NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN FOR BODY AND THE ENVIRONMENT:

FASHION

SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Skills, Status and Unethical Practices

Leah Kelly

SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF VISUAL CULTURE

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF B.A. (HONS) FASHION

DESIGN 2022

NCAD DUBLIN

National College of Art and Design

School of Visual Culture

I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed: Leah Kelly

Programme / department: Fashion Design

Date: 31 Jan 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The subject of my research is to question skills, status and ethical practices.
The thesis will compare how the production of Limerick lace is similar to today's problems of lace within fast fashion. This thesis will explore the cost of fashion and the comparison between who wears these items to who makes them. The personal subject of my thesis is my grandmother Dolores Kelly who was born in 1936. She lived in St. Georges Industrial school in Limerick which was run by the Good Shepherd nuns until she left in 1954 at the age of eighteen. I am very interested in this topic as my grandmother was an orphan in an industrial school run by the Good Shepherd nuns which were known for their Limerick lace making skills. I also want to investigate the skills my grandmother learned within institutionalized care and how these skills impacted her life. One of the main sources of research for my thesis was from talking to my grandmother throughout my life but also specifically interviewing her for my thesis. I have paraphrased what she has had to say about her time within the industrial school and her life after. I have also quoted her directly and she has read it for verification.

Lace was developed primarily as a luxury fabric with no specific useful purpose. It is a versatile fabric for which there is no single comprehensive definition. This problem of technical definition is matched in any historical context by the problem of scope; lace was both one of the most expensive of all fashionable textiles and one of the cheapest of home-made trimmings. Between these extremes were almost as many varieties as there were social classes and regional differences. (Levey, 1983, p. 1).

Today we talk about issues of sustainability and ethical fairtrade. These are not new problems and they haven't been only subjected to third world countries, these have been issues within Ireland and have impacted the lives of many women for many decades as seen within the Limerick lace making industry. “Since the invention of the mechanical loom nearly two and a half centuries ago, fashion has been a dirty, unscrupulous business that has exploited humans and Earth alike to harvest bountiful profits. Slavery, child labor, and prison labor have all been integral parts of the supply chain at one time or another—including today. ” (Thomas, 2019, p. 17).

Limerick lace which is the main inspiration for my thesis also links with my related studio practice. In my studio work I am addressing the Limerick lace industry through textile manipulation. I am using laser cutting and embroidery to make new lace patterns inspired by Limerick lace whilst still trying to capture the handcraft qualities.

Chapter one will provide the background and history of the Limerick lace industry. When it was made, who it was made by, what it was made for and who it was used by are all questions that will be investigated. The working conditions that the women in the industry endured will also be addressed. This chapter will investigate how the Catholic Church in Ireland played a role within the Limerick lace industry.

Chapter two will delve into the day to day skills that children within industrial schools in Ireland learned alongside their daily routines. How these skills impacted their lives after institutionalization and what employment opportunities

they had will also be discussed. The relationship with clothing during and briefly after time spent in the industrial school will be explored.

Finally, chapter three will analyse how the status and quality of lace has changed within the current market. This chapter explores the various ethical issues associated with producing modern-day lace within a fast fashion industry. It also draws on the previously discussed ethical issues within the Limerick lace industry and the similarities of issues with Bangladesh within the present lace fast fashion industry.

CHAPTER 1: Limerick lace; Lacemakers and Consumers

This chapter will explore the history and the background of the Limerick lace industry. It will examine the contrast of the low pay and working conditions of the lacemakers in comparison to the wealthy consumers. There will be a focus on the role of the Catholic Church in Ireland within the Limerick lace industry. *Amazing Lace: A History Of The Limerick Lace industry* written by Dr Matthew Potter and *Limerick Lace: A Social History and A Maker's Manual* written by Nellie Ó'Cléirigh and Veronica Rowe were the two main sources I used for research in this chapter.

Limerick lace has been described as the most famous of all Irish laces. Limerick lace is a form of hand embroidery on machine made net and is a 'mixed lace' rather than a 'true lace', which is entirely handmade. Limerick lace comes in two forms: tambour lace and needlerun lace or a combination of both techniques. Needlerun laces are made by passing the sewing needle and thread in and out of the meshes of the net.

Tambouring refers to chain-stitch worked with a small hook which wraps around a length of thread drawing it upwards through the net. (Earnshaw, 1993, p. 2). Sometimes appliqué is used and even net appliquéd on net, which makes a gossamer fabric. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 11). It requires practice and patience to become proficient.

The Limerick lace industry was founded in 1829 by an Englishman, Charles Walker. Lace making skills originated in the fifteenth century but the concept behind the Limerick lace industry was a new idea of teaching skills for economic and personal progress. From the 1830s to the early 1860s, Limerick lace was made under classic factory conditions. The lace factories housed a large workforce under strict supervision. They were also overcrowded, due to the large numbers employed. (Potter, 2014, p. 88). The first factory in Limerick was set up in Mount Kennet, and to get a place in the factory was very difficult. Each girl had to provide a certificate from a doctor, as well as giving her age which was to be between eleven and fourteen years. Women were quoted as earning as much as 15s to 20s per week by working until 12.00 at night. (Ó Cléirigh, 2003, p. 93). Charles Walker died in 1843 and the industry declined.

Florence Vere O'Brien had come from England to Limerick in 1883 and wanted to improve Ireland's lace making industry. She was the most important figure in the revival of Limerick lace-making. She realised that with better materials and design a revival in the industry was possible. (Ó Cléirigh, 2003, p. 95). Florence set up lace

schools and also employed home workers. Her home workers worked in very challenging conditions. She described how they worked on the lace;

> In their own little rooms – rooms often so dark and dingy in the most dilapidated quarter of the so-called English Town of Limerick, that it was a wonder how the lace could emerge, as it generally did, as clean and fresh as if made in the most wellappointed and roomy factory. Sometimes, I am bound to say, there were difficulties peculiar to cottage industries. Turf smoke in excess, a drunken husband, and once a cat who jumped through a beautiful run-lace flounce when in the frame, to the bitter disappointment of both the worker and myself.(Potter, 2014, p. 92).

Commercial lace makers had the satisfaction of making something both functional and attractive. They were highly skilled craft workers, in many instances they were continuing a family tradition of lace making and in the case of home workers they enjoyed a degree of autonomy. On the other hand, when working in a factory or workshop, they enjoyed the companionship of their colleagues. However in most cases, commercial lacemakers did so to help make ends meet, rather than for work satisfaction. (Potter, 2014, p. 96).

Like other Irish laces, the making of Limerick lace spread outside the area where it was established and from which it got its name. Kinsale, Dunmore East, Benada Abbey, Cahirciveen, Kenmare and Youghal were all other centres of Limerick lace. (Ó Cléirigh, 1988, p. 112). An early patron was Lady Normanby, wife of the Lord Lieutenant. She gave great encouragement to the Limerick lace industry, causing dresses to be made, not only for herself but also for Her Majesty, the Queen of the Belgians and the Grand Duchess of Baden. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 12).

The Limerick lace industry gave employment to women who would have had no other possibility of making a living, who in turn supported or helped to support a large

number of dependent relatives. In 1851, it was estimated that each lace worker maintained two or three other family members. (Ó Cléirigh, 2003, p. 92). The overwhelmingly female workforce had to contend with long hours, tedium and eye strain, while in the early decades of the industry, child labour was endemic. (Potter, 2014, p. 81). As a result, there's a saying about Limerick lace, "The people that wore it never made it, and the people that made it never wore it." (McCarthy, 2020).

In April 1900 during the visit of Queen Victoria to Dublin, specimens of the needlework executed at the Crawford School in Cork were submitted to her Majesty, who was graciously pleased to order two embroidered coverlets, which were completed and forwarded to Buckingham Palace. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 30). The royal patronage was invaluable to an industry such as lace, which depended on high fashion and the monied classes for its survival. (Rowe, 1999). Lady Aberdeen held a Lace Ball in 1907 at which everyone was requested to wear Irish lace. Apart from obvious uses like wedding veils and court trains the amount of lace worn on clothes for all social occasions was remarkable. Lace was also a treasured wedding gift. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, pp. 40). The Limerick lace industry suffered from problems relating to supply and demand but the lack of suitable patterns and drawing skills were very important factors. Ireland had no 'ateliers' or design studios which were a normal part of lace industries in France and Belgium. Most of this work was in fact centered in convents ran by nuns who were very remote from the world of fashion. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 31).

Limerick-style lace was made in convents all over Ireland from the 1840s until production ceased in the Good Shepherd Convent in 1990. During this time the nuns

also ran a number of laundries which housed unmarried mothers and ex-prostitutes. Many of them became lace workers as they were not strong enough to work in the laundry. (Ó Cléirigh, 2003, p. 94). Cannocks and Todds which were both department stores and the Good Shepherd Convent appear to have been the only organised manufacturers of lace in Limerick in the 1870's. In the early 1880's there was a big revival in the making of Limerick lace partly because the Good Shepherd Nuns had switched to making it. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 16). The convents had one very important point in their favour: they provided much better continuity than small undertakings set up by individuals. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 31).

In the famine year 1848, in Kinsale, an industrial school was opened in which employment in various kinds of needlework commenced. The girls who were there to learn lace-making were 'bound' as apprentices for three years, with their parents' consent. This is the only reference found of Irish lacemakers being indentured servants. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 19). In the Presentation and Mercy Convents they engaged in shirt making, dress making, machine knitting, embroidery and lace making. Some of the manufacture was for private orders and some of the clothing was used for the orphans and pupils of the attached industrial school. The pupils received no payment, but the report was at pains to point out that they received 'very efficient' teaching, which equipped them with useful skills. (Potter, 2014, pp. 93). By 1886 Florence Vere O'Brien persuaded the Convent of the Good Shepherd in Limerick to become more seriously involved in the making of lace, and provided them with better designs to work with. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 48). In 1888 Florence, after visiting the sisters of Mercy at the Convent of St. Vincent, the

Convent of the Good Shepherd at Sunday's Well, and St. Joseph's Convent at Kinsale, which were the three convents that made Limerick Lace, remarked that 'I do not know how Ireland would get on without the Convents and the Convent Industrial Schools'. (Ó Cléirigh and Rowe, 1995, p. 50).

In recent years, the revelations of abuse and ill-treatment in various institutions run by religious orders in Ireland has made the role of the Good Shepherd nuns one of the most controversial and contentious chapters in the history of Limerick lace. In many respects, the convent regime was prison-like, as residents were committed to the institution against their will, not permitted to leave and 'received no pay at all' for their work. (Potter, 2014, pp. 93). In contrast to this statement, many people believed that the nuns taught these women and girls valuable skills that could be useful when they left the convent to become independent and to make money. Potter said "They were geniuses with their hands at needle craft, those women. Many of them went out to the outside world with the crafts they learned here." (2014, pp. 95).

To conclude, I believe that low pay and poor working conditions for lace makers characterised the Limerick lace industry while in paradox it also provided a living for thousands of women and their families. These skills learned did not provide these women with true independence but they did provide them with an adequate life. In contrast to the lives of the lacemakers, the Limerick lace industry relied on a rich material culture. I also believe that the Catholic Church had an impact on the progression of Limerick lace. They played an invaluable role in providing workers to embroider the lace to keep the industry going consistently.

FIG.1 Artist unknown, c.1930-1950, Tambour Limerick Lace Altar Fall. (source: http://limericklace.ie/?tag=tambour)

FIG.2 Artist unknown, c.1880-1890, A Limerick Lace Bertha Collar. (source: https://thelittlelacemuseum.wordpress.com/2012/09/27/a-limerick-lace-bertha-collar/)

CHAPTER 2: Ireland’s Industrial Schools; Skills and Clothing

This chapter will attempt to explore the relationship between nuns and children that were in their care in industrial schools and the different skills these children learned. I will look at my grandmother's story from her time during and after spending her youth in St. Georges Industrial School, Limerick from 1939 -1954. I will look at their daily routine and skills they carried out and how these skills affected their lives after leaving the school. I also want to explore the relationship these children had with clothing during and after their time institutionalized. The main sources I used for my research in this chapter was an interview with my Grandmother, Dolores Kelly about her experience.

My Grandmother Dolores was born in Limerick in 1936. In 1939 after the death of her mother due to tuberculosis, she and her four sisters Nancy, Martha, Nelly and Marie went to live in St. Georges Industrial school in Limerick which was run by the Good Shepherd nuns. The Good Shepherd nuns were introduced to Limerick in 1848 to take over an existing Magdalen refuge. They then established a complex of buildings including a reformatory for girls, an industrial school, the main convent and a large chapel. (Potter, 2014, p. 34). Within the industrial schools and orphanages the children were taught from a very young age, skills that would serve the needs of others. Girls were trained in “needlework, machine work, washing, ironing, cooking and housework”. (Raftery, O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 15).

Kelly remembers her daily routine consisting mainly of domestic jobs. Every day they woke up at 6:30am. They said their morning prayers and then made their beds even from a very young age. At 7:30am they attended mass. They attended school everyday from 9am to 4pm. Nuns which were mostly novices taught them. The children were taught basic maths, English, Irish, Irish history and geography. There was a focus on teaching about religious saints in school.

The children learned to knit while in school. They made their own knitting patterns and knitted their own jumpers, socks and gloves. They also knitted skull caps which were sent to the army. There was a sewing room with sewing machines where they learned to sew. Kelly's sister Marie was taught how to make Limerick lace which the Good Shepherd nuns in Limerick were known for but she left the school before she was fully trained. “In 1897 one of the main lace manufacturers in Limerick was the Good Shepherd Convent, where Valenciennes lace was made by industrial school children and Limerick lace by around six other girls.” (Potter, 2014, p. 44). They also learned how to cook for themselves while at school. They went to bed at 7pm after they had their bath and all their domestic jobs were completed. Kelly remembers they washed their hair with carbolic soap and Jeyes Fluid. She said “I remember sometimes they would put too much Jeyes Fluid in the water and our eyes would be burning.” (L. Kelly, 2021 in conversation with Dolores Kelly). Some girls wet the bed so they slept on sacks of hay. The other girls slept on mattresses filled with horse hair which the children made themselves.

At the age of thirteen the children stopped going to educational classes as mainstream education was of secondary importance compared to the domestic jobs that they carried out daily. At the age of thirteen Kelly began the job of cleaning the toilets and floors in the dormitories. At the age of sixteen she was assigned a job in the kitchen placing pots on a solid fuel stove fueled by logs. The children were also expected to clean the convent corridors on their hands and knees. A job which Kelly does not remember fondly as she remembers having sore, wet knees and arms from scrubbing. They polished the classroom floors, she remembers placing a cloth underneath her feet and sliding up and down the floors to get the job done quicker. Kelly remembers the expectation of the nuns to see themselves through the shine off the floors. The nuns made their own wax for the floors out of the melted church candles and paraffin which the children used for this job. Some children worked in the refectory setting the tables where they ate their food. Each child had their own designated domestic jobs that they carried out daily. Younger and older children were mixed together in dormitories. The older children were assigned a younger child that they had the role of looking after. This created life long bonds between the children. (L. Kelly, 2021 in conversation with Dolores Kelly). Many of the so-called training areas were in fact more geared towards the needs of the school than for any employment the children might subsequently be able to gain once they left. (Raftery, O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 15). Girls usually ended up in domestic service. Without even the most basic education, most remained trapped in a cycle of poverty all their lives. They were never prepared by the nuns for anything other than a life of servitude. (Raftery, O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 156).

At the age of eighteen Kelly along with her twin sister Martha left the Industrial school. They were given a small case to bring some basic essentials that they owned. Which consisted of a dress, a cardigan, a pair of shoes, socks and underwear. The nuns brought them to a bus station and they were sent to Dublin. Their older sister Nelly, who had previously left the industrial school, was working in Dublin and collected them from the bus stop. This was the first time they were outside Limerick.

Kelly remembers being very nervous about leaving the industrial school. She said she wasn't really looking forward to it as she didn't know what to expect. Although she said "I was looking forward to going shopping to buy my own clothes." (L. Kelly, 2021 in conversation with Dolores Kelly). Kelly said, "I didn't know much about the 'outside world' and it was a very strange experience, experiencing it for the very first time." She didn't want anybody to know she had come from an industrial school as people would look down on her. She remembers people saying "She knows nothing, sure she just came out of the convent." She became very private about her past and wouldn't tell family, friends or neighbours where she truly grew up as she was ashamed and afraid that people would think that she was put there because her mother didn't want her. (L. Kelly, 2021 in conversation with Dolores Kelly).

In Dublin, she was sent to work in St.Michael's hospital, Dun Laoghaire. All the children that left the school were sent to work in hospitals around the country or to houses of the wealthy to work as servants. Kelly worked in a convent at the hospital setting the tables and serving food to the nuns. Her sister Martha cleaned the

theatres in the hospital. These were two jobs that they were well accustomed to from growing up in the industrial school. Their two sisters Nelly and Marie, who had left the school before them also worked in the hospital making shrouds and curtains. Kelly lived in the residential quarters of the hospital where she shared a room with four other people. She earned £4 a month. In 1958 Kelly went to work as a servant for a private home in Dalkey. She left the hospital to work in the home as it had better pay.

While working in the home she wore a servants uniform which consisted of a hat and an apron. She looked after the children, cooked and cleaned. She worked from morning to night and only had one day off a week. She called the lady of the house Miss when speaking to her and when the family were eating meals she ate separately from them in the kitchen. In 1959 she moved to England. In England she worked as a cleaner in Kingston hospital, London. After returning to Dublin in 1962, she got married and went to work in St.Joseph's hospital as a cleaner. While in the industrial school Kelly learned lots of different crafts which she used to her advantage when she was a married woman to create an income by making purses which she sold to neighbours. She also made wicker lampshades and baskets. Kelly said “The domestic skills I learned in the industrial school were helpful in later life as I knew how to cook, look after my children and look after my home. I could also knit jumpers for my children whereas other mothers sometimes did not have that skill.” (L. Kelly, 2021 in conversation with Dolores Kelly).

Kelly was never able to buy her own clothes until she left school at age eighteen. The children in the school were great sewers and they were expected to make their own

clothes with the patterns they were given by the nuns. Each morning they were given clothes to wear. They never got to choose or have their own style. Each child was nearly dressed the same as the next. They wore wool skirts and jumpers in the Winter with boys laced up shoes. They wore boys shoes as they wore more hardwearing. In the Summer, they wore sandals and dresses. (L. Kelly, 2021 in conversation with Dolores Kelly).

After leaving school, the first item of clothing she bought was a wine mohair coat with a peter pan collar from Roches Stores that she saved up to buy. Kelly said “It was one of the most expensive coats in the shop but I really loved it.” Everytime she got paid she recalls going into town with her sister Nelly and buying one piece of clothing. Due to being institutionalized she didn’t understand the cost of items so she relied on her sisters who had previously left the school earlier to help her. (L. Kelly, 2021 in conversation with Dolores Kelly).

To conclude, The Catholic Church taught skills to children within industrial schools that could be used for them to have financial independence. Although most of the skills were primarily for the benefit of the convent and schools. From the account of Dolores Kelly about her life within and after the Industrial school and the skills she learned it is evident that the skills helped her to achieve employment as she continued doing what she had been accustomed to since early childhood; cleaning, cooking and caring for others. This was a low income job and if she had had proper education that wasn’t for the benefit of the Church she may have had more sufficient job opportunities.

FIG.3 Uncredited photo, c.1900, Good Shepherd Convent, Clare Street, Limerick. (source: https://www.limerick.ie/sites/default/files/media/documents/2020-03/amazing-lace-a-history-of-the-limerick-lace-industry-resized.pdf)

FIG.4 Uncredited photo, c.1943, Dolores Kelly and other children at St. Georges Industrial School, Limerick. (source: Dolores Kelly)

CHAPTER 3: Unethical Practices; Comparison of the Limerick Lace industry to current standards within the fast fashion industry.

This chapter will analyze how the modern lace industry has changed over the years from an industry that was once considered luxury to how it has become an accessible, affordable fabric and how the status of the fabric has changed in parallel with that. This chapter assesses the various ethical issues associated with workers' rights with producing modern-day lace in a fast fashion industry. The chapter will compare and contrast the similarities and differences with the Irish Limerick lace industry and the unethical practices the workers had to endure. The main source of research I used for this chapter was *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes* written by Dana Thomas.

Lace can either be a cheap or an elaborate fabric. At one point in time lace was the symbol of absurd wealth. In the modern fast fashion industry lace is easily accessible but in the past it was a treasured item that only the elites could afford. Due to this accessibility the quality of lace has also declined. The quality of lace differs greatly from high end to low end. With the growth of the lace industry in the 1920's, lace became a very complex fabric. A century later, "It's still a fabric that still can't decide whether it's an angel or a devil; a luxury fabric we place on the highest pedestal or a saucy fiber used to make bargain basement négligées." (Fogarty, 2016). "As lace became more accessible we were able to get more creative with it," says Dawnn Karen, the founder of Fashion Psychology Institute. "We have more access to it, the have and have-nots can both get lace." Laura Arkin, a designer says that with lace

appearing in both cheap and expensive designs, it’s become more and more acceptable to wear "anytime, anywhere, and during any season." (Fogarty, 2016).

Fast fashion essentially refers to clothing that is excessively mass-produced and is cheap to make and buy, causing it to easily and frequently be disposed of and replaced. (Gordon, Hill, 2015, P. 78). “To be able to sell clothing that cheaply and still reap a sizable profit, production is outsourced to independently owned factories in developing nations, where there is little or no safety and labor oversight and wages are generally poverty level, or lower.” (Thomas, 2019, p. 12). This system and culture of fashion is relatively new. In the past, “every process necessary to the manufacture of clothing - from spinning yarn, to weaving fabric, to sewing elaborate gowns - was done by hand,” and there certainly was no large-scale production. (Gordon, Hill, 2015, P. 79). The Limerick lace industry which was labour intensive is an example of this older manufacturing model. Even among the wealthy, fabrics were often saved and repurposed because buying entirely new textiles or garments was so expensive. Though garments were expensive, it also meant that fashion was highly sustainable during this time and garments held a large amount of value, both monetarily and personally to its owner/wearer. (Costas, 2021, p. 15).

Buying lace is both insanely easy and affordable now but this also means that someone or something else is taking a hit in order to maintain this status quo. In reality, both someone and something suffers under the status quo of fast fashion. In order for lace to be so mass produced and affordable, unsustainable practices are employed. (Costas, 2021, p. 2). The fashion industry as we know it today is built upon

a system of exploitation. (Lavergne, 2015, p. 31). Poor working conditions and pay are a commonplace in today's fast fashion factories. To keep consumer prices low and profits high, labor costs need to be very low. “Fashion employs one out of six people on the globe, making it the most labor-intensive industry out there, more than agriculture, more than defense. Fewer than 2 percent of them earn a living wage.” (Thomas, 2016, p. 21).

Ethical fashion may be understood as “fashion with conscience”. According to Thomas, the term “ethical” is a recent arrival in fashion terminology and is often used in relation to manufacturing, consumption, fashion design and trading. (2008, cited in Haug and Busch, 2015, p. 320). The governing principle of ethical fashion is “fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions while not harming the environment or workers.” (Haug and Busch, 2015, p. 321). Bangladesh is the number two apparel producer in the world, after China/Hong Kong. (Thomas, 2019, p. 112). The garment industry in Bangladesh was established in the 1970’s and “As with every new garment industry locale before it, impoverished young women flocked—or were dispatched by their families—to these places for jobs. With rock-bottom wages and unconscionably long hours, Bangladesh became the cheapest place to produce apparel.” (Thomas, 2019, p. 113).

In Bangladesh, about 3.5 million people work in the garment industry (Costas, 2021, p. 32) and “fashion accounts for 78 per cent of the country’s total exports” (Styles, 2014, p. 39). Due to much of the population living at or below the poverty line, people are willing to work for very low wages and in unsafe work environments.

In Bangladesh, the minimum wage is 2,800 taka, or around $33 per month. (Styles 2014, p. 40). Which is barely enough to support a household's basic needs. This means that while manufacturing costs are extremely cheap for companies, laborers are still left struggling financially. (Costas, 2021, p. 32). The unsafe working conditions these workers face was highlighted on a global scale when Rana Plaza, a building housing several garment factories, collapsed in April 2013 in Bangladesh. Workers in the factories told their managers that they had noticed cracks in the building but were told to go back to work. At one point, the managers were even given an evacuation order which they ignored. Nothing was done. Over 1,100 people were killed and thousands were injured. (Styles, 2014, p. 44). In Bangladesh, "between 2006 and 2012, more than five hundred garment workers died in factory fires." (Thomas, 2019, p. 115). Outside of the tragedies that have occurred in the industry's factories, many of the factories cut corners on a regular basis to reduce production costs. Work areas are frequently found to have poor lighting, which can be damaging to the workers' sight, and toxic chemicals, which can be harmful to their respiratory systems. (Reid, 2018).

The issues within the fast fashion industry impact many different areas in human rights. Regarding employment, Article 23 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that every person has the right to "just and favourable conditions of work," as well as the right to "just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity." The poor conditions and low pay that underpins the fast fashion industry prevents workers from accessing these rights. According to Article 25, the UDHR

depicts the right to a standard of living that is sufficient to maintain an individual's health and well-being, which requires an adequate income, which is another right that is being violated daily within the fast fashion industry. (Reid, 2018).

Characteristics of unethical labor practices that are frequently associated with fast fashion today are consistent with some labor practices that became prevalent during the Limerick lace industry. More often than not, the workers that work within the fast fashion factories cannot simply quit and find work with better circumstances. They must be able to provide for themselves and their families and they lack the education and qualifications for more favorable employment. (Reid, 2018). Similarly like the women and girls who worked making Limerick lace during the eighteenth century. This was an age of harsh working conditions and exploitation with long hours of work, poor pay, severe discipline and dangerous conditions. There was a major imbalance between the power of the employers and the employees. (Potter, 2014, p. 81).

Production specialist Sally Reid travelled to factories around the world throughout the 1990's. Reid says she never saw "people chained to their machines" or any other abusive conditions, but she does remember factories in earlier years being very dirty and inhumanely hot, and payroll records either were kept ineffectively or weren't kept at all." (Cline, 2012, p. 319). "The factories were nasty," Reid recalls. Factories during the Limerick lace industry were similarly not suitable to comfortably work in. Several of Charles Walker's workers, claimed that he had, contrary to the terms of their apprenticeship, made them work by candlelight, and even forced them to pay for the candles out of their earnings. (Potter, 2014, p. 82).

The fast fashion industry also has a connection to gender inequality. Within the industry 85% of the workers are women. Often, these women are single mothers without any other real employment opportunities, due to a lack of access to education and other similar resources. They continue to work in poor working conditions because they want their children to be able to go to school and have better job opportunities in the future. (Reid, 2018). This is likewise for the children that grew up in Ireland's industrial schools. When they left the schools they worked in jobs that just provided them enough money to help support their families that provided them with a somewhat adequate life.

To conclude, the status of lace has changed from being a once a treasured item that was worked on intensively for hours to simply becoming a product of a machine. Lace is now a readily available fabric, which quality ranges from high end to low end. It is available to all classes of people, this is due to the labor practices of the fast fashion industry which are morally and ethically questionable, whilst being extremely exploitative. So while lace is becoming more and more cheap and accessible, it is not without consequences. The management within these fast fashion lace factories could do more for the women and men working for them. They could honour them their rights and pay them a fair living wage, similarly what the Catholic church could have done for the women and girls who worked for them to make Limerick lace. They could have given them a proper education along with the skills of needlework which in return would have given them more opportunities for them to live a good life and not just an adequate life.

FIG.5 A garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Photograph: NurPhoto (source: https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2020/apr/07/fast-fashion-speeding-toward-environmental-disaster-report-warns)

CONCLUSION

The thesis set out to question skills, status and ethical practices. I used the Limerick lace industry, my grandmother's experience in an industrial school and the fast fashion industry to explore this topic in depth from three different viewpoints.

The Limerick lace industry was a new concept and idea of teaching skills for economic and personal progress. The lace industry which was already established in Ireland never had this sort of opportunity before. Women and girls could now help support their families while working from home or in a factory making lace. Working

conditions were very challenging and the pay was very low but it provided the workers with enough money to live adequately. The consumers of Limerick lace lived lives in complete contrast to the poor workers. The royal patronage was invaluable to the industry, as it relied on the monied classes for survival. The Catholic church taught women and girls the skills of Limerick lace and the industry relied on them as a manufacturer. Although these valuable skills were taught, the women and girls received no pay for their work. It was hoped that when they left the convent they could use these skills to become independent and make their own money.

It was evident from my grandmother's account of her time attending an industrial school that she learned many skills. In contrast to learning these skills she lost the opportunity to gain an education. When asked if she thought the skills she learned within the industrial school were useful to her after she left, my grandmother said "They were useful because we learned to look after ourselves, we were independent and used to working very hard". The conditions they lived in were very tough and they had no freedom. The skills taught to them were primarily for the benefit of the school and convent. If they had been given a proper education along with the skills they learned they could have gained better employment opportunities instead of carrying out domestic jobs all their lives.

The concept of having better education to gain better employment opportunities is also evident within the fast fashion industry. Many workers can not leave their fast fashion jobs due to not having an education and no other way of supporting their families. The cheap prices of the fast fashion industry has resulted in poor pay and

working conditions for the industry workers. Fast fashion has also changed the way we value items. Modern lace is now accessible and affordable in comparison to Limerick lace which only the wealthy could afford. Whilst the status of modern lace is a stark contrast to the status of Limerick lace, the two industries share many similarities. They both suffered with low pay and unsuitable working conditions and the rights of the workers were violated in both industries.

To conclude, through my thesis I discovered that the Limerick lace industry, Ireland's industrial schools and the fast fashion industry all have similarities in relation to skills, status and unethical practices. I believe that as expected these case studies all shared a similar underlying issue, a lack of education of the workers and children which resulted in them only being able to secure employment that would give them enough money to survive and live adequately. In all cases, the men, women and children were subjected to unfair and unethical working conditions. The Catholic church could have done more for the children in its care. Similarly to how the factory management could have done more for the Limerick lace industry workers and similarly how the management of the factories in fast fashion could be doing more to protect the rights of their workers. If all of these people had done more, the women, men and children could have had better lives instead of just struggling to survive. By not doing more they maintained the rigid class distinctions within society, with the disadvantaged people kept firmly at the bottom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cléir, S.d. (2010) 'Ireland' in Skov, L. (ed), *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: West Europe,* Oxford: Berg, pp. pas314-320. Bloomsbury Fashion Central [online]. Available at https://www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com/products/berg-fashion-library/encyclopedia/berg-encyclopedia-of-world-dress-and-fashion-west-europe/ireland (Accessed: 29 September 2021).

Cline, E.L. (2012) *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion.* USA: Portfolio.

Costa, G. (2021) *The True Cost of Clothes: Sustainability Issues in the Fashion Industry.* Environmental Studies. Fordham University.

Drudy, S. and Lynch, K. (1993) *Schools And Society In Ireland.* Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd.

Earnshaw, P. (1980) *The Identification of Lace.* UK: Shire Publications LTD.

Earnshaw, P. (1993) *Embroidered Machine Nets Limerick & Worldwide.* Guildford: Gorse Publications.

Fogarty, L. (2016) *The Ever-Shifting Symbolism of Lace.* Racked. Available from: https://www.racked.com/2016/10/10/13017212/lace-symbolism (Accessed at: 21 December 2021).

Gordon, J F. and Hill, C. (2015) *Sustainable Fashion: Past, Present, and Future.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Haug, A. and Busch, J. (2015) 'Towards an Ethical Fashion Framework', *Fashion Theory,* 20 (3), p. 317-339, Taylor & Francis [online]. Available at:

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1362704X.2015.1082295 (Accessed: 14 November 2021).

Kelly, L. (2021) Interview with Dolores Kelly, 22 October.

Lavergne, M. (2015) *Fixing Fashion: Rethinking the Way We Make, Market and Buy Our Clothes.* Gabriola, BC: New Society Publishers.

Levey, S.M. (1983) *Lace: A History.* UK: W.S. Maney & Son LTD.

McCarthy, M C. (2020) *WATCH Pennywell Lace Makers want to keep Limerick lace making alive.* Limerick: I Love Limerick. Available at: https://www.ilovelimerick.ie/pennywell-lace-makers/ (Accessed: 10 December 2021).

Ó'Cléirigh, N. (1988) "Limerick Lace." *The GPA Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, p. 109-115, JSTOR [online]. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20492056?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=limerick+lace&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dlimerick%2Blace%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Ae8f6e00ddd00af6038ce6e275c14902b&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents (Accessed: 10 January 2022).

Ó'Cléirigh, N. and Rowe, V. (1995) *Limerick Lace: A Social History and A Maker's Manual.* Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited.

Ó'Cléirigh, N. (2003) *Hardship & High Living Irish Women's Lives 1808-1923.* London: Portobello Press.

Paulins, V.A. and Hillery, J.L. (2020) 'Ethics in Everyday Life', *Ethics in the Fashion Industry.* New York: Fairchild Books, p. 1-23.

Potter, Dr M. (2014) *Amazing Lace: A History Of The Limerick Lace industry.* Limerick: Limerick City and County Council.

Raftery, M. and O'Sullivan, E. (1999) *Suffer The Little Children.* Dublin: New Island Books.

Reid, L. (2018) *Fast-Fashion: Unethical and Unsustainable.* Alabama: The University of Alabama at Birmingham. Available from: https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2018/04/26/fast-fashion-unethical-and-unsustainable/ (Accessed: 4 January 2022).

Rowe, V. (1999) 'Two Forgotten Talents of Limerick Lace: Michael Hayes and Eileen O'Donohue' , *Irish Arts Review Yearbook,* 15, pp. 61-70, JSTOR [online]. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20493046?seq=3#metadata_info_tab_contents (Accessed: 30 October 2021).

Styles, R. (2014) *Ecologist: Guide to Fashion.* Lewes, UK: Leaping Hare Press.

Thomas, D. (2019) *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes.* USA: Penguin Press.

Zilber, E. (2015) *Crafted: Objects In Flux.* Boston: MFA Publications.

Limerick Lace Making. Ireland: Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Available at: https://nationalinventoryich.chg.gov.ie/limerick-lace-making/ (Accessed: 25 November 2021).

The True Cost (2015) Directed by Andrew Morgan [Documentary]. USA: Life Is My Movie Entertainment.