

Fashion Matters: The ‘Glocal’ Mix of Dutch Fashion

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Abstract

‘Fashion matters’ proposes a new-materialist framework to look at global fashion. A new-materialist approach helps to highlight fashion’s materiality and understand the hybrid mix of both local and global matters in fashion. An analysis of the material details of the—often ironic—use of cultural heritage in contemporary Dutch fashion (e.g. Viktor&Rolf, Klavers van Engelen, The People of the Labyrinths, Oilily, Scotch & Soda) reveals how Dutch fashion designers tap into local clothing styles and crafts. Such examples are part of a growing preoccupation with local roots in times of globalisation. The current interest of Western countries in their own local, national roots cannot be separated from a fascination for ‘cultural otherness’ and for ‘other’ local traditions. Fashion designers and firms establish a look that is both local and global at the same time; or: ‘glocal.’ The ‘material turn’ enables an understanding of ‘glocal’ fashion as both a material reuse of local crafts and as an immaterial phenomenon of globalized identities.

Keywords: cultural heritage; materiality; glocalization; Dutch fashion; new materialism.

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Viktor & Rolf, Vincent van Gogh, and Vlisco

Viktor & Rolf's haute couture collection of 2015 (S/S) was inspired by two iconic Dutch traditions: Vincent van Gogh's paintings and Vlisco's "Dutch wax" fabrics. The buoyant pastel colours of van Gogh found their way into the floral prints of the dresses that somehow moved into 3D with outrageous hemlines pointing in all directions. Although based on Dutch cultural traditions, this collection is a prime example of how the local is at all times insistently global. Vlisco is a global design house that introduced premium Dutch wax print design to West Africa. It was established in 1846 in the Dutch city of Helmond. Hand-printed textiles formed the basis for the initial production and sales of Vlisco fabrics in the Netherlands and Europe. Today, Vlisco is the market leader in African prints designed and produced through a unique process combining Indonesian batik, African heritage and Dutch design.¹ The example of Vlisco goes to show that the global is a multi-faceted and diversified phenomenon, which always includes colonial elements and hence circulation of capital as well as ideas.

Viktor & Rolf's "Van Gogh" collection brings into contemporary design the local—Dutch national cultural heritage—and the global—Dutch wax with its colonial roots and postcolonial market. This new formation can be called the "glocal." The sociologist Roland Robertson introduced the term "glocalization" to refer to the reciprocal dynamics in which the global and the local are messily mixed up.² Due to globalisation, questions of defining, formatting and even branding national identities are increasingly urgent. According to Simona Segre Reinach fashion has played a particular role in producing a national position in the global exchange of goods: "Fashion is not just making clothes, but also an attribute that nations no longer seem to be able to do without."³ As fashion is both a material commodity and an immaterial product it can evoke "fresh imaginaries."⁴ Fashion can thus function as the "ambassador of a country."⁵ It is then no surprise that globalisation resulted in a proliferation of national fashion weeks, fashion styles and new fashion centres since the 1980s.⁶ Several small countries that are traditionally seen as marginal to the big fashion centres of Paris, Milan, London and New York have striven to develop a national fashion identity. Lise Skov refers to this phenomenon as the "fashion dream of small nations."⁷ Geographically small nations like the Netherlands share such dreams, although it is only since about two decades that anything like a public discourse on Dutch fashion identity has emerged.

For the understanding of the interaction between the local and the global, I propose a new-materialist approach that foregrounds the continuum between material and semiotic elements of fashion as a cultural practice.⁸ This theoretical framework entails detailed attention to clothes and designs, but also to cultural traditions as they recur in material objects, visual patterns, storytelling, and mental habits. Fashion studies has developed many different methods for analysing garments, but the field needs new ways of conceptualizing fashion as a complex and ever-evolving phenomenon in a globalized world. New materialism is here presented not so much as a methodology, but rather as an interdisciplinary perspective

1. See for critical readings of Vlisco: Daniëlle Bruggeman, "Vlisco: Made in Holland, Adorned in West Africa, (Re)appropriated as Dutch Design," *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*, vol. 4 (March 2017): 197–214; and Christine Delhaye and Rhoda Woets, "The Commodification of Ethnicity: Vlisco Fabrics and Wax Cloth Fashion in Ghana," *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, vol. 2 (April 2015): 77–97.
2. Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), 25–44.
3. Simona Segre Reinach, "National Identities and International Recognition," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, vol. 15 (April 2011), 267–72.
4. Cf. Simona Segre Reinach, "National Identities and International Recognition", 271.
5. Cf. Simona Segre Reinach, "National Identities and International Recognition", 270.
6. José Teunissen, "Introduction," in *Global Fashion: Local Tradition: On the Globalisation of Fashion*, eds. José Teunissen and Jan Brand (Arnhem: Terra Lannoo, 2005).
7. Lise Skov, "Dreams of Small Nations in a Polycentric Fashion World," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, vol. 15 (2011): 137–56.
8. See for a more extended review of new materialism for fashion studies, Anneke Smelik, "New Materialism: A Theoretical Framework for Fashion in the Age of Technological Innovation," *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, vol. 5 (April 2018): 31–52.

grounded in a theoretical approach. A new materialist approach offers fresh perspectives for the study of fashion in a globalized world because it rethinks dualisms, for instance between the natural and the social, the local and the global, the material and the immaterial.⁹ The deconstruction of binary oppositions was already at the heart of poststructuralism, but the critique is further “intensified” in new materialism.¹⁰ In material culture studies this perspective has recently gained more ground. Sophie Woodward and Tom Fisher, for example, claim that it is crucial to examine “the role of materials in the creation and dissolution of fashions.”¹¹ Such an approach offers “a useful way to understand fashion’s mutability and transience without presuming that we should either characterize fashion as ‘immaterial’ or that the materiality of things is just an unambiguous ‘carrier’ of the meanings of fashion.”¹² For a deeper understanding of fashion it is important to overcome the dualism between the local and the global as well as the material and the immaterial; rather I propose to view fashion’s designs on a material-semiotic continuum.

In this article I will trace how Dutch fashion designers play with the project of a Dutch fashion identity by tapping into local craftsmanship and traditions that are, in fact, fully immersed in global trends, labour relations and transglobal interactions. The case studies are taken from a recent research project on Dutch fashion¹³ and have been researched through a mixed-method approach, including archival research of journals and magazines; analysis of clothes and designs in archives and museums; analysis of visual material; archives of firms and chambers of commerce; and interviews with (among others) designers.¹⁴

Local, Global, and Glocal

Fashion operates in global flows of consumerist capitalism and thus commodifies objects from a wide variety of local traditions and cultures.¹⁵ Due to globalisation “diverse and remote cultures have become accessible, as signs and commodities.”¹⁶ Although globalisation has often been seen as a synonym for cultural imperialism where one nation’s values are imposed onto others, David Hesmondhalgh claims that globalisation generates heterogeneity rather than universal sameness.¹⁷ While consumerist global flows may cause a process of cultural homogenisation, “mechanisms of fragmentation, heterogenization and hybridity are also at work.”¹⁸ In the words of M. Angela Jansen and Jennifer Craik globalisation “feeds into cultural heterogenization through the (re)invention of local cultural heritage and vestimentary traditions as a powerful means of distinction.”¹⁹ The simultaneity of homogenization and heterogeneity, connectivity and fragmentation, constitutes the schizoid core of the global economy.

9. Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce, *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (London: Routledge, 2010); see also Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
10. Elizabeth St. Pierre, Lisa Mazzei and Alecia Jackson, “Introduction: New Empiricisms and New Materialisms,” *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies*, vol. 16 (March 2016): 99.
11. Sophie Woodward and Tom Fisher, “Fashioning through Materials: Material Culture, Materiality and Processes of Materialization,” *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*, vol. 5 (October 2014): 6.
12. Sophie Woodward and Tom Fisher, “Fashioning through Materials”, 6.
13. Anneke Smelik, *Delft Blue to Denim Blue. Contemporary Dutch Fashion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).
14. For this article I have drawn upon the doctoral research of Daniëlle Bruggeman and Maaïke Feitsma and our joint chapter. See for a more detailed account of the methodology: Anneke Smelik, Daniëlle Bruggeman and Maaïke Feitsma, “Vivid Colours: From the Local to the Global and Back Again,” in *Delft Blue to Denim Blue*, 84–101.
15. Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark, *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity and Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
16. Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 2012), 159.
17. David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage, 2013), 275.
18. Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 2012), 164.
19. M. Angela Jansen and Jennifer Craik, *Modern Fashion Traditions. Negotiating Tradition and Modernity through Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 4.

As mentioned above Robertson refers to this dynamic process as “glocalization,” a concept that he popularised after adopting it from marketing and business discourse. He uses this term to articulate the dynamics in which the global and the local are reciprocally constituted as “mutually ‘interpenetrating’ principles.”²⁰ This applies to human subjects as well as to material objects. Sociologist Stephanie Lawler stresses the importance of acknowledging the complex interdependency between self and other, which has usually been suppressed in the Western view of the individual.²¹ This interdependency is evidently essential to the formation of local, national identities as their meanings are always constructed in relation to the global flows of contemporary capitalism.

José Teunissen claims that Western countries are prone to residual modes of orientalism and have been fascinated by non-Western items of clothing in different time periods. Since the 1980s, however, “major companies and commercial brands have started to exploit their national identity.”²² The global flows of capitalist modernity lead to a renewed interest in local or national identity and traditions. This trend is further enhanced by a growing social and political preoccupation with the structure and resilience of local roots in times of global sweeps and influences. Not only economic globalisation, but also the technological spread of Internet and the emergence of the creative economy have reinforced this trend. The growth of the creative industries is connected to the rising importance of design and style innovation in economies where most of the basic economic needs have been fulfilled. These technologically backed information societies form the backbone of “platform capitalism.” Economic competition in such a context leads to increasing product differentiation, which in turn requires ever larger diversity.²³ One way of achieving product differentiation is to mine local clothing styles and crafts for inspiration: culture is a true form of capital in both the material and the immaterial sense of the term. As Jansen and Craik put it: “Contemporary fashion designers are increasingly tapping into their local cultural heritage (tradition) for inspiration to create distinctive design identities, while simultaneously reinventing/modernizing it. On the one hand, in a globalized world, this allows designers to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive international fashion market, while on the other hand, on a national level, it makes them successful as a result of a general revaluation of local cultural heritage as a counter reaction to cultural globalisation.”²⁴

In the field of creative design and innovation there is then a need for product differentiation in which local identities play an important role. But these identities, however materially grounded and historically embedded, are invested by flows of transformation that impact strongly upon them. Designers take local fashion freely as raw material for a reconstruction and deconstruction of styles. Styles are often related to (sometimes transnational) group identities beyond the local culture, thus blurring categorical distinctions between self and others. Most fashion firms try to cross-refer to several of these other identities, while also referring to and profiting from local roots, thus establishing a look that is both global and local at the same time—‘glocal.’ This glocal look is more than the sum of its material parts.

Therefore, it is important to realize that the current interest of Western countries in their own local, national roots due to globalisation, cannot be separated from a fascination for ‘cultural otherness’ and for ‘other’ local sartorial traditions. This cultural otherness has been relocated within, or rather transposed to a different plane of transversal glocal contamination. Moreover, the interaction between ‘other’ local traditions and a fascination for cultural ‘otherness’ is not only a phenomenon of contemporary processes of globalisation. It can be traced back at least to colonial times in which Western trading companies like the Dutch East India Company were travelling around the world, importing products and non-Western clothing styles from the Orient. As Sandra Niessen argues, fashion’s “ethnic novelties generate a false sense that the global, multicultural nature of fashion is unprecedented.”²⁵ When researching the ways

20. Cf. Roland Robertson, “Glocalization,” 30.

21. Stephanie Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 8.

22. José Teunissen, “Introduction,” 17.

23. Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

24. M. Angela Jansen and Jennifer Craik, *Modern Fashion Traditions*, 4.

25. Sandra Niessen, “The Prism of Fashion: Temptation, Resistance and Trade,” in *Global Fashion, Local Tradition: On the*

in which fashion brands and designers operate within their particular national context, it is thus crucial to take into account their multifarious and power-driven relationship to ‘others.’ As I will show below in the fascinating case of chintz, an intricate dynamics is at play in which ‘otherness’ has become part of a certain idea of national identity. But for now, let’s return to the issue of the alleged Dutch-ness of Dutch cultural heritage.

Clogs, Dykes, Tulips, and a Painting by Johannes Vermeer

Viktor & Rolf’s dresses in Vlisco wax prints and floral van Gogh colours and designs are not the only example of importing Dutch cultural heritage into fashion. The funny collection “Bedtime Story” (A/W 2005), in which the models were dressed in sheets and duvets, was a preliminary study of Dutch lace from the seventeenth century. In the “Silver” collection (A/W 2006) the clothes were designed with a technique from a Dutch custom of preserving a baby’s first shoes by dipping them in silver. This age-old technique involved “electroplating” the fabric.²⁶ While the first dresses had their hems or frills dipped in silver, the final dress looked like one big bulk of stiff silver lamé. A year later, Viktor & Rolf’s collection “Fashion Show” (A/W 2007) was inspired by Dutch traditional costume: the folding techniques of the pleated skirts were accompanied by traditional embroidery, red coral necklaces, and silver decorative buttons from the province of Zeeland. The wooden clogs—with the impossible high heels—were painted in a Delft blue colour and decorated with traditional dotting techniques from the village of Staphorst, but they were also printed with the V&R logo. Tradition goes hand in hand with modern marketing and somehow merges with it.

Viktor & Rolf are by no means the only designers playing with Dutch heritage. In the same period lingerie designer Marlies Dekkers held a fashion show in Paris, called *So Dutch* (2007) for which the models were adorned with typical elements of Dutch national heritage, such as little clogs inscribed with the text ‘Holland,’ miniature windmills, Delft Blue prints and folkloric crafted hats. Alexander van Slobbe designed porcelain ‘pearls,’ inspired not only by *The Girl with a Pearl Earring* by the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, but also motivated and made by the oldest factory in Holland, Royal Tichelaar Makkum, producing earthenware objects since 1572.

These examples all show a rather tongue-in-cheek if not ironical approach to Dutch cultural heritage: they combine material elements—real objects pertaining to traditional Dutch culture—with immaterial or meaning-laden, symbolic structures. This attention to a material-semiotic continuum in design is the defining trait of a new-materialist approach to the study of fashion. It confirms Lise Skov’s remark that “The new demand is that designers engage with their national culture and dress tradition, but in such a way that it can be attractive to outsiders.”²⁷ The global ends up reinventing the local. In trying to grapple with “the problem of defining national dress,” Jennifer Craik has suggested the use of cultural heritage as a source of national identity.²⁸ This is indeed what the Dutch designers do (or did) by mining some forms of almost-forgotten craftsmanship.

Another salient Dutch example is the fashion exhibition *Blown by the Wind* in 2009.²⁹ This exhibition was set up in the Zuiderzee Museum, which collects objects and costumes from Dutch heritage and is situated in the small trading town of Enkhuiszen, where the colonial Dutch East Indian Company traded chintz, earthenware and porcelain from the East. The Zuiderzee used to be a dangerous sea gnawing

Globalisation of Fashion, eds. José Teunissen and Jan Brand (Arnhem: Terra Lannoo, 2005), 157.

26. José Teunissen, “Deconstructing Belgian and Dutch Fashion Dreams: From Global Trends to Local Crafts,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, vol. 15 (June 2011): 172.

27. Lise Skov, “Dreams of Small Nations in a Polycentric Fashion World,” 149.

28. Jennifer Craik, “Is Australian Fashion and Dress Distinctively Australian?” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, vol. 13 (December 2009): 410.

29. The English title of the exhibition was *Gone with the Wind*, but I am unhappy with the specific and inopportune connotations in American-English and therefore prefer a literal translation of the Dutch. See for more information (in Dutch): Annelies Sinke, “Een beschaving vervlogen met de wind,” *Land of Water. Tijdschrift voor de Toekomst*, vol. 3 (March 2009): 86–96.

away at the land below sea-level, but has now become a lake tamed by a great dyke built in the 1930s. The exhibition played heavily on the Dutch heritage of the struggle against the sea, mediating elements of tradition and folklore as an attractive spectacle. Objects, materials, silhouettes, and images refer to the wind, sea, dykes, the clouds in the Dutch sky and the straight lines of the Dutch landscape. There are also references to the harshness of Dutch Calvinism with its emphasis on black and sober clothes, to the colours used by Dutch impressionist painters like Vincent van Gogh and George Breitner, and to specific Dutch icons like, again, Vermeer's *Girl with the Pearl Earring*.

Dutch designers were asked to design clothes based on folkloristic patterns, techniques, colours, clothes and jewellery from specific regions of the Netherlands. Some of these techniques from the past had already entered Dutch high fashion, such as the reuse of patterns and materials from Dutch traditional costumes in Viktor & Rolf's fashion collection of 2007, including the wooden clogs with high heels. Klavers van Engelen reworked the 'millstone' collar, traditionally made of folds of white fine lace and worn by Dutch rich burghers in the seventeenth century, by placing the folds in the middle of a dress or on top of a T-shirt. Francisco van Benthum and Alexander van Slobbe used the shape of traditional wide fisherman's trousers or farmer's prints to create new silhouettes for men's wear. Others returned to traditional craftsmanship techniques like dotting paint onto cloth from the village of Staphorst or the needlework from the village of Marken.

Another example of using Dutch heritage as a source of inspiration is the winter collection "The Golden Age" (2005) by the designer duo De Rooij and Démoed of the colourful label The People of the Labyrinths. They asked the famous Dutch photographer Erwin Olaf to photograph this collection. Both the designers and the photographer were inspired by the Dutch masters of the Golden Age in the seventeenth century, like Rembrandt van Rijn, Jan Steen, and Johannes Vermeer. The influence of the paintings can be detected in the rich colours, prints and fabrics of the clothes, but also in the composition and especially the lighting of the picture. The images thus become a modern amalgam of Dutch traditional paintings.

In referring back to Dutch heritage all these designers contribute to the stereotypical idea that people share of the Netherlands and what it stands for. They thus actively participate in a playful form of re-inventing nationalism: the ongoing project of the discursive production of what the Netherlands means, which comes into being through their material designs, as well as in catwalk shows and in visual imagery. There is thus a material-semiotic continuum from material artefacts to issues of storytelling and representation. Garments are not merely clothing, but also symbolise Dutch identity and traditions. Traditions are, however, not simply a given. As Niessen explains, "tradition, by definition, is unchanging, immutable and faithful to some authentic past time, even though the needs of the times are always changing, and similarly the content of 'tradition' is also changing."³⁰ The traditions may come from the past, but in fact refer to the constantly mutating reality of today and help shape the future. In other words, the use of cultural heritage in Dutch fashion points to the famous notion of the "invention of tradition" introduced by the historian Eric Hobsbawm, rather than to an immutable or faithful rendering of past techniques, materials or designs.³¹

A last and rather commercial example is the relatively young Dutch high-street label Scotch & Soda, a denim brand that produces colourful and exotic designs. The brand presents itself today rather loftily as 'Maison Scotch & Soda' with the subtitle 'Amsterdam couture,' thus marketing itself as an explicitly Dutch and even as an Amsterdam brand. In 2010 Scotch & Soda was not yet a 'maison' that featured 'couture,' nor did they have the tropical and colourful look of today, but they did launch a denim line under the name 'Amsterdams Blauw' (lit. 'Blue from Amsterdam'). In the brand story on their website Scotch & Soda at the time presented 'Amsterdams Blauw' as if it were a name derived from the colour of the blue pigment used during the Dutch Golden Age to decorate Delftware.³² 'Amsterdam Blue' thus

30. Sandra Niessen, "Review of Joanne Eicher's Dress and Ethnicity," *Anthropologica*, vol. 40 (1998): 129.

31. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

32. The text on the website is no longer retrievable; see for a detailed analysis Maaikje Feitsma and Anneke Smelik, "Denim Goes Dutch: A Myth-in-the-Making," in *Delft Blue to Denim Blue*, 104–18.

links blue denim to a well-known icon of Dutch cultural heritage: blue Delftware. The website further enhanced this nationalistic story of blue denim by references to the colour blue in the street signs of Amsterdam; as if other major cities don't have blue street sign—Paris, for example. Scotch & Soda is an apt instance of how story-telling uses Dutch customs, historical objects or contemporary artefacts to express a certain idea of a national identity, merely at the service of branding and marketing a product that was always blue in the first place: denim!

Cosmopolitan Nationalism

The use of objects, artefacts and symbols, in short of material and immaterial heritage, serves to shape and express a certain idea or meaning of nationality, cultural identity and belonging. It shows how the idea of a national identity gets expressed in and through the material details of fashion designs. Yet, the amount of story-telling that goes into explaining the old and often forgotten traditions in fact reveal the imaginary character of national identity.³³ Here, the notion of what Michael Billig has called “banal nationalism” may be helpful. In his seminal book he explains that nationalism finds its expression in the use of everyday objects, habits and rituals. Billig introduces the term banal nationalism “to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced. [...] Daily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged,’ in the lives of its citizenry.”³⁴ There is thus a continual material reminding of one's nationhood by means of everyday representations of the nation, which constructs an imagined sense of national solidarity. Billig notes that although today globalisation has overtaken and re-territorialized nationalism, a reminder is still necessary in order to reproduce ideas and experiences of nationhood. Taking Billig's notion of banal nationalism to British fashion, together with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of “habitus,” Alice Goodrum understands national identity in relation to clothing as a “habitualized form of national belonging.”³⁵ According to her, these “banal” mechanisms not only mobilise versions of nationhood, but are also invested with the power to actually shape these identifications. Fashion design as well as clothing habits can thus function as a largely unacknowledged yet significant force to build and construct sentiments of nationality. In the context of fashion, I want to suggest that expressions of “banal” nationalism are mostly material, harping back to age-old craftsmanship of dotting, embroidering, pleating, dipping in silver, or painting blue. They include manual labour, as well as visual patterns and narrative lines, in keeping with the material-semiotic continuum.

The interest in and focus on a specific national context in which Dutch fashion designers and brands operate is part of a broader development where nationalism reinvents itself and flourishes alongside globalisation, or “cosmopolitanism” as sociologist Ulrich Beck calls it. This indicates an era in which “the distinctions between national and international, local and global, us and them, lose their sharp contours.”³⁶ This is a mixed blessing that triggers contradictory responses. In spite of advancing globalisation or cosmopolitanism, or perhaps because of it, in recent years the issue of ‘national identity’ has emerged as an important and controversial topic in academia as well as on the political agenda in the Netherlands, as it has been in many other countries in the world. Populism wants to cleanse nationalism of any trace of cosmopolitan or global connections.

To come back to the example of the exhibition *Blown by the Wind*, we can see how Dutch fashion designs here call for an identification with the Netherlands. They do so in material and immaterial ways. Cultural heritage belongs both to the realm of material objects and to imagery or imagination: Viktor & Rolf's Dutch clogs with high heels are a heavy, wooden token of Dutch farming tradition, with Staphorster dots, as well as their logo. At the same time they conjure up ideological images of ‘Dutchness.’ Erwin Olaf's updated version of a painting by Johannes Vermeer in the series “The Golden Age” refers to the venerable era of the Dutch masters in the history of painting, while the folds of the

33. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

34. Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 6.

35. Alison Goodrum, *The National Fabric: Fashion, Britishness, Globalisation* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 70.

36. Ulrich Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Condition: Why Methodological Nationalism Fails,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 24 (December 2007): 287.

actual clothes are billowing in a postmodern wink at glorious times of yore. *Blown by the Wind* not only evokes a heroic past of the Dutch struggle against the sea, but also plays into a heated public debate about Dutch identity at a time when it is perceived to be under threat from globalisation and multiculturalism. The identification with Dutchness is evoked by material techniques and fabrics as well as by iconic and quite stereotypical images. The creative and commercial use of heritage in fashion can serve the political interests of the present. In this case, the manufacturing of fashion by way of cultural heritage plays with and obliquely evokes a certain nostalgia for a past and perhaps even an ideology like a reductive nationalism. Yet, the tongue-in-cheek approach of the fashion designs suggests that those clichés have done their time and nowadays are meant to question the identification with a narrow definition of the nation. The designers playfully challenge the notion of a stable Dutch identity, thus inviting critical self-reflection.

The point here is that fashion does not merely evoke a national past, but also engages cultural heritage as a material craftsmanship as well as a symbolic image with relevant meanings for today's society. With regard to fashion, the understanding of national identity in terms of a materially embedded construction of cultural imaginations is therefore quite productive. In this respect it is important, as Stuart Hall claims, "to remember that the nation-state is both a political and territorial entity, *and* what Benedict Anderson has called 'an imagined community'."³⁷ Hall stresses the discursive practice of the formation of a national identity, by reflecting on the crucial role that specific objects, symbols and representations play in that process. He continues: "In fact, what the nation 'means' is an ongoing project, under constant reconstruction. We come to know its meaning partly *through* the objects and artefacts which have been made to stand for and symbolize its essential values. Its meaning is constituted *within*, not above or outside representation."³⁸ Fashion is then one of the ways in which national identity is both materially reproduced and discursively reconstructed, both in the global arena and the local playground, but also in a transversal middle ground that is the glocal dimension, which today is carried by Internet and platform media technologies.

A new-materialist cultural perspective on national identity opens up a broader understanding of the role that commodified objects of fashion (material), as well as fashion images (semiotic) may play in relation to the making of a national identity. In fashion studies, Goodrum has defined national identity as follows: "National identity may be conceived as a confection of selective memories."³⁹ Amy de la Haye adds the commercial aspect: "national identity offers a route to product differentiation and makes good business sense."⁴⁰ If culture in globalisation is capital, national culture is like a central bank. Difference is indeed a crucial aspect today; it is, in the words of Goodrum, "the watchword of the postmodern marketplace."⁴¹ As difference is produced by the mix and match of the local and the global, postmodern style is always already fully commercial. This aspect goes hand in hand with Goodrum's idea that national identity in fashion is "a confection of selective memories" being recognisable not only for the local inhabitants but also for the international consumer market.⁴²

The question then is how a typically small country like the Netherlands positions itself in the global marketplace. Fashion may be "[t]ied to a 'national fabric'," but "fashion is always traveling and ultimately aims at a global market," as Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark argue.⁴³ In other words, the focus on the global is essential to fashion. Marie Riegels Melchior points out that "in order to increase market share and sales figures in a highly competitive international market, the articulation of cultural distinctiveness

37. Stuart Hall, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'The Heritage,' Re-imagining the Post-Nation," in *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, eds. Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt and Ziauddin Sardar (London: Continuum, 2002), 74, original emphasis.

38. Cf. Stuart Hall, "Whose Heritage?" 74.

39. Cf. Alice Goodrum, *The National Fabric*, 62.

40. Amy De la Haye, *The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion, 1947-1997* (London: V&A Publications, 1996), II-2.

41. Cf. Alice Goodrum, *The National Fabric*, 21.

42. Alice Goodrum, *The National Fabric*, 62.

43. Cf. Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark, *The Fabric of Cultures*, 2.

has become a pivotal business strategy for many fashion brands and local fashion industries.”⁴⁴ The Dutch fashion industry is no exception to this dynamics. In that respect, it may be helpful to turn to the term that Melchior, Skov and Csaba have introduced in relation to thinking through the concept of national identity, namely “cosmopolitan nationalism.”⁴⁵ This concept suggests that the nation functions as a resource that can be reinvented within a globalised world. Cosmopolitan nationalism involves an interpretation and transformation of cultural heritage rather than the use of it in its original form. Similarly, Melchior argues that it “enables fashion designers to use their awareness of cultural heritage for creative inspiration, enabling openness towards others and the negotiation of contradictory cultural experiences.”⁴⁶ In Dutch fashion, the designs of Oilily, Scotch & Soda, and the recently bankrupted labels Mexx and CoraKemperman,⁴⁷ show such a negotiation of the contradictory relations between the local and the global, often resulting in glocal designs embracing multiple cultural sources of inspiration.

The Glocal Connections of Chintz

The example of chintz helps to further unravel the knot in which the local and the global are tied up. Shocking pink, hard blue, fierce turquoise, curry yellow, olive green, crimson red: such are the colours used by designers like The People of the Labyrinths (1984–2014) and high street brands like Mac&Maggie (1976–1996) and CoraKemperman (1995–2017), as well as today by Oilily (1968–present) and Scotch & Soda (1985–present). There are two main sources of inspiration for such colours: regional wear from the Netherlands, and regional wear from Asia, especially India. For reasons of space I will only discuss the use of chintz by Oilily here.

The children’s and later also women’s label Oilily was founded by the couple Marieke and Willem Olsthoorn.⁴⁸ Oilily put down the importance of colour in an “Oilily principle” in the very first Oilily magazine in 1984: “The most striking aspect is the colourfulness of our clothes. We use bright and cheerful colours, which children find attractive. A loud variety of pink and turquoise are found in all of our collections.” Graphic designer and initiator of the Oilily magazines, Jean Philipse, connects Oilily’s aesthetic signature—its particular use of striking colour and unusual combinations of patterns—to its “origin” in Dutch folkloric costumes. However, while the late Marieke Olsthoorn, then designer of Oilily, acknowledged the presence of “typically Dutch elements” in Oilily’s designs, she was also inspired by a wide variety of other clothing traditions, such as the “dazzling colour combinations of women in the pink desert of Rajasthan as well as the wonderful multi-coloured clothes in South America.”⁴⁹ This rather unabashed orientalism points to a complex relationship between Oilily’s strong connection with traditional Dutch costume and its exploration of ‘other’ local sartorial styles that are also incorporated into Oilily’s designs and promotional images.

Oilily appropriates Dutch regional wear as well as regional wear from other parts of the world. Yet, this may not be such an opposition as appears at first sight. If we take a closer look, interesting links emerge between the different sources for the use of bold colours. Let me first concentrate on Dutch regional wear. Today Dutch regional dress is mostly reduced to folkloristic use, but it has influenced Oilily’s choice of colours as well as diverse patterns and shapes. In a rather merry postmodern style, Oilily’s garments freely mix and match costumes of fishing or farming villages such as Marken, Volendam, Staphorst, Hindeloopen and Spakenburg. Some of those villages are global tourist attractions

44. Marie Riegels Melchior “Catwalking the Nation: Challenges and Possibilities in the Case of the Danish Fashion Industry,” *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, vol. 3 (April 2011): 58.

45. Marie Riegels Melchior, Lise Skov and Fabian Csaba, “Translating Fashion into Danish,” *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, vol. 3 (April 2011): 209–28.

46. Cf. Marie Riegels Melchior, “Catwalking the Nation,” 59.

47. See for more detailed analyses of these brands *Delft Blue to Denim Blue*.

48. I am indebted to Danielle Bruggeman and Maaïke Feitsma for their research on this case study; see Anneke Smelik, Daniëlle Bruggeman and Maaïke Feitsma, “Vivid Colours: From the Local to the Global and Back Again,” in *Delft Blue to Denim Blue*, 84–101.

49. Marieke Olsthoorn-Roosen and Dido Michielsen, *Over Kinderkleren* (De Bilt: Cantecler, 1992), 7, my translation.

today, like Marken and Volendam close to Amsterdam, while other villages keep to their religious faith and reject tourism. An Oilily knitted sweater in bright red, for example, is based on the upper part of the costume of the women from Marken, mimicking the striped sleeves of the traditional smock, the laced bodice, the top part of the skirt, and the square flowered piece of textile covering the chest of the original regional costume.⁵⁰

Designer Marieke Olsthoorn claims that it was the *chintz* in Dutch regional dress that caught her attention because of its multi-coloured patterns.⁵¹ The colourful hand-drawn and dyed cotton fabric was brought to the Netherlands in the seventeenth century by Dutch traders of the Dutch East India Company,⁵² a now controversial trading company that engaged in colonialization, slavery and violence. In the third quarter of the seventeenth century chintz became fashionable in the Netherlands, especially as home wear for women, and was frequently worn in the northern part of the country near the coasts of the North Sea and Zuiderzee.⁵³ Since the seventeenth century, but especially in the eighteenth century, chintz was used in any type of clothing, such as children's clothes, and gowns, skirts, jackets, handkerchiefs and capes for adults.

The popularity of chintz was a result of the country's prosperity during the Dutch Golden Age, when the textile trade of the Dutch East India Company reached its peak.⁵⁴ Chintz was popular in different social classes in society, from the urban elite to farmers and fishermen, and increasingly became part of Dutch regional dress styles.⁵⁵ After the fashionable chintz mostly disappeared towards the end of the eighteenth century, it was still used for folkloric and traditional regional dress purposes.⁵⁶ Although chintz was originally an exotic textile, its bright colours and richly decorated motifs were soon integrated into Dutch regional wear, which is nowadays viewed as an icon of Dutch folklore. Equally, Oilily's link to Dutch regional wear is often perceived as an important part of the "Dutchness" of the brand, as Marieke Olsthoorn transposed the motifs and colours of chintz into Oilily's collections.

Paradoxically, then, the designs of 'Dutch' traditional costume have been greatly influenced by Indian chintz from colonial times. There are more icons of 'Dutchness' dating from the Golden Age with roots in foreign countries: Delft Blue earthenware was adapted from Chinese porcelain, while the tulips flourishing in the sandy grounds of the Dutch dunes were imported from Turkey. In this way, an interesting dialogue has been created between 'cultural otherness' (objects, fabrics, motifs, and colours from other countries and cultural traditions) and narratives of 'Dutchness.' Fashion epitomises these cultural dynamics as it operates in global flows of consumerist capitalism, while commodifying objects from a wide variety of local traditions and cultures. Teunissen reflects on these dynamics, arguing that fashion "has always sought inspiration in other cultures, starting with the importing of silk from China and later cotton and cashmere from India."⁵⁷ In the use of bold colours, patterns and motifs, and fabrics by Oilily (but also by Mac&Maggie, CoraKemperman, The People of the Labyrinths, and Scotch & Soda), a complex dynamics is at play in which the sartorial 'other'—for example chintz from India—is incorporated into the 'self' on a national level. Chintz has become a material part of the objects and representations that create shared imaginations of what 'Dutchness' means, which has subsequently become part of contemporary Dutch fashion.

50. Cf. Marieke Olsthoorn-Roosen and Dido Michielsen, *Over Kinderkleren*, 112–3.

51. Cf. Marieke Olsthoorn-Roosen and Dido Michielsen, *Over Kinderkleren*, 31.

52. Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian Textiles for the West* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008); and Ebeltje Hartkamp-Jonxis, *Sits: Oost-West Relaties in Textiel* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1987).

53. Hanneke van Zuthem, "Boeren en Burgers in Katoen," in *Sits: Oost-West Relaties in Textiel*, eds. Ebeltje Hartkamp-Jonxis, 76–106; and Jos Arts, *Oilily* (Arnhem/Zwolle: d'jonge Hond/ArtEZ Press, 2010).

54. Margaret Breukink-Peeze, "Sitshandel en Aspecten van Sits in Mode en Streekdracht," in *Kostuum. Relaties: Mode en Streekdracht*, eds. Gieneke Arnolli et al. (Amsterdam: Nederlandse Kostuumvereniging, 2000), 57–75.

55. Hanneke van Zuthem, "Boeren en Burgers in Katoen".

56. Jos Arts, *Oilily*.

57. José Teunissen, "Introduction," 13.

The changes in fortune of Indian chintz—first imported from India and integrated into Dutch regional wear, then reintegrated as an icon of ‘Dutchness’ into Oilily’s designs while remixed with patterns and colours from regional wear in India—demonstrate the way in which fashion expresses and underwrites the cultural hybridity of the Netherlands. Although these contradictory dynamics may pertain to most post-colonial European countries, the case study of Oilily shows the ways in which fashion appropriates both colourful indigenous and non-Western sartorial styles as part of the Dutch fashion industry. A variety of local and foreign cultural traditions become an intrinsic part of these brands, in some cases to the extent that the boundaries between them are blurred. The global dynamics of fashion produce glocal Dutch fashion brands, contributing to a visual and discursive reproduction of ‘Dutchness’ that includes ‘otherness.’ The inextricable interconnectedness of global and local undermines any idea of a homogeneous unity of a national identity. Instead, at the heart of national identity we find cultural hybridity.

Although narratives of national unity have taken centre stage in the last decade, these cannot be separated from narratives of cultural diversity within the Netherlands, which have been an important part of cultural imaginations of Dutchness since the Golden Age. Expressions of a strong interest in cultural ‘otherness’ are thus part of dominant Dutch narratives. Since it is this hybrid cultural context in which Dutch fashion brands operate, it is hardly surprising that the cultural dynamics of hybridity resonate in fashion. By expressing an interest in sartorial ‘otherness,’ Oilily, and other brands like Mac&Maggie and CoraKemperman, *The People of the Labyrinths*, and Scotch & Soda, echo memories of (post)colonialism, while at the same time discursively reproducing hybrid narratives of Dutch national identity. As such, the vivid colours of Dutch fashion signify the colourfulness of hybridity. Dashing colours, daring patterns, florid folds and bold cuts have made it from the local to the global and back again in a glocal mix of trendy fashion.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that a Dutch national style is always shot through with cultural hybridity. Rather than pursuing a myth of a national fashion identity within an international market, I have explored a “cosmopolitan nationalism”⁵⁸, that is, the relation between national and transnational connotations of fashion in times of globalisation. I have applied throughout a new-materialist approach that foregrounds the continuum between material and semiotic elements of fashion as a cultural practice.

Glocalisation is fundamental to the formation of local identities, because the idea of the local is produced within and by globalizing discourses.⁵⁹ Assimilating the global ‘other’ into the local is a crucial aspect for national identity as, according to Barker, it is “unifying cultural diversity.”⁶⁰ Fashion partakes in the creation of this unifying process. Goodrum argues that “the apparently straightforward and economically driven process to do with the globalisation of fashion is, in fact, a far more culturally nuanced and locally embedded encounter than has previously been suggested.”⁶¹ According to her, due to globalisation the national characteristics of fashion become increasingly questionable and questioned.

The paradox of globalisation gives rise to an increased interest in the local roots of Western (fashion) countries, while simultaneously appropriating objects, commodities and traditions from local cultures from elsewhere. As I have shown in the examples in this article, the global and the local are inextricably interconnected. A nation’s ‘own’ local sartorial heritage (a ‘Dutch self’) and its ‘others’ (other nations, cultures, traditions, symbols, commodities, fashions, etc.) are necessarily involved in a reciprocal interplay. These examples show that it is imperative to take into account the complex relationship to globalisation when researching the ways in which fashion brands and designers operate within their particular national and international context.

58. See Ulrich Beck “The Cosmopolitan Condition”; and Melchior, Skov and Csaba, “Translating Fashion into Danish”.

59. Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies*, 164.

60. Chris Barker, 164, 260.

61. Alice Goodrum, *The National Fabric*, 12.



Figure 1: Viktor&Rolf, clogs on high heels (A/W 2007–8). Photograph by Erik and Petra Hesmerg. © Collection Zuiderzee Museum



Figure 2: Colourful regional dress of the fishermen's village Marken. M. Olsthoorn-Roosen, *Over kinderkleren* (1992)



Figure 3: Women's collection by Oilily (A/W 2007-8). Photograph by Peter Stigter

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