversy, or ridicule. They include Obama's tan suit (Farzan 2019) and missing American flag lapel pin (Associated Press 2007), Marco Rubio's heeled boots (Clemente 2016), Ron DeSantis's shoe lifts (Guy 2023), Andrew Yang's tieless debate appearances (Givas 2019), and Donald Trump's ill-fitting suits and too-long red ties, which were sometimes held in place with transparent tape (Ford 2021). By contrast, Senator Bernie Sanders' frumpy clothes, unkempt hair, and the oversized

mittens he wore at Biden's inauguration are endearing and even meme-worthy. Failure to conform with these expectations by Senator John Fetterman, whose embrace of athletic shorts and hoodies over suits and ties likely helped him appeal to working class voters in Pennsylvania, led the US Senate to adopt a dress code requiring men to wear a coat, tie, and slacks on the chamber floor. Notably, the new rule did not attempt to provide similar restrictions on acceptable attire for women senators (Rimmer 2023).

This omission reflects the fact that the situation is far trickier for women in politics. First, women are at a disadvantage since they are not the typical face of leadership. Therefore, they need to choose clothing that will reinforce their authority without undermining their femininity. This situation is further compounded by the fact that there is no commonly accepted alternative to the men's business suit "uniform." Rather, each woman has to negotiate her own style. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, for example, chose a 1980s "power suit" with a handbag and accessories (Oh 2019; Sullivan 2019). Youri Oh (2019) found that Koreans preferred to see their women leaders in Western attire, whether it was a pantsuit, dress, or skirt, rather than traditional Korean dress.

Joanna Rosholm (2009) recounts how Hillary Clinton's style evolved over the decades, starting with a skirted suit as First Lady, the black pantsuit for her Senate campaign, a pink jacket that exposed cleavage as a Senator, and brightly colored, but "boxy" pantsuits in her presidential campaign. Rosholm (2009) concludes that Clinton was caught in Judith Butler's gender paradox where a woman leader must exude both masculinity and femininity, but not too much of either. Consequently, as First Lady, Clinton was a fashion misfit. Later, Clinton's pantsuits were too masculine since they hid her feminine shape, and on the Senate floor, Clinton's cleavage was too feminine. Rosholm also analyzes Sarah Palin and concludes that she set fashion trends with her rimless glasses and red pumps. However, when the cost of her wardrobe became public, the campaign suffered a backlash. Finally, she compares Representative Loretta Sanchez's form-fitting, brightly colored suits and "come hither heels" to Representative Barney Frank's ill-fitting suits. She concludes that both suffered backlash for sartorial choices; yet Sanchez was criticized in especially sexualized terms (Rosholm 2009).

Mary Edwards further argues that Clinton's pantsuits were criticized because there is still considerable discomfort at the idea of women wearing pants. Trousers are still signs of men's power and authority. Thus, with her preference for pantsuits, Clinton was more likely to be shamed as "an unfeminine, cold-hearted, 'nasty woman'" (Edwards 2018, 575). On the other hand, overt femininity and high style are also problematic. As Einav Rabinovitch-Fox relates, conservative reporter Eddy Scarry criticized Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for her designer clothes, implying that she could not empathize with working class and poor Americans if she wore such attire (2018).

Hillary Clinton's style evolution mirrors some of the changing norms of business attire for women, with wider acceptance of clothes other than

Thatcher's "power suit." However, Congress—in this case, a surrogate for "Washington" generally—has been slow to change. Rosholm (2009) notes that men wore cutaways in Congress until 1900. Women were expected to wear suited skirts until 1993, when then-Senator Barbara Mikulski led a "Pantsuit Rebellion" in the US Senate. It was not until 2017, after women members of Congress staged a "Sleeveless Friday" protest, that women were allowed to wear sleeveless dresses and blouses and open-toed shoes on the House floor and in the Speaker's Lobby (Linderman 2017).

The unstated norms for professional appearance extend to hair, with the expectation (at least since the 1990s) that in the workplace, women should wear well-styled short hair or pull their long hair back. These norms led to criticism of the headbands Hillary Clinton wore during the 1992 campaign and the perception that when a woman wears her hair down—or takes it down with an alluring shake of the head—that she is ready for sex. As Brown and Lemi (2021) describe, the expectation to have long, straight, or well-styled short hair is particularly fraught for Black women, whose hair is naturally curly—from gentle waves to tight kinks. Their hair is prone to dryness and is healthiest when not washed too frequently and worn in various natural styles, including as Afros, locs, braids, or twists. Moreover, coaxing the curls into the straight or carefully styled hair is time-consuming and expensive and can damage hair. As Brown and Lemi note, all Black women political elites they interviewed have a "hair story" and are moving increasingly to natural styles and defining those as "professional." As these efforts make clear, some women politicians are increasingly willing to push back against constraints imposed by the need to appear as masculine (and in the United States, as white) as possible. Such efforts are perhaps most visibly embodied by Sen. Krysten Sinema who has used recent leeway in defining women's professional dress to stretch these boundaries. After winning election, her wardrobe on the chamber floor included a faux fur stole, a variety of "Easter egg colored" wigs, stiletto heels, form-fitting dresses, capes—and a hot pink sweater emblazoned with the phrase "dangerous creature" (Friedman 2021). It remains to be seen whether other women politicians—and even Sen. Sinema herself—will be able to replicate her efforts while winning reelection and preserving their ability to influence public policy.

Given the difficult terrain political women need to navigate in finding acceptable business attire, perhaps women in conventional roles might have an easier time navigating the fashion minefield? Not exactly. Amy Sullivan analyzed the media coverage of First Ladies' inaugural ball gowns from Jacqueline Kennedy to Michelle Obama. She found that the fashion media were generally unforgiving. Hillary Clinton's first gown was considered dowdy. Lady Bird Johnson was compared unfavorably to Jacqueline Kennedy. Rosalyn Carter was widely condemned because she wore a gown she had worn twice before. Not only was the dress out of style, Rosalyn Carter was framed as a poor role model for American women because she did not wear a new, stylish, designer dress (Sullivan 2018, 43).

As much as women politicians might wish that their appearance was not a subject of commentary, it will be. Therefore, we assert that women should use their clothing choices, style, and yes, their bodies, to make political statements. If women do not ascribe meaning to their choices, others will ascribe it to them.

1.3 Plan for the Book

As the preceding discussion illustrates, the human body is a tableau and the clothes each person chooses, or is forced to choose, send signals about their social class, their profession, their credibility, and their group affiliations. It is no surprise, then, that individuals may choose attire that has political messaging and implications. The contributors to this volume explore these themes in greater detail and from a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. Specifically, in section one, we learn that one of the primary ways that fashion and politics intersect is its use to establish the credibility of its users. The authors in this section all explore this idea in a comparative context. From cases ranging from Spain, Germany, Turkmenistan, Ethiopia, and Kenya, we see commonalities in how the wearer signals legitimacy and seeks to establish credibility through their clothing choices.

Section two expands this examination by looking at cases only in the United States. From cases ranging from Supreme Court justices to legislators to first ladies, the authors explore how fashion is used to construct credibility and also power in different political contexts in the United States.

Section threee explores the symbolic politics of clothing choices among women and minoritized communities in both US and comparative contexts. This eclectic collection of essays demonstrates how government and social norms place undue burdens on people who do not share ascriptive characteristics of the dominant minority and that these deviations undermine individuals' power and credibility.

Section four explores the ability of fashion to facilitate individual expression and collective identity and to serve as a form of political agency that influences the public. In chapters focused on Pakistan, fraternal organizations, gun culture, body armor, and American flag fashion, this section elucidates how fashion can be linked to conservative beliefs and memories of the past.

And finally, section five explores the political symbolism inherent in military and police uniforms and in personal clothing choices of Queer persons, Cameroonian women, artist Frida Kahlo, and Biafra nationalists. In each case, the uniforms or personal clothing choices carry specific political and personal statements that communicate one's identity, critiques government policies or social norms, expresses national or ethnic identity, or physically embodies the state.

Our collective goal is to demonstrate that studying the intersection of fashion and politics is an important question, with ramifications for governing,

human rights, campaigns and elections, and state power. Political science needs to join other disciplines who work in this area, adding our disciplinary insights and methodologies to the larger scholarly conversation. Our hope is that these chapters will inspire many future studies.

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CHAPTER 2

Section One Introduction: Using Fashion to Establish Credibility—Looking the Part—Comparative Perspective

Karen M. Kedrowski, Candice D. Ortbals, Lori Poloni-Staudinger, J. Cherie Strachan, and Laura E. McCann

One of the primary ways in which fashion intersects with politics is its use to establish credibility. In Section One, the authors all explore this idea in a comparative context. We will explore this idea in the US context in Section Two. From cases ranging from Spain, Germany, Turkmenistan, Ethiopia, and Kenya, we see commonalities in how the wearer signals legitimacy and seeks to establish credibility through clothing choices. This is just as much a theme in Western Europe as it is in Africa and transcends democracies and authoritarian states. It is also a theme that transcends gender. This begs the questions:

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What is credibility? Why is credibility important? And how does one establish credibility?

The construct of credibility is defined as a set of perceptions that receivers hold toward a particular source, medium or message (Newell and Goldsmith 2001). Relied on heavily in the field of communication, McCroskey and colleagues have engaged in extensive research on the construct. The conclusion from most of McCroskey et al.'s studies was that there are five dimensions of credibility: competence, character, sociability, extroversion, and composure. Most studies over time have tended to focus on dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Teven and McCroskey 1997). For political figures, credibility is important because politicians perceived as uncredible are unlikely to be reelected (in democratic systems) or retain popular support (Choi et al. 2006; Hwang 2013; Funk and Coker 2016; Abramowitz 1991; Peters and Welch 1980).

While there are several ways in which a political actor can establish credibility, throughout the chapters in this section, we see fashion used as a performative tool to establish credibility across all McCroskey's dimensions. In the chapters in this section, authors explore how in-group and out-group signaling can be accomplished through clothing. Clothing and fashion are invested with symbolic meaning and can be used strategically by political representatives. As Diehl in Chapter 5, "Merkel's Non-Fashion," illustrates, "politics, fashion cannot be disentangled from performances, symbols, and political discourse. The impact of fashion depends on who is wearing what, when, and is intrinsically linked to the materiality of the body." Fashion as symbolic meaning is a theme we will see throughout this book, with the concept reinterrogated in chapters across the various sections. As Muhando elucidates in Chapter 3 "Performing Dress on Political Campaign Trails," fashion establishes credibility through a "sociology of material culture." Material culture is defined as "any component of nature that is made meaningful through cultural action" (Mukerji 158). In other words, the meaning of dress is constructed and produced by social actors through their day-to-day practices. It is through this construction that credibility is established. Through Muhando's discussion of the use of fashion in Kenya, we see how dress is used to denote material power and as a political language to connect with certain demographic groups, for example youth and Muslim constituencies. Diehl illustrates through her chapter how former German Chancellor Angela Merkel used "non-fashion" to symbolize she is a leader for all Germans, not just women. In Spain (as seen in Chapter 6 by Valiente), clothes denote party identification. As she explains in her chapter, "Do Women Politicians from the Left and Right Use Fashion Differently?", women of the right in Spain wear more traditional clothing to denote more traditional values, while women of the left use purple to show solidarity with the women's movement. Finnell in Chapter 4, "The Dictator Wears New Clothes," challenges us to consider how authoritarians message through fashion, using it both as a tool for control and to establish a cult of personality. Thus, dress becomes a form of signaling

strength, solidarity, and commitment to certain groups. It is a function that transcends geography, gender, and governmental structure.

As we discuss in Chapter 1, "normal" professional attire among politicians is a suit and tie as represented by a Western, male politician. The chapters in this section all explore what happens when politicians deviate from this norm. The choice to deviate and the reactions to the deviation can tell us a great deal about perceptions of power, as well as provide commentary on gender, strength, group affiliation, and trust. Women political decision-makers, in particular, face a double-bind in this regard. If they dress too femininely, they are perceived as deficient in exercising political power. If they dress too masculine, they are seen as inadequate as women. As Valiente points out, when Spanish women of the left posed in couture—deviating from their constituency of the Left who are portrayed as working class and unlikely to afford couture—they were criticized. Merkel too, as explained by Diehl, faced her own criticisms for sartorial choices. Muhando's and Finnell's chapters show how deviation from this norm can be purposeful to establish credibility in opposition to Western ideals of dress. Re-identification with traditional dress or military dress is a signal of Western revolt.

Thus, these chapters illustrate how in using clothing to establish credibility, fashion helps to establish the leader as the institution, either as an authoritarian strong man (Finnell), by de-emphasizing gender (Diehl) or by association with a particular political party or movement (Muhando; Valiente). Fashion helps to establish a social connection between the wearer and those with whom they interact. It is through this connection and the performative use of power that leaders strategically use fashion to establish credibility in the hopes of securing their political positions.

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CHAPTER 3

Performing Dress on Political Campaign Trails: The Case of Raila and Ruto in Kenya

Isaac Muhando

3.1 Background

African fashion and style evoke the continent's histories and cultures both lived and imagined (Rovine 2004, 189). From the pre-Colonial period when many Africans used hides, paints, and adornment of *sisal* skirts to grace various occasions to colonial and missionary periods when adoption of Western style permeated the continent (Hay 2004, 67–68), fashion as a product of material culture continues to evolve connoting different stances in many African communities. In Kenya, religion, culture, and modernism have exerted profound influence on the perception, production, and consumption of dress. For instance, in the local indigenous churches such as the Akorino in central Kenya, members wear white turbans to emphasize commitment to priesthood (Waigwa 2011, 268). The youth subcultures of Nairobi, on the other hand, mirror Western fashion and style to index both local and imagined global identities. All these examples demonstrate how individuals use dress to embody sense of self, belief, and identity; however, studies surrounding the interface between fashion and politics in the post-Millennial Africa are relatively few, necessitating further interrogation into this area. Dress and politics are intricately intertwined. Political actors may use dress to index varied meanings and sensibilities including, but not limited to, ideological stances, power, dominance or to make political statements. From the Sankara's *red beret* in Burkina

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Faso to the Obasonjo's *boubou*[1] in Nigeria, dress establishes itself as an iconic and significantly mediated symbol in the African politics. After his assassination in 1987, Thomas Sankara's[2] legacy of Pan-Africanism still lives on and is symbolically exemplified through his military hat, the "*red beret*." Young African leaders who embrace his Marxist ideology such as Julias Malema (a popular South African politician) and Joseph Kyangulanyi (former member of parliament in Uganda and a seasoned critic of long serving president of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni) wear this hat to index their shared ideological stance with that of Sankara. The former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, on the other hand was popularly known for his *agbada* (Yoruba for boubou) dress in official functions as a symbol of embracing Africanism. African fashion and clothing do not only depict personal sense of style but also material resources that afford the wearers an opportunity to project multiple sensibilities in the public space (Mangieri 2013, 154). Wearers may also use clothes to communicate what Hertz calls "a self-conscious definition of self" (Hertz 2021, 8). For instance, *Kaunda* suits,[3] which were donned by Zambia's former President Dr. Kenneth Kaunda in the late 1980s and early 1990s, remained to be seen as a symbol of Pan-Africanism while repudiating the colonial imperialism of the West. Such sartorial choices act as a lens for understanding other layered meanings associated with culture, power, and society.

The present study seeks to examine how culture and religious practices in contemporary Kenya influence fashion and sartorial choices of political actors during political campaign periods. In other words, I investigate the sartorial choices of local leaders in Kenya to underscore how they deploy dress as a powerful political language in religious and cultural spaces. Using Mukerji's notion of "sociology of material culture," that is, the use of physical objects to express or define one's own culture (Mukerji 2002), I explore how political protagonists use dress and bodily ornaments to seek political legitimacy and public presence during campaign periods. I also examine how political candidates frame dress as a political language on campaign trails and how the same is perceived and interpreted by the public through social media platforms. I envisage dress as a site of political performance where actors advance their political interests and dominance.

Study data include observations of politicians' dress code in certain select functions and the public's reactions about those dresses in the social media, mainly from X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook. My aim is to mine

[1] A popular West African dress worn by both men and women. The men's version consists of a three-piece garment of a shirt, pants that narrow at the ankles, and an open-stitched sleeveless gown worn over the other two pieces. Women's boubou, however, consist of only two pieces, i.e. a large overflowing gown and headscarf.

[2] Former military officer and a Marxist revolutionist who served as Burkina Faso's president between 1983 and 1987.

[3] Kaunda suit (named after former Zambian president) is a two-piece wear consisting of short-sleeved top with four visible external pockets and a matching long pants.

data that depict actors' choice of dress in certain religious and cultural gatherings. I thematically coded these data by comparing the relationship between the designated dress code of a given function (for example, a religious function) and protagonists' dress choice in that function, and how the public frame these individuals and their regalia in such functions. At the center of these analyses are the cases of two prominent politicians in Kenya: Raila Odinga and William Ruto. Raila, 78, is a veteran politician who has served in past regimes as a prime minister, member of parliament, and other ministerial positions. Ruto, 56, is the current president of Kenya for the political period running from 2022 to 2026. Prior to this, he served as a deputy president, minister, and member of parliament for Eldoret North Constituency.

3.1.1 Dress as a Material Culture

I confine this study within the "sociology of material culture" in which "symbolic values are attributed to material culture through the collective activities of personnel with a wide range of skills" (Crane and Bovone 2006, 321). In other words, dress is a form or process in which meanings are symbolically attributed to material culture, that is, the meaning of dress is constructed and produced by social actors through their day-to-day practices. Dress, as a visual and expressive material symbol, is mediated through social practices by the wearers and viewers. With this theoretical understanding, I position fashion and dress as a system that individuals draw on to construct different meanings and sensibilities in varied societal contexts. Since dress closely reflects personal identities more than any other material objects such as architectural designs, relics, or paintings, it conveys social transformation at several levels (Allman 2004, 5) and can be used to dissect and understand one's self-representation, identities, and ideologies. As Hansen observes, dress utilization in Africa mediates different sensibilities when compared to those of the West, that is, in Africa fashion connotes the continent's histories, culture, and heritage while in the West textile and clothing is used for economic expansion (2000, 23). Byfield (2004, 31) also notes, "there was no one relationship between dress and politics. Political actors deployed dress in multiple ways to express varied notions and ideas." Somali women, for instance, use dress as a space to participate in national discourse (Akou 2011, 9). According to Akou, while Somali women have not been allowed to directly participate in politics, they are indirectly engaged in political discourse through the way they dress themselves or their children to make political statements, for instance, in Minnesota, immigrant Muslim parents dress their school-going daughters with hijab in institutions where direct expression of religion is suppressed (politically) (2011, 9). In Uganda, the outspoken opposition leader, Robert Kyagulanyi (popularly known as Bobbi Wine) is widely known for donning a *red beret* embroidered with a tagline "People Power, Our Power," a symbol of revolt and protest against corruption and cruel suppression by the incumbent president, Yoweri Museveni. African Marxists like Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso used

dress to champion the transformation of the country's freedom from French ideology (Prairie 2007). During his presidency in Burkina Faso, "civil servants were required to wear traditionally designed and woven *Faso dan Fani*[4] outfits instead of Western-style suits" (Harsch 2013, 371) with the goal of promoting local textile industries and independence from the West. Such dress practices not only demonstrate imaginative possibilities of reconstructing local identities but also sites for contestation and revolt of Western ideologies in Africa. Dress therefore establishes its position in the political arena as a medium of political expression with diverse functions.

3.1.2 Dress and Religion: From Kenya's Perspective

Hansen (2000, 23) observes that dress was one of the earliest commodities that preoccupied the interaction between Africa and the West. That is, Western cloth and clothing were used by missionaries and early explorers as tools of civilization and continue to play a key role in defining modernity. In Kenya, religious and cultural practices have had a considerable influence on sartorial choices of the actors. During the Colonial period, missionaries and their African converts partnered to promote new forms of dress such as cast-off khaki jacket, khaki shirts, and robes (Hay 2004, 68–69). Clothing as a material culture embodied beliefs, identity, power, status, and position in different contexts. As Hansen (2013, 3) notes, sartorial choices in certain contexts are informed by the norms and values we are socialized toward. Dress as a site for projecting religious visibility is a widespread practice in Kenya. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Kenya is an interfaith dominated state with Christianity estimated at 85.52% of the total population and Islam at 10.91%, while other faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and traditional religion share the remaining 3.57%. As a multilayered symbol, dress may signal religious identity, rank, association, or authority among other functions. Congregants of conservative churches, such as the African Divine Church, attend their masses in long white robes blended with a red collar, and a running red strip from collar cleavage to the bottom hem. This is also matched with a cap of similar colors for men and head wrap for women. The Salvation Army don their white Khaki suits with an "S" badge on their collar (although the color and nature of the uniform may differ according to established ranks within the church). The East African Muslims on the other hand attend their religious functions in white *kanzu* (loose dress of synthetic fabric) for men and black *buibui* (robes) and *hijab* (head scarf) for women. These established clothing patterns among religious groupings express their identities while simultaneously promoting their visibility. While religious dress is centrally positioned to demonstrate faith and beliefs of the various religious

[4] A handwoven cotton cloth which was popularly used as 'Burkina Faso's national cloth. *Faso dan Fani* is a Dioula phrase meaning 'woven cloth of homeland.'

groups, it is often commodified and used by politicians to gain access to the masses for political expediency, a central focus for this study.

In the next sections, I provide a brief highlight on the interaction of dress and politics in Kenya followed by an analysis of dress consumption in the context of political, religious, and cultural practices. Lastly, I reflect on how the two political actors, i.e., Raila and Ruto, deploy dress to position themselves in different social contexts and how this is conceptualized by members of the public through social media reactions and comments.

3.1.3 The Margins of Dress and Politics in Kenya

In the wake of the twentieth century, many leaders in Kenya had a high affinity for Western-styled clothes such as Khaki tunic, trousers, boots, and helmets. And to them, such symbolized modernity (Hay 2004, 67). Whereas many of the post-Millennial political actors still don Western-styled suits in selected occasions, there is a growing affection for African dress.

In contemporary Kenya, political practices such as campaigns and elections can be contentious and emotive. Every four years, Kenyans participate in the general election to elect their leaders for various government positions. Prior to this, candidates appeal to their respective electorate for votes. Campaign managers for respective candidates create strategies to market their candidates to the electorate. Many public spaces are inundated with political campaign materials ranging from billboards, posters, graffiti, and fliers as a way of promoting their visibility to the electorate. One promotional technique that remains salient yet unchecked is the use of dress as a campaign language. Dressed bodies at political events can be used to convey multilayered meanings. This is also echoed by Byfield (2004, 31) who observes, "political actors [in Nigeria] deployed dress in multiple ways to express varied notions and ideas." Similarly, I contextualize this study around Kenyan politicians to explore how they express multiple meanings through dress.

3.2 Raila's Air Jordan Sneakers: A Politically Situated Appeal to the Youth Subculture

Raila Odinga, also known to locals as "*baba*" (father), "*Agwambo*" (the mysterious one), and "*tinga*" (tractor), is a seasoned politician who has had major influence on Kenya's political landscape. In the history of Kenyan politics, Raila is one of the most influential public figures. He commands a huge political following not only in his hometown of Siaya but also in Kenya at large. This is evident in how he effortlessly persuades the masses to align with his political ideologies and stances. In the extant literature, Raila is one of the most studied local leaders in Kenya (Okoye et al. 2019; De Smedt 2009) but few, if any, feature his sartorial choices and how he uses dress as an expressive language while advancing his political interests. In the words of Barnard (1996, 26) "Clothes are the equivalent of words and may be combined into

'sentences'" to express concepts. Akou (2011) echoes this notion with the statement "as an extension of the body, dress can 'speak' much more loudly and continuous" (19). As a powerful political language, it is therefore necessary to understand how political leaders such as Raila negotiate fashion to convey different meanings and sensibilities. Such symbolism illustrates how Raila (and Ruto, to be discussed later) frame their wardrobe to intricately connect and communicate with their followers.

In the period leading to the 2022 general elections in Kenya, Raila held a youth forum meeting with the young people of Mt. Kenya region. Conspicuous in the meeting was Raila's youthful look. He appeared wearing a polo shirt with sleeveless puffer vest. On his head was a well-positioned trilby hat. He wore blue jeans that matched his blue and white *Men's Air Jordan* sneakers. While this is not Raila's archetypal adornment, it evokes a youthful feel and situates him within the urban youth subculture of Nairobi. The following tweet from @sureobinge Oct 12, 2021, demonstrates how this is achieved.

Sheng	**Translation**
Baba! Hiyo kiatu manze ni kalii, I have always wanted to get one but bei iko juu sana.	Baba (Raila)! That shoe is (sic) so trendy, I have always wanted to get one, but it is too expensive. (@sureobinge Oct 12, 2021)

The tweet above shows how *@sureobinge* connects with Raila's dress through his admiration of the shoe even though he acknowledges his inability to afford it. The clothing in this case achieves the sender's intention of conveying his visibility and rhetorical appeal to the youth. Raila's *Air Jordan* sneakers, which are popular among young people in general, evoke an affective and emotive connection to youth as highlighted in the tweet above. Masquelier argues, "young people place high importance and value on stylish looks and spend large sums of money on their wardrobe" (Masquelier 2013, 143) in effort to access this trendy look. To youth, fashion gives them identity within their own youthful spaces. The malleable nature of fashion also provides them with the opportunity to construct a bricolage identity that situates them within the Nairobi urban subculture while also staying interconnected to the global world. As a compelling political language, Raila and his campaign team leverage this interaction between youth and fashion to advance their political rhetoric. The assumption here is that in order to appeal to young people one must look like them and probably act like them. Dress appears to be one of the ways of leveraging this. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), seventy five percent of Kenya's population are between the ages of 15 and 35 (KNBS 2019). Young people, thus, become an ideal target during political campaigns as they form the largest voting block during the general elections.

While donning a youthful look may appear to be a powerful and persuasive message from Raila's campaign team, the deceptive potential of dress

(Masquelier 2013, 143) may invite opposition and contestation from the very same youths to whom it was intended to appeal. In a twitter reply, after Raila's dressed body surfaced online, Victor Otengo disparaged Raila's dress as highlighted below.

> Whoever is running Baba's accounts, tell him trying to be a youth once every 5 years won't win him the presidency, just be you and tell the people what you have instore(sic). This was a tactic in the past, now with all the woke youth around. (@VeeqOtengo Oct 12, 2021)

This reply points to the notion of how dress has multiplex sensibilities that may confer identity and connection while at the same time inviting contestation and challenge of the aforementioned connections. In this twitter response, @VeeqOtengo who situates himself as an urban youth challenges this seasonal use of dress as an appeal by political actors to gain youth's support. To him, Raila is only being deceptive by donning a youthful look that is only occasional (note "after every 5 years"). According to Tarlo (2010, 11), "the effects and resonance of a particular outfit depend, however, not just on the clothes themselves but also the manner and context in which they are worn." In this case, if Raila's sartorial choices regularly featured youth clothing, this would make him not only politically visible but also evoke a sensibility of a youth-minded politician. Otengo's construal of dress reveals, in part, that while dress and dress practices can encourage the association of trust and admiration, it can at the same time evoke feelings of mistrust, disgust, and hostility (Tarlo 2010, 11).

In the final campaign period leading up to the general elections of 2017 and 2022, Raila's dress choice featured a repertoire of clothing ranging from embroidered African shirts, stylish African *vitenge*[5] wears, Western suits, traditional *Maasai* shirts among other local wears. I argue that his sartorial choices in the public space are intentional and well-choreographed to match the occasion both in style and in purpose. In one of his political campaign trails in Voi, Taita Taveta County, Raila surfaced from the crowd dressed in a brightly colored African embroidered *Kitenge* shirt. This was one of his popular choices at such events. *Kitenge* or *Chitenge* is a brightly colored African print fabric that is worn on special occasions and gives its wearer an elegant look that can be spotted from a distance (Rabine 2002, 77). I contend that the choice of *Kitenge* shirt by Raila, first, depicts him as a nationalist who embraces local values and aesthetics, and second, as an activist who defends local textiles from foreign competition. In Kenya's post-colonial history, Raila has been labeled as the father of second liberation based on his fight for human rights and wealth distribution. It is not surprising that he has been a major critic of imported secondhand clothing locally known as *mitumba,* which has been blamed for scuffling local textile industries through unfair competition. For instance, while

[5] Plural for *Kitenge*-a bright colored African print cotton fabric with bold figures.

unveiling his manifesto in preparation for the 2022 general elections, Raila remarked:

> Our people are only wearing clothes coming from outside the country which have been worn by people who are dead. We are going to go to primary production so that our people who are importing *mitumba* can have good products to sell here. (*Daily Nation* 2022)

From this comment, we infer Raila's social action for rallying support for local textile industries. I also argue that Raila's *kitenge* (a locally produced dress) frames him as a nationalist while establishing his political dominance as "a man of the people." Thus, Raila donning *kitenge* demonstrates his awareness for local challenges, including the revival of local textile industries. His dressed body is a site of activism and a call to action.

3.3 Dress as a Political Performance

Tarlo (2010, 11) states, "clothes have the propensity to trigger feelings of solidarity and hostility, admiration and disgust, affection and fear, trust and mistrust." In other words, dress is fluid, flexible, and malleable with respect to meaning. This dynamic function of dress is harnessed by political actors in Kenya through their use of religious dress. While attending an *Iftar* dinner in the Coastal region of Kenya (a Muslim-dominated region), Raila donned an embroidered white cap with full-length white *thobe (*robe) over on his normal clothes. While the significance of dress for religious practices may vary considerably, Muslim men in East Africa don white robe (Kanzu) with a white cap for religious functions. *Iftar*, a meal used to break a day fast by Muslims, is a religious practice connected to the religious rituals. In this case, Raila who has a Christian background, uses the Muslim religious dress not as a change of faith but as a political performance to project his political connection to the coastal people. His dress choice aligns with values that are closely embraced by the Muslim faith. As a political expert, he uses his sartorial choices to advance his political interests in a religiously fashioned way. As a country dominated by multiple religious practices, political players like Raila use religion as a platform to access the masses. It is dress that affords them visibility in such masses. The deliberate choice of Muslim dress by Raila speaks to the masses and portrays him as a leader who upholds Muslim values and if elected, he will promote such values.

3.3.1 Piety or Politics: Ruto's Religious Dress

William Samoe Ruto, the sitting president of Kenya at the time this chapter was authored, is one of the country's leaders who has developed his political career through the ranks to become a head of state. Born in 1966, Ruto's

political career came to the limelight when he became a member of parliament for the Eldoret North constituency in 1997. Like Raila, he has also served in various ministerial positions before being appointed as the republic's deputy president in 2013 and later elected as head of state in 2022. As a political specialist who has risen through the ranks to become the head of state in Kenya, Mr. Ruto has built his political brand partly through his devout connection to the evangelical Christianity. Ruto is one of the politicians who is not shy of publicly professing his religious inclination. His alliance with different religious sects has consolidated his political support base among the evangelical voters who are convinced by his political ideology. Ruto's repertoire of dress in public spaces has prominently featured religious dress. According to Almila (2020, 1), there is a close interaction between religion, dress, and fashion. Religious groups such as Orthodox (Judaism) have established gendered dress norms. Rank and position in Catholic Church are physically identifiable through dress. The Muslim dress is associated with visibility, modest, and decorum especially in relational contexts (Tarlo 2010, 8). This chapter extends this discussion further by examining how political actors such as Ruto use dress as a vehicle to cross religious boundaries with the interest of advancing their political interests. Ruto's sense of style is evident in his public display of dress in both political and social functions. In his early years of political career, he was popularly known for his *baseball cap* that featured colors of the Kenyan national flag. This established him as patriotic and a nationalist. Politics as a social practice is also represented and constructed through fashion. The dress choice of Ruto features a multiplex of religious adornments that vary in context and meaning. This elicits mixed reactions from the members of the public who admire and deride him in equal measure.

In September 2020, Ruto was hosted by members of the African Church of the Holy Spirit (ACHS) in Uasin Gishu County. In this occasion, he threw on a white robe embellished with a red cross embroidery on the right side of the extended collar flap. In addition, he also wore a white cap and held a red wooden cross in his right arm. The ACHS is an evangelical splinter group of Friends African Mission. Their religious identity is partly marked by dress, that is, an embroidered red cross patched on their long white robes. While conducting their service, men carry a red-painted wooden cross as a symbol of holiness. In addition, ACHS men are characterized by beards and turbans. Women wear long robes with red strap around their waist. Their heads are covered with white headscarves that fall off their back. Ruto's ritualized dressing in this function aligns with the ACHS religious practices. Such deliberate dressing is aimed at building connections that are used to construct his political dominance. As Rabine (2002, 13) notes, fashion mixes and influences bodies which in return build an authentic shared identity. Ruto's sartorial choices entangle with the church symbolic identity to give him political advantage.

In his special address to the Muslim community who were commemorating the holy season of Ramadhan in 2020, Ruto appeared dressed in a gray *kanzu*

(robe) with hems falling to mid-calf, dark blue jean pants and sandals. This echoes the East African Muslim men's wear which according to Mangieri (2013, 157) may include *kanzu* (loose silk dress ending below the knee) or *kikoi* (handwoven Kenyan fabric) and an embroidered cap. In addition, she notes "young men in jeans and trousers with *kofia* (cap) in hand hurrying to mosques is a frequent sight on Friday afternoons in Nairobi" (Mangieri 2013, 157). Such visual rhetoric is what Ruto's fashionists use to dress him for specific audiences. To appeal to the Muslim community, he dresses like an archetypal Muslim man to align to the Muslim piety that places high significance on religious dress. By donning this Muslim wear, Ruto can shape political loyalty and subordination allowing his dominance.

While attending the Turkana Cultural festivals in Marsabit County in 2018, Ruto's dress choice involved an African print shirt, couture suit pants, and a black Borana turban (Newswire 2018). Draped around his upper body was white *shuka* (shawl) with tassel-trim hem which is considered as the traditional Borana regalia. In his left hand was *ororo* (long wooden stick). According to the Borana culture, *abba warra* (married man or head of the family) must carry the *ororo* stick as a mark of his married status. In Ruto's company was Marsabit County Governor, Mr. Muhamud Ali who also donned a white cotton shirt with white pants. Draped over his shoulders was a white *shuka*. In addition to the turban, Mr. Muhamud also wore *Kalacha* (a pointed metal worn on the forehead using a leather strap). According to the Borana culture, *Kalacha* is a symbol of peace and wisdom (personal communication).

In this context, Ruto uses the dressed body as a socio-political act that helps him establish new alliances with the marginalized Borana community. The dress rhetoric helps him to culturally connect with the local community and enhance his political visibility among the Borana. As a performative act, Mr. Ruto carefully selects clothing that communicates layered sensibilities that on the one hand helps him advance his political rhetoric and on the other hand situates him as a leader who cares for and advocates local cultural heritage as in the case of the Borana dress. These featured images of Ruto elicit mixed reactions from the members of the public who signal both admiration and derision in equal measure. Consider the following Facebook comment on the original post featuring Ruto's dressed body.

> Interesting culture that pull brothers from two countries (sic) together regardless of the boundary of the two states. Proud of you for doing it now and passing to the next generation. (Cheru Bejiga, June 29, 2018)

This reaction demonstrates how consumption of dress fashions social connection between the wearer and those with whom they interact. Here, the donning of the traditional dress by the two political actors not only promotes the Borana culture, but also strengthens social ties with those who identify with the culture. This implicates dress as a social performance that places the body into new social spaces to construct new identities. As Masquelier would

put it, "clothes are not mere adornment, however; they are centrally implicated in the creation and maintenance of social bonds" (2013, 143). Ruto's careful choice of dress accelerates his public visibility thus asserting his political presence. I argue that the flexible nature of dress affords the political actors an opportunity to exploit its potential to their advantage. Ruto's dynamic dress patterns gain him entry to multiple social spaces where he reinvents himself to appeal to a wider electorate composed of different sociocultural and religious backgrounds.

On the contrary, socialization of dress may elicit discontent and opposition from the same society as inferred from the following Facebook comment on the same post highlighted in the previous paragraphs:

> The man who wears *kalacha* must stay calm and not speak loudly, very few of our politicians would qualify that. (Mike Ndegwa, June 29, 2018)

According to Ndegwa, the demeanor of the two political leaders does not align with the symbolic meaning of the dress they wear. As pointed out in his post, *Kalacha* (a metallic headgear) should be won by an exemplary leader, which according to Ndegwa very few politicians would qualify to wear. Dress therefore is not only used for shaping new identities but also a site of contestation where political narratives are checked and challenged.

3.4 Conclusion

Drawing on the analysis above, it is apparent that dress practices in Kenya are sites for political expediency and contestation. Political leaders such as Ruto and Raila leverage the interconnectedness of dress with other local practices to advance their political interests. In addition, dress practices also help us understand how "power is fashioned through bodily practice" (Allman 2004, 8) by local leaders in contemporary Africa. It is apparent that the fluid and flexible nature of dress affords these leaders multiple chances of fashioning different identities in different social contexts. The interaction of dress with local practices such as politics, religion, and youth subcultures is vital to understanding other layered meanings such as construction of activism, resistance, patriotism, and nationhood. As a situated practice, political actors use dress to construct what Herzt (2021, 4) terms as "social selves" that they use to project themselves to others for specific purposes. For instance, as highlighted in this chapter, Raila dons a youthful look to appeal to young people while Ruto throws on multiple religious dresses to project his political visibility toward the electorate. While dress has been used as a political language for fashioning new relationships between the wearers and those they are in contact with, it can also be a site of challenging the legitimacy of the dressed body. From the social media reactions by the members of the public, sartorial choices can be contested and called out for if they are deceptive. This study has shown that dress as a material culture embodies social and cultural meanings that local

political actors draw on to advance their own political interests and that the margins of religious and cultural dresses can be flexible, fluid, and subject to change, inviting others to exploit its meaning for personal gain. This is evident in how Kenyan leaders use dress to shape their own political identities while projecting varied meanings in different social contexts.

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CHAPTER 4

The Dictator Wears New Clothes: Authoritarian Home Style in Action

Rachel Finnell

4.1 Introduction

Take a moment and look up the world's best dressed politicians. Odds are, at least one leader on this list is an authoritarian[1] leader. Then look at any list of the world's most eccentric global presidents and their outfits. Repeatedly, you find authoritarians topping these lists (Peterson 2016). Authoritarians are known for their outlandish military outfits and unique attire, frequently eliciting vivid imagery to bolster their legitimacy and image. Given that authoritarians acquire legitimacy in ways different from their democratic counterparts, the image of an autocrat is critical. What authoritarians wear is as much a tool for their rule and authority as it is a signal of their strength.

Authoritarian regimes were "the executive achieved power through undemocratic means, that is any means besides direct relatively free and fair elections; or if the executive achieved power via free and fair elections, but later changed the rules that subsequent electoral competition was limited" (Frantz 2018, 6). Turkmenistan and Ethiopia are both authoritarian regimes. In Turkmenistan, the government came to power through elections that are neither free nor fair. In Ethiopia, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power

[1] Note that authoritarian and autocrat are interchangeable in this chapter.

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through democratic means.[2] Since then, Prime Minister Ahmed has consolidated power and restricted overall freedom in Ethiopia ("Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2023 Country Report" 2023).

Increasingly, populations living in autocracies[3] outnumber democratic populations. The Democracy Report (2023) states that seventy-two percent of the world's population live in an autocracy in 2022 and "the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2022 is down to 1986 levels" (Papada et al. 2023, 6). Democratic backsliding and authoritarian consolidation are occurring globally, making the topic of legitimacy and durability in autocracies essential to understand. Fashion is one way to understand this. Thus, this leads to the question: How do autocrats use fashion to their advantage to remain in power?

The short answer to this is twofold. First, autocrats can use fashion as a means for control. This is not a new phenomenon. In fact, we see historical examples of this from fascists of the early twentieth century to modern autocracies like Turkmenistan. Second, autocrats use military fatigues to make themselves look especially strong. By exhibiting strength in their attire, they further reinforce their rule. To the autocrat, image curates the presentation of themselves as strong and can spark the building a cult of personality. Wearing fatigues is something we see in military regimes but also in countries that are not military regimes like Ethiopia and China. To answer how autocrats employ fashion, this chapter adapts and applies the conceptualization of home style (Fenno 1978) beyond the American context. Home style explains how members of Congress present themselves while in their home districts to get reelected by their constituents. I adapt home style to authoritarian regimes, illustrating the ways autocrats remain in power through their presentation of self. Through the use of news articles, scholarly work, and other sources, I utilize heuristic case studies to examine the role of fashion in autocracies (Eckstein 1992). The time frame for data collection is 2018 through 2023. Historical examples in this chapter are most often in the twentieth century. There are numerous limitations to this methodology, most notably the limited generalizability of these findings. My primary goal with this chapter, however, is working toward a theory that is applicable to autocracies more broadly.

4.2 Authoritarian Home Style

Fenno's (1978) seminal work on members of Congress illuminates how the presentation of self, a performative aspect of representatives (see also Goffman 2002), is critical for understanding the perception that constituents have of

[2] Ethiopia is a parliamentary republic where the Prime Minister must be elected from within the House of Peoples' Representatives. A vote of no-confidence would remove the Prime Minister and cabinet from power.

[3] Authoritarian regimes and autocracies are interchangeable in this chapter.

their representative. This presentation of self helps build trust in representatives. According to Fenno (1978), trust is built utilizing three components: qualification, identification, and empathy. Qualification is built on the premise that these representatives are able to do the job. In a democracy, being qualified for the job of representative is of paramount importance. If you are not qualified for the job or are unable to successfully complete the job, or both, you are likely to be held accountable and potentially not be elected or reelected. How qualified someone is frequently a reflection of past experiences holding office in other positions. Identification implies that each representative can say "I am one of you" (Fenno 1978, 59). The identification component relies on imagery and the presentation of self by the representative. Finally, empathy expresses that "I understand your situation and care about it" (Fenno 1978, 59). Altogether, these components help explain how members of Congress gain trust and connect with their constituency. Fashion becomes necessary for this process in that representatives wear items like flannel shirts, cowboy hats and boots, or other regional fashion choices to appear more relatable.

While home style is used in a democratic context, one can situate it within the authoritarian context. In fact, authoritarians mimic their democratic counterparts to extend their longevity (Bernhard et al. 2019; Brancati 2014). Through different avenues, authoritarians craft their image and control their populace to extend their longevity. The goal of any authoritarian is to gain a faithful following and *retain* that following (Gerschewski 2013; Davenport 2007; Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014, 2017). This is done through tools like repression and co-optation, which include building a cult of personality. However, building that cult of personality puts self-image and perception of it as central. Authoritarians use control of state media to craft their image (Dikötter 2019). Stalin's rule in Soviet Russia or more recently leadership in North Korea are prime examples of this (Dalton et al. 2017; Dikötter 2019). Moreover, building an obedient polity leverages control. Control over clothing and the presentation of self is one tool where autocrats can maintain power. Moreover, these choices can help build authoritarian durability, that is, the longevity and resilience of these regimes over time.

Adapting Fenno's (1978) home style and applying it to the authoritarian system of government is a valuable contribution to broader literature on authoritarian durability. Authoritarian home style as it is conceptualized comprises three key tenets: power, identification 2.0, and idolization. Each of these concepts is the antithesis of their democratic counterparts, yet all lead to the authoritarian leader establishing support among their constituents. Power is beyond the ideal that "I alone can do this" because it applies beyond a personalist dictatorship where a single authoritarian leader is in power. Authoritarians use institutions like elections, especially in the post-Cold War era (Levitsky and Way 2002, 2010), rarely govern alone (Bueno de Mesquita 2011), and utilize power sharing institutions like legislatures and other institutions frequently (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Barros 2002;

Wright 2008). Ultimately, authoritarian home style speaks to power in the ability of the authoritarian to influence policy and appear strong. Expression of power through attire, particularly through military fatigues or other authority signaling measures, can be effective. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is a great example of a leader utilizing military fatigues to project power in a time of conflict—a useful case to explore further.

The second component of authoritarian home style is identification 2.0, where fashion and imagery find their strongest foothold, underscoring how an individual's clothing and general appearance is controlled by the authoritarian regime. Identification 2.0 is the way in which autocrats attempt to create a uniform society using fashion as a means of domination. Whether it is limiting of haircut choices or limiting outfits in Turkmenistan, the control of identity is vital to authoritarian home style. Turkmenistan's control of clothing—the restrictions on what women and men are forbidden from wearing—is especially beneficial for understanding identification 2.0. For example, Western clothing and certain cosmetic procedures are outlawed for women (Najibullah 2022b; Lauring 2023). However, men are also seeing limits on their behavior including no longer being permitted to grow out their beards (Najibullah 2023). These limitations are beneficial in their control of how citizens behave and appear within the state, extending control from the public sphere into the private, a case we are exploring further.

Finally, idolization is the third component which reinforces that authoritarians are not only powerful but have continual admiration of their populace. Reinforcing idolization can be done through the presentation of self where the populace sees the autocrat in outfits that reference power. One such way the autocrat applies this is through wearing military fatigues. The cult of personality is another notable means by which many personalist authoritarians reinforce idolization, personalist autocrats being comparable to the typical conceptualization of a dictator. Further idolization ensues through conformity where atomization of outfits as well as the preference for particular pieces of clothing signal being a member of a broader in-group with clothing like red hats or ethnic outfits. Taken together, power, identification 2.0, and idolization offer a useful theoretical foundation for our understanding of authoritarian durability and longevity.

4.3 Historical Discussion of Authoritarian Fashion

Historically, the use of clothing by dictators has a rich tradition from fascists to totalitarians. Benito Mussolini notoriously used fashion to control his population with uniforms for all, including children. On "Fascist Sunday," children wore black uniforms to practice "military activities" (Dikötter 2019). In Greece under Pangalos, the law forbade women's skirts in public from being more than 30 centimeters above the ground (Pichou and Kapartziani 2016). Mao Zedong's China was so meticulous about the use of fashion as control

that his *Little Red Book* is purposefully designed to fit in the pocket of military uniforms so that soldiers took it with them to study and memorize wherever their service took them (Dikötter 2019). In fact, Mao's *Little Red Book* was in such high demand that production of items made with plastic, such as shoes and slippers, was limited to accommodate production of these covers for the book (Dikötter 2019, 101). These examples are all useful for understanding power and identification 2.0 in the historical context.

Fashion is also a signal of strength of the autocrat. Hitler is notorious for wearing his military uniform consistently to show strength (Dikötter 2019). Stalin is frequently depicted in propaganda and photographs as an Army Commander "with a military cap and single red star, his uniform decorated with imposing epaulettes" (Dikötter 2019, 80). Ironically, Stalin's seclusion from the public eye was useful for propaganda because it ensured there were no contradictions between the reality of who he was and his image in public. Imagery that elicits strength is something François Duvalier uses to his advantage. François Duvalier ruled Haiti as "President for Life" for roughly fourteen years until his death in 1971, survived a failed military coup in 1967 during his sixtieth birthday festivities (Dikötter 2019). Upon surviving, Duvalier brought the suspects of this coup attempt to a dungeon and showed up "in full military uniform and army helmet, personally presiding over the execution of the nineteen suspects, tied to stakes on a rifle range" (Dikötter 2019, 130). These examples illuminate idolization and power as useful tools for autocrats. While these are more historic examples, there are more recent examples of authoritarians using fashion as a means for control and learning from past autocrats.

4.4 Modern Examples of Fashion as Control

In the modern era, autocrats continually exploit fashion as a means for control. Central to this are religious practices and beliefs. For example, Iran limits what women can wear on college campuses through their Islamic code of behavior, including wearing a proper hijab by women, policies on wearing makeup, prohibiting male–female fraternization at universities, and banning co-educational activities and fieldtrip camps (Golkar 2012). In some rural Iranian universities, these Islamic codes of behavior extend to women being required to wear full body coverings (Khatam 2009). By controlling what must be worn or prohibiting certain attire, modern authoritarians are dictating what is acceptable and using identification 2.0 to create *uniform* and *conforming* societies.

Other instances of control of fashion extend beyond religious reasons to general control. Uganda's 2014 Anti-Pornography Act "criminalized pornography, which is defined as 'representation through publication, *exhibition*, cinematography, *indecent show*, information technology or by *whatever means*, of a person engaged in real or stimulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the *sexual* parts of a person for primarily sexual excitement'"

(Kasule 2019, 15). While not primarily about clothing, it was quickly publicized as limiting what women could wear, limiting indecent apparel, most notably the miniskirt (Kasule 2019). Those who fail to follow this act risk prosecution and physical assaults by those around them in public. This is not the first time Uganda has had these types of draconian laws. Under Idi Amin (in power for eight years from 1971 to 1979), laws and decrees were made which "prohibited the wearing of certain dresses that outraged 'decency' and were 'injurious to public morals and for other purposes connected therewith'" (Kasule 2019, 16). In fact, women are frequently the group who face stricter limits on attire. By limiting what women can wear, attire becomes a direct form of control over the populace in these autocracies and an example of identity 2.0.

In North Korea, clothing itself is a means by which identity and the ideation of what it means to be a woman or man are shown through the utilization of fashion. This goes beyond basic control to form femininity through propaganda. Further, this propaganda, while formed by men, ultimately evolves through the women (Dalton et al. 2017). The ideal woman in pre-famine era of North Korea from the 1960s to 1990s was "the state-promoted feminine ideal of revolutionary mother, devoted to serving the state by producing children to be future loyal and disciplined workers" (Dalton et al. 2017, 507). Clothing during this time is under state control where Kim Il Sung openly criticized women who dressed in fancier clothing, makeup, and curled their hair—categorizing these types of clothing as "disruptive of both physical and ideological discipline and needed to be controlled" (Dalton et al. 2017, 512). Women working for the state were fired if they did not dress modestly enough. This is something that can be seen in Turkmenistan as well—where there is an idealized image of the female body that is extended through government policy and further control by the autocrat (Najibullah 2022b; Lauring 2023).

4.4.1 Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic, is located in Central Asia and gained its independence in 1991 (Al-Bassam 1997). Prior to its independence and into the birth of the new nation, "the former Soviet republic was led by 'founding father' Saparmyrat Nyýazow from 1985 until his death in 2006" (Bohr 2016, 3). This new nation's founding father "created a political system based on repression and hydrocarbon wealth" (Stronski 2017, 1). Historically, this region has neither a legacy of democracy nor democratic consolidation (Al-Bassam 1997). Turkmenistan and much of Central Asia under Soviet collectivization were quite severe, facing the Soviet policy of "divide and conquer" which was meant to undermine the republics from seeking nationhood independent of the USSR (Al-Bassam 1997).

Turkmenistan continues to be infamously repressive (Bohr 2016). As of 2023, "Turkmenistan holds the title for the most authoritarian of all former Soviet states" (Stronski 2017, 1). Repression shows itself in numerous ways,

including through the banning of forms of fashion. In 2018, bans on imports for women's swimsuits and shorts began (Syundyukova 2018). A more recent increase in control of women and their attire is happening under the President Berdymukhammedov, who took office in March of 2022, the focus of much case study and data collection. Women are forbidden from wearing "'sexy' outfits, tight-fitting clothes, and Western-inspired garments" (Lauring 2023). These bans include garments such as blue jeans, t-shirts, Western branded clothing, shorter skirts, and most attire that Westerners wear on a daily basis. However, at the same time, Western attire is ostensibly acceptable for men but not for women, a signal that control may be patriarchal in Turkmenistan. For instance, Business Turkmenistan (2022) advertising new clothing for citizens from exclusive brands by ten new specialized stores where shoppers "can choose from over 100 different designs of men's shirts with short and long sleeves, including 12 different designs of Ýeňiş white shirts" (p. 1). While this advertisement is seemingly meant to garner interest among those in the country, looking through the photos in the article evidences that several of the pieces of clothing are very Western in design. In fact, jeans and graphic tees are apparent in these photos that are "in high demand in domestic and foreign markets" (Business Turkmenistan 2022). However, men are forbidden from wearing skinny trousers or shorts (Aitakov 2022). Thus, these jeans must fit strict requirements even for men.

This control has extended beyond fashion in Turkmenistan. In fact, *The Economist* (2022) expresses that "everything from false eyelashes to Botox injections are now restricted." When asked for an explanation, the official policy appears quite unofficial, about which *The Economist* (2022, p. 1) states "law-enforcement officials simply cite an unofficial ban on introducing 'foreign objects' to the female body." Furthermore, restrictions are in place that prevent women from dying their hair, wearing false nails, using beauty accessories like tattoos, attaining beauty services at salons, and bleaching their hair (Najibullah 2022b; Lauring 2023). However, recent developments around male facial hair and the act of shaving of young men's beards against their will has policies impacting men too (Najibullah 2023). This policy requires beards be shaved prior to boarding flights to match passport photos while also demanding beards not be grown in the future (Najibullah 2023).

Turkmenistan offers a useful case in the application of power and identification 2.0. First, using fashion to control certain segments of society demonstrates power in practice, albeit more control over women than men. Second, identification 2.0 in Turkmenistan is being implemented through the limitations on women's clothing. Society becomes more uniform with lists of what clothes and forms of behavior are acceptable or not—including restrictions on hair styles, makeup, and other cosmetic procedures. Decisions on appearance whether through fashion or facial hair in men are all being regulated by the state, going far beyond the public sphere. The President of Turkmenistan frequently wears Western business attire (like suits) or traditional Turkmen clothing and is rarely in public in attire outside of these

fashion choices (Amanov 2022). Furthermore, the President's wife is unknown (Najibullah 2022a). Thus, it is unknown if she must abide by these same fashion restrictions. Altogether, Turkmenistan's President appears to implement different aspects of authoritarian home style through the repression of fashion choices though far more patriarchal in its restrictiveness of fashion overall.

4.4.2 Ethiopia

Building idolization through authoritarian home style often occurs through wearing military fatigues and gear. Authoritarian leaders who are not military members wear fatigues to signal strength and elicit idolization. It is not as common to see this sort of behavior by an executive in democracies because of the historic division of civilian and military roles. To see a breakdown in these roles could signal a broader erosion of democratic norms and of changing roles for the military (Eschenauer-Engler and Kamerling 2018). Erosion of democratic norms through the wearing of fatigues is occurring in Ethiopia under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (in power since April 2018), who is utilizing idolization and power as a part of authoritarian home style.

Situated in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is a state with a rich history filled with political violence. From the early 1970s to the early 1990s, former Army Officer Mengistu Haile Mariam ruled Ethiopia, first the head of state and chairman of the Derg then President of Ethiopia (Marcus 2002). After 1995, the Tigray government was in power and held control of the government for nearly twenty-eight years under a Tigrayan soldier-politician named Meles Zenawi (Lemma 2019; Center for Preventative Action 2023). Prior to the election in April of 2018, there were reports of mass violence and more than two-hundred thousand arrests made (Lemma 2019). The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won the election, sparking what some believe to be a new era in Ethiopian politics, and bringing a fresh wave of democratic reforms. In fact, Lemma (2019) writes that at this time Abiy Ahmed, the new Prime Minister and subsequent 2019 Nobel Peace Prize Winner received comparisons to notable world leaders like Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama, Justin Trudeau, and Mikhail Gorbachev. Furthermore, "Ahmed's rhetoric and temperament [was] nearly as impressive as his policy accomplishments. Beyond the standard shaking of hands, he has made a conscious effort to display courtesy and geniality" (Lemma 2019, 7).

The conflict in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia that led to this was a civil war which saw an escalation in 2020 eventually led Ahmed to pivot away from this genial and democratic leadership (Center for Preventative Action 2023). The conflict has quickly become a humanitarian crisis with alleged crimes against humanity and reductions in rights ("Ethiopia: Freedom in the World 2023 Country Report" 2023). During Prime Minister Ahmed's visit to the Tigray region, Chothia (2021) notes that Ahmed in fatigues "evoked memories of the country's kings and emperors by going to the frontlines to lead a dramatic

fightback against Tigrayan rebels who had threatened to overthrow him." Not only did this show power and idolization in practice, it "led to a surge in Ethiopian nationalism (…) and thousands of people lined up to join the army and the Amhara [ethnic group's] militia" (Chothia 2021). A critical point in the use of military fatigues by Prime Minister Ahmed is its portrayal in the newspapers within Ethiopia. His appearance at the front lines in fatigues is widely known and reported on throughout the press, both domestically and internationally (Anderson 2022; Nigatu 2023). Domestically, these photos are front page news across numerous points in time during the conflict in Tigray (Nigatu 2023). Nigatu (2023) notes instances where Prime Minister Ahmed is greeting the military, on the battlefield, spending time with war generals, and motivating fighters to continue in their battles that are all present on the front pages of Ethiopian newspapers. These frontline photos are additionally linked to "fighting colonial powers" and "shouldering additional obligations with triumph" (Nigatu 2023, 6). Other newspaper imagery shows "the prime minister […] clutching equipment such as military cameras and war telescopes in eleven of the pictures. He is also seen in the newspaper wearing glasses, yet he is not seen wearing them [in] office" (Nigatu 2023, 7). Thus, the imagery of the Prime Minister in military fatigues was not only a call to action but also a move to solidify power and build the idolization aspect of his rule. Showing up in military fatigues without being a member of the military is a huge power move that underscores his desire to be viewed as having ultimate authority. Further, this move added to idolization by inspiring others to follow his lead and fight in the army—a great example of idolization in practice and a potential building of a cult of personality.

4.5 Conclusion

Fashion in authoritarian regimes is just as much a means to control the populace as it is to show authority and strength. Through adapting Fenno's (1978) home style, a new approach for the world's autocratic counterparts—authoritarian home style—has offered a unique look at authoritarian durability. Power, identification 2.0, and idolization are all critical to understand how autocrats remain in power. More must be done to understand this phenomenon to truly see if all authoritarian leaders partake in this type of approach. Heuristic case studies underscore the need for more theory development relating fashion and authoritarians. Authoritarian home style needs more refinement and further growth for application to other autocracies. To this point, too little work has been done to make the necessary connections between repression, authoritarian durability, and how fashion can be a tool for autocrats. Furthermore, the impact of repression of female fashion in autocracies like that seen in Turkmenistan and control beyond the public sphere is critical for future studies. With more repression occurring globally for women, one area to investigate is if other autocrats model their behavior of control after Turkmenistan. In addition, more work should be done to investigate the

role military fatigues have in signaling strength in non-military regimes and if this could be a signal of the changing structure of societies under authoritarian rule.

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CHAPTER 5

Merkel's Non-fashion

Paula Diehl

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses Angela Merkel's uses of non-fashion in her political performances. I argue that Merkel uses clothing to neutralize the particularities of her body and gender. She is well known for wearing the same type of jackets in different colors and never wears skirts or high heels. Her simple and almost identical garments stress her detachment from "superfluous" things and at the same time became a kind of uniform that underlines her institutional role. Merkel's "non-fashion" is a statement and is closely aligned with the motto of her inaugural speech: "I want to serve Germany." In adopting this "uniform," she found a way to counteract gender. As the first female German chancellor, she avoided positioning herself as a woman, instead performing the neutrality of the institution she claimed to represent. However, on one special occasion, Merkel did use fashion to stress luxury and femininity. At the inauguration of the Oslo Opera House, she appeared wearing a luxury ball gown with a deep décolleté. This performance stands in sharp contrast to her consistent non-fashion style and can be understood as a strategic element to gain media attention. Paradoxically, this performance is closely connected to non-fashion helping to neutralize her body in her role as a political representative by sending an important message: Merkel could indeed wear fashion but abstained from it in order to represent her institutional role. A such strategic

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use of clothing went through three phases in dealing with media attention and imposing her own style, as it will be shown in the section *Creating Non-Fashion as a Statement*. Merkel's non-fashion is a key element of her political performances and crucial for understanding the role of the body in political representation. This article uses a constructivist approach to political representation and explores the performative role of female bodies in an environment that is still coded as male.

Contrary to the standard account in political science, political representation is a deeply performative activity, which is invested with symbolic meaning. In political theory, the constructivist turn (Disch et al. 2019) shifted the paradigm of political representation toward a symbolic understanding of the term, emphasizing performativity and aesthetics, and paving the way for the consideration of body and clothing. This perspective stresses "the active making (creating, offering) of symbols or images of what is to be represented" (Saward 2006, 301). Political representation involves body staging and enables the members of a society to imagine politics as a coherent order. Some political theorists refer to the French philosopher Claude Lefort in order to expand the understanding of political representation (Diehl 2015). Lefort considers representation as a symbolic activity through which society stages itself, giving itself meaning and form (1988, 11). Following this approach, symbolism is not a by-product of political action, but inextricable from it. As Saward asserted, "one cannot present oneself as representing without making representations in the sense of claiming to symbolize something (being a subject); and, one cannot make representations without presenting oneself as someone who can make them" (Saward 2006, 309). The representative's body is invested with symbolic meaning and as such is central for building a collective political identity (Disch 2019, 9). Representatives act symbolically and, in doing so, they can articulate ideas, imaginations, and emotions shared by both the represented and the representatives (Diehl 2015).

Against this background, a new field of research is to be explored. Considering the symbolic meaning of the representative's body is one step in this direction. Clothing and fashion are powerful tools for mobilizing symbolic meanings and have a crucial role to play in political representation. Angela Merkel's case is particularly interesting for examining the role of clothing as a performative tool of political representation and for situating it within democratic symbolic practices. It shows how "bodies out of space" (Puwar 2004) get under pressure. Merkel's strategy was to neutralize femininity. Her uses of non-fashion urge a reflection on democratic principles and social body norms. From the perspective of democratic theory, the normative horizon involved in symbolic representation is key for the evaluation of representatives' performances. Moreover, democratic principles of universality and neutrality often clash with body norms and expectations in modern democratic societies (Diehl 2019) since the imagination of representatives and citizens is still focused on a hegemonic norm: the white, male, educated, and healthy body. Women and minorities need to find strategies for dealing with these expectations. Merkel's

non-fashion is one of them. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of her uses of non-fashion in democratic representation. If Merkel had no choice but to be perceived as a woman (Ferree 2006), her strategy for dealing with that was to choose to run not as a woman, but as neutral and institutional.

5.2 Political Representation and Clothing

The examination of clothing and fashion in politics is crucial for understanding the performative effects of body aesthetics on political representation. Although the constructivist turn made considerable progress in expanding the concept of political representation to encompass its symbolic dimension, aesthetics, and performativity, the representative's body and clothing are still marginal research subjects in political science. The very idea that democracy is based on rationality and deliberation led to symbolism being excluded from the theory of political representation. Hanna Pitkin's famous book on the topic recognized that representation has a symbolic meaning but dismissed symbolism as non-rational and non-democratic (Pitkin 1972, 107). Constructivist approaches recover the symbolic dimension of representation as intrinsic to democracy. Combined with the sociological perspective on performances (Goffman 1961; Alexander 2004), they offer important theoretical and methodological tools for evaluating the staging of social interactions, while performance and theater studies (Gluhovic et al. 2020; Fischer-Lichte 2008) help open up the field for the examination of the body, its aesthetics, and staging. In recent years, political theorists have analyzed body performances in terms of representation by similarity, especially regarding women and minorities (descriptive representation) (Celis 2008; Lombardo and Meier 2014), and research on symbolic representation of the people and state institutions is growing (Diehl 2015). Together, these approaches provide a robust analysis framework for reflecting on political staging. They can now easily be combined with gender studies and intersectional perspectives and contribute to the examination of staging practices of political representation (Rai 2015; Rai and Reinelt 2015). The body and its clothes are "read" by society (Bourdieu 1996; Daloz 2010) and are at the same time instruments for expressing political messages, identities, attitudes, and symbols (Butler 1988), while also displaying descriptive representation of discriminated groups (Lombardo and Meier 2014). In this context, clothing and fashion are invested with symbolic meaning and can be used strategically by political representatives.

5.3 Fashion

With Roland Barthes's seminal work in the 1960s, fashion has become a crucial object for studying culture and society. As Barthes's semiotic analysis has shown, fashion inserts itself between capitalist economy and cultural production, shaping taste as well as individual and collective modes of expression. *The fashion system* opens the field for decoding clothing in social and

cultural studies. Although Barthes recognizes the potentiality of fashion for expressing political messages—as used by punks, for example—political expressions through fashion are not the focus of his work. Moreover, fashion appears to be a tautological system. "Fashion can be defined only by itself, for Fashion is merely a garment and the Fashion garment is never anything but what Fashion, decides it is" (1990, 287). As Barthes shows, the meaning-giving of fashion is deeply dependent on visual proliferation—at that time in fashion magazines (1990, 51).

Merkel's style avoids relying on the established "fashion visual machine," asserting itself instead by creating a performative gesture of "non-fashion." This detachment from fashion can produce an individual style of performance and is well suited to dealing with staging on social media. With the digitalization of social and political communication and the increasing dislocation of political performances toward social media, the visual "fashion machines" have become multiple. Network communication highlights the performative capacity of individual actors, allowing influencers to become important references for fashion and style. The use of fashion for meaning making in political representation is now more open to individual and polysemic production of political symbolism. I argue that Merkel's non-fashion allowed her to construct an image that could navigate more freely through fashion and gender expectations.

This is possible since clothing has become an individual element of political performances and symbolism, allowing individual expressions of political messages and style. Melania Trump, for example, used fashion as a statement: The words "I really don't care" on the back of her jacket sent an ambivalent message when she boarded the plane to visit hurricane victims in Puerto Rico and generated media attention. In the same manner, left-wing Democrat representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez used the back of her gown for the statement "Tax the rich," creating a performative contradiction between the luxury symbolism of a ball gown and the written statement. These two examples are very pedagogic, with clothes used as the surface for written messages. Yet, as the contradiction in the Ocasio-Cortez case indicates, fashion is not only an element of individual style and image, but can be adopted on specific occasions to performatively produce political symbolism. Melania Trump's blue dress on inauguration day is a perfect example of this. It confirmed her position in the fashion world and, more importantly, it aesthetically quoted Jackie Kennedy, suggesting that Melania was following in her footsteps as the most glamorous First Lady of the USA. At the same time, the dress referred to the 1960s, when women's roles were still traditional and feminist struggles had not yet brought about abortion rights—rights that Donald Trump promised to abolish. In politics, fashion cannot be disentangled from performances, symbols, and political discourse. The impact of fashion depends on who is wearing what, when, and is intrinsically linked to the materiality of the body. Since the representatives' bodies are also read in terms of social norms, the symbolism of their bodies is dependent on the social categories attributed

to their appearance. Intersectionality and cultural repertoire are crucial for understanding the symbolic meaning of clothing. Merkel's case is a perfect example for this.

5.4 Understanding Body Symbolism in Political Representation

In modern democracy, the physical bodies of political representatives are involved in multiple symbolic processes that contribute to the imagination of politics. Two of them are crucial: the symbolic representation of political institutions and the representation of identity. On the one hand, the representative's body is embedded in institutional mechanisms and needs to be staged as neutral. On the other, the materiality, appearance, movements, voice, facial expressions, and clothing of the representative are objects of social reading and expressions of individual and group identities. As I show elsewhere, the bodies of political representatives are read in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, age, fitness, etc., and are therefore intrinsically connected to individual and social identities (Diehl 2015). The logics of these two symbolisms contradict each other. In pre-democratic regimes, the reading of the body in terms of identity did not pose a problem, since power was personalized or legitimized by God (Lefort 1988). In democracy, however, the idea that power belongs to all citizens depersonalized the representation of power, making the symbolic task of the representative's body more difficult to achieve. One of the consequences of democratization is that political institutions are now embedded in a neutral frame capable of symbolizing universality, the people as a whole, and depersonalized power. Therefore, symbolic representation of democratic institutions requires neutrality to address each and every citizen (Diehl 2015). This generates an intrinsic tension within democratic representation: In principle, performances of representation should be neutral, but the body that performs them cannot be, since in modern society, bodies are always read in terms of identity and social categories.

Furthermore, another contradiction complicates the performative task of the representative's body: Although democracy was able to produce neutral principles applicable to the heterogeneity of society and citizens, the expectations it generates are not neutral at all. Feminist scholars (Fraser 1985) have shown that the imagination of citizens and political actors is a historical product and closely linked to unequal social conditions and norms (Diehl 2019). In modern democracy, a specific imagination of the representative as male, white, educated, and healthy has become hegemonic. The long-term perpetuation of slavery, denying women the vote, and discrimination against the poor, non-whites, and people with disabilities are evidence of this contradiction. Given this background, it is not surprising that the hegemonic social norm of the white, educated, and healthy man conflicts with the represented principles of equality and universality. Hegemonic bodies are perceived as neutral, while representatives whose bodies do not match this norm are mostly

perceived as representatives of minorities or discriminated groups. As a result, expectations and codes of political representation are associated with white, healthy, and educated men.

In their book, Lombardo and Meier show how the female body clashes with the hegemonic body in political representation (Lombardo and Meier 2014). Their bodies can be considered as "space invaders" (Puwar 2004). As Nirma Puwar points out, public spaces and spaces of power are closely connected to hegemonic body norms (somatic norms). "Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being 'out of place'" (Puwar 2004, 8). While the white, educated, and healthy male body can pass as universal and neutral, those which do not match this appearance are more inclined to be perceived as particular and are connected to a specific group identity instead of referring to all citizens. "The ability to pass as the 'universal human' is an incredibly powerful location precisely because positions within the public realm are normed as being universal and disembodied" (Puwar 2004, 56). That is the reason why Ferree argues that Merkel had no choice but to run as a woman (Ferree 2006).

Although hegemonic body norms are always changing with culture and political practices, the prevalent imagination of the representative described above is still valid. For political representatives whose bodies do not match the hegemonic norms, representing neutrality and universality becomes a challenge. Such representatives need to be particularly attentive to the task of symbolizing neutrality in representing the institution, and the perception of their bodies as "space invaders." In order to avoid delegitimization as an institutional representative of the office, they must develop performance strategies to deal with the social reading of their bodies as "not universal." Neutralization of the physical body is one such strategy.

5.5 Neutralizing the Body: Non-fashion as a Performative Instrument

Political representatives whose bodies are non-hegemonic struggle to find the "right way" to appear in public. For women, the poor, non-whites, and other discriminated groups, performing political representation becomes particularly difficult. When women come to power, they face expectations that relate power to masculinity. As a study on French female representatives has shown, women are compelled to train their voices to speak lower and closer to the male authority (Coulomb-Gully 2012). They also train their body language to fit in better with masculine codes. Yet the absence of codes for female representatives also opens up performative opportunities. Since political roles are predominantly associated with the imagination of the male politician, females do not face a strict dress code as the male does (suit and tie). Against this

background, fashion can become both a risky attempt and a chance to play with a broader repertoire of codes and symbols.

Angela Merkel's strategy for coping with her non-hegemonic body is the staging of neutrality, making her body particularities "disappear." Like Dilma Rousseff and Michelle Bachelet, the former presidents of Brazil and Chile, respectively, Merkel belongs to the first wave of female heads of state.[1] Once in power, they all opted for a similar style, predominantly characterized by clothes that neutralize femininity.[2] Ferree is right when she addresses the structural moment of Merkel's perception as a woman: "She has no choice but to run as a woman" (2006, 96). However, an examination of Merkel's staging reveals that her strategy was not to position herself as a woman. On the contrary, non-fashion and body language were strategically applied to neutralize the female body. Merkel provides a perfect example of the strategic negotiation between the expectations on the female body as representing only women and the performance of universality by representing the people and the state. Her "non-fashion" is an attempt to avoid the risk of expressing gender. As the first woman to occupy the position of German chancellor, Merkel faced fierce misogynistic attacks from her opponents, the media, and her fellow party members. Her non-fashion style neutralized her body, including gender.

Not only did Merkel diverge from the imagination of the male representative, she also had "multiple outsider status": She grew up in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and not in the Federal Republic of Germany and was Protestant in a majority-Catholic party (Ferree 2006, 100). Unlike West German women of her age, she did not have children and never embraced the role of housewife. Instead, she was a physicist—an exception in a German political landscape dominated by law and humanities graduates (Ferree 2006, 101). Early in her career especially, Merkel's non-fashion was very much connected to her gender and to her socialization in the GDR, making her appear less powerful and professional. As the next section shows, her appearance was transformed during the first phase of her strategic performances.

[1] Of course, Margaret Thatcher is the most famous female head of state and was the role model for Merkel's electoral campaign, but in the 1970s she was perceived as an exception.

[2] An exception in this generation is the former Argentinian President Cristina de Kirchner, who succeeded her husband Néstor as president. Cristina opted for feminine clothes and used fashion in her public appearances. As I show elsewhere, de Kirchner was following the Peronist tradition of a couple, strongly characterized by Evita Perón (Diehl 2023 forthcoming).

5.6 Creating Non-fashion as a Statement: The Three Phases of Angela Merkel's Style

To become German chancellor, Merkel needed to cope with the hegemonic body norms in politics and media expectations. She developed a performative strategy that can be depicted in three phases: The first phase took place during her electoral campaign for chancellor in 2005, when her strategic uses of fashion first became visible. This phase was marked by the search for a female role model and by compromises with media expectations concerning gender. Contrary to her dress preferences, during the campaign Merkel wore skirt suits and, at some occasions, even high heels, overcoming her later well-known dislike of them. Her clothes were mostly in pastel colors, very different from her later affirmed dress style in dark and vivid colors like red, dark green, or blue. In the absence of role models for a female head of state in Germany, she shortly adopted Margaret Thatcher's dress style, who notoriously faced the same problem and copied the Queen.

Before 2005, Merkel's clothing and hairstyle were perceived as awkward and the media mocked her style as unprofessional.[3] Her clothes were mostly gray and beige and her hair was badly combed. Her style was the opposite of elegant or fancy (Diehl 2007, 185). Politically, she was also shadowed by Helmut Kohl, Germany's longtime chancellor and her mentor. This was the reason why she was called Kohl's girl. However, in 2000, a donation scandal involving Kohl gave her the opportunity to overcome her subordinate position. Together with Wolfgang Schäuble—a central figure in the Christian Democratic Union—she positioned herself against Kohl and helped end his career. The party went into a crisis but, for Merkel, this event paved the way for her candidacy as chancellor. By 2005, Merkel's style had changed radically and was the object of media attention. Her dress and hairstyle were intensively discussed by journalists, who equated her body "transformation" to professionality and empowerment. This discussion transformed the perception of Merkel as a public figure, making her acceptable as a chancellor. The weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* called it "Die Verwandlung" (the transformation) (Ulrich 2005). On June 2, 2005, the Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel* published the article "Macht macht schön?" (Does power make beautiful?) clearly making the analogy between Merkel's new "beauty" and power: "She was the ugly duck and became the swan, she is as eligible in Hamburg as she is in Halle" (Geffken 2005). The two cities in this sentence were symbolically opposed after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Hamburg stands for Western upper-class elegance, while Halle was synonymous with the deindustrialization of the GDR and linked to the discriminated status of East Germans in the Federal Republic. Merkel was not only the first female candidate for chancellor, she

[3] This change in style can be seen in a short documentary of Spiegel TV: https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=verwandlung+der+weg+nach+oben+merkel#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:2bbfcbca,vid:-6H4HwghYz0.

was also the first politician from East Germany to become head of state. The transformation of her clothing and style and her adoption of Western female aesthetic norms were convincing performative instruments for signaling this claim. This phase ends with her election.

The second phase can be described as a test phase and lasted from her first day as chancellor until her shock appearance in a low-cut dress in 2008. This phase is characterized by non-fashion: comfortable shoes and pants and clothes that do not emphasize curves. Right from her appearance to announce the new government coalition, Merkel adopted a new sober style, which has since become famous. She abandoned high heels and skirts and opted for a unique jacket cut that she repeated in different colors until the end of her last term in office. Her shoes, always black, were not elegant, but comfortable and practical. After she came to power, this new style was important to fix her image as the representative of the political institution and to obfuscate gender. It appears that neutralizing the female body was the way to become acceptable as a powerful politician in a male-dominated environment. This style was unusual for the German audience and was criticized in the media, which once again mocked Merkel's style as unprofessional and insecure.

Instead of adapting her dress and performance style to media and audience expectations as she had during the electoral campaign, Merkel doubled down on the criticized elements. At that time, journalists detected her preference for pressing her fingertips and thumbs together and interpreted this gesture as discomposure and unease in front of the cameras. One of the most brilliant marketing strategies of her team was not to change it but, on the contrary, to insist on this gesture. Every time Merkel was caught on camera, her hands were in front of her stomach, with her fingertips touching to form a diamond, while she looked straight at the camera. Through repetition, Merkel succeeded in establishing the "Merkel rhombus" as her own logo, symbolizing her power.[4] There is a clear connection with her clothing since they both eclipse the feminine body in favor of the abstract symbolization of power and authority. When asked by a journalist why she always adopted this pose, she said it was a very relaxing posture for her shoulders. Indeed, physical therapists recommend pressing the fingertips and thumbs of both hands together to relax the neck and shoulders. The interesting point of Merkel's answer though was that she never claimed that it was a power gesture. Yet, at the same time, she ostentatiously repeated the rhombus, consolidating the pose as her brand logo.

The third phase was the consolidation phase of Merkel's non-fashion, when her style became uncontested. The path was paved by a calculated surprise. In April 2008, over halfway through her first term in office, she attended the inauguration of the new Oslo Opera House wearing an elegant gown. For

[4] In 2013 the rhombus became the major symbol of Merkel's electoral campaign. See: Spiegel.de: "Maxima Merkel", 2nd September 2019. https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/wahlkampf-riesenplakat-der-cdu-zeigt-haende-mit-merkel-raute-a-919905.html.

the first time, she appeared in a glamorous long dress that emphasized her curves and had a plunging neckline.[5] For the German audience, this came as a shock. The top tabloid newspaper *Bild Zeitung* opened with the headline "Angela has breasts" (Angela hat einen Busen) (2008) and was not the only one to publish the photograph. The most widely disseminated picture of the event shows Merkel's chest and face in half-profile. She is turned away from the viewer and seems to be talking to someone on her right. According to Nadja Seenewald, this type of picture illustrates interaction with other people and is therefore often used in dialog scenes in films (Seenewald 2008, 81). As a portrait photo, it creates an effect of spatial proximity to the depicted person and a certain intimacy. Merkel looks very at ease in front of the camera and reproduces the same poses film stars when captured by photographers.

Contrary to expectations, the sexist headline and the unexpected sexualization of Merkel's body did not damage her image, perhaps because the chancellor resumed her sober clothes the next day. This episode remains ambivalent and its interpretation cannot fully answer the question posed by Karen Ross: What should we make of these forms of auto-sexualization? (Ross 2017, 71). A further aspect of this event is the way it follows mass media attention rules. As an unexpected event, the performance was able to catch the attention of the media by surprising the audience. Paradoxically, presenting herself in a glamorous dress and emphasizing the female body freed Merkel from gender expectations and contributed to the consolidation of her sober style (Diehl 2015, 336). Her spokesperson's statement regarding the event reveals the connection between clothing and empowerment: "The chancellor will continue to choose her dress according to her own taste at future events, as the mood takes her" (Maier 2008). The freedom to choose her own clothing was performed as a synonym of power.

However, Merkel understood how to display elements of clothing as political symbols when strategically necessary. Although she avoided stressing femininity, one concession to female dress codes was made: She always wore a necklace. This piece of jewelry was strategically used in the electoral debate on September 1, 2013, and transformed into a political symbol. On this occasion, Merkel appeared wearing a necklace in the colors of the German flag, emphasizing her role as the nation's representative and once again attracting media attention. The "German necklace"[6] invested Merkel's body with national and institutional symbolism, reinforcing her function as the head of state and almost naturalizing her representative role. Symbolically, the necklace fixed her claim to be chancellor, shaping the secondary frame (Goffman 1961) during the TV debate. The claim to be and to continue being the chancellor

[5] See Die Welt, Wieviel Dekolleté darf eine Kanzlerin zeigen? 14th April 2008: https://www.welt.de/jahresrueckblick-2008/april/article1899926/Wieviel-Dekolleete-darf-eine-Kanzlerin-zeigen.html.

[6] See "Die Bedeutung von Merkels Halskette"; in: taz, 2th September 2013: https://taz.de/Die-Bedeutung-von-Merkels-Halskette/!5059983/.

was particularly powerful because Merkel had already neutralized her body through non-fashion.

5.7 Conclusion: From the Body to the Logo

Merkel's non-fashion was performed as a powerful symbolic machine, by both neutralizing gender and merging her image with the institution she claimed to represent. If she had no choice but to be perceived as a woman, as Ferree stated, she definitely had the choice to perform neutrality instead of her multiple outsider status. Ferree is right about the democratic imagination of the male white representative, but it does not mean that bodies perceived as "space invaders" (Puwar 2004) have no other choice but to embrace descriptive representation. On the contrary, Merkel's performative strategy was indeed to run as a "neutral" representative and to neutralize her body through non-fashion. In the end, she created a logo of herself as a symbol of power. The paradoxical effect of this neutralization was that Merkel's success contributed to making female politicians more acceptable in Germany and worldwide. Today, the number of women and non-white persons becoming head of state has increased dramatically, challenging the hegemonic body norm without dissolving it. They have developed very different styles. The new generation of female high-status representatives seems to be more comfortable dealing with gender norms, as demonstrated by the heads of state of New Zeeland, Finland, and Denmark, but also by the German minister for foreign affairs, Annalena Baerbock. Baerbock embraces fashion and pursues at the same time a feminist foreign policy. Merkel's non-fashion strategy must be seen as one of the steps leading up to this.

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CHAPTER 6

Gender, Fashion, Politics and the Left-Right Divide in Spain

Celia Valiente

6.1 Introduction

Do left-wing and right-wing women politicians use fashion differently?[1] If they do, what exactly are these differences? Using the available literature and printed and digital primary sources, this chapter analyzes how Spanish women ministers with left and right political ideologies relate to fashion in slightly different ways. Women ministers from the right seem to use more elements of fashion that are associated with conventional and traditional styles, such as skirts or dresses. Women ministers from the left appear to wear purple clothes and/or purple lapel badges on March 8th (International Women's Day) street demonstrations to show support to the women's movement. Thus, in Spain, fashion is a tool used by women politicians to differentiate themselves along ideological lines. However, other uses of fashion by Spanish women politicians are striking, unexpected and hard to explain. In summer of 2004, the eight women ministers in the cabinet headed by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero from the left-wing Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) posed for fashion and lifestyle magazine *Vogue* (Spain) in high-couture costumes, creating a high-voltage polemic. On the other hand, very few times, and to a considerably lesser extent than women politicians,

[1] To avoid repetitions, this chapter uses "left-wing" and "left" as synonymous. This chapter also uses interchangeably "right-wing," "right," and "conservative."

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men politicians also use fashion to transmit messages (and generate controversies). This happened in summer of 2022, when PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez recommended men decision-makers in politics and the economy to avoid wearing ties whenever possible.

6.2 Gender, Fashion and Politics

Political decision-making has been traditionally a men's profession. At least from the first part of the twentieth century in Western countries, the overwhelming majority of men political leaders wore a common attire: a suit. For example, in the US, most men politicians wear a dark suit, a light-colored shirt, a necktie and dark low-heeled shoes. There are of course exceptions to this pattern, but this type of attire is so common as it serves as a "uniform" (Kedrowski et al. 2021). To some extent, this is also the "uniform" of men politicians in most Western polities (Flicker 2013; Ford 2021).

As it happened in other professions historically monopolized by men, no definitive "uniform" was available to women when they entered the upper echelons of political decision-making in recent decades (Ford 2021; Kedrowski et al. 2021). Moreover, women politicians are constantly scrutinized by mass media for what they wear instead of what they say or do. This constant surveillance of female politicians' appearances trivializes them (Rabinovitch-Fox 2018). Women political decision-makers are constantly under a doubled-edged sword. If they dress too femininely, they are perceived as deficient in exercising political power. If they dress too masculine, they are seen as inadequate as women (Kedrowski et al. 2021).

Extant studies show that, apart from being scrutinized for how they dress, women politicians have some room for maneuvering and can use fashion to convey political messages (Brown and Lemi 2021; Kedrowski et al. 2021). During her Premiership in the United Kingdom (1979–1990), Margaret Thatcher utilized skirted suits and assorted blouses to transmit femininity and seriousness (Conway 2016). In her role as a politician (senator, secretary of state, presidential candidate), but not as much as first lady, Hillary Clinton used pantsuits in bold colors to project femininity and credibility (Rabinovitch-Fox 2018).

Women politicians are a heterogeneous group, with differences along numerous dimensions, for example, race (Brown and Lemi 2021). Women vary in terms of their ideological commitments, so left and right is another dimension of interest. In the last and current centuries in Western countries, the left-right divide has been of paramount importance among political cleavages. However, the salience of the left-right divide may be less intense than decades ago. If the left-right political cleavage is still important, it would probably be reflected in how left-wing and conservative women policymakers use fashion in the political arena. After all, since the nineteenth century onwards, clothing has been a social marker differentiating social classes, and social class

forms the historical basis of the left-right divide (although in complex ways) (Crane 2000).

6.3 Spain as a Case to Study Gender, Fashion and Politics

Most extant studies of politics and fashion analyze the US. In an increasingly globalized world, some elements of fashion are present in nearly all societies. But because fashion is still a context-specific phenomenon, it is important to examine other societies. Spain is an ideal case to study gender, fashion and politics. In the last decades, Spain has ranked comparatively high regarding women's access to political decision-making positions. In 2023, Prime Minister Sánchez's cabinet is formed by 14 women ministers and 8 men ministers (La Moncloa 2023; 21 March 2023 data). Thus, 64 percent of ministers in the cabinet are women. Additionally, Spain ranks number 22 in terms of the percentage of women in national parliaments, with 42 percent of seats in the lower chamber of parliament occupied by women (Interparliamentary Union 2023; 1 February 2023 data). Because a relevant number of Spanish politicians are women, the case offers an empirical base large enough to analyze the use of fashion in politics.

To the best of my knowledge, this chapter is the first academic study on fashion and women politicians in contemporary Spain. Because of the centrality of the executive in the Spanish political system, this study analyzes women in the executive cabinet, that is, women cabinet ministers. As explained by political scientist Juan Rodríguez-Teruel (2020), "Spain's executive dominance over parliament is one of the highest in the democratic world" (p. 196). In democratic Spain, the first women ministers were nominated and confirmed in 1988. From 1988 onwards, women have been ministers in all cabinets, although no woman has yet occupied the position of Prime Minister. This chapter analyzes fashion and politics between 1988 and 26 March 2023 (last day of field work). During this period, the PSOE headed the executive for 20 years (1988–1996 and 2004–2011) and the conservative People's Party (*Partido Popular*, PP) for 15 years (1996–2004 and 2011–2018). In democratic Spain, the left-right divide has been important in politics in many regards. For example, voters' identification with political ideologies has been a major determinant of voting behavior (Fraile and Hernández 2020).

It is customary once a cabinet is formed for the Prime Minister and his ministers to pose standing at the entrance of the Moncloa Palace before photographers. The Moncloa Palace is the official residence of the Prime Minister and his family, the workplace of the Prime Minister, and the location where weekly meetings of the cabinet take place. For each cabinet, this presentation photograph is called "family photograph" (*foto de familia*). Both terms ("presentation photograph/s" and "family photograph/s") are used in this chapter. These photographs constitute data for this chapter and they are

published in the media, available on the website of the Premiership (www.lamoncloa.gob.es).

As women ministers are often present in the media, this chapter analyzes other data different from the cabinets' presentation photographs. Every March 8th, International Women's Day, the Spanish women's movements hold demonstrations in the main cities of the country. This chapter studies pictures of the demonstrations in the city of Madrid, the capital, published in the printed or digital versions of the three newspapers of general information with the widest readership, that is, left-leaning *El País*, right-leaning *El Mundo* and right-leaning *ABC*. Ministers work in Madrid and some of them march with the women's movements.

With the help of digital and printed newspapers, this chapter analyzes controversial public debates about fashion and female politicians, such as the 2004 appearance in *Vogue* (Spain) of PSOE women ministers dressed by high-couture designers. Finally, because fashion and politics also refer to men, this study scrutinizes the public discussion around the use of ties by men politicians in 2022.

A caveat is necessary at this point. This chapter analyzes women politicians and refers very briefly to fashion and politics regarding men. This binary approach acknowledges that not all people are either women or men. This binary approach simply reflects the fact that no member of any Spanish cabinet has ever self-presented her/himself as a non-binary person. Similarly, this chapter focuses on the left-right divide and not other cleavages fundamental in society and politics, for example, ethnicity. The attention given to the left-right divide in this study reflects the fact that no member of any Spanish cabinet has ever self-presented her/himself as a member of an ethnic minority (in the Spanish context, the Roma and immigrants).

6.4 The Presentation Photographs of Spanish Cabinets

In Western countries, skirts and dresses are historically associated with femininity (in contrast with pants). What is more, in Spanish, the word "pants" is directly associated with power and authority. The expression "to wear the pants" (*llevar los pantalones*) means "to exercise authority." Historically, men held power but women did not. As in Western countries, conservative parties promote more traditional views on gender than left-wing parties, and in Spanish the word "pants" is linguistically linked to power, this chapter hypothesizes that in Spain, conservative women ministers wear skirts or dresses more

often than left-wing women ministers. To test this hypothesis, this study examines the 28 cabinets' family photographs available at the Presidency web page between 1988 and 26 March 2023 (last day of field work).[2]

The 28 cabinets' presentation photographs portray 179 women ministers. Some female ministers appear in more than one photograph if they were (or have been) members of two or more cabinets. Ministers pose in two or more consecutive rows, and therefore only the portraits of first-row ministers are full-length portraits. In the majority of cases (79% or 142 out of 179 women ministers), it is possible to see whether a woman minister wears a skirt, dress or pants. In a minority of cases (21% or 37 out of 179 women ministers), it is not possible to know in all confidence whether a woman minister wears a skirt, dress or pants. The proportion of conservative women ministers for whom it is not possible to know whether they wear a skirt, dress or pants (24% or 11 out of 37 ministers) is somewhat higher than the proportion of left-wing women ministers (18% or 26 out of 143 ministers). This small difference should lead to cautious interpretation of the analysis.

What do cabinets' presentation pictures show about conservative and left-wing women ministers? There are differences between them but these differences are small. As expected, conservative women ministers are slightly more prone to wear skirts or dresses: 39% of conservative female ministers (and 32% of left-wing female ministers) do so. In contrast, and as is also expected, left-wing women ministers are more inclined to wear pants compared to skirt or dress: 49% of left-wing women ministers (and 37% conservative female ministers) do so.

In sum, the pattern of conservative women ministers wearing skirts or dresses more often than left-wing ministers is identified by the analysis of the cabinets' presentation photographs. Plausibly, this pattern may be indicative of a general trend of conservative women politicians using elements of fashion and personal appearance associated with traditional femininity.

6.5 Women Ministers' Participation in March 8th Demonstrations

Social movements utilize fashion to convey demands effectively, and the women's movement is no exception to this general rule (Titton 2019). In marches and demonstrations across the US, civil rights activists wore their best Sunday clothes to transmit an image of respectability (Ford 2021). In the 1910s, US suffragists participated in public campaigns dressed in a feminine and fashionable style to reject the critique that they were threatening and masculine women. White was the color representing sexual and moral purity,

[2] Between 1988 and 26 March 2023 at the Presidency web page, most cabinets had a family photograph but very few did not for a variety of reasons including the fact that some cabinets were very similar as former cabinets, if, for example, only one minister was new in the executive.

and in some public parades, suffragists dressed in white to invoke support for the female franchise (Rabinovitch-Fox 2018). Social movement activists routinely use special colors in their clothes and movement-related objects, and in this way, activists managed to convert these colors into symbols of their movements. For instance, white, purple and yellow/gold became the colors connected to the suffrage movement (Rabinovitch-Fox 2018). The "green wave" in Latin America is also worth mentioning. In the twentieth century, pro-choice protesters have been wearing green, and green has become a symbol of feminism (Calderón-Villareal et al 2023).

In current Spain and other Western countries, purple is the color usually attached to the women's movement. In Spain, from the late 1970s onwards, every March 8th, the women's movement has convoked demonstrations in cities and towns to celebrate International Women's Day. Since the late 2010s, thousands of people (mainly women, some men) have participated in these demonstrations, putting Spain at the vanguard of support in the streets to the women's movement (Fraile 2023; García 2019). During this time, some women ministers from the left have participated in the Madrid demonstrations and have worn purple clothes and/or purple lapel badges. The March 8th, 2023 Madrid demonstrations serve to illustrate this point. Two different marches were organized in the city of Madrid by the women's movement. Large photographs of the two Madrid demonstrations appeared on the front page of popular newspapers, including the left-leaning *El País* and the right-leaning *ABC* and *El Mundo*. These three newspapers dedicated several pages to inform and comment on the two marches and the movement. One of the two marches was attended by eight PSOE women ministers walking together behind a banner. All of them wore purple clothes and/or purple lapel badges.[3] Acting in this way, left-wing women ministers showed support to the Spanish women's movement in an open and visible way. In this sense, left women ministers were different from conservative women ministers of cabinets formed before 2018, because conservative women ministers generally did not participate in March 8th demonstrations and did not wear purple clothes.

6.6 Women Ministers in 2004 Vogue (Spain)

Interlinkages with gender and class add further nuance to the complex role of fashion in politics. An example serves to illustrate this point. In spring of 2004, PSOE Prime Minister Zapatero nominated the first ever parity cabinet in Spain, which was formed by eight women ministers and eight men ministers.

[3] On March 8th, 2023, the ministry of equality was held by Irene Montero. She was from *Unidas Podemos*, an electoral coalition to the left of the PSOE. Montero participated in the same march as PSOE women ministers but walked in a different place and after a different banner. Montero wore purple clothes in the political activities she undertook prior to the evening demonstration.

Moreover, a woman (María Teresa Fernández de la Vega) was the government spokesperson, minister of the presidency and first deputy president (a key position in the cabinet right under the Prime Minister).

During his first parliamentary term (2004–2008), Zapatero would advance a set of path-breaking gender equality policies including, but not limited to: the 2004 gender violence law (defining violence against women in gendered terms, establishing more services and support for victims, and strengthening the legal means to prosecute perpetrators); and the 2007 gender equality law (the first ever comprehensive gender equality law tackling most dimensions of gender inequality). For his record on gender equality policymaking, Zapatero's premiership gained international recognition (Valiente 2008). However, women ministers from Zapatero's first cabinet became famous for an episode for their use of fashion in politics. In summer of 2004, the eight women ministers posed at the entrance of the Moncloa Palace in high-couture outfits for the Spanish edition of *Vogue*. Four women ministers posed standing while the other four women ministers posed seated on two sofas covered by fur.

The *Vogue (Spain)* photographs ignited a high-voltage polemic. Defending the photographs, woman Minister of Culture Carmen Calvo affirmed that Spain "was the only country in the world where women share power with men. The photographs are austere, serious and historic" (Intxausti 2004).[4] Photographer Alberto Heras declared that he had portrayed "a modern, contemporary Cabinet, the first ever to be composed by the same number of women and men" (Mateo 2004).

Following their feature in *Vogue (Spain)*, PSOE women ministers were fiercely attacked by many political and social actors. For instance, the National Association of the Animals' Protection and Well-being (*Asociación Nacional para la Protección y el Bienestar de los Animales*, ANPBA) demanded the resignation of Cristina Narbona, the woman Minister of the Environment. Narbona posed seated on animals' fur, which, according to the ANPBA, "is nothing but animals' corpses" (Intxausti 2004).

The lelft-right divide appeared in many criticisms expressed by Conservative women politicians. Ana Torme, PP woman Parliamentarian, accused PSOE women cabinet members of "frivolousness" for having been photographed "in an outfit that the majority of people cannot afford" (Intxausti 2004). The PP woman regional Prime Minister of Madrid Esperanza Aguirre declared: "If we, Conservative women, had been ministers and had posed for *Vogue* in outfits worth one million Pesetas [around 6,000 Euro or 6,500 US dollars], we would have been torn to shreds." Aguirre added: "Would you imagine men ministers posing at the entrance of the Moncloa Palace with makeup and hair made by hairstylists, or with Armani clothes and luxury cars?" Finally, Aguirre implied that PSOE politicians predicated one thing (being close to the working-class and defending its interests) while doing the opposite (indulging themselves in an upper-class living style) (El País 2009).

[4] In this chapter, all translations from Spanish to English are done by the author.

In sum, and unexpectedly, in 2004 women ministers from the left (not from the right) posed for a fashion magazine with a high-couture attire more proper of people from an affluent background than people with less station. Part of the criticism toward these eight PSOE women ministers centered around the expected behavior of politicians from the left and the right.

6.7 The 2022 Polemic Around the Tie

Women politicians are constantly scrutinized for what they wear, while men politicians are not. However, there are exceptions to this rule, such as when men politicians are intensively examined for their outfit. For instance, on July 29, 2022, at a press conference assessing the political year, PSOE Prime Minister Sánchez advised political and economic decision-makers to avoid the use of ties (Carmona 2022; El Mundo 2022). The assumption was that ties make people feel hot and inclined to use more air conditioning. In his own words:

> Before finishing, I would like you to notice that I am not wearing a tie. This indicates that we all can save energy. I have asked members of the cabinet and decision makers in politics and the economy that, if they still wear a tie, they no longer wear it unless it is necessary. In this way, we would be saving energy. This is so necessary in our country!" (Serrano 2022, 27).

Sánchez's recommendation was not surprising, given the environmental deterioration of the planet, in general, and energy shortages caused by the war in Ukraine, in particular. In the past, the executives of other countries had already made similar gestures. In summer of 2005 in Japan, the executive used outfits lighter than the traditional "uniform" for men politicians in order to comply with the Kyoto protocol (an international treaty for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions). Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, from the Liberal Democratic Party, set the example in a public appearance wearing white pants, an ample blue long sleeve shirt and no tie (Serrano 2022). And in some sectors of the economy, for example, technological firms, men occupying the highest positions no longer wear conventional clothes such as suits or ties (Ford 2021).

In Spain, what was surprising in the reactions to Sánchez's proposal was the salience of the left-right divide. In general, parliamentarians from the left supported Sánchez's advice, while parliamentarians from the right did not. On the first parliamentarian session immediately after the summer break, journalist José Marcos (2022) from left-leaning *El País* stated "that one could know if a parliamentarian belonged to the left or the right by having a look ... at his neck .... The tie has been politicized ... Sánchez's suggestion ... threatened to turn itself into the last cultural war" (Marcos 2022, 12). Seen from a broader perspective, Sánchez's recommendation can be interpreted as a manifestation

of the left's change from concerns about workers' rights to New Left's focus on environmentalism.

6.8 Conclusion

An analysis of presentation photographs of Spanish cabinets between 1988 and 2023 shows that Conservative women ministers wore skirts or dresses slightly more often than left-wing women ministers. In this way, fashion is a device to mark that left and right are still relevant political cleavages. A study of photographs of March 8th demonstrations in Madrid since the late 2010s documents that some left-wing women ministers attended these demonstrations and wore purple clothes and/or purple lapel badges, while conservative women ministers did not. Given that purple is the color associated with the women's movement—and feminism—some left-wing women politicians use fashion to convey messages of proximity to specific social movements. In this manner, fashion is used to show that politics extends beyond formal institutions and encompasses actors of society.

But gender, fashion and politics are related in other unexpected ways. One would associate high-couture with conservative women politicians more than left-wing women politicians, as in general and with exceptions, conservative politicians support free market capitalism and the consequential income inequality more than left-wing politicians. However, and contrary to expectations, a high-voltage polemic aroused in 2004 when left-wing women ministers in high-couture outfits posed for a *Vogue (Spain)* photo-shoot at the Moncloa Palace, breaking the association between upper-class attire and right-wing politics. Finally, while women are often the center of public discussion on the topic, men also leverage fashion in politics, for example, when in 2022 PSOE Prime Minister Sánchez advised decision-makers in politics and the economy to avoid the use of ties.

The findings of this chapter open lines for future research. Given the enduring importance of the left-right divide in Western polities, it would be worth exploring whether left-wing and right-wing women politicians use fashion differently in countries other than Spain. On the other hand, as women accessed politics decades ago, it would be valuable to introduce the variable time in the analysis, that is, to ask whether women politicians (of all ideological colors) have been using fashion differently at different moments or decades. The empirical findings of this chapter suggest an evolution of the left to new issues (environmentalism) and even couture fashion, but numerous other changes in the left and the right are still not analyzed systematically. Until such studies are undertaken, this chapter has found that the relationship between gender, fashion and politics is slightly different in the left and the right of the ideological spectrum in contemporary Spain.

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CHAPTER 7

Section Two Introduction: Using Fashion to Establish Credibility: Looking the Part—United States

Karen M. Kedrowski, Candice D. Ortbals, Lori Poloni-Staudinger, and J. Cherie Strachan

Section Two, Using Fashion to Establish Credibility: Looking the Part (United States), examines fashion expectations for political elites and surrogates in the United States and analyzes how various actors, depending on their institutional positioning and personal identities and preferences, respond to those expectations. The actors discussed in these chapters include Supreme Court justices, national and state-level legislators, and first ladies. The authors included in this section show how fashion expectations and these actors' responses to them contribute to whether or not the public and their peers perceive them as credible. Looking at formal and informal dress codes, the authors explore how dress codes express the culture of an institution, disproportionally impact women and people from marginalized groups, and often

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create a double standard. The actors' responses vary; some are amenable to expectations, some subtly reject them, whereas others signal rebellion against societal norms. In this sense, the chapters attest to the idea of fashion as a political strategy and as a substantive signal of political ideology, but also show that fashion can constrain elites and serve as the basis for othering them.

Anishanslin et al.'s chapter about dress codes in state legislatures returns to the theme in the introductory chapter regarding the expectation of "normal" professional attire among politicians, namely a suit and tie, as has been historically worn by men. The authors find that dress codes for women are less common than those for men; however, this does not mean that women get a free pass on fashion. Instead, it shows that men are the standard to the extent that it is difficult for dress codes to determine what exactly women should wear in order to approximate the male standard. Whereas the Missouri state legislature specified, for example, that women legislators and staff should cover their shoulders, other legislatures simply require that women wear the "business equivalent" to a suit and tie. In either instance, women are the Other and men are the standard. This theme was also seen in the chapters in Section One.

Rabinovitch-Fox expands the analysis of dress codes, first, by recognizing both written and unwritten dress codes and norms in the U.S. Congress, and, second, by showing how women legislators rebel against them. In the late 1970s the House defined men's attire as a suit and a tie, but, as in many state legislatures, women were instructed only to wear "appropriate attire" equivalent to suits. Even so, from the time of the first woman elected to Congress, Jeanette Rankin, the public and media have judged elected women based on their ability to adhere to traditional beauty and femininity. Because what is deemed appropriate for women is often thought to be a careful dance between the expectations of feminine beauty and masculine power, the "pantsuit rebellion" of 1993, as described by Rabinovitch-Fox, was significant not because it violated a dress code, but because women wearing pantsuits aimed to normalize women as powerful actors, who would no longer be othered by unwritten expectations of feminine fashions.

Supreme Court justices and first ladies are not held to the same expectations as state and national legislators. Whereas first ladies are expected to be feminine and expressly not masculine, Supreme Court justices have worn a black robe throughout history. The Bennion et al. and the Ortbals and Maniscalo chapters explore how the feminine expectations of the first lady require her to carefully consider her wardrobe while allowing her leeway to signal subtle political messages. Bennion et al. capture Michelle Obama's successful strategy as a Black woman to embrace a femininity approved by much of the public, while at the same time expressing a fashion style that suited her personally and redefined the position of the first lady, which historically is associated with traditional, White femininity. Ortbals and Maniscalo, in a similar vein, endeavor to conceptualize double-binds particular to first ladies. Like Michelle Obama, other first ladies, according to Ortbals and Maniscalo,

must use fashion in a strategic but subtle, non-threatening way, given that the public expects first ladies to be uncontroversial in terms of fashion and policy advocacy. This chapter, in reviewing the fashion choices of Melania Trump and Jill Biden, shows that the latter, on a foreign policy trip, was able to signal the simplicity of "love" and a return to U.S. normalcy in world affairs by wearing an attractive dress and a jacket with the word "love" on it. Melania Trump's fashions, in contrast, signaled controversial messages that were met with public disregard.

Even with the fairly limited fashion flexibility afforded to the black-robed Supreme Court justices, justices—like first ladies—can make subtle choices that reveal personal identity or signal substantive political messages. For instance, Stepp and Castle observe that Sonia Sotomayor wears bold colors in her clothing and on her nails, which arguably shows she is expressing her Latina heritage. Amy Coney Barrett, a conservative justice, wears traditional feminine fashion. Following up on the discussion in the introductory chapter, the Stepp and Castle chapter also delves into the political meanings of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's collars.

Thus, the chapters in Section Two pick up on themes of credibility we saw in Section One and apply them in an American context. In all the chapters, we see the double-bind of women discussed in the Introduction. Women have to balance feminine and masculine looks while appearing confident and approachable. In this way, American women in political settings are not unlike their peers in other countries. A byproduct of this is that media attention is often focused on fashion choices and not the policy contributions of women. Although, as these chapters show us, women also use fashion to construct their own identity and challenge assumptions about gender, race, and class, often in a way that subverts existing power structures.



CHAPTER 8

Power Dressing: Dress Codes in State Legislatures

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8.1 Introduction

Fashion is a means of communicating who we are. It can communicate social class, gender, religion, job, values, and status. Dress codes, both formal and informal, are a means of controlling that communication and have been used throughout history to convey norms, structure hierarchies, and determine power (Ford 2021; Rubinstein 2018). Dress codes are enforced informally by various social rewards and punishments. Dress codes are enforced formally with explicit rules created by non-governmental entities (workplaces, restaurants, etc.) and governmental entities (public schools, legislatures, etc.). In this

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chapter, we investigate the politics of dress codes for members of state legislatures in the United States. What dress codes do state legislatures have? What power structures do these dress codes reflect?

Recent examples of dress code controversies in legislatures include discussions about "proper and appropriate attire" defined as "blouses and collared shirts with a jacket" in the Rhode Island state legislature, proposed bans on denim and short skirts in Montana, and jackets or cardigans to cover women's arms in Missouri ("A New Dress Code" 2021; Samuels 2021; Bella 2023). In 2017, women in the U.S. House protested the ban on sleeveless tops and open-toed shoes and it was removed (Marcelo 2021). The U.S. Senate Rules Committee, on the behest of Senator Amy Klobuchar, followed suit largely in anticipation of incoming Senator Krysten Sinema, who was known for her independent fashion choices and preference for sleeveless dresses (Friedman 2021; Steinhauer 2020). But dress codes for elected officials and the debates surrounding them are neither new nor always predictable. For example, a ban on hats on the U.S. House floor took 25 years to pass after it was first proposed in 1822 ("The Ban on Hats" 2021). Hat wearing was understood by some to symbolize independence from the King of England and by others as a practicality, since there was no place to store them while Congress was in session.

Dress codes that differentiate by sex, which are quite common, can perpetuate gender stereotypes with the notion that there is some standard of dress appropriate for men and another for women, with the attendant gendered expectations for appropriate behavior (Zalesne 2007). Supreme Court cases, such as *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* (1989) and *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), suggest that workplace dress codes that treat one sex differently or differentiate dress codes by sex could be violations of employment non-discrimination laws. At a minimum, as Whisner (1982) argues:

> Appearance regulation is an obvious means of enforcing gender differentiation. Requiring women and only women to wear skirts and men and only men to keep their hair short, for example, forces people to "wear" their gender for all to see, setting the stage for differential treatment, and reinforcing the belief that "the sexes" are "opposite." And because differentiation takes place in the context of patriarchy, it works to the detriment of women as a class. (76–77)

However, elimination of formal dress codes may not eliminate informal demands to conform to norms and expectations and instead may reassert new, and perhaps more exclusive, modes of signifying power. For example, without a dress code, only those "in the know" can benefit from conforming to particular expectations and stereotypes of what it means to be a professional. Research shows that women who follow an unwritten dress code of "professional attire"—typically, a gender normative standard—are evaluated more positively and as more powerful and competent than those who do

not (Gurung et al. 2017a, b; Glick et al. 2005). Women who dress more provocatively are judged more negatively than women who do not (with as small a change of one more button unbuttoned on a blouse negatively influencing perceptions). The color of women's clothing can influence perceptions of competency and aggressiveness (Richards et al. 2021).

Black people, indigenous people, and other historically marginalized groups are often targeted for failing to meet particular norms regarding appropriate attire and/or hair styles. In a recent interview, former First Lady Michelle Obama said about her time in the White House: "I didn't wear braids …they're not ready for it. It would have been 'remember when she wore braids? Those are terrorist braids. Those are revolutionary braids'" (Yasharoff 2022). In at least two recent instances at the U.S. Supreme Court where cases on Native American rights were being argued, Native American leaders trying to observe the case were told that they could not wear traditional native attire. However, in another case, after telling a woman dressed in the traditional dress of the Wampanoag Tribe of Aquinnah that she would be jailed if she did not comply, the Supreme Court security guards changed their minds (Maltais 2022; "Tribal Leader" 2018).

Professional norms and gender and racial stereotypes can constitute an unwritten code available to some and not to others. One survey of government workers found that informal communications (from work colleagues and supervisors) were the most important way individuals learned what the appropriate professional attire was (Bowman and Lavater 1992). In the case of gender norms, what counts as professional dress for men is much more uniformly understood; thus, a lack of dress codes can also unfairly leave women with less direction about what will be perceived as appropriate (Gurung et al. 2017a). Without a dress code, power belongs then to those who are aware of the unwritten rules and those rules advantage certain groups over others, a phenomenon that has been referred to as the "hidden dress code dilemma" (Lang 1986, 277). It should be noted, however, that even if professional or stereotypical norms of appropriate dress are known, some may be unwilling or unable financially to conform. A sex-based or race-based dress code while, on the one hand, reproducing and perpetuating gender and racial stereotypes, on the other hand, can provide a clear, written articulation of the rules, thus, leveling the power playing field.

Today, dress codes are being challenged for their perpetuation of racist and patriarchal norms but are supported by others as empowering equalizers. While there are a number of recent efforts to eliminate dress codes in state legislatures, at least one bipartisan group of female legislators in Minnesota met recently to discuss having them reinstated (Lopez 2021). How do state legislatures regulate their members' attire? What does this tell us about power and place?

8.2 The Dress Codes of State Legislative Chambers

8.2.1 Our Data

We obtained data on dress codes from 89 of the 99 state legislative chambers across the United States that were in place during the summer of 2022.[1] For the chambers that had dress codes, these dress codes were found in legislative manuals and state house and senate rules available online. When these manuals or rules were not available online, we called legislative staff. This information was occasionally supplemented with articles that appeared in news coverage. Extensive internet searches were conducted in order to find state house and senate chamber manuals and rulebooks on decorum and dress. In circumstances in which these manuals or rulebooks could not be located, or when dress code information was not mentioned, legislative staff were contacted via email and phone calls, as some rules on dress are circulated in rulebooks and memos that are not immediately available to the public. Comprehensive efforts were made to locate dress codes but also confirm when there was no dress code. Many state legislative chambers also have dress codes for staff, the media, and the public, but these are not included in our data.

8.2.2 The Frequency of State Legislative Dress Codes

Over half of the state legislative chambers in our study have dress codes. Thirty-one state houses and 31 state senates, for a total of 62 out of 89 (70.0%), have some kind of rules regarding what clothes state legislators can wear. Table 8.1 shows that the majority of these dress codes, 52 out of 89 (58.4%), are written in legislative manuals or rules, often falling under the heading of "decorum." Only a few state houses and senates have the exact same written rules: the same dress code was shared by the state house and senate in only seven states. Among the states with written dress codes, the preference appears to be for each legislative chamber to create its own rules.

The vast majority of these written rules are public, with 25 out of 27 state house dress codes (92.6%) and 20 out of 25 state senate dress codes (80.0%) openly available and reasonably easy to access. However, there are seven chambers that have written dress codes that are not public. For example, in the Alaska House of Representatives, the written dress code is created by the house rules committee chair and distributed as an internal memo to all state representatives. It is not made available to the public.

As Table 8.1 shows, ten chambers have unwritten rules. In the Delaware General Assembly, according to the Division of Research, while there are no formal written rules, members are expected to dress formally. A similar policy

[1] Nebraska only has one chamber, and we could not find or confirm the dress codes for the Maryland House and Senate, the New Jersey House and Senate, the Ohio Senate, the Pennsylvania House, the Tennessee House, the Virginia House and Senate, and the Washington Senate. We also recognize that not all lower state legislative chambers are called "houses," but we use the terms "lower chamber" and "state house" interchangeably.

Table 8.1 State legislative chambers with dress code

	Houses	*Senates*	*Total chambers (out of 89*)*
Written rules	27	25	52 (58.4%)
Written rules are public	25	20	45 (50.6%)
Unwritten rules	4	6	10 (11.2%)

Note Nebraska only has one chamber, and we could not find dress codes for the Maryland House and Senate, the New Jersey House and Senate, the Ohio Senate, the Pennsylvania House, the Tennessee House, the Virginia House and Senate, and the Washington Senate.

exists in the Minnesota state senate: according to the Minnesota Senate Information Office, there is no written dress code, but male senators are expected to wear a suit and tie, and female senators are expected to wear the "business equivalent."

The Colorado state senate also does not have written rules, but this has not stopped the senate president from enforcing a dress code, which can include fines on state senators who do not comply. The secretary of the senate said that this was based in "tradition" ("Capitol M" 2021). The Missouri State Senate also has a tradition of requiring senators to wear "dress pants." In February of 2022, Senator Mike Moon wore denim bib overalls on the senate floor, because he had just come from cooking breakfast for his constituents and "didn't want to get pancake batter or eggs" on his nice clothes. He explained that he was "simply wearing the attire that many people in his district wear when they are at work" (Erickson 2022). Moon was stripped of his committee assignments by the President of the Senate (Erickson 2022).

While the Vermont State House of Representatives also does not have a written dress code, legislators are expected to wear suit jackets, which is not unusual. However, the Vermont House does have a unique tradition, in that only a female House member can make a motion to allow male colleagues to remove their jackets on the House floor. As one male Representative noted, during the summer, when being in the state house chamber can "feel like an oven," "women often vote in a block against allowing the men to remove their jackets, laughing as they vote no" (Yacovone 2022).

8.2.3 Content of the Dress Codes

Dress codes among state legislative chambers vary widely in their content and specificity, but there are some overarching themes. As Table8.2 shows, among the 62 chambers with written and unwritten rules, two-thirds (41) of the dress codes contained phrases like "proper," "appropriate," or "business" attire. However, it is not uncommon for dress codes to combine these phrases with additional rules, especially for men. In fact, 9 chambers use these general phrases and have additional rules for men only. There were no chambers that used these general phrases and had additional language only for women.

Table 8.2 General types of state legislative dress codes

	Houses	*Senates*	*Total (out of 62*)*
Rules for men	17	11	28 (45.2%)
Rules for women	14	4	18 (29.0%)
Rules are gender neutral	11	12	23 (37.1%)
Uses phrases like "proper, appropriate, or business attire"	21	20	41 (66.2%)

Note This includes chambers with written and unwritten rules

In fact, dress codes that are explicitly for men are more common than dress codes explicitly for women. Almost half of all legislative chambers with dress codes, 28 out of 62 (45.2%), have rules for men. Interestingly, three of these chambers use the word "gentlemen," while no chambers use the word "ladies." Only 18 chambers, less than a third, have specific rules for women, and they always appear with rules for men. For example, the Maine Senate rules state that, "Senators should be appropriately attired on session days. Men are expected to wear a suit jacket and tie. Women are expected to wear a jacket when wearing slacks" ("Maine: Senate Chamber Decorum" n.d.). The Montana House passed a new dress code in April of 2022, "formalizing the long-held traditional, and inviolable decorum of the Montana legislature that members of the House of Representatives dress in professional business attire… Professional business attire means: (i) for men, dressed in a suit, or dress slacks, jacket, and tie, and appropriate dress shoes or dress boots … and (ii) for women, dressed in a suit, or dress slacks, skirt, jacket, and dress blouse or suit-like dress, and appropriate dress shoes or dress boots" ("Montana HR 5" n.d.).

Only 23 chambers, 37.1%, have rules that are entirely gender-neutral. The dress code for the Florida Senate, a typical example, states that, "All persons on the main floor of the Senate Chamber … shall wear appropriate business attire at all times while the Senate is sitting" ("Florida Senate Rules and Manual" 2020, 74).

While dress codes for men are more frequent, they tend to be relatively similar. As Table 8.3 shows, about a third, or 20 out of 62 chambers, require men to wear a suit, coat, or jacket. About the same proportion of chambers require men to wear a tie. The Montana and Missouri State Houses of Representatives also require men (and women) to wear dress shoes or boots.

There may be fewer dress codes for female legislators, but there is substantially more variety. As we can see in Table 8.3, some chambers use more generic language, such as "appropriate business attire or equivalent" for women, but this language is still using men as the referent for "appropriate business attire." When providing specifics, there is not much agreement over what this means, with five chambers using the word "dress," four using "skirt," five using "pants," and four using "blouse." Three chambers mention

Table 8.3 Specific language from state legislative dress codes

	Chambers (out of 62)*	
Rules for Men		
Suit, Coat, or Jacket	20	(32.3%)
Tie	19	(30.6%)
Dress shoes or boots	2	(3.2%)
Rules for Women		
Dress	5	(8.1%)
Skirt	4	(6.5%)
Pants	5	(8.1%)
Blouse	4	(6.5%)
Jacket or coat	5	(8.1%)
Pantsuit	3	(4.8%)
Dress shoes or boots	2	(3.2%)
"Appropriate business attire or equivalent"	7	(11.3%)
Other Rules		
No jeans or denim	5	(8.1%)
No shorts	2	(3.2%)
No tank tops or halter tops	1	(1.6%)
No hats or head coverings	2	(3.2%)
Allows for cultural attire	5	(8.1%)
Allows for exceptions	4	(6.5%)

Note This includes chambers with written and unwritten rules

"pantsuits." In contrast to dress codes for men, only five chambers explicitly mention "jackets" or "coats" for women.

There are additional dress codes in some chambers beyond these. Five chambers ban denim or jeans. The Iowa Senate and West Virginia House of Delegates ban the wearing of shorts. The Iowa Senate forbids tank tops and halter tops. The Wisconsin State Assembly bans hats, and the Oklahoma House of Representatives bans hats and "non-religious head coverings." Three states have provisions for "cultural attire." The Alaska House and Senate rules state that Qaspeqs, a hooded overshirt with a large front pocket worn by Alaska Natives, can be worn on Fridays. In the Hawaii House of Representatives, members may wear "aloha attire" on Fridays. The New Mexico House and Senate allow the wearing of bolo ties.

8.3 What These Dress Codes Tell Us

Here we use methodologies and theories from material culture studies and fashion history to analyze the overarching significance of patterns found across state legislatures' dress codes. Put together, what meaning does this assemblage of clothing and dress codes communicate (Latour 2005)? This analysis focuses upon three patterns that offer the most revealing and/or interesting

statements about power dynamics in these political spaces. From anthropologists to historians of fashion, scholars agree that dress codes shape what people wear, regardless of whether they choose to abide by them (Ford 2021; Miller 2010). We examine the significance of: (1) fashion that constitutes "business attire," (2) gendered terms for specific items of clothing, and (3) allowances for "cultural attire" in some states.

8.3.1 "Business Attire"

Whether unwritten or written, most dress codes in state legislatures revolve around an assemblage of clothing classified as "business attire." Phrases such as "business attire," "appropriate attire," "professional attire," or "formal business attire" all use shorthand to refer to a traditional understanding of what one should wear to work in an American office space for a job in which manual labor is not performed (Westling 2021; Dishman 2022; Shinn et al. 2011).

Some state legislatures, such as the Montana House of Representatives, provide detailed lists of what constitutes "business attire"; others do not define what individual clothing makes up "business attire" at all. Anthropologists remind us that what is widely understood and agreed upon as conventional fashion rarely needs to be spelled out: legislatures rely upon the assumption that the rules of what constitutes "business attire" are known and will be followed. Such shared understandings operate within a cultural system in which there are well-established rules and conventions around fashion and general agreement to maintain them (Miller 2010).

Despite its common usage as shorthand, "business attire" often remains implicitly rather than explicitly defined. Historically, a "business" dress code typically was associated with a dark-colored suit of some kind. The definition of a suit has remained remarkably consistent since the late nineteenth century: two, three, or more items of apparel designed to be worn together. For women, this means a jacket with either a skirt or pants, and for men, a jacket with trousers, and sometimes a vest (Tortora et al. 2002).

But the definition of "business attire" has not stayed as static. For example, it was relaxed in the 1990s, when "business casual" entered the workplace fashion lexicon (Vangen 2002). That trend accelerated in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. It is, in some ways, the opposite of a "uniform"; exactly what clothing items are acceptable parts of its code remains shifting and ill-defined. A 2002 survey by a department store chain, for example, revealed that 90% of its office workers could not differentiate between "formal business attire," "business attire," "business casual," and "casual dress" (Spitznagel 2010).

Such confusion likely plays into the desire of those who are proponents of greater rather than less formality in dress codes to codify exactly what business attire—and, more specifically, business casual—is. Examples of how this manifests in state legislatures' dress codes can be seen in the specificity of

the Montana House of Representatives' 2022 dress code revision; the (unsuccessful) 2016 effort to require Arkansas lawmakers to wear "business casual," defined as not including sweatpants or jeans (DeMillo 2016); bans on denim in five chambers; and the Iowa Senate's mandate that its members should "wear appropriate business attire, e.g., no denim, tank tops, halter tops, or shorts" ("Access to Senate Chamber and Rules of Senate Decorum" of Iowa, n.d.).

8.3.2 Gendered Terms

Fashion traditionally associated with men makes up the normative standard for most state legislatures' dress codes. If what men wear to work in jobs at which no manual labor is expected is the norm, what does that say about those who wear clothing that is identified as outside that norm, and about whom does and does not belong in these spaces of power (Paoletti 2015)?

In addition to material distinctions that arise when wearing a skirt or dress rather than pants, some legislatures' dress codes place women members outside the normative standard even when they wear garments visually similar to those worn by their male counterparts. One example is the use of female-gendered terms such as "pantsuit" and "blouse" in dress codes for women versus using terms such as "suit" and "shirt" for those for men. Such terms highlight gender distinctions despite material similarities in the fashion being described. For example, both a "pantsuit" and a "suit" for men consist of two pieces of clothing, one a jacket and one pants, made of matching material. There is little material difference between the two garment assemblages. Yet a man would never be said to be wearing a "pantsuit"; that term is reserved for women's clothing. The persistence of such gendered terms provides insight into how dress codes uphold gender distinctions in legislative spaces.

In American parlance, pantsuits were first used to refer to suits young boys wore with short pants and a jacket (Oxford English Dictionary 2022). In the 1920s and 1930s, women could be arrested for wearing pants in public, and perceptions of those who wore pants were ranged from transgressive to sexually deviant (as personified by Marlene Dietrich in the 1932 film *Morocco*, who wore pants when she kissed a woman onscreen [Wright 2016]). Unsurprisingly, then, "business attire" for professional women in the first half of the twentieth century did not include pants, no matter how formal.

In the 1960s, however, "pantsuits," became popular among American professional women. High-end fashion designers like Yves Saint Laurent showcased them and women embraced them as feminist symbols of equality. By 1972, Title IX of the Education Amendment mandated that schools could no longer forbid young women from wearing pants (Wright 2016). But as professional women wearing suits with pants rather than a skirt or dress became both fashionable and legal, the use of a distinctive term for women wearing a suit with pants persisted in the popular lexicon, replacing its association with boys' garments.

The use of "blouse" versus "shirt" in dress codes to refer to the garment women wear on the upper half of their bodies shows a similar historical pattern. The garment worn on the upper part of the body known as a "shirt" has been in use (both the term and the garment) since the early Middle Ages. Defined as a garment for both men and women, it can be closed in front, in back, or pulled on over the head, with gendered distinctions only when it has buttons; for women and girls, shirts button right over left; for men and boys, they button left over right (Oxford English Dictionary 2022).

A "blouse," on the other hand, was originally a light, loose garment of linen or cotton associated with men. In the United States, it first referred to a type of shirt worn by the armed forces in the nineteenth century, the upper part of a military uniform known as an "Army blouse" or "Navy middle blouse." In the 1860s, it migrated into American civilian use, used in boys' clothing as the "middy blouse." It only came into popular use as a term for women's shirt in the 1920s and 1930s, partly in response to suits becoming essential to American women's wardrobes (Oxford English Dictionary 2022; Tortora et al. 2002). Initially contested for women's wear, over time and in response to pivotal events like World War I and the achievement of woman suffrage, it became acceptable for women to wear a "blouse," and the word now is gendered female.

The history of the etymology and use of both "pantsuit" and the "blouse" supports scholarly theories that as more women entered the workplace, first in the post-World War I era of the 1920s and then again within the context of the women's rights movement of the 1960s, they adopted previously male (and boy)-coded garments for their own use. At the same time women were entering the professional workplace in significantly larger numbers, they also were elected, appointed, or hired to work in political spaces such as legislatures, Cabinets, and government offices. Thus, there is a political component to the confluence of women adopting male-coded garments for their own use and those same garments simultaneously becoming feminized in the popular lexicon.

8.3.3 Cultural Attire

Exceptions for cultural attire, particularly that stemming from Indigenous and native-inflected regional traditions, offer a final interesting case study about how dress codes shape power dynamics in state legislatures, particularly those in states where Indigenous culture influences popular perceptions of regional cultural identity. Dress codes that rely on cultural traditions can sometimes be used to subvert the existing power structure but can also be appropriated by individuals trying to maintain power. The cases of Alaska, Hawaii, and New Mexico show this complexity.

Alaska House and Senate rules allow for the wearing of *Qaspeqs* (or *Kuspuks*), an Inupiat-Yupik garment whose name translates to "cloth over

parka." Similar in form to a hoodie, qaspeqs were traditionally worn by Indigenous people to protect their parkas from the elements. Initially made of thin animal skins, they later became crafted of cloth, particularly cloth repurposed from cotton flour bags that once housed goods traded to Indigenous communities by European whalers (National Park Service 2021). Once made of cloth, they also became worn on their own rather than over parkas in milder seasons. Now fashioned from a wide range of (often very colorful) fabrics, they are popular among men and women within and outside Native communities (Brown 2016; Brown and Arthur 2002).

In 2013, Alaska House representative Mary Kapsner, an Indigenous legislator, along with her aide Katie Real, introduced the tradition of wearing qaspeqs to work at the House on Fridays. Real's death later inspired Kapsner and other women legislators in the House to continue the tradition in her honor. "Kuspuk Friday" was also adopted by the Alaska Senate, where men as well as women wear the garment. Although men as well as women wear them, Qaspeqs are gendered feminine by the addition of a skirt-like flounce at the bottom for women, and when made out of more brightly patterned fabrics. Men or women, most of those wearing kuspuks on Fridays at the Capitol are not Indigenous (Edge 2013). It seems that non-Native adoption of the garment on Fridays is understood as material manifestation of pride in Alaskan culture, rather than as cultural appropriation.

Similarly, the Hawaii House of Representatives allows members a culturally significant departure from standard dress codes on Fridays, when they may wear "aloha attire." The history of "aloha attire" is intrinsically linked to Hawaii's representative political institutions. In the 1960s, the Hawaiian Fashion Guild, eager to promote sales of locally manufactured "aloha shirts," or "Hawaiian shirts," launched a campaign known as "Operation Liberation." Arguing that for comforts' sake, the tropical Hawaiian climate necessitated a change in traditional business attire, "Operation Liberation" sent "aloha shirts" to every member of the Hawaiian House of Representatives and Senate and lobbied them to encourage their wear among Hawaiians. Eventually, Hawaii's state government officially recommended that "the male populace" adopt "aloha attire" during the summer both "for the sake of comfort and in support of the 50th state's garment industry." By 1966, in response to more successful lobbying by the Hawaiian Fashion Guild, "aloha attire" became standard policy for government workers every Friday and it became known as "Aloha Friday." In the 1990s, the practice migrated to mainland America, where it eventually morphed into the practice of "Casual Friday" (Arthur 2000; Smallwood 2015) and "business casual" (Smallwood 2015).

Unlike "Casual Friday," however, which is an amorphous dress code without many norms or rules, "aloha attire" is well-defined. For men, it consists of an aloha, or Hawaiian, shirt worn with pants (not denim); for women, it can be either an aloha shirt over pants or an aloha print dress (Hawaii Department of Defense 2013). The wearing of Hawaiian shirts predated "aloha attire" by three decades or more, as they were first made in

the 1920s or 1930s, likely by Japanese-Hawaiians using kimono fabric to make men's shirts. Hawaiian designers, especially Indigenous ones, substituted Hawaiian motifs for Japanese ones, and the colorful garments became increasingly popular post-World War II. By the 1960s these shirts were as ubiquitous on men in the mainland United States as they were in Hawaii (Brokaw 2020). They are not without troubling associations, however, as they also can be viewed (particularly when not designed or made by Indigenous Hawaiians) as emblematic of America's history of settler colonization and imperialism in Hawaii (Elan 2021a, b; Imbler 2019). Within the context of their wear in the state legislature, however, they seem to be material embodiments of pride in Hawaiian heritage.

Finally, in New Mexico, both the House and the Senate permit bolo ties to be worn with business attire in lieu of traditional cloth ties. The bolo tie, a type of necktie that consists of a "thin metal-tipped cord secured with an ornamental fastening at the throat" (Oxford English Dictionary 2022). Although its origins remain murky, the bolo tie seems to be a fashionable hybrid of Navajo and Zuni traditions of jewelry making and sartorial practices of American cowboys. Both Indigenous and non-Native people wear them today, and they are also popular in other Western states such as Arizona and Wyoming (where state legislators also are permitted to wear them). In 2007, the state legislature made it the official state tie of New Mexico (Secretary of State of New Mexico 2022).

Taken together, these exceptions for "cultural attire" offer an interesting example of how dress codes—or exceptions to dress codes—can be used to highlight Indigenous and regional culture via fashion that does not fit the general normative standard of "professional business attire" long associated with middle- and upper-middle-class white men in America.

8.4 Conclusions

Dress codes materially express the culture of an institution. Study after study shows that workplace attire—whatever form it takes—is key to establishing any organization's desired culture (Shinn et al. 2011). In implementing, and sometimes debating dress codes, state legislatures are shaping, as well as challenging, what belonging to these political institutions does and should mean. In January of 2023, Missouri revisited its dress code specifically targeting women's attire and required that women legislators and staff cover their shoulders with a jacket or sweater. The female Republican legislator who introduced the change claimed, "It is essential to always maintain a formal and professional atmosphere on House floor and to ensure this happens, I have felt compelled to offer this amendment" (Funk 2023). In other words, according to this legislator, maintaining a formal and professional atmosphere requires that women act more like men and dress in "business attire."

Like all dress codes, that of "business attire" serves as a marker of both belonging and exclusion. Evolving from fashion associated with the work

uniforms of middle to upper class (mostly white) men laboring in "white collar" professions, they are a form of sartorial knowledge obvious to insiders, yet harder to decipher and replicate for outsiders. Formal dress codes like "business attire" have historically marginalized those who hold less power in the settings in which they are the fashionable norm (Ford 2021). Traditionally, in the United States, these groups include women, minorities, and the poor; groups that, tellingly, have not been as well represented in American legislative bodies as well-off white men.

It remains to be seen what further changes will be implemented to codify sartorial norms as state legislatures change over time. How will state legislators choose to dress for political battle and who is allowed in these spaces of power changes? Our analysis provides a snapshot of legislative dress codes in 2022. As more legislators who are from groups historically marginalized in representative politics enter these spaces, what changes in dress codes will we continue to see?

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CHAPTER 9

Who Wears the Pants? Fashioning Politics on Capitol Hill

Einav Rabinovitch-Fox

In October 2021, Senator Kyrsten Sinema from Arizona created turmoil when she presided over the Senate wearing a denim vest over a black T-shirt dress. Sinema, who is known for her colorful and eclectic fashion choices, was quickly derided by many who found her casual appearance disrespectful and inappropriate for the occasion. While Sinema's denim vest was not the senator's first (or last) outfit to draw criticism, the commentary around her appearance went beyond the usual conversations on social media and propelled multiple op-eds that analyzed her use of fashion as part of her political strategy (McMillan Cottom 2021a, b). These in turn spurred an open letter of support by three of her fellow women senators: Susan Collins (R-ME), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), who criticized the coverage and called it "demeaning, sexist, and inappropriate" (Collins et al. 2021). Arguing against the double standard by which women politicians are treated and judged, the senators claimed that Sinema's style, and fashion in general, should not be part of the political discourse.

While the senators have hoped to disassociate fashion from politics, Sinema's style proves that fashion is in fact a useful tool, as through it she has been able to push against conventions regarding what a woman politician should look like and how she should behave. And although Sinema's use of fashion to build her own "brand" in politics has received much attention, the idea of fashion as a political tool is certainly not new. Politicians of all genders have

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long used their attire to make political statements and construct their own image. Indeed, rather than being marginal to the dealings of Congress, the question of appearance proved to be part and parcel of the political system and a way to yield and wield power in public. Either through defying dress codes, or by maneuvering them to get attention, Sinema and other women politicians use fashion to define and redefine women's role in politics.

Due to the strong association of fashion with femininity, clothing and appearance provide—particularly for women—an accessible means to carve their own place and voice within politics, shaping public perceptions of women and their status as politicians. Although the relationship between fashion and politics can be problematic, leading critics to argue that the scrutiny women politicians face over their clothing choices is evidence of the persistence of sexism and misogyny in politics, women politicians have used fashion as a potent means to convey ideas and construct images (Ball 2013). Recognizing the power of fashion, these women fought against written and unwritten dress codes and norms, using their appearance to navigate their way within an environment that was and still very much is dominated by men. In the process, women politicians developed new fashionable practices and customs that shaped the image of the modern "woman politician."

Women representatives have long used their clothes and appearance to make political statements, yet as their presence in Congress increased in the late 1960s and 1970s, their wardrobe choices also came to symbolize their new approach to politics. Specifically, it was the pantsuit that became the ultimate fashion choice for women who sought to break new grounds and gain influence. Conveying a message of power, professionalism, and yes, also masculinity, the pantsuit offered these politicians a way to assert their equal status as elected representatives while also challenging gender norms and traditions as women. The pantsuit thus became part of a political feminist agenda that was popular in the 1960s and 1970s and was replicated and propagated by later generations (Rabinovitch-Fox 2021).

By delineating how the pantsuit moved from being a controversial and even radical fashion statement to a mainstay in women politicians' wardrobe, this chapter highlights the importance of fashion in modern-day politics. Whereas scholars have noted how fashion became a crucial platform for political speech, especially for women and marginalized groups, understanding how fashion, and specifically the pantsuit, function on Capitol Hill and in politics at large, demonstrates how women employed appearance to claim power and redefine political institutions. Rather than being an inappropriate or frivolous topic, as the senators claimed in their letter regarding Sinema's vest, the long history of women politicians' battles in Congress over their appearance illustrates the power of clothing not only in "making the (wo)man," but also in defining their role as politicians.

Even before women occupied Capitol Hill as elected representatives, fashion proved to be a crucial realm where they could shape society's perceptions regarding their fitness for political participation. During the suffrage

campaign, suffragists turned fashion into a political tactic showing their respectability as women and their worthiness as voters. They particularly emphasized the importance of presenting a feminine, appealing, and less threatening public appearance to refute anti-suffrage propaganda that proved to be a serious obstacle for gaining the right to vote. By adopting popular trends, suffragists exhibited their superior fashion sense; but by cultivating their own individual tastes, these suffragists also proved their independence of mind and distinct character. Through fashion, suffragists could express their ideas in tangible and visual terms, demonstrating the possible contributions women could bring into politics if they receive the right to vote (Rabinovitch-Fox 2021).

The fashion vocabulary introduced by suffragists continued to shape women's appearance in politics even after 1920. Just as women needed to carve themselves a public presence during the suffrage campaign, newly elected women—both on the local and the national level—had to navigate patriarchal political institutions and norms, harnessing fashion and femininity to bolster their image. While these women, who became "firsts" in politics, offered a gendered alternative to the traditional politician's image, their appearance underlined rather than challenged ideas regarding femininity and beauty (Freeman 2000, 80). Jeannette Rankin (R-MT), the first woman elected to Congress, promoted a political agenda that suited her image as a woman reformer who acted on behalf of others, thus working within social conventions regarding women's propriety and gender roles (Finneman 2015, 51). Rankin's silky flowing dresses allowed her to mitigate some of the radicalism in her candidacy, as well as her controversial positions, such as voting against U.S. entry to World War I and World War II.

However, although Rankin's feminine appearance helped to downplay the challenge that women in politics posed to the gendered status quo, it also constructed the image of the "woman politician" as an "other," who was mostly there to provide a pretty object to look at (Finneman 2015, 69–71). "If she is elected to Congress, she will improve that body aesthetically, for she is said to be 'tall with a wealth of red hair,'" commented the *New York Times*. Arguing that Congress needs Representative Rankin "badly," the article saw her main contribution to politics in making the "House Beautiful" (*New York Times* 1916, 10). Indeed, press coverage often sexualized Rankin, focusing on her womanly traits and not on her political and organizing skills. An article in the *Topeka State Journal* celebrated her win by announcing "Look Out, Boys! She's Good Looking, Classy Dancer and Isn't Married." Instead of discussing her political agenda or how she planned to represent Montana's interests, the article informed that "she can make her own clothes and her family say she's a good cook" (*Topeka Daily State Journal* 1916, 5). Women's presence in politics was thus reduced to their gender, making it the main criteria of their performance in politics. While Rankin was not the only one in Congress to make the controversial vote against U.S. entry to World War I, her gender and looks served as the main point of criticism, showing that women were

too emotional and fragile to make important decisions about foreign policy (Finneman 2015, 76).

Being the only woman in Congress, the emphasis on Rankin's femininity set a problematic precedent for others to follow, pushing the press and the public to judge women politicians according to their looks. This did not change even as more women were elected to office in the following decades. During the 1930s and 1940s, there were about 10 women serving in the House at any given point. In 1932, Hattie W. Caraway (D-AR) became the first woman to be elected to the Senate, serving most of her tenure as the only woman. In 1949, Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) took the oath of office, becoming the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress (Congressional Research Service 2022). Yet, as long as women had a miniscule presence in Congress, they were mostly portrayed as a curiosity that belonged more to the social circles of Washington D.C. than to the serious dealings of government. Moreover, the fact that most of these women entered politics as widows of their politician husbands furthered the notion that women in politics were not equal or capable, but involuntarily dependent and convenient "fill-ins" to men (Parkin 2020, 111).

Even women who were elected in their own right—an act that was still controversial in the mid-twentieth century—did not seek to challenge the existing sexual and social order, but used traditional femininity and clothes to fend off criticism about their candidacy (Finneman 2015, 82–83). These women constructed their own image of "women legislators," often presenting themselves as housewives, pictured in domestic settings, and emphasizing their homemaking skills. Many adopted printed skirt suits and dresses as their professional attire, often pairing them with pearl necklaces, which became a symbol of propriety. However, appearing feminine was a double bind for these representatives, helping them to legitimize their presence in politics while simultaneously underlining that their presence was always tangential. Women politicians had to balance between presenting themselves as capable leaders, often possessing "masculine" traits, and conforming to gender norms that did not threaten their status as women (Parkin 2020, 118). As California congressman Jerry Voorhis commented in 1947, "the woman member must take care that she does not base her appeal…on the fact of her womanhood. She cannot expect chivalry from the male members…Neither…can she hope to gain a strong position for herself if she…tries to be like the men" (Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives 2006, 149). Fashion became a way to bridge these tensions, as women politicians adopted a professional look that expressed both femininity and formality.

Unlike men, whose authority and legitimacy in politics was never questioned, women had to rely on their appearance as they constructed their image and claims for power. Yet, since it was their gender, not their style of dress, that made women politicians stand out among their male colleagues, women in Congress could enjoy some leeway with regard to their fashion choices. As long as they followed conventional gender norms with their attire and

decorum, women's fashion was more of an issue of gossip rather than an issue to seriously address or to regulate. In fact, women legislators' feminine appearance only stressed that they did not threaten the power hierarchies in Congress. It was their conspicuous presence as women, not their fashion, that framed their status in politics.

Indeed, although both houses of Congress had dress codes, until the late twentieth century—when women's presence in Congress increased significantly—they were very general and obscure, operating under the assumption that all elected officials would adhere to the conventions of business attire. Since regulating attire is an act of asserting power and control, legislators preferred to rely on unwritten customs than to follow a formal rigid code, resulting in minimal policing of appearance. Men's attire was not much of a concern as fashion was never a significant component of how men derived their power in politics, and since women's numbers were so miniscule, there was not a need to regulate their clothes. This indifference to women's dress only stressed their precarious status as permanent and equal members of Congress. Since women adhered to conventions of femininity, neither their dress nor their numbers posed a challenge to the patriarchal control of Congress.

Some form of dress code did exist, however, regardless of gender. The oldest and most elaborate rule was enacted in 1837, mandating that "No member is to come into the House with his head covered, nor to remove from one place to another with his hat on, nor is to put on his hat in coming in or removing, until he be set down in his place" (Jefferson's Manual, Rule XVII 2019). It was enacted as a move to increase the dignity of House proceedings, viewing it as a marker of American individualism and independence that separated the U.S. republic from the British crown (Office of the Historian, House of Representatives 2016). In addition to hats, overcoats were also prohibited on the floor, however other than these specific requirements, custom only demanded "proper attire," without specifying what exactly it included. The Senate followed suit in terms of decorum requirements, although these rules were never made official but served more as unwritten custom that was left to the Senate's Sergeant-at-Arms to enforce. Only during the 96th Congress in 1979 (when the House began live televised broadcasting from the floor), the Speaker finally defined the category of "proper" with regard to appearance. However, specificity only applied to the male members, who were now required to wear the customary and traditional attire of a suit and tie in order to receive their privilege of the floor (Jefferson's Manual, Rule XVII 2021). For the 17 female members serving that time, only "appropriate attire" was required, without mentioning exactly what that entailed.

Despite the steadily growing numbers of women in Congress during the 1960s and 1970s, they remained a distinct minority and as such there was not much need to officially regulate their appearance, as they did not serve as a threat to the existing system. However, this new generation of women politicians was more inclined to challenge gender norms and long-standing



Fig. 9.1 President Gerald R. Ford seated at the Cabinet Room table signing a proclamation on Women's Equality Day 1974 surrounded by women representatives of Congress. *Source* National Archives

congressional practices, both in terms of their legislative agendas and appearance. Compared to their predecessors, this group was more ethnically and racially diverse, and many of them had professional experience as state legislators or as activist reformers. These women embraced a legislative identity and agenda that was influenced by the social and political movements at the time, mainly the civil rights and the women's liberation movements (Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives 2006, 324–327). Harnessing the power of fashion to convey powerful messages, this cohort constructed a new image for the "woman politician." While many maintained their penchant for printed skirt suits and pearl jewelry, their appearance was bolder and unapologetic, seeking to draw attention and claim their presence as equal to men (Fig. 9.1).

Representative Shirley Chisholm (D-NY), for example, constructed a unique style of bold prints and bright-colored ladylike suits, together with her signature bouffant hair and cat-eye-shaped glasses. As the first Black woman to be elected to Congress, Chisholm offered a modern interpretation to Black femininity that did not breach the boundaries of respectability, but celebrated a fashionable role model that symbolized her overall image of "unbought and unbossed," as her campaign slogan attested (Rabinovitch-Fox 2021, 159). Other representatives also adopted signature looks that redefined women's new presence in Congress. Representative Bella Abzug (D-NY)

became famous for her distinct hats, which she used to gain attention from the media and the public (Zarnow 2019, 179–180). Abzug began wearing hats in the mid-1940s in order not to be mistaken as a secretary in the firm where she worked as a lawyer. When she entered politics, she turned the hat into her trademark as a harbinger of change (Cong. Rec. 1998). "By wearing a hat, I was able to show everyone that I was there on serious business," she confessed (Kushner 1974, 47). Abzug earned a reputation for her battling attitudes and lack of propriety, but she transgressed neither gender conventions nor the House dress code. Despite reports that she clashed with the House doorkeeper about wearing her hat on the floor—spouting some expletives when asked to remove it—Abzug never tried to defy the official rule. "I'm not here to fight on trivialities. I want to break traditions, but only ones that count," she explained (Zarnow 2019, 196).

Adopting bold colors and attention-grabbing outfits served to challenge the perception of women in politics, but cultivating a strong statement was not without backlash. Whereas Chisholm's printed suits won her the title of "best-dressed" in Congress, Abzug's colorful wardrobe and flashy hats attracted scorn and criticism (Zarnow 2019, 195). Indeed, despite their growing numbers, women in Congress still faced discrimination and scrutiny over their appearance, especially if it challenged conventions regarding the gender status quo. When in 1969 Representative Charlotte Reid (R-IL) became the first woman in the House to appear with a pantsuit on the floor, she drew attention from her peers. Although Reid recalled that overall she received positive feedback for her fashion choices, she doubted if she would wear the suit again: "I am really quite serious about my service in the Congress and I wouldn't want to do anything that seemed facetious. Neither would I want to do anything to take away from the femininity of the women in the House, even though I think pants are feminine-looking" (Ross 1969, D1). Reid's decision to wear the pantsuit on the last day before the holiday recess might have been why she did not receive a serious backlash, yet when Representative Pat Schroeder (D-CO) decided to wear a pantsuit, her appearance caused a scandal. "The day I wore a pantsuit onto the floor you'd have thought I asked for a land base in China," she commented (Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives 2006, 340).

Whereas the sight of congresswomen in pants certainly caused a stir, Reid was right to claim that her pants were "feminine-looking." Unlike the more tailored pantsuits that symbolized women's new presence in the workforce and became associated with empowerment, the trousers that Reid and Schroeder wore were more feminine in cut and fitted more closely to the body, accentuating their femininity rather than presenting a masculine look (Paoletti 2015, 38). These congresswomen's decision to wear pants was less about an attempt to reclaim the power that a tailored suit conveyed, but to expand the fashionable imagery for women in politics. Nevertheless, the act of wearing pants, especially in a professional context, proved to be controversial. More than just a bold fashion statement, wearing pants in the 1970s was about challenging



Fig. 9.2 Congresswomen of the 89th Congress. *Source* National Archive

the masculine dominance of the political sphere, and as such it became, as Susan Brownmiller noted, a "feminist statement" (Brownmiller 1984, 80). However, since there was not a specific dress code for women that banned pants, congresswomen could have the freedom to appear in trousers, even if it drew criticism from the male members. Muftiah McCartin, who served in the Office of the Parliamentarian, recalled that although she received complaints about women members in pantsuits, she refused to reprimand them due to the lack of specific regulation (McCartin 2016).

Despite having no rules that banned pants for women, their normalization on Capitol Hill was a slow process. While pantsuits became more mainstream in the corporate world by the 1980s and 1990s, congresswomen still preferred to stick to more traditional gendered conventions of appearance (Fig. 9.2). When they did wear pants, such as when Representative Susan Molinari (R-NY) gave a speech on the House floor in 1990, the press often scandalized these occurrences (Molinari 2016). Instead of pants, women politicians thus adopted a more uniformed look as part of their image, following the idea of the "success suit" popularized by advice manuals such as John T. Molloy's bestseller *Dress for Success*: blazer-style jacket and a skirt in dark colors (Molloy 1977). Rebellious fashion was not expressed through wearing pantsuits, but through wearing bright colors that drew attention (Boxer 2018).

The most significant change to women's appearance came in 1993, much due to the record-breaking number of women who were elected to office. Dubbed by the media as the "Year of the Woman," the 1992 elections brought 47 women to the House, a gain of nineteen seats, and five to the Senate, making California the first state to be represented by two women (Kay Bailey Hutchison [R-TX] would join the Senate later, via a June 1993 special election). Despite this great achievement, women made up only 11% of the House and 7% of the Senate (Braden 1996, 127). Nevertheless, it was more difficult to ignore—especially in the Senate—women's presence on Capitol Hill, as they were now a notable minority, not just a curiosity.

The new cohort of women politicians in the 1990s was also more willing to push against institutional norms, determined to reclaim their equal space with men. Whereas issues like bathrooms and access to the gym became high on the agenda, so did women's appearance. Since women senators could operate as a group, their image and legitimacy as legislators received much more scrutiny. Although the Senate did not have specific rules that banned pantsuits for women, the willingness of Senator Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL), the first Black woman to serve in the Senate, or Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) to defy the unwritten dress code and appear wearing trousers was seen as a rebellion, or as Mikulski put it, "a seismographic event" (Bash 2010). In 1993, the women senators organized a coordinated action of wearing pantsuits as a show of force. The action, coined by the press as the "pantsuit rebellion," was not only a powerful statement regarding the image of "the woman politician," but also an attempt to create an institutional change. As Moseley-Braun recalled in an interview, women staffers followed the senators' example, demanding to wear pants to work (Moseley-Braun 2017).

Unlike the feminine pantsuits of the 1970s, the "pantsuit rebellion" of 1993 was significant not because it defied the traditional dress code, but precisely because it demanded for the code to equally apply to all genders. By wearing pants, these women senators did not ask to create an alternative image to what politicians looked like, but to tap into the existing one. Indeed, there is nothing radical about pants. On the contrary, tailored suits have long been the conventional attire in politics, yielding power, tradition, and honor. As a masculine attire, the suit offers its wearer an aura of authority, which men politicians traditionally held. Thus, when women demanded to wear pantsuits, they sought to break the barriers on who traditionally could exert this power and authority. There was no legal or procedural barrier for women to serve as senators or to wear pants; the only barrier they had to transcend was the historical reality of their presence in politics. In asserting their right to wear pants, these senators asked to be treated as equal to their male colleagues, arguing for their right to be considered as legitimate politicians.

The normalization of wearing pants in turn created a new image for women in politics that sought to reclaim the masculine power of the suit yet without imitating men in the process. When women wore trousers or pantsuits to the floor, they offered a new interpretation of legislators' "proper attire," but in

the process, they also created a new standard of appearance. The "pantsuit rebellion" forced the Senate's Sergeant-at-Arms Martha S. Pope—the first woman to hold the job—to finally clarify the dress code, circulating a memo announcing that "Women are required to wear business attire, ie. [sic] dress, skirt/blouse, business suit, coordinated pantsuit (slacks and matching blazer; no stirrup pants) … Men are still required to wear suit jackets and neckties and maintain an overall neat appearance" (Talbott 1993). Pope's directives expanded women's fashionable choices, but they also recognized women's legitimacy in politics. As women's presence on Capitol Hill was now permanent, their appearance needed to be regulated just like the men, not on an ad-hoc basis.

Whereas the "pantsuit rebellion" made pants an integral part of women politicians' wardrobes, no one did more to mainstream pantsuits for women than Hillary Clinton, both as a First Lady and as a senator and a presidential candidate (Fig. 9.3). Although Clinton's decision to adopt pants originated from practical reasons and considerations of modesty, she quickly made the pantsuit part of her signature style, posing for her First Lady official portrait in a black pantsuit (Newman 2023, 116–118). Yet, it would be her penchant for bright-colored pantsuits she adopted as a senator, Secretary of State, and presidential candidate that would turn pants into her trademark, fashioning a personal style that was both completely her own, and an epitome for the confident female politician, and conveying both strength and femininity. By choosing bold colors that went beyond the traditional black-navy-gray color scheme of the manly suit, and by adopting more flowing cuts and round collars that broke the rectangular silhouette of the jacket, Clinton claimed the pantsuit not as a masculine but as a feminine attire. The pantsuit became more than just her personal brand, but part of her political message, causing her supporters to adopt the style and show up with pantsuits to the polls (McGrane 2016).

Clinton's embrace of the pantsuit enacted a new standard for women in politics. From being a radical statement or a quirky curiosity in the 1970s, Clinton made the pantsuit the modern woman politician's "uniform." Congresswomen such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), as well as New York Governor Kathy Hochul and Vice President Kamala Harris, all adopted the pantsuit as part of their political image, using it to assert their power and influence. Whereas Harris prefers a more somber color palette than Clinton, she has managed to turn the pantsuit into her professional trademark, setting the standard to what a woman VP should look like. The pantsuit is not just another fashion choice for a woman in politics, but an essential aspect of how women today claim their authority and legitimacy.

Fashion continues to play an important role in our current political discourse, from being used as part of a campaign message or in building a political image. As the number of women in Congress continues to increase, so does the diversity of their sartorial presentation. Whereas many have adopted



Fig. 9.3 Official Portrait of First Lady Hillary Clinton by Simmie Knox. *Source* White House Collection/White House Historical Association

the pantsuit as their staple outfit, some employ other styles. Former Representative Deb Haaland (D-NM) and Representative Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) for example, turn to their cultural heritage as they build their political brand, while Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) espouses more feminine looks with colorful dresses. Elected women also continue to push against institutional traditions and decorum protocols, expanding the definitions of appropriate attire. In 2017, congresswomen protested House rules that prohibited wearing sleeveless dresses and open toe shoes, leading a bipartisan call for "the right to bare arms" and the updating of the dress code in both houses of Congress

(BBC.com 2017). And in 2019, the House finally revised its hats ban, creating an exception for religious or medical head-covering to accommodate Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) (Jefferson's Manual, Rule XVII 2021).

The question of "what a woman politician looks like" keeps being redefined and refashioned as women continue to break new ground in politics. Although there is a slow shift in recent years toward more casual wear, women are sticking with their pantsuits and more formal attire, which became the conventional option of appearance for women. The power that the suit conveys and the cultural capital it carries serve as useful tools for women to claim their equality with their male peers. However, as a younger, more diverse generation of women venture into political office, they push back against norms of not only who can participate in politics, but also what they should look like, setting new standards of appearance. And as these women continue to shape women's role in politics, they also continue to redefine the image of the "woman politician," whether they choose to wear a pantsuit or a dress.

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CHAPTER 10

Looks on Trial: Fashion and the Double-bind among Female Supreme Court Justices

Kyla K. Stepp and Jeremiah J. Castle

10.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we study how women use fashion in the historically male-dominated area of law, with a particular focus on the fashion choices of female justices on the United States Supreme Court. First, we argue that the double-bind for women in power extends to the legal profession, where female attorneys face both written and unwritten rules about what they can and cannot wear in court. Female attorneys must walk a fine line between being too feminine (and thus "suggestive") and too masculine (and thus "non-traditional"), and choose apparel that satisfies the long-standing "acceptable" uniform of skirts that fall below the knee, blouses that fully cover up the chest area, closed-toe high heels, minimal jewelry, and dark, monotone colors (Han 2021).

Second, we argue that female Supreme Court justices are also subject to the double-bind and engage in strategic fashion choices to communicate their ideas about gender to their peers in the legal community and the broader public. Given that in over 230 years there have only been six female justices on the U.S. Supreme Court, we engage in brief case studies of all six of them. Specifically, we focus on five key elements, most (but not all) of which can

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be analyzed using available evidence: (1) their fashion choices, (2) what they were trying to express, (3) what they (themselves) said about it, (4) what the media said about it, and (5) what they ultimately accomplished.

Our case studies reveal that all six female justices have used fashion deliberately to either reinforce or challenge gender norms, and that the media and other public figures have spent much time covering their fashion choices. Sandra Day O'Connor, with her simple black robes and lace jabots, and Amy Coney Barrett, with her pastel-colored skirt suits, have both consistently made fashion choices that adhere to the deeply held traditions of the Court and of the legal profession more broadly, all the while showcasing their femininity (O'Connor 2013; Reed 2020). Conversely, Sonia Sotomayor, with her brightly colored outfits, lips, and nails, and Elena Kagan, with her pantsuits and rejection of morning jackets, have both challenged the gender-based uniform expected of them as women in law (Rubino 2019; Williams 2010). The media's focus on the fashion choices of female Supreme Court justices have often drawn the focus away from their legal contributions, demonstrating yet another way in which gendered expectations disadvantage female justices.

While our case studies reveal that all female justices use their fashion choices to communicate gender norms, Ruth Bader Ginsburg was unique in her use of her famous "dissent collar" to silently, but effectively, voice her profound displeasure with the direction that the court's male-dominated majority was taking its jurisprudence (Rosen 2019). This use of fashion was innovative in its attempt to re-focus discussion by the media from critiques of her fashion choices to her critiques of the actual content of the Court's rulings. Although women on the highest court in the land cannot escape the double-bind entirely, Ginsburg's case suggests the possibility that female justices can use their fashion choices to redirect attention back to their substantive legal contributions.

10.2 The Double-Bind for Women in Law

The double-bind presents a significant challenge to women at all levels of the legal profession, from deciding how to behave to what to wear. Essentially, the double-bind occurs when a woman is expected to behave in a feminine way to conform to gender norms, but that behavior contradicts masculine behavioral expectations placed upon her. For example, a woman may be expected to be assertive and confident, but at the same time, she may be penalized for being too aggressive or not feminine enough (Vedantam et al. 2016).

Women in law face unique challenges that make them particularly susceptible to the double-bind. Women are still significantly underrepresented in the male-dominated legal profession, particularly in leadership positions (Weiss 2021). The American Bar Association reports that as recently as 1970, only about 3% of lawyers were women. Women made big gains in the 1980s and 1990s, but as of 2022 only about 38% of all lawyers were women (American Bar Association 2022). 2014 was the first year that there were more women

than men in law schools; as of 2021 women made up 55.3% of law school students (American Bar Association 2022). Women are expected to be both confident and likable, but these two expectations can be difficult to reconcile. Research has shown that women who are assertive and competent are often perceived as less likable than their male counterparts (Heilman and Okimoto 2007). This can make it difficult for women in law to assert themselves and take on leadership roles, as they may be penalized for doing so. On the other hand, women who are seen as too likable or friendly may be perceived as weak or lacking in competence, which can limit their opportunities for advancement.

This double-bind can affect female attorneys in many ways, including their choices in fashion. In the legal profession, women are often expected to project a professional image that is both authoritative and approachable. This means that they must be taken seriously as legal professionals, but also that they must be seen as empathetic and caring. Female attorneys must attempt to reconcile these conflicting requirements, a problem not typically faced by the men in their field (Rhode 2010). Similarly, women face "unofficial" dress code requirements in courtrooms and offices that make these choices even more difficult. Male judges and partners often expect female attorneys to dress conservatively, to wear skirt suits (with pantyhose) instead of pants suits, and to wear neutral shades on their nails and understated makeup (Han 2021).

All of these inconsistent expectations can make it difficult for women to feel confident in their fashion choices, as they may fear being judged or penalized for their clothing. Women may be criticized for wearing clothing that is too revealing or not conservative enough (Han 2021). Women may feel pressure to wear clothing that is more traditionally feminine in order to appease judges or law firm partners and to evidence approachability; however, others may see this as a lack of professionalism or assertiveness. Alternatively, wearing more masculine clothing can project a more professional and assertive image, but may also be seen as too aggressive or unapproachable (Han 2021). Either way, female attorneys are consistently judged for their fashion choices, and are often stuck in a no-win situation.

10.3 Fashion in the U.S. Supreme Court

We now shift our focus to a series of case studies considering the fashion choices of the six female justices on the United States Supreme Court. We choose these case studies for several reasons. First, the United States Supreme Court is the most important court in the land. Second, the justices are well-known public figures, and are highly influential within the legal community. Outside of their service on the Court, they give public talks at educational institutions and think tanks across the country, many are prolific authors, and many are looked up to in legal circles. Therefore, their choices are likely to have broad influence on the legal community.

Although our focus is fashion among women on the Supreme Court, fashion is not simply the domain of women. Scholars have pointed out that,

for all its influence, the Court is severely lacking in the power to compel (see Rosenburg 2008). The Court depends on the perception that it has power, and many of its choices (from the design of the Court to the secrecy of its proceedings) are meant to reinforce that power. In fact, one of the first debates in the Supreme Court was what the justices should wear. Thomas Jefferson, famous for his opposition to the trappings of elitism, opined that they should do without "any needless official apparel," especially "the monstrous wig which makes the English judges look like rats peeping through bunches of oakum" (quoted in Honig 2018). Hence, the relatively pedestrian black robe became the uniform of the Court.

Over the years, male justices have made changes to the way they wear the robe. For example, Chief Justice John Jay wore a robe with red facing that more closely echoed the appearance of English judges (Klimkiewicz 2005). More recently, in 1995, Chief Justice William Rehnquist began wearing gold stripes on one sleeve of his robe because, as Sandra Day O'Connor recounted, "he had recently seen a Gilbert & Sullivan opera in which the lord chief justice wore a robe with gold stripes" (O'Connor 2013). In both cases, the Chief Justices seem to be using fashion to lend a touch of grandiosity, at the expense of simple republican values.

Still, the tendency to associate fashion with women puts female justices in the double-bind. For example, a 2009 *Washington Post* article includes excerpts of interviews with all of the justices on the eve of Justice Sotomayor joining the Court. The interviews with the male justices focus on the effect of bringing a new justice onto the Court. In contrast, the quotes from O'Connor and Ginsburg focus on fashion, including O'Connor's difficulty finding robes for women and Ginsburg's collars (Barnes 2009). This tendency to focus on the fashion choices of female justices obscures their many contributions to the Court's jurisprudence. The media's focus on flash over substance is nothing new to women in politics. Female politicians have long been subjected to journalists' coverage of their clothing choices and attractiveness (Braden 1996; O'Neill et al. 2016). While female justices wear robes, ostensibly making them look no different than their male counterparts, they are still unable to escape the gendered expectations placed on women.

10.4 Conservative Approaches to Fashion: Justices O'Connor and Barrett

In addition to showcasing an individual's personality, profession, and social status, fashion has a long history of being used to reveal the wearer's political ideals, including conservatism and liberalism (Ford 2022). Formal attire, traditional styles, and dark colors can demonstrate conservative ideas and resistance to change (Ford 2022). At times, female justices on the Supreme Court have used fashion in similar ways to communicate conservative ideals.

10.4.1 Sandra Day O'Connor: Setting Precedent Through Fashion

As the first woman ever appointed to the Supreme Court, all eyes were on Justice Sandra Day O'Connor when she took the bench in 1981. In addition to paving the way for female justices, she was also a pioneer when it came to fashion on the Court, as she had the opportunity to shape precedent for female justices to come. Well aware of her pioneering role on the Court, she chose her outfits, accessories, and judicial robe very carefully. O'Connor's fashion choices were often understated, reflecting her modesty and conservative values. She was known to favor traditional, simple suits and dresses in muted colors (Biskupic 2005). However, she also liked to accessorize with colorful scarves and decorative brooches, adding a touch of personality to her otherwise conservative attire. For example, she often received beautiful scarves as gifts from friends or purchased them during her travels, and she would sometimes wear them to honor the culture or heritage of a particular region (Biskupic 2005).

Her choice in judicial robe evidenced her keenness for tradition. In her own words, Justice O'Connor describes why, upon her appointment to the Court, she immediately chose to wear a simple black robe like her male counterparts, "I am fond of the symbolism of this tradition. It shows that all of us judges are engaged in upholding the Constitution and the rule of law. We have a common responsibility" (O'Connor 2013). O'Connor did add a feminine touch to her black judicial robe once Ginsburg joined the Court: a white lace jabot. This small addition to her robe demonstrated the balance she found between maintaining traditionality on the Court by not dressing "flamboyantly" while still showcasing her individuality and femininity (Biskupic 2005) (Fig. 10.1).

Justice O'Connor was a groundbreaking justice who served on the Court for 24 years, participating in numerous important decisions and authoring the court's opinion on blockbusters like *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2002). However, despite her significant influence on American jurisprudence, the media has often focused on her fashion choices rather than her legal contributions. She was the subject of many news articles during her years on the bench (and after) that specifically described her outfits and accessories worn while in court, for state dinners, on shopping trips, and during other public appearances, something that her male counterparts were not subjected to (Thomas 2019).

10.4.2 Amy Coney Barrett: A Return to the Feminine Ideal

Donald Trump's appointment of Amy Coney Barrett to the seat once filled by Justice Ginsburg represented a transition to a very different sort of political ideology. Whereas Ginsburg was the symbolic leader of the liberal wing of the Court at the time of her death, Barrett represented an ascendant form of cultural conservatism. Barrett attended an all-girls Catholic high school in



Fig. 10.1 Justices O'Connor and Ginsburg wearing their lace jabots for the Court's official photo. (By Supreme Court Official Photo—US Government, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=129135841)

New Orleans, then Rhodes College, and eventually did her JD at the University of Notre Dame. She clerked for conservative icon Antonin Scalia before returning to the University of Notre Dame's law school to teach from 2002 to 2017 (Fig. 10.2).

Analysts critiquing Barrett's fashion choices during her nomination hearings connected her fashion choices to her conservative ideology. Sam Reed of *InStyle* magazine wrote: "Coney Barrett's wardrobe only seemed to confirm her role as the conservative feminine ideal, and the notion that a woman, even a woman in power, should still appear *as a woman* of a distinct mold" (Reed 2020). In contrast to the Hillary Clinton-esque pantsuits of Elena Kagan, on the first day of her confirmation hearings Barrett wore a magenta knee-length dress, pearls, and pink high heels. Later in the confirmation hearings, Barrett wore a matching skirt and jacket with a pink blouse that spawned memes and videos in liberal internet circles comparing her to loathed Harry Potter villain Dolores Umbridge (see YouTube 2020).



Fig. 10.2 Justice Amy Coney Barrett. (By Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amy_Coney_Barrett.jpg)

10.5 Liberal Approaches to Fashion: Justices Sotomayor, Kagan, and Jackson

Other justices have taken a more liberal approach to fashion. These approaches include some combination of rejecting traditional fashions within the legal profession, as well as bold outfits that challenge traditional notions of femininity.

10.5.1 Sonia Sotomayor: Defying Fashion Advice

As only the third woman, and first Latina, appointed to the Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor was closely observed by court watchers and fashion bloggers alike. Before joining the Court, she was known for favoring bright colors and patterns, as well as bold accessories, seemingly as a way to highlight her Latina heritage (Scafidi 2009; Solá-Santiago 2019). Speculation as to how she may depart from long-standing Court traditions was widespread. In fact, for her confirmation hearings, she was given specific instructions by the White House about what to wear, including the admonition to wear a neutral shade of nail polish, instead of her signature bright red (Rubino 2019). Then, once confirmed, the White House exercised complete control over her wardrobe for her swearing-in and related events, requiring her to send them several options, from which they chose an "appropriate" outfit (Gendreau 2009).

While adhering to this advice for the confirmation process, Sotomayor has not put her individuality aside while acting as a Justice. She is still often seen wearing brightly colored blazers and dresses and bold accessories, which

has inspired fellow Latina and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to embrace her culture in her fashion choices as well (Solá-Santiago 2019). She famously wore bright red nail polish to the White House reception celebrating her appointment to the Court, even showing off her freshly manicured nails to President Obama (Rubino 2019). When interviewed (and photographed) by Oprah Winfrey in 2013, Sotomayor wore leopard-print pumps, a fact noticed by Oprah immediately, which she pointed out in the second sentence of the article summarizing the interview (Oprah.com 2013).

Despite the attention given to her fashion choices, Justice Sotomayor prefers to discuss her contributions to the Court and the significance of becoming the first Latina on the Court. She often discusses her childhood growing up in the Bronx and the many obstacles she faced to get where she is. She has refused interview requests from media outlets focused on fashion, even declining a photo shoot for *Vogue* with noted photographer Annie Leibowitz (Bravin 2009). When she has chosen to speak on the issue of fashion, she has said that "it took her years to realize that being a smart lawyer didn't preclude her from also enjoying her 'feminine side'" (Oprah.com 2013).

10.5.2 Elena Kagan's Rejection of Morning Jackets as Solicitor General

Another female justice who challenged traditional notions of femininity using her fashion choices is Elena Kagan. Elena Kagan had a distinguished and well-respected career well before she ended up on the Supreme Court. After clerkships with Abner Mikva on the DC Court of Appeals and Thurgood Marshall on the U.S. Supreme Court, and some brief time in private practice, she ended up on the faculty at the University of Chicago Law School. Kagan bounced between politics and academia, eventually serving a well-regarded term as Dean of Harvard Law School. When Barack Obama won the presidency, he nominated Kagan (whom he knew from the University of Chicago) as Solicitor General.

During her time as Solicitor General, Kagan began asserting her fashion sense. As we noted earlier in the chapter, men also face fashion standards and expectations in the legal profession. The Solicitor General is a victim of a particular fashion tradition: on days when the Solicitor General argues before the Supreme Court, they typically wear a "morning coat" that goes down past the waist, to slightly above the knees. Kagan was the first woman to hold the position of Solicitor General, and she was faced with a slightly different version of the classic "double-bind" problem. If she chose to wear the morning jacket, she would add to the perception that she looks masculine (see Williams 2010). If she chose not to wear the morning jacket, she would be breaking a long tradition. She ultimately opted not to wear the traditional morning coat, on the basis that, whether because she's a woman or because she is notoriously short (5 foot 3), she thought it "looked ridiculous" (Toobin 2012, 171).

During her nomination hearings, Kagan followed similar fashion choices as Sotomayor, selecting a modern combination of colorful blazers and neutral

blouses and pants. In fact, during the first day of the hearings, Kagan wore an electric blue blazer over a black blouse that was very similar in appearance to Sotomayor's outfit for her first day of confirmation hearings (Lat 2010). The similarity was not lost on the media; popular law blog *Above the Law* even asked, "Who Wore it Best?" (Lat 2010).

10.5.3 Ketanji Brown Jackson's Middle-of-the-Road Approach

Just as Donald Trump's pledge to nominate faithful conservatives presaged his selections of Justices Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barrett, Joe Biden's promise to nominate the first Black woman to the Court strongly signaled his eventual nominee. Few were surprised when Biden tapped then-DC Court of Appeals Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to replace the retiring Justice Stephen Breyer in 2022.

Justice Jackson's nomination was historic for several reasons. Much media attention has focused on her intersectional identity as the first African American woman, third African American, and sixth woman in the Court's history, out of a total of 116 justices. But Jackson's nomination was historic in other ways, too: she was the first former public defender nominated to the Court since the great Thurgood Marshall (Mention 2022).

Jackson's fashion choices at her confirmation hearings attracted less attention than some other female justices. To the extent that fashion choices were discussed at all, articles tended to focus on her husband Patrick Graves Jackson's colorful socks featuring George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and John F. Kennedy or her daughter Leila's lavender pantsuit that was featured in high-profile photography (e.g., Pardilla 2022).

Jackson's own fashion choices seemed to blend the traditional and modern. During the hearings, Justice Jackson tended to wear sleek, modern outfits that blended neutral-toned blouses with colorful jackets. This included a white blouse with a royal blue jacket, a black blouse with a bright red jacket, and a white blouse with a purple jacket. Justice Jackson accessorized with large glasses and understated necklaces. In many ways, Jackson's fashion choices were relatively safe, avoiding both the hyper feminine pink of Barrett or the masculine fashion of Kagan. Those in search of a message might suggest that, especially when combined with her husband's patriotic socks, the use of party colors (red, blue) and patriotic combinations (such as her blue and white ensemble) might suggest an effort to communicate that she's every bit as patriotic and American as the senators who were questioning her—a message worth making from a candidate whose intersecting identities make it easy to perceive her as a departure from the traditional white male demographics of Supreme Court justices.

10.6 Ruth Bader Ginsburg: When Fashion Meets Substance

There's a touch of irony in the fact that we conclude Ginsburg's fashion was the most important on the Court. Early reviews of Ginsburg's fashion choices were not positive, and Ginsburg herself was aware of the fact. Ginsburg, for her part, seemed aware of her celebrity status. "In the same month, soon after the U.S. Senate confirmed my nomination to the Court, I made the Style page of the *New York Times* and the *People* magazine list of America's Worst Dressed" (Rosen 2019, 130).

Once she was on the bench, though, her fashion choices started to make an impact. When she was first appointed to the Court, Ginsburg forged a strong friendship with the only other female justice at the time, Sandra Day O'Connor. The two observed that the traditional robe worn by justices was quite masculine. "You know, the standard robe is made for a man because it has a place for the shirt to show, and the tie," Ginsburg said in a 2009 interview. "So Sandra Day O'Connor and I thought it would be appropriate if we included as part of our robe something typical of a woman" (Barnes 2009). Therefore, Ginsburg and O'Connor began wearing a long white jabot similar to those worn by French justices. While the decision may have undermined the anti-elitist imagery of a plain black robe (Honig 2018), it also highlighted the women's femininity.

Over time, Ginsburg's fashion shifted from the jabots to the collars that she is associated with today. The timing of this change in fashion seemed to reflect her transition from a moderately liberal justice finding her place on the Court in the 1990s to her role as the symbolic leader of the Court's liberal wing by the Obama years. Over time, Ginsburg developed quite a collection of collars, as well as a complex methodology for wearing them. In a 2015 interview with Katie Couric after her dissent in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* (2014), Ginsburg showcased her collection. Ginsburg has one collar that she reserves for when she is delivering the Court's majority opinion. The ornate yellow collar, which was a gift from a law clerk, gives a sense of power and authority (Bryant 2015).

Ginsburg's most iconic collar is undoubtedly her dissent collar. She received the collar, which came from Banana Republic, in a gift bag at the 2012 *Glamour* magazine's Women of the Year Party (Abreu 2020). Ginsburg herself was coy about why she chose the collar, telling Katie Couric "This is my dissenting collar… it looks fitting for dissents" (video embedded in Bryant 2015). One might speculate that the collar's studded rows communicate power and authority in their own right, but a harder, more defensive power. On extraordinary occasions, Ginsburg has used the dissent collar to communicate opposition to broader political events. For example, on Wednesday November 9, 2016, the day after Donald Trump was elected president, Ginsburg wore her dissent collar despite the fact that the Supreme Court was not announcing any decisions that day. Ginsburg had previously expressed her

disapproval of Trump, and her decision to wear her dissent collar at the time seemed to be another (symbolic) statement of discontent (Ali 2016).

Justice Ginsburg's embrace of the dissent collar is closely tied to her philosophy on dissents. Even before she was the symbolic leader of the Court's liberal wing at a time when the court leaned rightward on most issues, Ginsburg's academic work demonstrated that she possessed a clear philosophy toward what makes an effective dissent. Ginsburg's philosophy begins with the view that dissents are an important opportunity for justices in the minority to persuade both the present and the future majorities. Ginsburg told Jeffrey Rosen, "We've had a long tradition of dissents becoming the law of the land" (Rosen 2019, 149). In Ginsburg's view the ideal dissent is both persuasive and educative. Justice Ginsburg strongly believed that the most effective dissents had a persuading, and indeed a teaching, quality. Ginsburg implemented these views in many of her own dissents, including her effort to convince her male colleagues of the difficulty of being a woman in a traditionally male industry in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company* (2007) (Rosen 2019, 148) (Fig. 10.3).

Therefore, it is clear that Ginsburg's dissent collar is more than a fashion accessory: it is a way for Ginsburg to symbolically redirect the focus to her substantive views on the law. For many of the other female justices discussed, fashion reinforced the "double-bind." That is, their fashion choices at times distracted from their valuable contributions to the law and the Court's legacy. For example, every moment spent commenting on Elena Kagan's masculine fashion choices was a moment not spent reflecting on her well-received legacy



Fig. 10.3 Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. (By Supreme Court of the United States—Supreme Court of the United States (Source 2), Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=94295523)

as Dean of Harvard Law School. Ginsburg's use of fashion was unique, then, because it escaped the "double-bind" entirely: Ginsburg used her fashion to redirect the focus back to her legal views, communicating her legal positions visually as well as verbally. Her majority opinion collar lent a sense of power and authority when she announced the Court's position on issues. Her dissent collar highlighted her profound disagreement with the Court's decisions on a variety of issues, as well as the election of Donald Trump.

10.7 Conclusion

The double-bind faced by female attorneys extends all the way into the upper echelon of the legal profession, affecting even female Supreme Court justices. Female justices on the nation's highest court should be studied for their historic appointments and ability to overcome unique challenges to get to the Court, and especially for their important contributions to American jurisprudence. However, all too often the six female justices have instead encountered questions and criticisms surrounding their fashion choices, both before and after they took the bench. In turn, each of them has used fashion deliberately to either reinforce or challenge gender norms and the traditional, conservative nature of the legal profession. Only Ruth Bader Ginsburg was truly unique in her ability to use the media's focus on women's fashion choices to her advantage, by using fashion to express substantive ideas and to ensure she always had a voice, even when she wasn't speaking. Her ability to flip the double-bind on its head provides an excellent example to other female attorneys and justices that they have an opportunity their male colleagues do not—the ability to use the inevitable media scrutiny of their fashion choices to take control of the message and to make political statements of their own.

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CHAPTER 11

Michelle Obama and the Strategic Deployment of Fashion

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11.1 Introduction

This case study examines Michelle Obama's use of fashion to construct her own identity as the first African American First Lady in U.S. history. Assumptions about gender, race, and class have shaped public narratives about her fashion choices and leadership style; however, she pushed back and blazed a new path, using the media's fixation with her wardrobe to connect with key constituencies.

To capture this story, we provide a thematic analysis of stories in major national newspapers and magazines, women's fashion and pop-culture magazines, informed by past academic research. We pay special attention to how both economic and political contexts in which Obama entered the White House shaped her ability to create a public image that would connect with Americans from many walks of life while minimizing social and political backlash.

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We conclude that sexist, racist, and classist depictions of First Lady Obama existed, but that Obama did not let such narratives define her. Rather, Michelle Obama strategically deployed fashion to challenge notions of Black womanhood and connect with Americans struggling under the weight of an economic recession. Obama turned the public's fixation with her fashion choices into a strategy, utilizing fashion as a message to champion the issues, and communities, most important to her while forging her own identity as First Lady.

11.2 Understanding Michelle Obama's Fashion Choices: Theoretical Framework, Political Context, and Past Research

From the campaign trail to Inauguration, international visits to late night appearances, Michelle Obama's fashion choices made an undeniable impression. In her role as First Lady, her style became a focus of fashion writers and political commentators alike, making headlines in news publications like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Although Obama was featured in articles and blog posts noting only the color and cut of her dress or her fashion triumphs and failures, many identified her fashion choices as tools to form the narrative surrounding her leadership, and to move beyond critical perceptions of her as a Black woman in a position of influence.

11.2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

There are several theoretical approaches to fashion that help to understand women's fashion choices, identities, and political efficacy as they construct a public persona to match the political office or leadership position they hold. These include theories of branding, power dressing, and intersectionality (Rall 2022).

What high-profile women (e.g., First Ladies) wear can dominate media coverage. Women in leadership can strategically deploy this focused attention on their appearance to send a political message about their values, commitments, identity, and allegiances. Brands derive their appeal from the story of origin, purpose, and character they create (Tseëlon 2018a, b). The debate over how women can brand themselves as both strong and successful, yet appropriately "female" began in the 1920s and continues today (Rall 2022).

Moreover, some women face additional sets of stereotypes and expectations based on their perceived identity. Intersectional identity markers, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and age combine to shape people's experiences and identities, and the way other people perceive and respond to them (Crenshaw 1991; Collins and Bilge 2016). As formerly disenfranchised groups gain political power and leadership roles, they are often still viewed as outsiders.

In the case of Michelle Obama, this meant considering how her race, class, and gender might create stereotypes, expectations, and perceptions about her role in the White House. The role of First Lady is largely symbolic; political image and public approval determine the amount of influence a First Lady exerts. A First Lady wields influence through marriage, rather than through political election or appointment, which places further constraints—and even greater importance—on the symbolic value of her style choices.

11.2.2 First Ladies as Symbols of White, Middle-to-Upper Class, Femininity and Domesticity

The image most Americans have of a First Lady is that of a white middle-to-upper middle class feminine woman focused on domesticity. As the first Black woman to serve as First Lady, Obama had to actively redefine this image. American First Ladies have long influenced conceptions of womanhood and female identity. First Ladies have functioned as "symbols of traditional white middle to upper class femininity in America" (Anderson 2004, 18). Hillary Clinton's professionalism was a departure from previous conservative administrations and challenged existing notions of the "proper" role of an American First Lady (Rall et al. 2022). While Clinton has noted that her decision to stop wearing skirts was prompted by reporters taking inappropriate photos (Edwards 2022), her signature outfit—the pantsuit—matched Clinton's identity as an outspoken feminist lawyer who became actively involved in the Clinton White House and publicly championed critical policy initiatives, including an appointment by her husband to lead the push for healthcare reform. Clinton's style of dress challenged expectations about how a First Lady should look, act, and dress, and reflected her independence, professionalism, and political agency. Despite similarities in their educational and legal backgrounds, Michelle Obama did not follow Clinton's example in the White House.

Michelle Obama's status as the nation's first Black First Lady made a racial re-negotiation necessary to contextualize her place in American political life (Rall et al. 2022; Williams 2009). Race, class, and gender affected how people viewed Obama and her performance of her role (Guerrero 2011). Several scholars have argued that concerns about public attitudes toward the nation's first Black First Lady shaped Obama's decisions about how to express her ethnic background. While she shared a similar educational and professional background to predecessor Hillary Clinton, she returned to the pre-Clinton tradition of focusing primarily on family and domestic life (Dillaway and Pare 2008). Such a choice is strategic as it avoids the public criticism that can result when a First Lady fails to "perform" gender in ways that are socially sanctioned (White 2011).

11.2.3 Political Context

Michelle Obama had to manage fears generated by the "angry Black woman" stereotype while fitting into a role traditionally linked to white-middle to upper-class notions of domesticity and femininity. The political and economic context in which she rose to national prominence influenced her strategic choices about how to do this. Her husband's "foreign-sounding" first name and "Arabic-sounding" middle name fueled conservative concerns about disloyalty and threats to the nation (see, for example, Goldenberg 2008).

The controversy surrounding a *New Yorker* cartoon cover depicting Barack and Michelle Obama as anti-U.S. Muslim militants highlighted fears felt—and manufactured—by conservatives who viewed an Obama presidency as a threat to the nation (ibid. 2008). As First Lady, Obama sought to diffuse these concerns by presenting herself as a proud American woman and mother who was able to relate to, and connect with, women from all walks of life. Her high-profile selection of American designers and off-the-rack fashions reinforced this image, as our analysis of newspaper and magazine articles documents below.

11.3 Research Methods: A Thematic Analysis of Fashion Magazines, Celebrity Magazines, and National News Outlets

A thematic analysis was employed to examine Obama's depiction in various media formats and identify key themes that emerged in the coverage of Obama's fashion choices. Using the search terms "Michelle Obama AND fashion" we explored fashion magazines (i.e., *Vogue*), newspapers (i.e., *New York Times*), and news magazines (i.e., *Time*) published between 2007 and 2016. *Vogue*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* were the focus of this analysis, but dozens of articles from other sources were quickly reviewed to determine if alternative or additional themes emerged. A grounded theory approach was employed to allow plausible themes to emerge when reviewing the data. Five prominent themes emerged as common across all three media types: (1) *Authenticity and self-empowerment*, (2) *media influence on power and femininity*, (3) *economic fashion style*, (4) *support of the marginalized*, and (5) *media emphasis of political fashion*. These themes are consistent with the existing literature and are analyzed individually to illustrate important distinctions.

11.3.1 Theme 1: Obama Embraced Authenticity and Self-Empowerment

Vogue, the leading fashion magazine in the industry, ran several cover stories on Michelle Obama, noting her personal sense of style and confidence and how "relatable" her wardrobe choices were to other American women. For example, a March 2009 *Vogue* article quoted Obama as saying "I love clothes. First and foremost, I wear what I love. That's what women have to focus on:

what makes them happy and what makes them feel comfortable and beautiful" (Talley 2009).

Obama's clothes defied easy classification, representing the different tasks she performed, roles she accepted, and styles she embraced. *New York Times* writer Claire Cain Miller (2008) highlights this in an interview with fashion blogger Mary Tomer in the International Business Section: "On the campaign trail, she's in skinny jeans and a sweater set, and a few hours later on 'Larry King Live,' she's in this beautiful purple frock with a fantastic feathery brooch.... With Michelle Obama, you see the different roles she takes on in her life reflected in her wardrobe. There's an authenticity, a realness, and people can relate," Journalists and designers also described Obama as "inspirational," "accessible," and a person who "won't conform to any of the predefined stereotypes available to her" (Wilson 2010; Etheridge 2009).

Obama utilized clothing to create and convey a sense of authenticity and to feel more confident as a person and in connecting with others. A 2013 *Vogue* cover article quoted Obama as saying, "I always say that women should wear whatever makes them feel good about themselves… I also believe that if you're comfortable in your clothes it's easy to connect with people and make them feel comfortable as well. In every interaction that I have with people, I always want to show them my most authentic self" (Van Meter 2013).

11.3.2 Theme 2: Media Stories Highlight Obama's Refusal to Choose Between Power and Femininity

Obama's perceived success in refusing to choose between power and femininity is well documented. In a 2012 article in the Fashion section of the *New York Times*, Bee-Shyuan Chang (2012), stated, "There is arguably no more powerful influence in American fashion today than the country's stylish, risk-taking first lady." Chang goes on to quote J. Crew designer Jenna Lyons who noted that, "We've sort of gotten used to the suits and really downplaying the femininity aspect. The incredible thing about Michelle Obama is that she's front and center, and it has done a lot for women in that regard" (Chang 2012). In actively deciding to place her femininity at the forefront of her political appearances and clothing choices, Obama sent the message that power and femininity can coexist, and there may be strength in embracing aspects of femininity that allow one to become an effective and relatable leader.

While the decision to embrace femininity can be seen as a capitulation to traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms, it can also be seen as a strategic choice—one driven by personal preference, cultural awareness, including an understanding of the need to avoid controversy within an already hyper-scrutinized administration, and a desire to build broad support.

11.3.3 Theme 3: Obama Selected Clothing to Connect with People from All Walks of Life

A major theme throughout the news, fashion, and popular media was Michelle Obama's decision to combine "high" and "low" fashion to relate to people across the economic spectrum. The Obamas moved into the White House during The Great Recession (2007–2009), a period of marked general decline observed in national economies globally, including in the United States which experienced the deepest and longest period of recession since World War II. Given this context, a decision to make all public appearances dressed in high-priced, exclusive, designer clothing could easily backfire, making the First Lady seem out-of-touch with ordinary Americans who were feeling the economic pressure of the recession. At the same time, a decision to dress exclusively in off-the-rack bargain brands could lead to the impression that an African American woman with working-class roots—no matter how well educated and accomplished professionally—simply did not belong in the White House or "fit in" with the power elite. Perhaps in response to these twin dangers, Michelle Obama opted to combine ready-to-wear off-the-rack and high-end fashion while enhancing her image of inclusive leadership by opting to wear clothing from new designers—especially women and people of color.

Obama's 2008 appearance on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* wearing a J. Crew floral dress, and her 2011 appearance on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* wearing a $34.95 polka-dot dress by H&M are examples of Obama's image as an "everyday woman"—a person one could imagine befriending or chatting with about the daily joys and challenges of marriage and motherhood. While not rejecting high-end fashion, Obama connected with budget-conscious middle-class women across the nation. News magazines and news reports mention Obama's wardrobe from J. Crew, White Market Black Market, and Talbots while referencing sold-out cardigans, dresses, and the importance of affordability (Bates 2016; Lang 2017). Both scholarly and media accounts persuasively argue that Obama's fashion choices, such as shopping online at J. Crew and wearing the same outfit more than once, made her relatable to a wide range of Americans (Elder and Frederick 2019; Ford 2017; Friedman 2017).

11.3.4 Theme 4: Obama Selected Designers to Create Opportunities for the Marginalized

Although J. Crew became a staple of outfit choice, Obama also paved the way to recognize American designers of color (Bates 2016; Lang 2017). Numerous news articles mention Obama's specific choice to wear young minority designers in an effort for inclusivity in fashion. Several of Obama's most celebrated fashion selections were created by "hyphenated American" designers such as Cuban-American Narciso Rodriquez or New York City-based

Taiwanese-Canadian designer Jason Wu, who designed her two inauguration gowns (Tate 2012).

Obama herself has noted that her clothing choices were deliberate, and that she used her platform as a fashion icon to bring attention to young women immigrants and African Americans rather than limiting her selections to clothing by more famous designers (Van Meter 2016). Obama also recognized that using American designers and outfits could promote American business. Obama was quoted in the Style section of the *Washington Post* stating, "For so many people across the country, it is a calling; it is a career. It's the way they feed their families" (Givhan 2016, para 14). (Wilson 2015). The dresses Obama wore in public while the First Lady sometimes sold out within minutes and she used this influence to highlight underrepresented designers who might benefit from the attention. She made this clear in a 2018 interview with Sarah Jessica Parker: "There are a whole lot of people out here who are trying to make it, there are young women and immigrants and black folk … I did know that my clothes were making a statement. So we decided, why don't we use this platform to uplift some young new designers who normally wouldn't get this kind of attention? Because you can change their lives" (Obama 2018).

11.3.5 Theme 5: The Media (Rightly) Viewed Obama's Fashion Choices as Inherently Political

A review of newspaper and news magazine coverage of Obama's fashion choices shows that such choices were seen as commentaries on foreign and domestic policy and economics. The designers Obama selected were scrutinized for how they related to the policy issue or event at hand. One journalist in the Americas section of *New York Times* took note of Obama's outfit designed by a Cuban-American designer, stating she "may have chosen Rodriguez because of [her] desire to improve relations with Cuba" (Horyn 2009). Journalists in the Lifestyle section of the *Washington Post* expounded on this further when Obama chose a dress by a Japanese designer to celebrate the culture of Japan (Givhan 2015b). As noted earlier, Obama was known for highlighting the cultural mosaic of the United States by choosing dresses from designers with a "hyphenated lineage," which can be seen in her choice of a Chinese-American designer for the State dinner with China (Givhan 2015a). This nod to other cultures in her fashion made her a respected figure among many cultures and showed her dedication to goodwill with foreign countries.

11.4 Becoming a National Icon: Evidence of Influence

Blogs, websites, and news sites including the Mrs. O website, Michelle O. Style blog, *Huffington Post*, *Vogue*, *In-Style* magazine, *Essence magazine*, *ABC News*, and the *New York Times* followed her style choices, which increased

public interest in her fashion choices while also providing evidence that women found something interesting and appealing about her sense of style (Mathews et al. 2015). The prevalence of social media only heightened these effects. However, this interest went beyond merely reading about Obama's fashion choices to purchasing the brands the First Lady wore.

David Yermack assessed the impact of Michelle Obama's influence on key fashion brands by examining the stock prices of 29 apparel brands whose merchandise was worn by Obama in public appearances (Yermack 2010). He found that Obama positively influenced these brands with an aggregate gain of $2.7 billion in stock value across the brands, suggesting an increase in sales of brands occurred during this time. Subjectively, Matthews et al. (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with females aged 25–62 finding that Michelle Obama's style made her more down-to-earth, approachable, and relatable to women, and caused them to view her role as First Lady positively. Obama's decision to shop at Target made her seem more genuine, while her decision to wear sleeveless dresses and bold jewelry caused women to take more risk in their own fashion choices. Additionally, participants reported being drawn to certain apparel and retail brands after Michelle Obama appeared in those brands—something the participants viewed as an implied endorsement of the brands or retailers. While the sample size was small and lacked racial, ethnic, educational, and socioeconomic diversity, this study, when combined with Yermack's research, suggests that Obama's fashion choices played a role in gaining the support, acceptance, and admiration of constituents by becoming an accessible public figure that people could relate to and sought to emulate. Public opinion polls suggest that Obama's presence in politics was particularly important to Black women who reported a significant increase in positive feelings toward their own race-gender group (Badas and Stauffer 2019).

Obama's ability to maintain high approval ratings during a period of political, social, and electoral upheaval provides evidence that this strategy was a success. While most Americans told the Associated Press that they did not care what Obama wore to the inauguration, those who offered a response were overwhelmingly positive about her choice (Elder and Frederick 2019). While a sizable number of people told 2009 Marist pollsters they did not think Obama changed fashion at all, most Americans felt Obama had changed fashion for the better, while only 8% thought she had changed it for the worse (Elder and Frederick 2019).

Obama's popularity cannot be attributed solely to her astute fashion choices. Drawing upon a wide range of public opinion data, Laurel Elder and Brian Frederick (2019) identify several important forces behind Michelle Obama's popularity, including her decision to emphasize her role as a mother, give up her career, and embrace traditional aspects of the role. Obama leaned in to gendered expectations of the First Lady and most Americans viewed her as a good mother and a good role model for women. Her fashion choices

strategically reinforced this image, allowing her to avoid most negative stereotypes associated with black womanhood and motherhood (Harris-Perry 2011) and maintain high popularity ratings.

According to sociologist Shirley Tate (2012), navigating a treacherous terrain marred by expectations and assumptions about race, class, and gender while avoiding social sanctions required Obama to perform a "transracial, upper middle class and heterosexual identity" (Tate 2012, 235). On the whole, the evidence suggests that this strategy proved successful. Michelle Obama did not set out to revolutionize the role of First Lady or dramatically change gender role expectations. Rather, she successfully negotiated existing norms, biases, and cultural expectations to strengthen the administration's ability to appeal to diverse communities and build support for its policy agenda.

11.5 An Important Caveat: Becoming a Fashion Icon Did Not Protect Obama from Criticism

Attitudes toward race, class, and gender shaped public commentary surrounding Michelle Obama's appearance and fashion choices. Her body was framed as atypical (Rall et al. 2022), a departure from the norm. She was described as having an "uncommon figure for an American First Lady," and her biceps, often revealed by the sleeveless dresses, created a national conversation, with articles titled "Sleevegate," "The Right to Bare Arms," and "The Upper Body Stimulus Plan" (Fuller 2011).

Obama often focused on the importance of health, nutrition, and fitness in her public-facing role, but that did not stop critics from suggesting that she should cover her arms. Critics of her sleeveless dresses argued that they were too "informal," "out of season," and "distracting" (Ibanga 2009, 151). Such criticism reflects attitudes toward class and race as much as it reflects attitudes about gender. Joan McAllister (2009) has noted the assumption about class driving some critics' anxiety about Obama's muscular arms—arms fit for menial labor, but unfit for display in "polite company" (312).

While some articles directly invoked racially charged descriptions of Obama as "ghetto" and "angry" (Gibbs and Newton-Small 2008, 28), it was more common to question Obama's authenticity and commitment to economic recovery and inclusion. Her choices were sometimes criticized as insensitive (e.g., "How dare she wear a Gaultier blouse while on holiday in Spain during an economic crisis!") and even unpatriotic (e.g., "Who wears a dress by a non-American designer to a state dinner?") (Cottle 2011, 44). Critics noted that while volunteering at a food bank wearing her usual J. Crew cardigan, Obama also wore a pair of Lanvin sneakers, retailing at $450 (DiLuna 2009). While Obama received rave reviews from top fashion magazines like *Vogue* that conferred upon her the title of a "classic American beauty" (Talley 2009), such labels did not free her from constant scrutiny of the appropriateness, socioeconomic, and political implications of her clothing choices.

Given the intense focus on her fashion decisions, the nature of American politics, and the complex nature of the intersection between race, class, gender, and politics, it is not surprising that Obama's outfit selections attracted both praise and criticism. However, Obama emerged as a fashion icon and trend-setter, a dynamic that has continued long after she left the White House (Twersky 2022).

11.6 Conclusion

Though not free from criticism, Michelle Obama successfully used her fashion choices to develop her own personal style, relate to diverse communities of American women, and emphasize the issues that mattered most to her—including her messages regarding the importance of personal fitness, diversity, and socioeconomic inclusion. *New York Times* style critic Vanessa Friedman explained the strategic value of Michelle Obama's American-based style that "... represented the country her husband wanted to lead. It was about the melting pot and the establishment; the 1 percent and the accessible. There was something in her closet for everyone, yet she was beholden to no designer" (2017, 3). This image helped the First Lady and her husband, as the first Black occupants of the White House, to build support for the administration despite political backlash and economic challenges. Michelle Obama worked successfully within the social, political, and economic context and constraints of her time to deploy fashion in an effective and strategic way. A review of past literature, supplemented by our original analysis of diverse media sources, confirms the power of Michelle Obama to influence media narratives, consumer behavior, and public opinion through her fashion choices as First Lady—an influence that continues today.

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CHAPTER 12

First Ladies and Fashion Double Binds

Candice D. Ortbals and Hannah R. Maniscalo

12.1 Introduction

> Look good, but not too good, or people will wonder how you can afford all those great clothes. … Be independent, but not a free thinker, or there will be expectations of marital troubles. (Oates 1993, n.p.)

This quotation elaborates the lose-lose scenario that first ladies face. First ladies are portrayed as objects to be judged but also as upstanding women to admire. They must be as fashionable as celebrities, yet they cannot be frivolous. We ask in this chapter, what double binds, or "lose-lose" scenarios, do first ladies confront in relation to their fashion choices? Do public discussions regarding first ladies' fashions highlight the political agency of first ladies and/or portray them as accessories to their husbands and/or as sexualized objects?

We argue that first ladies face three double binds: (1) the *armpiece-active participant bind*, (2) the *celebrity-ordinary bind*, and (3) the *sexy-plain bind*. These binds dictate that first ladies must bolster their husbands' agendas in non-political ways and dress on par with celebrities, but they also must represent the style of everyday American women. The thematic analysis herein

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examines four fashion cases: Jill Biden's "fishnet" tights, Jill Biden's jacket stating the word "Love", Melania Trump's jacket with the phrase "I Really Don't Care", and Melania Trump's military-style ensemble worn at the 2020 Republican National Convention (RNC). We find that first ladies receive criticism when their fashion distracts from the presidency and that they are applauded for positive and simple political messaging. First ladies must balance wearing low fashion and high fashion because they may be derided for looking too commonplace or for spending too much on clothing. We also find that first ladies are critiqued for fashion choices that are interpreted as sexy.

12.2 Literature Review

Scholarship on the American first lady suggests that the public prefers a first lady who portrays a womanly persona and who embodies hegemonic femininity, a historically White embodiment of womanhood, defined by a focus on mothering and hosting (Handau and Simien 2019). Hegemonic femininity implies that the first lady always will be by the President's side and devoted to his needs. She is more of a feminine helpmate than an autonomous individual. Winfield (1997) describes the first lady as "an escort with her husband; a protocol role for leading fashionable, ceremonial and social events; a noblesse oblige role with charitable works, [and] a policy making role of helping to formulate, develop, and influence issues" (241).

New-traditionalism prescribes that the first lady is a traditional wife and mother but also that she participates in the president's administration in non-controversial ways (Elder and Frederick 2019). First ladies have "become a central part of the 'team' that comprises the U.S. presidency" (Watson 1997, 806), by helping on the campaign trail, giving speeches, and working on "charitable, social, and civic initiatives", typically related to women and families (Handau and Simien 2019, 484). First ladies receive praise for involvement in domestic and international affairs of the country and criticism for a lack thereof. For instance, Michelle Obama was applauded for being active on social media regarding social issues (Newly and Perreault 2018), but media criticized her for not prioritizing human rights (Chao and Zhang 2018).

Portraying celebrity status and representing American women at the same time requires the first lady to carefully choose her fashions. For instance, the first lady's inauguration gown cannot be over-the-top (Sullivan 2018), but it must be elegant because it symbolizes the transition to a new head of state and becomes part of the pageantry that confirms U.S. state sovereignty and power (Behnke 2016; Young 2011; Sullivan 2018). Edith Roosevelt represented this difficult balance. She was celebrated by media and the public for wearing reasonably priced, "down-to-earth" fashions; yet, she was also judged for lacking the high-fashion sensibility of London and Paris (Horohoe 2011, 77–78). Michelle Obama escaped similar criticisms by pursuing a high-low fashion strategy (Poplin 2019); she wore expensive clothing sometimes and

ordinary mall fashions at other times, and her audiences saw her as both a celebrity and a down-to-earth woman.

Because the first lady is expected to be classy and motherly, she is not prominently thought of as a sexy person. Nevertheless, the first lady's fashion and intense scrutiny of it renders her an object of masculine gaze. Keohane, speaking of the first ladies inaugural gown exhibit at the Smithsonian, explains that it "is about a spectator's gaze….[that] affirms a gendered hierarchy wherein women are contained by a need to please men through their appearance…." (2017, 274–285).

12.2.1 First Ladies and Double Binds

We define double binds as a lose-lose scenario, or, "a [social] construct that posits" two alternatives, both of which represent an unsatisfactory social outcome (Jamieson 1997, 13–14). First ladies experience unique double binds. Like women politicians, they are functioning within the confines of a masculine field, however, *unlike* women politicians, they are expected to be traditionally feminine and *not* to approximate normative masculinity. Double binds facing first ladies include:

(1) *Armpiece-active participant bind*: This bind suggests that a first lady should complement her husband, like an accessory on his arm, and that her fashion should reflect his stances and not distract from him in any way. A modern first lady must actively contribute to the presidency, and she could use fashion, for example, to promote a designer with a given political/social identity and/or make non-controversial, political/social statements. Meanings of fashion can be ambiguous and depend on context, thus her fashion activism may be critiqued as a distraction to the Presidency and/or as controversial.
(2) *Celebrity-ordinary bind*: This bind conveys that first lady fashion must be on par with celebrities in order to symbolize the grandeur of the head of state of a powerful nation. However, if her clothing is costly and out of reach of the general public, she will be criticized. She might be congratulated if her clothing is down-to-earth, but she will be critiqued if her clothing is too pedestrian.
(3) *Sexy-plain bind*: This bind suggests that first ladies must be feminine and an object of masculine gaze without being sexy. She should not be sexy or overemphasize her body/physique because she is a proper woman at the helm of the traditional first family. However, she cannot be so dowdy that she is unfashionable or unfeminine.

12.3 Method

We chose to study Melania Trump and Jill Biden because: (1) media compare them as consecutive first ladies, and (2) they differ in terms of identity—Biden is a Democrat and is older and Trump is a Republican, an immigrant, and younger. We utilized a most-different case design (Przeworski and Teune 1970); if the double binds we propose are relevant across the tenures of two very different women, we can conclude that the binds are theoretically significant.

We look at two fashion incidences per first lady. We conducted a thematic analysis of print media, collected from the database Factiva, a global news database from Dow Jones, and from Google news searches. We examine articles published in the first week after the fashion incident and additional articles after that if a first lady later clarifies her motive for said fashion. We documented themes, which we considered to be "commonalities… [and] overarching patterns" across the data (Mills et al. 2010, 2), with a particular eye for the presence of the three aforementioned double binds. Given that print media often report social media content, the emergent themes also depend on social media.

12.4 Analysis

12.4.1 Trump "I Don't Really Care" Jacket (June 21, 2018)

Melania Trump wore a jacket with the words "I don't really care. Do U?" on June 21, 2018. She wore it in Washington D.C. as she boarded Air Force 1 en route to McAllen, Texas to visit children in a migrant detention center, and she wore it as she deboarded the plane in D.C. later that night. She did not wear the jacket while visiting the detention center. The jacket was from the fast-fashion designer Zara, and it was a military-style parka with large, graffiti lettering. We argue that her jacket was understood as dismissive to migrants and/or as an affront to the media and that this case demonstrates the celebrity-ordinary and the armpiece-active participant binds.

The Trump administration's policies of separating migrant children from parents began at this time, and the simplest media interpretation of the jacket was that Melania Trump did not care about migrant children. If this was her intended political messaging, the jacket comes across as "tone-deaf" and "surprising" (Al-Heeti 2018; Agence France Presse 2018). On Twitter, a former government official suggested that the jacket's message was representative of her lack of care. He stated sarcastically, "Dear @FLOTUS, thank you for your refreshing honesty" (Al-Heeti 2018). An immigration advocate considered the choice to be disparaging to migrant mothers. He stated, "'it mocks the mothers who have lost their children and it mocks those babies we heard wailing on that tape' [referring to an audio recording of the cries of young children who were separated from their parents]…'It's inexcusable. It's shameful'" (*The Hamilton Spectator* 2018). One op-ed in *The Washington Post*

indicated that Trump did not fit the paragon of virtue expected of a first lady. The jacket was "not quite the message you want to send when you're traveling to a photo op meant to demonstrate your compassion for children who have been torn from their parents' arms; it's more petulant teenager than nurturing national mom" (Waldman 2018). A "national mom" is an active participant in the president's administration and must forthrightly demonstrate care; she cannot be off-message because of a carelessly chosen youthful fashion. Because many believed the jacket was a political statement, they attributed political agency to the first lady, while, at the same time, viewing her as a reflection of her husband's controversial policy of "zero tolerance" for immigrants (Fig. 12.1).

The jacket can also be understood as a rebuke of the media. President Donald Trump tweeted out this interpretation: "I REALLY DON'T CARE, DO U? Written on the back of Melania's jacket, refers to the Fake News Media. Melania has learned how dishonest they are and she truly no longer cares" (Cillizza 2018). This tweet is fascinating because Melania, through her spokesperson at the time, clarified that the jacket did not constitute political messaging. The spokeswoman said "It's a jacket. There was no hidden message. After today's important visit to Texas, I hope the media isn't going to choose to focus on her wardrobe" (French 2018). Moreover, by tweeting, #SheCares #ItsJustAJacket, the spokesperson suggested that the first lady was practicing a non-controversial political agency of caring. In a 2018 interview, however, the first lady confirmed (or at least adopted) the president's above interpretation. She stated, it "was a kind of message, yes…It's obvious I didn't



Fig. 12.1 First lady Melania Trump arrives at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., Thursday, June 21, 2018, after visiting the Upbring New Hope Children Center run by the Lutheran Social Services of the South in McAllen, Texas. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

wear the jacket for the children…It was for the people and for the left-wing media who are criticizing me. I want to show them I don't care." (*BBC* 2018). The first lady's interpretation makes sense especially considering that the media had intensely scrutinized her for wearing stilettos on a past trip to Texas during the Hurricane Harvey recovery, about a year before.

We see the armpiece-active participant bind in this case. Trump's jacket was understood to be an extension of her husband's callous migrant policy; however, as a first lady, she could not relay his message and at the same time meet the expectation of a caring first lady. If Trump's jacket was her own political messaging, she could be interpreted as being too political and harsh to convey the softness typically rendered by an armpiece wife.

The low-fashion nature of the jacket contributed to the celebrity-ordinary bind. The jacket was judged as undignified; media focused on the jacket's cheap price ($39 USD), graffiti style font, and informal vibe. Melania Trump is known for wearing expensive designer clothing and wearing the "I Really Don't Care" jacket could not, therefore, be interpreted as a haphazard choice. According to media, she did not simply pull the jacket out of her closet and instead must have been using it as a form of messaging. The jacket was interpreted as being beneath Trump's designer standards.

12.4.2 Trump's Military Jacket (August 26, 2020)

Two years after the "I Really Don't Care" jacket, the media inferred another strong message from Melania Trump's fashion—this time at the 2020 Republican National Convention. The first lady wore an army green, military-style jacket with gold buttons, shoulder pads, and heeled shoes that were "pointed as a bayonet". The media drew conclusions about how this fashion related to her and her husband's political beliefs (Goldstone 2020). The ensemble was labeled as fascist and was considered to project a cold demeanor on the part of the first lady. As with the previous case, we note the armpiece-active participant and celebrity-ordinary binds.

The media narrative about Melania Trump's military jacket centered on what political message her husband's administration wanted her to convey and/or what message she herself was sending. Traditional and social media seemed to agree that the first lady was representing the fascism perceived in her husband's administration. One Twitter user said, "Melania appearing in a military-style outfit is no accident. The Trumps are telling you they're authoritarians" (Goldstone 2020). Media compared the ensemble to the uniforms of fascist leaders such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini and said that this was the first lady's way of showing herself to be a proud fascist. Some media suggested that the public believed that Melania was not only giving witness to her husband's ideology but was actively perpetuating authoritarianism herself. The author of one article said, "In wearing decidedly military attire, Melania is sending a secret message about the type of future she and President Donald Trump envision — one in which the military may play a much larger role"

(Ballhaus 2020). Thus, instead of solely supporting her husband, she was believed to be strategically sending a political message. In any case, by evoking a violent ideology, the outfit did not come across as appropriate attire.

The outfit also was judged as "too cold" because it did not align, first, with her message of empathy in the RNC speech, and second, with the expectation that first wives and mothers are to be affable. One Twitter user remarked, "Is it just me or is Melania's choice of dress very military and cold? Not exactly the warm or relatable choice" (*The Heavy* 2020a). Trump's fashion was considered to be unrelatable not just for its military aura but also because it was monetarily out of the reach of ordinary American women. One author joked, "the jacket normally costs $2,450 but is currently on sale at Far Fetched for 40% off, costing 'only' $1,470" (*The Heavy* 2020b). What is more, she paired her expensive suit with Louboutin heels. Recalling that Melania Trump was critiqued for wearing low-cost fashion in the aforementioned case, we note that in this instance, she was punished by journalists and social media for embracing designer fashion.

We conclude that possibly signaling an affirmation of fascism through dress was not suitable for a first lady who is to be a non-controversial armpiece. By representing President Trump's supposed inclination toward authoritarianism, Melania Trump's fashion choice distracted from her speech's purpose to kick off the general election campaign. Her militaristic fashion, if viewed as her own expression and not that of her husband's, was at the very least cold and at the worst anti-democratic. Additionally, even though first ladies are viewed as celebrities, some American women felt Melania Trump's chic and expensive outfit was unrelatable.

12.4.3 Biden's "Fishnet" Tights (April 1, 2021)

On April 1, 2021, Jill Biden was seen exiting Air Force 1 wearing an all-black outfit including a knee-length leather skirt, heeled booties, and patterned tights. The tights Jill Biden wore had a crisscross pattern which some commentators thought was a fishnet design. Fishnet stockings are highly fetishized and sexualized. As such, we note the sexy-plain bind in this case along with the armpiece-active participant and celebrity-ordinary binds.

Observers described Biden's tights as inappropriate and tasteless and as a poor representation of the first family. Much of the conversation about Biden's tights centered around her body and sexuality. Twitter commentators called her outfit "racy" and "trashy". One Twitter user wrote, "Is this Jill Biden or a DC street hustler?" (Trubek 2021) and another called the first lady a "hoochie-mama" (Maxtcat 2021). Other observers, including journalists, academics, and Twitter users, stressed that the first lady should be afforded personal agency regarding dress. One Twitter user said, "the current FLOTUS and indeed any FLOTUS along with any woman on the planet, can wear whatever the hell she likes" (Street 2021). And another remarked, "If my legs looked as good as Dr. Jill Biden in those fishnets & booties, I'd be

wearing exactly the same outfit" (Ritschel 2021a). Notably, Biden herself later claimed personal agency regarding her tights in *Vogue* the following June. She explained her outfit by stating, "They were very pretty stockings" (Van Meeter 2021).

Peggy Drexler, in an op-ed, challenges Biden's personal agency in choosing patterned tights, and, by doing so, reflects sentiments related to the sexual-plain and armpiece-active participant binds. She states,

> She looks 'cool,' sure, but it's not her job to look cool stepping off a plane…It's part of her high-profile, first lady job to look dignified. And gracious. While her spouse negotiates infrastructure plans and coronavirus response and more – and is so far holding on to high favorability ratings – she should not be news. Not for this. (Drexler 2021)

In short, Biden's racy fashion choice was not dignified and gracious and it distracted from her husband's policy agenda.

Two additional themes emerged from media regarding Biden's tights. First, Biden's age was stressed as a reason why her tights were particularly unseemly. One Twitter user commented, "Jill Biden is just too old to be wearing fishnets. It's gross. But Melania on the other hand would rock them" (Lankston 2021). Second, some observers thought the tights looked cheap in terms of cost and/or joked that her outfit had come from a teenage-oriented mall store called Forever 21. One social media user said, "FLOTUS is a Fake Doctor but dresses like a real $5 whore. This is unbelievably bad. As if the country going to hell in record speed wasn't enough. Can someone please DRESS this FLOTUS? This is a fashion crime" (Jamal 2021).

The three double binds intersect in this case. Biden prominently encountered the sexy vs. plain bind. Sexiness for a woman of her age was not applauded by many, and the call for her to be more dignified conveys that it would have been preferable for her to cautious and plain. Biden's fashion statement was a distraction to the Presidency, which resulted in her being scolded for her own personal agency about a style she thought was "very pretty". Additionally, others were frustrated that the outfit appeared cheap in cost and could have been replicated at low-end clothing stores. As with the "I Don't Really Care" jacket, we find that low fashion seems to contradict the high status of the first lady. This is interesting with regard to Biden because she has also been praised as a relatable first lady because she puts scrunchies in her hair and she wears outfits multiple times.

12.4.4 Biden's "Love" Jacket (June 10, 2021)

In August 2021, while in England at the G7 summit, Jill Biden wore a jacket with the word "LOVE" written on the back in rhinestones. She wore the jacket with a modest polka dress underneath. The media almost always compared the "Love" jacket with Trump's "I Don't Really Care" jacket.



Fig. 12.2 First Lady Dr. Jill Biden's "LOVE" jacket. Official White House Photo by Cameron Smith. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:F20210610CS-1045-2_(51362297114).jpg

Biden was largely applauded for her fashion choice, and we argue that she managed to surmount the lose-lose scenarios coming from the armpiece-active participant and the celebrity-ordinary binds (Fig. 12.2).

Media discussions of the "Love" jacket presumed Biden acted strategically in a "Battle of the Jackets" with Melania Trump (*South China Morning Post* 2021) or stated that she was "throwing shade" or making a "not-so-subtle public dig" at Trump (Scanlon 2021). Social media on both sides of the ideological spectrum concluded as such. A Republican commentator, Matt Whitlock, stated, "Jill Biden knows a jacket with words on the back will automatically draw comparisons to Melania, so it's fascinating that she would want a (not subtle) troll move to define one of her highest profile moments in the administration so far" (qtd. in Scanlon 2021). A social media user, presumably not on the Right, proclaimed "quite the contrast to Melania's hate message, isn't it?" (Blazquez 2021). Biden was considered the winner of the so-called battle because her "simple message" of love was more palatable than Trump's message (Noticias Financerios 2021).

The message of love also allowed Biden to be seen as a helpful spouse. A *New York Times* op-ed claimed that as a "supporting player" she was "as much part of the narrative arc as the policy statements" discussed at international conferences (Friedman 2021). When asked about the jacket, Jill Biden responded by saying "Oh, the love? I think that we're bringing love from America. This is a global conference and we're trying to bring unity across the globe" (Vandenberg 2021). One source called the jacket a representation of empathy and "a symbol of change…from chaos and disunity [in the Trump administration]" (*Irish Daily Mail* 2021). One social media user stated "I adore @FLOTUS ❤ It's so refreshing to have a smart, kind, involved #FLOTUS again, and that jacket is ON" (Ritschel 2021b).

The "Love" jacket, by a French designer, cost almost $500 USD, yet it was perceived as ordinary because Biden had worn it once before and had "recycled" it. One social media user claimed, "She's worn this jacket before. Gasp! Dr Jill Biden actually wears an item of clothing more than once, like

most people…And she is a total contrast to the former first lady in just about every way possible – and it's refreshing" (qtd. in Blazquez 2021). Whereas Melania Trump was harshly criticized for slogan clothing because of its youthfulness and trendiness, Biden's choice was perceived of as fun, sophisticated, and within the reach of ordinary American women.

This case does not elicit a lose-lose scenario for a first lady. Biden is praised for joining her husband in messaging about foreign policy. Her message was simple and direct—even to the point of shading Melania Trump—and the media deemed this as appropriate behavior. Biden was not critiqued for wearing designer or slogan clothing; in fact, the combination of the two made her a celebrity-like and ordinary all at once. Biden's positive message of love was fit for a first lady and served as a juxtaposition with the harsh rhetoric of the Trump administration.

12.5 Conclusion

Evidence of the armpiece-active participant and celebrity-ordinary binds was present in every case (see Table 12.1); Melania Trump was caught in these binds in two cases, whereas Jill Biden faced them in relation to her patterned tights but managed to foil them in the "Love" jacket case. When Trump wore the "I Really Don't Care" jacket and her military-styled suit, her messaging was considered inappropriate. Media could not decide if she was simply reflecting the President's agenda or sending bold messages of her own. No matter the extent of her political agency, the messages of fascism or lack of care for migrants did not mesh with the expectation of the first lady as gentle and caring. When Jill Biden wore patterned tights, she claimed personal agency more so than political agency, but she too faced criticism for distracting from her husband's presidency. Biden also claimed agency when she wore the "Love" jacket, and the media interpreted this as a positive addition to the president's agenda. In summary, first ladies, through fashion, embrace an active stance and/or are afforded agency by commentators whether they claim agency or not; and, through this agency, they are held accountable for representing their husbands, positively or negatively. We thus confirm the concept of the New-Traditional first lady, who, in order to receive approval from the public, is mainly an accessory to her husband but also needs to assume some political action that is soft and feminine in nature.

Findings about the celebrity-ordinary bind indicate the need for future research. Recall that Michelle Obama successfully employed the high-low fashion strategy (Poplin 2019), but we found that Melania Trump could not do the same, as she was not relatable in a fast-fashion jacket or in a high-fashion ensemble. We believe that Melania Trump could not believably follow Michelle Obama's strategy because of her reputation for high fashion prior to the White House and as someone married to a television celebrity known for luxury living. Moreover, though many American women on social media applauded Jill Biden for wearing patterned tights that they too could imagine

Table 12.1 Presence of double binds in first lady fashion cases

	First lady fashion cases			
First lady double binds	*Trump "I Really Don't Care" jacket*	*Trump's Military jacket*	*Biden's "Fishnet" tights*	*Biden's "Love" jacket*
Armpiece-active participant	✓	✓	✓	✓
Celebrity-everyday	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sexy-plain	X	X	✓	X

themselves wearing, others considered them too inexpensive—not fit for a dignified first lady. Jill Biden, however, was able to mimic Obama's high-low strategy with the "Love" jacket, which was relatively expensive but was ordinary in its playful and simple message.

The sexy-plain bind was the least prominent in the four cases. When Jill Biden wore patterned tights, media sexualized her and discussed her body, whereas none of Trump's outfits in these particular cases were deemed sexually provocative. Nevertheless, we note that articles about the two Trump cases referenced her body as sexualized by discussing her modeling career, her past fashion choices (e.g., a pussy bow blouse), and her preference for sexy stilettos. However, notwithstanding the Biden tights case, we found no prevailing assumption that first ladies are to be plain in their fashion choices. We believe Biden was expected to be more conservative because of her age, but we generally are inclined to think that first ladies' clothing must be smart and fashion-forward in today's age of media celebrity rather than plain.

Although we have demonstrated that Melania Trump and Jill Biden faced similar fashion expectations as first ladies, we recognize two factors that distinguish them. We argue that media treated them differently due to Melania Trump's commitment to privacy and Jill Biden's age. First, as stated above, Jill Biden's age comes with societal expectations for women about how they should dress. We did not see vitriol directed at Melania Trump's attractiveness, partially because her particular fashion choices in these cases were not overly form fitting, but also, we believe, because she is a younger woman who people see as fashionable and capable of being sexy. Second, Trump was private about her identity as first lady and this extended to a lack of transparency about her fashion choices. Because she was less apt to communicate with the American public, her fashion choices and their intended symbolic messages were up for debate and available for others to judge as ill-intentioned. Given that her husband was loathed in many circles, she arguably could have used fashion strategically to soften his image. However, rather than doing so, she left people to judge her as being equally loathsome. One can therefore conclude that style activism from first ladies is only successful to the extent that the first lady clearly

communicates the symbolic message of her clothing and that the message is soft and positive enough to engender her with the public and the media.

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CHAPTER 13

Section Three Introduction: Women and Minoritized Bodies as Threats

Karen M. Kedrowski, Candice D. Ortbals, Lori Poloni-Staudinger, and J. Cherie Strachan

Section Three brings together chapters focused on symbolism, in particular exploring how women and minoritized bodies are seen as symbolic threats or something to be controlled through dress. What do durags, hijabs, fat bodies, and women's bodies in general symbolize and how does the state or public react to these symbols? The responses to these questions are seen in the eclectic mix of chapters in this section. The chapters cover US (Kedrowski and Krammerer, Keator and Kirkpatrick) and international (Muzee, Prihatini, Sari, and Elvianti, and Meriläinen, Ortbals and Strachan) cases from developing (Uganda and Indonesia) and developed (United States and Finland) countries.

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In particular, these chapters illustrate that when newcomers (women, minorities, fat people) challenge the old guard's exclusive claim to political credibility and authority or prioritize alternative issues, the old guard is apt to invoke stereotypes to undermine credibility and influence. Such attempts are especially likely when women's fashion choices symbolize their rejection of normative masculinity and embrace of progressive, feminist political agendas.

Kedrowski's chapter introduces us to Murray Edelman's classic work, The Symbolic Uses of Politics. Edelman argues that the state uses symbols to maintain legitimacy with the masses as the masses are generally low informed about politics. The framing of bodies as threats or vulnerable to threats means bodies are subject to policing by the state. Kedrowski draws examples from Black women and girls, gay men and transgendered people. For example, women who historically adopted bloomers threatened patriarchal hierarchy, so their clothing choices were policed. Similarly, in present times, drag queens are portrayed as threats to children.

Clothing and bodies can also be used as a proxy for competence and legitimacy. As explored earlier in the volume, women in particular face a double-bind with symbolisms of clothing choice, being judged for being too masculine or too feminine in their choices, or as seen in the chapter by Meriläinen et al., too youthful or too sexy. As we see in the chapter by Kammerer, Keator, and Kirkpatrick, impressions of fat political candidates can shape the public's assessments of these candidates due to implicit bias around fat bodies, particularly women's bodies. Anti-fat bias changes people's perceptions of competence and professionalism, which can have dramatic effects on a person's career potential. In short, fat is a symbol for incompetent leadership. Fat politicians can mitigate fat bias by "dressing the part" to symbolize competence. However, as the authors of this chapter point out, it is more difficult to find professional, high-quality clothing for fat women candidates.

Meriläinen et al. illustrate that even in Finland, a nation known for high levels of gender egalitarianism, women politicians are not entirely immune from gendered attacks on their credibility when they dress and act as women as seen through the Sanna Marin case. The Finnish case reiterates how fashion is a key component of credibility, as we saw in Sections One and Two.

The chapters by Muzee and Prihatini et al. explore the use of dress, particularly traditional or Western dress as a symbol used by politicians, specifically Speakers, in developing countries. As clothing is a symbol, women need to choose clothing that will reinforce their authority without undermining their femininity.

Muzee's chapter looks at Ugandan leadership and how fashion ensures legitimacy for Speaker Among, while Prihatini et al. examine Indonesia. Using gender regime theory, Muzee explores how the current (as of 2024) speaker in Uganda eschewed traditional dress for more modern and tailored styles. Similarly to Kammerer et al., she argues that women need to look good to be taken seriously. Thus, we see in very different contexts (United States and

Uganda), women held to a standard of dress due to their positionality and the symbolism imbued in their sartorial choices.

Prihatini et al. find somewhat different results in Indonesia. Whereas in Uganda we see the Speaker moving toward Western dress, in Indonesia the female speaker embraced traditional clothing as a way to connect with the people. Women choose to wear batik for formal occasions, just like their male colleagues do, and they may appear feminine without worrying about being perceived as less competent politicians. Similarly to what we saw in Sections One and Two, the batik is worn to gain sympathy and connection to regional constituents. In this way, the batik is a symbol for the politicians to show they are connected to the populace. Just like Marin's strategic use of fashion in Finland to indicate a break with old guard politics, women politicians in Indonesia use fashion strategically to symbolize their connection to local populations.

As Kedrowski points out, dress codes as a means of control are not evenly applied, with people from marginalized groups more likely to be subjected to control by the state than the unmarginalized (i.e., white, cis men). Nevertheless, in a country like Indonesia where the batik is a universally established dress code for all formal sessions, this becomes blurred. As Edelman reminds us, most people don't pay attention to the details of policy, so the government uses symbols to justify its actions. Clothing is universal, obvious, and simple to understand. Thus, it is the perfect vehicle for symbolic politics. Differences between countries break down when we consider how fashion is used as a symbolic means of control to indicate who is allowed and not allowed to govern or participate in the system. As a result, these chapters leave us with a troubling question: Should women continue to mimic traditional looks in their fashion choices (for example, women in Indonesia) or should they attempt to break with norms (for example, Hannah Among and Sanaa Marin)? Choosing the latter could be the first step in changing assumptions about women's capacity for political leadership, but this may also carry with it social sanction.



CHAPTER 14

The Symbolic Politics of Fashion: Using State Power to (ad)dress Threats

Karen M. Kedrowski

14.1 Introduction

Murray Edelman, in his classic work *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, argues that the state uses symbols to maintain legitimacy with the masses ([1964] 1985). While a growing literature has noted the political symbolism in dress—such as group membership or eschewing the trappings of wealth—little has discussed how government can use its power to confer legitimacy or to regulate an individual's attire. This chapter applies Edelman's theory by arguing that the state can use its power to regulate clothing choices of the politically weak by framing them in primarily terms of threats (and occasionally as needing protection).

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first summarizes Edelman's argument. The second uses four case studies to demonstrate that states use symbolic politics to regulate attire. The last section concludes and discusses the ramifications of these state actions.

14.2 Edelman's Symbolic Uses of Politics

Murray Edelman critiques the belief that institutions are responsive to citizens' needs and desires, which is the very essence of representative systems of government. Rather, he argues, democratic institutions use myths and rituals to shape what citizens ask of the government, by shaping "what they want,

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what they fear, what they regard as possible, and even who they are" (1985, 20).

Undergirding Edelman's argument is the notion that most people are ignorant of the details of public policy. Thus, symbolic language and actions become the primary means through which the government communicates with the citizens, and how citizens understand their government. For instance, government can maintain policies that are detrimental to ordinary Americans if officials profess to side with the "little man" (1985, 25). Similarly, the administrative state only occasionally enforces laws, thus allowing individuals or corporations to largely ignore the law with few negative consequences (1985, 44–72), resulting in enforcement that is ritualized and symbolic.

Likewise, political leaders use symbols to build and maintain public support. Public support is not, according to Edelman, a product of a rational process. Rather, it is a combination of a leader's charisma; the public's belief that the leader is trying to address problems, even when such efforts fail; and the leader's ability to define an enemy (1985, 73–91).

Because the public is ignorant of policy details, officials use "political actions and speeches make them symbolically threatening or reassuring, and it then responds to the cues furnished by the actions and speeches, not to direct knowledge of the facts (1985, 172)." Edelman's statement provides the framework for this essay that the bodies of powerless people—women; girls, especially Black girls; gay men; and the trans gendered—are subject to policing because their bodies are framed as *threats* or as being *vulnerable to threats* from others.

14.3 Addressing Threats: The Fashion Police

14.3.1 Cross-Dressing and Masquerade Bans

A common way that the state polices people's bodies is through cross-dressing and masquerade bans. Cross-dressing bans specify that one cannot dress as a member of the opposite sex; masquerade bans simply state that one cannot dress in a way to hide or change one's identity (Redburn 2022). One justification for cross-dressing bans was religion. The Old Testament passage Deuteronomy 22:5 states that women should not wear men's clothing and vice versa, with divine disapproval as the consequence; a passage used to enforce dress codes in both the Christian and Jewish traditions (Ademiluka 2013; Irshai 2021). Similarly, men dressing as women is specifically prohibited in the Muslim faith under Shariah Law, which has been enshrined in national or regional laws in some Muslim nations (Sahri et al. 2014).

A second reason for cross-dressing bans is to preserve women's modesty. Pants reveal more of the woman's body than long skirts. Long skirts hide the buttocks, legs, and ankles, effectively desexualizing women's bodies by hiding many of their curves. Pants, when they became popular, scandalized many because they were seen as promoting immorality (Rabinovitch-Fox 2021).

A third reason for cross-dressing and masquerade bans was to criminalize trans people and drag queens. Laws criminalizing cross-dressing began in St. Louis in 1843 (Redburn 2022) and spread to 85 cities in 40 states over the next century (Eskridge 1999, 338–341). Kate Redburn (2022) documents how the trans movement, which predates the gay rights movement and worked in parallel, slowly worked to overturn these laws starting in the 1950s.

However, cross-dressing in general, and drag performances in particular, continue to be controversial. Recently, protests erupted against "Drag Queen Story Hours" at public libraries and bookstores, drag queens riding on a float in a Christmas parade, or drag performances on a college campus (see, for example, Gay and Keenan 2023; Silvers 2022; Stuart 2022). In 2023, Tennessee recriminalized drag queens by banning "adult cabaret performances" that may be held in public or in the presence of a child. The first offense is a misdemeanor. Subsequent convictions are felonies (López Restrepo 2023; SB 3 2022). Fifteen other states introduced similar legislation in the same year (Rogers and Kim 2023).

How do these laws fit into Edelman's theory? First, these efforts to police clothing choices were based upon perceived threats. Initially, women who adopted bloomers, or in some cases, full men's attire, threated the patriarchal hierarchy. By adopting men's dress, women were emphasizing their physical similarity to men. Thus, they may want to pursue intellectual and political equality, in addition to dress equality (Rabinovitch-Fox 2021). William Eskridge notes that the early feminist movement that advocated dress reform, paradoxically, led to stricter dress codes:

> Faced with the newly independent woman, middle class men grew obsessed with cultural reinforcements for their manliness. Concepts of gender inversion [cross-dressing] and sexual perversion were part of a medicalized discourse that responded to men's, and often women's, concerns about the loss of stable expectations about male and female roles. (1999, 3)

More practically, by dressing like men, women were able to access employment opportunities, including enlisting in both Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War—and later demanding pensions for their service—or to find employment in jobs restricted to men. Cross-dressing bans were designed to end "gender fraud" and restore social order. In these ways, women dressing as men again threatened male political, social, and economic hegemony and threated "social chaos" (Redburn 2022, 11).

Masquerade laws were also based upon perceived threats. Redburn (2022) notes that men engaging in violent social unrest in the early nineteenth century would disguise themselves by wearing dresses or as native indigenous persons. Similarly, Texas's law may have been used to tamp down on the Ku Klux Klan, whose members wear distinctive attire and face coverings.

Redburn also argues that trans movement used two strategies to overturn these laws. The first used the First Amendment, stating that clothing choices

were protected free expression. The second was to argue that trans people were no longer a threat, but rather cross-dressing "could be a benign fashion choice, an element of personal expression, or a medical treatment" (2022, 37).

Similarly, drag show prohibitions are justified by framing exposure to drag performers as a threat. For example, drag ban supporters argue that drag performers are "grooming" children, a term that is used to illustrate how abusers recruit children they molest (McMillan 2022). This charge builds upon the stereotype that gay men are also pedophiles. In addition, if drag performances move into the mainstream, children will learn to accept LGBTQ persons, thus threatening and undermining heteronormativity.

Columnist Amanda Marcotte (2022) argues that critics are threatened by drag shows because they: "expose how much of femininity—and how much of gender overall—is socially constructed…The exaggeration of drag draws attention to the lesser, but still time consuming, effort that everyday women and other femme-presenting people put into performing their identity." Thus, building upon her argument, drag then demonstrates that masculine behaviors are neither innate nor biological, but performative, a notion that threatens male hegemony.

I take Marcotte's argument a step further. Drag performers' costumes and trans women's attire may be effective in presenting biological *males* as sexually attractive *females*. As one drag queen, Lil Miss Hot Mess, stated, "I think to accuse us of sexualizing our performances or sexualizing children, is really kind of just trying to attach a hypersexuality to LGBT people… I'm sorry if you're titillated by me, but that's kind of on you, that's not on me" (Rogers and Kim 2023). Thus cis-gendered, heterosexual men could be threatened by the possibility that they could be sexually attracted to a biological male—and consequently be labeled "gay."

A different threat was articulated by West Texas A&M University President Walter Wendler in March 2023, when he canceled a drag show scheduled to be held on campus. He argued that drag performers are a threat because they degrade women and employ negative stereotypes. In his words,

> As a performance exaggerating aspects of womanhood (sexuality, femininity, gender), drag shows stereotype women in cartoon-like extremes for the amusement of others and discriminate against womanhood. Any event which diminishes an individual or group through such representation is wrong… Drag show are derisive, divisive, and demoralizing misogyny, no matter the stated intent. (Wendler 2023)

Of course, as countless Internet memes illustrate, defining drag is difficult and constitutionally fraught (Robson 2013; Rogers and Kim 2023). Depending on the definitions, recriminalizing cross-dressing could bar theatrical performances in which actors play characters of the opposite sex. It could also ban popular movies such as *Tootsie* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*; the television shows *M.A.S.H.* and *Bosom Buddies;* comedians such as Bob Hope, Flip

Wilson, and Tyler Perry, all of whom have dressed as women in their comedy routines; and masquerade balls and Halloween.

14.3.2 Swimsuits and Headscarves

In addition, other state actions have targeted women, notably regulations on women's bathing attire and laws that either ban or require Muslim women to wear headscarves or other religious attire. Since both sets of laws focus on questions of public modesty with the result of policing women's bodies, these examples are analyzed together.

Angela Latham (2000), in her analysis of changing fashions in the early twentieth century, recounts that a primary argument used against women who wore short skirts and sleeveless tops and eschewed the corset and other binding undergarments was modesty. Changing fashions threatened good taste, marriages, and women's virtue, and could lead to "decay of morals and the downfalls of nations" (49). Similarly, eschewing corsets was coupled with the rise of jazz dancing, which meant that the freedom of movement was sensual, which was another threat to morality (50).

Latham documents how the fear of this moral decay led several municipalities to pass laws regulating swimsuits. In the late nineteenth century, beaches were segregated by sex to protect women's modesty. Nineteenth-century women's swim costumes included long skirts, full sleeves, and stockings. Women entered the surf through "bathing machines" that concealed women's bodies as the machines rolled to the surf and they could hide in the water (2000, 67). In 1921, the Jersey shore was embroiled in controversies stemming from varying city ordinances regulating women's swim attire. Atlantic City banned one-piece suits and required women to swim in stockings that covered the knee and a skirt that extended to mid-thigh. The ordinance was enforced by lifeguards and censors employed by the city. Ten miles away, Somers Point allowed both one-piece swimsuits and bare legs. Somers Point was overwhelmed with visitors to the detriment of Atlantic City's economy. Nonetheless, Atlantic City continued to enforce its municipal code. Its authorities famously arrested and jailed Louise Rosine for failing to roll up her stockings past the knee. Rosine declined to pay bail and protested her incarceration by disrobing entirely, declaring that she would remain nude until released (Latham 2000, 78–87).

Swimwear fashions became more and more revealing over time. By the 1960s, the bikini was popular and France decriminalized topless swimming and sunbathing. The French argued that topless beaches were "a way to prove that a woman was liberated and free from patriarchal pressures" (Ledsom 2020). By the 1980s, 40% of French women reported that they had been topless at the beach. This practice has declined to just 19% because of concerns about having one's topless photo placed on social media, sexual harassment on beaches, and worries about skin cancer (Bunyan 2021; Ledsom 2020).

By the early 2000s, France became a focal point in the multi-national debates over burkinis. French municipalities may restrict swimming attire at their discretion. Local governments began to ban the "burkini"—a modest swimsuit favored by some Muslim women that has long sleeves, leggings, and sometimes a head covering—in 2009, with the bans becoming widespread in 2016 (Rosenblum 2017). The burkini bans followed equally divisive bans of the hijab (headscarf), niqab (face covering), and burqa (long dress, covering the body from head to toe) (Berg and Lundahl 2016; Rosenblum 2017; Winter 2008).

In every case, the Islamic attire—not the women wearing it—was framed as a two-part threat. First, Islamic attire is considered a threat to the French value of *laïcité,* loosely translated as secularism. As Winter (2008) notes, French secularism, embodied in French law, seeks to maintain public spaces free of religious trappings. While there are no prohibitions on the private practice of religion, "ostentatious" public displays of personal religious convictions are banned. (Of course, defining ostentatiousness poses its own challenges.) The second threat is to the women themselves. The banned attire symbolizes the patriarchy of Islamic culture, where women are subordinate to men. As Berg and Lundahl (2016) stated:

> In the Western orientalising imagination the veil has remained quite intact and is seen as a never changing garment and a symbol of otherness, oppression, backwardness, and in need of development. (265)

Of course, France is not the only country to regulate religious attire. Turkey, for instance, banned women from wearing the headscarf on university campuses until 2008 (Jones and Goktas 2008). The Canadian province of Quebec has banned the niqab and prohibits most government employees from wearing any religious item (Coletta 2021). A Muslim woman who applied for a teaching position in Germany was not hired because her hijab was "'not suitable' for a teaching position" (Abdo 2008).

In the same vein, 16 countries have banned the burqa (World Population Review 2023). Some countries have justified burqa bans as a national security measure. For example, Sri Lanka considered a burqa ban to counter Muslim extremism (Coglan 2021). In New South Whales, Australia, a proposed ban was justified by alleging that male suicide bombers could hide explosives under the flowing robes (Barker 2014). However, burqa-wearing women have also been framed as a threat. Women suicide bombers who wore burqas killed 13 people in Cameroon in 2015, an incident that led to a ban in that country (BBC 2015). Similarly, the US Department of Homeland Security in 2008 issued a threat assessment that warned that the burqa was a threat because

> …veiled women or men hiding beneath face veils or burqas presented a serious threat were justified on the grounds that the long and flowing material of the

> burqa would allow both men and women to conceal their gender identities as well as dangerous weapons. (Magnet and Mason 2014)

By contrast, some Muslim theocratic nations require women to cover their bodies and/or their hair as an expression of modesty. Saudi women are required to wear the *abaya*, a black flowing gown, in public (Dress Code for Foreigners, Women, n.d.). In Iran, the morality police may arrest women who wear their hair uncovered and women are also expected to wear pants under their coats. In 2022, widespread protests erupted against the regime after the death of Mahsa Amini, who died while in custody for alleged violations of the dress code (VOA 2022). After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban regime reinstated the requirement that women wear the burqa in public, covering their entire bodies other than their eyes (Hadid 2022). Finally, during the ISIS occupation of Mosul, Iraq, the terrorist organization imposed a dress code for women, requiring the abaya, gloves, socks, headscarf, and "a film of black cloth over their eyes." Gowns needed to be "thick and not reveal what is underneath." The dress code was enforced by the morality police who levied fines and issued notices for court appearances (Callimachi 2016). In all these incidents, the dress codes are justified as protecting women's virtue and modesty from males who are not members of their families.

14.3.3 Public School Dress Codes and Uniforms

A dress code defines what *cannot* be worn to school; a uniform stipulates what *must* be worn (DeMitchell 2015). Public school dress codes and uniforms are popular, and today, more than half of public schools have either a dress code or uniform (Ford 2021, 242). Supporters of school uniforms and dress codes argue that they create a sense of camaraderie, eliminate class distinctions, improve discipline, and reduce classroom conflicts, although evidence of these positive impacts is unclear. In addition, surveys show that a majority of parents favor uniforms (Lumsden and Miller 2002).

School uniforms are also justified on the grounds of student safety. If students, for instance, are prohibited from wearing gang colors or symbols, then there will be fewer incidents of violence in the schools (Nyce 2016). Similarly, courts have upheld schools that ban the Confederate flag, swastikas, and other symbols of hatred based on the expectation that such symbols may provoke violence (Glum 2017).

Dress codes and uniforms are problematic. First, they often have different standards for boys and girls, and emphasize white standards of dress over those of racial or ethnic minorities (Aghasaleh 2018). For example, dress codes may prohibit any non-religious head covering, effectively targeting do-rags and hair wraps but not hijabs or yarmulkes. Second, dress codes are not enforced equitably. In 2018, the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) published a study of dress code enforcement in Washington, DC high schools. They found that Black girls were disproportionately targeted for dress code violations and

missed instructional time because they were suspended or sent home to change (NWLC 2018).

The NWLC report inspired other studies around the nation (see, for example, Edwards and Marshall 2020; Knipp and Stevenson 2022; Reddy-Best and Choi 2020). They found similar results that Black students were more likely to be cited for dress code violations than White students. In one study, Black male students believed that dress code enforcement meant "that the school was positioning them as criminals or potential criminals" and cited rules against hoodies as an example. Similarly, Black girls were more likely to be cited because their clothes were perceived as too revealing. This is particularly a problem for girls who are buxom and/or curvaceous (Pavlakis and Roegman 2018).

Dress codes not only emphasize white, middle-class fashions, they can also reinforce heteronormative gender stereotypes. For instance, in 2022, the US Fourth District Court ruled that the Charter Day School in Leland, NC could no longer enforce a discriminatory dress code that required girls to wear skirts, skorts, or jumpers. The school justified its policy "based on the view that girls are 'fragile vessels' deserving of 'gentle' treatment by boys." Other recent cases include a student who was barred from prom because she wanted to wear a tuxedo and another girl whose picture was left out of the yearbook because she refused to wear the required drape (Paúl and Branigin 2022; Robson 2013, 67–72).

In Edelman's terms, dress code enforcement is clearly an example of how the government defines students' bodies as a threat because of the clothes they wear. Males, especially Black males, are a threat because they might be criminals or gang members. Girls, especially Black girls, are a threat because they are sexualized. Dress codes frequently prohibit girls from showing too much skin, cleavage, shoulders, or leg. Even clothing that covers the body, such as yoga pants and leggings, might be banned as too suggestive. These girls are disciplined because their attire is, allegedly, "a distraction" (Ford 2021, 244; Harbach 2016; Pavlakis and Roegman 2018).

However, determining who is threatened by a dress code violation is unclear. On the one hand, dress codes imply that girls' bodies, and their budding sexuality, are *threats* to boys because the boys can't (or won't) concentrate on their schoolwork. On the other hand, as high school principal Jim Bazen articulates below, girls' dress codes need to be rigidly enforced to *protect* girls from the threatening and lascivious gazes of boys and men. After stating that female(s) "will never completely understand the male mind," he writes:

> Being wired more visual, males are attracted to shape and skin. Yes, a lot of bare skin or tightly covered (Spandex!) skin is a sexual distraction to a male.... A dress code policy stating "women, dress how you wish" and at the same time expecting guys to keep their eyes off young ladies with shirts revealing their cleavage, short skirts, tight pants/leggings, shortly shorts, or tight skirts, is like

> walking out in the rain and expecting not to get wet… The only way you can help young men not treat young ladies as sex objects is by telling the young ladies to cover up! (Bazen 2015)

This type of victim-blaming and victim-punishment is all too common, and dress code enforcement that targets girls does not protect girls. Rather, inequitable dress code enforcement communicates shame, deviance, irresponsibility, and objectification to girls (Pomerantz 2007). Given the heteronormativity implicit—and often explicit—in dress codes, they also force children into preconceived notions of what a body should look like. This too poses a problem for gender nonconforming students. Just as in the case of Black girls, trans children subjected to gendered dress codes see their grades suffer and they experience more disciplinary actions. Obviously here too, trans children are perceived as a threat and enforcement of strict gendered dress codes creates an unsafe environment for trans children, leading some advocates to call for gender neutral dress codes (DeMitchell et al. 2020; Glickman 2016).

14.4 Conclusion

This chapter applies Edelman's *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* to the ways that governments regulate attire. Specifically, these case studies demonstrate how the state has regulated LGBTQ persons, female swimmers, Muslim women, and school children. In each case, the state framed each target population as either a threat—or as a vulnerable group needing protection from other threats—and sometimes as both. As Edelman reminds us, most people do not pay attention to the details of policy, so the government uses symbols to justify its actions. Clothing, as universal, obvious, and simple to understand, is the perfect vehicle for symbolic politics.

Yet, policing fashion does not exist in a vacuum. Drag and cross-dressing bans stem from a larger anti-LGBTQ movement. The regulation of Muslim women's attire comes from either anti-Muslim or anti-West sentiments. Gendered school dress code enforcement is built upon the sexist yet pervasive belief that boys and men should not be held accountable for their actions.

Moreover, there are cases that the government should regulate attire, as in protecting the public's or workers' health and safety. For example, mandating that food service workers wear gloves and hairnets protects those who consume food. Personal protective equipment; steel toed shoes, and eye protection; and protective sports equipment are necessary to protect health care workers, people operating heavy machinery, and athletes. Yet the important distinction here is that these protections do not frame other people as threatening based upon the clothes they choose to wear or not wear.

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CHAPTER 15

Sizeable Burdens: The Effects of Weight Stigma on Political Candidates

Edward J. Kammerer, Ananda S. Keator, and Kellee J. Kirkpatrick

15.1 Introduction

First impressions matter. People routinely evaluate others upon first meeting, and they do this within fractions of a second. Split second assessments include not just a valuation of a person's appearance, but also include judging their personality traits (Naumann et al. 2009). These evaluations are based on a complex mix of factors. While people sometimes have the ability to manipulate some of these factors, others, like race, are outside their control. A bad first impression can be overcome, but this requires effort and intentionality. People are slow to reassess their initial judgments of others. The extent to which individuals can shape perceptions of their identity matters for political candidates and officeholders. Because impressions are made in a matter of seconds, voters often make assessments of candidates before they have a chance to engage with a candidate's platform, if they engage with the policy platform at all. With little to base judgments on in these split-decisions other than appearance, for political candidates, appearance clearly matters.

This chapter explores how impressions of fat political candidates can shape the public's assessments of these candidates. First, we review the literature on fat stigma in society to show the many hurdles fat people face across many aspects of social life. We then examine how fashion can be used to

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shape impressions and evaluations of individuals. Next, we discuss the role of appearance in evaluating political candidates. We then bring these discussions together to explore the way fat stigma and fashion shape assessments of fat candidates. We then conclude with a discussion of where future research is needed to better understand this topic.

Before we begin, we wish to explain our intentional choice to use the word "fat." The use of the term "fat" has become the commonly accepted term among the fat acceptance movement (Cooper 2010; Gordon 2020; Kirkland 2008). Words like "overweight" imply that certain weights are or are not appropriate, placing a value judgment on weight. Fat, on the other hand, is a descriptor without inherent comparisons and should not be read with any negative connotations.

We also acknowledge that our focus here is primarily on cisgender people. The literature on political candidates, unfortunately, is limited by the types of candidates seeking office. Transgender, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and other genderqueer people are all also affected by the issues we discuss here, and their relative absence in elected office likely signals that the potential effects are strong. This community faces challenges specific to gender diverse people and warrants a fuller discussion that is beyond the scope of this chapter. We do not, however, intend to imply that those issues are of less importance. To the contrary, the issues facing this community are so important that we do not want to do a disservice by attempting to include them in this limited space. We recommend that future work examines the challenges faced by this community specifically.

15.2 Fat Stigma in Society

Fat people routinely face social stigma in society (Hilbert et al. 2008; Puhl and Heuer 2009). Stigma here refers to the ways that certain identities are seen as inferior, leading to disadvantages across a range of aspects of life; fat stigma specifically "involves the ways in which our society both regards and treats fatness as a bad thing" (Nath 2019, 578). Ridiculing and stigmatizing people based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion is generally seen as unacceptable in society, and many avoid making jokes that target people based on these traits. These same people, however, will still make inappropriate comments about others' weight because homophobia, sexism, and racism are stigmatized in ways that fat bias is not (Nath 2019). This allows fat stigma to continue to permeate society. Even articles that highlight the stigma faced by fat people in society regularly use stigmatizing language. Overweight, a term used regularly even outside of medical contexts, implies too much weight, that less weight would be better. One article focusing on fat stigma in workplaces says it explicitly: "*overweight*…refers to various forms of excess weight and body fat" (Roehling et al. 2013, 238). By defining overweight in terms of "excess" weight, the authors reaffirm the belief that fat people exist in a way that they shouldn't. Fat people are, apparently, too much for society.

Fat stigma does not, however, impact all people equally. Women tend to face greater fat stigma than men, although there is some research questioning this assumption in some contexts (Roehling et al. 2013). Most research, however, shows that women suffer from anti-fat bias to a greater extent than men. Research also tends to find that women begin to experience anti-fat bias at lower weights than men. This is important to consider in the context of fat political candidates because women already face significant disadvantages in seeking electoral office (Fox and Lawless 2010, 2014) and thus, heavier women may opt out of political campaigns entirely (Roehling et al. 2014).

Fat stigma exists across multiple areas of society like employment, medical care, education, and more. Puhl and Heuer's (2009) review of this literature provides important details on the various ways that fat people face discrimination in society. Their analysis of then existing literature shows the harsh reality of fat stigma in society. And anti-fat stigma has been increasing in society since they conducted that review. Thus, the stigma that fat people suffer, and the harms caused by it, are likely worse today than in 2009. In this section, we examine two key areas to demonstrate this stigma in ways that are relevant to fat political candidates: medical stigma and employment stigma.

Medical stigma imposes significant costs on fat people as fat people often receive less effective medical care than non-fat people. Several studies demonstrate the widespread, self-reported anti-fat bias held by doctors as well as the negative experiences patients have as a result (see Puhl and Heuer 2009; Sabin et al. 2012). Using an implicit bias test, Sabin et al. (2012) show doctors, on average, harbor strong anti-fat bias, similar to the general population. Puhl and Heuer's (2009) view of fat stigma in medical care shows that this stigma extends beyond doctors to include nurses, dieticians, and medical students. The discrimination faced by fat people in medical settings leads many to avoid or delay seeking medical care at all (Puhl and Heuer 2009). Doctors assume, often incorrectly, that fat patients' medical issues all stem from their weight. Rather than treat their actual medical issues, doctors instruct fat patients to lose weight. This ignores the growing body of literature showing that weight is at least partially genetic (Choquet and Meyre 2011; Herrera et al. 2011; Park et al. 2021) and that weight loss can be incredibly difficult to maintain.

Fat people also face significant discrimination in employment, with some research showing bias against fat people at higher rates than discrimination against women, racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and other groups (see Henderson et al. 2022). Fat people face discrimination at all stages of the employment process, from recruitment and hiring through discipline and discharge (Puhl and Heuer 2009; Roehling 1999;. Roehling et al. 2007). Unlike other personal characteristics unrelated to job performance (race, sex, sexual orientation, for example), there are few laws prohibiting discrimination against fat people. A meta-analysis of experimental studies on anti-fat bias in the workplace found evidence of bias throughout the employment process. Interestingly, one of the clearest examples of anti-fat bias was not from supervisors making hiring or promotion decisions (although stigma did

exist here). Instead, it came from people's assessments of fat people as potential coworkers (Roehling et al. 2013). Other research has found anti-fat bias against supervisors and other senior personnel (Henderson et al. 2022; King et al. 2016).

Anti-fat bias changes people's perceptions of competence and professionalism, which can have dramatic effects on a person's career potential. For example, fat workers are seen as less competent and lazier than other workers (Roehling et al. 2008). This may stem from the misperception that being fat is simply a personal failing; if fat people worked harder at not being fat they would lose weight. Fat people are seen as less competent and less professional. One study attempted to assess whether weight was related to personality traits like conscientiousness and neuroticism. While they found statistically significant relationships, the variance explained by weight was negligible. They conclude: "the effect sizes are too small to be considered practically significant" (Roehling et al. 2008, 410–411). Some research has shown that moderately and extremely obese workers (as defined by BMI) are less productive than other workers with lower BMI scores, including both mildly obese and overweight workers (Gates et al. 2008). But even here, not all job tasks were affected by obesity. Work that focused on mental or interpersonal tasks were not affected by obesity, but physical tasks were (Gates et al. 2008). Thus, there are some possible differences among fat workers and specific jobs that may lead to different assessments and outcomes.

As we can see, medical and employment bias can both impact fat people, and these biases can combine to create even more obstacles for political candidates. Political candidates' health is often a regular concern in political media because voters want to ensure that candidates are healthy enough to do the job if they are elected. It is routine for presidential candidates to release the results of their physical exams (Annas 1995). In the 2022 midterm elections, then-candidate John Fetterman's stroke was an issue raised repeatedly by the media and his opponents. For fat candidates, the mistaken belief that fat equals unhealthy raises similar questions about fitness for office. The focus on health and the often-misunderstood ways in which fatness contributes to health combines with employment stigma as elections are also about selecting someone to do the work of politics. And fat people are routinely believed to be incapable of doing work as effectively and efficiently as non-fat people.

Clothing for fat people is also challenging to find, particularly professional clothing. This compounds the stigma that fat people face. They cannot easily overcome biased assessments of their capabilities by working to dress the part. As the next section details, fashion is an integral part of how people are assessed—one that contributes to the burdens faced by fat people in society.

15.3 Fashion as Signifier

Clothing plays a significant role in how people assess others across a host of measures (Johnson et al. 2002; Lennon et al. 2014). Even minor adjustments in clothing quality can change how people are perceived (Gurung et al. 2018; Howlett et al. 2013). The type of clothing worn varies depending on the occasion and signals something about the person wearing the clothing. Formal clothing signals different things than casual clothing. Wearing more formal clothing can signal more professionalism, but may at the same time indicate less approachability (Oliver et al. 2022). Professionalism, however, remains grounded in specific ideas of race and gender. Clothing, hairstyles, make-up, and jewelry common among certain minoritized communities are routinely deemed unprofessional by those in leadership positions. This means racially minoritized people are held to standards of professionalism not designed for them (Cumberbatch 2021; Koval and Rosette 2021). This is also true for fat people who are often ignored by the fashion industry, making finding professional clothing challenging (Russo 2020).

Finding flattering fashion for fat people is a fraught endeavor that can cost a fortune. Fashion education does not, traditionally, train designers to design clothing for fat bodies. Textbooks for fashion education routinely exclude images of fat people and equipment to help students learn to drape fat bodies is still not universal (Christel 2016, 2018). This limits the designs available to flatter fat people's bodies, particularly for women. Age also matters here as retailers tend to focus their "plus-sized" collections on women in their 30s and 40s. Younger women entering the workforce often struggle to find professional clothing that reflects their career stage and identity (Gnegy and Christel 2016).

15.4 Assessing Political Candidates' Appearance

Voters assess candidates across a range of factors, including party, policy, and personality. Some of these are clearly more legitimate than others. A candidate's policy views and goals should be a major factor in determining who to support. Their race, gender, and physical appearance should be less important, if considered at all. Voters' assessments of candidates' likelihood of winning also plays a role. Concerns about electability can even cause voters to switch their support to a less-preferred candidate if their preferred candidate is viewed as unelectable. In other words, voters may prefer one candidate, but fear that other voters will not, and that strategic analysis can influence how they cast their ballot (Corbett et al. 2022).

Appearance plays a role in candidate success (Ahler et al. 2017; Chiao et al. 2008; Hoegg and Lewis 2011; Lawson et al. 2010; Lemi and Brown 2019; Todorov et al. 2005; Olivola and Todorov 2010; Praino et al. 2014). Appearance here includes both physical attractiveness and appearing competent. Both

have been shown to provide electoral advantages, although with some variations depending on the target group (e.g. Chiao et al. 2008; Jäckle et al. 2020). Hayes et al. (2014) look at the interaction of appearance and media coverage, rather than appearance itself. They find that media that reports negatively on candidates' appearance lowers support and perceptions of professionalism. This adds another important layer to the ways that voters assess candidates.

Research shows that respondents make determinations about candidates and their appearance in fractions of a second (Ballew and Todorov 2007; Olivola and Todorov 2010). For low-information voters and low-salience elections, candidate appearance can be more influential than in elections with well-known candidates or higher levels of engagement (Jones and Price 2017). Voters who are less informed about the candidates are more inclined to base their assessments on the available information. In low-salience elections, this information often includes just the candidate's appearance. Thus, looking the part may increase a candidate's chance of winning an election (Lawson et al. 2010; Lenz and Lawson 2011).

Several research designs have had respondents rank candidates for office on appearance (either attractiveness, apparent competence, or both) and then compared those results to the elections in which the candidates were running (Olivola and Todorov 2010; Praino et al. 2014; Stockemer and Praino 2015; Todorov et al. 2005). The studies use different methods to attempt to eliminate bias from prior knowledge about the candidates. Based only on photographs, respondents have accurately predicted election winners at relatively high rates. This demonstrates that appearance likely matters to some extent when assessing political candidates.

One way that candidates can work to appear professional is through dressing the part. Clothing contributes to first impressions of people (Johnson et al. 2002), including political candidates. Political success requires clothing to signal competence, professionalism, and electability. Even something as seemingly innocuous as wearing a tan suit—instead of the more appropriate navy blue—can send the political commentariat into apoplexy. Other colors also send specific messages. For example, Democratic women in Congress wore white to the State of the Union, a color long associated with women's suffrage, sending an important message about women's political power (Zraick 2020). Because of the gendered nature of professionalism, this expectation presents challenges for women who must balance conflicting gender expectations. They must look feminine enough to adhere to standard biases about women while also looking masculine enough to adhere to the gendered expectations of what politicians look like, a problem often referred to as the double bind. Professional clothing, however, is not equally obtainable for all political candidates.

15.5 Implications for Fat Candidates

Fat candidates are at a disadvantage when voters rely on appearance, both for assessments of physical attractiveness and for perceived competence. Fat stigma in society shows that fat people are routinely assessed as less attractive and less competent (Puhl and Heuer 2009). Fat people are seen as less capable leaders (Re and Perrett 2014; Re et al. 2012). This influences how fat candidates are seen by voters since leadership is a key trait voters seek in politicians. While former President Donald Trump and former Governor Chris Christie have had political success despite being fat, both faced significant negative press related to their weight (Anderson et al. 2017; Bresnahan et al. 2017). And this stigma may have influenced their political careers. At least one study has shown that media coverage that emphasizes candidate weight can lower public perceptions of competence, a trait directly relevant to electoral success (Bresnahan et al. 2016). Other research has shown how anti-fat bias affects candidates in other ways, both direct and indirect (Elmore et al. 2015; Kindinger 2022; Kwan et al. 2022; Miller 2019; Miller and Lundgren 2010; Roehling et al. 2014). Indeed, the extreme fat bias against political candidates prompted a study evaluating the media rhetoric surrounding Chris Christies' presidential candidacy titled, "Too Fat to Be President?" (Miller 2019, 60), finding that the discussion about his weight leads to assessments about "health, morality, and individual failure."

P. V. Roehling et al. (2014) examined the 2008 and 2012 United States Senate Elections to determine if voters demonstrated an anti-fat bias. They had respondents estimate candidate size from pictures and then grouped those into weight categories. Despite the high prevalence of fat people in society, this study found that "obese individuals were virtually absent" among campaigns for the Senate (Roehling et al. 2014, 339). They did find more "overweight" candidates than obese ones in the two elections studied. Here, they noted a gender effect; "overweight" women were underrepresented in the candidate pool, but men were not. This indicates that overweight women face greater barriers to running for office than overweight men. They found weight bias influenced not just which candidates run, but also voters' reactions to those candidates. Slimmer candidates had a higher vote share, with a stronger effect when the difference in candidate weight was larger. This finding affected both men and women.

As these studies found, fat women face greater barriers to running for office than fat men. While this issue is concerning on its own, it becomes even more problematic when we consider race. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), racial minorities, especially women, face higher rates of obesity than Whites. For instance, recent trends reveal that 54.8% of Black women and 50.6% of Hispanic women are classified as obese. This is significantly higher than 38% of White women. We also see that Hispanic men show higher rates of obesity at 43.1% compared to White and Black men at 37.9% and 36.9%, respectively (Fryar et al. 2018). These data

suggest that fat Black and Hispanic women candidates are even more likely to face fat stigma, and this may be yet another reason for seeing so few minority women in elected office.

Fat candidates may be able to mitigate some of the social stigma that attaches to their weight through intentional fashion choices. Fashion, as discussed above, can signal competence, professionalism, warmth, and other traits that may increase positive assessments of candidates for office. But, this presents challenges. Clothing for fat people is generally more costly and more difficult to find, leaving them with limited options (Bellafante 2010). Indeed, plus-sized clothing options are often quite limited, with plus-sized clothing relegated to a few racks of the overall women's clothing department or only carried in specialty stores, which are often only located in larger population centers.

Furthermore, navigating what is "professional" attire is a much larger minefield for women than for men. For instance, the scope of men's professional clothing is often limited to a specified uniform consisting of a dark suit, oxford shirt, and tie. Women, on the other hand, do not have the same structured expectations. And while this may seem to give women more freedom to find well-fitted clothing, it often opens up their clothing choices to criticism ranging from the choices of color, pants or skirts, accessories, and even the amount of skin showing (Fasoli et al. 2018; Smith et al. 2018).

When professional clothing options are found, fit is often a problem. The challenge of finding well-fitting professional attire is compounded for fat women (Gordon 2020). Unlike men, who generally carry their weight in one place, fat women can carry their weight in several different places (Christel 2013, 2016). Women can carry their weight in the bust, the hips, the thighs, the arms, or any combination of those. This makes it challenging for fat women to wear clothing off-the-rack. Instead, their clothing requires specific tailoring, which adds extra costs. Tailoring professional suits is particularly expensive, adding an extra cost to professional clothing. While tailoring is often a feature of many men's professional clothing stores, this is far less likely in women's specialty stores, making tailoring even more burdensome for women. The cost for tailoring, however, may be worth paying, as two studies demonstrate.

Howlett et al. (2013) compared perceptions of men in bespoke suits and off-the-rack suits. Both suits were the same color and material and worn by the same model (presented using a faceless picture). Only the cut and tailoring of the suits differed, and then only minorly. They found that respondents rated the bespoke suit more favorably. Because they were able to hold constant everything except the minor changes to the suit's tailoring, they concluded that this minor change had a statistically significant influence. Since their study only considered men's suits, future research is needed to determine how this applies to women.

Hayes et al. (2014) had respondents read descriptions of candidates' appearances in mock news articles. These included articles with neutral descriptions

("navy-blue suit and red tie" or "red scarf"), positive ("fit and stylish in a classic navy-blue suit and fashionable red scarf [tie]") and negative ("looking disheveled and sloppy in an ill-fitting navy-blue suit and tattered red scarf [tie]") (Hayes et al. 2014, 1198–1199). The choice to use written descriptions rather than photographs helps the authors here isolate the effects of clothing descriptions. The word choice for the negative articles, however, may have crossed too far into unrealistic descriptions. While many politicians likely do wear ill-fitting suits, the description of the scarf/tie as "tattered" seems to place a finger on the scale. Further research into the influence of specific descriptions and adjectives may be warranted. This does not, however, undermine the importance of finding that negative descriptions matter, even if the degree of those negative descriptions may have added influence.

Both of these studies demonstrate that clothing matters in assessing individuals. Howlett et al. (2013) found higher ratings for the better fitting clothing; Hayes' and colleagues found lower ratings for the ill-fitting clothing. Most importantly, Hayes et al. 2014, 1203) found that the negatively described candidates were assessed a penalty when rated on professionalism, dropping approximately 2 points on an 11-point scale. While neither of the studies focused on fat people, the impact of clothing on professionalism assessments can likely be extrapolated to fat people. As discussed above, stigma marks fat people as less professional than others and the impact of clothing on that rating must be considered. Research is needed that directly addresses the intersections between weight, fashion, and electoral politics.

15.6 Conclusion

Fashion is an integral part of how people assess others. And those assessments matter. When seeking political office, it is important that candidates look professional and competent. For fat candidates, because of the stigma associated with fatness in society, this can become quite challenging. Fat people tend to be perceived as unprofessional, lazy, and less competent than thinner people. They are also routinely ignored by the fashion industry, making finding the necessary clothing to appear professional even more difficult. Unfortunately, research on fat political candidates remains limited. The research that does exist shows an anti-fat bias, but these studies have not yet incorporated fashion as a mitigating element. The studies on fashion show its importance to assessments of political candidates but these have ignored fat candidates.

While this project attempts to unite these literatures, research needs to explicitly bring these two areas together and demonstrate the extent to which changes in fashion can shape perceptions of fat political candidates and, hopefully, help them overcome some of the unwarranted social stigma society imposes on them. These issues can start to be addressed, in part, by encouraging fashion education to embrace designing for fat bodies. This, in turn, can lead to more appropriate clothing which will help alleviate the unwarranted negative judgments fat people face with respect to their competence

and professionalism. And, as the fat acceptance movement continues to grow, attempts to bring light to the role fat stigma plays in politics will help show that fat candidates are equally capable of the important work of politics.

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CHAPTER 16

By the Looks of Her She Is Not Credible: Sanna Marin and Fashion's Influence on Credibility

Niina Meriläinen, Candice D. Ortbals, and J. Cherie Strachan

16.1 Introduction

Women's historical subordination results in ongoing difficulty for those seeking positions of political authority. When women enter the public sphere, their appearance and behavior can trigger the gendered stereotypes that evolved to justify denying their access to political decisions. The physical attributes of women's bodies alone can damage their credibility as political leaders by raising suspicions that they are inherently unqualified. Women candidates and politicians in Western democracies often choose fashions that make them appear similar to men in order to conform to the so-called old guard who are gatekeepers. They may choose tailored pants instead of skirts and closed-toe pumps with low heels. A new generation of young women politicians associated with Fourth Wave feminist agendas have begun to pursue an alternative sartorial strategy. They eschew clothing that disguises

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their bodies to highlight their femininity and to oppose the old-guard gatekeepers (Caldeira 2020). Former Finnish Prime Minister (PM) Sanna Marin, a progressive member of the Social Democratic Party in her late 30s, provides an example. Her wardrobe highlighted her youth and gender as a foil to older, established politicians who are men. We find that this tactic worked to her advantage in the eyes of a younger and more progressive audience (Parmelee et al. 2023) but left her vulnerable to the old guard's gendered criticisms.

We employ a least likely case analysis of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's tenure (2019–2023). Our findings demonstrate the continued influence of the old guard, who overtly critiqued Marin's fashion choices and youthful behavior in order to question her credibility. We also find that progressive Finns believe Marin's fashions elucidate her own empowerment and signal political change. Our conclusion is particularly salient considering that Marin stepped down from party leadership in 2023, leading to her exit from the prime ministership.

16.2 Literature Review: Credibility, Fashion, and New Politics

Leaders with perceived credibility can successfully frame issues, actors, and events, which allows them to influence debates and decision outcomes (Druckman 2001; Meriläinen 2014).[1] Framing is a process that shapes realities in our thinking and affects how actors, from individual people to media to organizations, view issues, events, and other actors (e.g., see, Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Lippmann 1922; Meriläinen 2014). Classically powerful actors, the political elite or what we call here the old guard, serve as agenda setters and gatekeepers, and they not only determine who should have access to political power and influence, but frame which policy issues are legitimate and what actors are credible. Those who are not in power feel pressure to follow the gatekeepers' lead in order to continue receiving support for their own agendas (Bennett et al. 2011; Bob 2009; Meriläinen 2014, 11).

Women have difficulty establishing the credibility required to become powerful gatekeepers because Western political theory has judged them to be emotional and irrational, with bodies that make them unfit for democratic participation and political leadership. Moreover, the old guard tends to marginalize narratives that diverge from their own priorities, to the exclusion of youth, minorities, and women (Fridkin et al. 2006; Kidman and O'Malley 2020; Meriläinen 2019, 2021, 2022; Meriläinen et al. 2022). When women challenge the old guard's exclusive claim to political credibility, the old guard and social media influencers who embrace the old guard's patriarchal values are apt to invoke gendered stereotypes to undermine women's credibility and, therefore, women's influence (Funk and Coker 2016; Marjanovic et al.

[1] Source credibility refers to credibility that the message sender has (Meriläinen 2014, 2019, 2022).

2022). We expect that such attempts are likely when women's fashion choices symbolize their rejection of normative masculinity and embrace of progressive, feminist agendas.

That said, the so-called new guard in politics is often open to new behaviors, styles, and media, which leads them to expectations about fashion and credibility distinct from that of the old guard. Fourth-wave feminists often use hashtags to call out misogyny online, see social media as a conduit to introduce new voices into political debates, and use fashion and self-presentation to challenge male gaze (Caldeira 2020; Looft 2017). These younger women, part of the so-called new guard, sport fashions that match their own uniqueness and all styles are possible—ones that express androgyny, traditional masculinity, and/or traditional femininity. Younger citizens also use newer communication and media platforms to participate in politics. Social media influencers can encourage political efficacy (Harff and Schmuck 2023), and, in Finland, young adults identify various online influencers, such as activists, young politicians, and celebrities as credible political agenda setters, often valuing these online sources over traditional ones (Meriläinen 2021, 2022). Despite the significant power of the old guard, we expect shifting gender norms, emerging communication technologies, and changes in who constitutes the electorate to potentially undermine existing power structures in politics (Bennett et al. 2011; Meriläinen 2014, 2022).

16.3 Least Likely Case Analysis of Finland's Former Prime Minister Sanna Marin

16.3.1 Finnish Case

We evaluate the case of a former Prime Minister Sanna Marin to assess how the old and new guards have framed her as a credible and/or uncredible leader.[2] The old guard in Finland consists of people over 50 years old. These are current or former party leaders, labor union and industry leaders or journalists, military personnel, and political commentators. They are white, mostly Christian men who dress according to normative masculinity and must not appear too feminine or soft. Previously the old guard used "sauna agreements"; the good old boys go to the sauna, drink, and make decisions that benefit their political parties and various industries. Alternatively, the new guard includes fashionable and sometimes provocative 20-to-45-year-old politicians, social influencers, musicians, artists, and activists. The new guard often has connections to NGOs, think-tanks, and consultancy firms, where they have worked. Among other issues, the progressive new guard supports LGBTQI+ transrights, energy efficiency, and NATO membership. Though social media tactics

[2] Finland is a parliamentary democracy with a multi-party system. While the Prime Minister is the head of the government, the President is the head of state and leads Finland's foreign policy in cooperation with the Government, which must enjoy the support of a majority in parliament.

were first associated with efforts of the new guard to challenge the status quo, Finnish politicians across the ideological spectrum now communicate through social media and use technology to support their issues.

Marin became PM when her predecessor stepped down in late 2019 (Finish PM 2019). When she was elevated to PM at the age of 34, all of the governmental parties were headed by women, which drew much national and international interest (Niethhammer 2019). Marin's government (2019–2023) was supported by various left and centrist parties, including the Greens; the Social Democratic Party, Centre Party, Green League, the Left Alliance, and the Swedish People's Party. Although polls show she was a popular PM, her government faced internal and external disputes due to policy disagreements, the COVID-19 crisis, and the war in Ukraine. She also faced much sexism and frequent and graphic sexualization online. She was called "a cum bucket," "whore," and "crackhead"; and online threads discussed Marin's alleged drug use, alleged nose job, weight loss, sexuality, and sexual behavior.[3] Nevertheless, Marin has one million followers on Instagram, which is unheard of for a Finnish politician, and many online commentators defended her and called out misogyny (Mikkola 2020).

In the 2023 elections, Marin received a landslide number of votes as the second most popular candidate in the nation, yet she and the Social Democratic Party lost the elections, coming in third, and the Left and the Greens lost a huge number of seats in the parliament. After the election, Marin stepped down as a party leader, stating that years of political leadership had strained her wellbeing and urged the press to stop publishing stories about her private life (Kangas and Piirainen 2023; Marin 2023).

16.3.2 Method

A least-likely case "is one that should not conform to the theory"; but, when it does conform, it provides strong support for the theory (Koivu and Hinze 2017, 1024). The theory we seek to evaluate is whether old-guard gatekeepers and their embrace of traditional gender norms are still powerful enough to diminish women political leaders' credibility when their fashion and behavior do not conform to normative masculinity. Finland is among the least likely countries worldwide to maintain traditional gender norms because, in 2022, it ranked second on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap and fourth on the European Union on the Gender Equality Index. According to Levy, "the inferential logic of least likely case design is based on the 'Sinatra inference'—if I can make it there, I can make it anywhere" (Levy 2008, 12). Therefore, if we find that the fashion expectations of normative masculinity affected Sanna Marin's credibility in Finland, we can conclude that women politicians in many countries will face credibility critiques related to fashion.

[3] These comments were noted in various online social media threads, such as Ylilauta at https://ylilauta.org/, by one of this chapter's co-authors.

We analyze three fashions: Marin's blazer ensemble photographed in *Trendi* magazine, a leather biker jacket worn to Sweden and to a music festival, and body armor worn in Ukraine. These incidences are connected inflection points that create a self-referencing narrative about Marin's credibility and leadership.

16.4 Case Analysis

16.4.1 Blazer Ensemble and the Trendi Cover

In early October 2020, after almost one year as PM, Marin appeared in the Finnish magazine *Trendi* wearing Finnish jewelry and a black blazer with a plunging neckline with no shirt or bra beneath it. The photo was taken at the Prime Minister's official government residence. Marin's look was interpreted as a surprising choice for a woman politician because it violated the expectation that women leaders embrace normative masculinity, as the featured photograph highlights Marin's jewelry and her breasts (see Fig. 16.1). The cover photo and the corresponding magazine interview were reported widely in Finland and internationally (Woodyatt 2020). *Trendi* published the photo with the caption, "Prime Minister Sanna Marin has a leading position as an example, a role model, a change[r] of things and an influencer."



Fig. 16.1 *Trendi* cover (Photo credit: Jonas Lundqvist/A-Lehdet Oy)

Political opponents of Marin used this incident to frame her as an immoral, incompetent, calculating, and inferior woman (Sakki and Martikainen 2022). They charged that casually posing like a fashion model at the time of COVID-19 demonstrated Marin's lack of concern for the health crisis. One conservative pundit alleged that Marin was successfully playing the media game; she knew exactly what she was doing and used the photo to distract from the crisis. Similarly, Finnish entrepreneur Aki Pyysing critiqued Marin's economic policies alongside discussing her cleavage and alleged "attention-seeking." Two conservative members of parliament shared Pyysing's blogpost on their social media accounts, but later took down the posts and apologized for mocking Marin's appearance (Cohen 2020). The *Trendi* photo began a years-long debate about Marin's credibility as a prime minister. In the fall of 2021, a psychologist wrote a newspaper op-ed expressing concerns over Marin's ability to do her job. He framed Marin's recent weight loss, changes in her appearance, and her personal habits, such as running for exercise and late-night cleaning stints to reduce stress, as signs of mental instability that should disqualify Marin as a credible political leader (Mäkinen 2021).

Young progressive women supported Marin when she faced criticism and rejected the criticism as demeaning to women. The supporters also noted that unorthodox photos had been taken of previous Finnish leaders (Odom 2020). On social media, with Marin's acquiescence, they began using the hashtags #imwithsanna and #misogynyvisible to convey approval of Marin's attempt to associate her body—and by extension other women's bodies—with political leadership (Woodyatt 2020). Some supporters paired the hashtag with a photo of themselves dressed in a low-cut blazer without a shirt or bra. *Trendi*'s editor-in-chief said "it was hard to interpret the criticisms as anything other than misogyny" and that Marin should only be seen as being "dressed in a trendy black trouser suit" (Moody 2020).

Marin arguably used fashion to challenge the boundaries of what is professional and appropriate for a political executive to wear, and according to Anu Koivunen, a Finnish gender studies professor, she did so "with full cognizance." She stated that Marin is "media savvy and this social media storm [over Marin's outfit] did not come as a surprise" (as quoted by Craw 2020). Koivunen's claim can be validated in two ways. First, in the *Trendi* interview, Marin engages the topic of fashion and politics and interprets why she wears what she does. Given that Marin discussed fashion constraints and concurrently agreed to be photographed in the low-cut blazer, she likely recognized the blazer's potential controversy. Second, Marin regularly uses social media and has portrayed herself as a bride, a mother, and a fun-loving person; thus, her blazer photo may be considered another incident of social media transparency. Later that year, however, Marin commented that "I want the focus to be on issues, not on how I look" (Peltola 2020).

16.4.2 Leather Biker Jacket in Sweden and at a Musical Festival

In April 2022, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Marin visited Stockholm, Sweden to discuss the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO. Given Finland's historical neutrality with NATO as it relates to Russia, the meeting symbolized a significant action against Putin to advance Finland's security. Marin was photographed with Swedish Prime Minister, Magdalena Andersson, who wore a blue overcoat and knee-high leather boots. Marin wore a black, biker-style leather jacket with black pants, showcasing another rarely seen style in Finnish politics, particularly on a state visit abroad (Thursday's Papers 2022) (Fig. 16.2).

The biker jacket was not revealing like the *Trendi* blazer, yet it generated significant media coverage—both negative and positive. Leather jackets are associated with rock-n-roll music and with being young and "cool"; thus, negatively, the jacket dovetails the accusation that Marin is uncredible because she is young and/or distracted by her chic social media self-presentation. After becoming prime minister, various online media outlets, but also traditional news media in print, radio, and TV, accentuated Marin's age and her arguably irresponsible behavior like partying (see below). Regarding the leather jacket, Swedish newspaper columnist Oisin Cantwell asserted that no leading Swedish politician would dare wear a leather jacket (Thursday's Papers 2022) and



Fig. 16.2 Sanna Marin on the right, with the-Swedish PM Anderson on the left (Photo credit: © Anne Sjöholm/valtioneuvoston kanslia [The Finnish Government office] https://www.flickr.com/photos/finnishgovernment/52002013294/in/album-72177720298077756/; https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/10616/prime-minister-marin-meets-with-swedish-prime-minister-in-stockholm)

an Instagram user decried, "Embarrassing what kind of clothes this girl is [wearing]… At least the Swedish prime minister is an elegant woman…" (Hullumpi 2022).

An alternative interpretation is that the biker jacket symbolizes toughness and assertiveness in foreign policy. A fashion influencer, Sami Sykö, said of the diplomatic meeting in Stockholm that "Sanna Marin's leather jacket says that Finland does what it wants" (Sykö 2022). A commenter in an online forum stated, "honestly just makes her kind of badass" (Our Prime Minister 2022). Marin's Instagram video in late April of 2022, about a week and a half after her trip to Sweden, bolsters this interpretation. She wore the biker jacket with jeans and sneakers while performing pull-ups at a park, and she commented, "with the family at the playground. I should have filmed the first 5 [pull-ups]. These [last few] were more burdensome" (Matthews 2022). Some social media users claimed her video elicited strength, with one Finn stating, "Our wonderful Prime Minister…strength in this very challenging world situation. Love to see you breaking conventional thinking patterns by representing in a leather jacket 🔥" (Siirtola 2022). Another saw the jacket as strength *vis-à-vis* Putin and put it this way, "Prime minister of Finland doing pull-ups in a leather jacket. I'm pretty sure Putin can't do that" (Roinila 2022).

The international press praised Marin as well. Swedish journalist Joanna Bergh announced Marin was "bringing contemporary fashion to politics (Thursday's Papers 2022), and *The New York Times* labeled her leather jacket her "trademark" (Bennhold 2022). She also has been labeled a "rockstar," with the connotation of being highly admired. What is more, sales of biker leather jackets rose 179 percent immediately after Marin's visit to Stockholm (Klarna's Purchase Data 2022).

Marin's response to the narrative surrounding the biker jacket was to continue to wear it, not only in the abovementioned Instagram video but also on several later occasions. At the Ruisrock music festival (Turku, Finland) in July 2022, she was photographed again wearing the jacket, but this time with ragged jean shorts and black combat boots. Responses to this fashion choice ranged from people considering her cool and beautiful to speculation that she staged the photo or that the photo is evidence of her "party girl" persona (Fig. 16.3).

A month later, in August 2022, a video of Marin partying with her friends surfaced on social media (Kwan 2022; Thomas 2022). Marin was not wearing the leather jacket, but she appeared in casual clothing, she was drinking, and she danced and/or embraced men other than her husband. Her footloose behavior led many to believe she had taken drugs and the incidence furthered the framing of Marin as youthful and uncredible. Some social media commentators fashioned Marin as a whore and a cheater (RÄMÖ 2022). Previous prime ministers—members of the old guard—harshly criticized Marin. Former PM Jyrki Katainen claimed he would have been forced to resign under similar circumstances, while former PM Antti Rinne compared Marin's behavior to that of his daughters when they were teenagers (RÄMÖ 2022). Marin's



Fig. 16.3 Sanna Marin at Ruisrock music festival Finland (Photo credit: Janita Autio)

partying could also be seen as dangerous to the country as some claimed it made Finland look soft and weak at a time in which Russian-relations were challenging or that Russia could use the video for disadvantageous propaganda. Others were not bothered by the partying itself but believed that she did not present a "good look" ("I am also human" 2022). One Reddit user states, "I want the ministers to party and have fun even in difficult times. But Marin does it in a way that destroys her credibility" ("I am also human" 2022). Again, women around the world took to social media to defend Marin. Hillary Clinton and Joan Baez tweeted themselves dancing along with the caption "keep dancing" (Baez 2022; Clinton 2022), and a woman journalist from UK said that "Marin is showing the world that politics isn't just for privileged men in suits" (Murphy 2022). Marin's own response to the leaked video was contrite but bold. She took a drug test to prove her innocence, and she stated on TV that she "did wrong…[and] should have considered the situation more carefully" (Picheta and Meilhan 2022). However, she also argued

that she thinks "Finnish society and its resilience can withstand me singing and dancing with my friends" (Milne 2023).

16.4.3 Body Armor in Ukraine

In May 2022, Marin visited the heavily bombed cities of Irpin and Bucha and met with Ukraine's President Zelensky (Marin Visits 2022). The visit was heavily publicized, but only afterward due to security concerns. Marin conveyed her support for Ukraine by providing Zelensky with military aid and by disengaging from Russian trade and energy. The media focused on photos from the trip in which Marin is wearing all black and body armor, including a bulky bulletproof vest that disguised her physique.

Marin's look was hyper-masculine, but she still encountered sexism. Some social media participants commented on her attractiveness, stressing that she still looked good even with masculine clothing. One tweet sexualized her by stating, "Sanna changed her bra to a bulletproof vest" (Marleena 2022). Others interpreted the masculine, military look as fake or contrived for political purposes. Some questioned if she was featuring this look in Ukraine as a way to kick off a 2024 campaign for the presidency, which is the office in Finland most responsible foreign policy (Kauppinen 2022). It should be noted that Marin was photographed as she was learning about Russian war crimes, thus she appeared teary-eyed and horrified. This prompted some commentators to claim that her look "says it all" and that she must have been processing the atrocities as a mother of a young child (Business Ukraine Mag 2022). Others thought her look was akin to a photo-op. One person said, "she is excellent on pretending and posing" (Hämäläinen 2022). A Finnish man on Twitter stated, "A bulletproof vest creates a sense of danger for the viewer. Great propaganda. 5/5" (Ranta 2022a). He also tweeted, "There are so many classic and over-the-top transparent things here. 1. The look is perfect 2. The bulletproof vest creates seriousness. 3. Marin's image from an elitist princess to a brave leader. Will people buy this?" (Ranta 2022b).

Social media praise for Marin's trip to Ukraine far outweighed the above criticisms (Kuronen 2022). Praise for Marin centered on her bravery, her support of Ukraine, and her strength in light of observing atrocities. People also expressed that they could understand the emotional significance of atrocities by way of Marin's actions and expressions. A comment from a Finnish woman on Marin's Instagram photo, which included the body armor, summarizes this well. She explains, "these pictures bring tears to my eyes ☹Your visit was an extremely important show of support for Ukraine. May the strength be with you ❤" (Hyvarinen 2022). To our knowledge, Marin did not respond to critiques about the body armor and instead went on to emphasize security throughout her tenure. She successfully led Finland into NATO, which, despite critiques from her political opponents, was a favored policy in public opinion polls (Fig. 16.4).



Fig. 16.4 Sanna Marin wearing body armor (Photo credit: Irpin city government)

16.5 Conclusion

Sanna Marin challenged the assumptions of the old guard by relying on new modes of communication and choosing to present herself in ways that are novel to Finnish politics. Marin purposefully refused to modify her public presentation to disguise her biological sex, gender identity, or her youth. However, throughout her prime ministership, her age, appearance, behavior, and friendships became liabilities as opponents and media outlets used selective framing to cast doubt on her ability to serve as a credible political leader.

Upon becoming prime minister in late 2019, Marin stated "When it comes to social media or Instagram, I think I'm an individual - a real person even though I'm a prime minister also. So, I won't change the way I behave" ("I Won't Change" 2019). Her use of social media does not shy away from identities and experiences that have historically diminished women leaders' credibility. She consistently portrayed herself as a friend and a mother, as a bride and later as a divorcée, and as a young, fun-loving person. She was seemingly intent on pushing the boundaries on the embodiment of her nation's political executive. This argument is best represented in an op-ed, where the author concludes Marin's social media and photo shoots were cultivated to "convey the unspoken message: 'This is what a leader looks like'" (McBain 2020).

Marin's defiance of normative masculinity appealed to her progressive base, but, despite her ongoing personal popularity and her potential to shift cultural norms toward inclusion, Marin's efforts to challenge traditional gender norms by physically embodying egalitarianism in Finnish politics proved difficult as she experienced significant sanctions from the old guard. Marin's attire may be

considered appropriate for a woman of her age, but it was not deemed appropriate for a politician, which then implies that young women are thought of as incapable and unqualified to wield political power. Such criticism gained enough traction that Marin was forced to expend valuable political capital defending her choices—even to the point of taking a drug test. Ultimately, she decided to step away from party leadership and Finnish national politics.

We see Finland as a least likely case to affirm the old-guard approach; if Finland has not moved past requiring normative masculinity to establish credibility, we doubt women politicians' ability to do so elsewhere. The Sinatra inference that emerges from our case study of Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin makes clear that those who fail to mimic normative masculinity in the public sphere still suffer a loss of credibility. Women who attempt to embody egalitarianism by embracing their sex and gender identities while wielding political power, especially as prominent politicians, are still subject to considerable social sanctions and backlash. While women may be welcome as grassroots activists, when they break through to elected office, those who fail to embrace and mimic normative masculinity are quickly subject to exhaustive social sanctions and quickly reminded of their proper place.

These findings leave women politicians in Western democracies with a troubling dilemma: to continue mimicking the old guard in an attempt to successfully wield political power, or to follow Sanna Marin's lead by highlighting their status as women in an attempt to change deep-seated cultural norms about women's role in the public sphere and capacity for political leadership. Choosing the latter could be the first step in triggering a sea change in assumptions about women's capacity for political leadership, but this choice is not without significant social sanctions and damage to their political credibility and ability to govern.

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CHAPTER 17

"Eh eh eh My Lord, Looking Dapper": Rebranding the Speakership and Women's Political Leadership in Uganda?

Hannah Muzee

17.1 Introduction

The 2021 elections for speakership in Uganda's 11th Parliament (2021–2026) were marred by controversy, creating several factions within the ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM). In a bitter campaign, the incumbent, Rebecca Kadaga (2011–2021), who many believed to be an independent voice and protector of legislative autonomy from executive interference, lost to Jacob Oulanyah, the Deputy Speaker (2011–2021) who thought it was his time to lead. Tensions were further amplified following Oulanyah's death due to illness shortly after the election. Oulanyah's former Deputy, Anita Among (2021–2026), was then charged with taking the helm amidst controversy and suspicion of her competencies as a capable leader of parliament.

Succeeding Rebecca Kadaga, Uganda's first female speaker and seasoned politician, was no easy task. Some claimed Among needed more time to learn the ropes of the speakership. She, therefore, had to prove herself worthy of the position. However, she carved her own path and created a unique leadership style. Her former boss was known for his love of bow ties and his acute handling of parliamentary affairs. In the wake of her leadership, social media was awash with interest in her fashion sense, characterized by well-tailored feminine western style suits as depicted by this comment from a celebrity on Twitter, "Eh eh eh my lord…looking dapper Hon @AnitaAmong" (Idringi 2022). While Among's fashion sense certainly looks like a rebrand of the

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speakership and women's political leadership in Uganda, the central question in this chapter is whether fashion is a triviality for women politicians or can be used to their political advantage. Through content analysis of social media X posts (formerly Twitter), guided by gender regime theory, this chapter examines citizens' outlook on women politicians' appearance in Uganda and its impact on women's political careers. I argue that fashion can be used as a conversation starter; it yields political advantages but can be considered trivial in many ways. Nevertheless, women politicians should not shy away from expressing themselves through clothing; despite the unwelcome attention it may draw, it is a stage-setter.

17.2 Ugandan Case

Uganda is a pluralistic political system that allows representation of political parties and minority groups such as women. Women, through the gender quota system of reserved seats, have been able to gain more presence in the legislature and other positions of governance. This affirmative action policy received significant backing from the National Resistance Movement, the current regime in power, with a running term from 1986 to 2026; however, 35 years since the introduction of gender quotas in 1989, the number of women in parliament has stagnated at the 30% level. Scholars have argued that the policy of reserved seats for the gender quota system has tokenized and further marginalized women rather than enhancing their substantive representation (Ahikire and Madanda 2009).

It could be argued that the reserved seats for women in Uganda are used to benefit the ruling party more than women, the purported primary beneficiaries. The reserved seats are based on the number of districts in Uganda. Over time, the number of districts has significantly grown from 33 in the 1980s to approximately 146, representing the exact number of reserved seats for women. The NRM, as the long-serving and ruling party, is entirely entrenched in the countryside and therefore presents the only viable option for women and any first-time political aspirant lacking financial and social capital to get into office. Consequently, a large percentage of the women occupying reserved seats belong to the NRM party, presenting an advantage to the ruling party, given that women are also the most significant voting constituency. However, the system of reserved seats as argued by Wang and Yoon (2018) has instead ghettoized women's political representation and limited their numerical representation because it only provides for a minimum representation for women in parliament.

Nevertheless, despite the daunting path toward gender equality in the political and governance spaces in Uganda (Tamale 1999), for the first time in history, many of the country's top positions are being held by women. As of 2023, the Prime Minister, Robinah Nabbanja, has been in power (2021–2026) and, for the second time since 1994, the Vice President is a woman, Jessica

Alupo (2021–2026). Also for a second time in a row, the Speaker of Parliament is a woman, Anita Annet Among (2021–2026), and, peculiarly, the first lady of Uganda, Janet Kataaha Museveni, has served in two parliaments and is the Minister for Education and Sports in Uganda since June 2016. Overtime the country's electoral gender quotas, in the form of reserved seats, have led to a significant increase in women's representation in parliament to 34% in 2023, although the presence of women in politics under the incumbent NRM, that is branded a pro-women government, is marked with criticism (The State House of Uganda 2022).

Besides the critiques that women's presence in politics in Uganda is tokenized as a result of the gender quota system, some scholars have continued to argue that the Ugandan political system characterized by patronage and clientelism has made women politicians more loyal to their political parties than to women (Tamale 1999; Collord 2016). Furthermore, many political actors and citizens consider parliamentary seats gained from the gender quota as the preserve of women, whereas parliamentary seats tied to constituencies for men. The reserved seats have made it hard for women to vie for constituency seats, thus keeping their numerical representation at a minimum. Nevertheless, the continued presence of women in positions of power and at high levels has created a culture that is accepting of women in politics, and women have strategized to ensure pro-women legislation in areas of sexual and domestic violence, criminalization of harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation among others (Ottemoeller 1999; Goetz 1998). Criticisms aside, women politicians have continued to hold their ground and carve a unique path for themselves amidst the maze of patriarchy, patronage, and clientelism in Uganda.

17.3 Gender Regime Theory and Fashion

When a spotlight is shone on women, keen attention seems not to be on their politics but on their aesthetics, fashion, social status, marital status, and parental status, including with whom they have children. This phenomenon, especially regarding fashion, could be explained by gender regimes theory (Walby 2020). The theory argues that gender relations, as depicted in the public space, reflect what happens in the domestic sphere of life. For instance, women's unequal representation in the polity is demonstrated by their status in family and society. In organizations, gender regimes are depicted in several ways, in the division of labor, power relations, emotional and human relations, and gender culture and symbolism, such as fashion, where certain forms of expression, e.g., speech or dress, are attributed to women. The use of women's fashion, rather than their political ability as an evaluation tool, is a manifestation of gender stereotypes in politics, as depicted in the case of the Ugandan Speaker of Parliament Anita Among. The focus on the speaker's fashion sense presents a form of private patriarchy translated into public patriarchy (Walby 2020), perpetuating the notion that women need to be good to

look at and hence should adorn themselves accordingly, regardless of the space they occupy. The enhancement of women's stereotypical femininity downplays women's role in the polity, only to emphasize that even when they are present, it is perhaps for decoration purposes, hence preserving the androcentric nature of politics (Daly 1973). In situations where women attempt to fit in, they need to conform to the norms of the political space, which would mean abandoning flowery dressing in an attempt to exude power (e.g., dressing in darker colors and tailor-made suits). The phenomenon of "power dressing" began in the 1930s and was characterized by the wearing of tailored suits with additional accessories such as shoulder pads to provide the illusion of broad shoulders like those of men. In modern times, it has evolved to incorporate feminine attributes such as softer colors like pink, slimmer, and fitted silhouettes, as seen in the clothing of Anita Among, which features stereotypical feminine colors (Kim and Bae 2016). Similarly, in other settings such as the United States and Asia, women politicians', fashion has always drawn more attention than their accomplishments and capabilities (Oh 2019).

Should women then abandon power dressing since it draws more attention compared to the dressing of men, perhaps not Adducci (2019) argues. Aside from the apparent depiction of one's social status, dress can be used to assert one's political power (Witte 2021). Politicians' clothing determines how they are viewed by their constituents and colleagues. A study by Gurney et al. (2017) found that both men and women benefited from dressing smartly and that they were able to manipulate competency ratings through their dress. Therefore, dress, too, can speak. An initial message is conveyed through clothing choice, perhaps validated through words or used to confuse one's audience by presenting an image that distracts and covers up one's inadequacies. For influential people, their dressing communicates power, enhances charisma, increases respect, builds solidarity, incites specific emotions, or is used as a substitute for words (Desai 2022; Osiebe 2020).

17.4 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative content analysis research design to analyze text on the social media platform X, formerly Twitter. Content analysis is used when one attempts to derive meaning from words in several recorded pieces of information in different media such as books, newspaper articles, websites, media records, television, informal conversation, or social media (Stan 2010). Content analysis utilizes several units to analyze text, such as *sampling units* which include the study of words, sentences, and/or paragraphs; *recording units*, which include the analysis of relevant ideas in text; and *context units* that allow for the inclusion of assertions in the evaluation of text (Stan 2010).

I analyzed context units, which typically allow the researcher discretion over the choice of posts that fit the subject under observation. The context unit of content analysis was used in tandem with manifest analysis, which involved the presentation of the actual statement from the X posts (Bengtsson 2016).

Consequently, the content analysis was performed on two X posts and affiliated posts and replies to these posts. The content was analyzed from the X posts of Patrick Salvador Idringi, a comedian, engineer, and radio personality, and Samson Kasumba-Mulunda, a news anchor on one of the national television stations in Uganda (Flash UG News 2020; NBS 2023). Of note is as of 2023, statistics show that Uganda has approximately 601.2 thousand X users with an advertisement audience of 22.9% females and 77.1% males (Kemp 2023).

17.5 Analysis of Anita Annet Among

Anita Among represents the success of women's representation in Uganda's political scene. She became the Speaker of the 11th Parliament of Uganda in 2021. Anita Among was born in 1973 in Bukedea District and has served as the woman member of parliament for this district since 2016. In 2021, she ran unopposed for the ruling party, the National Resistance Movement. She holds bachelor's degrees in business administration and law and, before her political career, worked in the banking sector and academia as a lecturer. After failing to be elected under her original affiliation with a popular opposition party in Uganda, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), she ran for parliament as an independent candidate in 2016 and later under the NRM party in 2021(Esiana 2021).

While Among has been a long-serving woman member of parliament since 2016, she rose to popularity when she vied for and won the speakership of the Ugandan Parliament in 2021. Suffice it to say that she had big shoes to fill: those of the first woman speaker, Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga, who had been speaker from 2011 to 2021 (Who is Who 2017). Rebecca Kadaga is a lawyer who served as a member of parliament since 1989 and occupied positions such as the Secretary General of the East African Women Parliamentarians Association in 1996 and on different occasions Minister of State for Regional Cooperation (Africa and the Middle East, from 1996 to 1998), Minister of State for Communication and Aviation from 1998 to 1999, Deputy Speaker from 2001 to 2011 and currently, as of 2023, the First Deputy Prime Minister of Uganda and the Minister for East African Community Affairs.

Given that Kadaga's extensive political career placed Among under public scrutiny, contrary to popular expectation, it was certainly not going to be a battle of wits between her and her predecessor; Anita Among was determined to be her person, and quite unexpectedly, her fashion sense stood out contrary to her predecessor's which was prosaic, presented in less tailor-made and unstructured suits more like off-the-rack kind of clothing. In a highly contested speakership election, Among certainly exploited fashion as a democratic medium to draw attention to her person and position. Her fashion created a space for citizen deliberation on political issues (Miller 2005), as seen from the X posts.

Among's fashion sense was amplified on social media by famous TV Personality Samson Kasumba-Mulun on X. He commented: "When you are a public

figure, invest time and money in finding people who will make you look sharp and elegant. Many people underestimate the power of getting the appearance right. @AnitahAmong The Rt. Hon. Speaker is on top of her game. This is not an accident. Bravo." This was supplemented by another post, "You look so lovely, Madam Speaker. You are a true representation of the face of parliament" Guminkiriza (2023). These statements draw similar admiration to Michelle Obama's "Feminine dresses, kitten heels and kitschy brooches," which proved that power doesn't have to be dull and boring but can allow influential women figures to express their individuality (Betts 2011). Anita Among presented herself in well-tailored and structured Western-style women's suits, creating a clear distinction from other women politicians like her predecessor Rebecca Kadaga, who was primarily clad in African print clothing with occasional Western-style clothing (Fig. 17.1).

Other comments on Anita Among's dressing by Kasumba-Mulun (2022) include: "Dress right, then walk with some authority, confidence and a swagger. Because we have become a nation that does not care about small details, those who invest time in them stand out. Madam Speaker, get the job done *Osirike* (Keep quiet)…." This was complemented by another post, "You are very right, Samson Kasumba, Rt. Hon. is super smart" (Kyatusiimire 2022). "*Kyona Kyekiri* (That's it), she really nailed the look, and she has been consistent in always keeping it up, dats [y] I want younger leaders, but these old guys with their funny dresses and suits, *olemwa!!!*(You fail)" (Sema 2023) (Fig. 17.2).

Her fashion sense was not short of praise, with comments such as "Am not a regime apologist but, to be honest, the speaker is elegant," and the "Speaker (being) a true representative of Ugandan Ladies, very beautiful, kind



Fig. 17.1 Rebecca Kadaga (Nandudu and Masaba 2023)



Fig. 17.2 Anita Among, Speaker of the Uganda Parliament (Twitter Post [Kasumba-Mulun 2022])

and smart." The former was affirmed by another post that read, "by the way, madam speaker, you need to teach…members of parliament how to dress for occasions…(to) represent the country…" and that she is "a true representation of the face of parliament." "For sure, this 11th parliament Hon speaker really looks very active, time management, energetic or physically fit more than even her bodyguard the way am seeing her in motion., good luck my lord and keep on be active for a better Uganda in tomorrow's history" (Okullo 2022). "She represents Uganda…She cannot be scruffy, really!" (Katompanga30 2022), Another noted, with a couple of some other strong affirmations, "…Looking smart is a mindset" (Fish 2022). The affirmation comments on Among's fashion sense demonstrate how one's appearance can dictate personal or professional relationships (Raj et al. 2017).

The commentary about the Anita Among's fashion sense also acknowledged its regularity. "This is not having money, far from it. It has a fine taste for drapery. Eventually, I shall end up in fashion punditry after all, there too controversy abounds. Just send me pictures of other smart people if you have them. They have to be smart regularly, not once in a while" (Kasumba-Mulun 2022). Contrary to Veblen's (2007) argument that expensive items or pieces of clothing are considered beautiful and the reverse for inexpensive items, the latter post argues that one's economic status does not necessarily determine their fine taste in clothing but rather fashion taste is related to one's personality that is appreciative of proper representation (Fig. 17.3).

Subsequent X posts were, however, riddled with mixed emotions. While other comments to the X post affirmed that "her being smart is paramount…" they noted that "she is funded by taxpayers…anyone can, given [the] same benefits and privileges. Its money that changes our situations" and "with a budget like hers, you can only look shabby by choice." Some thought that "looking great on the outside [meant] nothing if you have ZERO on the inside." In other cases, the Speaker's fashion tweets sparked disgruntlement with the political leaders. One commented, "Ugandans need serious work to uplift their living standards, not fashion displays by some of our leaders who are consumed [by] self-praise." "This is not a showbiz parliament…to engage in showing off all types of dresses in the name of smartness, no!" In some instances, the disgruntlement presented the triviality of fashion for politicians. A post noted, "Fashion is my taste, but this is trivial for a speaker only to be known for [fashion] compared to what is actually biting the country."

Disapproving of Among's fashion sense, a social media user stated, "I remember parliament passed a bill which bars public servants from putting on skirts which are above the knee. What could have gone wrong?" (Adam 2022). This post makes reference to the Uganda Ministry of Public Service establishment notice 1 of 2017 on the dress code for the non-uniformed officers in public service, which recommends the dress code for female public officers: "[a] dress, a skirt or dress that is not above the knees…" (Ministry of Public Service 2017). The comment on dress code is akin to clothing regulations in certain professions, such as the military with prescribed uniforms or



Fig. 17.3 Anita Among, Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament (Twitter post [Kasumba-Mulun 2022])

corporate organizations and schools; however, what is considered decent for women in politics and other facets of society is usually enforced legally with limited consultation of the concerned parties, consequently highlighting the sexual stereotypes and gender regimes in the polity, expressed in the control of women's appearance. While certain forms of dress worn by women, such as corsets, were outlawed due to their detriment to women's health, in modern times, the dress suits for women have been institutionalized as acceptable for the workplace, albeit with restrictions to form and fit (Miller 2005).

Findings from X show that some Ugandans trivialized fashion, but is fashion trivial for politics? Unfortunately, the patriarchal system associates fashion with femininity and hence uses it to trivialize women's participation in public spaces such as the polity. On the other hand, Among's fashion is praised by the public and arguably aids in her popularity among the public.

17.6 Conclusion

Among's dressing attracted several comments with mixed sentiments. While some praised her sense of fashion, others argued that it was expected of her, given her allowance as a Speaker of Parliament, but that it contradicted the dire political and economic situation that many expect the legislators to be interested in addressing. For a politician to indulge in fashionable and expensive clothing seemed unbecoming when a big chunk of the population is wallowing in poverty. Thus, while fashion, as argued by Oh (2019), has become for female politicians a nuisance, they can still use it to their advantage. Drawing and keeping attention to oneself is important to ensure relevance, or there are many chances of one sinking into oblivion. Fashion and dressing can be a conversation starter and women politicians should not shy away from expressing themselves through clothing; despite the unwelcome attention it may draw. But, fashion is a tool to be used carefully. Because some fashions can mislead or cause misinterpretation of an individual's cause, political dress should be used in moderation to balance one's wealth and one's need for political expression (Miller 2005).

The attention to Among's fashion sense, in light of quota systems, shows how gender regimes influence women politicians, highlighting the tokenization of women under quotas. Most importantly, the presence of a few women at the top, while symbolically relevant and inspiring, is not sufficient to rid the political system of gender stereotypes. The tokenization of women instead preserves the patriarchal and androcentric nature of the polity (Daly 1973). On top of tokenization there is: policing of women's appearance that is rooted in the power dynamics of society and modes of oppression and exploitation (Tsoumpra 2020; Robson 2013). Is parity a solution, then? Perhaps, since it will help even out the playing field, but indubitably, gender stereotypes toward women politicians will not disappear without a deliberate focus on societal mentality change.

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CHAPTER 18

Traditional Attire and Political Statement: A Case Study of Indonesia's First Female Speaker

Ella Syafputri Prihatini, Dessy Kurnia Sari, and Witri Elvianti

18.1 Introduction

Fashion is often seen as a personal preference that has nothing to do with civic engagement or political life. However, studies have shown that fashion has played a significant role in political involvement and protest, from the French Revolution to post-revolutionary China (Parkins 2002; Roces 2022a; Titton 2019). Fashion provided symbolic and narrative spaces within which to articulate, negotiate, and perform issues. A growing body of literature on fashion and politics suggests that politicians face consequences for their sartorial choices, yet women tend to experience a double-bind in which they are judged both for being too feminine and too masculine (Barlett 2019).

Women politicians in the United States, for example, are commonly dressed in pantsuits or skirts with political statements displayed either by the color of the outfit or accessories such as mace brooch, lapel pins, pearls, and sneakers (Rosholm 2009; Bernhard 2022). In countries like South Korea, female leaders are perceived better in Western attire rather than traditional Korean dress (Oh 2019). Hence, suits versus dress is the most notable debate

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surrounding this field of fashion in politics, in which the common understanding asserts that female politicians will be more inclined to conform with men's professional attire.

Women need to choose clothing that will reinforce their authority without undermining their femininity, hence traditional dress is often becoming a least preferred option (Roces and Edwards 2010a). However, traditional dress has been strongly associated with political statements, such as a political strategy to support anti-colonial movements presented by Mohandas Gandhi in India. A study on Burmese parliamentarians suggests that fashioning and reinvention of traditional attire has accelerated the pace of decolonization, while serving as an effective tool of representation (Egreteau 2019). Traditional dress also served as a signal of nationalism in embracing cultural wealth, and this is strongly relevant with the case of Indonesia, an archipelagic country with over 300 ethnic groups (Artada 2023).

This chapter aims to investigate how traditional dress has been used as a political statement by Indonesia's first female Speaker of the House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*/DPR), Hon. Puan Maharani. The chapter shows how the dynamics surrounding "fashion and politics" in Indonesia is not about suits versus dress, as female members of parliament (MPs), and female politicians at large, are not really considering the need to look masculine to garner political support or public approval.

By applying (1) content analysis on news articles regarding several events in which Puan Maharani wears traditional dress during her official activities and (2) semi-structured interviews with women politicians, this paper seeks to understand how fashion choice may or may not help women to convey political statements. The findings will shed light on how the experience in Indonesia uniquely does not conform to what we have seen in western and other Asian countries in terms of gender, fashion, and politics. Instead, it opens an alternative avenue on how female politicians can exercise their liberty in combining political statements and traditional attire. Women choose to wear *batik*[1] for formal occasions, just like their male colleagues do, and they may appear feminine without worrying about being perceived as less competent politicians.

18.2 The Politics of Fashion

With few exceptions, the study of politics has ignored fashion, whereas scholars in sociology, ethnography, culture studies, history, and even philosophy have discussed various facets of how we dress from various viewpoints. One might

[1] *Batik* is an Indonesian technique of wax-resist dyeing applied to the whole cloth. The technique has been part of Indonesian culture since ancient times. *Batik* became Indonesia's cultural heritage after it was determined by the Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on October 2, 2009, hence October 2 is celebrated as National *Batik* Day. *Batik* comes from a Javanese word *ambatik* which means a cloth with many dots.

reasonably ask why there is such a resolute lack of interest (Behnke 2016). Scholars agree that politics and clothing are linked (Hillman 2013; Gökarıksel and Smith 2017; Delgado 2018). It can serve as a historical record of a civilization as well as a social status indicator or a personal political statement. Wendy Parkins (2002) argues that what leaders and individuals wear is a crucial indicator of their political engagement, sense of loyalty, and personal history. Observing the use of traditional attire by the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders for the yearly formal photographs, Roces and Edwards (2010b) further contend that cross-cultural fashion exchanges in public indicate a readiness to consider the world from a different viewpoint and temporarily put oneself in another person's shoes, even though the display was only for a short period of time.

Nevertheless, systematic inquiry on the politics of fashion and gender has been dominated by the Western context. For example, Sullivan's (2018) work on media coverage of first ladies and their inaugural gowns in the United States (1961–2009) concludes that the dress serves as a political allegory for American aristocracy as well as a display of national pride. Furthermore, Williams (2021) finds that British mainstream press coverage of Prime Minister Teresa May's ascension in 2016 was more gendered than the coverage of Margaret Thatcher's in 1979. Media coverage has become increasingly more informal, hence more gendered, personalized, and sensationalized. On a broader aspect, Brown and Lemi (2021) explain the politics of appearance for Black women politicians that both challenge and provide opportunities for their candidacies.

Studies on the politics of dress in Asia include a seminal book by Mina Roces and Louise Edwards (2010a) which argues that clothing is a component of "hard core" politics and demonstrates how clothing has been essential to the creation of national identities and nationhood in both Asia and the Americas. A chapter by Molony (2010) finds that between the 1870s and 1945, Japan's adoption of Western fashion has connotations beyond modernity and citizenship. Western-influenced clothing was utilized to convey (a gendered idea of) Japanese dominance in the late nineteenth century. To demonstrate that they deserved rights similar to those enjoyed by males, feminists also adopted gendered Western attire, particularly when advocating for full citizenship.

Glickman (2005), on the other hand, explains the 1937 anti-silk campaign that linked Japan's militarism to silk consumption in the United States. Most boycotters identified raw silk as "the lifeline of Japanese militarists," so they sought to prevent such innocent ignorance. They did not hesitate to attribute a direct causal link between silk purchases and murder, arguing that unthinking consumption of such goods would promote Japanese imperialism.

Traditional garb, such as the Indian khadi worn by Gandhi during his non-cooperation movement, was quickly reappropriated by nationalist elites in developing countries such as Myanmar. Egreteau (2019) suggests that indigenous clothing was intended to be vectors of new political ideas, anticolonialism, race belonging, and identity in Myanmar's postcolonial legislatures.

As a result, parliamentary rules require elected representatives to wear outfits that reflect both their higher social status and indigenous traditions. Nonetheless, while the clothing standards hastened decolonization, it has also amplified ethnic reification in a major state institution.

An observation on South Korea concludes that female politicians tended to wear suits, implying the legacy of gender stereotypes and imperialism as it originated in the West as gentlemen's formal clothing representing masculine power and formality (Oh 2019). This choice of attire serves as a means for female politicians to benefit and survive, whereas the national dress (*hanbok*) was frequently used in the past as an appeal to female virtue. *Hanbok* is only worn by President Park Geun-hye and First Ladies during official visits to foreign countries, possibly due to its symbolic representation of national identity and culture of national dress.

18.2.1 Case Study: Indonesia

Jean Taylor's (2010) work follows a chronological path through the key transformations in the links between dress and politics in Indonesia from the beginning to the present. Indonesia's first president, Sukarno (r. 1945–1967), promoted the Western suit for elite Indonesian men as a nationalist leader. He was quoted as saying, "… The minute an Indonesian dons trousers, he walks erect like any white man…. Let us demonstrate we are as progressive as our former masters. We must take our place as upstanding equals. We must put on modern clothing" (Adams 1969, 80–81). His approach to Indonesian women, on the other hand, favors the traditional *kebaya*—long-sleeved upper garment worn with a long piece of cloth known as *selendang*—without any kind of head covering.

Meanwhile, Suharto (r.1967–1998), as Indonesia's second President, did not support Sukarno's complete reliance on the Western suit to represent Indonesia's equality among the world's nations. The emphasis was on modernity rather than opposition to colonialism (Elson 2001). He promoted the long-sleeved *batik* shirt with trousers, *peci*, and shoes as formal evening wear for men and as official and national dress for ceremonies. The First Lady Ibu Tien always appeared in public in *kebaya* and *selendang*—evolved into a fashion statement, a fine fabric to decorate elite females. Figure 18.1 shows Hon. Ledia Hanifa, member for West Java district, in *kebaya*, *selendang* (the left made out of *batik*, while the right is *songket*[2] from Palembang), and jilbab. She wears the outfits for official occasions that require national dress.

[2] Songket is made using a weaving technique that is indigenous to Sumatra, Bangka and Belitung Islands, Java, Celebes, and Nusa Tenggara. However, songket is most common in the province of South Sumatra, where it is known as songket Palembang (the capital of South Sumatera province). It is elaborately designed with gold or silver threads and handwoven in silk or cotton. The metallic threads pop against the backdrop fabric, creating a dazzling look. Metallic threads are placed in between the silk or cotton weft (latitudinal) threads during the weaving process using a technique known as supplemental weft weaving.



Fig. 18.1 A female politician wearing variations of *selendang* and *kebaya* from different parts of Indonesia

Further transformation can be seen in Ministry of Education rulings, which banned the jilbab in government schools in 1982 but rescinded the ban in 1992. The policy shift benefited Indonesia's garment industry, which saw a potential new mass market. It developed "Islamic clothing" lines and promoted them through fashion shows and advertisements in women's, youth, and religious magazines, resulting in "a Southeast Asian Islamic style" (Taylor 2010, 112). Elizabeth Bucar, known for her term "pious fashion," contends that in Indonesian gendering of fashion and nation, "men's clothing is the marker of the nation's power and modernity; women's clothing is the marker of its morality, honor, and ethnic identity" (2017, 22).

Additionally, academics emphasize that clothing serves as a political statement that makes the person and their demands visible (Roces 2022b; Molony 2022; Wu 2022; Jung and Dalton 2022). For instance, Mary Austin's (2022) work illustrates how dress and performance are used to support arguments for Indonesian domestic workers' legal protection. The apron and napkins that are part of the housemaid's uniform have evolved into a distinctive symbol that has assisted in securing domestic workers' presence in the contentious public realm in Indonesia.

18.2.2 Traditional Attire

To understand fashion and politics, we applied content analysis from articles published by prominent online media platforms with significant national readership such as BBC News Indonesia, CNN Indonesia, AntaraNews.com, Liputan6.com, Detik.com, and the Voice of Indonesia. We are interested in how these articles are discussing a national event in which Puan Maharani wears traditional attire from West Sumatera and how this appearance is later interpreted as a political statement. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with women politicians to complement our approach in understanding how fashion choice may or may not help women in their career in national politics.

Traditional attire has regained its popularity in national news coverage as President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo (r.2014–current) wears traditional clothes during official trips, for example Ulun Khas Tana Tidung dress during a visit to Tidung (North Kalimantan) in December 2014 (Gandhi 2016). The peak of media attention took place in 2017 when he started a new tradition as the country's leader to wear traditional attire at the commemorations of the Republic of Indonesia's Independence Day at the Merdeka Palace. In 2017, President Jokowi wore traditional clothes from Tanah Bumbu (South Kalimantan), while the First Lady, Iriana Joko Widodo, wore traditional clothes from Minangkabau[3] (West Sumatera) (Natalia 2022). For the celebration of Indonesia's 77th Independence Day on August 17, 2022, Jokowi wore Dolomani—a grandeur dress that the sultan of Buton (Southeast Sulawesi) usually wears when attending imperial events (BBC News Indonesia 2022).

President Jokowi wishes to highlight that Indonesia is rich in customs and culture, with one example being the richness of traditional clothing, which varies greatly by region. "Indeed, the cultural wealth of this traditional dress is thousands. There are thousands of them," Jokowi said as quoted from the Cabinet Secretariat website (Syahrial 2022). Another reason for promoting traditional clothing is to help the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSMEs) sector. "If the president uses it and other officials and the community follow suit, it will not only promote customs and culture, but also drive the economy," said Heru Budi Hartono, Head of the Presidential Secretariat (Sukmawijaya 2022).

However, the president's wearing of traditional attire does not always result in praise. The Perempuan AMAN (Association of Indigenous Women of the Archipelago) responded by rhetorically questioning whether wearing traditional clothing was considered a tribute to indigenous peoples, or is it simply the act of politicizing indigenous peoples' symbols to serve certain

[3] West Sumatra has an area of approximately 42,012.89 km^2 inhabited by 5 million people and the capital city is Padang. The majority of the population comes from the Minangkabau tribe. In addition, there are also the Tompa, Bendang, Biduanda, Bodi, Caniago, Domo, Guci, Mandailiang, Malay, and others. People from this tribe are often referred to as Minang.

interests? Rukka Sombolinggi, Secretary General of the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN), claims that "Indigenous people's clothing is used. The attire used in state celebrations appears to glorify Indigenous Peoples. However, at the same time, violence against Indigenous Peoples continues" (Perempuan AMAN 2020).

18.3 Puan Maharani and Minangkabau

In this part, we look at media coverage of Puan Maharani who was reciting the Proclamation of Indonesia[4] on August 17, 2021, while dressed in Minangkabau traditional garb (see Fig. 18.2). Prominent media outlets discuss the clothing' originality as well as what the headpiece signifies in Minangkabau society (Fadil 2021; Priatmojo 2021; Fitriana 2021), while others choose to assess the decision as a political statement (Hutabarat 2021; Ferdinan 2021).



Fig. 18.2 Speaker of the House of Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat/DPR) Honorable Puan Maharani. Honorable Puan Maharani attended the Commemoration Ceremony of the 76th Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia on August 17, 2021, wearing a traditional attire *tingkuluak tanduak balenggek* from West Sumatera (Photo by Raden Bonis Februariyanto)

[4] The national Independence Day ceremony at Merdeka Palace traditionally broadcast live nationally starting at 09.00 AM and attended by distinguished guests from ambassadors, former Indonesian presidents and vice-presidents, ministers and other government officials, and other selected invitees from the general public. The remembrance of the proclamation of independence commenced at 10.00 AM by the speaker of the House of Representatives (DPR) reading of the proclamation text that was read out by Indonesia's first President Sukarno.

The headpiece is called "tingkuluak tanduak balenggek" and it is one of the distinctive characteristics of traditional clothing coming from Lintau, Tanah Datar. *Tingkuluak* is a head covering worn by Minang women. *Tanduak* resembles buffalo horns, and the word *balenggek* means two levels. Buffalo horn is an icon in Minang culture, the philosophy is to symbolize strength of heart, persistence, never giving up, and high will in achieving good goals. The ends of *tanduak* are made slightly blunt to symbolize being warm-hearted, courageous, and not wanting to hurt others. The length of the horns on both sides must be equal and balanced because it is intended as a symbol that life must be balanced and fair. According to customary rules, *tingkuluak balenggek* can only be used by people who are noble or traditional aristocrats and have higher social status. Ordinary people do not wear *balenggek*, they can only use one level *tingkuluak*. This headpiece is a unique attribute of people who live in mountainous areas, including Tanah Datar.

West Sumatra has the world's largest matrilineal system, which means that women have more power and responsibility in ancestor properties than men (Games et al. 2020). A daughter inherits her mother's entire estate, and when she marries, her husband is treated as a visitor in her home (Sankari 2016). Women are Minangkabau system leaders who prioritize their families. On the one hand, women's traditional leadership roles in West Sumatra may serve them well in politics. However, only 4 of the 65 (6.15%) members of the current provincial legislature are female—the previous sitting period (2014–2019) had 7 female lawmakers—implying that Minang women may not receive full support for political participation due to the outsized role they play in caring for large families (Selinaswati 2014).

Puan is the youngest child and the only daughter of former president and current Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) leader Megawati Sukarnoputri and a granddaughter of Indonesia's first president Sukarno. Her father, Taufiq Kiemas, was a politician who served as the speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Perwakilan Rakyat*/MPR) from 2009 until his death in 2013. She was elected to the national parliament in 2009 as a representative of PDI-P. She led the party's faction from 2012 until her appointment as minister in 2014, following Jokowi's successful presidential bid. She was one of eight women appointed as ministers and the only female coordinating minister (2014–2019). She became the first female and the youngest of all past and present coordinating ministers, having taken office at the age of 41. Puan was re-elected to the legislature in 2019 and has served as Speaker of the House ever since. She is the first female and the third-youngest person in this position (she was 46 when she was appointed).

Both Puan Maharani's father and mother are of Minang ancestry (Riso 2020), but her decision to dress in traditional West Sumatra attire has sparked a larger discussion about whether her dress is a political statement meant to appeal to the sympathies of the province's voters and the Minang community at large. According to Liputan 6 (www.Liputan6.com), Puan Maharani's

clothing conveys her desire to send a "message of peace" to the people of West Sumatra following her divisive remarks in 2020 (Hutabarat 2021).

The statement was conveyed by Puan Maharani in September 2020 when she announced the West Sumatra governor and vice governor candidates supported by PDI-P in the 2020 gubernatorial election. "For West Sumatra province, recommendations are given to Mulyadi and Ali Mukhni. Freedom! Hopefully West Sumatra will become a province that supports the Pancasila[5] state," she said as reported by CNN Indonesia (2020). Many people perceived her remark to imply that West Sumatra did not support Pancasila since the elected leaders have not yet come from PDI-P. People's interest in supporting PDI-P was significantly tarnished by the events that took place in the 1950s when President Sukarno ordered military operations in West Sumatra. Soon, this statement became a polemic and led to Mulyadi-Ali Mukhni returning the recommendation from PDI-P and the party decided not to participate in the local election.

Airman Sori, a senator from West Sumatra, drew attention to the worrisome comment by questioning the rationale for Puan Maharani's remark. Alirman believes Pancasila is definitive, and there is no need to debate it, let alone become associated with a specific province or region. Aliram stated, "Puan must explain, what does it mean for West Sumatra to become a supporter of Pancasila" (Sihombing 2020).

18.3.1 Political Statement

Adi Prayitno, a political observer, contends that the remark implies that people in West Sumatra are unsupportive of Pancasila, and that this will change if PDI-P-backed politicians rule the province (Hutabarat 2021). To make apologies, Puan Maharani chose to dress in Minang traditional clothing, which represents the greatness and splendor of West Sumatran women. "At the end of the day, whatever activities politicians engage in are not an empty vacuum; politicians' activities are always about gaining electoral support," said a political consultant Pangi Syamwri Chaniago, who was also quoted in a Liputan 6 piece.

Similarly, an article published by Detik (www.Detik.com) cites another political commentator that Puan's choice can be translated into her way of making peace with the people of West Sumatra and this indicates a good step moving forward by embracing their customs and culture (Safitri 2021). Yet, PDI-P released a rather neutral statement regarding the motive behind the traditional attire as nothing but showing respect and care toward the Minang community.

[5] As a state ideology, Pancasila is formalized in the Preamble of the 1945 Indonesian Constitution and consists of five abstract principles: (1) belief in one Almighty God; (2) just and civilized humanity; (3) Indonesian unity; (4) democracy guided by the wisdom of representative deliberation; and (5) social justice. During the formulation of the 1945 Constitution, Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, outlined these five principles.

In a wider context, PDI-P has been puzzled by low electoral support from voters in West Sumatra despite winning two consecutive general elections in 2014 and 2019 (Aditya 2022). The party secured less than 15% of votes in the 2019 presidential election and failed to send a single candidate to the national parliament. From four legislative elections in the provincial level, PDI-P only won an average of three to four seats, far fewer than compared to Golkar which won 16 seats, Democrat 14 seats, and Gerindra 14 seats.

Consecutive failures for the PDI-P in West Sumatra were not merely due to ideological considerations such as religion or Pancasila, but to history engraved by Indonesia's first President Sukarno in the land of Minang, according to a cultural observer Edy Utama (BBC News Indonesia 2020). In the late 1950s, President Sukarno ordered military operations in West Sumatra to put down the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) uprising. The deployment of military force was the beginning of a split that caused deep wounds and trauma in the people of West Sumatra, which had implications for PDI-P, Sukarno's party.

Even before the PRRI took place, Israr Iskandar said that the relationship between the Minang people and Sukarno was very close, such as with Mohammad Hatta leading Indonesia, and working together with other national heroes from Minang in the history of Indonesia's struggle. Before the PRRI incident, such as in the 1955 election, the Minang community's political support was very dynamic, and varied. However, after the PRRI incident and entering the New Order, Israr Iskandar said the Minang people's political choices became more patterned, namely withdrawing support for parties associated with Sukarno and choosing Golkar instead.

Entering the reform era, support from the Minang community continued to flow to Golkar in the 1999 and 2004 legislative elections. For this reason, Israr disagreed with Puan Maharani's statement which linked the political support of the people of West Sumatra to their understanding of Pancasila ideology. "West Sumatra definitely supports Pancasila, three of the nine formulators of Pancasila are Minang people; Agus Salim, Hatta and Yamin. So, there is no relation between political choices (in elections) and support for Pancasila," said Israr (BBC News Indonesia 2020).

18.3.2 Suits vs. Dress

We conducted follow-up interviews with three female lawmakers to understand how they see fashion throughout their political careers in Indonesia. They represent three different parties and constituencies. According to one respondent, DPR members are not really considering the vital role that fashion plays in politics. She asserts that she is not concerned with how she dresses to advance any cause or win over political support, "…since I wear *batik* practically daily, I'll be honest and say that I don't give my wardrobe much thought. The color, whether it is too bright or too soft, would be my main worry as

I need to ensure that I still follow the color code suitable for the event I am attending.[6]"

Another respondent claims that when it comes to professional appearance, Indonesian female legislators are free to wear feminine clothing without fear of being seen as less capable than men.[7] *Batik* for the top and pants or skirt is the most typical outfit combination for politicians, both male and female. The organizer will demand VIP attendees to wear traditional costumes for major events such as commemorations of the Republic of Indonesia's Independence Day at the Merdeka Palace.

The use of traditional garb as a political statement is confirmed by a female lawmaker who asserts that the selection of attire is an opportunity to strengthen her support toward MSMEs sector and nationalism. "I am sure fashion helps politicians to build closeness and connection with constituents. Personally, I will use *batik*, woven, or cloth from the area to show respect and to gain their sympathy," said a respondent representing a West Java district. Respondents in our study assert that dressing in a feminine and traditional manner offers them the benefit to express support toward constituents by acknowledging their local wisdom.

18.4 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that traditional attire has been used as a political statement by female politicians in expressing their support or alignment to certain constituents. In the case of Indonesia's first female Speaker of the House, Puan Maharani, she wore a Minangkabau traditional dress to win back support from the people of West Sumatra following her divisive remarks in 2020. As mentioned by our respondents, "…the dress serves as a symbol of recognition and support for the area where the traditional clothes originate."

We have also shown that the gendered dynamics surrounding "fashion and politics" in Indonesia are not about suits vs dresses. That discussion is simply meaningless for female MPs because there is a universally established dress code for all formal sessions, which is *batik*. It is also worth noting that practically every region in the country has its own *batik* motif. *Batik* from Papua, for example, with Cendrawasih motifs, describes the richness, beauty, and grace of Papua's flora and fauna. Asmat motifs express the individuality and heritage of sculpting.

The findings provide a one-of-a-kind experience that contributes to an under-studied topic: fashion and politics. Future research could benefit from including additional politicians from other countries with similar socio-cultural characteristics. And as Suyarkulova (2016, 252) maintains that clothes "speak volumes" and reveal a great deal about the wearer's identities, be they related

[6] Personal interview on 19 March 2023.

[7] Personal interview on 11 April 2023.

to gender, class, ethnicity, or political affiliations, thus traditional dress and political marketing would be a fascinating extension of the subject.

Political marketing is the application of marketing principles to political issues. Politicians utilize it to shape voters' viewpoints, opinions, and trust. The notion of marketing is applicable in the selection of traditional costume for politicians in order to demonstrate an identity that is similar to their target audience (Henneberg and Ormrod 2013; Fernández Gómez et al. 2021). Fashion helps people, and politicians, to gain their identity and to get attention as well as to build their image.

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CHAPTER 19

Section Four Introduction: Wearing Identity

Karen M. Kedrowski, Candice D. Ortbals, Lori Poloni-Staudinger, and J. Cherie Strachan

Chapters in this section uncover the ability of fashion to facilitate individual expression and collective identity and to serve as a form of political agency that influences the public. The fashions discussed herein have implications for social division; individuals and groups choose fashion as a symbol of particular identities and political beliefs, and the fashion serves to distinguish them from other social and political actors who do not share the same identities and beliefs. This set of chapters also demonstrates fashion in relation to reactionary and/or conservative politics. Whereas other chapters in this handbook have shown the revolutionary goals accomplished by actors through fashion, this section elucidates how fashion can be linked to conservative beliefs and memories of the past. However, even when fashion is linked to conservatism,

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it is not simply stuck in the past, nor is it static. Rather, the mobilization of traditional identities through fashion interrogates aspects of the status quo and makes demands on society.

The chapter by Alam centers on the fashion and individual identity of Bushra Bibi, a former first lady of Pakistan. Bibi chose to wear what Alam calls "a distinctively modern purdah," which is a religious covering for women that veils the face. This choice is distinctive because it is not akin to the status quo fashion choice of many Pakistani women, the *shalwar kameez,* which consists of a tunic, pants, and a scarf that does not cover the face. Bibi's purdah is salient to Bibi's husband's particular moment in office. It represents Islam as well as an "otherworldly quality" that signifies change. While Bibi's fashions amount an individual and unique style of her own, they have implications for the entire country, considering that the fashions orient Pakistan back to "the golden age of Islam." Bibi's fashion is thus conservative and harnesses memories of the past, and, at the same time, points to a future that breaks with status quo fashions.

Chamberlain and Yanus's chapter about fraternal organizations demonstrates how fashions—in the form of pins and badges—provided a source of individual and collective identity that in turn influenced the public sphere. These authors liken fraternal ties to that of familial bonds, and they explain how the collective identity developed by fraternities was so revered that fraternities sought laws to prohibit non-members from wearing their insignia. Although fashion in this case drew lines between in-groups and out-groups—those in the fraternities and those not—the impact of fraternal fashion arguably enhanced the public sphere given that fraternal organizations were the basis of social capital in the early part of the twentieth century. This chapter does not center on reactionary politics; however, the authors show that fashion influences racial politics. The Ku Klux Klan used fashion in a way similar to fraternal organizations, and laws attempted to stymie the fashions of black fraternities.

In detailing the evolution of gun culture in the United States, Middlewood, Schwartz, and Wasinger, like Chamberlain and Yanus, explain how fashion serves to construct a collective identity associated with a particular swath of a population. Gun culture, which includes an emphasis on firearms-related clothing and tactical wear, is associated with the right-wing and has historically been gendered along the lines of normative masculinity; however, Middlewood, Schwartz, and Wasinger document that gun companies are increasingly marketing their products to women and gun owners of color. The authors document, through the analysis popular publications for gun enthusiasts, the emergence of a female fan base for guns. Similar to Bushra Bibi's fashions' ability to embody conservatism and signal change, fashion in gun culture continues to signal conservative identities and politics but it by no means represents static identities.

Fashion's capacity to concurrently perform tradition and change is also captured in the chapter by Reanne regarding American flag apparel. This

chapter provides a history of American flag apparel that makes a reader question how MAGA extremists can claim respect for the United States and the sacredness of the flag and at the same time attack the Capitol while wearing the flag as a cape or carrying it as an extension of their bodies. Reanne aptly explains that the flag served as a way for extremists to forge "a second founding" of the United States in which the flag became a uniform that distinguished the far-right activists from the far-left, like Antifa, that wear black-out gear.

The Akou chapter, looking at the history and modern use of body armor, shows how fashion can appeal to new groups and construct identities for them. Body armor was first a garb for the military and police officers, but it has become popularized as an item for civilians. For instance, Akou explains how rappers have worn body armor to avert attacks from rivals as well as to make high fashion statements at awards shows and on album covers. Body armor can also be worn as a statement of aggression; a specific example of this is paramilitary groups in the United States, such as the Proud Boys, who wear armor to public events in order to signal their willingness to use violence. Despite the proliferation of body armor to new groups, Akou concludes that its high cost dictates that it will not become commonplace, thus meaning that most people will continue to associate it with its military origins. In this way, fashion retains its historical identity even as it provides ways from some people to express new identities apart from the older ones.

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CHAPTER 20

First Lady Fashion in Pakistan: Bushra Bibi's Transcendental Style

Zainab Alam

20.1 Introduction

Pakistan's national dress, the *shalwar kameez* (see Fig. 20.1), consists of a tunic paired with loose tapered-leg pants, complemented by a scarf or *dupatta* for women. This gendered uniform has been donned by most Pakistani women in politics for the past four decades. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan (2018–2022), for the first time in Pakistan's visual history, first lady Bushra Bibi's employed a unique *purdah*, traditionally a one-piece cloak draping over a woman's head torso and face. Despite this fashion first, little research has been done on the fashion choices of women in politics in the country, and how this traditional dress is employed by women as a means of negotiating their contentious relationship with the public sphere (Khan et al. 2020). While an Islamic headscarf or *hijab* and the sometimes accompanying face veil or *niqab* are often assumed to signify patriarchal subjugation associated with a lack of agency, as Saba Mahmood (2011) argues, women also actively make this choice to signify their relationship with their faith that supersedes earthly relationships. On the other hand, political women wearing Western clothing is widely viewed as immodest in Pakistani culture—invoking ire as well as occasional violence (Alam 2021). While the religious attire of the former first lady is largely seen as apolitical, married just six months before the election, I argue her unusual choice of dress should be viewed in the context

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of her husband's purported dedication to bring back the golden age of Islam to the country.

Through a multimodal critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1993), I explore the nexus of national belonging and anti-colonialism alongside the embodiment of piety and modernity in the Pakistani context. Critical discourse analysis enables the inquiry of the language and symbols used in multiple modes of communication, including visuals and the uncovering of the underlying power structures and ideologies within visual representations present in fashion choices (Jones 2014). Sartorial choices have a semiotic quality, enabling in visual discourse to take place (Flicker 2013). In analyzing the online news media and visual representations of First Lady Bushra Bibi's agency-through-dress, supported by her fashion-related comments during her only televised interview, I show how these visual representations are even more potent when they are tied to celebrity power and executive politics. Despite assumptions that traditional attire in countries like Pakistan is at odds with modernity and does not give room for individual agency, Bushra Bibi's choice



Fig. 20.1 Illustration of *shalwar kameez* (by author)

of public outfit is distinctively not the national dress of the *shalwar kameez* (Craik 2003). Although Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country where modest dress is expected, Bushra Bibi is the only first lady to prominently cover her face. And, especially as a woman from a politically connected landowning Punjabi family, her choice of dress is markedly not emblematic of her class or ethnic background where such visible conservatism is rarely seen in the media. This visual representation is complicated by the fact that Bushra Bibi's now-reformed husband Imran Khan was infamously known as a philandering cosmopolitan figure when he was an international sports celebrity prior to his political career.

This said, the adoption of the *purdah*, a term for women's simultaneous head and face covering in Urdu, is not uncommon among the nation's religious conservatives. Traditionally, this type of head-and-face cover is typically fashioned from a two-and-a-half-yard rectangular cloak which is initially wrapped around the head from one end, with the remaining brought forward to cover the face. Within the Pakistani context, the typical *purdah* or the singular headscarf and face-veil cloth is typically worn as a layer over the shalwar kameez. Bushra Bibi's active decision to not display her national attire, I posit, warrants scholarly analysis. This atypical and virtue-signaling outfit is fraught with symbolic meaning, especially as her husband sought to revitalize the role of Islam in the country. More specifically, 'a systematic observation and analysis of the visual discourse' (Flicker 2013, 185) is warranted surrounding Bushra Bibi's fashion agency as a 'performance of piety' (Shroff 2019). To do this, I unpack the fashion choices of her women in politics contemporaries and to Khan's proclaimed political vision for the country. In doing so, I maintain, she embodies a form of piety that reflects a particular form of religiosity that transcends nationality, encompassing her political views—inextricable from the nation's colonial history.

20.2 Anti-Colonial Nationalism and Fashioning Women in Politics in South Asia

Like other post-colonial contexts, in order to situate Bushra Bibi's fashion agency in juxtaposition to tradition, some situating of the significance of national dress is warranted (Hansen and Madison 2013). Pre-independence India consisted of around 560 princely states, many of which had local dresses or local dress elements that reflected forms of identity like religion, ethnicity, social status, occupation, or geographic affiliation. Like in other parts of colonized Asia, a national dress was invented as a means of nation-building in Pakistan, which sought to distinguish itself from its Hindu-majority neighbor India when they each achieved independence in 1947 (Roces 2007). Pakistan's founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, did not adopt *khadi* clothing for himself, instead choosing to wear largely Western clothing with a tapered-cylindrical woolen *karakul* hat that was a marker of educated Muslim men

in the mountainous Northwest regions (Sircar 2019). In the immediate aftermath of partition, women in Pakistan wore a variety of modest dress styles which were tied to ethnic fashions from Muslim-majority regions and brought in elements from Muslim historical influence in the region.

This historical influence pre-dated the seventeenth century, when the British East India Company established a massive textile industry in the Indian subcontinent, leveraging the quality and affordability of Indian cotton cloth and exploiting skilled artisans and laborers (Reid 2009). The British Raj, encompassing modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and parts of Burma, played a crucial role in the British Empire's wealth and success. During this period, elite colonial subjects sometimes adopted Western elements in their attire, appreciating this adoption as a civilizational marker under British rule (Roces 2007; Mayer 2019). However, Mohandas Gandhi, in his anti-colonial movement, famously rejected the Western suit, a symbol of power and modernity, in favor of a handspun cotton loincloth that he made himself (Edwards 2007; Maran et al. 2021). Gandhi's choice of attire was a protest against exploitative British policies that devastated the local cotton industry, a rejection of British cultural imperialism, and a show of solidarity with the poor. The spinning wheel, symbolizing freedom and self-sufficiency, is now featured on India's post-independence flag, and it can only be made from *khadi*, the coarse cotton fabric Gandhi wore (Ramagundam 2008). Even today, Indian women politicians, particularly those associated with the Indian National Congress, continue to wear khadi saris in various regional styles, consisting of seven yards of draped fabric forming a skirt over a blouse (Young 2011).

The first prominent women in Pakistani politics endorsed and embodied a number of specific forms of national dress. Fatima Jinnah, the 'Mother of the Nation,' who ran for Pakistan's presidency in the 1960s, famously wore white cotton wide-legged pants with a flare above the knee called a *gharara*, a marker of her Gujarati Muslim background even before partition. Though ethnically from Gujarat, she also supported the wearing of the *shalwar kameez* for women, typically a Punjabi style (Pirbhai 2016). Shaista Ikramullah, a Bengali representative in Pakistan's first constituent assembly in 1947, consistently wore saris without covering her head (Pirbhai 2016). Over the following decades, these dress styles incorporated both Eastern and Western influences, such as mandarin collars and shorter tunics with pants inspired by the 1960s bell-bottom trend (Husain and Sheikh 2022). This said, like in neighboring South Asian states, markedly 'Western' outfits were discouraged for the majority of 'good Pakistani women' who are still considered the cultural fortresses and honor of the nation (Yuval-Davis et al. 1989; Kandiyoti 1991; Roces 2007; Rai 2015). Professional men of wealth or political status during this time would typically wear Western suits, while ethnic clothing like the *shalwar kameez* was seen as the dress of poor men—until popularized by populist Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in his presidency (1971–1978). A few years later, in 1978, when General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq threw a coup

to become the head of state, his Islamization policies included the encouragement of the *shalwar kameez* as a national form of dress for both men and women regardless of ethnicity, and compelled women appearing on television to always wear a *dupatta* or scarf on their heads—in line with more conservative Islamic ideas of modesty (Abbas 2018). While wearing a headscarf is not required by Pakistani law, today, many women in the public sphere choose to wear a dupatta in the form of a lightly placed headscarf that also shows some hair at the crown (Fig. 20.1). Even when they do not cover their hair, most all Pakistani women wear some form of the national dress, which usually includes a *dupatta* worn on one shoulder or draped loosely around their neck.

Despite national pressures for traditional attire, South Asian women use fashion to assert political agency, resist ethnic norms, and challenge gender roles (Roces 2007; Young 2011). However, South Asian women's political fashion remains underexplored. A few studies focus on Indian women in politics. Suchismita Chattopadhyay (2016) examines Sonia Gandhi and Kumari Mayawati. Sonia Gandhi, an Italian who married into the Nehru-Gandhi family, adapts her wardrobe to honor local weaves. Mayawati, a Dalit, intentionally wears extravagant designer items to defy caste stereotypes. Like Jemima Goldsmith in Pakistan, Sonia adapts to tradition, while Mayawati breaks caste assumptions (Chattopadhyay 2016). Deepsikha Chatterjee (2021) analyzes female leaders in India, highlighting Indira Gandhi's signature style: handloom saris, coordinated blouses, and short hair, blending ethnic heritage and Western modernity in post-colonial India. This style influenced neighboring women leaders in Pakistan and Bangladesh (Chatterjee 2021).

When the sartorial style of women in politics is referenced with respect to South Asia, the Pakistan People's Party's Benazir Bhutto, the first Muslim woman to be Prime Minister (1988–1990; 1993–1996), is often appreciated (Young 2011; Husain and Sheikh 2022). Daughter of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who popularized *shalwar kameez* as a dressing style for upwardly mobile men, Benazir Bhutto carried on with parts of her father's legacy. Harvard and then Oxford-educated (like Khan), she wore Western clothing during her undergraduate studies. However, by the time she first became Pakistan's Prime Minister in 1988, she had already established herself as a trendsetter when it came to national dress. Her iconic shalwar kameez was sometimes layered with a matching blazer—with power-dressing shoulder pads obscuring the bulletproof vest she wore underneath (Husain and Sheikh 2022). Also employed by the 'mother of the nation' Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto's style of a loosely draped *dupatta* crowned above her temple over the national dress is shared by numerous women in Pakistani politics, including Maryam Nawaz Sharif. A political hopeful in the rival dynastic party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Maryam Nawaz is also known for her luxurious Pakistani designer styles and high-end European luxury shoes and handbags—drawing indignation from those who see her lavishness as

inappropriate given the stark economic inequality in the developing country (Global Village Space 2022; The Current 2022).

The shalwar kameez is a potent symbol of national belonging, even for those not born in the country. Three years after he captained the Pakistan cricket team's win against Britain in the 1992 World Cup, Imran Khan married British socialite Jemima Goldsmith. The daughter of British aristocrats, Goldsmith made a substantial move to Pakistan—which included her learning Urdu and adopting the *shalwar kameez*, even occasionally draping the accompanying *dupatta* over her head—seen as an extra measure of respect for Pakistani culture. Soon after the move Khan switched careers and crafted the *Pakistani Tehreek-e-Insaaf* ('Movement for Justice,' PTI), a challenge to the two dynastic political parties that typically hold electoral power. While cultural pressures prompted their divorced in 2004, Goldsmith is often lovingly called *bhabhi,* or sister-in-law by her Pakistani supporters, including thousands of her followers on social media sites like X who consider her Khan's true love and a de facto *Pakistani* because of her appreciation of national culture (@jemima_khan).

20.3 Bushra Bibi, Fashion Agency, and Transcendental Representation

On February 17, 2020, Goldsmith posted a photograph of a poster-style painting her friend in Pakistan had sent her. The now deleted post shows Khan sitting professionally amid two Pakistani flags at the base, with Goldsmith visible in a traditional *dupatta* to the left, and Khan's current wife Bushra Bibi being represented as an overpowering figure at the top right (Gulzar 2020). In the poster, Bushra Bibi, who is shown as wearing a drapey white headscarf and face veil, is depicted as a fortune teller with a crystal ball that her hands are waving over. Below the crystal ball, written in Urdu, is the question: *tu ne kesa jadoo kiya?* or 'what kind of magic did you do?'.[1] Painted in a mocking tone, the poster portrays Bushra Bibi as a spooky fortune teller who helped secure Khan's prime ministerial win, while Goldsmith questions jealously from the side (Gulzar 2020).

Little is known about Bushra Bibi Khan (née Wattoo), the third wife of Imran Khan, former PM of Pakistan, and only non-dynast to claim a democratic electoral win in the country. Sometimes referred to as 'Pinky Peerni,' Bushra Bibi is known to be an adherent of an Islamic mystic or ascetic tradition known as Sufism, which has an increased focus on spirituality and cultivating direct personal experiences with the divine. While 'Pinky' is a common women's nickname in the Indian subcontinent, *peerni* is the feminine version of the Urdu word for spiritual guide—*peer*.[2] It is in the capacity of spiritual

[1] In her now-deleted Tweet, Goldsmith translates the word *jadoo* as "black magic" which is a more negative interpretation of the term.

[2] Also transliterated as *Pir*.

guide, that Bushra Bibi, married to Khan only six months before his selection as Prime Minister in August 2018, was most well-known. Khan visited and trusted Bushra Bibi for spiritual guidance during his political campaign leading to his election, which is assumed to be one of the reasons he married her. Some of these assumptions are based on a book by Khan's second ex-wife, Reham Khan, who gained international attention by publishing a critical book about her ex, exposing his unconventional lifestyle, scandals, and superstitious practices (Malik 2018). Twice divorced from women of media prominence, Khan's previous wives did not maintain the same off-camera life as Bushra Bibi. However, with her lack of social media and very limited media appearances, she maintains an air of mystery—contributing to her being the most Googled person in Pakistan in 2018 (Google Trends 2018). This mystery is fortified by the largely monochrome drapey attire she wears in public, a distinctively religious dress consisting of a long flowy solid colored robe and a headscarf and face veil of the same color.

In contrast to Maryam Nawaz Sharif of the rivaling party and Imran Khan's previous wives, I argue Bushra Bibi, has a distinctively different style reflecting her agency. Since marrying Imran Khan and serving as first lady (2018–2022), she usually opts for airy yet opaque long robes, covering her face in public appearances, diverging from the typical shalwar kameez. Rather than embracing the national dress in public, Bushra Bibi dons a style of dress that is distinctively *Islamic* rather than traditionally South Asian or Pakistani in nature. Bushra Bibi's *intentional* purdah styling challenges predominant notions of Islamic dress as being a yardstick of women's oppression (Abu-Lughod 2002). Her dress signals that she follows a strict interpretation of Islamic texts that suggest an adult woman's hair, face, and bodily form should not be visible to men outside her immediate family. However, unlike the light blue 'shuttlecock' burqas notoriously associated with the Afghan Taliban, and distinct from the typically black *chadors* worn by religious conservatives in Iran, Bushra Bibi has her own sartorial identity. She wears at least three pieces of usually light-colored fabric in her choice of dress, draping her head-covering like the traditional *chadors* or cloaks worn in Iran. However, in choosing largely light colors, Bushra Bibi disassociates herself from the black robes prominent among women in the Gulf or the black *chador* the wife of former President Ahmadinejad wore in public (Young 2011). When she does wear black, as she did in her religious pilgrimage to Mecca, and during her visits to a mental health institute and a shelter home, she shrouds her face in superfluous layers of wrapped head-covering, creating a halo of fabric around her face, a style not typically donned by those in Iran or the Arabian Peninsula (@ISFKarachi 2021; Nihal 2021).

Building on Saba Mahmood's (2011) work about the limitations of Western liberalism to recognize women's agency as manifested through an active submission to one's faith through acts of piety, Sara Shroff (2019), theorizes the notion of 'pious capital.' In her exploration of a Pakistani fast fashion brand

called *Working Woman*, Shroff (2019) argues that pious capital is 'a transnational process of creating new frames of value in which a version of Islam is deployed as compatible with capital and its attendant and discursive technologies' (362). With the social capital that *could* make her the 'richest' woman in the public sphere, Bushra Bibi's 'pious capital' becomes a political statement that transcends national borders. Shroff's (2019) definition of piety as 'virtue in motion,' where 'piety produces and reproduces the ideal (cis) woman as the figure which accumulates value through virtue' is insightful here (363). In contrast with Khan's previous wives and political rival Maryam Nawaz, I put forth Bushra Bibi embodies piety through her drapey style of dress. As Khan's spiritual guide even before marriage, she exerts a power that challenges patriarchal practices that devalue women's expertise or capacity. As someone who actively chooses to wear outfits that differ from the *shalwar kameez*, Bushra Bibi uses religious attire to de-nationalize and make a visual anti-colonial statement about the image of a civilized first lady.

Her 'modest' style was initially the source of discussion during her husband's oath-taking ceremony on August 18, 2018, where she dressed in white silk with lace edging, her hands manicured in white nail polish and adorned with a sizeable emerald ring, with white prayer beads wrapped around her wrist (Qureshi 2018). While her outfit was reminiscent of a drapey Algerian Islamic dress style known as *haik* because of its white color, I posit the outfit Bushra Bibi wore was distinctively tailored with a lengthy face veil that placed it outside of any specific ethnic or national categorization (Morocco World News 2013). Instead of the untailored visual the one piece of fabric with numerous folds can create, there are multiple pieces of fabric deliberately sewn and pinned together in Bushra Bibi's outfit, signaling a couture collection of a woman of means.

Online debates on this initial choice of clothing ranged from criticism of her dress as unnecessarily conservative to supportive of her choice to dress as she pleases, especially as Islamically condoned (Qureshi 2018). In an off-camera interview after the oath ceremony, she expressed support for her husband's vision of the *Riyasat-e-Medina* ('State of Medina'), a vision of an Islamic welfare state based on early Islamic history, where, in the city of Medina under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad, there was peace and justice for all (Radio Pakistan 2018). Echoing Erdogan's 'New Turkey' rhetoric, promising to make *Naya Pakistan* ('new Pakistan'), Khan emphasized the idea of creating a more just and Islamic society by implementing principles of Islamic governance, such as social justice, accountability, and the rule of law.

Bushra Bibi wore a similar all-white outfit, this time with a red ring and red prayer beads wrapped tightly around her right wrist, to her exclusive Urdu-language 45-minute interview with established journalist Nadeem Malik on HUM News. In this sole public interview, her choice of *purdah* twice came up as a point discussion (HUM News 2018). On discussing her activities as first lady in visiting government welfare institutions, Bushra Bibi specifically

brought up her dress on her visit to a home of the disabled (HUM News 2018). After expressing her distress at witnessing the difficult conditions of the poor, she emphasized being *very happy* when she went to the home of the disabled because the residents had recognized her from afar when she entered the establishment (HUM News 2018). When she noticed they were happily laughing upon seeing her, she asked them 'Who am I? How do you know who I am?' to which the residents responded: 'You're Mrs. Khan, we recognize you from your appearance' (HUM News 2018).[3] In recounting this instance to Malik, Bushra Bibi said 'I was so happy that I am recognized by my purdah, because this is the most important thing in Prophet Muhammad's religion' (HUM News 2018). It is clear even though her intentional choice of attire both hides the majority of her face and the shape of her body, it still makes her a uniquely identifiable figure. She is proud that her dress marks her as the *atypical* religious person in Pakistani politics, as it is through this virtue-signaling fashion choice that she is specifically recognized as being Mrs. Khan.

Like the turn toward religious-but-not-traditional fashion in Indonesia, Bushra Bibi presents her use of the *purdah* at the forefront of religious morality and nation (Jones 2007). After Mr. Malik's inquiry about her activities as first lady, Bushra Bibi was asked specifically about her choice of dress as a subject of national discussion, even though, as he prefaced, choice of dress should be left at a matter of personal choice. In response, Bushra Bibi expressed '…About the purdah, it is between me and my lord, not the people. If you do not want to do it, don't. But, living in [a Muslim country] like Pakistan, you shouldn't argue about the purdah. If you cannot appreciate it, it is a matter of bad character…stay quiet…' (HUM News 2018). After Mr. Malik supportively expressed that it should not be a reason for maligning her, Bushra Bibi stated '…Talk about my personality, talk about my manners and how I speak, but purdah is one of the most important religious things [for Muslim women] … Today, they [wrongly] make fun of religious people as being ignorant and backwards and think of wearing fewer clothes as being modern' (HUM News 2018). In mentioning this Islamic clothing in relation to modernity, just like her husband, Bushra Bibi aims to publicly present an Islamic modernity that is centered around the ideal of the Islamic welfare state her husband proposes. Rather than presenting a Pakistani modernity that utilizes the national dress and follows the stricter Islamic ruling on covering one's face, Bushra Bibi's carefully tailored *purdah* wardrobe signifies an otherworldly quality that simultaneously signified being above the nation's previous political changes. Like the previous commentary about her choice of clothing, Bushra Bibi presents a sense of agency in her self-fashioning. However, where she was happy the disabled residents recognized her because of her religious outfit, here she expresses distress at being mocked as in the poster portraying her as a fortuneteller, asking that people focus on her actions.

[3] Author translation of the Urdu video.

In portraying herself as the ideal Muslim woman in public and as a valued wife and spiritual guide in the home, she appeals to the conservative base supporting her husband's political vision. As with the recent increase in Islamic fashion consumption in Turkey, women choosing to veil refuse 'to be included in the dominant definition of modernity and civilization' (Kılıçbay and Binark 2002, 509). Like women in Pakistan's *Jamaat-e-Islami* ('Party of Islam,' JI) party (Jamal 2013) Bushra Bibi enjoins a visually virtuous life—but adamantly not one where she is in need of having her image saved or defined by others (Abu-Lughod 2002). Her highly visible outfit, with prayer beads worn as a fashion accessory, is an embodiment of virtue-signaling that is in line with Imran Khan's vision for the country's Islam-centered welfare state. In contrast to the traditional clothing other leading Pakistani women in politics have worn, Bushra Bibi marks herself as something different—just as her husband's '*movement for justice*' political campaign promises in response to the other corrupt parties. While Bushra Bibi presents herself as the image of Islam *in* the country but not specifically *of* the country, Imran Khan presents himself as the caretaker of Islam's image on the international stage, defending Muslims worldwide suffering through the 'War on Terror' and being the leader of the campaign that established an 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia' at the U.N. (Khan 2020).

20.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of first lady Bushra Bibi's distinctive purdah in the context of Pakistan's political landscape sheds light on the complex interplay between tradition, faith, and modernity. While the shalwar kameez has been the traditional attire for women in politics in Pakistan, Bushra Bibi's choice to wear a unique version of the purdah marked a significant departure from the norm. This choice should not be viewed in isolation but rather in the broader context of Prime Minister Imran Khan's commitment to reestablishing Islamic values in Pakistan. This paper delves into the intricate dynamics of national identity, anti-colonialism, and the embodiment of piety and modernity within Pakistan. It challenges prevailing assumptions about Islamic attire as a symbol of patriarchal subjugation and underscores the agency women can exercise in expressing their religious devotion through their clothing choices. This case study challenges colonial perspectives that often portray Muslim women as passive victims. Instead, it offers a deeper understanding of Bushra Bibi's role in fashion and her husband's political agenda, suggesting that they presented themselves as a powerful joint political symbol.

To be sure, this analysis extends beyond their specific example and sheds light on a broader phenomenon. It highlights that, even within patriarchal systems, women, especially those with intersecting class and status identities, can exert influence and wield power. It counters the Western assumption that sartorial choices are solely a reflection of individual liberalism. In line with Mahmood (2011) and Shroff's (2019) insights, this paper demonstrates that

women can be active political agents, even within conservative political movements. Overall, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the role of clothing in shaping the discourse around women's participation in politics in Pakistan and contributes to the ongoing dialogue about the intersection of Islam, nationalism, and liberalism in contemporary Pakistani society. Further research in this area can offer valuable insights into the evolving nature of politics, gender, and identity in the region.

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CHAPTER 21

The Political Importance of Fraternal Fashion

Adam Chamberlain and Alixandra B. Yanus

21.1 Introduction

Fraternal organizations were central to American life from the end of the Civil War until the 1960s. Membership in these groups reached peak levels in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during the so-called Golden Age of fraternity (Harwood 1897, 623), with an estimated 5.4 million active memberships in fraternal orders in 1896 (Harwood 1897, 617). The largest orders in the United States—including the Freemasons, Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), and Knights of Pythias (KOP)—were predominantly organizations for white Protestant men (Carnes 1989), but similar groups formed among Catholics (e.g., the Knights of Columbus, see Kauffman 1982), Black Americans (e.g., the Prince Hall Masons, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, see Skocpol and Oser 2004; Skocpol et al. 2006), and ethnic groups (e.g., the Ancient Order of Hibernians for Irish Americans, the Sons of Hermann and the Order of Harugari for German Americans, and the Polish National Alliance for Polish Americans; on ethnic orders broadly, see Kaufman 2003, 71–78). Women also participated in women's (and women-led) branches of men's fraternal orders (e.g., the Order of the Eastern Star), mixed-gendered orders (e.g., the Independent Order of Good Templars),

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and (though rare) in their own orders (e.g., the Ladies of the Maccabees) (Clawson 1986). No matter the composition of their membership, fraternal organizations brought together millions of Americans.

In this historical overview, we rely on primary and secondary sources to explore how fraternal fashion, such as ritual regalia, uniforms, lapel pins, and badges, played a central role in developing fraternal identities in society and politics during the Golden Age of fraternity. Because most fraternal organizations of the period shared a common set of civic values—in particular, patriotism and "mutualism, self-reliance, business training, thrift, leadership skills, self-government, self-control, and good moral character" (Beito 2000, 33, see also 32–45)—organizations sought other ways to differentiate themselves. Their unique regalia and uniforms served this purpose. Whether in the lodge, in the community, or in government, fraternal fashion was a concrete visual indicator of members' "in-group" status (Conover 1988), making them clearly distinct from those outside fraternal life (or members of another group). These adornments also provided a marker of social standing and reinforced the racial, ethnic, and religious divides inherent in orders' membership requirements.

Inside local lodges, members donned fraternal regalia for meetings, ceremonies, and rituals. The unity created by these practices and reinforced through fashion helped members develop civic skills and practice self-government (Schlesinger 1944, 24–25). It also encouraged mutual reliance and social support in an era before government expanded welfare services (Beito 2000).

Members' fraternal affiliations were also evident in the community outside the lodge. Uniforms, aprons, sashes, lapel pins, and other accessories both identified likeminded individuals and inspired conversation among non-members. Fraternal organizations—and appendant orders, like marching and drill teams—were also common participants at patriotic and civic-minded celebrations, such as parades and Memorial Day services.

Fraternal fashion was so important to organizations' identities, and indeed, their very survival, that some groups even turned to political action to protect signs and symbols. Many organizations used the clout and unity of their membership to lobby government to pass laws prohibiting non-members from wearing fraternal fashions for purposes of fraud or financial gain; those caught wearing the order's symbols illegally could be fined or imprisoned. Later, governments also set limits on fraternal fashion, with the most conspicuous case being state laws limiting the public wearing of the white hood and robes of the second Ku Klux Klan (Allen 1990).

21.2 Inside the Lodge: Building a Fraternal Family

The Freemasons, well organized in Great Britain, were the first fraternal organization to establish themselves in the American colonies in the 1730s. Masonry continued to expand in the early 1800s and was so successful that

a second major fraternal order, the IOOF, was imported from Britain to the United States in 1819. After the Civil War, fraternalism became even more popular. New fraternal organizations were created, and their memberships grew at exponential rates between the end of Reconstruction and the 1910s (on this rise, see Schlesinger 1944; Gamm and Putnam 1999; Skocpol et al. 2000). These groups fell into two main categories—traditional "friendly" orders like the Masons and IOOF, which offered sickness benefits and mutual aid to members, and fraternal benefit orders, a new form of fraternalism that offered life insurance (e.g., the Woodmen of World, Modern Woodmen of America, and the Knights of the Maccabees).

Regardless of type, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fraternal orders were largely federated organizations, united by a shared identity and practices at the national level, but with most activities occurring in local lodges. Here, members held meetings and participated in rituals and ceremonies of the order. These activities aimed to create a fraternal family—most often, a brotherhood—among members, who after being initiated into a lodge, could advance through degrees of membership.

Fraternal fashion was central to building these in-group identities. Each fraternal organization had its own ceremonial regalia—uniforms, badges, sashes, hats, pins, and jewels—that distinguished it from other groups and acted as a selective and material benefit of membership (Salisbury 1969). As noted in the introduction, fraternal organizations' diverse apparel also differentiated between members and non-members (or members of another group). And, even among members, fashion demarcated a clear hierarchy, separating rank-and-file members from leadership. As individuals rose through the organization's ranks, they earned the right to wear increasingly ornate adornments and accessories.

Regalia was designed as part of a fraternal order's rituals. For example, members of the Improved Order of Red Men often wore what they perceived to be the dress of indigenous Americans while the KOP's lodge ritual involved donning knightly surcoats reminiscent of the Middle Ages, as these themes shaped their rituals. Figure 21.1 provides a visual example of regalia, showing the members of the Anglo-Saxon Masonic Lodge posing in ceremonial dress in 1902. Note the significant variation in apparel, differentiating between different degrees of membership and the roles played in the rituals.

Ultimately, the unity created by fashions and rituals inside the lodge fostered civic engagement and encouraged democratic values, making fraternal fashion central to the high levels of social capital and political engagement noted by scholars of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The groups themselves certainly reaped the benefits of members' loyalty, in the form of sustained membership and dues and increased social and political prestige and standing. But, some of the most positive externalities of members' distinct in-group identities were displayed outside the lodge.



Fig. 21.1 Freemasons in Lodge Ritual Regalia, 1902 (Image depicts members of a Masonic lodge, wearing the fashion required for the rites of the order. These rituals and their fashions were used to create brotherhood and emphasize the values of the order. Library of Congress image LC-USZ62-38,125; accessible online at https://lccn.loc.gov/2001695466)

21.3 Outside the Lodge: Social Capital in Action

In daily life, members wore badges, pins, and other accessories to identify themselves and their affiliations; larger community events became occasions for fraternal orders to put their fashions on full display. This helped organizations promote the benefits of membership, convey their values to the public, and emphasize their civic ideals and patriotic fervor.

21.3.1 Lapel Pins, Badges, and Jewels

Lapel pins were the most basic identifier of fraternal membership outside the lodge. They provided an easy way for members to connect with other members on the street, when traveling to new locations, or when involved in political or business transactions. Though many fraternal lapel pins were subtle, leaders and former leaders had the privilege of wearing special pins and, at times,

jewels of the order. These served as clear indicators of commitment to fraternal life and values.

One example of these adornments can be seen in Fig. 21.2, which is a form created by M.C. Lilley & Company, the major fraternal fashion company, for the Royal Neighbors of America (RNA). The RNA was a fraternal benefit order that was started by women but also included men; it enrolled approximately 259,000 benefit members in 1915. Putting aside the signet rings, there were pins, brooches, and badges, as well as eight types of small lapel pins, not including the design for juvenile members. Similar adornments are still widely used by surviving fraternal orders, including the IOOF (IOOF n.d.).

21.3.2 Fraternal Fashion in Action: Parades and Memorial Days

Fraternal fashions were also on full display at community events such as parades and other patriotic celebrations, which were major civic events during the height of fraternalism. Most organizations did not wear their private ceremonial regalia for these activities, but instead devised separate, public-facing uniforms. This evolution of fraternal fashion prompted one scholar to observe that, "after 1880, uniforms replaced aprons and sashes as the single most identifiable feature of fraternal membership" (McBride 2000, 264).

For example, fraternal orders' marching or drill teams—affiliated groups individuals could join after becoming full-fledged members of both friendly and fraternal benefit orders (McBride 2000, 280–288)—were central to the success of holiday and anniversary parades. In a notable example of a fraternal benefit order, the Modern Woodmen of America's drill team, the Foresters, distinguished themselves by carrying axes and wearing colorful uniforms (Modern Woodmen 2023). Among friendly fraternal organizations, appendant orders included the Knights Templar (Masons) and the Uniform Rank (KOP) (McBride 2000, 261–280).[1] Figure 21.3 provides an example of these groups' military-style uniforms, showing the IOOF's military appendant order, the Patriarchs Militant, marching in full uniform for a parade in Deadwood, South Dakota, in 1890.

Black and ethnic groups also developed appendant orders, which played an important role in shaping the public sphere in an era of Jim Crow segregation and nationalism. In Richmond, Virginia, for example, "Parades…were a central feature of black life in the city throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Brown and Kimball 1995, 308–309). These parades, which occurred almost weekly (Brown and Kimball 1995, 309), were often led by organizations such as the military order of the Uniform Rank of the Knights of Pythias of North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa (a

[1] At times, appendant drill teams also received government support through the use of public facilities. In particular, the Knights Templar were often given space in local armories to store their equipment (including regalia), and the grounds of public armories would be used for drilling (Moore 2006, 57–65).



Fig. 21.2 Royal Neighbors of America Jewelry Advertisement and Order Form, circa 1910s (This figure depicts an advertisement for a variety of lapel pins, badges, and jewelry for members of the Royal Neighbors of America. The wide array of designs was common and reflected the importance of these items to members. Image courtesy of Columbus Metropolitan Library)



Fig. 21.3 Patriarchs Militant in Parade Formation, 1890 (This figure depicts the Patriarchs Militant, the appendant marching order of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, in formation at a parade. Parades and military-inspired drill teams were popular in the late 1800s, and fraternal orders were central to these civic events. Library of Congress image LC-DIG-ppmsc-02570; accessible online at https://lccn.loc.gov/99613854/)

predominantly Black organization separate from its white-led namesake; see Brown and Kimball 1995, 309–312).

Other community events and celebrations also provided opportunities for fraternal organizations to demonstrate their patriotism (McBride 2000, 262). For example, Burlington, Vermont, held a weeklong celebration in July 1909 to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's arrival on what is today known as Lake Champlain. One of the main goals of this event, which also included an Independence Day celebration, was to provide "a grand civics lesson by the town fathers" that would Americanize immigrants and their children (Dann 2009, 89). Part of this was a parade on July 7, or what was called "Patriotic and Fraternal Society Day." The parade was led by veterans' and hereditary organizations, including the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) of Union veterans and the United Spanish War Veterans (USWV). These groups were followed by sixteen fraternal lodges representing eight different organizations—all generally white Protestant orders—and multiple professional and labor orders, including representatives from German, Irish,

Catholic, and French-Canadian fraternal groups. Each group came dressed in full uniform.

Finally, fraternal orders played a key role in communities' Memorial Day activities (Beito 2000; Warner 1959). As early as 1868, the GAR led the effort to organize local "Decoration Days." On these occasions, GAR members, dressed in full military uniforms and the symbolism of the order, adorned the graves of their fallen Civil War comrades with flowers. These events united the community around a shared American identity, instilling patriotism and civic virtue through the memories of the largely volunteer Union force. After many veterans passed away, women's auxiliaries and other hereditary organizations (e.g., the Sons of Union Veterans) continued Memorial Day traditions. Later, they were joined by other fraternal and veterans' orders, such as the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. These practices also extended to funerary practices more broadly (Chamberlain et al. 2019). Groups devised rituals, regalia, and even ornate headstones to both create selective benefits of membership, even after death, and build fraternal brotherhood among the living.

In summary, the fraternal fashions worn outside the lodge, especially at patriotic events, conveyed to the public the importance of these orders in the civic and political life of the nation. Fraternal orders harnessed this visibility, recognition, and goodwill to make claims on government to protect their fashions—and with it, their members' distinct in-group identities.

21.4 Policy Making and Fraternal Fashion

As we have established, fraternal orders used regalia and uniforms as selective benefits of membership; the growing ranks also increased leaders' and activists' leverage when speaking about orders' policy demands. Thus, fraternal fashion became a subject for government regulation. Laws and policies both protected the symbols of some orders and restricted other orders' regalia and accoutrements.

21.4.1 The Lodge-Lobbying Connection

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a Union veterans' organization founded after the Civil War, provides a notable example of how private activities became the subjects of public policy campaigns. Initially formed as an advocacy group with close ties to the Republican Party, by the early 1880s, local GAR posts began to employ meeting rituals that closely mirrored those of other fraternal orders (McConnell 1992, 79–111). Members also wore uniforms and held ranks similar to those employed by the Union Army. These practices inspired significant membership growth—at its peak in the early 1890s, the GAR claimed to represent over 400,000 members. This helped the GAR to successfully lobby for expanded federal pensions; representatives from states with a greater GAR presence (measured as both members and posts)

were more likely to support Union veterans' pension legislation in both 1879 and 1890 (Ainsworth 1995).

Similarly, in the 1880s, the Grange gained traction with farmers in the Northeast, and its ranks began to swell (Nordin 1974). These new members were attracted to local lodges by the Grange's rituals and regalia, emphasizing rural life in an ever-urbanizing Northeast; much like the GAR, this helped build camaraderie that soon became leverage for political efforts. By the 1890s, Grangers were active on a wide range of national and especially state policy issues. These political efforts were typically carried out by leaders and lobbyists, who pressured policymakers on the organization's behalf (Chamberlain and Yanus 2023). Empirical evidence suggests that greater numbers of Grange lobbyists registered in states with greater numbers of Grange members during this period (Chamberlain and Yanus 2023).

21.4.2 Legislation Protecting Fraternal Fashion

Fraternal fashion not only created solidarity that helped leaders lobby; it also became the subject of legislation. The popularity and wealth of fraternal orders, as well as the benefits of being part of an in-group, including financial and social support, created incentives for people to fraudulently claim fraternal membership. In a highly mobile society, it was possible for men to arrive in a town, visit a local lodge, and seek assistance from "brothers" in the order. Fraternal fashions such as pins, buttons, or regalia could be used as evidence for these claims. These same fraternal fashions could also be used improperly to create positive feelings and profit in business transactions. Therefore, many orders appealed to government for legal protection to protect the integrity of their signs, symbols, and regalia—and, by extension, their order and its members.

State legislatures began to pass legislation, first, to protect the symbols and uniforms of military veterans' orders and those established for veterans' descendants. The GAR led the way in advocating for these protections, lobbying in support of laws making it illegal to wear the badges and pins of the order unless an individual was a member in good standing.[2] This resulted in a spate of legislation passed in the second half of the 1880s to protect GAR uniforms and symbols from fraudulent use. For example, New York state passed a law in 1884 making it a misdemeanor for expelled or suspended members of the order to wear the GAR's badge; this was expanded in 1885 to apply to anyone wearing a GAR badge for personal gain or assistance. In response to the 1884 law, an editorial in the *Buffalo Evening News* ("More Legislative Nonsense" 1884) blasted it as a state effort to regulate men's dress. But, another editorial, published in the *Albany Journal* (and reprinted in other

[2] Veterans' organizations like the USWV and the American Legion would eventually be protected under these laws, too.

papers, see Elmira Daily Advertiser 1885, 4), saw the 1885 law as a necessary limit to fraud:

> We are not aware of how great an extent the abuse which this act remedies extends; but no doubt the badge of this patriotic organization is often used in appeals for charity by those who are not entitled to it. Even mendicants realize that the star of the grand army is the quickest passport to the sympathies of our citizens…

The national government was also sympathetic to protecting the public display of symbols representing the GAR and other Union-affiliated orders. Confederate symbols, including those of the United Confederate Veterans, however, did not receive similar protection. In fact, US Army regulations explicitly forbade military personnel from wearing Confederate organizations' badges and buttons. There were efforts to push back against this. In 1910, the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), the hereditary fraternal order for the sons and grandsons of Confederate veterans, appealed to President William Howard Taft to change regulations that barred active duty Army and Navy members from wearing SCV badges. The Department of the Navy and the War Department, however, declined (USCV 1910, 12–18).

By the early twentieth century, numerous state legislatures passed laws to protect other groups' symbols, too. Building on GAR badge laws, state laws generally made fraudulently wearing the accoutrements of a fraternal order a misdemeanor punishable with 30 to 60 days in prison. Some laws were blanket prohibitions, while other policies specified that the laws applied only to organizations that had been operating in the state for a certain length of time (such as ten years).

Critically, these laws were often passed with the whole or partial intent of eliminating Black fraternal orders that paralleled white fraternal orders in name and imagery. Black orders that did not have connections to British counterparts—specifically the Black-led Knights of Pythias, Elks, and Shriners (Liazos and Ganz 2004, 493)—were especially at risk. By regulating the public display of these organizations' symbols, legislators reasoned, their brotherhood would be weakened and their community presence diminished to a point of insignificance and marginalization.

These laws were challenged. In *State* v. *Holland* (1908), for example, William M. Holland, a Black man, was convicted of violating Montana's emblem law. Specifically, Holland was charged with fraudulently wearing a fraternal pin of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (the White fraternal Elks), when he was not a member—though he was a member of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (the Black fraternal Elks). Holland brought suit under the Fourteenth Amendment, alleging that the law violated the amendment's equal protection clause. The Montana Supreme Court agreed, ruling that the law "punishes one citizen for doing that which another may do with impunity" (qtd. in Harper 1990, 514). In other words,

criminalizing the actions of a Black man for doing what a white man could do freely did not provide equal protection to two otherwise similarly situated citizens.

However, other state laws withstood judicial review. For example, in *Hammer* v. *State* (1909), Charles Hammer, a white man who worked as a bondsman, was charged with violating Indiana's 1891 badge law by falsely wearing "a Royal Arch Masonic emblem in the lapel of his coat and a Masonic emblem on his watch charm" with the goal of gaining an advantage in business ("Does Your Emblem Belong to You?" 1908, 4). He appealed his conviction, alleging that the law violated the Fourteenth Amendment's privileges and immunities clause and the state's criminal code by granting to one class of citizens protections that did not apply to others. The Indiana Supreme Court disagreed, and upheld Hammer's conviction. In a decision written by Justice Quincy Alden Myers—a longtime civic leader and known member of the Elks (Cumback and Maynard 1899, 260–261)—the court argued that membership in "benevolent, philanthropic or fraternal organizations" was not one of the fundamental privileges and immunities of citizenship protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court also made a powerful statement about the sanctity and exclusivity of fraternal symbols and regalia:

> It is a matter of common knowledge that the membership in most, if not all, societies or organizations, whether secret or otherwise, is the result of fitness and selection, which give members standing and character, at least among their fellows, and to a greater or lesser degree with the public, and he who wears a badge or emblem of the order or society without being a member holds himself out to the public and to actual members as guilty of a false personation.

21.4.3 Legislation Restricting Fraternal Fashion

Not all state legislation protected fraternal fashion. Perhaps fraternal fashion's most conspicuous brush with the law relates to the second Ku Klux Klan, founded in 1915 by William Simmons as a fraternal order based on *The Birth of a Nation*. The group rose to popularity in the early 1920s, its profitable recruitment machine (not unlike a modern multi-level marketing corporation; see Fryer and Levitt 2012) fueled by a "100% American" message that attracted white, native-born Protestants. To distinguish themselves from other groups, organizers encouraged members to wear the uniform of the second Klan—white hoods and robes—at a variety of public events. This was a sharp departure from the first Klan, which covertly wore similar head coverings to evade detection while carrying out extra-legal violence. Because of these displays and the order's notoriety, state governments quickly passed anti-masking or anti-hooding laws targeting the Klan's public regalia (Allen 1990). These laws served to accelerate the Klan's precipitous decline, which was also fueled by corruption and unsavory practices among its leaders.

The examples detailed in this section reveal how fraternal fashion served, for some organizations, as a boon to membership and therefore a key to lobbying success. Critically, fraternal fashion itself became a subject of government policymaking by determining which uniforms and symbols, such as those of the GAR, deserved legal protection, and which, most notably the masks and hoods of the second Klan, merited suppression.

21.5 Conclusion

This historical overview demonstrates the political importance of fraternal fashion both inside and outside the lodge. Regalia, such as uniforms, badges, pins, and hats, was used to attract members, as part of ceremonies and rituals, and to develop civic values (Beito 2000). Fraternal organizations also fostered community, a sense of civic duty, and national pride outside the lodge. Members, dressed in full honors of their orders, were omnipresent in civic and political life. Donning the outfit of an order's drill team, wearing its apron in a parade, or displaying a lapel pin when conducting business or riding a train, are just a few examples of the pervasiveness of this activity.

Fraternal organizations with political goals also used their membership bases, attracted and retained in part by the order's regalia, to support their lobbying efforts in the halls of government. And, beginning in the late nineteenth century, fraternal regalia became a subject of both protective and restrictive legislation. Governments took actions to protect fraternal orders by establishing boundaries on who could wear fraternal symbols and accoutrements. Still, there were limits, as evidenced by state and local governments' actions targeting the second Ku Klux Klan, whose white robes and hoods became subjects of anti-masking legislation.

Today, some fraternal orders continue the traditions of their late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century counterparts. Perhaps no modern group is more identifiable by its regalia than the Shriners, an appendant Masonic organization known for their distinctive red fezzes. More commonly, though, fraternal fashions are heirlooms of another time, passed down within families and exhibited in museums. For example, scholars and archivists, including at the Center for Fraternal Collections & Research at Indiana University, are actively working to catalog and preserve these artifacts in a centralized location. This is because fraternalism has declined since the 1960s, largely replaced by voluntary and community movements and organizations, such as civil rights groups and soccer leagues. Other individuals, for example, donors to public radio, choose to show solidarity with causes important to them not through membership, but through monetary donations.

To this end, we encourage scholars to explore how organizational fashions—both historical and modern—perpetuate in- and out-group identities, encourage tolerance and intolerance, and empower citizens to make claims on their government. It is almost certain that fashion plays a much different role in today's world. Yet team apparel and the ubiquitous NPR tote bags may still

play a key role in shaping and signaling identities, polarizing citizens, and influencing political outcomes. Moreover, comparing what organizations do today with what fraternal orders did in the past will center fashion in the discussions about social capital and democratic governance in the modern era.

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CHAPTER 22

Tactical Is the New Black: Examining Gun Owner Fashion as Political Expression

Alexandra T. Middlewood, Noah S. Schwartz, and Anne Wasinger

22.1 Introduction

Observers of the January 6th insurrection at the US Capitol noted a trend among those participating in the demonstrations and eventual storming: tactical gear. However, January 6th was not the first time this aesthetic appeared as a form of political expression. In 2020, tactical wear was prominent across the country at pro-Second Amendment and anti-lockdown protests in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, tactical wear and highly accessorized semi-automatic rifles have become mainstays at pro-gun protests and other, often though not always, right-wing causes.

Over the past several decades, gun owners have emerged as a political force in their participation and attitudes. Studies of firearms show that people derive meaning and political identity from gun ownership (e.g., Lacombe 2019; Lacombe et al. 2019; Middlewood et al. 2019; Joslyn 2020; Lacombe 2021; Middlewood 2021; Schwartz 2022). This chapter examines how gun owners express their political values through tactical clothing choices and what this means for gun politics. We hypothesize that the rise of the tactical aesthetic

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is attributed to shifts in gun culture. As gun culture has evolved, the fashion trends of the gun enthusiast community have also changed. Gun Culture 1.0 is characterized by the use of firearms for hunting and recreational shooting but has declined steadily since the mid-1960s and given way to a new version, Gun Culture 2.0, primarily focused on self-defense (Yamane et al. 2020b).

Tactical gear is a key part of this fashion. The term "tactical" is employed within the community of gun enthusiasts to describe military-style clothing and equipment. It is usually developed for military use but trickles down to police forces and the civilian market. The aesthetic includes cargo pants, plate carriers for mounting body armor, and other gear. Tactical clothing and accessories follow the principle of modularity meaning they can adapt to different tasks using systems of straps, velcro, attachment points, and rails that allow for attaching accessories. For example, a user with a plate carrier fitted with a Modular Light-Weight Load-Carrying Equipment (MOLLE) system can swap out armored plates or attach spare gun magazines, first-aid kits, radios, and other items directly to their chest. They can even mount small velcro "morale patches" to express political opinions. Tactical fashion usually draws on a subdued color pallet suitable for military and police use: black, dark green, tan, gray, and even navy blue.

We argue that tactical fashion has become a form of political expression among gun owners and speculate this style is part of the emerging Gun Culture 3.0. Further, fashion trends among gun owners are influenced by market forces, changes in policy, and the shifting demographics of gun ownership in America. This chapter will explore these themes using content analysis of advertisements in five major publications popular with different segments of the gun owning community—*American Rifleman*, *Recoil*, *Guns & Ammo*, *Gun Digest*, and *Field & Stream*. We examine a sample of randomly selected issues between 1994 and 2021, developing a database of 2,310 advertisements.

22.2 Gun Culture

The term "gun culture" is contentious within the social sciences. First coined by Hoftstadter (1970), the term describes the unique attachment to guns in American culture. Since then, scholars have adapted the term to describe the shared culture of gun enthusiasts in the United States (Yamane 2017). This culture consists of practices, like concealed carry (Carlson 2015) and shooting sports (Kohn 2004); symbols, like the AR-15 and Gadsden Flag; jargon, like Fudd[1] and tacticool[2] (Schwartz 2022); narratives like the "good guy with a

[1] The term Fudd, which comes from the famous Looney Tunes character, is used disparagingly to refer to an older gun owner, who is likely to own less controversial firearms, and thus more willing to compromise on gun control.

[2] The term tacticool is used to describe items that fit the tactical aesthetic.

gun" (Cook and Goss 2014; Joslyn 2020; Schwartz 2022); artistic productions, like online videos (Schwartz 2019), magazines (Yamane et al. 2019), podcasts, and chat rooms (Hassett-Walker 2019; McLean 2018); and material culture, like firearms, accessories, clothing brands, and even Second Amendment friendly coffee companies. This culture is political because of the way that social movement leaders use it to rally opposition to gun control laws. In fact, the influence of gun culture can be observed in the political behavior of gun owners, who regardless of gender identity, are more likely to vote, write their representatives, and donate to a political cause than non-gun owners (Joslyn 2020; Middlewood et al. 2019; Middlewood 2021), and are also more likely to support the Republican Party (Joslyn 2020).

Scholars of gun culture, led by Yamane (2017), divide gun culture into various iterations or periods. Gun Culture 1.0 developed in the United States as guns shifted from objects of necessity on the American frontier to objects of leisure used by sportsmen for hunting and competition. As such, Gun Culture 1.0 was centered around these practices (Yamane et al. 2019). Starting in the 1970s and 1980s, influenced by fear due to rising crime rates during the crack-cocaine epidemic and the work of gun-rights groups like the National Rifle Association (NRA), states began to liberalize their concealed carry laws. More Americans now carry guns than at any time in the last century (Carlson 2015; Rowhani-Rahbar et al. 2017; Yamane 2021), shifting the focus of gun culture from hunting and sports shooting toward self-defense. The overwhelming majority of American gun owners now cite self-defense as their primary reason for owning a gun (Parker et al. 2017).

The shift away from the widespread popularity of sport hunting and traditional sports shooting among the urban upper-middle class—still cultural pastimes and tools of subsistence for rural Americans and Indigenous peoples—toward self-defense has had the effect of universalizing gun culture (Yamane 2017). Self-defense is theoretically a universal concern. For example, historians have recently uncovered a long historical tradition of defensive gun ownership in African American history from slavery to the civil rights movement (Cobb 2015; Jackson 2020; Johnson 2014). As a result, gun culture has begun the process of diversification, incorporating progressives and political moderates (Liberal Gun Owners 2021; Yamane et al. 2020a), women (NSSF 2022; Stange and Oyster 2000), 2SLGBTQ+ folks (Combs 2022), and a new generation of Black Americans concerned with police violence (Perry and Meraji 2020).

Gun culture is influenced by broader American culture, especially right-wing politics, given the well-documented relationship between the Republican Party and pro-gun groups like the NRA (Lacombe 2019, 2021; Melzer 2009, 2018; Schwartz 2022). As such, the norms, meanings, and narratives of gun culture are shaped by the way Americans see and experience race, gender, sexuality, and class. Gun culture is a gendered space, often associated with hyper-masculinity (Carlson 2015). Scholars studying gender and guns have tended to do so from several perspectives. The first model, which

fits into what Yamane (2022) dubs the "Standard Model," through which academics view gun ownership as a social nuisance, focuses on the relationship between firearms and intimate partner violence.[3] The second model, generally adopted by sociologists and anthropologists, highlights the relationship between firearms and gender to explain human behavior and social practices like gun ownership (Stange and Oyster 2000) or gun carry (Carlson 2014, 2015). Finally, political scientists have examined gender as a variable explaining political opinion (Carson and Froese 2019; Goss 2017; Kleck 1996) and political behavior (Joslyn 2020; Middlewood et al. 2019).

Though the term gun culture has gained widespread traction in the sociological, public health, and political science literature, little research has examined this culture in relation to fashion. Like all cultures, gun culture is susceptible to trends and fads. These are expressed when gun owners dress their bodies, their vehicles, and even their firearms.

We ask, how can changes in gun culture be examined by looking at fashion among gun owners? How do broader political shifts, movements, and identities influence this fashion?

22.3 Fashion as Politics

A rich literature explores the intersections between fashion and American politics. Historically, sartorial articles communicated an individual's social status, political ideologies, and religious affiliations (Miller 2005). As such, fashion has always served as a means of communication. Lurie (1981, 36) contends: "Fashion is free speech, and one of the privileges, if not always one of the pleasures of a free world." Fashion is inherently communicative, and this communication has in turn been sanctioned by society through dress codes and laws (Boland-Devito 2020). For example, Ford (2021) observes the tendency of elites to regulate dress as a means of political control.

Over the last century, the connection between fashion and politics has been detailed in numerous cases heard by the Supreme Court. The reality of clothing as a conduit for political speech was recognized during the landmark 1969 case *Tinker vs Des Moines Independent School District*, which asserted that the students' donning armbands in protest of the Vietnam War were exercising their right to free speech (Boland-Devito 2020). Years later, in 2018, *Minnesota Voters Alliance v. Mansky* explored the legality of restricting political dress in polling places. The Minnesota law was criticized in the Court's majority opinion as the state never defined the term "political" in its attempts to regulate voter fashion. Chief Justice Roberts observed: "[T]he Election Day Policy… poses riddles that even the State's top lawyers struggle to solve… as political…. How about a shirt bearing the name of the National Rifle Association? Definitely out…" (Boland-Devito 2020, 495). While the Minnesota law was ultimately deemed unconstitutional, it furthered the notion that clothing

[3] For example, Bender et al. (2021).

can be used as means of political expression and messaging. Further, the political significance of clothing is validated by the country's history of regulating dress (Miller 2005). Multiple studies have verified the capabilities of clothing as a form of political communication paving the way for researchers to begin to dissect the meanings behind political actors' fashion choices.

22.4 Group Identity and Allegiance in Dress

Political dress fosters group identity and allegiance. Researchers have credited fashion with "influencing political bonds, reinforcing group ties, and acting as a catalyst for common action" (Miller 2005, 7). Organized political dress often characterizes protests and enhances the political messages of the protestors by creating a sense of group allegiance (Miller 2005). Famous movements and political ideologies have been associated with a specific article of clothing, for example, the pussy hats of the Women's March or the widely worn MAGA hat. These articles communicate political messaging.

In turn adopting forms of political dress cultivates a sense of group identity. In this way, sartorial choices encourage a common feeling that Miller (2005, 6) considers "crucial to democratic community," promoting common action within a group. There is evidence of this phenomenon within the gun community in the form of protests. The emergence of the tactical aesthetic and its usage in political protesting signals a shift in the way that some gun owners represent themselves politically.

Scholars are just beginning to probe the connection between fashion and firearms in America. Browder (2009) cites the push by gun companies to supply their consumers with compatible accessories for their weapons. For example, gun companies in the early 1980s deployed targeted clothing advertisements to American women in an attempt to create a devoted female fanbase of gun owners (Browder 2009). Forty years later, female gun owners utilize a wide variety of accessories to carry, and numerous fashion brands have tapped into the lucrative market of concealed carry fashion (Bethea 2019). Organizational promotion in the form of the NRA Fashion Show has further popularized the industry (Bethea 2019).

22.5 Data Collection

Looking at fashion trends within gun culture helps us to better understand the relationship between fashion and politics. To this point, we have argued that fashion has become a form of political expression among gun owners. Further, these fashion trends are influenced by changes in policy and thus become a part of the broader conversation between regulators and regulated. We analyze this claim using content analysis of advertisements in major publications popular with gun enthusiasts, following the example set by Yamane et al. (2019). As Griswold (2012, 73) states, producers and consumers of cultural objects are

Table 22.1 Circulation and readership of firearms magazines

Magazine	*Circulation*	*Readership*
American Rifleman	1.5 million	NRA members
Guns & Ammo	6.5 million print, 400,000 online (Sebastian 2013)	Broader gun community
Gun Digest	Not available	Broader gun community
Recoil	250,000	Younger gun owners
Field & Stream	Not available	Hunters and anglers

Circulation data and readership demographics for the five most common firearms magazines

connected through a complex apparatus, and "this apparatus includes facilities for production and distribution; marketing techniques such as advertising, co-opting mass media, or targeting; and the creation of situations that bring potential cultural consumers in contact with cultural objects." Gun advertising's purpose is to sell firearms and accessories to consumers and thus can influence owners in various ways. While previous studies have focused mainly on *American Rifleman* (Yamane et al. 2019) we chose *American Rifleman, Field & Stream, Guns & Ammo, Gun Digest,* and *Recoil* to represent a broader range of firearm publications and readerships. *American Rifleman* is the premier magazine of the NRA and has a broad reach of 1.5 million subscribers, but is not a monolithic representation of gun culture. Only about 19% of gun owners belong to the NRA (Parker et al. 2017). These members are more likely to be conservative, have distinct policy preferences, own more firearms, and use them more often (Parker et al. 2017). Additionally, 78% of NRA members are white, and members are more likely to score higher on social science measures of racial resentment (McElwee 2018). Therefore, we have included *American Rifleman* in our analysis in addition to four other publications with broader coverage of gun culture and a more diverse readership (see Table 22.1) For example, the editors of *Guns & Ammo* take a less absolutist stance on Second Amendment issues, even publishing letters from readers advocating for gun control (Poole 2021), while *Recoil*, one of the newer firearm magazines with a younger readership, a diverse editorial team, and was the first firearm magazine to feature an openly gay person on its cover.

22.6 Content Analysis

Our starting point for data collection began in 1994 and ended in 2021. We chose to begin in 1994, as this is when the Federal Assault Weapons Ban was passed in Congress, and examine if the law had any effect on advertisements of tactical wear, both during the ban and after it expired in 2004. Our analysis of *American Rifleman*, *Field & Stream*, and *Guns & Ammo* spanned the entire time period. Our analysis of *Gun Digest* and *Recoil* began in 2012 and ended in 2021. *Recoil* was not published until 2012, while *Gun Digest* began

publication in 2006; however, for unknown reasons it proved impossible to find issues between 2006 and 2011.

We used a random sample from each publication. Following the example of Yamane et al. (2019, 2020b), we randomly selected one issue per year from each magazine using a random number generator. We then examined each issue for advertisements "placed by the manufacturer, licensed dealer, or importer of the product" rather than big box stores, or sporting goods stores (Yamane et al. 2020b, 15). The ad had to be for firearms, ammunition, or accessories and at least one-quarter page in size.

Following Saylor et al. (2004) methods, we selected seven themes: gender; race; tactical gear or clothing, including references to terms exclusive to tactical wear; concealed carry; polymer rifles[4]; gun attachments; and personal protection. We define "clothing" as items worn to cover the body, like shirts, pants, and jackets, and "gear" as accessories that are worn on the body in addition to clothing, like tactical vests, hats, jewelry, and baby carriers. In total our dataset comprises 2,310 advertisements, including 558 ads from *American Rifleman*, making up 24% of the total sample; 830 ads (36%) from *Guns & Ammo*; 154 (7%) from *Gun Digest*; 661 ads (29%) from *Recoil*; and 107 ads (5%) from *Field & Stream*.

Following Yamane et al. (2019, 2020b), intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorf's α (alpha). A sample of ten magazines were coded by all researchers on the team. Alpha values were produced for each variable (see Table 22.2). Alpha values above 0.800 are reliable, with values between 0.667 and 0.800 suitable for coming to "tentative conclusions" (Krippendorff 2019, 356).

Table 22.2 Measuring intercoder reliability

Variable	*Krippendorff's Alpha*
Gender	0.933
Race	0.91
Tactical	0.715
Concealed Carry	0.825
Polymer Rifle	0.804
Gun Attachments	0.729
Personal Protection	0.711

Note All three authors coded advertisements using these variables, and thus including Krippendorff's Alpha is necessary to determine intercoder reliability. Krippendorff's Alpha is a reliability coefficient developed to measure the agreement among coders, drawing distinctions among typically unstructured phenomena or assigning computable values to them

[4] Polymer, a dense and durable plastic, has slowly replaced wood in firearm design and is most commonly used on modern tactical firearms. This includes semi-automatic carbines like the AR-15 platform.

22.7 Analysis

Advertisements in firearms magazines follow similar trends seen in everyday examples of gun owner fashion, like tactical wear at protests and tactical-style baby carriers and backpacks in everyday life. Importantly, we do not claim whether shifts in the demand or supply of such goods came first, as the influence of market forces is simultaneous. The firearms industry, like all industries, "seeks to create demand for their products and so drive [gun] culture, but they also respond to demands in the marketplace that reflect a pre-existing culture" (Yamane 2023, 2). We found two primary trends in the data we collected related to an increase in tactical aesthetic. First, there was a large increase in the number of ads containing polymer rifles, which have been used as part of the tactical aesthetic by gun owners. Second, the number of ads containing tactical clothing and accessories increased exponentially. These trends are shown in Fig. 22.1.

22.7.1 Increase in Polymer Rifles

Recent advances in technology have allowed firearms manufacturers to increasingly use polymer in the construction of firearms. This shift began in the 1980s and 1990s and was partially driven by the popularity of the Glock handgun. While these firearms took some time to take off, as consumers preferred more traditional wood stocks or metal grips, their popularization in TV and movies soon drove the trend forward (Barrett 2013).

Fashion cannot fully explain the popularity of polymer firearms. Handguns with polymer grips are lighter than their full-metal counterparts and easier for concealed carry. Polymer stocks on rifles are more durable, weather resistant, and require less care than wood, which can crack over time if not stored or maintained properly. That being said, their adoption by many militaries and police forces, as well as their use in television, video games, and film has clearly driven the demand for black rifles, like the infamous AR-15 platform.

We see this reflected in our data, where both the self-defense and hunting markets have shifted toward the use of polymer in firearms. Of ads that contained messaging about personal protection, one-third contained an image of a polymer rifle. This shift occurred over time. Prior to 2004, 23% of those ads had polymer rifles compared to 37% after. A similar trend emerges within ads about hunting. In total, 23% of hunting ads contained polymer rifles, but prior to 2004 only 10%. That increased to 27% after 2004. Additionally, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest polymer rifles have become more popular among enthusiasts of shooting sports, but our data in this area is limited. Only 14% of ads analyzed contained reference to sports shooting. Of these, only 5% contained a rifle, though all of them were polymer.

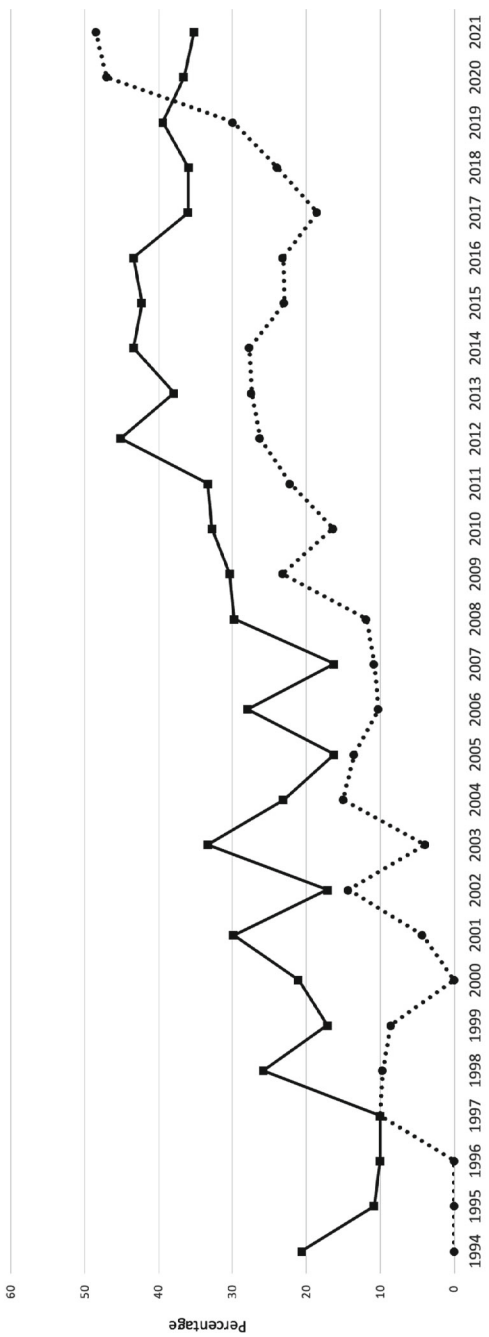


Fig. 22.1 Percentage of advertisements depicting tactical wear and polymer rifles in *American Rifleman*, *Field & Stream*, *Gun Digest*, *Guns & Ammo*, and *Recoil* magazines since 1994

22.7.2 *Increase in Tactical Wear*

We categorized tactical wear as an image containing at least one piece of tactical gear or clothing—including but not limited to items like plate carriers, helmets, gloves, utility or molle vests, and cargo pants—or text using terms like "tactical," "modular," "m-lok," and "picatinny." Over time there was an exponential increase in the number of advertisements containing tactical wear—a 420% increase after 2004. As shown in Fig. 22.1, the largest increase occurred in 2020 and was followed by a smaller increase in 2021 that made those two years far surpass the rest. These results support what we have witnessed at protests across the country over the past few years: that tactical wear is becoming increasingly popular among gun owners. We argue these fashion choices have emerged as a highly politicized form of expression, following the rise of Gun Culture 3.0, in response to government policies. The increase in advertisements for tactical wear in recent years exemplifies that these fashion choices have not gone unnoticed by firms in the industry.

22.7.3 *Decline in Concealed Carry*

Yamane et al. (2019, 2020b) chronicle the rise of concealed carry in firearm advertisements throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Our data provides evidence that this trend may be peaking. After 1998 we noted a decrease in ads targeting concealed carriers with short-lived increases in 2009–2012 and again in 2019, though none of these later years reached as high as the mid-1990s.

The trend is logical from a market perspective. A key aspect of the tactical aesthetic is modularity, which is the ability to change out and swap accessories to create a unique look or feel for the user. This applies as much to tactical clothing as firearms. For example, as Baum (2013) explains, much of the appeal of the AR-15 platform is the ability to customize and personalize one's rifle, leading him to label it as "Barbie Dolls for men." This modularity allows firearms manufacturers and producers of aftermarket parts to create a wider range of products and accessories than with concealed carry. Aptly, 44% of the advertisements we analyzed contained some sort of firearms attachment, such as red dot sights, flashlights, or night vision scopes.

22.7.4 *Other Trends: Gender & Racial Diversity*

A key feature of the shift from Gun Culture 1.0 to 2.0 is the diversification of gun culture. The preoccupations of Gun Culture 1.0, hunting and traditional sports shooting, were the activities of upper-middle-class white and rural men. Self-defense, alternatively, is a universal preoccupation (Yamane et al. 2020b). This diversification of gun culture, accelerated by the great gun pandemic buying spree of 2020, has meant more women, people of color, and 2SLBGTQ+ folks have become gun owners (Combs 2022). This shift

was reflected in our data. The majority of advertisements portraying women and people of color were published after 2010. While a large portion of these ads still predominantly depict people who are white men, there is a noticeable increase in diversity after 2010. Prior, just under 4% of advertisements showed people of color and 6% showed women. After 2010, those percentages increased to 12% and 15.5% respectively. Though surprisingly, 2020 and 2021 do not stand out compared to other years. While gun owners were becoming increasingly diverse during 2020 and 2021, advertisements did not follow suit. This is perhaps because the market has not yet caught up to demand. There is a scarcity of publicly available data concerning the subscribers of the magazines in this study; though it is not a stretch to suggest that women and people of color are probably less likely to read these publications, and thus advertisers do not feel a need to include more diversity than is already present.

A vast majority of the ads that included women and people of color alongside tactical gear were published after 2011, once again highlighting increased diversity in these advertisements during the 2010s.

22.8 Conclusion

Fashion is political expression, and gun owners are no exception to this rule. The emergence of tactical fashion has resulted from a combination of political factors, like the sunsetting of the Weapons Ban in 2004; market forces, like the emergence of polymer firearms and modular designs; and cultural trends, both within and outside gun culture.

We found that firearms advertisements increasingly feature tactical gear and polymer firearms. We also see a rise in women and racially diverse individuals in firearm advertisements, following trends in the gun community, albeit with some significant lag.

Our research has only begun to explore the emergence and influence of the tactical aesthetic on gun culture and politics and is limited by looking only at this phenomenon through the lens of magazines. Future research should draw on a broader range of methods to explore this topic, including interviews or ethnographic fieldwork, to better understand how gun owners consume, accept, modify, and perhaps even subvert the messaging from these advertisements. Further, while gun magazines are beginning to catch up to the changing demographics of gun culture, future research should shine a light on the diversification of gun culture and implications for the future of gun politics.

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CHAPTER 23

Flying the Coup: American Flag Apparel and the January 6th Insurrection

Jessica Reanne

The first spiritual want of a barbarous man is decoration.

—Thomas Carlyle, Sartour Resartus

23.1 Introduction

Whether it is a hat, a mask, or a cape, the American flag's many iterations made a stunning appearance at the January 6th insurrection (Fig. 23.1). This is not the first time the American flag has been caught up in controversy. Examples abound from Vietnam veterans burning the flag or hanging it upside down from the Statue of Liberty, or Occupy Wall Street creating flags with corporate logos instead of stars. For conservatives, these actions are disrespectful to the flag, the country, and their values. Political questions about the symbolism of the flag, its creation, and most importantly, its desecration, are negotiated in courts (see *Texas v. Johnson* 491 U.S. 397), the media, and everyday conversations. Teachout (2010, 4) writes that the American flag "has stood, at different times, for radical democracy, opposition to immigration, the abolition of slavery, unregulated capitalism, segregation, integration, and a hawkish war policy, among many other things". The flag is a cultural icon that provides the basis for the mythologies of American culture. It appears on

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t-shirts, wallets, pet collars, swimming suits, underwear, home décor, and the list goes on. Some even get the flag tattooed on their bodies. It's a powerful symbol of American patriotism.

This chapter looks at the use of flags as apparel and costuming in the January 6th insurrection and the memory-building of insurrectionists. What does it mean to don the American flag while inciting a coup at the Capitol? Utilizing literature on collective memory, this chapter posits that the insurrectionists relied on a highly theatrical form of political flag culture that included the visual cues of costumes, e.g., wearing a flag as a cape, to reenact the founding as a form of mnemonic appropriation. Kidd (2007, 57) writes, "Unlike many European nations, the United States lacks shared cultural symbols that help define national identity, such as a royal family, a national religion, or an ethnic costume. The flag has filled that role and become a sacred cultural symbol that establishes our national identity." Draped in the flag, insurrectionists claimed an epochal shift in American history: a second founding, beholden to the values of Trump. The insurrectionists relied on the symbolic power of the flag. Kidd (2007, 56) states, "As symbols, flags create solidarity and unity, represent common interests and points of reference; flags are used by groups to release emotions important in developing nationalism. When apparel items use the flag as the dominant design motif, the apparel items also become symbols." For American cultural memory, flags are indispensable tools.



Fig. 23.1 "Capitol Breach 2." Out of focus fist in the air with Trump and American flags in the air and worn as capes (CC Image Curtesy of Brett Davis on Flickr)

The question of how the flag can mean opposing things at the same time is that of cultural memory-making. There is no monolithic American culture. It ebbs and flows and varies region to region and community to community. The January 6th insurrection is an example of cultural memory-making that recreates and negotiates cultural memories and reduces them to mythic archetypes (Novick 1999). According to Novick (1999), the mythologization of events suspends them out of context, de-historicizes them, and increases their affective persuasion for them to become mythic, cultural memories. Crises like revolutionary wars or insurrections are formative cultural ruptures that spur on the clarification of old and the creation of new cultural memories (Schwartz 2000). The January 6th insurrection is not just a failed attempt to stop the count of electoral votes and keep Donald Trump as President. It is a key moment of memory-building for a particular sect of American culture that utilizes the flag as its rallying cry.

23.2 Political Flag Culture

The American flag has been political from its inception. After the infamous act of throwing tea into the harbor, Teachout (2010, 25) writes, "the act of patriotic dissent began to foster a different kind of patriotic sentiment: a growing sense of 'nation,' a sense of community that could stand politically separate from Great Britain." As the rebellion grew, so did the use of flags and liberty poles (tall ships' masts placed in public spaces where colonists would gather and often protest). Dozens of flag designs were used between 1765 and 1775. For colonists, the use of a flag, regardless of design, symbolized defiance. Teachout (2010, 25–26) continues to say that America "developed its own iconography of protest," and that the use of flags and liberty poles "expressed an emergent political flag culture."

Teachout (2010, 5) describes the creation of two separate types of patriotism connected to this flag culture. Humanitarian patriotism "represents an ideological commitment to democracy as a political and social system" and can be seen in the likes of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr. Nationalist patriotism, on the other hand, comes about in the early twentieth century. "It presupposed a citizenry defined not only by a political covenant but also by a shared cultural, social, economic, ethnic, and geographic heritage," says Teachout (2010, 6). Those with nationalist patriotism are:

> more likely to think in terms of duty… they were more willing to sacrifice the rights of individuals for what they perceived to be the good of the country, privileging loyalty above skepticism. Their patriotism reflected this deference, using songs, rituals, and symbols to create a culture of reverence. (Teachout 2010, 6)

Nationalist and humanitarian patriotisms are not discreet categories: they intertwine and blend. However, for those who marched on the Capitol, their reverence for the flag and America created a fervent nationalistic style of patriotism that is easily subsumed into authoritarianism because it prioritizes the myths of the founding and people like Thomas Jefferson over historical and scientific truths. Patriotism here means believing in a particular account of American cultural history and viewing other accounts as inherently threatening. When other subcultures of American cultural memory come to light or become more dominant, for these patriots, the only way that their cultural memory can remain true is if all these other accounts are discredited or destroyed. This is why who uses the flag, who is an American, and what American history is, is so controversial.

Those with nationalistic patriotism are also much more susceptible to white supremacist cultural narratives. Each surge of the KKK's membership and activity in history coincides with a surge in electoral power that destabilizes the existing power structure. Whether it was emancipation, the rise in parochial schooling in the 1920s, or school desegregation, the KKK utilized the opportunity to demonize particular groups in society. McVeigh and Estep (2019, 52) write:

> Native-born whites, who previously enjoyed these privileges all by themselves, saw these changes diluting their social status. So the Klan constructed narratives that depicted ascendant cultural groups—former slaves, Catholics, immigrants, Jews, or [Black] Americans—as culturally and morally inferior.

Groups like the KKK utilized these moments that they understood to be crises to shore up their own cultural narratives of supremacy and recruit those who were also feeling destabilized.

When Donald Trump became president, he took to the campaign trail and the White House with this same nationalistic brand of patriotism. The call to "Make America Great Again" pulled the flag out of its frozen symbolism of 9/11 and the War on Terror and imbued it once again with nationalistic patriotism. However, like the many flag designs used by colonists during the revolution, the new flag designs are not just that of the old red, white, and blue. These designs contain the Trump-brand iconography and recreations of flag designs from early colonists. These designs are made into hats, t-shirts, sweatshirts, coffee mugs, and so on, and they designate the wearer as a "true patriot."

23.3 History of the Flag as Apparel

The popularity of the American flag apparel is hardly a long-held tradition. Prior to the Civil War, the flag was primarily a maritime device used to designate American ships at sea. Kidd (2007) finds that prior to the Spanish-American War in 1898, American flag apparel was few and far between, mostly

seen in political cartoons or used in advertisements. It wasn't until the late 1920s with textile worker strikes that the flag became a part of protest apparel. During this time, states also began to pass their own flag desecration statutes that addressed commercial and political uses of the flag. In 1942, the US Flag Code established rules for the display and care of the flag that specified apparel for the first time. In Section 8 on "Respect for the Flag" it states:

> d. The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery….
> g. The flag should never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature…
> i. The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever…
> j. No part of the flag should ever be used as a costume or athletic uniform. (The Flag Code)

However, the Flag Code does not specify any penalties for violating its rules, nor is there any specified mechanism of enforcement.

It wasn't until the 1960s and the Vietnam War that American flag apparel found itself in the midst of true controversy. Kidd (2007, 54) says:

> Members of the establishment, the hawks, generally wore the flag in the form of a lapel pin or flag patches over their hearts or on their sleeves. Members of the anti-establishment, the doves, wore flag shirts and vests, used flags as shawls or blankets, and wore flag patches on their blue jeans, often over holes in the seat or knees of their jeans. To members of the establishment, ultimate disrespect to the flag was its use as or on clothing, especially as a patch on blue jeans by young anti-establishment war protesters.

By the late 1960s, most states had passed flag anti-desecration laws that were used primarily to arrest and charge anti-war protestors who burned the flag or wore flag patches on their apparel. One of the cases brought under these statutes is *Hoffman v. United States* (1971). Wearing a shirt with an American flag design with two political buttons pinned to it, Hoffman was arrested on Capitol Hill where he was responding to a subpoena to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Hoffman was playing with a yoyo when three Capitol police officers approached and arrested him in a struggle. The shirt in question was ripped and police found that Hoffman had painted a Viet Cong flag on his back. Hoffman was arrested for violating the flag code by "knowingly [casting] contempt upon the flag of the United States by publicly mutilating, defacing and defiling" it (*Hoffman v. United States*, 445 F.2d 226, 227 D.C. Cir. 1971). The circuit court didn't have a strong case to condemn Hoffman, but stuck to the point that Hoffman had mutilated the flag by pinning the two political buttons to his shirt. Hoffman was sentenced to 30 days in jail or a $100 fine. In his defense, Hoffman said:

> I had a shirt that *resembled* the American flag. I wore the shirt because I was going before the Un-American Activities Committee of the House of Representatives, and I don't particularly consider that committee American in the tradition as I understand it… and I wore the shirt to show that we were in the tradition of the founding fathers of this country, and that that committee wasn't. That's why I wore it. (*Hoffman v. United States*, 445 F.2d 226, 227 D.C. Cir. 1971, emphasis added)

Hoffman appealed his case. The D.C. Court of Appeals dismissed the case, stating that Hoffman's shirt merely resembled the flag and was not created from a flag. When Hoffman later appeared on *The Merv Griffin Show* in 1970, again wearing a flag shirt, the network blacked it out, which sparked controversy (Gould 1970).

The D.C. Court of Appeals was one of many venues that negotiated whether the use of the flag for apparel was desecration. It was a political question that had yet to be settled. Some courts upheld convictions and others did not. Kidd (2007, 55) writes, "Court decisions appeared entirely subjective, with the most vocal protesters wearing flag-themed clothing receiving the harshest punishments." Wearing the flag as a shirt, vest, or patch made anti-war protestors easy targets, while conservatives, wearing flag lapel pins, were left alone.

While both liberal and conservative groups utilized the flag in their apparel in the 1960s—one as a symbol of personal patriotism and the other as a form of protest—dominant usage shifted from liberal to conservative after the 1960s. Kidd (2007, 56) states, "As 'owners' of the symbol, the use of the flag in apparel items was culturally sanctioned, even endorsed, because flag-themed items represented their [conservative] political point of view." Wearing American flag apparel beyond just a small pin was now in line with the conservative majority and endorsed by the institutions themselves. Charges against people wearing the flag stopped making their way to the courts and both conservative and liberal politicians wore flag apparel and lapel pins. However, when President Nixon resigned from office wearing a flag pin, pins fell out of favor with all politicians until after 9/11 when they became a symbol of unity and patriotism. When presidential candidate Obama opted not to wear a flag lapel pin in 2008, it sparked controversy. "Today," Kidd (2007, 56) states, "people most likely to be wearing flag-themed clothing tend to identify themselves as conservative, with a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism." Similar to the 1960s, conservatives today still wear flag lapel pins and apparel as a mark of personal patriotism and support for conservative political platforms, whereas liberals tend to wear (or not wear) the flag as a form of personal protest.

The mainstream popularization of flag apparel has another driving factor: consumerism. Kidd (2007) argues that flag apparel becoming increasingly commonplace is due to the consumer culture in the US, which has turned the flag into a commercial product. There seems to be free license to utilize and monetize American flag designs however one sees fit. Kidd (2007, 57) continues, "Flag-themed apparel and other items are good business, and, as long as the demand is there, the supply will keep coming."

23.4 The Flag, White-Supremacy, and Trump

Xenophobia and racism were the main elements of Trump's campaign strategy, "America First." McVeigh and Estep (2019, 48) write, "[Trump's slogan] suggested he would fight for those who believed they were losing their country to racial, ethnic, and religious minorities; to women; to LGBTQ rights activists; and to a highly educated coastal 'liberal elite.'" Trump's presidential campaign followed the same formula that groups like the KKK had throughout history: capitalizing on white America's destabilization and fear of losing their cultural and social supremacy.

Whether all Trump voters were aware of the inherent racism in their politics, many were keenly aware of a sense that they were losing "their America," not realizing that what made America "theirs" to begin with was white supremacy and exclusion. While the Trump campaign leveraged white anxiety to their benefit, members of white supremacist groups like the Proud Boys, the KKK, or the Three Percenters, gained a political ally who refused to condemn their beliefs and touted their rhetoric from behind the presidential seal.

The Unite the Right rally took place in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 is illustrative. Its organizing leader, Jason Kessler, was pictured carrying an American flag (Lopez 2018). Marching alongside Confederate battle flags, KKK and white supremacist symbols, and flags with Nazi iconography, the American flag fits right in. For white supremacists, the American flag has always been part of their iconography of protest, a key part in their cultural memory. When people looked to then-President Trump to condemn the actions of the white supremacists, Trump stood boldly in the White House Press Room in front of a blue wall and four American flags. He wore a flag pin on his lapel. Trump said, "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides, on many sides" (White House Press Pool Report, August 12, 2017). This remark, applicable to both the white supremacists and the counter protesters, sparked outrage. When questioned on this remark a couple days later, Trump flustered. This time standing in front of a marble wall in Trump Tower with one American flag and one bearing the presidential seal, with the flag lapel pin still in place, Trump stated:

> Okay, what about the alt-left that came charging at… as you say, the alt-right? Do they have any semblance of guilt? Let me ask you this: What about the fact that they came charging with clubs in their hands, swinging clubs? Do they have any problem? I think they do… you had a group on one side that was bad, and you had a group on the other side that was also very violent. And nobody wants to say that, but I'll say it right now. You had a group -- you had a group on the other side that came charging in, without a permit, and they were very, very violent… *you had some very bad people in that group* (referring to the white supremacists*), but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides*". (Trump, White House Press Pool Report, August 15, 2017, emphasis added).

Racism and hate crimes surged under the Trump presidency, not solely due to Trump's ascension, but because Trump's ascension validated the beliefs and claims of white supremacists (Edwards and Rushin 2018). Now white supremacists could claim that not just the flag, but the presidential seal and the iconography of America, all the grandiosity and splendor of the Capitol belonged to them.

23.5 "It's 1776, Baby!": Re-founding America on January 6th

When Biden was declared the winner of the 2020 presidential election, Trump refused to concede. In the weeks between election night and January 6th, a slew of homemade movie-like trailers were posted on social media by Trump loyalists alluding to a building storm. At any alt-right web hangout, you could hear about the so-called stolen election, Trump's campaign to Stop the Steal, and the anger and rage of those who felt they had been cheated. Chat rooms, live streams, and messages spread the word about January 6th in hushed tones to comrades. On January 4th, 2021, at a campaign rally in Dalton, Georgia, Trump egged on the crowd and said, "Watch what happens over the next couple of weeks. You watch what's going to come out. Watch what's going to be revealed. You watch" (January 4, 2021, Campaign Rally in Dalton, Georgia). The audio clip spread like wildfire through social media.

On January 5th, the night before Trump's big speech and the march to the Capitol, many right-wing live streamers, white nationalists, and Trump loyalists marched in D.C. There were guest speakers in Freedom Plaza. The gathering crowd was careful with their words about the following day. One man showed his American flag draped on a spear to Josh Fulfer and Jason Phillips of the alt-right news platform Oreo Express. Knowing glances were shared, but little was spoken (Parler Night has fallen in DC!-X-skeeEkHlk).

When the clash finally began on the Capitol steps on January 6th, insurrectionists used carabiners to attach American flags to their outfits like capes. Insurrectionists yelled "1776! It's 1776, baby!" over and over like a beckoning call. One insurrectionist stood on the front line handing miniature flags to Capitol police. Amid the yelling and pushing at the metal barriers on the Capitol steps, another insurrectionist used his American flag, wrapped around its pole, to beat Capitol police. This was a common occurrence during the insurrection. Flags were tied to hockey sticks, spears, and wooden poles that were reinforced and weaponized in order to attack the Capitol police and gain entry to the building. Insurrectionists donned the flag on their bodies and held the flag in their hands as they pushed through police barricades. It was an almost cannibalistic violence of American flag-covered bodies overtaking the Capitol, while it flew at its peak, the very same flag as its enemies (Fig. 23.2).

When hit repeatedly by a weaponized flagpole, a Capitol police officer grabbed the weapon and threw it behind him onto a pile of confiscated items on the ground. The insurrectionist was enraged, shouting "Why would



Fig. 23.2 "Capitol Breach 5." View of insurrectionists on a grand balcony at the Capitol building with waving "Don't Tread on Me," American flags, Trump, and Three Percenter White Supremacist flags together (CC Image Curtesy of Brett Davis on Flickr)

you not pick an American flag up? Pick the flag up. Pick the flag up. HEY COMMANDER PICK THE FLAG UP! PICK THE FLAG UP! COMMANDER PICK THE FLAG UP!" on repeat until the commander picked the flag up off the ground and set it upright against the scaffolding set up for Biden's inauguration (Facebook 6486).

While the insurrectionist arguably mutilated and defiled the flag by turning it into makeshift weaponry, the anger he unleashed when he saw the flag on the ground—itself a violation of the flag code—speaks to the meaning of the flag to insurrectionists. In their attempt to reclaim the nation and re-found the country, the American flag became part of the insurrectionists' uniform, a piece of their body and armor. It signaled the repudiation of the black-out gear of Antifa and their alliance to Trump, MAGA extremism, and white supremacy. This is the true convergence of America's political flag culture, where draping oneself in the flag, whether by cape, t-shirt, mask, hat, or hockey stick, is the performative reclamation of their country, their values, and their freedom and where white supremacy and patriotism are one and the same. Three Percenters fought alongside insurrectionists in "Stop the Steal" garb (see Fig. 23.3). People wearing "1776" sweatshirts pushed back barricades alongside red Trump hats and KKK flags. January 6th is an account of



Fig. 23.3 "Capitol Breach 4." Insurrectionists on their phones holding American flags, Trump, and Three Percenter White Supremacist flags (CC Image Curtesy of Brett Davis on Flickr)

a weaponized flag, so much so that it covers bodies and spears alike, to push, hit, crush, and break their way into the Capitol of their very own country.

23.6 Alternative Histories

What has been labeled as rampant conspiracy theories, "alternate facts," or a cultish reverence for Trump can all be considered extreme forms of collective memory formation that take processes of history-formation and detach them from any semblance of objective facts. Carl Becker (1958, 61), discussing "What are Historical Facts?" writes:

> The kind of history that has most influence upon the life of the community and the course of events is the history that common people carry around in their heads….Whether the general run of people read history books or not, they inevitably picture the past in some fashion or other, and this picture, however little it corresponds to the real past, helps determine their ideas about politics and society.

Facts, however contradictory to their own mythos, would seemingly have to be accounted for and negotiated in the political community. But what has happened in the MAGA-extremist subculture is that processes of cultural memory formation have been pushed beyond a simple interplay of history

and memory. Put simply, the historical imagination of a MAGA-extremist is a form of cultural memory-making that substitutes performativity and mythos for *both* history and memory. It's a cultural memory of "truthful hyperbole" where repetition equals truth (Trump 1987, 58). It's a culture of "*If you say it enough and keep saying it, they'll start to believe you*" (Trump, July 3, 2021).

The coalescence of MAGA extremism and the symbolism of the American flag is more than a tendency to rally around the flag during times of crisis (see Feinstein 2022). Instead, the seizure of the American flag by insurrectionists and the creation of multiplicitous flag designs signals a deep-seeded desire to not only reforge American cultural memory to their liking, but to do so in a way that rekindles their very own sense of belonging to a nation that chooses them above others and possesses the same value system that they do. Without other national symbols like the same geographies, religions, or ethnic or racial makeups, the flag *is* the national symbol for American culture. It is linked to every piece of American cultural memory, good or bad. The insurrectionists who chanted "1776" and wore the flag on their bodies were making claims to the original rebellion against the British and subsuming it into their own myths and narratives. By adapting their own political flag culture, which utilizes flag poles as weapons and their bodies as the mechanism of drapery, insurrectionists attempted to assert their own political and cultural memory over that of other contemporary groups. The January 6th uprising is more than a failed coup. It is the reclamation of a political flag culture that resigns history to a footnote in a Trump-addled mythos. It is an attempt to re-found the country, draping oneself in American flag designs as masks, hats, shirts, or capes, and weaponizing flag poles and bodies as a claim to "*my* country 'tis of thee.'"

23.7 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the importance of the flag in American cultural memory and the use of American flag apparel as a mechanism to assert one set of cultural memories above all others. Embodying the flag, with all its symbolic power, is a means of claiming legitimacy and the only "right" version of history. Assmann (2016, 26) writes, "myth denotes the affective appropriation of one's own history." Wearing the flag is how the insurrectionists embodied the mythology of the founding and touted the virtues of the Declaration of Independence and in doing so, tried to delegitimize any other cultural memories that counter their beliefs. Storming the Capitol, on paper, was about throwing out election results, but this was ultimately a battle to revive and recreate the revolution and *re-found* America in their imagining, in their *own* cultural memory. It was a mnemonic battle to create a future that matches their mythologized past, where they retain their power and those who are opposed to them—women, Black Americans, Indigenous Peoples, LGBT2SIA+, Critical Race Theorists, disabled folx, and people of color—have no space for their own cultural histories and no legitimate claim to what it is to

live as and be American. Embodying the flag becomes a mechanism of performance and memory-making—the statement piece of a nationalistic claim to country and history. After all, what is a tragedy without costume.

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CHAPTER 24

Echoes of War: Body Armor for Safety and Fashion

Heather Akou

24.1 Introduction

THIS VEST MAY SAVE YOUR LIFE![1]

WARNING: NOT FOR USE AS BODY ARMOR[2]

For fashion designers in the United States, military clothing and gear have been a frequent source of inspiration. This says something about the militarization of American culture, but also about how innovations in style and technology ripple across different segments of society. Some military-inspired fashions—such as aviator glasses, cargo pants (Hancock and Augustyn 2010), trench coats (Tynan 2022), and camouflage (Major 2010)—are now so commonplace that many consumers are not aware of their military origins.

[1] Text from the label in an armored vest, manufactured for the US Army by Stein Bros. Mfg. Co. in New York in 1954 (Howard 2020, 21).

[2] Text from a steel plate to be worn inside a "plate carrier" sold by Rogue Fitness in 2022.

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This chapter focuses on a long-term fashion trend that is still building: how an invention for the military—flexible body armor[3]—is being adopted by other types of people in the United States such as rappers (mostly black men), power athletes, and militia groups (most commonly, but not exclusively, men in white supremacist militias). It also considers the impact of legislation on the purchasing and use of body armor, which exists at multiple levels (municipal, state, and federal) but is highly varied and fragmented.

24.2 The Modern Origins of Body Armor in the United States

The concept of wearing body armor as protection during combat has existed for centuries in various parts of the world, including Ancient Rome, Medieval Europe, the Middle East, China, Japan, and the South Pacific. In the early 1900s, American inventors—driven by the horrific combat conditions of World War I and inspired by examples of body armor from other times and places—began to experiment with techniques for making flexible, mass-produced armor. One of the earliest patents, filed in 1920, demonstrated how small steel plates could be sewn into pockets within a garment made of cotton, linen, and/or wool felt (see Fig. 24.1). The inventors, Theodore de Dragic and Albert Schwarz, argued that the ideal body armor would be "sufficiently compact and flexible" but also not reduce the wearer's "agility or the free use of his body or arms in fighting; and it must be sufficiently light so that it will not overtax him and thus cut down his endurance in fighting" (de Dragic and Schwarz 1921). This ideal would prove difficult to achieve. In 1934, Alexander Dunlap, the inventor of a new style of "bulletproof vest," described several problems that designers were still grappling with: the armor was expensive to manufacture, the steel plates were heavy, and projectiles could penetrate through the seams (Dunlap 1937).

By the end of World War II, the Army was experimenting with new designs for body armor made of fiberglass, ceramic, and/or aluminum plates encased in layers of nylon fabric, a radically new material invented by DuPont in the 1930s (Wolfe 2008). Ordinance testing revealed that layers of nylon fabric were more effective than steel at stopping bullets and shrapnel from entering the body (Office of the Quartermaster General 1952). A 1952 patent application (Ehlers 1953) shows the T-52-2 Armored Vest, the first style of flexible body armor that was widely distributed to US Army troops for use in combat. Manufactured in three sizes, it weighed a little over eight pounds. The inner shield was made of small nylon plates and layers of nylon fabric that were strategically laminated together, holding the plates in place while maintaining

[3] This chapter uses the terms "body armor" and "bulletproof vest" interchangeably. There are subtle differences; however, "bulletproof vest" is the term more commonly used in US popular culture. Unlike plate armor (worn, for example, in medieval Europe), contemporary "flexible" body armor is made primarily out of fabric.

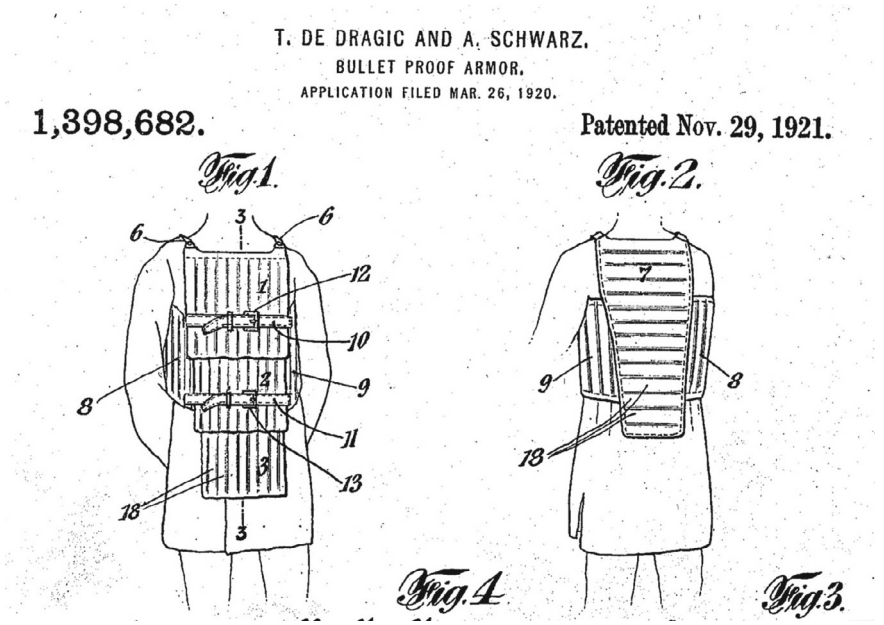


Fig. 24.1 One of the earliest patents for flexible body armor, consisting of small steel plates sewn into pockets within a garment made of cotton, linen, and/or wool felt

flexibility. The cover had pockets, ties to adjust the fit, and snaps in the front so it could easily be removed during an emergency. In the 1960s, another DuPont chemist invented Kevlar (Kwolek 2017), an extremely strong, synthetic material that does not burn or melt. When the US Army incorporated Kevlar into body armor in the 1980s—as both fabric and solid plates—it was quickly recognized as a major improvement. However, it was also expensive. When the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001, only one-third of the troops were issued Kevlar body armor because the cost was $712 per set (Howard 2020, 26).[4] In some cases, soldiers and their families began purchasing their own body armor (Lenz 2004), facilitated by the rapid growth of online shopping and crowdsourced fundraising.[5] In 2006, the Army banned soldiers from wearing body armor that was not military-issued. While acknowledging that there had been problems with supplies, a spokesperson for the Army argued, "We're very concerned that people are spending their hard-earned money on something that doesn't provide the level of protection that the Army requires people to wear" (Associated Press 2006).

[4] Adjusted for inflation, this was roughly equal to $1,200 in 2022.

[5] For example, in early 2006 a journalist for the Associated Press noted that a soldier's wife was "launching real and virtual bake sales" to raise money for body armor (Brown 2006).

One body armor manufacturer that stood out for its aggressive marketing was Pinnacle, which claimed that its Dragon Skin body armor—made using small, overlapping ceramic plates sewn into layers of fabric[6]—was superior to the Kevlar armor (known as Interceptor) issued by the US Army (Sadler 2007). In 2007, Dragon Skin was featured on the Discovery Channel in an episode of *Future Weapons* (Machowicz 2007), showing how it performed in tests on ballistic dummies. In his memoir, *American Sniper*—which was turned into a blockbuster film directed by Clint Eastwood (2014)—former Navy SEAL Chris Kyle described Dragon Skin as "the best" style of body armor he had worn (Kyle et al. 2013, 112). Enthusiasts began sharing clips about Dragon Skin on YouTube, spawning an entire new genre of body armor testing videos.[7]

As viewers absorbed Pinnacle's marketing and pressured politicians about the military's ban, NBC News aired a segment titled, "Are U.S. soldiers wearing the best body armor?" While a retired Marine colonel described Dragon Skin as "the best out there," a representative for the Army's ballistic testing division argued that Dragon Skin had actually "failed miserably" in the Army's own testing (Ciralsky and Myers 2007). In 2010, Pinnacle quietly filed for bankruptcy (United States Bankruptcy Court 2010); however, the concept of selling body armor directly to the public persisted among other manufacturers.

24.2.1 From the Military to Law Enforcement

In 1972—amid concerns about lingering civil unrest (Flamm 2005) as well as pressure from veterans who had become familiar with body armor during the Vietnam War[8]—the National Institute of Justice (NIJ, an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice) began testing body armor and issuing guidelines for its use by law enforcement officers (National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice 1972). In 1975, the NIJ received funding to distribute 5,000 sets of body armor to police officers around the country who had volunteered to test the new equipment. A 1989 report noted that

> The first instance of saving a participating officer's life occurred less than 6 months after the armor was distributed and less than 2 weeks after it was issued to him. During the 1-year demonstration period, there were 18 shooting incidents in which soft body armor successfully protected the officers. (Frank and Shubin 1989)

[6] The number of layers and composition of the original fabric was a trade secret.

[7] YouTube channels in this vein include "Going Ballistic," "Ballistic High-Speed," and "Ballistic Dummy Lab, Inc." (which also sells ballistic dummies on its website, www.ballisticdummylab.com).

[8] In her book, *Bring the War Home*, historian Kathleen Belew traces how experiences with combat have followed veterans back to their daily lives in the United States (Belew 2018).

As with the military, cost was a barrier to more widespread adoption. In 2007, a survey of more than 700 large police departments throughout the country revealed that only half were requiring officers to wear bulletproof vests. Federal subsidies for purchasing more body armor enabled that percentage to grow to nearly 80% by 2013 (Greene 2018).

In 2017, a photographer for *The Boston Globe* captured images of heavily armored riot police at the Boston Free Speech demonstration, which occurred just a few days after the deadly "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia (Asenas and Hubble 2018). In addition to wearing flexible bullet-proof vests, their uniforms included ballistic helmets and hard pieces of armor strapped to their arms, knees, lower legs, and shoulders. While some police departments have acquired body armor as military surplus—typically with a camouflage, tan, or olive covering (Johnson and Hansen 2016), the black color of the armor worn in Boston indicates that it was made specifically for use outside of the military (Nickels 2008).

Over the last two decades, more workers in hazardous professions such as security guards, firefighters, first responders (McQuerry 2019), and journalists (Rosen 2020) have begun wearing body armor for protection. In most cases—with the exception of felons convicted of violent crimes (18 U.S. Code §931, "Prohibition on Purchase, Ownership, or Possession of Body Armor by Violent Felons") it is legal in the United States for civilians to purchase and wear body armor. In 2021, an elected representative in the state of New York introduced a bill to sharply limit sales. Speaker of the New York State Assembly, Carl Heastie, justified the bill by arguing, "Bullet-proof vests are necessary to protect those in law enforcement or those whose professions put them at risk of injury such as armored car drivers or security guards. Otherwise, bullet-proof vests are used by those intending to protect themselves while committing crimes" (Heastie 2021).

In July 2022, a teenager without any prior criminal record killed ten people at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York (Michel et al. 2022) while wearing body armor with Kevlar plates. In response, the State Assembly resumed deliberations and passed the body armor bill, restricting its use to a list of eligible professions (§270.22, "Unlawful Purchase of a Body Vest."), regardless of whether the wearer had ever committed a crime. At first, the list was restricted to law enforcement officers, National Guard troops, armored car guards, security guards, first responders (firefighters and paramedics), and retailers who sell firearms and body armor. It was expanded to include private investigators, building safety inspectors, and code enforcement officers. Additional requests to include journalists, process servers, firearms instructors, and technicians who install and service alarm systems have been made (New York Department of State 2022).

24.3 The Slow Diffusion of Body Armor into Non-occupational Settings

As body armor was becoming more accessible and affordable, the public noticed. In 1995, an FBI bulletin warned that violent criminals had better weapons and body armor than government workers and that "police officers must arm themselves with every available tool if they are to survive" (Edwards 1995, 23). Paradoxically, as the police increased their use of body armor, it only magnified concerns among minorities (especially black men) about police brutality. After the videotaped beating of Rodney King in 1991, scholar of Criminal Justice, Helen Taylor Greene, argued that there was an urgent need to study incidents of excessive force against minorities and to hold officers accountable (Greene 2000, 73).

24.3.1 Body Armor for Safety, Style, and Political Activism

Against this backdrop of violence, in 1989 rapper Eazy-E was photographed in Venice Beach for a feature in *Thrasher* magazine,[9] wearing a light-colored bulletproof vest over dark jeans and a dark sweatshirt.[10] As one of the founding members of NWA, Eazy-E had become famous for the group's *Straight Outta Compton* album (released in 1988), which featured the now-classic song, "Fuck Tha Police." Police unions pressured radio stations and MTV not to give the music airtime. Far from diminishing NWA's popularity, it made the rappers "icons of the era's free speech debates" (Viator 2020, 205).

The idea of wearing body armor spread to a small number of other rappers. In 1997, Jay-Z wore a bulletproof vest while performing in the "No Way Out" tour headlined by Puff Daddy. In 1998, C.M.N. (a rap trio based in Louisiana) produced an album on CD called "Bulletproof Vest" with an olive-colored bulletproof vest featured on the cover. In 2000, rapper 50 Cent was shot multiple times by a rival (HOT97 2020). He returned to performing with caution, wearing a bulletproof vest that became a signature part of his look (Krastz 2014). For the next fifteen years, interest in bulletproof vests was sporadic and focused mostly on safety. During an interview in 2010, Jay-Z recounted how rapper Eminem had worn a bulletproof vest during a recording session.

> I remember I hugged him, and I could feel that he had on a bulletproof vest. I couldn't imagine being that successful. I mean, he's a guy who loves rap and wanted to be successful his whole career. Then he finally gets it, and there's this dark cloud over him. […] He has to be afraid to walk about New York freely (as quoted by Mitchell 2010).

[9] *Thrasher* is a magazine for skateboarding enthusiasts.

[10] These photographs are featured in a short film made by the photographer (Pappas 2019).

By the mid-2010s, however, interest was growing again. Rappers at various levels of fame have worn them in music videos: YG in "Thug" (2016) and "Bulletproof" (2018), Young Boy in "No Smoke" (2017), A$AP Rocky in "Praise the Lord" (2018), Post Malone in "St. Tropez" (2019), RMR in "Rascal" (2020), and Sheff G in "Start Some Shyt" (2021).

In 2019, rapper Nick Cannon wore what appeared to be a bulletproof vest to the MTV Movie & TV Awards. Custom-fitted by Louis Vuitton, it was made mostly of red leather with the company's iconic logo stamped on sections of brown leather. It is impossible to know just from looking if the vest was truly bulletproof; it may have had hidden layers of Kevlar.[11] Like military body armor, it had clasps at the shoulders and waist for quick release and webbing around the torso to hold MOLLE pouches.[12] *E! News* described the vest as an "eye-catching" alternative to a suit (E! News 2019). *TIME Magazine* called it one of the "wildest, wackiest, and weirdest moments" at the awards show (Locker 2019).

In 2021, Kanye West collaborated with Balenciaga to produce a bulletproof vest for the release of his long-awaited album, *DONDA*, which he wore to an exclusive pre-release listening party in Atlanta. It later sold at auction for $75,000. A catalogue for Christie's auction house described its symbolic meaning:

> Worn during his time at the stadium, the *DONDA* bulletproof vest was designed as a metaphor for West's militaristic perspective, reflecting his need for only the essentials to survive and his readiness to go on stage and risk his life for his music and craft (Kearns 2021).

Black with large white letters on the front and back, it closely resembled the soft bulletproof vests worn by the FBI and law enforcement officers.

In June 2020, shortly after the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, rapper Lil Baby released a song titled "The Bigger Picture" in support of Black Lives Matter. When the rapper participated in BLM protests in Atlanta, his production team recorded footage to use in a music video (Lil Baby Official 4PF 2020). Although Lil Baby did not wear body armor during the protest, some scenes in the music video show small groups of protestors wearing bulletproof vests and balaclavas while carrying large, automatic weapons.[13] For his performance at the 2021 Grammy Awards, Lil Baby commissioned an accessories designer, Kerin Rose Gold, to customize a bulletproof vest. As described on her company's website,

[11] Kevlar cannot be dyed without compromising its strength, so in garments it is usually covered by other fabrics.

[12] For a description of how the MOLLE system was developed, see Sampson (2001).

[13] Georgia is an "open carry" state that allows individuals with legally obtained firearms to carry them openly in public.

> The vest came to us olive and it was hand painted black. Using multiple hotfix applique sheets designed and made in house we were able to meticulously place over 20,000 crystals onto the vest, each one equidistant from the other, with the hand placement of over 2,000 crystals (Kerin Rose Gold 2022).

At the beginning of the performance, the rapper wore a black leather jacket (unzipped) over the vest. After the first chorus, the camera shifted to activist Tamika Mallory making a live protest speech, when the camera shifted back, Lil Baby was wearing the vest in full view without the jacket. In an interview for *Rolling Stone* magazine, the rapper noted that the performance and the message was more important to him than the Grammy nominations. "I paint pictures with my songs and wanted the performance to bring that picture to life. […]. No sugar coating" (as quoted by Conteh and Spanos 2021).

24.3.2 Body Armor for Fitness and Aggression

Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—including some who had purchased their own body armor or received it as a gift—returned home with ideas to use it in new ways such as for protection during gun hunting and sport shooting.[14] A more novel idea was to use a "plate carrier" during fitness training. Rogue Fitness, a well-known company that sells equipment for weightlifting and CrossFit training, carries various weighted vests (designed to be filled with small iron bars) and plate carriers (filled with large plates made of cast iron or steel, ranging from 3.75 pounds to 45 pounds). The steel plates display a prominent warning that they are "not for use as body armor," however plate carriers can also be used as bulletproof vests by inserting Kevlar plates instead of iron or steel.[15]

A plate carrier made by 5.11 Tactical (Fig. 24.2) has a very clear military inspiration. The front, back, and sides have webbing for MOLLE pouches. The upper half is made of a brushed nylon material that can be used with Velcro "morale patches." Like t-shirts, there are thousands of patch designs conveying a wide variety of messages. Some of the most common are flags—the US flag, state flags, and ideological flags (Gadsden flag, Gonzales flag, etc.)—but many have humorous and/or intimidating messages. For example, Tactical Gear Junkie, launched "in the basement of a gym at a miliary school" (Tactical Gear Junkie 2022) to make nametapes and patches for uniforms, offers hundreds of different morale patches. The messages range from funny references to pop culture (i.e., the Jolly Roger pirate flag) to deadly serious ("BE POLITE, BE PROFESSIONAL, BUT HAVE A PLAN TO KILL

[14] Three examples of small businesses in the United States that specialize in selling body armor for these activities are iweapons.com (https://iweapons.com/bulletproof-vests-for-hunting/), Safe Life Defense (https://safelifedefense.com/blog/protective-body-armor-for-hunters-preventing-accidents-and-reducing-your-risk/), and White Horse R&D (https://www.whitehorserd.com/buyers-guide).

[15] Kevlar plates are also used as inserts in bulletproof backpacks and laptop bags.

EVERYBODY YOU MEET," a quote from USMC General James Mattis during the war in Iraq (Ricks 2006)). Some patches mix the two ("BEARD THE FUCK UP!" which echoes the trolling and hypermasculine style of the "Duck Dynasty" television series[16]). Patches for CrossFit enthusiasts—an aggressive style of fitness training that has become popular among soldiers, law enforcement officers, and veterans (Aisha 2020)—can have subtle military references that are not necessarily obvious to outsiders. "Pain is just weakness leaving the body" is a mantra within the US Marine Corps, but also a popular morale patch.

Members of paramilitary groups in the United States, such as the Boogaloo Boys, Oath Keepers, and the Proud Boys (Perliger 2020) often attend events wearing plate carriers covered in morale patches that signal their affiliations, ideologies, and willingness to use violence. For example, a photograph taken by Chip Somodevilla for Getty Images showed two men at the 2017 Unite the Right rally wearing olive and coyote tan plate carriers (colors regularly used by



Fig. 24.2 Plate carrier by Tactical 5.11 covered with morale patches and an olive-green MOLLE pouch; item in author's research collection (*Source* Photograph by author)

[16] Duck Dynasty (2012–2017) was a popular reality television series featuring a family-owned company that makes duck calls. It glorified hunting, weapons, ultra-conservative values, and long beards (Holladay 2018).

the US military). The one on the right had three patches on his vest: a US flag, a "thin blue line" flag,[17] and a patch that combined the Betsy Ross flag and the Confederate flag.[18] The man on the left had two patches: a variation of the Jolly Roger flag and his blood type. Blood-type patches have a practical function (like a medic alert bracelet), but they also indicate a willingness to engage in violence so extreme that it might require a blood transfusion.

24.4 Conclusion

At least in the United States, body armor is slowly creeping into mainstream fashion, partly—but not entirely—out of concerns about safety. Sales have increased (Dewey 2022); however, laws that prohibit the impersonation of soldiers and law enforcement officers (for example, by wearing military-issued body armor or equipment that resembles it) are rarely enforced (Alghareeb 2018). These conditions have created some new dangers. A 2008 report by the US federal Government Accountability Office (GAO) cautioned that sales of military-grade body armor (whether stolen or decommissioned) "could allow the creation of equivalent technology or the discovery of countermeasures based on potential weaknesses in the armor" (Government Accountability Office 2008) endangering those who wear it for safety purposes.

The growing use of body armor among law enforcement officers has also contributed to an atmosphere of aggression and mistrust in US society. In 2020, a journalist for *Teen Vogue* (primarily a fashion magazine) observed that:

> With helmets, tactical gear, shields, and belts adorned with an array of weapons, police departments are routinely showing up to peaceful protests dressed as if they are ready to fight. […] Even when police across American do their 'normal' duties (controlling traffic, handling noise complaints), their uniforms have evolved into something intimidating. Over time they've been styled to look like urban soldiers: not there to serve, but to impose. (Forster 2020)

The same is true for civilians who wear body armor—whether for safety, exercise, to make a fashion statement, or for aggressive political activism. In October 2022, several government agencies in Maricopa County, Arizona issued a joint statement to "drop box watchers" after receiving numerous complaints of voter intimidation.

[17] The "thin blue line" flag is an all-black version of the US flag with a blue stripe in the middle, signaling support for the police, who typically wear blue and/or black uniforms (Chammah and Aspinwall 2020).

[18] The Betsy Ross flag is the original US national flag, featuring red and white stripes and a blue square with a circle of white stars. To far-right extremists, the flag is a call to violent revolution. The Confederate flag is also a symbol of violent revolution (Ashcraft 2022).

> For those who want to be involved in election integrity, become a poll worker or an official observer with your political party. Don't dress in body armor to intimidate voters as they are legally returning their ballots. No matter how you choose to vote in Arizona, you should feel safe doing so. (Gates and Richer 2022)

When a federal judge declined to forbid armored civilians from monitoring the drop boxes and taking photographs of voters, the county erected physical barriers and directed law enforcement officers to patrol the polling sites (Associated Press 2022).

While the financial cost of body armor has limited the spread of this fashion, the social cost is also higher than other military-inspired fashions. Combat boots and cargo pants do not cause voters and protestors in the United States to worry about their safety. It seems unlikely that body armor will ever become so commonplace that consumers forget about its military origins.

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CHAPTER 25

Section Five Introduction: Fashion as Symbol and Critique

Karen M. Kedrowski, Candice D. Ortbals, Lori Poloni-Staudinger, and J. Cherie Strachan

This collection of essays focuses on ways that fashion is used by groups or solo actors to shape or critique their political realities. The authors approach this question by using different case studies and varying theoretical foundations. While focused on different cases, all the essays in this section advance scholarly understanding of how uniforms and individuals' fashion choices are political acts and express one's national identity or sexual orientation. Individually and collectively, these essays advance our understanding of fashion as a form of political activism that transcends time and geography. To summarize each briefly: Danladi Amoah and Solomon Kofi Abah examine how wearing the symbols of the lost African republic of Biafra is used to protest the marginalization of the Igbo in Nigeria. Linda Silim Moundene traces the evolution of

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the Kaba, a loose-fitting garment first developed by the European colonists to hide the curves of indigenous women, into an expression of Cameroonian identity. Armida de la Garza and Zheng Shen explore the significance of artist Frida Kahlo's adoption of "Tehuana" dress, popularized by indigenous Mexicans, despite her German heritage. Isabel Felix Gonzales compares the cross-dressing statements of two celebrities, Harry Styles and Billy Porter, in terms of what their sartorial choices mean given their intersectional identities. Maylin Hernandez uses Walter Benjamin's theoretical concepts of ruin, angel of history, and tiger's leap to interrogate the expressive power of queer fashions. Finally, Karen M. Kedrowski explores the symbolism in military and police uniforms as expressions of state power and authority that convey both protection and threat to various communities, based on their intersectional identities.

There are several common themes run through these very different essays. The first is personal and/or political freedom. The Igbo activists who wear stylized versions of the Biafra flag not only express their Biafra nationalism, they risk arrest and incarceration by the Nigerian government because such symbols are illegal. Thus, the activists take to wearing Biafra symbols at night or in private to avoid the police gaze. Similarly, the Kaba has become a symbol of national pride for Cameroonian women who redesigned the shapeless dress imposed by colonial rulers to make it more form fitting. This is a great example of appropriating the symbol of the oppressor into a symbol of national pride. Finally, Gonzales and Hernandez both explore instances of how cross-dressing or gender-bending fashions are liberating for the wearers.

A second common theme is how androgyny is a means of breaking away from the gender binary. Hernandez, for instance, discusses *dansō,* a form of female-to-male cross-dressing in Japan that renders the wearer "genderless." It is also a way for queer Japanese women to "come out" by eschewing feminine attire. Similarly, de la Garza and Shen contrast Kahlo's Tehuana blouses and skirts with her "Self Portrait with Cropped Hair," in which Kahlo is depicted in a man's suit and with short hair. They note that Kahlo depicts herself androgynously during the brief time she is divorced from her husband. When the couple remarried, Kahlo returned to her hyper-feminine persona. Hernandez also explores "fashion hacking," whereby individuals redesign second-hand clothing into a new item that better expresses their personal identity, empowering themselves by adopting gender-bending forms. Kedrowski's analysis of uniforms shows the limits of androgyny when the model for the androgenous uniform is the male body, which doesn't account for the sexes' physical differences.

Third, Gonzales, Hernandez, and de la Garza and Shen all explore instances of how fashion expression once adopted by minoritized communities can be appropriated by members of the dominant culture. De la Garza and Shen note that Frida Kahlo's father was German and her mother was Mexican. Yet she adopted the indigenous dress of the Zapotec and Tehuantepec peoples rather

than Western attire. Gonzales documents how cross-dressing has been appropriated by conservative white men who call themselves "Fascist Femboys." For them, cross-dressing mocks the LGBTQ community and left-wing politics rather than being a vehicle for self-expression. Hernandez also recounts Judith Butler's analysis of how mainstream, heterosexual culture appropriated cross-dressing in popular culture, through films such as *Tootsie* and *Victor/Victoria*. These films and similar genres made drag culture less threatening to heterosexual audiences.

Thus, this collection explores the symbolism inherent in the expressions of the state (through uniforms) and individual expression, demonstrating how the body is a tableau for a variety of political messages, be they individual critiques of politics and society or an overt expression of state power.



CHAPTER 26

Activism Through Fashion: State Repression and the Politics of Fashion in Biafra Southeast Nigeria

Danladi Abah and Solomon Kofi Amoah

26.1 Introduction

Fashion provides a critical lens for understanding conflict and socio-political change, especially in multi-ethnic societies (Filippello 2023). In the contemporary world, fashion has become a major site of conflict occasioned by the forces of globalization and democratization which have animated diverse social movements such as anti-immigrant, separatist, nationalist, climate and feminist movements. These changes have resulted in an extraordinary reawakening of "fashion's political consciousness" (Loscialpo 2021, 1). Fashion in this context becomes not just a mere social resource but shifts from serving individual needs to meeting group/nationalist functions as a purveyor of ideological inclination in society (Abah 2015). It has been recognized as an "aesthetic and affective reconfiguration of the political" and a site for negotiating social and political tensions (Filippello 2023, 4).

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Fashion conveys significant meanings among people in society (Michalove 2014; Bucar 2020). It expresses cultural norms, serves as shorthand for social grouping and provides a kind of corpus of visual allusion. Essentially, what we wear and how we wear them constitute a system of signification; a visual language as dynamic and complex as any spoken communication (Erazo 2020). Fashion reveals the ideology and belonging of people who consume it and also acts as the optical litmus for gauging the mood of society (Michalove 2014). Indeed, in pluralistic societies, fashion choices can be mobilized and deployed to negotiate and contest socio-political and economic spaces or opportunities.

In most African societies, including Nigeria, clothing and how it is worn expressly depicts cultural and nationalistic norms and beliefs (Ajiginni et al. 2020). Michalove (2014), draws from Moroccan fashion consumption experiences in Rabat to argue that fashion constitutes a symbolic battlefield of contestation over the signs and symbols of modernity and the construction of individual identity. Intellectual debates exist on the history and sociology of how fashion has at times been weaponized and manipulated for political gains (Bucar 2020; Keigel 2019; Michalove 2014). As Butler (1993) notes, individual and collective identities are constructed through sartorial choices, which may represent a site of political articulation, negotiation and resistance.

In Nigeria, the Biafra Southeast region represents one such area where collective identities are ferociously constructed and expressed through sartorial choices. The construction of neo-Biafra identities through fashion appears to be a response to a range of internal governance crises (Daly 2020; Nwangwu 2022). However, despite the rich evidence pointing to fashion as a combustive contested site between the state and collective identities, little scholarly attention has been devoted to interrogating this phenomenon in Nigeria-Biafra relations. A flurry of literature on the Nigerian-Biafra war exists (Alabi-Isama 2017; Derrick 2022) with some literary prisms (fictional and non-fictional) on the tragedy of the war (Adichie 2007; Achebe 2012) but none of these works focused on fashion as a site of conflict. Meanwhile, anecdotal evidence shows a resurgence of Biafran political articulations and resistance to state repression through the deployment of fashion.

State repression is the forceful control of a citizenry by a government or its agents for political reasons (Nwangwu 2022). It also involves the restriction or prevention of the citizens' ability to take part in the political life of a society, especially through harassment, surveillance, bans, proscriptions, arrests, torture and mass killing within territorial jurisdictions. The practice uses instruments of violence or coercion (especially by the police, military and paramilitary forces) to curtail dissident and collective organizations. The central essence of state repression is to subjugate, decimate and annihilate dissenting voices, identities or actors in a society through security apparatuses (Nwangwu 2022). It is a state-sanctioned clampdown on individuals, groups or organizations by the government or its agents to maintain regime stability and national security (Uche 2019).

In Nigeria, the history of state repression dates back to the Colonial Era, when the British imperialists deployed the state apparatus to subjugate and imperialize the people through the brute force of the Colonial army and the police. Unfortunately, these agencies have persisted as instruments of oppression by the ruling class under present-day democracy. The Nigeria-Biafra war lasted 6 July 1967–15 January 1970 (30 months) with casualties. Though the Biafrans lost the war, the government of Nigeria has had a troubled journey in the reintegration of Biafra into the Nigerian federation. The trauma and memories of the war coupled with flawed post-war reconstruction have made effective reconciliation difficult. The Biafrans continue to demand secession while the government vows to keep the unity of Nigeria. As a result, the Biafra Southeast region has become one of the most state-repressed regions in Nigeria.

The reincarnation of Biafra in contemporary times finds expression in diverse forms including social movements like the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by the charismatic Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. Recent forms of expression of Biafra activism occur in cultural, artistic, musical, literary, political and economic forms. Meanwhile, the effects of the resurgence of violence-laden Biafra nationalism have continued to undermine national security and compromise internal livelihood and peace, and the economic, social and political development of Nigeria (Adibe 2017; Nnam et al. 2022). It has been argued that the flawed democratic experience in Nigeria is responsible for the clutter of diverse ethno-nationalist movements undermining democratic consolidation (Adibe 2017). Since the return to civilian rule in Nigeria, there has been a dramatic rise in the intensity, lethality and manifestation of Biafra separatism with its cataclysmic consequences on national cohesion and sustainable development (Ibeanu and Iwuamadu 2016; Nnam et al. 2022; Nwangwu et al. 2020). To deal with the situation, the Nigerian government has continued to devise and test-run several repressive measures. In the same vein, by subterfuge, the Biafrans continue to mutate in their strategies toward engaging and mediating the repressive state.

We find that fashion has become a site of conflict in contemporary Nigeria-Biafra relations. The local Biafrans confront, resist and mediate state repression through forceful consumption and circulation of Biafra fashion arts choreographed through social media, populism, and Biafran celebrities. We argue that in a climate of hardened repression, fashion becomes a cultural subterfuge to claim and assert rights and ideology. This chapter relies on primary and secondary data sources to discuss this reordering and shifting of the zone of Biafra nationalism to fashion even as the politicization of fashion as an expression of protest and dissent is violently pursued through the production and consumption of clothes that communicate defiance against a repressive federal government. We also draw on the recent arrests of popular Nigerian Nollywood actor of Biafra origin, Chiwetalu Agu and a Biafra youth, Idara Godwin (popularly called Idara Golden), for dressing in Biafran style to show

that personal appearance (fashion) choices of Biafrans irrespective of location, class and positionality play a unique and crucial role in the development and revision of a simultaneously public and personal collective Biafra national identity which constitute the cultural purveyor of Biafra nationalism. Thus, as the chapter will prove, Biafran fashion has become a viable agency or "weapon of the weak" used to confront and mediate the repressive state. The chapter is subdivided into four sections. The first of these provides the research methodology followed by an overview of the Nigeria-Biafra War. The third and fourth sections examine why and how fashion has become the new battleground drawing on semi-structured interviews, discourse and content analysis of the recent arrests and detention of Biafrans for dressing in Biafra outfits.

26.2 Research Methods

The study carried out a discourse analysis of interview data and a content analysis of newspaper publications. The research focus required an in-depth understanding of the myriad expressions of Biafran fashion in Southeast Nigeria. We sought to gain insight into the tensions between the state and Biafra separatists and the diverse expressions of dissent through fashion. The data was collected through interviews with Biafran fashion consumers and producers from May to August 2023. The study participants were purposively selected based on their patronage, production or consumption of Biafra fashion. Ten (10) individual interviews were conducted with producers and consumers of Biafra fashion in Southeast Nigeria. While six (6) of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, the remaining four (4) were conducted over the telephone as the researchers found continuous visits to some participants in the Southeast region difficult due to security concerns.

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The interview data was analyzed using discourse analysis. This technique was used to understand the various ways Biafran fashion producers and consumers framed their experiences and ascribed meaning to their expressions of fashion and encounters with the federal state. The interview data were complemented with content analysis of newspaper publications and desk review of journal articles and reports on the subject.

26.3 The Nigeria-Biafra War and its Resurgence in Contemporary Nigeria

Our study reveals that the Nigeria-Biafra civil war which was fought between 1967 and 1970 sparked a host of unsettled animosities that have culminated in the resurgence of violent separatist organizations committed to the realization of an independent Biafra republic after several decades (Daly 2020; Udiyaundeye 2008). Some of the studies on post-war Biafra secessionist movements in Nigeria, their causes, and strategies blame the root cause of the crises on the 1945 Richard's constitution that balkanized colonial Nigeria into

three unequal administrative regions, namely; Northern, Eastern, and Western, which coincidentally align with the cartography of the three dominant ethnic groups of Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba (Udiyaundeye 2008). Thus, the British colonial administrators created conditions that promoted unhealthy, competitive inter-ethnic rivalries among these regions (Daly 2020).[1]

Meanwhile, some arguments on the resurgence of Biafra nationalism have been framed around the failure of post-war reconstruction, reconciliation, and rehabilitation programs and a flawed federal structure that has excluded and marginalized the Igbo (Ibeanu et al. 2016; Nwangwu 2022). In the same vein, state repression of Biafra in Southeast Nigeria has hardened and expanded the explosion of a neo-Biafra movement devised through the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Nnam et al. 2022). The government has deployed all legislative and institutional mechanisms needed to repress and annihilate this Biafra nationalism. The state strategies have oscillated from the proscription of all Biafra activities and fashion to mass arrests and detention of Biafra nationalists. One such non-kinetic strategy is the ban on the production, consumption and circulation of Biafra fashion. The government feels, correctly too, that the production and circulation of Biafra arts will intensify pan-Biafra nationalism. Hence, the state believes it needs to continually police fashion and arrest dissent expressed through artistic resources. While other government strategies seem to be working, that of fashion has failed to yield to governmentality. Attempts to arrest, detain and prosecute Biafrans for dressing in Biafra have intensified the circulation and consumption of Biafra fashion materials. We consider local Biafrans' agentic embrace of fashion as a weapon amid a repressive state to require further interrogation.

Fifty-three years after the civil war, a new generation of neo-Biafra nationalists emerged with rage and anger. Mostly young, educated Biafrans, many of whom did not witness the war, began the new combustive movement of Biafra under the new name—Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) with Nnamdi Kanu as their leader. The goal of the new group, according to the interviews, is the same as the old championed by Late Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu—the restoration and independence of an Igbo nation from the Nigerian federation. To IPOB, the Biafra Republic, a country cut off from the current Federal Republic of Nigeria, is the desired home of the Igbo race. IPOB as a social movement strives to pursue the realization of a Biafra nation through all means possible. Their strategies include civil disobedience, protests and disregard of the government and violent confrontation with state security agencies. Culturally, neo-Biafra nationalism advocates the rejection of the Nigerian national flag, anthem, and pledge and the allegiance to Biafra cultural and artistic resources. IPOB encourages its people to wear Biafra fabrics and

[1] The impact of the civil war and post-war actions are well documented (Daly 2020; Nwangwu 2022). Indeed, the repression of Biafra nationalism through a violent approach has led to wanton deaths and destruction of property and communities across Igboland leading to Biafrans' resort to self-help in the face of unprovoked military offensives (Nwangwu 2022; Agboga 2022; Ibeanu et al. 2016).

fashions during weddings, traditional marriages, burials and birthdays and to eat food made in Biafraland. The group has a heavy media presence with an online radio Biafra and a militant wing known as Eastern Security Network (ESN) to implement its order in Biafraland.

This resurgence of Biafra nationalism in contemporary Nigeria by a new generation is aimed at completing the battle that the older generation of Biafrans began. It is also a symbol of the inter-generational purveyor of civil war memories through history and cultural resources. IPOB members blame the government for excessive highhanded repressive tendencies that exacerbate the trauma of the past Biafrans who paid the supreme sacrifice for the restoration and actualization of the failed Biafra republic.

26.4 Fashion and the Cultural Economy of Neo-Biafra Nationalism

The fashion economy is huge in the Biafra region. It encompasses many material and non-material socio-cultural resources defined by the prevailing style, trend and look of an individual or group over time. Fashion is a form of self-expression and autonomy in time and space and may include clothing, footwear, lifestyle, accessories, makeup, hairstyle, or body posture. It is an area of activity that involves styles often conceived as, but not exclusive to, clothing and appearance.

Historically, links between fashion and politics have been studied (Gaugele and Titton 2019; Maxwell 2021). Maxwell (2021) examined, theoretically, the social nexus between clothing, nationalism and fashion and observed that "nationalized clothes are designed or worn primarily to signify membership in some imagined national community" (Maxwell 2021, 1). Similarly, Gaugele and Titton (2019) state that "fashion has always provided rich visual, material, symbolic and narrative spaces within which to articulate, negotiate and perform political issues" (615). Biafra as a physical and spiritual nationalist movement has gained admittance to the fashion industry. During the Nigeria-Biafra war, Ojukwu optimized the values in fashion in his messaging, communication and war mobilization. Fashion was a tool for war mobilization; a nationalist sedative that was intended to build and disseminate Biafra identity within and outside Biafraland. This started with the design of the Biafra flag as a national emblem. Biafra fashion as observed today derives largely from the color and painting of this flag. The "flag consists of a horizontal tricolour of red, black, and green, charged with a golden rising sun over a golden bar."[2] The eleven rays of the sun represent the eleven provinces of the former Biafra. The red for the blood of Biafrans who died during the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970) as well as those who died during the pogrom in Northern

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Biafra#cite_note-:0-1; Also see: See ICRC Audiovisual archives.

Nigeria (1966). The black is for the mourning of those who died while both green and gold represent the prosperity and bright future for Biafrans.

We find a cultural artistic turn in neo-Biafra nationalism seen both as an entrepreneurial process and development of a cultural economy ecosystem that produces the tangible heritage resource needed to confront and negotiate state repression while advancing neo-Biafra ideologies. In the cities of Aba, Onitsha, Nnewi and Awka, underground companies producing Biafra fashion resources abound. Biafra fashion exists in different forms and brands such as blouses, skirts, clothes, trousers, berets, jerseys, belts and shoes among others. The Biafra fashion consumed by our research participants included the artistic objects that embody and express the ideology and beliefs of Biafra, its people, society and spirituality.

26.5 Dressing and Policing Dissent: A Case Study of Chiwetalu Agu and Idara Gold

On 8th October 2021 and 6th September 2022, two major separate events happened in Nigeria as a result of Biafra fashion, which made headlines in both local and international media. In the first, a veteran Nigerian Nollywood actor and producer, Chiwetalu Agu, was arrested by troops of the Nigerian Army for wearing Biafra regalia. The arrest took place at the popular Upper Iweka road in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria (Olonilua and Oyero 2021). Chiwetalu's arrest went viral on many social media platforms. Human rights defenders, pro-democracy and Biafra defenders condemned the arrest, calling it an infringement on his fundamental human rights. To the Nigerian Army, Chiwetalu was arrested and detained for questioning because his fashion choices evident in his public donning of Biafra regalia "negates the peace efforts in the region given the security situation." The Director of Army Public Relations, Brigadier General Onyema Nwachukwu, noted that, "Troops of the Nigerian Army (NA) have arrested one Chiwetalu Agu while inciting members of the public and soliciting for support for the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)… Dressed in a very well-known attire of the proscribed Biafra group, Agu was picked for questioning." The photo below shows the arrest and ordeal of the actor with military officers (Fig. 26.1).

In the second case, Miss Idara Godwin (Idara Gold/en), an Akwa Ibom-born Biafra nationalist, was arrested in Enugu metropolis, Southeast Nigeria by officers of the Department of State Security Services (DSS), Nigeria's top-secret police. Idara was released in May 2023 after almost a year in police custody without trial. Idara Gold was arrested and detained for wearing a Biafra-themed outfit on her birthday. She was accused of sharing her photos on Facebook dressed in Biafra regalia. When police saw the pictures, she had posted online wearing Biafra attire to celebrate her 20th birthday, she was immediately arrested and handed over to DSS in Enugu from where she was transferred to DSS headquarters, Abuja. The photo below shows the Idara



Fig. 26.1 Photos showing the arrest of Nollywood Actor, Chiwetalu by Nigerian Soldiers for wearing Biafra dress (*Source* Punch Newspaper, 8 October, 2021. https://punchng.com/ipob-chiwetalu-agu-has-been-arrested-by-dss-says-actors-guild)

Golden Biafra regalia which she posted on her Facebook page which led to her immediate arrest by government security agents (Fig. 26.2).

A critical analysis of the recent ordeals of Chiwetalu and Idara as published on news portals situates them within the context of policing dissent through fashion (Taylor et al. 2019). Beyond the reasons given by the government for their arrest, there are socio-political or nationalist messages in their fashion choices that were understood by the government and Biafrans albeit differently.

For the government, the existence of Biafra through the proliferation of Biafra's tangible and intangible resources constitutes an existential albatross to the country's unity and national security. This position runs parallel with the Biafrans, leading to violent confrontations on different fronts, including fashion. The government believes that Biafra must be decimated to keep Nigeria peaceful as a united, indivisible entity. From a statist perspective, the fashion choices of Chiwetalu and Idara (even though personal choices) constituted a security threat to Nigeria. Their Biafra dresses evoke ambivalence positionality and temporality as both personal sartorial apparel and mass mobilization attire.

26.6 The Resurgence of Biafra Protest Fashion in Southeast Nigeria and the Causative Factors

Similar to how people deployed fashion to make political statement in America during the civil rights movement (Crane 1999), we find that in Southeast Nigeria, Biafra protest fashion has gained momentum among all categories of the Igbo people (men, women and children). Dressing in Biafra fashion is considered a means of conveying information about their ideology, particularly in defiance of their forceful incorporation into Nigeria's federation. In the



Fig. 26.2 Photos of Idara Gold dressed in Biafra Regalia on her Birthday in Nigeria (*Source* Sahara Reporters, September 6, 2022. https://saharareporters.com/2022/09/06/outrage-20-year-old-idara-gold-arrested-nigerian-secret-police-dss-wearing-biafra-themed)

Nsukka area of Southeast Nigeria, Biafra-styled T-shirts, caps and shorts were found to be common among the youth. Despite the presence of state security agents, the youth often wore Biafra clothes in their homes and neighborhoods. To evade arrests, they wear Biafra dress mostly in the evening and at night when police presence would have been reduced. One common reason given by our participants for the resurgence of Biafra fashion is the perceived marginalization of the Igbos in Nigeria since the end of the Civil War (1967–1970). As Ugochukwu, a participant, observed, "The ghost of the war continues to hunt the Igbo, especially in terms of the distribution of political and economic positions." A common example often cited to justify this is the inability of the Igbo to produce a president of Nigeria since the end of the civil war. The

view expressed in the quote below featured prominently in most participants' reasons for continuing to patronize the outlawed Biafra fashion:

> Since the Nigerian government has refused to allow us to have our freedom by allowing Biafra to stand as an independent republic, I have decided to ensure that until I die, I will continue to wear Biafra pants, caps and shirts as my way of rejecting the unending maltreatment and marginalization of our people in Nigeria. Even when I die, I have told my people that I should be wrapped in a Biafra apparel for internment". (Oge, Participant 6)

These views of participants align with the argument of Savannah Price (2017) who noted that groups and individuals use clothing and dress as a mechanism of protesting or a bargaining tool to seek justice through a subtle nonviolent confrontation of power holders in society. Biafra fashion to the wearers is a way to remain strategically visible with Biafra nationalism or spirit and at the same time, openly stand against and communicate defiance to the Nigerian government. One participant noted that,

> …dressing in Biafra fabrics, in whatever form is a sign of emotional, national and personal fulfilment because it is in Biafra that my true life and essence belongs. (Eze, Participant 7)

Eze's reason for consuming Biafra fashion reverberates what Covington and Medvedev (2019) call "dressing for freedom" when they noted that sartorial choices often evoke powerful messages and perceptions that communicate political statements.

Another major reason for the forceful resurgence of Biafra protest fashion was attributed to the unending incarceration of neo-Biafra leader and freedom fighter Nnamdi Kanu by the secret police. Nnamdi Kanu is unarguably one of the foremost Biafran leaders after the late Col. Chukwumeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. Kanu founded the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) committed to the revival and restoration of the independent republic of Biafra. He built a cult followership that cuts across age categories of Biafra (Igbo) extraction from within and outside Nigeria. However, under President Muhammadu Buhari, Kanu was arrested, rearrested and later attacked by government security agents. In one such attack in his hometown, some of his family members were killed leading to his escape to Europe. While in exile, he continued his anti-government attacks which prompted the government to mastermind his arrest and onward transfer to Nigeria to face criminal charges.

Since he was brought back, Kanu has remained in DSS detention without trial, leading to massive riots, attacks and civil disobedience in different parts of the Southeast. The most prominent of such civil movements has been the sit-at-home order that has seen the closure of markets, banks, schools and all socio-economic, cultural and political activities including non-movement of

people and vehicles in Igboland. These actions sought to compel the government to release Kanu after three years of sustained efforts, Nnamdi Kanu remains detained without trial. As some participants argue, these circumstances intensified the deployment of protest fashion as a weapon against the Nigerian state. To the locals, the government can continue to keep Kanu in detention but they will continue to show affection and solidarity through the various forms of Biafra fabrics and fashion that they continue to produce and consume:

> As long as Kanu remains in detention, nothing will stop the people from identifying and supporting their own *onye ndu [saviour]* who has sacrificed his life and comfort in the UK to fight for the restoration of an independent Biafraland. (Ikechukwu, a participant in Nsukka)

This participant further stated his desire to see school children in the region dressed in Biafra clothes as their uniform.

Affirming the Kanu factor, another participant stated during the interview that:

> The Nigerian government can keep Kanu in detention and flood our land with police and military officers but they cannot and never will they be able to prevent us from wearing Biafra dress. (Kaku, Participant 4)

We find what appears to be a deification of Nnamdi Kanu in Igboland especially among the youth leading to a surge in the proliferation of Biafra caps and other paraphernalia. Kanu's positionality and temporality evoke love and passion within the Biafrans and fashion has become a viable means for expressing the nationalistic feelings and identification with his trials and travails. This can be clearly observed in the decision of Idara Gold and Chiwetalu Agu to dress in Biafra attire amidst ominous state security agents.

Quite clearly, Chiwetalu Agu chose to show his protest fashion at the popular upper Iweka market road in Anambra State. The market road is known for the expression of defiance against Nigerian state repression of Biafra. First, the road houses the headquarters of Nollywood movies in Southeast Nigeria rivalling Lagos in terms of being a good location for shooting and marketing movies. Second, the market is one of the largest in Anambra State and a highly policed space. If these reasons are plausible, how is the timing of this one-man public fashion protest to be understood? Why did he choose the afternoon and not the night to appear? First, he perhaps wanted to clearly communicate his defiance to the Nigerian federation through an alloyed nationalism to Biafra. He deployed fashion to engage and communicate both Biafra of the mind and Biafra of the body.

Second, Okeke notes that:

> Contrary to the Nigerian Army's position that Chiwetalu was 'arrested and detained for questioning because his fashion choices' negates the peace efforts in

> the region given the security situation in the state,' it was his way of promoting internal, personal, spiritual peace. (Okeke)

Afternoons have special significance in Igbo cosmology. In traditional Igbo society, afternoon (*ehihe*) is considered a time for sacrifices and real work by men. Thus, Chiwetalu's choice of the afternoon at Upper Iweka bellies a cosmological appeal to his soul and ancestors to support and help him realize his dream of an independent Biafra republic. Chiwetalu himself declared to the soldiers upon interrogation that "he was dressed in a rising sun:"

> I can wear this…this is a rising sun, not Biafra, not Eastern Security Network…this is a civil dress. With my education, I know areas to go, areas not to go. I was sharing 10,000 Naira worth of bread when he (the soldier) came, no campaign, nobody was doing any demonstration. (Olonilua and Oyero 2021)

An analysis of Chiwetalu's comments shows that fashion choices communicate messages beyond their literal meaning. While it was true that he was sharing bread with the poor in the market, Chiwetalu's real motive was not the bread but the corpus of messages his Biafra regalia conveyed. For instance, one interviewee noted that "Agu's regalia instantly inspired renewed hope of Biafra consciousness in the market and his unfortunate arrest globalized the Biafra regalia and consciousness which the soldiers were determined to repress" (Pascal, Participant 9).

Many of the research participants made reference to Chiwetalu's arrest at Upper Iweka, which they claim encouraged them to wear Biafra to church and village meetings. This singular act frustrated the government efforts as the security could not arrest all the people who had suddenly become Biafra fashionistas as a result of Chiwetalu.

Thus, the unintended consequences of Chiwetalu's arrest included a renewed love for Biafra fabrics. Other prominent Igbo celebrities like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (the world-renowned writer) and a popular music producer Don Jazzy quickly joined in the fashion protest movement. They shared photos of themselves dressed in Biafra regalia. These celebrities with massive social media following became the agents of mass defiance against state repression of Biafra through fashion. During this turbulent period of near-national chaos, social media provided a platform for Biafra mass mobilization and an avenue for mediating power dynamics. For instance, on Twitter, the Army and the then—President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari were, correctly too, cyberbullied.

The Nigerian President, during this time, referred to all the Igbos (Biafra) as a "dot" (signifying a tiny, insignificant part of Nigeria perpetually disturbing its peace with Biafra). President Buhari was reported as saying that most of the current young Biafra nationalists were and still are ignorant of the atrocious

nature and catastrophic consequences of the Nigerian civil war by their incessant fashioning and drumming for another Biafra war. He warned that his government would deal decisively with these disgruntled elements within the Biafran enclave that continued to test the power of the federal government under his watch. Following this outburst, the dot.com sobriquet suddenly trended online and Biafra fashion producers and designers quickly curated dresses and regalia with dot.com insignia.

Young people like Idara Gold continue to resist and reject government repression against Biafra through open and fashion-driven celebrations of Biafra leaders and their activities. Idara Gold and her likes can be classified as Biafra nationalists rejecting and mediating the oppressive state through fashion. Agreeing with Michalove (2014), we find Biafra clothing serving as a form of symbolic communication used as a means of conveying information about the wearer's social role, standing and personal character.

26.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the cultural politics of fashion in the Biafra separatist region of Nigeria considering the motivations, strategies and consequences of people's dressing choices employed as resources for Biafra nationalism. It examined the tension animated by the government's counter-strategy to eliminate the production, consumption and circulation of fashion, taking into account the materiality, positionality and temporality of Biafra fashion as a mobile corpus of local agency of resistance choreographed by social media, local propagandists and celebrities.

We argue that the recent upsurge in hard power state repression of Biafra separatism has led to the reordering and decentering of Biafra resistance through fashion. As a weapon of the weak, the contemporary generation of neo-Biafra nationalists has found in fashion, a viable agency for confronting the Nigerian repressive state. As established here, protest fashion serves as the non-verbal sartorial tool deployed to confront, mediate and negotiate for space within the Nigerian federation. Also, through fashion, the people visually reject allegiance to the repressive state. Thus, people's sartorial choices constitute a vital tool for communicating dissent and resisting state policing of dissent; and as seen in Southeast Nigeria, attempts to delegitimize and eliminate Biafra fashion through lawfare and military approaches have rather intensified activism and nationalism through protest dress.

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CHAPTER 27

Frida Kahlo's "Tehuana" Attire: Ethnic Dress as Feminist Self-Branding

Armida de la Garza and Zheng Shen

27.1 Introduction

Mexican painter and feminist icon Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) is known to have used fashion to claim personal and political agency in various ways, mainly through her impressive collection of ethnic dresses and jewellery, which she turned into an integral component of her subjectivity. Several reasons have been proposed to account for her performance of gendered indigeneity. Some argue this might have stemmed from her rejection of bourgeois dress in favour of more "authentic" clothing, displaying in this way solidarity with the indigenous peoples of Mexico, who were then—and largely remain—at the margins of society. This would have been part of broader trends in Mexican politics of the day, following the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) with its impetus for nation-building, as many other middle- and upper-class women opted for similar attire.[1]

[1] For instance Rosa Roland, wife of Miguel Covarrubias, Director of the Fine Arts theatre; Alfa Rios, wife of prominent Oaxacan politician Andres Henestrosa; and painter Maria Izquierdo were all photographed and often depicted wearing the attire, sometimes along with Kahlo, although del Conte has argued that only Kahlo "insisted on wearing it in her private life, as well as in public" (2007, 36).

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Others have argued this type of dress allowed Kahlo to participate in *mexicanidad*, especially given her father's German nationality. For example, photographer Edward Weston's comments on his diary upon photographing Kahlo and her husband, celebrity painter Diego Rivera, point to this understanding. Weston wrote: "I photographed Diego again, his new wife—Freida [sic]—too: she is in sharp contrast to Lupe [Marín, Rivera's previous wife], petite, a little doll alongside Diego, but a doll in size only, for she is strong and quite beautiful, *shows very little of her father's German blood dressed in native costume* even to huaraches" (cited in Ankori 2013, 10, emphasis ours).

And yet others actually deny either political or personal agency was at stake with her sartorial choices, ascribing them simply to a desire to please her husband Rivera, who admired powerful Zapotec women (Phillips Olmedo 2007, 11; Wilcox and Henestrosa 2018, 75). Paradoxically, this would have suited Kahlo since the dress of the ostensibly matriarchal society of Tehuantepec aligned with her feminist beliefs. During the period that she and Rivera divorced before marrying each other for a second time (1939–1940), she is said to have dressed according to the styles of European fashion, as she did prior to their marriage (Turok 2021, 222).

A more recent explanation of her adoption of ethnic dress has been that it allowed her to cover up her disability—as a child the polio virus had damaged Kahlo's right leg, which was later amputated in 1953 after contracting gangrene. This attire features long skirts gathered with a waistband, and above a square cut embroidered geometric blouse, sometimes worn with a shawl (Fig. 27.1).

Flower ornaments feature as part of the hairstyle. The adornment of the blouse and hairstyle would have called attention to Kahlo's head and torso, and away from the limbs. With this explanation, "[…] the colonised body which Kahlo clothed in revolutionary idealism has lost its function as a symbol of nationhood, becoming instead an icon of female suffering" (Baddeley 1991, 16).

Without denying any of these various interpretations, this chapter places Kahlo's adoption of ethnic dress firmly in the context of the nascent capitalist and consumer society that was taking shape in Mexico at the time, to argue that another—perhaps even the main—reason for this choice might have been that it allowed her to craft a personal and feminist brand for herself as an artist, thereby exerting both personal agency and political agency. It is well known that Kahlo had a short, intense, painful and extraordinary life, which became not only the source of her painting, but also of her iconic, even mythical status as a signifier of Mexican identity, of feminism and of the value of the marginal" (de la Garza, 2013, 68). Criticism of her work often dwells on all these aspects to engage her paintings. An art critic who attempted to summarise her life in six phrases chose "road accident, miscarriage, a marital fiasco, jealousy, alcohol problems and life in a wheelchair" while also observing that "such a many-layered tension field of crisis and suffering is highly beneficial to the culture industry's need for gossip and kitsch" (Rebel 2008, 70). We concur, and in



Fig. 27.1 Kahlo dressed as a Tehuana on self-portrait dedicated to Leon Trotsky, 1937

this chapter raise the possibility that these unfortunate circumstances might have also posed advantages for Kahlo, to some extent, from the perspective of building a feminist artist brand. As Lieb observes, when constructing person-brands, artists must "be likeable, have a voice, exhibit diversity, be memorable, experience conflict and appear deviant, but not too deviant" (Lieb 2018, 32–33), all of which apply to Kahlo, whose voice was heard through painting. Her dress style was an important element for her to be perceived as likeable, exhibiting diversity and being memorable. And as we show below, also attested to her experiencing conflict and appearing deviant, as per Lieb, "the right way."

In line with research practices in the arts and humanities, which "more often problematise an object or phenomena rather than pose research questions or testable hypotheses" (Borgman 2015, 179), our chapter approaches dress as feminist branding as the phenomenon to research. Frida Kahlo is here

our case study. Using letters, diary entries, paintings, and importantly her dress collection as data, our article first discusses the connection between branding and politics as well as artist branding in general terms, and then brings this discussion to bear on the case of Kahlo, focusing on her use of dress. The article concludes with summarising remarks that highlight how close attention to dress can generate a new and multi-faceted understanding of political agency in the case of women artists such as Kahlo, adding to the scholarship of fashion and politics, and of Kahlo as well.

27.2 Artists and Branding

It is often thought that branding is an eminently commercial activity and thus inimical to politics, even though slogans actually precede businesses in branding. This precedent can be seen for instance on coins, where, during their reign, "emperors printed the few words that could fit" (Bloen and Kempenaars 2019, 11), to remind subjects of personal mottos. It was only with the industrial revolution that distinguishable trade names, trademarks and logos became sales tools. Today, the distinction between the two fields is less sharp: "cause branding," such as that of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) or the Extinction Rebellion, who campaign to minimise ecological extinction, is perceived as a logical offshoot of commercial branding. Political parties are said to "stay on brand" to appeal to their desired base, while protest or dissent movements have turned to brand strategies to reach their followers. This has made the long-existing connection between politics and branding clearer: on the one hand, branding is related to advertising and public relations, and to trade. On the other, it is also a propaganda tool for ideology, used towards shoring up political loyalties. In the branding process, the body, and one could add, particularly the clothed body, is a key tool. By simply showing up, "the body can stylise a protest" (Bloen and Kempenaars 2019, 15), and a specific body gesture can become the trademark of a movement. Fashion accessories can become iconic symbols, such as the handkerchiefs in the "green tide" 2021 movement in Argentina, where women fought for their reproductive rights, and marched waving their green handkerchiefs; they can be employed for cover, as with masks; and at any rate they can convey a variety of messages, since both accessories and dress are part of a semiotic system (de la Garza and Jie 2022). Ultimately, in both business and politics, brands rich in meaning have greater opportunities to be dynamic and to last (Lieb 2018, 16), and very rich meanings can of course be forged by means of dress. Branding is akin to framing, and indeed called cultural framing by a social movement.

With her striking collection of expressive indigenous dress, which she depicted on most of her self-portraits, Frida Kahlo was a pioneer of this type of branding, seamlessly blending the political gesture with the self-advancing PR trading one. In the political battle to be recognised as a painter in her own right (rather than as Rivera's wife), the *Traje de Tehuana* became her trade brand. While the very notion of self-branding and self-promotion may

be viewed as contrary to any sense of cohesive community and the commitment associated with collective feminist goals, feminist person-brands have been known to advance some feminist causes:

> A feminist brand is a polyvocal entity affiliated with and constructed by key stakeholders, whose meaning is rooted in one or more precepts from potentially conflicting versions of feminism. These precepts range from promoting equality between men and women in all spheres of life through collective action, to recognising diversity owing to intersections of gender with race, sexuality, age, economic status and so on, to empowering and self-actualising individual women, to advocating women's increased representation in cultural, political and economic realms (Fischer and Otnes 2022, 79).[2]

Notably, all of the precepts quoted above were advanced by Kahlo, even though only voting rights were the main concern of the women's movement during her lifetime. Further, Lieb has also argued that:

> Artists offer exemplary instances of image creation in the service of building a recognisable look, name and style—a brand, in other words. Successful artists can be thought of as brand managers, actively engaged in developing, nurturing and promoting themselves […] in the competitive cultural sphere. (Lieb 2018, 17)

Painting for Kahlo is often discussed from sociological or psychological perspectives, as a means for her to record her lived experience, to attempt to overcome pain and loss, to state political beliefs and positions and to explore the making of identity or indeed of various identities (Andrade 2000; Ankori 2013; Baddeley 1991; del Conte 2007). Dress is seen as part of all this. It is often forgotten however that painting was also a career for Kahlo, and, during at least the period of her divorce, one that she pursued with the aim to make a living. Kahlo began teaching young children at the age of 19. Later in 1942 when the Ministry of Public Education's School of Painting and Sculpture opened at La Esmeralda, she became a teacher there, and excelled, devoting much time and effort to mentoring her students. Four of them were especially persistent, even taking lessons at her home in Coyoacan when illness prevented her mobility. They became known as "los Fridos".[3] She gave interviews and engaged with the media to assist with the dissemination of her and their work. She also applied for grants several times, such as ones from the Guggenheim. She travelled alone to exhibit her work in Europe and the United States. She enlisted the help of friends and acquaintances as would-be sales agents,

[2] Fischer and Otnes provide a classification of feminist brands into "Product brands," such as the publisher of books for children Littlefeminist.com; "Person-brands," for example fashion blogger Leandra Medine Cohen; and "Movement brands," as with #March4women (Fischer and Otnes 2022, 80–83).

[3] They were: Arturo Garcia Bustos, Guillermo Monroy, Fanny Rabel, and Arturo Estrada.

attempting to promote her work in those places as well. In other words, she was actively engaged in developing, nurturing and promoting herself in a most competitive cultural sphere. As a painter, she was in a privileged position to create the recognisable look, name and style of a brand. The following sections consider the Tehuana attire, both depicted and worn, as a tool employed to build this distinctive brand image. Along with this, the man's suit she painted herself with on "Self-portrait with Cropped Hair" (1940), and which she wears in some photographs, is also considered, since the role of the ethnic dress is thus highlighted, through contrast.

27.3 The Tehuana Dress or Traje de Tehuana

There are many reasons why the Tehuana costume can be regarded as a key part of Kahlo's feminist artist brand. First of all, the *traje* itself, mentioned above as giving rise to branding, is far from being "the primitive vestige of pre-Columbian indigenous civilizations worn by alluring Zapotee matriarchs as imagined by travellers, intellectuals and artists." Rather, it is the outcome of the process of industrialisation. "Almost every aspect of the *traje de Tehuana* is a product of the transnational encounter of European, Asian, and modern Mexican textiles and styles with Zapotee traditions and ingenuity" (Chassen-Lopez 2014, 282). Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, women from the Tehuantepec Isthmus used to wear only *enagua de enredo*—a large sheet of cloth tightly wrapped around the waist—and no top or blouse, as suited the environmental conditions of the area. The Tehuana costume as it became known developed and changed along with the expansion of capitalism and consumption, and it is "mestizo" in the sense that it represented the blending of indigenous Zapotee traditions with modern Western fashion. In fact, many of the fabrics and embellishments that were imported for the *traje*—silks, velvets, and pearls—would have actually been forbidden to women from Tehuantepec even less than a hundred years prior to the revolution, as sumptuary laws under Spanish colonialism had regulated the clothing worn by different social classes.

But the *traje* is nonetheless a symbol of female empowerment, in that both the production and the consumption processes that served to make, wear, and ascribe meaning to it were the outcome of women's agency. On the one hand, research has documented the crucial role played by businesswomen, and in particular a female entrepreneur from Oaxaca named Juana Catarina Romero, who just prior to the Revolution took inspiration from Victorian dress. After touring English factories to learn the fine points of cloth production, Romero ordered the fabric of muslin huipiles (loose fitting tunics made by stitching together rectangular pieces of fabric) from Manchester, based on her own designs and colour schemes. Moreover, promoting the use of wider skirts and numerous *refajos* (petticoats) served business purposes, as it increased the volume of cloth sold. However, from the perspective of consumption, it is important to add that there is no *one* traje: each woman creates her

own by making combinations from the existing array of possibilities. Contextualising the history of the Tehuana costume thus reveals how mestiza and indigenous women became not only subjects but also agents of modernisation, as producers, merchants, and consumers. What mattered was not so much its indigenous, and supposedly matriarchal, pedigree, but rather—or in addition—the possibilities it offered women to exert creativity, business acuity and political skills. Kahlo, whose mother Matilde Calderón (1874–1932) was from Oaxaca and had both Spanish ancestry and indigenous ancestry, would have been aware of the cultural heritage of this costume.

In the light of this, it is possible to reinterpret Andrade's understanding of Kahlo's Tehuana attire, which Andrade claims is an iconographic item that conferred upon her a religious dimension. Instead, the attire can be understood as a brand-building strategy. Andrade writes that dressed as a Tehuana, Kahlo:

> Appears to have an aura of sanctity or divinity [...] when choosing the typical dress of indigenous Zapotee women instead of a more modern or contemporary form of dress, Frida placed herself in a circular temporal dimension, a cyclical more than historical one [...] This is an atemporal creature, coming from a place that is more legendary than geographical [...] assuming the dimensions of a virgin and goddess. (Andrade 2000, 47)

An alternative understanding would be that Kahlo opted for a seemingly atemporal look that would be fit for a long-lasting logo, especially in the eyes of the target audience in Europe and the United States, unfamiliar with the (very temporal and changing) fashion of the Tehuantepec Isthmus. However, since according to Lieb (2018, 17) death can confer "sainthood" and thereby strengthen the person-brand of some artists, the religious association in the case of Kahlo would still hold today, albeit from a marketing perspective.

Second, while this aspect of her life has been rarely discussed in the literature, Kahlo was acutely aware of the difficulties faced by women artists in pursuing a professional career as she tried to manage hers. Despite her considerable talent, she was usually described in the press as an "exotic, diminutive sidekick" to her famous husband Rivera, merely "a Sunday painter with few professional claims of her own" (Roberts 2019, 31). But it was precisely this sense of exoticism and primitivism, largely derived from her dress style, that drew attention to her and was therefore useful for making a name for herself, a brand that could be leveraged for the marketing of her paintings. It has been noted that aspiring person-brands must attract attention, elicit positive emotional responses, "activate the public's need for fantasy, identification [...] affiliation and attachment" (Lieb 2018, 17). Dress could become a useful resource for this. There is evidence that this was her approach both in her personal correspondence to friends and relatives as she attempted to forge a network of patrons, and in her dress collection itself. This shows Kahlo using fashion as a means for personal agency.

As regards the former, we can quote a letter to her mother written in San Francisco in the early 1930s, which reads "Americans are fond of me and they notice and pay attention to the dresses and shawls I wear, they find the jade necklaces astonishing" (Tibol 2022, 203, our translation). Another letter to the daughters of the Venezuelan ambassador Mr Sawatsky dated 1 December 1941 is signed "your very true friend, the one who wears the 'naguas larga' [long skirts from the Tehuana costume]. Do not forget me" (Tibol 2022, 333). As she was writing letters such as these and despite her avowed affiliation with communism, Kahlo was in fact also befriending and cultivating wealthy patrons such as the Rockefeller family, in particular John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his wife Abby, a cofounder of MoMa, who developed a bond to Kahlo and helped fuel her career.[4] Other letters to Nickolas Muray and Alejandro Gómez Arias speak of the advantages of wearing a Tehuana dress for the Paris exhibition of her paintings in 1939, and of the photographs made of her with indigenous attire for *Vogue* and *Life* magazines (Tibol 2022, 262, 253). This exhibition also presented a networking opportunity for Kahlo, where she met not only artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp, but also patrons including A. Conger Goodyear, a founder of the Museum of Modern Art; actor and collector Edward G. Robinson; and writer and feminist politician Clare Boothe Luce. The Louvre Museum acquired their only painting by her then, entitled, "The Frame" (1939). It is said that upon the occasion of the exhibition, Elsa Schiaparelli declared that she "intended to design an outfit *Madame Rivera* style". Thus, not only did indigenous dress give Kahlo the opportunity to build the recognisable look, name, and style that became her brand, but this was also one that matched, to European eyes, the (allegedly) surrealistic style that she eventually became famous for in her painting. She evinced this match with the definition of surrealism she once provided, which centred on both wild nature and clothes.

Her dress collection[5] provides further evidence of her attempts at image creation and management. This refers to both the number and type of outfits, the time when these were acquired (and worn and depicted), and the aesthetic, even "ritualistic" approach that she took to caring for them, employing her sewing, mending and embroidery skills. Gannit Ankori has remarked upon the way that Kahlo transformed her wardrobe over the years, with a clear chronology discernible. Modern, contemporary style clothes prevail prior to

[4] In fact, taking commissions from wealthy patrons was one of the reasons Rivera was expelled from the communist party in 1929, and Kahlo also left at this time. She re-joined in 1948.

[5] The collection comprises 23 huipiles, 38 skirts, 12 shawls, 3 underskirts, 1 wrap-around, 32 blouses and 2 Tehuana headdresses, 4 quexquemitls, 1 Chinese shirt front, 4 shirts, 3 laces for underskirts, 3 short capes, 3 pairs of shoes, 2 woollen capes, 1 glove, 4 outfits, 4 pairs of stockings, 3 aprons, 11 girdles, 1 cap, 1 long straight Chinese skirt, 2 slips, 1 bathing suit, 1 pair of short pants, 5 Mayan huipiles, 5 lace headdresses, 3 pants, 10 cotton pants, 2 scarves, 1 pajama, 1 nightgown, 25 ribbons, 1 robe, 1 embroidered caftan, 1 cloth bag and 14 sack bags (Rosenzweig and Rosenzweig 2007, 175).

her marriage to Rivera, and then "ethnic" dress becomes more prevalent between 1930 and 1939 when she was active seeking to exhibit her work in Europe and the United States. Moreover, this is not a random collection of fine Tehuana costumes but a colour scheme can be discerned, with red, fuchsia, pink, chartreuse, yellow-gold and electric blue predominating, and to a lesser extent aqua, violet and lilac. Flowers, birds and geometrical patterns are also recurrent, and each and every item is striking for its design (Turok, 2007, 103) As put by Herrera, "For Frida the elements of her dress were a kind of palette from which she selected each day the image of herself that she wished to present to the world" (Herrera 1986). She made of her dress "a whole picture with colours and shapes" (Herrera 1986). Last, it must also be noted that for so-called person-brands such as the ones applicable to artists, one's name is an important part of the brand equation. And Kahlo used different names to sign her paintings too, which match the dress style evolution cited here; she changes from the early "Carmen Rivera" of, for instance, "Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States" (1932) (see Fig. 27.2), and others prior to this date, where she did not depict herself wearing a Tehuana costume, to the latter "Frida Kahlo."[6]

Whereas "Carmen Rivera" has a Hispanic ring to it and would thus naturally belong, as it were, in indigenous costume, "Frida Kahlo" has more of a European cultural baggage, highlighting the exoticism of the costume for a wearer thus named. In addition, Carmen Rivera would have more firmly been placed under her famous husband's shadow, so her name and fashion style made her more of an individual apart from him, showing a sense of feminist politics on her part.

27.4 The Man's Suit

But if it was the Tehuana attire that was crucial to the feminist branding of Kahlo as the discussion above has shown, the garments she wears on the "Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair" made in 1940 are equally telling of the strategy she followed. This is in many ways a painting of contrasts, especially when compared to her earlier work.

Figure 27.3 exhibits neutral hues such as brown, black and beige predominate, instead of the bright colours of the palette (and dress) that she became famous for. The dogs, monkeys and other animals or creatures that often feature in her oeuvre are also absent. And importantly, her hallmark indigenous dress is gone as well, with a dark, oversized man's suit and shirt replacing it—only the shoes are woman's. In addition, rather than the inscription stating the subject matter of the painting and the date of completion as on many other paintings of hers, instead she includes the lyrics and printed music from a popular song that read, "Mira que si te quise fué por el pelo, Ahora que

[6] Kahlo was born Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo Calderón.



Fig. 27.2 Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States (1932) signed Carmen Rivera

estás pelona ya no te quiero" (Look, if I loved you it was for your hair. Now that you have cut it, I no longer love you).

In a similar manner to the hypotheses that have been put forward as to Kahlo's choice of indigenous dress, and in particular the *traje de Tehuana*, several explanations have also been advanced for the reason and significance of the man's suit and shirt on this painting. In the context of her strong exploration of *Mexicanidad* in the 1920s and 1930s, "Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair" is said to be particularly radical. Given that this painting was made during the time that Kahlo and Rivera were briefly divorced (1939–1940), the costume has often been interpreted as being somehow related to him. Because of the bulky proportions of the suit, some scholars have taken it to be Rivera's, in which case her donning of it might be interpreted as an attempt to remove the physical and emotional distance imposed by their divorce (Lindauer 1999). Other scholars have agreed the suit is a reference to her donning of it as a reproach to Rivera; Kahlo avoided the Mexicanist style which he favoured and she had adopted it, allegedly to please him. For yet others, however, the suit need not refer to Rivera. Roberts notes that Kahlo had previously flouted



Fig. 27.3 Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair (1940)

conventions of gender roles and power relations, including through dress (and here, the scissors, which can be said to take the role of an accessory). She had, for instance, shocked her conservative family by dressing as a man for the famous family photograph dated 7 February 1926 (Roberts 2019, 26). Rebel too sees the suit as meaning a casting off of "the burden of femininity that was bought dearly enough in better times because it always went hand in hand with servile beauty, with complaisance towards others. So away with the role of woman as "woman"" (Rebel 2008, 70).

In addition to the apparel, the other element of the painting that is often remarked upon is the printed music, also taken as an accusation of superficiality aimed at Rivera. As the song lyrics imply, his love for her failed to

extend beyond the props, that is, beyond the nativist Mexican features that she had thus far carefully cultivated in her appearance and work. At a deeper level, this inclusion of a popular song on the painted canvas would also have reversed Rivera's mode of work and the whole approach of his project, which consisted of frescos with the aim to educate the (largely illiterate) population of the country about its history, while presenting a powerful vision of its future. In other words, instead of bringing culture by means of painting into the public realm as Rivera did, the popular song alluded to in "Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair" brings culture into the private realm of Kahlo's small canvas. This constitutes a powerful feminist gesture on her part. For our focus on the making of an artist feminist brand, both the attire and the reference to music are important. We concur with Roberts that rather than any reference to Rivera (who rarely wore suits and eschewed them on his self-portraits), Kahlo's decision to depict herself dressed as a man indicates her own "growing ambition and increasing desire to be included in an artworld dominated by men" (Roberts 2019, 31), and that therefore the reasons were mostly related to the management of her image, which she was struggling with at the time.

Just as female (pop) stars are today held to rigid standards of appearance and beauty that confine them to a small number of highly patterned types, in contrast to the many more types and positions available to male artists, at the time Kahlo was painting in order to succeed internationally she had been limited to a small number of options for depiction, resorting mainly to self-exoticism. While for male artists the content of the work is prioritised over their bodies and costume, this was and is still not so for women. Writing in 2018 about Jo Calderone, the male persona of popular music star Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, professionally known as Lady Gaga, Lieb advanced a series of observations related to Germanotta's person-brand that we argue were also applicable to Frida Kahlo's brand already in 1940. Lieb ponders upon Germanotta's performance as Calderone, rhetorically asking whether she had burnt through "so many provocative female poses in so little time that all she had left was to turn herself into a man" (Lieb 2018, 17). When she presented the Jo Calderone persona, Germanotta "apparently pleaded 'I want her to be real'" and then she "sang her heart out … demanding that the audiences really listened to her for a change" (Lieb 2018, 17). In a similar manner, by 1940 Kahlo may have painted herself into so many exotic and primitive, matriarchal Tehuanas in colourful, natural settings that all she felt she had left was painting herself into a man in a grey suit, on a chair against the wall in an empty room. In the process, the trappings of *mexicanidad* that loom large in their absence are revealed to have been little more than the elements of "the look."

After her second marriage to Rivera, Kahlo resumed the Tehuana image she had carefully built by then, at least in public, and did not abandon it (until shortly prior to her death in 1954), even wearing the costume to the last exhibition of her work that took place in 1953.

27.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced a new perspective on the crucial relationship between dress and political and personal agency as performed by Frida Kahlo, one which focuses less on nationalism and nation-building, disability or marital relations and considers instead brand management: the consumption and adoption of "ethnic" fashion to create a style for self-empowerment in a competitive, and male-dominated, cultural sphere at the dawn of the twentieth century, when consumer culture was emerging in Mexico. In his *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau (2011 [1974]) famously pointed out that while social science has the ability to study the traditions, language, symbols, art and articles of exchange that make up a culture, it fails to take account of the means by which to examine the ways in which people re-appropriate them in everyday situations. And it is precisely in the act of appropriation in these situations that people can find opportunities to subvert the rituals and representations that institutions seek to impose upon them. This alone is a political act and seeks political change. de Certeau argued that without clear understanding of this activity, social science is bound to create nothing other than a picture of people who are non-artists (meaning non-creators and non-producers), passive and heavily subject to received culture. We contend that this is precisely the picture of Kahlo that criticism in the humanities and social science has rendered, one of, paradoxically, a non-artist, in the sense that she comes across as heavily subject to reacting—to an accident or illness, an infidelity or a divorce, a war or revolution—rather than to acting. Her use of traditional dress is taken to stand, at best, for pleasing someone or covering something, at worst as a complaint (Mexican writer and Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz once said of Kahlo that before her oeuvre, he often felt as though he was before a complaint). Our focus on the mundane, on the everyday life necessity to earn a living, brings forward those aspects of Kahlo's life and work that most empowered her, foregrounding the role of costume in the making of an artist.

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CHAPTER 28

From Cover to Kaba: A History of Women's Fashion in Cameroon

Linda Silim Moundene

28.1 Introduction

The arrival of missionaries in Cameroon at the end of the nineteenth century completely changed the cultural habits of the local population in all aspects, including clothing. Inspired by the Christian morality that dictated the new social norms, the first measures to control the image of the Cameroonian woman with clothing as an element of control appeared (Elamé 2006). It should be said that the first relationship of the Cameroonian woman with what can be called Western fashion is immediately tinged with political influence because it is for the missionaries' wives to hide the naked bodies of Cameroonian women and, at the same time, saved the European colonizers from temptation (Ngametche 2012).

Today in the woman's wardrobe, a garment that symbolizes more than all the others the evolution of the Cameroonian woman since the colonization, is the Kaba. This dress, originally imposed by the wives of German colonizers, has evolved over the generations until it has become today a traditional dress, a symbol of women's emancipation with International Women's Day, widespread among the younger generations and even a symbol of interculturality and evolution (Garbyan 2022).

Although several African countries claim authorship of the Kaba, which is plausible because it is a long, loose dress commonly found in the wardrobe of colonized women, the fact remains that when we speak of Kaba or

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Kaba Ngondo we are referring to the Cameroonian woman (Garbyan 2022). Regardless of ethnic origin or religion, every Cameroonian woman owns at least one Kaba, which she has probably worn since childhood for various occasions. As an actual historical and cultural link between yesterday, today, and tomorrow, how does the Kaba Ngondo embody the evolution of Cameroonian women for over a century? This study aims to show how a dress or Kaba Ngondo is a witness to the feminine history of Cameroon. The history of this dress will mix episodes of censorship, Christianity, popular culture, and fashion.

28.2 Context

The word "Kaba" is said to be a distortion of the English word "cover," which was used by missionaries' wives to signify to the indigenous women of the coast that they should cover their nakedness and dress more decently according to Christian codes (Garbyan 2022). The "cover" became the only decent attire to please the Lord. Thus, the Sawa women (a coastal ethnic group) had to wear this cover as a decent garment. Without using cloth or cotton, the first Kaba were made of burlap sacks with three openings for the head and the two arms. Hence this loose dress structure was imagined initially to hide the curves of the Sawa woman (CRTV 2020). Let us recall that long before Cameroonian women, the woman's body has always been the object of numerous codifications, both as an object of fantasy and administrative or religious censorship (CRTV 2020). In the case of the history of the Kaba, it was a preventive measure of a religious nature because it was seen as necessary to preserve the missionary man from the temptation of carnal sin (Garbyan 2022).

Despite the absence of a law imposing the wearing of the Kaba in society, it gradually became popular as Christianity advanced. From the house of their European mistresses, the dress became a Christian accessory used to distinguish advanced indigenous women and pagans (Garbyan 2022). Thus, among the Dwala, two classes of indigenous women appear, those who are described as Bito ba Kaba (women who dress in Kaba, and therefore Christian women) and the Bito ba Mukanja (women of traditional fabric or pagans) (Garbyan 2022). The Kaba thus becomes a factor of exclusion and discrimination between these two worlds.

With the opening of training courses in domestic arts for women, the Kaba will undergo its first aesthetic revolution. The indigenous women copied the fashion codes of European women and modified the Kaba's appearance to incorporate the codes of what they interpreted as Victorian fashion of the early 1920s first when Cameroon was under German administration then the period between the two World Wars when Cameroon's administration changed from Germany to France and England (CRTV 2020). At that time, with fabric being a valuable object, the Kaba was also a prestigious dress, a symbol of social success (Vincent 1976, 43). The Kaba became so prestigious that it

was adopted by the Traditional Assembly of the Dwala (Ngondo) peoples as the official traditional dress for women. From that point forward, the dress was called Kaba Ngondo (Ngametche 2012). This transition from a Christian dress to an official traditional and pagan dress also allowed the Kaba to continue popularizing and leave the Sawa cultural area to become the dress that Cameroonian women unanimously wore.

Toward the end of the 1990s, the Kaba was revived with the appearance of the "Mini Kaba." Local market dressmakers transformed the Kaba to adapt to the needs of women's coquetry, especially young girls of the time (Garbyan 2022). With the "Mini Kaba" concept, the dress was adapted to different style, which was attractive to a younger generation. When it arrived in the 1990s, the Kaba experienced an identity crisis because it was associated with older women and was not attractive enough for young women. The mini Kaba not only blew a wind of freshness on the dress's aesthetics but also brought a wind of freedom (CRTV 2020). From then on, the Kaba is not only a traditional garment extremely codified, but it is also the symbol of the coquetry of each woman. The wind of freedom carried by the mini Kaba revolution opened an intercultural dialogue that continues today (CRTV 2020). By breaking the traditional aesthetic codes of the Kaba, designers integrated elements of local cultures (cowrie shells, Ndop fabrics, Igbo scarves, silk, straw, etc.), limited only by the imagination of the designer and the client.

The establishment of the fabric of March 8 for International Women's Day (IWD) in the year 2000 opened a new chapter in the history of the Kaba. Women naturally associate the Kaba with this celebration. Every year, a race for originality is opened as designers compete for ideas to produce new Kaba models that must be more innovative than in previous years to meet the demands of women (Bia 2022). The Collective of Women for Renewal (CFR), a group created in 1982, helped to lay the groundwork for the first IWD in Cameroon, defining. Feminism as a tool for political analysis of the patriarchal system that dispossesses women of their lives and their essence (Eteki-Otabela 1992). To this end, the actions of the Collective were mainly focused on three points: the denunciation of violence against women, the organization of March 8 activities, and the political struggle. Since its creation, the Collective has defended an African vision of feminism with demands specific to local societies. Thus, actions were taken on the issues of women's names, the pressure of motherhood, polygamy, women as economic actors, violence, and gender equality (Eteki-Otabela 1992). In 1992, the Collective was transformed into the Association de Lutte Contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes (ALVF), which is still a key player in the fight against violence against women and girls. As a symbol of elegance and dignity, the Kaba was adopted by women's organizations, so much so that today, we speak of Kaba of March 8 as a specific garment (Pommerolle and Ngaméni 2015).

28.3 Methodology

For this research, I used a mixed research methodology at the intersection between literary analysis and the use of the video and photo corpus. Indeed, to compensate for the lack of documentation on Kaba Ngondo, clothing and textiles in Cameroon, the video archives available on Youtube (the largest video-sharing platform) provide additional information. Since the late 1980s, videography has been fully integrated into the academic landscape, especially in North America (Cléret et al. 2018). In 1989, Belk's Consumer Research Odyssey on American consumer society was published. It is a data collection that combines ethnographic, photographic, and videography work (Leblanc and Gaudin 2020). This critical research project on American society opened up the experimental field of methodology by making the visual arts and the social sciences intersect more and more.

Since then, different types of video have been used in research, including ethnographic documentaries, filmed interviews, collaborative videos, films, and series. With the birth of visual social networks, Instagram and Tik Tok, the corpus has grown even more significant. This study used videos from official TV channels and popular movies and series. The videos were chosen according to the following criteria:

- The national media: videos produced by the national channels (Cameroon Radio and Television) were favored;
- Private media: groups such as Canal 2, STV, although private, function like local media;
- Foreign media: a source especially for documentaries on March 8; and
- Films and series: the videos analyzed the use of the Kaba, when the Kaba is used, and what the Kaba represents. There is also data on the 8th of March, the importance of the loincloth, and the clothing associated with this event.

For several years now, on the occasion of March 8 celebrations, films, and documentaries have been made on the themes chosen for the IWD and the condition of women and girls in the country. These films are also tools to present the work of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the programs of First Lady Chantal Biya's foundation, and some international programs that work on the issues of women's and girls' rights. As the daughter and granddaughter of a seamstress trained in domestic arts in the girls' schools opened by the Catholic missionaries in Douala, the analysis of the results tries to show both the historical and the aesthetic impact of the Kaba in the life of the woman.

28.4 Results

28.4.1 The Kaba as a Controlling Tool for Women's Bodies

Designed by the wives of missionary settlers, who first dressed their servants in it, the Kaba had two objectives: to divert European men from temptation and to impose new moral and puritanical values on the indigenous people. This idea of the African woman whose nudity must be covered feeds the erroneous imagination of Africans who constantly walk around completely naked (Rivière 2008). The testimonies of the Arab historian of the twelfth-century Al Bakri, mentioned cotton clothes worn by the rich of the empire of Ghana (Rivière 2008). Africans generally wore finery, nudity being temporary and functional for bathing or sleeping. Men and women covered or uncovered their bodies depending on their daily activities. The intimate parts were always covered. The materials used were vegetal, leather, cotton, raffia, and bark. Thus, the influence of Christian and Muslim religions has modified the notion of decency and non-erotic nudity (Rivière 2008).

According to Claude Rivière (2008), between 1890 and 1925, colonizers profoundly changed the habits of the Africans by importing their values and Western tradition, religious modesty, and economic interest with the sale of cotton. Thus, the Kaba was introduced by European women as a political act aiming to modify indigenous peoples' culture by introducing European Christian values (Rivière 2008). From then on, traditional societies integrated new social norms on nudity and the aesthetic relationship of the body, the other, and space.

28.4.2 The Kaba: A Tool for Appropriating European Culture

French missionaries believed that natives dressed like colonists increased the hope of conversion in their communities. In February 1922, Charles Atangana, a Beti chief who had converted to Catholicism, forbade men and women to wear traditional finery; this prohibition extended to certain hairstyles for women. He required men to wear clothes made of cloth and women to wear dresses (Rivière 2008). Taking up the work of Laburthe-Tolra, Christian Rivière (2008) recalls that women saw a new opportunity for coquetry in this new fashion. Indeed, nudity became a sign of poverty, slavery, and non-development. Abandoning the Ebui (banana tree skirt), the Kaba was the obligatory garment for entering the church. This long dress, loose with the scarf, was the object of the covetousness of women whose conversion was a means of exposing their beautiful finery during mass or Christian events (Vincent 1076. P43). Thus, for women, the Kaba became an object of exclusion and social distinction (The-Bochet 1970, 201). In the 1920s, training in sewing and domestic arts for indigenous women led to indigenous women's first transformation of the Kaba, inspired in particular by the Victorian fashion of European women (Garbyan 2022). Thus, the Kaba became a codified and sophisticated part of Cameroonian life. The indigenous women changed the

codes of Victorian fashion to make a dress that, while remaining large, highlighted the chest compared to the rest of the body (Garbyan 2022). The Kaba was then worn with a scarf to cover the head and a petticoat to amplify the majestic effect of the bottom of the dress (CRTV 2020). In a way, what the European women wanted to hide at all costs at the beginning of the twentieth century, the indigenous women, in approximating her image, found a way to put forward their feminine attributes in a garment imposed by the colonists.

28.4.3 The Kaba: A Rallying Tool for Women

Serving as both a new dress code and an instrument of conversion, the Kaba was exported outside the Sawa community to other ethnic groups in the hinterland. As a coastal ethnic group, the Kaba was first imposed on Sawa women, including the Dwala, who were settled in the present-day city of Douala, which housed the colonial port (Elamé 2006). Of all the ethnic groups in Cameroon, only the Dwala would make the Kaba the official garment of the Dwala woman (Ngametche 2012). Through this act, the Kaba, which is now called Kaba Ngondo, combines religious and pagan functions. Today it is still the garment of ceremony and celebration of everyday life (baptism, mourning, marriage, etc.).

Consequently, several types of Kaba began to appear, corresponding to different functions. In the Duala language, there is the *Mindènè*, the ceremonial Kaba; the *Mukuku*, the elegant Kaba; and the *Misodi*, the home or everyday Kaba (Garbyan 2022). Even today, this diversification of Kaba can be found in the wardrobe of Cameroonian women of all ages.

Having become a popular dress, the Kaba owes its success in the independence and post-independence years to its qualities as a practical, elegant dress and the popularization of fabrics and sewing accessories (Atoukam and Dalis 2009). Thanks to its colors and prints, the Kaba became a women's association uniform. In Cameroonian society, each woman belongs to a group or organization, and very quickly, each woman owned one or more Kaba (Machikou 2015). This habit of having one Kaba per women's association is still present today. On meeting days, women recognize each other by their uniforms as a symbol of belonging to a group.

28.4.4 The Association Between the Kaba and the Fabric

By imposing a special fabric each year for March 8, the Kaba found a new expression. The Kaba of March 8, demonstrates once again the adoption of this dress for a specific event. The Kaba became the vector of the messages of this celebration by using prints and symbols conveyed by the fabric. For example, in 2019, the fabric presented the woman as the guardian of tradition, represented women in Kaba, and traditional clothing from different regions of the country. In 2020, the fabric presented women as an actress of freedom. The 2023 edition presents the woman as an actress of development, showing

women who are both farmers and businesswomen. During the pandemic of COVID-19, the fabric of March 8 depicted virus mitigation efforts, with images of women who wore masks. Women's organizations, as well, compete to have the most beautiful and unique fabric, extolling messages through the design of the cloth (Machikou 2015).

28.4.5 The Kaba: A Symbol of New Freedom for Women

Every year, the IWD is a celebration that allows us to take stock of women's rights in society. The Cameroonian woman has appropriated this event as a day of expression of her freedoms. The expression "raise the Kaba" highlights every year this woman who considers that on March 8 all is allowed, even raising her Kaba in an act of immodesty (Bia 2022). Whether or not a woman lifts her Kaba, this dress is associated with conquering her freedom. Some women will demand, for example, that their husbands take care of the household chores, cooking, or children on March 8 (Monica 2018). This day is the occasion to explore the reversal of the roles between men and women (Monica 2018).

As a yearly event, each March 8 Kaba edition has its unique fabric, and designers are obliged to redouble their inventiveness to satisfy women. On this occasion, different models will appear to make women even more elegant (Pommerolle and Ngaméni 2015). Moreover, some women have several Kaba for this day, a classic Kaba to attend conferences, roundtables, and other official events, and a more "fashionable" Kaba to party with friends (Pommerolle and Ngaméni 2015). This image of the dual function of the Kaba is mostly relayed in film, with heroines having multiple outfits for the single day of March 8 (CRTV 2020). However, even if the partying dress is modern, it will still include some codes of the classic Kaba (length, a large skirt, sleeves, etc.).

28.5 Analysis and Interpretation of the Results: Has the Kaba Become the Symbol of Freedom for Cameroonian Women?

28.5.1 From a Colonial Dress to an Assimilation Dress: The Kaba as a Bridge Between Many Worlds

As a loose dress that covers the entire body, the Kaba is the official female dress validated by the church. It is called Kaba in the Sawa region, but in other regions, such as the Beti in central and southern Cameroon, it is known as a mission dress (Vincent 1976, 43). This mission dress, or Kaba, is part of the symbolism of the liberation of women from the yoke of tradition (Vincent 1976, 43). In fact, during interviews with Beti women in southern Cameroon, Jeanne-Françoise Vincent (1976) discovered the association made by some

women between Christianity and freedom. For some, clothing is one of Christianity's advances because nudity is a symbol of savagery or slavery (Vincent 1976).

Consequently, this Kaba, which is the clothing to present itself in front of God, will crystallize the symbolism of the new condition of the Christian woman. Aware of the power they wielded over women, the missionaries created women's establishments called Sixa in Beti country (The-Bochet 1970, 210), which were refuges for women who wished to escape the weight of tradition, especially marriage (The-Bochet 1970, 209). Thus, women came to find refuge in the missions under the protection of the missionaries, which in some cases, reimbursed the dowry and guaranteed the woman the choice of her husband on condition that she married in the church and led a Christian life. From then on, the church (Catholic or Protestant) set itself up as the protector not only of the dignity of the woman but also guaranteed the salvation of her soul (The-Bochet 1970, 211).

In the missions and Sixa, women transfer power from their traditional environment to that of the colonial authority via the missionaries (The-Bochet 1970, 206). The power of the mission goes hand in hand with that of the administrative authority. Under this new administration, mass and catechism were compulsory daily at the risk of corporal punishment. In this new environment, women and men were obliged to dress for all their Christian obligations. This Christian life juxtaposed with traditional life forced the local people to practice what de The-Bochet (1970) calls identity doubling, which consists of copying the habits of people from another culture as a marker of assimilation (The-Bochet 1970, 206). What better way to quickly demonstrate assimilation than through clothing? The Kaba is thus seen as a passageway between two worlds, serving as a brake on masculine temptation, as a means of liberating the indigenous woman, and as an element of a new identity under construction.

28.5.2 The Kaba Element of Women's Coquetry

Several reports mention the inventiveness and natural coquetry of the Cameroonian women who came to sublimate the Kaba, making it pass from an ugly dress "burlap cover" to an elegant dress that rivals today with the dresses of great designers (Garbyan 2022). Several competitions of circumstance contributed to liberating women's creativity, particularly the learning during the interwar period of the domestic arts (sewing, embroidery). The mastery of sewing allowed women to regain control over their appearance because it was a question of sending back an image through clothing. When women learned to sew, they emphasized their breasts by making the Kaba an assembly of two pieces: a high piece, the body, and a low piece, a large skirt worn with an underskirt (CRTV 2020).

As Cameroonian women mastered the art of sewing, coupled with using materials (fabrics, WAX cloth, beads, cauris shells, etc.), the Kaba will became

an increasingly sophisticated dress (CRTV 2020). Not belonging to a particular ethnic group, the Kaba is like a painting on which each generation left its mark. As a witness to the history of women, it saw the arrival of new fabrics and prints used for various purposes (political, religious, community, etc.), and became enriched with new materials (straw, raffia, beads). Finally, it incorporated fashion pieces from other cultures.

28.5.3 The Kaba as a Link Between Women's Generations

By making the Kaba the official dress of Ngondo, the dress entered a universe of tradition and transmission. Accepting this dress was possible because, for indigenous women, dressing like the European woman, a symbol of strength and power, is a way of recovering the power of the other. This symbolism of the transfer of power via clothing is found among many peoples who have undergone colonization. For example, the Herero women of Namibia adopted Victorian dresses to symbolize this power transfer between the colonists and themselves (Rivière 2008).

From its inception, we have seen that the Kaba is imagined by women, who codify it. The first generations of indigenous women who had mastered sewing reversed the Western code of the Kaba to make it a garment more representative of their image. This first change, unchallenged by the colonial authority, gave birth to a tradition of generations of women who dialogue through this garment by reinterpreting the codes from one generation to another. The history of the Kaba underwent three significant changes; the first period was in the 1920s–1930s when the indigenous women appropriated this dress. The second period was in the 1960s, with the arrangement of materials and fabrics (Sonkeng and Kouosseu 2020). And the third revolution in the 1990s and 2000s was with the mini Kaba's invention and the general renewal of fashion (Garbyan 2022). These three phases of modification of the Kaba are linked to the transformations and the place of the indigenous woman in society. We observe that the less censored women are, the more they free their creativity, which they willingly express through their appearance. Today, precisely through the "raise the Kaba" movement, Cameroonian society reproaches women for a depravity of morals that we can situate in the year 2000 with the appearance of the Kaba of March 8.

Today the Kaba continues to write women's history by creating new intercultural bridges. In diasporic dialogues in the Cameroonian community, it is one of the garments that is exported and offered to children in the diaspora as a symbol of the country of origin (CRTV 2020). Because this dress is present among colonized and Christianized peoples, the Kaba is an element of belonging to this group of women worldwide. It is also the garment that allows the freedom to incorporate inspirations from elsewhere, whether it be lace, denim, embroidery, Madras, etc. Often at the center of debates on cultural appropriation because of the Dutch Wax fabric and Cameroonian women's adoption of this dress, the Kaba represents one of these universal

stories that connects several worlds at several different times. Without denying its colonial origins, the Kaba has since transcended its primary function of covering to become a piece of art of Cameroonian culture. Like Hip Hop or Afrobeat, the Kaba does not cause the disappearance of the other traditional clothes, which are still worn today in different ethnic groups. The Kaba is just the universal means of expression that is transmitted to women regardless of generations.

28.6 Conclusion

This research on the Kaba has made it possible to trace part of the history of Cameroonian women from colonization to the present day. A very popular dress with little interest for scholars, this research aims to fill the gap between fashion and politics in Cameroon. Alternatively, an element of colonization, then a symbol of freedom, the Kaba, allows us to trace the history of cultural contributions to Cameroonian society. Thus, the history of the Kaba retraces the long struggle of Cameroonian women to reclaim their image and make Kaba an object of pride and interculturality.

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CHAPTER 29

(White) Boys in White Dresses: Racial Capitalism and the Limits of Gender-Disruptive Fashion

Isabel Felix Gonzales

29.1 Introduction

With the growth of queer, trans, and nonbinary spaces alongside hyper-specific fashion subcultures, social media has acted as a space where hegemonic norms of sexuality, gender, and embodiment have been contested, subverted, and sometimes, dismantled. This is especially visible in how certain pieces of clothing are coming to be viewed. While not *entirely* mainstreamed, staples of "women's" fashion have been taken on as everyday wear for men and masculine people. Dresses, skirts, nail polish, and lipstick—all once viewed as solidly and primarily parts of womenswear—have since been incorporated into the wardrobes of some young men and masculine people, even those who are not queer or transgender.

In some ways, this contemporary shift against a fashion binary is reflective of wider changes in the mass imagination about the primacy of the gender binary. However, this shift against a gendered fashion binary is much more complicated than a simple linear progression toward full gender liberation, or even gender equality. Complicating this history even still is the fact that not all figures who take on gender-transgressive practices agree on the political importance or symbolic meaning of their everyday aesthetic performances. Some men and boys who adopt traditionally "feminine" fashion even identify with the political right. These right-leaning feminine boys and men—nicknamed

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"fascist femboys" in some spaces online—problematize the straightforward narrative of gender-transgressive fashion belonging exclusively to people on the political left.

Rather than representing an unsolvable contradiction, however, the presence of right-leaning feminine boys and men reveal the logics, systems, and conditions that allow for their existence. These conditions, including logics of liberal individualism and citizenship as individual sovereignty, are themselves products of racial capitalism, and allow it to maintain its project of ordering and extraction. In examining the ways liberal individualism is at the heart of the contemporary aesthetic turn toward forms of "feminine masculinity," I make sense of how liberal individualism *as* a technology of racial capitalism produces the conditions that understand fashion not as a collective project, but as an individual one, thus allowing for supposedly "revolutionary" gender-disruptive fashion practices to be taken up by those on the right *and* the left. In doing so, I also offer a critique of appropriation and extraction that are seen less as aberrations but, like right-leaning "fascist femboys," utilize the same logics, and uphold the same structures.

29.2 Feminine Boys, Femboys, and the Linear Narrative of Progress

As a marker of subjectivity and self-identification, "femboy" (sometimes spelled "femboi") is slippery. The term can refer to any number of social subjects, including cisgender men of all sexual identities, masculine-of-center transgender men, and people whose own self-identified genders do not easily fit within binary categories of man or woman. "Femboy" can be used *both* to self-actualize *and* to misrecognize. Contemporary use of the term "femboy" has largely developed from its spread on social media. Though feminine boys have long been a part of various internet subcultures, the "femboy" term and associated archetype found mainstream spread, with memes referencing femboys achieving virality on Twitter, spawning imitators, and spreading across various social media platforms in late 2019 (Carry and Sweat 2021). Around the same time, TikTok's rise allowed for the proliferation and mainstreaming of a kind of "soft" masculinity (Hawgood 2020), including forms of gender-transgressive self-styling. The #FemboyFriday hashtag received over 158.3 million views in 2020 (Hills 2020), and as of 2023, high-profile femboy TikTok creators have had their videos liked millions of times. "Femboys" as a specific referent also found circulation beyond internet platforms in 2019, with its use by a character on HBO's *Euphoria*. As HBO's second most-watched show since 2004 (Maas 2022), the show serves as something of a barometer of the present, revealing the relative mainstreaming of "femboys" as a term and femboys as an archetype of non-normative masculinity.

Through its circulation on social media and its subsequent spillage into offline life, the meaning of "femboy" has crystallized to typically refer to a man (often cisgender, though not always) of any sexual identity who self-styles

in "feminine" ways. As a community, femboys typically understand themselves as separate and distinct from transgender women, though the term's initial slipperiness remains, as "some [non-femboys] mistakenly believe that femboys (a term exclusively used by and for men) are the same as crossdressers or drag queens (who can identify with any gender)" (Queerty Editors 2022) and proposed options for the femboy pride flag bear deep resemblance to the transgender pride flag. Beyond adopting cosmetic and wardrobe practices usually associated with "femininity," femboys often possess physical traits that are conventionally valued under Western regimes of beauty: they are usually young, slim, and relatively hairless. These traits have especially crystallized on TikTok, a platform that has allowed for increased visibility of femboys as a population, and, by nature of being a video-based platform, has produced the visual register that marks one as belonging to the population of "femboy." Despite this rise in mainstream visibility, though, many avenues for feminine boy subcultures remain semi-anonymous, with text-based Reddit communities, forums, Discord servers, and Tumblr blogs still serving as central spaces for such communities.

In profiles about feminine boys and the femboy community, their increased mainstream visibility is taken as a sign of prospering individuality and progress in the culture writ large. As Dani Ran writes for *Vice*, "When I was growing up, gender non-conforming people were hugely ostracized…TikTok's femboy trend is one of a few signs that suggest these oppressive gender norms are slowly breaking down, one cute dress at a time" (Ran 2020). Here, Ran conflates the capacity to dress in one's chosen clothing of choice with the looming end of oppressive systems, with femboys as the cutely dressed front lines of this new, enlightened future. And while the shattering of gender binaries has long been a project of queer and trans political projects, Ran's analysis, like the body of reportage that it comes to stand in for, sees individual self-expression *itself* as indicative and productive of the end of violent systems. As I will describe later, this analysis re-inscribes the liberal subject, thus allowing for a kind of imbrication of *certain* subjects into the body politic that does little to actually dismantle structures of violence or acknowledge histories of conquest and repression that produce such an order. But even beyond this larger analytical failure, this framing of femboys as *necessarily, always already* representing radical politics by nature of their aesthetic choices belies something much more immediate: the phenomenon of politically conservative femboys.

The population of right-leaning and far-right young men who dress in feminine fashion is difficult to quantify because of the nature of both the femboy subculture and far-right online spaces. Despite this, digital traces of fascist femboys exist, gesturing toward their relevance as an under-examined part of this supposed new era for non-normative gender expression. The phenomenon of "fascist femboys" is a recurring topic of discussion in Reddit communities for self-identified femboys *and* right-leaning communities, respectively. For example, in the Reddit community r/PoliticalCompassMemes, a community that allows people to identify based on their location on the political compass,

the earliest posts specifically using the language of "femboys" reference racist, authoritarian-right, or fascist femboys. In 2022, the r/FeminineBoys Reddit community, a digital community active since 2012, updated their community rules to explicitly ban "bad-faith politics," including "Right-wing and fascist ideation." This policy change was not embraced by everyone in the community. Some users described feeling out of place or left out of the community for having right-wing views, while others still described the community's antiracism policies as promoting "anti-white racism."

Despite this, among femboy communities writ large, the concept of right-leaning, authoritarian, or fascistic boys who wear feminine clothing is taken as nothing more than a meme—a sarcastic, online joke whose entire punchline lies in its very premise. But though the existence of the "fascist femboy" might be dismissed as an outlier, as memetic, as overblown, feminine men with otherwise conservative political positions wrinkle the tidy, linear narrative of gender transgression proliferated in places like *Vice* and *The New York Times*, revealing the limits of contemporary understandings of gender, fashion, and politics. What fascist femboys and their related kin do is challenge liberalism's teleological narrative of progress, one that rests in the individual capacity to self-fashion. Rather than revealing something about the right *specifically*, the existence of fascist femboys reveals important continuities in the production of modernity and gender through liberalism, neoliberalism, and racial capitalism as an ordering project.

29.3 Racial Capitalism, Liberalism, and Self-Fashioning

Central to racial capitalism as a project of ordering are the values of so-called modernity, themselves *shaped by* the particularistic sociality of Western Europe (Robinson 1983, 9) while, at the same time, *actively shaping* the social order: "ideologies of individualism, liberalism, and democracy….monopolize the terms of sociality, despite their increasing hollowness in the face of neoliberalism's predations" (Melamed 2015, 76). As Lisa Lowe writes, liberal and neoliberal values, including and especially the centrality of liberal individualism, produce and are co-produced through forms of violence, extraction, subjection, administration, and governance (Lowe 2003, 3), while also universalized into the definition of the subject who *matters*: "The dominant meaning of intimacy, as sexual or reproductive relations of the individual person within the liberal private sphere, is a defining property of the modern citizen in civil society" (Lowe 2003, 21). In other words, the making of "the citizen" *as* the marker of "the subject" is rendered through a privileged site—intimacy—that reifies individual choice, individual personhood, and one's capacity to act within the private sphere. The modern citizen embodied through individualism cannot be disentangled from intimacy as an *individual* reproductive practice in Lowe's articulation of it. The modern citizen *as* the liberal individual *as* the normative figure of modernity and civil society under racial

capitalism, then, cannot be disentangled through normative reproductivity. If, following Lowe, the making of the modern citizen in civil society is through the privileged site of intimacy as a form of normative *reproductivity*, then Judith Butler's intervention that "The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (Butler 2006, 31), allows for a reading of gender and gendered performance in the making of liberal subjectivity. From Butler's provocation, the production of gendering and gender presentation as solely a project of *individual* personhood, too, can be understood as liberalism reifying the modern subject—a central element of racial capitalism *as* a project of ordering and extraction.

Such an understanding of *individual* gendered personhood as both a product of *and* a central ordering element of liberalism and the racial capitalist order allows a move toward a different understanding of *rejections* of gender-normative presentation. Returning to Butler's provocation that not all drag is subversive—and that some forms of drag are central to reifying the supposed naturalness of oppositional gender—then not all gender non-normative presentation can be understood as necessarily a radical repudiation of systems of hierarchy and order. Though not all femboys and feminine-presenting men necessarily *identify* as queer, they have been constructed in the public imagination as part of a larger queer *populace*. This is to say, feminine boys and femboys as a population are constructed as part of an umbrella population associated with those who transgress normative gender, normative-gendered presentation, and normative sexual practice. But while queer *politics* might have radical potential, single-strand understandings of queerness as *identity* not only fail to live up to the "radical potentiality of queer politics" as Cathy Cohen puts it (Cohen 1997, 438), but also produce avenues by which such sexually or gender non-normative subjects can reify and naturalize the logics of liberal individualism as a project of racial capitalism. Under post-1970 neoliberalism, Lisa Dugan writes, the public/private divide—also a central project of ordering in the early development of capitalism—was made manifest in the twinned, valorized concepts of privatization and personal responsibility (Duggan 2004, 12–13). Personal responsibility as a valorized concept is both a trait of those left-of-political center and right-of-political center, showing up as the valorization of "competition, self-esteem, and independence" and the excoriation of the "civil rights agenda" (Duggan 2004, 14). The public/private divide is not resolved in neoliberalism, and the figure of the liberal individual—embodied wholly as the full citizen—is ever more central under neoliberalism's drive toward increased privatization. This produces a kind of politics that reflect the central figure of this political and economic order, even for those outside of sexual and gendered hegemony. This *homonormativity*, as Duggan puts it, "promise[s] the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2004, 50). Individual

queer identity and liberty through market consumption come to define what being part of a queer population means. Under homonormativity, "There is no vision of a collective, democratic public culture….we get marriage and the military, then we go home and cook dinner, forever" (Duggan 2004, 62). Queerness as *identity* of the liberal individual, then, gets reduced simply to a project of individual choice and liberty, rather than as a critical relation to power and domination.

With this understanding of homonormativity in mind, the phenomena right-leaning men who fashion themselves in feminine styles become less incomprehensible and more the product of an accumulated process of meaning-making. Like our contemporary understanding of queerness as identity of the liberal individual, dominant cultural paradigms of fashion carry on in the tradition of liberal individualism; fashion is understood as a mode of self-expression, rather a project connected to larger communities and politics. Even self-fashioning in ways that might be gender-transgressive are understood less as projects of a particular *politics* and more closely tied to empowering one to express oneself to the fullest extent of one's personal liberty. Fashion-as-personal-liberty, in other words, both utilizes and reinstantiates the logics of the liberal individual as sovereign citizen, even when making surface moves toward a nebulous disruption. It is this logic of the liberal individual, the sovereign citizen, embodied *through* aesthetic presentation, that the seeming irresolvability of right-leaning feminine men becomes not just legible, but *in line with* the very logics that allow for less sinister—though by no means less extractive—modes of appropriative aesthetic presentation to flourish.

29.4 White Boys in White Dresses: Harry Styles and Exceptional Singularity

Aesthetic presentation as self-figuration makes self-fashioning not a means of dismantling dominant hierarchies of order, but a means of reinforcing the liberal individual subject and market logics as the central organizing factor of social life. Homonormativity, in reducing queerness—the identitarian position that is, ostensibly, outside of normative gender and sexuality—reducible to that which one does individually, privately; it also reduces queerness to consumption and access to markets. This access to markets and the accumulation of capital *because* of one's seemingly outsider identity is yet another way that the liberal individualism as the motivating logic behind forms of fashion performance reproduces and naturalizes the logics and hierarchies of racial capitalism, rather than disrupting them. The recent rise of Harry Styles as an icon of nonbinary fashion is just one such example of this phenomenon.

Styles, a white British musician who rose to early superstardom from his role in the boy band One Direction, made headlines in 2020 as the first man to receive a solo feature on the cover of *Vogue* (Nguyen 2020). What was just as notable was the fact that Styles' cover featured him wearing a white, lacy dress. Much like the pieces valorizing the feminine boys and the soft

masculinities of TikTok, Hamish Bowles' *Vogue* profile of Styles is a glowing examination of one man's personal journey of self-discovery. In the profile, Styles' exceptional singularity is emphasized. His style is framed not as a political decision, but as an inborn, personal trait, one that allows Styles to express his creative energies, paralleling and emphasizing Styles' role as a musician—the elite career that allowed him access to the social and economic capital that allowing him access to stylists, designer clothing, and the resources to do the "six-day juice cleanse[s]" he is described as undergoing in preparation for his *Vogue* photoshoot. Styles' gender-disruptive fashion is framed—by Bowles, by interviewees and bystanders, and by Styles himself—as singularly pushing toward a liberated future defined by unbounded capacity for personal expression and liberty. Styles is associated with modernity and futurity, described as a "revolutionary" for inspiring younger generations to "be themselves." This "revolution" that Styles leads is all but apolitical. Few connections are made to past histories of gender nonconformity outside of David Bowie and Elton John. No acknowledgment is made of the material conditions of trans and gender-nonconforming young people in the United States. There is no critique of dominant systems of power. When asked about the Black Lives Matter movement, Styles is vague, centering himself in the movement and describing it as an opportunity for, "opening up and learning and listening."

This absence of an *explicit* political statement in Bowles' article and, by extension, its portrayal of Styles' own understanding of his feminine masculinity, is not to say the article is entirely absent of a politics, however. The displacement of "revolution" from collective processes of dismantling systems of hierarchical ordering and extraction is twinned with the solidification of liberal individualism, access to markets and capital, and presumed futurity in the making of "the subject." This, combined with Styles' capacity to turn his now-famous *individual* gender-divergent style into market opportunities with the introduction of his new nail polish line—similarly marketed with the language of creativity, self-fulfillment, and individualistic pleasure—shows the ways that the liberalism shot through the mainstreamed project of gender-subversive fashion maintains the projects of capital that "revolutionary" change might work to displace, disrupt, or destroy.

As a high-profile symptom of gender-subversive clothing choices without politics or community, Harry Styles represents the ways that surface-level transgression may represent forms of extraction. This is not limited to celebrity men, though. As Foster and Baker write in response to the mainstream hagiographies of TikTok's supposed turn toward "soft" masculinities, this turn is more aesthetic than it is substantive. In their analysis, Foster and Baker find that though young men on TikTok may be embodying "softer" forms of masculinity through certain aesthetic practices—dancing to songs about heterosexual virility, or emphasizing their athletic muscularity—these reify normative, hegemonic forms of masculinity. Such "hybrid" masculinities, incentivized by algorithmic sorting and glowing articles from mainstream outlets, "incentivizes men's gendered transgressions, and [we] caution that

men's 'radical' moves signal little, if any change, to the gender order" (Foster and Baker 2022, 9). I would extend this argument further. Without a broader politics, the turn toward "soft" masculinities does not denaturalize gender. Instead, it leads to the re-naturalization of gender categories *as* categories of difference, particularly as they are rendered as *solely* projects of individual subjectivity.

29.5 Queer-of-Color Alternatives Beyond "Individuality"

If the liberal individualism that produces Harry Styles and fascist femboys alike shows us that aesthetic choices are not always radical political projects, it might then become easy to dismiss *all* fashion and aesthetic projects as necessarily apolitical, or, at the very least, falling short of the political. This, too, is taking liberal individualism as given, and limits a critical analysis of fashion cultures and the radical potentiality of fashion. For fashion—as industry, as mass practice, even as marker of individual subjectivity—cannot be split from the conditions that produce it, shape it, and that it helps to shape. Erique Zhang, writing on fashion houses as *collective*, rather than individualistic, projects, writes:

> Characterizing fashion as collective action highlights not just how many people are involved in its production, but also the complex and pivotal roles that each actor plays in making sure everything runs smoothly….I want to ask us to reimagine what fashion as collective action might mean if it were not driven primarily by profit, but rather by the debts we owe to the people involved in its production. (Zhang 2020)

Here, Zhang is describing the level of fashion houses, but thinking fashion as a *collective* project allows for a different orientation toward individual- and group-level aesthetic practices, as well. The liberal individualism that produces fashion cultures as apolitical aesthetic projects of individual consumption and access to markets deeply reflects what Melamed, following Ruth Wilson Gilmore, articulates as racial capitalism as a technology of *antirelationality* (Melamed 2015, 78). Fashion cultures understood *only* as the sovereign individual, then, are both products of, and reproducers of, the very processes that racial capitalism "impose[s] a forgetting of interconnections, of viable relations, and of performances of collectivity that might nurture greater social wholeness, but are deactivated for capital accumulation and state management" (Melamed 2015, 79).

To move against this aesthetic practice of antirelationality, aesthetic projects must be understood at their inception as explicitly political *and* explicitly collective to point us toward alternative ways of being that escape the trap of fashion as a project of personal liberty. Such alternatives begin from the understanding that one's gendered *and* racialized presentation is not discrete, but

connected to communities, legacies, and histories outside one's capacity for *personal* self-expression. Understanding fashion choices as explicitly political projects made in community across generations, for the purpose of disruption, gets closer to the revolutionary change that fashion cultures rooted in logics of the liberal individual gesture toward, appropriate, and displace.

Notably, one example of these two strands of fashion culture colliding involves another high-profile man famous for his feminine aesthetics. After Harry Styles' *Vogue* cover went viral, Billy Porter, a Black gay television actor and stage performer, criticized the mainstream reaction that placed Styles as a singular exceptional individual shepherding in a new era of "revolutionary" feminine masculinities. In an interview with the *Sunday Times*, Porter stated, "I. Personally. Changed. The. Whole. Game" for men embracing skirts and dresses. And while this does engage in a form of exceptionalism, Porter's critique is not one rooted in one's ability to self-actualize as a sovereign individual; instead, Porter approaches his self-positioning as a means of recognizing the structures of power that allow for certain social subjects to utilize aesthetic practices to access social and economic capital. Noting the virality of Styles' *Vogue* cover, Porter—in a quote that itself would become viral—stated:

> I'm not dragging Harry Styles, but he is the one you're going to try and use to represent this new conversation? He doesn't care, he's just doing it because it's the thing to do. *This is politics for me* [emphasis mine]. This is my life. I had to fight my entire life to get to the place where I could wear a dress to the Oscars and not be gunned now. All he has to do is be white and straight. (Grady 2021)

In this acknowledgment of the material conditions facing Black feminine gay men, Porter critiques not of Styles individually, but the systems, institutions, structures, and processes by which Styles becomes the posterchild for a "new" kind of masculinity. This additional context reframes Porter's statement of "I changed the game" from one that seeks the lost access to markets and capital "rightfully owed" under liberal individualism, and instead, casts Porter in a political genealogy—one that is being dismissed by nature of the very ways that race, gender, and capital interplay.

Beyond his critiques of Styles, Porter's aesthetic practice is worlds apart from Styles' approach to fashion in its political orientation. Porter has spoken about his aesthetic choices as a way of moving *against* the intertwined projects of racial ordering and the making of appropriate, "respectable" genders. For example, in a 2019 interview with *Vogue* that preceded Styles' cover feature by twenty months, Porter described his 2019 Oscars gown as a racialized project of disruption, saying, "People are going to be really uncomfortable with my black ass in a ball gown—but it's not anybody's business but mine" (Allaire 2019). While Porter's comments here do situate fashion and aesthetic projects as individualist to some extent, his centering of his racial subjectivity reflects an implicit understanding: that his *Blackness* is part of what makes this embodied

gender transgression itself an act of transgression. Elsewhere in this 2019 interview, Porter describes this aesthetic decision as inspired by and in community with his mother and grandmother, on one hand, and motivated by "[a] goal to be a walking piece of political art every time I show up" (Allaire 2019) on the other. Porter's explicitly political understanding of self-fashioning is a *collective* political project that spans generations of Black people, actively oriented against forms of white-normative ordering.

29.6 Conclusion

Porter is far from the only Black man or boy embracing feminine fashion, and he was hardly the first to twin this aesthetic project with an explicit political critique. The late Blake Brockington, for example, articulated his aesthetic practice of embracing tulle skirts to "break the binary" and move against normative understandings of gender, something that he, as a young Black trans man, was disciplined to embody in very binarist, gender-conforming ways. For Porter and Brockington, and for those who take on fashion practices that are explicitly political because their racialized and gendered subjectivities *make* their projects explicitly political, the clothing itself may be secondary to the politics at heart of these projects, while at the same time being indispensable to the *practice* of the politics themselves. In this way, the gender-transgressive projects of Black men and boys is a *political* nonbinariness in the vein of how Marquis Bey articulates nonbinary as not *solely individual* gender-identification, but, following Moten and Harney, a politics of:

> *the absolute overturning, the absolute turning of this motherfucker out*…racial and gender abolition—thoroughgoing abolition—and the impossibility of knowing ahead of time the identification of the being before us and the tortuously elegant openness to having our assumptions undermined and the utter cessation of biological, binaristic, sociohistorical determinism. (Bey 2021, 233)

For Bey, then, the "looking" is not what matters per se, but what the looking does. And while feminine masculinities offer surface-level ways of offering an "impossibility of knowing ahead of time," the political project of gender *and* racial abolition would require the detonation of the hegemony of the liberal self—something that the current epoch of feminine masculinities is produced by, reproduces, and gains legitimacy through.

It is this distinction of the "absolute undoing" from the "doing" that the political possibility of nonbinary fashion practices lies. Despite the language of "revolution," Harry Styles, fascist femboys, and feminine boys on TikTok are not invested in doing much. Their fashion projects, rooted in and reproducing individual liberty, access to markets/capital, and citizenship as sovereignty produce claims of futurity while renaturalizing racial and gendered hierarchies *and* the capacity of racial capitalism to order, value, and devalue populations

based on projects of difference-making like race and gender. This difference—this radical split between "doing nothing" to refuse the racial capitalist order and the "absolute undoing" of all its modes of differentiation and extraction—is not to be taken lightly. Returning to the fascist femboys that began this piece, though easy to dismiss as simply "memetic," as previous examples of the far-right have shown us, memes reveal dangerous undercurrents that have explosive potential. This—like Harry Styles' banal exceptionalism—might be described by less-careful pundits as "revolutionary." If our fashion projects are to become truly revolutionary, they must begin from that point of absolute undoing—one that understands that fashion, rather than being the apotheosis of liberal individuality, simply cannot exist devoid of community, historicity, and materiality.

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CHAPTER 30

Querying Radically Queer Political Fashion

Maylin M. Hernandez

30.1 Introduction

Every day we get dressed. As we place articles of clothing on our bodies, we are, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, choosing them based on the expectations of our employment, our goals, those around us, or our gender expression. Whether we intend to or not, we can either reproduce or aim to subvert these expectations; sometimes we may be doing both simultaneously. Fashion, particularly political fashion, is dialectical.[1] What this means is that fashion, as a cultural object, is imbued with radical potentiality, while also playing a role in maintaining the status quo and keeping us preoccupied with ever-new desires and objects. I understand potentiality in the way that José Esteban Muñoz uses it: "Unlike a possibility, a thing that simply may happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (Muñoz 2009, 9). Understood through the writings of Walter Benjamin (1999, 2003), fashion always has the potential to confirm hegemonic societal norms on how

[1] I develop this argument in more detail in my dissertation project, which develops and deploys a Benjaminian analysis of fashion (Hernandez, in progress).

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we present ourselves, but also provides avenues of resistance to challenge these norms. Furthermore, we know through the work of scholars like Judith Butler (1993), that we are interpellated and "perform" our gender identity, especially in cases where we may not feel like we are "performing." Queer temporality literature, exemplified by scholars like José Esteban Muñoz (2009) and Heather Love (2007), also makes us aware that we cannot escape our past if we want to maintain hope for a radical re-imagining of the future. Coupled with Benjaminian concepts like the ruin, the angel of history, and the tiger's leap, we can understand the way abjection links us to the past for challenging the pressures and norms placed upon us in the present and future. In this chapter, I will look at the interaction of fashion among queer(ed) and androgynous groups and where avenues for collective creativity and expression emerge as challenges to social and political pressures to maintain heteronormative gender expressions.While "queer" is at times difficult to define—Judith Butler herself admits to difficulty with the term in *Bodies That Matter*—I am indebted to Muñoz's definition of the term which I borrow in this essay: "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an identity. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain" (Muñoz 2009, 1). To do so, I first explain the core concepts and their relevance to the exploration of androgyny in fashion. Next, I highlight some contemporary instances of androgyny appearing in fashion and discuss it in relation to fashion's dialectical aspects. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of where this radical potentiality within androgynous fashion lies and how it can be applied to an emancipatory fashion more broadly through the act of fashion hacking. The interpretative approach this chapter utilizes to address these claims is rooted in critical theory and Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach that states, "[t]he philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it" (Marx 1978, 145). Critical theory, additionally, rejects the possibility of objective social science and would argue, were it even possible, it is undesirable to simply look at the world as it is (Horkheimer 2002). Thus, critical theory is always oriented toward emancipatory change, and stemming from that tradition, this chapter looks for the seeds of transformative change in current conjuncture.

30.2 Fashion, Concepts, and Theory

In his *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin (1999) discusses the role that fashion plays in our everyday lives. It is something embedded with capitalistic and emancipatory potential that may be able to awaken dream consciousness to act differently in the present and learn from the ruins and "death" of the past. What these ruins are in the present are the lingering "hauntings" of futurity imagined in the past. For much of Benjamin's central work, the ruin

is best represented in the form of the arcades of Paris. These architectural marvels exist around him as empty, almost forgotten spaces that maintain a semblance of the hope they once held for a different future. As Benjamin describes it, "fashion inheres in the darkness of the lived moment, but in the collective darkness. Fashion and architecture (in the nineteenth century) belong to the dream consciousness of the collective. We must look into how it awakes" (Benjamin 1999, 858). These "hidden" relics of the past form the catastrophe for Benjamin, or a missed opportunity (Benjamin 1999, 474). For queer temporality scholars like José Esteban Muñoz, these may also appear as images of gay and punk bar stages where we are confronted with the left-over failures of previous hope. While Muñoz bases the theory of his argument on Ernst Bloch, rather than Walter Benjamin, there is a shared desire among all three thinkers to re-consider the failure, or the ruin, of past action for renewed potential in the present. While Bloch articulates this future-gaze to utopian hope, Benjamin draws upon the concept of messianic redemption as the impetus for changing how things are. In Muñoz's images (many from the 1980s and 1990s) you see spaces that were erected for the purpose of providing space to imagine a future where one could express themselves freely. Their empty stages and, for many, now-closed doors, were signals of these dreams being unrealized.

A queering of the past, coupled with the concept of the dialectical image in Benjamin, allows us to identify remnants of the former lives of objects. For Benjamin, the dialectical image is a montage of the various, contradictory aspects of culture that illuminate tensions in history that can be acted upon. It is these lives that allow historical events to potentially become commodified because our collective history of what they represented still exists—even if it may require some additional labor to locate them—within our collective knowledge. These memories can challenge existing capitalistic fashion norms by bringing forth these lost, or dead, histories and re-utilizing them to reimagine a new present and future. It is here where Muñoz's desire for hope can be politically utilized. In fashion, we see this with modern adaptations of countercultural style. These styles refer to a past, and a past politics, that could be re-imagined in the present. In this way, any work that looks at the presence of the dialectical image is both a work of death (or co-optation within capitalistic fashion) and resurrection (or emancipation within fashion) in the spirit of Benjamin's thought. Within his thought, a variety of concepts emerge to pinpoint the various fragments (or to use Benjamin's own terminology, "ruins") circulating today, and the mechanisms to place them in conversation with one another to compose the dialectical image of fashion. Beyond the ruin, which can manifest as any fragmentary trend, reference to the past, or nostalgic nod in the present, we have the angel of history and the tiger's leap. The angel of history is a concept that appears most often in queer temporality literature (as in the work of Heather Love described below). Here, we have a figure who has its back turned away from the present to focus on the pile of discarded history—a mountain of catastrophe. The angel refuses to turn

away from the past and so a strong wind from Paradise forces it to move into the present—still facing backwards (Benjamin 2003, 392). Its goal is to "… awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin 2003, 392). The angel is introduced to us in Benjamin's work on "On the Concept of History," but Heather Love's usage of the figure highlights its importance to queer temporality since it represents a figure unwilling to "let go" of the past:

> Attending to the specific histories of homophobic exclusion and violence…can help us see structures of inequality in the present. It is also a way of claiming homosexual identity in the face of a call to abandon it. The invitation to join the mainstream is an invitation to jettison gay identity and its accreted historical meanings…. I insist on the importance of clinging to ruined identities and to histories of injury. Resisting the call of gay normalization means refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead. (Love 2007, 30)

The angel of history represents a desire, and a need, to ensure that the past is not forgotten due to a societal desire to make history linear, despite it being circular. Paired with the angel is the tiger's leap, or *tigersprung*, which provides a "can-do alibi" for the angel of history by functioning as a mechanism for the retrieval of the past into the present (Love 2007, 150). The tiger's leap is more frequently taken up within fashion studies scholarship to explain the circulation and re-emergence of past trends as they seemingly get plucked from the timeline of what once was, are reinterpreted, and then reproduced in the present. The tiger's leap fundamentally rejects a linear historical narrative as it leaps effortlessly between historical moments. Benjamin identifies fashion closely with the tiger, writing, "Fashion has a nose for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is the tiger's leap into the past. Such a leap, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands. The same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical leap Marx understood as revolution" (Benjamin 2003, 395). These leaps, whether occurring in an arena controlled by the ruling class or not, can function as acts of remembrance that bring forth raw material for creation in the present for the future.

The contemporary period is rife with opportunities to dissect emancipatory meaning from objects because of the quickening pace in which new objects are introduced to us and the old become the refuse of history. Theodor Adorno, who is formulating his own understanding of Benjamin's dialectical image, reflects in a letter to Benjamin that, "Dialectical images are constellated between alienated things and incoming and disappearing meaning, are instantiated in the moment of indifference between death and meaning. While things in appearance are awakened to what is newest, death transforms the meanings to what is most ancient" (Benjamin 1999, 466). To this, Benjamin adds the following commentary, "…it should be kept in mind that, in the

nineteenth century, the number of 'hollowed-out' things increases at a rate and on a scale that was previously unknown, for technical progress is continually withdrawing newly introduced objects from circulation" (Benjamin 1999, 466). What, if not fashion, is representative of this frequent circulation of things that are leaving behind fragmented histories awaiting their time to be awakened and re-activated?

30.3 Androgyny Within the Fashion Industry

Fashion's quickness to develop and disperse trends can allow for greater visibility of non-heteronormative ways of being, but it also runs the risk of reducing identities to trends and costumes to be worn by those who are uninterested in the social and political violence that has occurred against those deemed "other." As Elizabeth Wilson notes (2013), "[t]oday androgyny has ceased to be sacred. Modern fashion *plays* endlessly with the distinction between masculinity and femininity. With it we express our shifting ideas about what masculinity and femininity are. Fashion permits us to flirt with transvestism, precisely to divest it of all its danger and power" (Wilson 2013, 122). Because fashion is deeply interested in playing with ambiguity, it relies on opportunities to "flip the script" in order to become sexually appealing within the heterosexuality it aims to ultimately reproduce (Wilson 2013, 120).

Recently, androgyny has seen an uptick in representation and reproduction among major fashion houses like Louis Vuitton and Gucci. Part of this shift occurred when Case Legler was signed and categorized as an "A-gender" model, notably to be booked almost exclusively for male modeling jobs (Lapinski 2012). Self-identifying androgynous models have also been making a break on major fashion shows; Elliot Sailor, an androgynous female model, opened for the late Vivienne Westwood's Men's Collection show in 2015. High-profile models and celebrities have been included in the androgynous fashion campaign, like Ruby Rose and Jaden Smith. In discussing Smith's role in the Louis Vuitton Spring/Summer 2016 Womenswear campaign, the brand's creative director, Nicolas Ghesquière, stated that Jaden's presence "represents a generation that has assimilated the codes of true freedom, one that is free of manifestos and questions about gender. Wearing a skirt comes as naturally to him as it would to a woman who, long ago, granted herself permission to wear a man's trench or tuxedo" (Sleiman 2016).

Returning to the dialectical aspects of fashion, it is important to note that one aspect of fashion is capitalistic fashion, an aspect that is interested in the reproduction of the status quo by whatever means necessary, including the inclusion of identities it previously rejected. While not directly discussing fashion, Butler also hits on this problematic representation of identity in *Bodies That Matter* when discussing how heterosexual culture reproduced drag in a way that reduced or eliminated fears about homosexuality seeping into heterosexual culture. Butler cites Julie Andrews, Dustin Hoffman, and Jack Lemmon as representing drag characters as a form of "high het entertainment"

that cannot be considered subversive (Butler 1993, 126). Wilson adds to this, specifically critiquing androgyneity in the marketplace via unisex clothing departments held within exclusive and elite fashion stores as, "simply a new fad… aimed at… heterosexual *couples* for whom androgynous dress symbolizes not an attack on gender but merely a reaffirmation of middle-class togetherness" (Wilson 2013, 203). For Wilson, particularly, but Butler broadly, these acts—especially when applied top-down by a major fashion label—are tools for assimilating and including androgynous individuals while simultaneously stripping their identity of any power it once had. Furthermore, the emerging trends of unisex and androgynous fashion are argued to simply emphasize and promote "non-normative difference rather than agendered non-difference" because these clothing lines simply open a bit more space for clearly identifying male or female fashions to be placed on bodies that may or may not identify in the same way (Willson and McCartney 2017, 110). These acts reproduce a discourse on androgyny that separates the identity from the performance of wearing unisex or non-binary clothing without commenting on the ways in which these fashion acts can be liberating to a society often forcibly reduced to a gender and sex binary.

However, reading fashion dialectically alerts us to this contradictory aspect. And while we want to be mindful that failure and catastrophe are necessary parts on a journey toward what Muñoz identifies as queer potentiality, there are everyday forms of resistance that highlight the collective power fashion can have for a variety of gender identities. As a fashion, androgynous style subverts our typical understandings of masculine/feminine and male/female binaries, allowing for creative challenges to how gender, sexuality, and expression can mix. While androgynous, or non-binary, styles have become a trend, many of those who dress in this way have first found clothing that helps them express themselves authentically and then after the fact have labeled this style as androgynous. The labeling of these fashions and individuals in this way serves as a way for capitalist fashion to re-write these identities and re-market them. Articulating it as a style draws us to recall trends of androgyny of the past (like the 1920s flapper as an androgynous figure) leading to the interpellation of androgyny criticized above. However, as Butler reminds us, "Identifications are multiple and contestatory, and it may be that we desire most strongly those individuals who reflect in a dense or saturated way the possibilities of multiple and simultaneous substitutions" (Butler 1993, 99). When this fashion is taken up to model the rebelliousness of the past without regard to the need for rebellion in the present and future, we are watching the tiger's leap (drawing forward past radical rejections of binary gender presentations) fall into the arena of the ruling class. How youth groups utilize androgynous styles differently can give us a glimpse at what the tiger's leap landing differently may look like.

30.4 Androgynous Fashion and Its Political Uses

Dialectical fashion also provides us with glimpses at the way fashioning oneself can be used for potentially emancipatory ends. One way in which it can do so is by empowering the individual to subvert mainstream norms around how to dress or look. While it should be acknowledged that these acts are often co-opted by the fashion industry (or capitalistic fashion) by being labeled and reproduced on a mass-scale—see any major historical subculture, like punks, mods, or goths—they also demonstrate the discursive aspect of fashion and gender because they are labeled after the fact to depower their potential (Butler 1993). Individuals have used fashion to separate themselves from the pressures of society—often through rebellious acts of dress. For many, fashion is political because it allows "people under states of duress a way to craft their existence when it is denied by the state" (Barry and Drak 2019, 681). One such way individuals have done so in contemporary Japan is by embodying the *dansō* (female to male cross-dressing) or by defining their fashion as genderless. Genderless refers to a fashion "emerging in 2010 which theoretically denotes styles that do not distinguish between genders, but is not necessarily gender-neutral or without gender" (Ho 2021, 160). Both *dansō* and genderless are considered forms of androgynous dress. By looking at how Japanese *dansō* and genderless individuals clothe their bodies, we see how gender can be intimately linked to fashion—or how fashion becomes the mechanism for the realization of feelings about one's body. The term *dansō* refers to older forms of essentially drag performance in Japan and models out a way in which Benjamin's angel of history keeps its eye on the past (these performances could be considered ruins now), and the tiger's leap brings them forth to the present to be re-imagined as a distinct styling of the body. Of course, the practices still precede the labeling of them. As Ho writes, "these individuals first engage in their practices, construct their alternative identities and ways of being, and only subsequently become interpellated by other people as '*dansō*' and 'genderless'" (Ho 2021, 160). This retroactive labeling also highlights the tenet held by Benjamin, and queer temporality scholars generally, that history does not operate linearly, or else the label for these identities would need to emerge before one could "perform" them, and thus, such a labeling operates to co-opt. Much like the dandy, *dansō* and genderless fashioning allows for individuals to practice non-normative ways of being. Androgynous fashion plays with possibility by allowing its wearers to merge various parts of their identity into a coherent whole that is not rigidly enforced by ideas of "women's clothing" or "men's clothing." While, somewhat problematically, androgynous style tends to lean toward a predominantly "normative male" aesthetic, whereas some argue that Lolita fashion, with its excessive, almost campy, femininity, is a kind of androgynous dress (Ho 2021, 164). There is of course room for play here, and while male to female androgynous dressing, and cross-dressing, occurs, the articles of clothing we tend to

see marketed for a unisex or androgynous look are feminizations of masculine looks. As individuals lean toward androgynous fashion to give themselves creative leeway to construct their own style and identity, the labeling of these looks as "*dansō*" and "genderless" becomes a difficult identification because the act of labeling arguably turns these acts into trends that are being copied rather than authentic forms of expression. Androgynous fashion highlights the perpetual tug Benjamin identifies in fashion between being something new and being cast off by death as a trend; it is fundamentally the dialectical exchange "between carnal pleasure and the corpse," between identity and assimilation (Benjamin 1999, 62). But that it may be commodified in the future does not take away from the present the ways in which androgynous fashion allows individuals to pave new roads, feel more confident, and live more authentic lives. As Ho notes in her ethnographic research, some of the individuals interviewed viewed *dansō* as a way to "come out" by acknowledging "I can never live as a normal woman" (Ho 2021, 171) and though they may be perceived as not "normal" for not wearing women's clothes, the marketization of *dansō* and genderless fashion has allowed them to find a space in society to practice their identity freely (though still remaining unfree in other ways).

So, while it may be easier to identify as non-normative or androgynous now, acquiring clothing to fit this identity can still be a challenge. Queer collectives have emerged to provide affordable, used clothing that allows queer individuals to shop without the discomfort of glances when they venture into a section of a store that may not seem "correct" for them. One way a group of students decided to address this was by creating a Queer Closet on their Saint Louis University campus to allow students to purchase or rent clothing as they embarked on their questioning or transitioning journeys. The facility is a clothing library where students can find affordable clothing, including binders and other undergarments, and try them on before they feel fully confident to go shopping in more heteronormative spaces. According to one organizer, a "main issue in the queer community involves the expression of gender… Many individuals question their gender and how best to express it at an affordable cost. One way we thought of bridging that gap was Queer Closet. With this resource, gender queer, questioning, androgynous and transsexual individuals can experiment with their gender expression" (Saint Louis University 2019). While this particular example had the ultimate goal of allowing its patrons to shop in regular stores in the future (and thus fully enter the fashion industry), the act of collectively organizing to provide a space for alternative forms of expression is one aspect in which fashion allows opportunities to envision different futures.

30.5 Concluding Remarks: Is Fashion Hacking the Future?

Androgynous fashion as a category is a slippery and difficult one to analyze. By its nature, it simultaneously reaffirms traditional gender binaries between male and female by acting fluidly within these two categories, but it also poses some potential for thinking about how one might act outside of this established binary. While the examples discussed outline some of the ways dressing androgynously mirrors the dialectics of fashion: it can be co-opted and manipulated by the fashion industry in order to sell more goods or promote a false, or inauthentic inclusion, or, it can provide a creative outlet for how one can express themselves and their identities in a relatively safe way, these behaviors are all individualistic. Groups exist in which these individuals can participate with like-minded peers, but, like the Queer Closet demonstrated, you have a collective space for individual expression. What is needed more is a space for collective creation. Barry and Drak remind us that "we should not mistake individual body-mind pleasure and comfort for collective liberation" (Barry and Drak 2019, 700). Rather, what is needed are critical and widely available spaces where individuals can come together to collectively create out of the refuse of the fashion industry. Put differently, we need spaces where we can take the time to work as Benjamin's angel of history, discuss the past, the present pains, and pay attention to what has been left behind to begin to dream for the future.

A potential avenue for this kind of collective and creative work can be found in fashion hackathons. Fashion hacking has its roots in Otto von Busch's "Engaged Design and the Practice of Fashion Hacking" (2009) as a process building off computerized hacking which opens a system up, assesses it, masters its structure to reclaim and change that system for a more desirable effect. The process one goes through to achieve this is then widely shared with others to learn from as well (von Busch 2009, 164). When applied to fashion its goal is not to produce anti-fashion or a subversion trying to undermine fashion, but rather,

> …the hacking culture opposes the ready-to-wear paradigm to focus attention instead on participatory modes of production. Fashion hacking is about empowerment, capacity building, and clothing competence through collaborative endeavors and open source methods with wide interfaces between co-designers. The idea is to build a community of skillful fashion craftsmen and women by using the power of fashion, recircuiting its power to be more accessible. (von Busch 2009, 183)

This approach has been replicated by Barry and Drak to create environments for queer and trans youth to learn about queer history, reflect on how their identities are received by others, and build a community rooted in techniques to hack clothing to fit their needs rather than the needs demanded

of them by society. They demonstrate that "Fashion is an essential tool for queer people because it enables them to celebrate, display and/or conceal their queerness to navigate a heteronormative world" (Barry and Drak 2019, 680–681). While they looked primarily for high school students in Toronto and Ottawa that self-identified as queer or trans, some of the participants in their fashion hackathon were in a period of transition and may be identified as reflecting an androgynous identity—although there is no indication within their study that anyone identified specifically as such. While the activity was motivated by the conservative political climate of recent Canadian elections, and a larger trans-phobic and anti-queer political disposition seen globally today, the activity highlights the way that fashion, specifically dialectical fashion, is an important tool for crafting queer and egalitarian futures. Over the course of a few days, participants are taught about the fashion industry and how it functions to reproduce a heterosexual and non-disabled ideal of normalcy, an ideal we can all be a part of if we buy products to look a certain way. Of course, the fashion industry also encourages us to participate in new trends, which disadvantages those without disposable income.

In the workshops, participants were invited to "hack" second-hand clothing and re-use these materials to create new garments that were better representative of their own lives and bodies. The organizers asked participants to ignore sizes and shapes when choosing clothing and focus on things about the garments that appealed to them (Barry and Drak 2019, 688). They were then taught the basics of fashion illustration and encouraged to imagine new looks. Throughout this process participants were exposed to queer history and given the space to share knowledge that they had. Participants of color, for example, discussed how Black identities are presented in a singular way in media and within the Canadian education system, with Black queers being completely written out of the narrative (Barry and Drak 2019, 698). One participant, who identified as trans-masculine, chose a male dress shirt to hack and added a pride flag as a cape to it to wear it to their high school prom, as "[t]he participant wanted to wear a suit to their prom, but they could not afford to purchase it, and their parents would only buy them a second-hand gown. By wearing this shirt, … they would assert their masculine gender presentation and queerness" at prom (Barry and Drak 2019, 693). In sharing their story and struggle, other participants volunteered to accompany this participant to prom to ensure their safety and for companionship.

Through this creation of clothing, showing off these new creations, and deconstructing what went into their design, fashion hacking provides a space for collective support, education, and creativity. This seems like the closest example of a Benjaminian tiger's leap into an arena not actively controlled by the ruling class. Thinking back to how Benjamin sees contradiction within fashion, the act of fashion hacking brings these contradictions to the fore in an environment outside typical capitalistic pressures. While this environment is only short-lived (we cannot stay in the fashion hackathon forever) and there is no guarantee that the creative outputs, education, and alternative forms of

being will be maintained or radically activated, there is a hope, to borrow from Muñoz, that an alternative future can be sowed. This hope, or ability for redemption, is only possible with spaces like the hackathon that encourage a critical, egalitarian politics. While Barry and Drak (2019, 689) actively avoid bringing in the political climate of bigotry happening around them (they say it is not their intention to "directly mobilize youth"), this is exactly what is needed to ensure that these spaces have a deep, long-term, and meaningful impact to alter the ways in which we exist in the future. It is through doing all this that we may potentially be able to utilize fashion as collective dream consciousness and finally awaken it (Benjamin 1999, 858).

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CHAPTER 31

The Symbolic Politics of Police and Military: Threat and Reassurance in Uniform

Karen M. Kedrowski

31.1 Introduction

Like Chapter 14, this essay uses Murray Edelman's *Symbolic Uses of Politics* ([1964] 1985) to understand the symbolic roles of clothing in politics. Specifically, this chapter uses Edelman's theory of threat and reassurance to analyze the symbols embedded in the attire of two uniformed institutions, the police and the military, which are intended to be symbols of protection and reassurance. They exist to protect our communities from crime and our country from invasion. Yet as symbols, both are problematic. The military uniforms designed to convey authority and protect soldiers and police officers may do so for white men but not women and people of color. Instead, they may even become symbols of threat. Because uniformed armed services and the police are physical embodiments of the power of the state, understanding the symbolic power of the uniform justifies a theoretical analysis.

31.2 Edelman and Police and Military

While Edelman does not discuss drag queen bans or school dress codes, as explored in Chapter 14, Edelman does discuss the police as one very visible branch of the administrative state. For example, Edelman begins Chapter 3

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with a lengthy analysis of speeding enforcement, arguing that the administrative state selectively enforces laws like speeding or parking violations. Both the state and the public understand this and play "a game" whereby scofflaws are only occasionally punished and enforcement is primarily symbolic (1985, 44–72). Edelman spends little space mentioning the military, other than to depict the military as a purchaser whose decisions have ripple effects (1985, 62), user of symbolic language (121), or as a "bargainer," a favorable position within government (146–147). Edelman carefully dissects and analyzes the symbolic nature of government action, mass responses to those actions, language, and even government buildings, yet he fails to discuss the symbolism in the clothing that agents of the state use.

31.3 Background

Both the military and police wear uniforms, which transform both organizations into the physical embodiment of the state. Uniformed forces date back 5000 years with evidence of protective gear and clothing being found in Mesopotamia (Pfanner 2004, 95). Today, the Geneva Convention requires that members of the military wear uniforms so they can easily be differentiated from civilians (Pfanner 2004, 104).

Both the military and the police have at their core, protection of, or reassurance of the citizenry. The armed forces protect the state and its people from foreign threats, and the police protect society from criminality and other domestic threats. The uniforms themselves protect civilians from being mistaken as enemy combatants. In addition, the uniforms are designed to convey authority. For example, the uniforms "include features designed to make its wearer appear broader or taller, and thus to enhance the soldiers' stature…" (Pfanner 2004, 94). Similarly, formal uniforms (sometimes known as "Class A," "dress" or "parade" uniforms) especially are covered with insignia and symbols that denote rank, achievements, awards, and duration of service. The meaning behind these decorations is well known to others wearing the uniforms, yet these symbols are often mysterious to most people.

Of course, in war, opposing forces pose a real and direct threat to members of the military. In the case of the police officers, they are threatened by (alleged) criminal elements that pose a risk to themselves and their communities. Therefore, the state has an obligation to physically protect the protectors. One way to do so is through their attire. Thick-soled boots or shoes, bullet proof vests, helmets, weapons, sunglasses, pockets, holsters for guns and tasers, camouflage or dark-colored uniforms, riot gear, and coats and jackets will protect the wearer from weather and injury and ensure they are prepared for potentially dangerous encounters.

31.4 The Symbolic Power of Uniforms

While the military and the police as institutions symbolize state power, the presence of uniforms have symbolic importance both to wearers and civilians. For instance, members of the military are taught to honor the uniform, and by extension the military, by adopting certain character traits: bravery, respect, patriotism, honesty, and pride. Part of this socialization includes keeping uniforms clean and neat. Failing to keep one's uniform in good condition symbolically indicates that one has deviated from these powerful norms. Moreover, actions that deviate from the military's standards can lead to charges that one "disgraced the uniform." Of course, an inanimate object (clothing) does not feel shame. Rather, the disgrace is to what the uniform symbolizes to those who wear it and/or respect it.

In addition, the military decorations referenced are considered so important that the Department of Defense houses an Institute of Heraldry, which approves and trademarks designs for military honors, units, ranks, and insignia (Institute of Heraldry nd). It is illegal to copy and distribute military insignia and honors, punishable by fines and imprisonment. It is also illegal to falsely claim that one has earned a military honor to obtain benefits such as pensions, discounts in restaurants or retail stores, or preferential treatment in job applications (Kershaw et al. 2018; Kasturi 2012).

Moreover, the uniform and its accoutrements are identified with masculinity. Lauren Dundes (2023) analyzes the "Battlefield Cross." These impromptu memorials to deceased soldiers are made from each soldier's rifle, helmet, dog tags, and boots. She argues that each artifact symbolizes masculinity and/or male sexuality. For instance, guns are often considered phallic symbols and boots connote toughness and virility (pp. 5–9). Thus, the memorial not only communicates sorrow but also the military's hypermasculine culture.

Likewise, police uniforms also carry symbolic significance for the wearer. As one female officer in the United Kingdom recounted:

> Catching sight of myself in the mirror, I gasped. Wearing my police uniform for the first time I felt intoxicated. With its shiny silver buttons and inky material, it made me look like someone important, someone with confidence. (as quoted in Jackson 2017, 84)

Psychologists document that the act of donning police uniforms changes how people react in behavioral experiments, a phenomenon known as "enclothed cognition" (Hajo and Galinsky 2012). For example, Mendoza and Parks-Stamm (2020) designed a video game experiment in which participants were asked to "shoot" images that appeared to be holding a gun and to refrain from shooting those that were holding other objects. They found that participants who were dressed as police officers during the experiment were more likely to shoot in error—i.e., shooting at images that were not holding guns.

Similarly, Civile and Obhi (2017) found that participants wearing a police-style uniform had an "attitudinal bias" to photos of people wearing hoodies (an indicator of socio-economic status) than to those wearing business suits. The same anti-hoodie bias was not found in subjects wearing civilian clothes.

The symbolic power of the uniform is apparent in other ways. For instance, Cliff Cheng (1998) documents that members of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) in San Diego quit when the uniforms changed so that they no longer mimicked official Air Force officers' uniforms. They believed that the CAP would not be taken seriously if its members were not wearing military uniforms. Similarly, volunteers in the Canadian auxiliary police felt vulnerable when their uniforms were changed to be distinctive from regular (paid) police officers. Specifically, auxiliary members were worried that they would be targets because the public would know they do not carry weapons and because their light blue shirts are easier to see—and target—in the dark (O'Connor et al. 2022). Even some Civil War reenactors refuse to "galvanize"—or change uniforms and playact as a member of the opposing force to make reenactments more authentic—because they identify so closely with the cause represented by their uniform choice (Miller-Spillman 2015).

The symbolic power of police uniforms also triggers reactions among civilians who interact with the police. People are more likely to cooperate with researchers who are wearing police-style uniforms rather than other kinds of uniforms—like maintenance workers' attire—or casual clothing. Similarly, people believe that officers wearing dark colors are more aggressive than those in light-colored uniforms (Johnson 2001). Accessories such as black gloves, billy clubs, and sunglasses enhanced negative responses to police officers, while baseball caps and reflective vests led to positive responses (Johnson 2001; Simpson 2020).

The psychological impact of uniform colors, styles, accessories may impact the safety of police or members of the military who wear them. If the uniforms elicit a negative or aggressive response from members of the public, routine interactions can easily escalate. Moreover, these psychological responses can instill fear and undermine trust, leading to further tensions between uniformed forces and the public. Finally, if the very act of wearing a uniform changes behavior, leading to greater suspicion of people wearing hoodies or mistaking benign objects for guns, then certain members of the public are potentially endangered by the very people who are supposed to protect them.

31.5 Women in Uniform

Women have worn uniforms for much longer than they have served in the military or police. Elizabeth Ewing (1975) points to Florence Nightingale as the dawn of the "modern age" of women's uniforms. She introduced a uniform for the nurses who cared British troops in the Crimean War (1853–1856). The uniform protected the wearer, in part, because it was recognized and respected

by the soldiers they cared for (40–41). This nurses' uniform gave rise to other women's occupational uniforms, including fish wives, maids, and nannies.

The state, of course, restricted membership in the military and police forces until relatively recently. Today, women comprise just 13% of full-time police officers in the United States and just seven percent of state troopers (Van Ness 2021). Similarly, women comprise 16 percent of the US military (Robinson and O'Hanlon 2020). Despite these small percentages, women have served in the military since World War II and as police officers—in the United Kingdom—since 1907. In her historical analysis of women's uniforms, Jennifer Craik argues that women's police uniforms took on a "quasi-masculine" form, with a lengthy skirt paired with a tailored jacket, boots, and helmet (2005, 86). Similar "quasi-masculine" styles still exist in dress uniforms in all branches of the military (Military Health System 2022). These uniforms attempt to communicate the (masculine) power and authority associated with the military or police force and, at the same time, emphasize women's femininity.

Women in uniform still need to negotiate the tension between the femininity expected by society and the masculinity implied in wearing a uniform. Jennifer Midberry (2017) recounts how two photographs of military women breastfeeding their infants while in uniform ran afoul of what she calls "the Discourse of Military Masculinity." Critics charged that women who breastfeed in uniform would be unable to command the respect of other soldiers, the enemy, or their superiors. The cognitive dissonance that derived from the vision of nurturing (breastfeeding) with a military uniform that connotes a willingness to kill was too much for some to reconcile.

For combat or physical training attire, women typically wear the same uniforms as the men, often without alternation for the female body. For instance, when the Swedish military accepted women into most of its positions in the early 1980s, the defense ministry issued a declaration that women and men would wear the same uniforms. This included wearing men's underwear and not providing maternity uniforms. Women were not issued bras and had to pay for boots in smaller sizes with their own funds. The situation did not change until the 2010s, when the Swedish military began to develop and issue fire-resistant bras and panties, maternity uniforms, and other attire fitted for women's bodies (Strand et al. 2022).

US Representative Nancy Mace (R-SC), the first woman to graduate from The Citadel, a military college in South Carolina, tells a similar story:

> I already knew there would be problems fitting me. Two weeks earlier, I had learned that the black leather military shoes I had so carefully broken in that summer were unacceptable. Apparently, the style of the toes did not fit Citadel requirements. I had to be measured for a new pair of shoes, which had to be specially ordered, as nothing in the stock was small enough for me. I had already picked up the shoes, which felt stiff and awkward on my swelling feet. Blisters were certain; I only hoped I could keep them from becoming infected. As it turned out, the shoe problem was only the beginning. Nothing in the Cadet

> Store fitted me properly; even the extra-small items were too big and cut to fit a male. The belt they issued me could be wrapped another quarter of the way around my skinny waist and my new hat sank low over my ears. I could already imagine the "racking" I would receive for my "sloppy" uniform. (Mace 2001, 43)

Before 2022, US military women had to purchase and replace their uniform dress pumps, handbags, and swimsuits. Women had to pay significantly more for portions of their uniforms than did men, a "pink tax" that could total thousands of dollars over a career (Padilla 2021). In 2021, the US Army finally developed a "tactical bra" that would withstand the rigors of physical training or the battlefield, is flame resistant and includes a dog tag pocket (Kingsbury 2022).

Of course, ill-fitting uniforms are unsightly and might lead to disciplinary actions for "sloppy" uniforms. However, poorly fitting equipment can be harmful. An ill-fitting bra can lead to chafing, blisters, and scarring (Strand et al. 2022). Only in 2020 did the US military design smaller and lighter body armor suitable for women and smaller men, helmets that could accommodate a hair bun, maternity flight suits, and other changes (Vanden Brook 2020; Price 2021). These modifications were necessary to avoid the risk of injury, ensure that the women could use their weapons properly, and eliminate gaps in the armor that would "give snipers a clean shot" into the chest or under the arm (Price 2021).

As Sanna Strand and her coauthors note, problems with uniform fit are not trivial. In addition to the physical injuries caused by poorly fitting protective gear or civilian undergarments, they also "affect women's chances of being accepted as military personnel" (2022, 4). In terms of Edelman's theory, women are not able to fully embody the power of the state, and the symbolic reassurance it provides to the citizenry, because literally, the uniform does not fit.

31.6 Race and the Symbolism of Uniforms

While the 1960s *Andy Griffith Show* depicted bumbling, friendly, and harmless local police officers in fictional Mayberry, NC, the reality was much different. Instead, for too many Americans, a police uniform was not a symbol of reassurance and protection, but one of fear. Local police and the National Guard were used to enforce white supremacy in the South and in segregated cities of the north. During the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, police used violent tactics to break up peaceful demonstrations. The Civil Rights movement not only advocated for an end to segregation and discrimination, but to police brutality as well (Nodjimbadem 2020).

Of course, police violence against Black men and women continues today. An analysis of a 2015 database of more than 900 police shootings found that Black Americans were disproportionately likely to be killed by police officers,

even when unarmed and not attacking the officers (Nix et al. 2017). Many Black parents have "the talk" with their children, providing advice about how to live as a racial minority in the US, including how to deal with the police (Solis 2021). As a Black computer science professor recalled:

> As Pinkston [the professor] drove his Tesla home, he noticed a police car following him. He pulled into a driveway to allow the police car to pass by, but it stopped behind him. The officer knocked on Pinkston's window with his hand on his gun and asked what he was doing. The professor calmly said he had done nothing wrong. "When he was talking to me, I was very upset," he said. "But my training reminded me to be polite, to be courteous and not to escalate to cause any kind of racial or other kind of tension between me and the officer, because people die from that." (Solis 2021)

In addition to this tortured history, the police uniforms and tactics have undergone significant changes in recent decades, starting with the US "war on drugs" of the 1980s and terrorist threats that came 20 years later. The police began to use military equipment and were trained in various military tactics. In addition, the uniforms changed, losing their "humanizing details" such as buttons and decorations (Forster 2020), transitioning from khaki to dark colors or camouflage, combat helmets, bullet proof vests, and riot gear (Paul and Birzer 2004). Even *Teen Vogue* has written about this change, quoting a fashion professor who says militarized police uniforms are "designed for conflict" (as quoted in Forster 2020). The irony, of course, is that in a typical day, a police officer does not encounter the violent activity for which they are so amply prepared (Forster 2020). While police brutality has many causes ("Police Brutality" 2023), the uniform's power over the wearer and the symbolism ascribed to the dark colors and accoutrements, one cannot be surprised that police are perceived as threatening rather than reassuring.

Experts have advised police departments to diversify their forces to reduce tensions between minority communities and the police. So, how do minority police officers, especially African Americans, reconcile the conflicting symbolism of the police uniform: one intended to communicate authority and protection that also communicates threat? One study found that while Hispanic officers received support from their communities and could deescalate encounters, their African American colleagues had different experiences. Instead, they were greeted with suspicion from members of their communities, being called a "traitor" or "race traitor," an "Uncle Tom," or a "sell out" (Kochel 2020; Lee 2021; Suboch et al. 2017). At the same time, many Black police officers also had to confront implicit bias and overt racism from their white colleagues, who might not see them as "real cops" (see for example Lee 2021; Paul and Birzer 2017; Rice et al. 2022).

Off-duty Black police officers report being pulled over by police for trivial reasons, including driving a car that is considered "too nice" or being in the "wrong neighborhood." Once pulled over, their fellow officers don't believe

that the Black officers are members of law enforcement or that they start with hostile questioning (Paul and Bitzer 2017). This is unsurprising, given that the off-duty officers are probably wearing civilian attire. Without their uniforms—their symbol of authority—there is nothing to protect the officers from being pulled over for "driving while Black" (see for example, Harris 1999).

Moreover, the uniform that provides white soldiers, police, and veterans with legitimacy, honor, and authority fails to provide the same authority and protection to Black Americans. In her compilation, *The 1619 Project*, Nikole Hannah-Jones recounts the story of Isaac Woodward, an African American World War II veteran traveling home in his uniform. Woodward was beaten badly by white police officers who blinded him permanently (Hannah-Jones 2021, 30–31). In addition, at least a dozen African American veterans were killed upon returning home from World War II (Davies 2022). Their experiences were not unprecedented. African American veterans returning home from service in the American Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and both world wars were often subjected to discrimination, violence, and even lynching. Their service, represented by the military uniforms they wore, meant that the African American veterans "challenged the idea that black people were only fit for servitude and undermined a central tenet of white supremacy" (Equal Justice Initiative 2017).

Such injustices have not ended. In 1998, US Army Sergeant Ressano Gerald was pulled over by law enforcement in Oklahoma. The officers ignored Gerald's military ID and credentials and accused him of using and transporting drugs. They searched his car without a warrant and after two and a half hours, released him (Paul and Bitzer 2017; Harris 1999). In 2020, Virginia police officers held an African American and Latino army lieutenant, Caron Nazario, at gunpoint and pepper sprayed him during a traffic stop (Ankel 2021). Similarly, in 2021, Kansas City police pulled over Herb Robinson, a Black police detective, who was in uniform and driving an unmarked police car. As they departed, the officers who made the stop referred to Robinson in expletive-laden insults (Rice and Nozicka 2022). Black veterans relate that such incidents are not rare. "Once you put on the uniform, it doesn't erase the fact that you are a Black person in America" (as quoted in Pickrell 2021).

31.7 Conclusion

Near the end of his book, Edelman states "Man is constantly creating and responding to symbols, whether he is at any moment concerned with public affairs or not" (1985, 178). This statement, essentially, is the theme of this essay. People created the uniform, the insignia, and the accoutrements *as well as* the meanings that are attached to them. Since, as Edelman also states, "men differ in the meanings symbols convey to them" (179), we can hardly be surprised that a uniform, intended to convey authority, power, and reassurance, can also convey threats and fear.

Given the responses to women and people of color in uniform, this essay is also about another uniform, one that is not manufactured by people, but by genetics. This "uniform" is one's sex and race. The uniform carries the most authority and respect when it is worn by a white male. Women enjoy the uniform's safety and authority only when they can conveniently hide their sexual differences. This means that they must be physically large enough to wear standard issue uniforms and body protection. The symbolic power of pregnancy and breastfeeding overcome the power of the uniformed clothing they wear. Even for women who are not mothers, the "pink tax" is further evidence that women's bodies do not belong in uniform.

Similarly, people of color, and African American men in particular, find that the uniform issued by the military or police is not respected by the public or other officers because of the uniform they wear under the clothing: their skin. The symbolic power of the black body, so long framed as threatening, criminal, and servile, too often negates the symbolic power of the uniforms they wear. They do not provide protection and instead can even make them a target. This symbolic power of the black body of course is also present for civilians, whose clothing choices carry their own symbolic importance and threats. The sexist and racist biases cannot be overcome by simply adding more women and people of color to the armed forces or police forces, although this is a worthy goal. Rather it will come only with significant social change that overcomes implicit and explicit biases.

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CHAPTER 32

Conclusion

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As this edited collection makes clear, the phenomenon of fashion is inherently political. The ways that people choose to present themselves—and alternatively the ways they are prevented from presenting themselves—are integrally related to the exercise of power and political authority in society. As such, the topic is ripe for analysis through a disciplinary lens, like political science, that specifically focuses on power. Yet unlike social scientists from other disciplines as well as philosophers and critical theorists, few political scientists have prioritized the important influence fashion, political dress, and individual style have on political outcomes (yet see Brown and Lemi 2021; Miller 2015).

One reason for political science's delay in addressing this topic is that, as our introduction and several contributing authors make clear, the exercise

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of political authority in many regions of the world has long been associated with non-marginalized people (which oftentimes means white, able-bodied, cisgender men who visibly embodied hegemonic masculinity). These leaders benefited from the development of expected attire—both the required military uniform and the customary suit and tie—designed to complement their bodies. Costumes associated with minoritized others, whether women or indigenous persons in colonial contexts, were of little interest because these actors were historically excluded from formal political roles and thus dismissed as disinterested or incapable of participating in political decision-making. As Diehl (this volume) makes clear, mainstream political science paid scant attention to the way fashion and political dress contributed to the social construction and reification of patriarchies and caste systems. Rather, political scientists tended to study the hegemonic men who overtly vied for power within the status quo. Given that the design of men's military uniforms and suits have remained fairly static over long periods of time, at least in the West, not only their bodies but their political dress and style came to be perceived as neutral (see Diehl, this volume)—positioning fashion as peripheral, at best, to political science's disciplinary focus.

Fashion became far more relevant to political scientists in the wake of democratization, post-colonial struggles, and civil rights movements. As women, members of the LGBTQ + community, differently abled, and minoritized men began to vie for positions of political leadership within existing institutional structures, they struggled—and notably still do struggle—with how to embody political authority. As Diehl (this volume) explains, able-bodied, non-minoritized men in suits or traditional attire are perceived as neutral, rational, even-handed arbiters, while those whose demographic identity denies this presentation of self are more likely to be perceived as less-qualified, impassioned advocates for those who share their identities. Hence several chapters in this volume explore strategies for women and minoritized others who seek power within existing institutional structures. One of the most notable strategies of first-generation women leaders in Western countries and in former colonies that have embraced Western attire as the professional uniform has been to compensate by embracing established norms of acceptable dress for the position they sought or held, often by adopting feminine versions of men's suits, in an effort to appear as masculine and authoritative as possible. While some women, notably US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, failed to execute this strategy successfully, our contributing authors examine the use of this approach by prime ministers (Diehl this volume), legislators (Muzee this volume and Rabinovitch-Fox this volume), and Supreme Court justices (Stepp and Castle this volume) alike. The gendered double-bind that restricts women politicians tends to work in reverse for First Ladies, as leaders' wives are criticized if they fail to meet traditional gendered expectations that they will make conventional yet chic fashion choices that at minimum do not detract from and at best help to advance their husbands' political agendas (Bennion et al. this volume and Ortbals and Maniscalo this volume).

Our contributors suggest an intriguing alternative to these approaches, which is for women in the public eye to leverage ambiguity around women's expected attire to establish a personal brand—a fashion strategy women have successfully used to market themselves in other traditionally male-dominated fields (de La Garza this volume). In the United States, cultivating a personal brand may look like Senator Kyrsten Sinema's efforts to establish herself as a maverick with an irreverent, unpredictable personal style. Notably, Sinema has leeway to pursue this approach even on the floor of the United States Senate, while Senator John Fetterman does not. When Fetterman attempted wearing casual clothing, hoodies and shorts, the Senate voted in a resolution formalizing business dress as required on the Senate floor. In non-Western nations, viable approaches to establishing a brand range from appealing to traditional sources of authority to adopting local fashions and identities that bypass the abovementioned double-bind. The former First Lady of Pakistan, Bushra Bibi, adopted this strategy when she embraced *purdah* to embody religious mysticism and purity (Alam this volume). This approach allowed her to juxtapose the modern and traditional as a means of advancing her husband's agenda of an Islamic welfare state. Alam (this volume) in fact, explains that her interpretation of Bibi impugns colonialist notions of Islamic women as passive beings, allowing Bibi to brand herself as agentic and influential. Meanwhile, women politicians in Indonesia opted for the latter strategy of embracing traditional indigenous fashions, which means they can style themselves without the concern of approximating the normative Western suit while simultaneously highlighting their commitment to traditional communities and local concerns (Prihantini et al. this volume). Muhando (this volume), for example, describes how the fashion performances of Kenyan politicians range from Evangelical Christian and indigenous garb to popular brand sneakers and puffer vests in an effort to appeal to different demographic groups.

Yet efforts to navigate the gendered double-bind described above are increasingly problematic. Western democracies, for example, are polarized around gender issues and the role of women in public life (Wolbrecht 2000), so much so that conservative and liberal women's sartorial strategies appear to be diverging (Valiente this volume). The right, or conservative old guard, still prefers women politicians who signal reassurance that they will eschew identity politics by embracing feminine versions of men's suits. Meanwhile the new guard of young liberals and progressives, who are an increasingly important source of electoral support for the left, prefer when women politicians choose clothing that embraces their authentic intersectional identities. Yet no society, not even those in Nordic states renowned for egalitarianism, has so fully internalized gender equality that this approach guarantees a secure voting bloc, leaving women who use fashion to highlight their status as women vulnerable to sexist attacks on their credibility (Meriläinen et al. this volume). Notably, of course, all of these strategies also blatantly reinforce binary gender roles and biases that favor thin, able bodies. To the extent that white, thin, young, able-bodied cisgender women in Western democracies face difficulty dressing for

political success, these issues are exacerbated—and sorely under-studied—for politicians with minoritized, intersecting, and especially nonbinary identities (Kammerer, Keator, and Kilpatrick this volume).

Given that sartorial strategies of ambitious politicians often run the risk of reinforcing rather than challenging the status quo, they raise concerns for those who desire more radical change. As Diehl (this volume) points out, despite Angela Merkel's success in largely neutralizing her gender through fashion, she could not fully deny her gender identity and was forced to run "as a woman." Similarly, Kedrowski (this volume) notes that the symbolic power of Black bodies and women's bodies often overwhelms the symbolic power of even military and police uniforms, such that minorities and women who wear them are not protected from sexist and racist backlash. Hence it is important to note, as several contributors to this volume eloquently do, the role fashion can play not only in constructing and reifying the status quo—but in constructing and reifying a more egalitarian, inclusive world. The first step in this process is when people develop and share alternative identities that contradict those imposed by dominant cultural norms and state authority. Those who share these identities form non-mainstream, or deviant groups, which provide experiences and interactions that counter mainstream socialization (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This process entails developing labels and markers of shared group identity, which often includes new clothing choices—and these choices can serve a dual purpose. First, clothing is a deeply intimate example of freedom of expression, allowing people to engage in a presentation of self that is authentic to how they see themselves and how they want to be perceived by others. When feminists came to believe that that freedom of movement and ability to engage in physical activity were more important than modesty, they began to wear bloomers and pants. When political leaders embraced democracy in the wake of the Enlightenment, they eschewed wigs and other markers of aristocracy in favor of simpler suits. When indigenous activists seek to reestablish autonomy in post-colonial societies, they often embrace traditional styles and fabrics over Western attire. Second, these choices allow members of a group to recognize one another, which enables the type of connections that facilitate not only lasting changes in social norms, but the ability to organize and make demands of government. Gonzales (this volume), however, relies on current examples including fascist fem-boys and the stark difference underpinning Harry Styles' and Billy Porter's embrace of women's clothing to issue a warning. In racial capitalism, disruptive fashion styles will be extracted from minoritized communities and commodified by mainstream culture and the fashion industry, rendering them less threatening to the status quo. Also see Akou, this volume, for insight into the way pop culture minimized civilians' embrace of body armor to an expression of individual style. Gonzales cites Judith Butler (2006), to remind us, for example, that not all drag performances are subversive, as some performances reinforce rather than challenge the gender binary.

Yet several contributions herein bolster our faith in capacity for societal and cultural transformation, especially if we are willing to recognize that achieving change is a lurching, reiterative process rather than a linear one. Fashion's ability to be quickly transformed and dispersed allows it to repeatedly play a critical role in efforts to enact radical change. Hernandez's (this volume) theoretical contribution highlights this reiterative process by calling attention to the ruins, or past efforts to enact change, so that they can be resurrected and serve as inspiration in the present. Optimism emerges from this chapter in two ways. Even as current efforts are eventually commodified, framing fashion choices solely as personal stylistic choices, stripping them of the connection to marginalized identities and political agendas, such efforts still "lets people live more authentic lives in the present" (Hernandez, this volume). Further, those familiar with this process can enhance the emancipatory potential of fashion by purposefully creating spaces for collaboration and innovation, preferably in arenas beyond the fashion industry and pop culture that are not controlled by elites. Moundene's (this volume) case study of the evolution of Kaba in Cameroon provides an in-depth look at what this reiterative process can look like. Even if the Kaba becomes commodified by the fashion industry and eventually stripped of its overt political meaning, the agency that indigenous women were capable of exerting as seamstresses helped them to reclaim autonomy and a proud, independent identity in sharp contrast to that imposed by European colonizers.

Beyond seamstresses' control of garment design, textiles themselves and textile manufacturing constitute another opportunity for post-colonial activists to challenge European legacies. It is not only the structure or style of clothing but the cloth itself—such as batiks—that conveys identity and meaning. For instance, Muzee (this volume) discusses Rebecca Kadaga who largely wore "African print clothing" and Muhando (this volume) mentions Raila Odinga who criticizes *mitumba*, the influx of used clothing from wealthy countries, that negatively impacts local textile production and sales. Local textiles, therefore, not only aid in reclaiming autonomous local identities but illustrate how these shared identities can facilitate collective action that affects economic development and the potential for economic empowerment (for a discussion of textile industry politics, see Prag 2013 and Wolff 2020).

Together, these chapters draw attention to the dynamic nature of group formation, not only in open societies, but also in societies where associational life is suppressed. Tracking the fashion choices of those who identify with various movements, formal associations, or organized religions, in both Western and non-Western contexts, provides in-depth insight into their shared identity, values, policy agendas, and likelihood of political engagement—far beyond insights provided by more traditional political science methodology such as survey research (Muhundo this volume; Chamberlain and Yanus this volume). The post-colonial context in which several chapters are situated, for example, highlights fashion's ability to promote change through the embodiment of emerging nationalist, religious, and local identities. Fashion can

express anticolonialism and serve to build new national identities. Women and men politicians in world regions such as Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia sometimes choose local fashions—such as *Kitenge* fabric shirts (Kenya), the *shalwar kameez* (Pakistan), and the *kebaya* garment (Indonesia), instead of the Western power suit. Fabrics and styles in these cases may challenge Western norms yet still convey agentic new identities, with modernity forged alongside indigeneity and/or religiosity. The post-colonial contexts thus provide us with a more intricate look at intersectionality. Gender, nationalism, and localism intersect, for example, in Prihantini et al.'s (this volume) account of batiks. The batiks worn by women politicians originate from various parts of the diverse country and can be used to portray a politician's specific local identity. The Biafra region in Nigeria is a particularly acute example of local identity and fashion; in this case, fashion is a tool used to separate from the national state and express local identity (Abah and Amoah this volume). In all of these chapters, case studies focused on fashion choices provide in-depth understanding into the emergence of new identities and groups, along with nuanced insight into their predilection and capacity for collective action. Hence this approach can provide powerful insights into how political actors, in the Global North and South, skillfully coalesce intersections of age, nation, locality, religion, and/or gender into cohesive groups with a shared identity. This case study approach is especially valuable when these communities of interest are suspicious of traditional authority figures and likely reluctant to participate in traditional academic research (Akou this volume; Middlewood, Schwartz, and Wasinger this volume), or when they embrace identities and values that undermine the state (Reanne this volume; Abah and Amoah this volume).

Recognizing that some groups emerge to promote authoritarianism and hierarchy serves as an important reminder that because change is not linear, the process of democratization can work in reverse, with new and remembered identities cultivated to counter egalitarianism. In an era of rising authoritarianism and democratic backsliding in the US and abroad, contributing authors who draw attention to symbolic uses of fashion to undermine individual autonomy are invaluable. Notably, authoritarians use symbolic politics to bolster their own credibility through personal branding, military uniforms, and fatigues (Finnell this volume), but also by creating or appropriating symbols used to cultivate shared group identity and organizing capacity among their followers (Reanne this volume). Authoritarians also quickly impose restrictions on what individuals can wear, which helps to normalize loss of autonomy by extending state control beyond the public and into the private sphere (Finnell this volume). The fact that the harshest restrictions focus on women and often enforce a sharp gender binary that denies the existence of LGBTQ + individuals should come as no surprise, as misogyny and authoritarianism are "mutually reinforcing ills" (Chenoweth and Marks 2022), with patriarchy providing deference to unquestioned male authority figures that empowers dictatorship. This connection suggests political scientists should be interested

in fashion bans and dress codes, interrogating their effect on the rights of free expression and association (Amoah and Abah this volume), even when they are adopted in established democracies by elected officials or are self-imposed by the members of governing bodies on themselves (Annishanslin et al. this volume; Kedrowski this volume).

As intended, this edited collection raises far more questions about fashion and politics than it answers. We hope, however, that it has persuasively established the myriad connections between fashion and the exercise of political power—with ramifications for governing, human rights, campaigns and elections, and state authority. These intersections position fashion at the center of political science's disciplinary concerns rather than on the periphery. As such, the subject is ripe for new research incorporating political science's theoretical and methodological approaches. We hope this endeavor has laid a foundation for such work and that future studies on fashion and politics will be forthcoming.

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