PgCert
Unit 2 'Inclusive Practices'
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Reflective Report
Student project brief on 'Decolonising Fashion and Textiles' for PGR
Collaborative Challenge unit at LCF

1. Introduction

This report captures my reflection on my journey on the 'Inclusive Practice' (IP) Unit, and discusses a student project brief which I have developed as an Artefact to promote inclusive learning. Before diving deeper into the discussion of the Artefact, I would like to acknowledge my own positionality, as this is crucial to the work I do.

I am a design researcher, educator, and activist, striving to plant seeds of hope and change, especially when working with marginalised communities. I define myself as a craftsman of my own life, which looks like a patchwork of the diverse cultures I have absorbed from the countries (Italy, the Netherlands, Brazil, Hungary, South African and the UK) in which I have lived, throughout my migration journey in search of better education and employment opportunities. I am aware of the privilege which I hold now, working as a Senior Lecturer in Fashion and Design for Social Change at LCF, in one of the world's top Arts and Design Universities. However, I constantly challenge my own positionality and am committed to use my power to give voice and agency to the marginalised. Moreover, as I work within a Higher Education Institution and my projects are often funded by Local and Central Government, I strive to activate change from within – rather than outside – the system.

2. Context

As Artefact for the IP unit, I developed a student project brief for the Collaborative Challenge Unit at LCF. The Unit offers an opportunity for MA students to collaborate across disciplines and respond to provocations set by researchers and industry partners in relation to challenges affecting the field of fashion, especially in relation to sustainability, diversity, and social responsibility. The Unit runs in the Autumn term, and the students must choose one out of 15 projects, expressing their preference after reading the briefs available on Moodle and engaging with industry partners at an event at LCF.

The brief is linked to my on-going research project 'Decolonising Fashion and Textiles' which engages London-based refugees from all over the world, who are approaching fashion and textiles to express their shifting identities as they are rebuilding their lives in a new place. The brief invites 30 MA students from various courses to work with refugees through the lens of design activism to prevent cultural appropriation and craft commodification whilst shifting power dynamics in the fashion system. They will be asked to co-design and deliver artistic interventions aimed at fostering cultural sustainability within refugee communities and, in so doing, engage in a process of decolonising fashion and textile practice.

The brief aids the students in acknowledging the complexity of climate, racial and social justice, from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989). It is strategically aligned with

the UAL Climate, Racial and Social Justice principles 4 'Design for human equity, social and racial justice' and 5 'Accelerating activism and advocacy' (University of the Arts London, 2023a). The brief is also aligned with the University of the Arts London (2021) 'Anti-Racism Action Plan' and supports the process of decolonising the curriculum.

3. Inclusive Learning Theory

The brief invites students to critically reflect on 'cultural appropriation' practices often undertaken by fashion brands (Young, 2008) and engage with the 'sacrifice zone' of fashion, meaning the traditions of the 'other' that have historically been obscured or undervalued as 'non-fashion' (Niessen, 2020). While the fashion industry is currently being guided mostly by the three core pillars of sustainability – environmental, economic, and social – this brief contributes to the emerging discourse on design for cultural sustainability. This means valuing and sustaining diverse cultural heritages, beliefs, practices, and histories as an essential component of a sustainability agenda (Williams *et al*., 2022). The brief primes the students to consider culture not as a return to our 'roots' but as 'routes' through which our diverse cultures change and develop, as advocated by cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997).

The students will be exposed to self-reflexive methodologies to address power imbalances, challenge privilege and prejudices (Pettit, 2020) and maintain receptivity to diverse ways of knowing and approaches to knowledge (Öz & Timur, 2022). The brief is also conceived to leverage the values of equality, diversity and inclusion in Art and Design education (Richards & Finnigan, 2015). Engaging with vulnerable people, the students will be expected to practise critical reasoning and compassion (Bloom, 2016), but also empathy towards others (Gamman & Thorpe, 2015) and develop dialogical relations grounded on inclusion (Cipolla & Bartholo, 2014).

The brief is intended to contribute to advancing the emerging discourse on 'decolonising' design, challenging colonial systems of oppression and exploitation, and empowering a plurality of voices and agencies (Mignolo, 2018; Escobar, 2018). The students will be encouraged to challenge the dominant practice of social designers being 'parachuted' into marginalised or disadvantaged communities with the assumption that they can bring their own knowledge and expertise to solve other people's problems (Willis & Elbana, 2017). Going beyond the well-recognised role of the designer as 'facilitator' (*i.e.* supporting on-going initiatives), the brief encourages the students to play an 'activist' role (*i.e.* making things happen) (Manzini, 2014). Working within a framework of 'ethics of care' (Gilligan, 1982), the brief is conceived to leverage the potential of design and 'craftivism' to foster empowerment (von Busch, 2022) and contribute towards social justice (Constanza-Chock, 2020).

4. Design of the Artefact

The brief (available in full in Appendix A) invites students to collaborate with refugees and work in 6 multidisciplinary teams of 5 people each to develop design responses in relation to one of these thematic sub-briefs: fashion and textile artefacts, ethical storytelling, and legacy (entrepreneurship or advocacy). 3 teams will be supervised by myself and 3 by Dr Seher Mirza (design researcher, maker and entrepreneur who works with me as Post-Doctoral Research Fellow on the larger project). We will provide pastoral support and formative feedback through 4 group tutorials, and I will connect the students with relevant stakeholders and community members. To support the students' responses to the brief, I designed a programme of masterclasses (including talks and workshop activities) to be delivered by guest speakers. In designing the sessions, I covered a wide range of topics (*i.e.* decoloniality, social practice, ethical storytelling, social entrepreneurship, and campaigning)

and took into consideration various contributions (from academics, practitioners, and activists) as well as diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the speakers. Although I left the brief open enough for students to engage in 'experiential learning' by doing (Kolb, 2007) and develop individual responses to the project (Orr, Yorke & Blair, 2014), I recommended the following potential outputs: fashion and textile artefacts, a communication campaigns, social enterprise models.

The brief invites the students to build on their diverse cultural backgrounds, acknowledge their positionality, tackle issues of privilege, power, and agency in co-design processes, build empathy and collaborate with diverse stakeholders. Since I do not want the students to treat the refugees participating in my research as the subjects of their studies in an extractive way, I framed the brief in a way to include refugees as active members of the project teams to create counter-narratives that value refugees' perspectives and voices – as recommended by Blomfield and Lenette (2018). I will carefully support the students in navigating potential conflicts that may emerge when working with people from different cultures, to facilitate dialogue, co-existence, and connection (Gupta & Ferguson, 2008). In order to prepare the students to sensibly engage in cross-cultural collaboration with vulnerable people, I included in the brief two workshops on intercultural communication to be delivered by Adam Ramejkis. I will ensure that a safe space is created, that safeguarding measures are in place at all times, and the ethical implications of the students' project are suitably managed. If engaging with the traumatic stories of displacement of the refugees triggers unpleasant emotions in the students, I will point them towards counselling services available to them.

5. Evaluation and Re-design

To evaluate the effectiveness of my Artefact, I gathered feedback via email from academics with extensive experience in setting student projects (*i.e.* Professor Helen Storey – who also works as UNHCR Designer in Residence – and Professor Lucy Orta – socially engaged artist). I interviewed my colleague Tiff Radmore (Collaborative Challenge Coordinator who oversees the development of all briefs and the delivery of the Unit) and Ipsita Kurikala (ex-student and former UAL Climate Advocate with expertise in decolonising fashion and cultural sustainability) (see Appendix B for the interview questions I used). Moreover, I discussed my Artefact with my PgCert tutor and peer group and received valuable feedback which informed the further development of the brief, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation of the Artefact to inform its re-design.

Feedback and advice	Received by	My interpretation and action
The Artefact was thoroughly conceived as a *"whole programme which speaks well to diverse students"* and invites them to *"engage in different ways with the local community"*.	Tiff Radmore	To respond to the brief, I will invite the students to attend a series of masterclasses, comprised of talks by guest speakers aimed at informing their projects, and seminars intended to aid the students' development of mindsets and skills in systems and future thinking, critical reflection, collaboration, resourcefulness, activism, creativity and collaboration.
"Excellent resources and masterclasses with academics who specialise in the topics related to the brief".	Ipsita Kurikala	I invited diverse guest speakers and project partners to share their expertise in decoloniality, social practice, ethical storytelling, social entrepreneurship, and campaigning, as well as experience of working with refugees and vulnerable communities. I acknowledge that the list speakers could have been even more diverse, but this was the best I could arrange considering people's availability and budget constraints.
"It feels fresh to be able to approach this in an entirely new way, now we have a new local community and a beautifully considered showcase of our works all at the same time. […] It would add such vibrancy to the session to have the work 'live' in the exhibition, rather than a laptop presentation in a classroom".	Helen Storey	Considering that the project brief will take place while the 'Designed for Life' showcase will be on at LCF East Bank, I liaised with the LCF Showcasing team to link Helen's session to the exhibition content so that the students can interact directly with the work and then include the final project presentations within the exhibition's cultural programme, with drinks reception in the gallery space.
"For my BA Textile Design student brief, Adam Ramejkis devised an 'Unconscious Bias' workshop, to mentor the students in interviewing and interpreting the migrant experience. […] The students would need to undertake the workshop on unconscious bias beforehand, or something similar".	Lucy Orta	I included in the programme of the project two workshops on intercultural communication to be delivered by Adam Ramejkis, building on a previous brief set up by Lucy, and upon consultation with Tiff.
Ensure that safeguarding measures are in place, that refugees' personal data is anonymised, and that students and refugees are pointed towards counselling services available to them.	PgCert peer group	I also included in the brief an explicit mention to the educational resources available on the University of the Arts London (2023b) 'Ethics for Making' website.
Have more than one refugee joining each team to ensure more balance within the composition of the groups.	PgCert peer group	I followed this advice, as this would also be a strategic choice to avoid that the student projects would be much affected in case some refugees can't engage extensively in the brief due to their unpredictable and challenging life circumstances.

The brief provides *"multiple entry points around an umbrella theme"*.	Tiff Radmore	Compared to other briefs set up by industry partners which are much more prescriptive and narrower in focus, I framed mine in an inviting way for students to explore systemic issues and experiment with their creative practice.
The brief *"offers a wide range of approaches and deliverables. [...] However, the 'open' deliverables might pose a problem to students with learning disabilities who might struggle with decisiveness or to see the bigger picture"*.	Ipsita Kurikala	The openness of the brief will likely be very suitable especially to the needs of neurodiverse students. I also plan to provide guidance to students in the form of regular check ins and/or help them map out their journey throughout the project (*e.g.* via Padlet or a blog) and will liaise with Tiff (as Unit Coordinator) if extra support is needed.
What are the benefits for the students and refugees to participate in the project?	PgCert peer group	I unpacked in the brief the expected benefits from participating in the project, not only from the students but for all involved, including the refugee collaborators.
Make the brief more aspirational for the students.	Ipsita Kurikala	I offered to the students the option to stay in touch and be informed about the progress of the larger project, and get involved beyond the timeline of the Collaborative Challenge, if they are interested.
"It would be nice to tell the students how their contributions will be credited within the project".	Ipsita Kurikala	I added in the brief an explicit mention to the fact that the students' work will be suitably credited in the outputs (*e.g.* exhibitions and publications) of the larger project as their own 'legacy' within it.

6. Conclusion

Engaging in the IP Unit has been a really transformative journey for me, at personal and professional level. My own positionality has evolved, and this has informed the way in which I deliver and frame my work. Having developed the brief as an Artefact for the IP Unit has provided me with a strategic opportunity to design the brief with inclusive pedagogic principles in mind and get feedback from colleagues and a former student to best equip me for the delivery of the project in the next term. While I was not able to collect feedback on the brief from more students and my refugee collaborators due to time limitations, I acknowledge this would be an important next step.

I am aware that some ethical issues may arise in the delivery of such a complex project, that supporting a large student cohort may be challenging for me, and that some tensions may be experienced within the multidisciplinary teams. Nevertheless, I look forward to delivering this brief, which I intend to undertake as my Action Research Project for the PgCert. Overall, I believe this will be an invaluable opportunity to apply and test my research, advance my teaching practice, and nurture my students to become change-makers, whilst contributing to shaping an alternative fashion system, grounded on equality, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability of cultures.

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Appendix A – Artefact

Decolonising Fashion and Textiles – in partnership with Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL

How can we work with vulnerable communities through the lens of design activism to prevent cultural appropriation and craft commodification while shifting power dynamics in the fashion system?

Overview:
This brief is part of a large research project titled 'Decolonising Fashion and Textiles', led by Dr Francesco Mazzarella from Centre for Sustainable Fashion, and running from September 2022 to August 2024, with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project team include internationally acclaimed artist Professor Lucy Orta, Dr Seher Mirza, Nicole Zisman, curator Camilla Palestra, film-maker David Betteridge, community artist and designer Alisa Ruzavina and photographer JC Candanedo. Project partners include: Victoria and Albert Museum, Bow Arts, Poplar HARCA, Arbeit Project Ltd, Rosetta Arts, the London Boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Through a reciprocal process of textile and fashion making, the project team and its participants are shifting narratives around refugees, mapping ways to build resilience within the local community, framing collective visions for a sustainable future, co-creating culturally significant fashion and textile artefacts, developing a social enterprise model, and outlining recommendations for positive policy change. The project contributes to re-examining research methods from a decolonial perspective, and shaping an alternative fashion system, grounded on equality diversity, inclusion, and cultural sustainability.

Provocation/ challenge/ scenario/ concept:
With the mass displacement of people on the rise, it is clear that we need to rethink and address the needs and aspirations of refugee communities and find ways to honour their diverse cultures. Historically, the textile heritage of marginalized groups has often been subjected to cultural appropriation practices or systematically undervalued and 'othered' as 'non-fashion'. While the fashion industry is currently being guided mostly by the three core pillars of sustainability – environmental, economic, and social – this brief invites you to contribute to the emerging discourse on design for cultural sustainability. This means valuing and sustaining diverse cultural heritages, cultural systems, values, behaviours, and norms as an essential component of a sustainability agenda.

This brief invites you to challenge dominant practices of social designers being 'parachuted' into marginalized or disadvantaged communities with the assumption that they can bring their own knowledge and expertise to solve other people's problems. This project encourages you to move away from such dominant design approaches, and participate in a process of 'decolonising' fashion, challenging colonial systems of oppression and exploitation, fostering ethics of care, and leveraging the values of equality, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability of cultures.

To respond to the brief, you will be invited to collaborate with London-based refugees and asylum seekers and work on a multidisciplinary project around the themes of: fashion / textile artefacts, ethical storytelling, and legacy (entrepreneurship or advocacy).

Two teams will be asked to engage in co-design of fashion and textile artefacts celebrating the identity, cultural heritage, and sense of displacement / belonging of yourself and your refugee collaborators.

Two teams will be expected to shift the prevailing negative narratives around refugees and develop an ethical storytelling campaign (*e.g.* through fashion photography, film, AR / VR experiences, social media, exhibition, etc.).

Two teams will be asked to contribute to the legacy of the project (*e.g.* developing a social enterprise model to enhance the resilience of refugees), and/or develop a creative campaign (*e.g.* performance mediated by costumes, textile banners, etc.) to advocate for positive policy change to overcome some of the barriers that refugees face in the UK.

Your work will be suitably credited within the larger project within which this brief sits. If you are interested, you could discuss with Dr Francesco Mazzarella opportunities for further engagement in his research activities beyond the timeline of this Collaborative Challenge.

Considerations:
Going beyond the well-recognised role of the designer as 'facilitator' (*i.e.* supporting on-going initiatives), this brief primes you to play an 'activist' role (*i.e.* making things happen) and contribute towards social justice and sustainability. Throughout the project, you will be invited to challenge common negative narratives around refugees, explore issues of agency and power relations in collaborative making contexts, develop, adopt, and adapt research methods to support decolonized design practice. Drawing upon findings from your own research and from inputs provided by the teaching team and project partners, you will be expected to develop experience in fashion design for social and cultural sustainability, through a hands-on, participatory action research project.

You will be invited to reflect on your positionality, and explore the potential to play the role of a change-maker, challenging the *status quo* and collaborating with London-based refugees and asylum seekers in order to explore cultural, social, economic and environmental issues. You will be encouraged to engage in a reflexive process and adopt an embedded and situated approach to designing in order to co-create and deliver a participatory action research project which is envisaged to be beneficial to all those involved (*e.g.* students and refugee collaborators) in terms of building new connections, exchanging intercultural experiences, sharing skills, developing new mindsets, and contributing to social change.

Since the brief involves cross-cultural collaboration with vulnerable people, you will be invited to attend two workshops on unconscious bias delivered by Adam Ramejkis (Intercultural Communication Trainer at UAL). As this brief sits within a larger research project led by Dr Francesco Mazzarella, he will ensure that a safe space is created, that safeguarding measures are in place at all times, and the ethical implications of your project are suitably managed. If engaging with the traumatic stories of displacement of your refugee collaborators triggers unpleasant emotions at any time, you will be pointed towards counselling services and support available to you.

To respond to the brief, you will be connected with relevant stakeholders and community members, and invited to attend a series of masterclasses, comprised of talks by guest speakers aimed at informing your project and seminars intended to aid your development of mindsets and skills in systems and future thinking, critical reflection, collaboration, resourcefulness, activism, creativity and collaboration.

Timeline:
To complement the general schedule of the Collaborative Challenge with its consultancies with supervisors Dr Francesco Mazzarella and Dr Seher Mirza, you will also be inspired by diverse guest speakers and project partners sharing their expertise in co-creation, sustainable fashion, storytelling, social entrepreneurship, and campaigning, as well as experience of working with refugees and vulnerable communities. Therefore, it is recommended that you attend a series of masterclasses at the new LCF East Bank campus, to help you develop your project, as per the following schedule:

20/09/23, 6.30-8.30pm, LCF East Bank, 4th Floor – Collaborative Challenge Partner Q&A evening event

04/10/23, 12.30-14.00, LCF East Bank, Room 426 – Masterclass 1 "Decoloniality and Cultural Sustainability in Fashion Practice" by Dr Francesco Mazzarella and Dr Seher Mirza (Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL)

18/10/23, 12.00-14.00, online – Consultancy 1 with Supervisors and Partner + Research and self-directed study

25/10/23, 10.00-11.30, LCF East Bank, Room 426 – Masterclass 2 "Art / Design / Fashion as Social Practices, for Emergency, and for Emergent Times" by Prof. Helen Storey and Prof. Lucy Orta (Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL)

25/10/23, 12.00-14.00, LCF East Bank, Room 612 – Consultancy 2: Students pitch to Supervisors to address the Challenge.

01/11/23, 10.00-11.30, The Lab E20 – Masterclass 3 "Shifting Identities and Perceptions through Ethical Storytelling" by Kate Keara Pelen and Tim Stephens (University of the Arts London)

01/11/23, 12.00-14.00, The Lab E20 –Partner Q&A

01/11/23, 15.00-16.30, The Lab E20 – Workshop 1 'Intercultural Communication' by Adam Ramejkis (University of the Arts London)

15/11/23, 10.00-11.30, The Lab E20 – Masterclass 4 "Empowerment and Entrepreneurship with a Social Purpose" by Charlie Fraser and Adele Meyer (TERN: The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network)

15/11/23, 12.00-14.00, The Lab E20 – Consultancy 3

15/11/23, 15.00-16.30, The Lab E20 – Workshop 2 'Intercultural Communication' by Adam Ramejkis (University of the Arts London)

22/11/23, 10.00-11.30, The Lab E20 – Masterclass 5 "Building Community Power and Campaigning for Policy Change" by Froi Legaspi and Toyin Gbomedo (Citizens UK)

29/11/23, 15.00-18.00, LCF East Bank, Room 515 – Consultancy 4: Final presentations to Supervisors and Partner and potential pop-up showcase as part of the cultural programme of the 'Designed for Life' exhibition at LCF East Bank

Deliverables:
Although you are free to respond to this Challenge in any way you deem appropriate, you may like to consider producing the following outputs:

- Fashion and textile artefacts
- A communication campaign
- Social enterprise model

You will also be asked to present the outputs of your project to the Supervisors, partners, and the wider community. Additionally, there will be an opportunity to showcase the responses to this Collaborative Challenge brief within a wider project exhibition which will take place in a gallery space in Summer 2024.

Courses:
We are seeking up to 30 students to work in 6 teams of 5 people.
This project is open to all Master courses, and a balanced mix of students from the three LCF Schools – School of Design & Technology, Fashion Business School, and School of Media & Communication – will be selected. This is a great opportunity for students with diverse backgrounds, interested in decoloniality, co-creation, fashion sustainability, storytelling, social entrepreneurship, and campaigning. Students will be assigned in groups at the beginning of the project.

How to apply:
If you are interested in this opportunity, please choose '***DFT***' project on as one of your 2 project choices. <u>You can apply for two projects each. </u>This will be monitored. If you have any issues, please contact cu@fashion.arts.ac.uk

DEADLINE: Wednesday 27 September, 6pm

You will be notified of your final project on Wednesday 4 October by the Collaborative Challenge Team.

Appendix B – Interview Questions

For colleagues

1) Why do you think this brief is important for the curriculum? (e.*g.* think about its embeddedness into the Collaborative Challenge unit, LCF and UAL pedagogy)
2) In your opinion, what are the strengths of this brief?
3) To what extent does the brief – as it is framed – considers inclusive learning theories and practices? (*e.g.* think about references to literature or practice on inclusive learning)
4) What would you recommend changing in the brief in order to make it more inclusive (e.*g.* think about diversity in terms of race, faith, disability, etc.)?
5) What challenges and opportunities do you envisage there could be in the delivery of this project brief?
6) Is there anything else I didn't ask you, that you think I should have?

For students

1) Why do you think this brief is important for education (in fashion design for sustainability) and the academy? (*e.g.* think about its embeddedness into the curriculum, LCF and UAL pedagogy)
2) In your opinion, what are the strengths of this brief?
3) To what extent does the brief – as it is framed – considers inclusive learning theories and practices? (*e.g.* think about references to literature or practice on inclusive learning)
4) What would you recommend changing in the brief in order to make it more inclusive (e.*g.* think about diversity in terms of race, faith, disability, etc.)?
5) What challenges and opportunities do you envisage there could be in the delivery of this project brief?
6) Is there anything else I didn't ask you, that you think I should have?