

# A UTOPIAN STORY OF FASHION

## INSTRUCTIONS

### What it is about:

“A Utopian Story of Fashion” is a dream journey into a possible future of textiles. In this future, you are free to dream and to pursue the hope of a beautiful, shared future.

### What you need:

- At least one narrator (can also be split between 2 or 3 people) sitting on a chair, sofa or armchair
- Several disruptors
- Printed or digital text for the participants
- An audience that remains as stable as possible (also possible in a noisier setting such as an exhibition hall, but difficult)
- Time: approx. 20 minutes for the text, at least 20 minutes for joint reflection
- Be aware that the version was written for an event in Germany in early 2026 and contains some context-specific references. You may of course adapt those for your own use.

### How it works:

The story consists of three chapters, set in different regions of the world, yet interconnected.

At least one person, the narrator, reads most of the story aloud. This continuous narrative guides the audience through the dream journey. However, the narrative is repeatedly interrupted by so-called “disruptors”. They appear to come from the audience. Their remarks confront the utopian story with the harsh reality of the present.

The disruptors’ lines are indented and marked in italics in the script. It is **important to note** that the narrators secretly brief the disruptors **before the performance begins** and inform them of their role, without the rest of the audience finding out. The narrators ignore the interruptions.

It is worth pausing for a moment of silence after the story has ended.

### Open questions for reflection:

- How do you feel?
- What thoughts are going through your head?
- What have you taken away from the story?
- What new ideas do you have that weren’t mentioned in the story at all?

We hope you enjoy “A Utopian Story of Fashion”!

We would very much appreciate hearing your thoughts and feedback!

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# A UTOPIAN STORY OF FASHION

By the SÜDWIND Institute, in cooperation with participants of the Just Fashion Workshop Hamburg 2025 and participants of the Clean Clothes Campaign Action Meeting in Würzburg 2026

## “THE SEAM OF THE FUTURE” – MAKING FASHION IN BANGLADESH

It was a clear morning in the year 2040 when Lina opened the door to her atelier. The air smelled like fresh linen and the light scent of flowers growing in the vertical gardens on the facades – an adaptation to the hotter summers that had become the norm since the 2020s. Where grey factories once dominated the Dhaka skyline, light-flooded workshops for all kinds of everyday necessities and the arts now rose, surrounded by green oases that not only provided shade but also cooled the air. Lina took a deep breath. She had a feeling that today she and her team would finish the new collection – a collection that was not only timelessly beautiful but also just.

The atelier was a place of community. On the walls hung fabric samples created in collaboration with farmers from Uzbekistan, designers from Germany and artisans from Peru. Each pattern told a story: of living wages that enabled a good life, of employment contracts that offered security and perspective, of breaks that were observed because the "Social Clock" on the wall dictated it – a device that measured not just time, but also the dignity of labour.

### *[Voice from the audience]*

*“This story must be a joke. Where is this supposed to come from? Today, wages in the textile industry are not ensuring subsistence. Millions of people sew our clothes – and cannot live off it. (\*ironically\*) Okay, but at least there is now the Living Wage Action Day, which draws global attention to this problem.”*

Since the binding advertising bans for Fast Fashion and Ultra Fast Fashion in 2028 and the Global Agreement for Good Fashion in 2030, the industry had fundamentally changed. Anyone wishing to participate in the fashion market today had to prove that they complied with human rights due diligence obligations and submitted to strong state controls. Wages were no longer dictated by market pressure but were negotiated in democratic workshops – between workers, designers and customers. Every voice

counted. Just recently, a consumer council had requested standardised knee reinforcements for toddlers' clothing and side-buttoning outerwear for adults with disabilities.

***[Voice from the audience]***

*“A lot needs to be done before such formats can exist! What we see today instead: trade unionists like Iqbal Abro in Pakistan are being arrested and threatened – just because they are fighting for fair wages. We also work on a case from Turkey right now where a union was not recognised for a long time. And the factory belongs to a medium-sized company from Germany! That is why we apply pressure for freedom of association in international campaigns. The Clean Clothes Campaign provides the necessary networking.”*

***[Voice from the audience]***

*“Exactly. And besides: regulation, global cooperation, common rules? Never! All multilateral and national successes – supply chain laws, international agreements and cooperations – are currently being rolled back and it seems as if we have to start from scratch explaining the meaning of human and labour rights. Didn't the current Chancellor of Germany even want to abolish the right to part time work recently? Of course, we won't give up. Perhaps there is still a little bit of common sense left in the minds of people in Europe?”*

Lina entered the room full of energy. In the middle of the atelier stood a large table covered with fabrics that glowed in soft colours. The cotton came from cooperatives working according to the principles of regenerative agriculture. This was not a luxury but a necessity since global warming of 1.5 degrees had changed growing conditions. It had been a great effort to help the soil and its tiny inhabitants regain fertility and health. The dyes were produced without toxic chemicals that had once poisoned rivers. The ingredients of the diverse colours were regularly published as a common good. For several years, the composition had been so well thought out that it did not restrict the possibility of recycling fibres.

***[Voice from the audience]***

*“Always this daydream about circular economy. Wake up. In India's textile recycling centres, most people work without a contract, without social security, without protection from toxic chemicals; the same in Pakistan. At least: organisations like Arisa in the Netherlands are fighting alongside colleagues in India and*

*Pakistan for better working conditions in recycling and are raising awareness.”*

Lina thought about the extensive developments of recent years: every garment carried a transparency code that not only traced the product's journey but also showed how the price was distributed: 60% of the price (minus expenses) remained with the people who made it and 40% flowed into non-profit transformative projects – including initiatives to secure clean water, training on good production planning, or research for even better materials.

Lina reached for a piece of fabric that felt soft and warm. “In the past,” she said to the new apprentices, “we were told that justice would make fashion expensive. But today we know: it was injustice that made us all poor.” Today's customers invested not just in clothing, but in a future where everyone benefited. Prices were perceived as fair because the value chain was transparent and just. “It's like smoking,” Lina explained. “For so long, everyone did the opposite of what felt right. Against them knowing better. Those who experienced the other times shake their heads today, feel ashamed and wonder what they were thinking with this senseless waste and destructive behaviour. They actually knew better.”

***[Voice from the audience]***

*“How is that supposed to happen? Today, Ultra Fast Fashion is becoming more and more popular – faster, cheaper, always available. Greenwashing and social washing are used to deceive consumers. Okay: there are young people with a different awareness, but will that be enough?”*

Outside on the streets, life pulsed. The city was clean, the air clear – a success of the strict environmental regulations that had applied worldwide since the 2030s. Where textile factory wastewater once poisoned the rivers, fish were swimming again today. The fashion industry had learned that environmental compatibility was not a luxury but a matter of survival. Every garment was designed to last a long time, to be repairable and to become something new at the end of its life. In the Second Chance Workshops found in Dhaka and many other cities, items like bags and wallets were made from old jeans and new fabrics from worn-out jumpers.

In the evening, Lina met some friends on the riverbank. Children splashed in the water while adults exchanged ideas about the latest collections. “You know,” Lina said, pointing to a sign on the bank, “people used to ask:

Who made my T-shirt? Today they ask: How can I contribute to making the world of fashion even better?"

The change had not come overnight. It was the result of decades of struggle by people who refused to accept the exploitation of humans and nature any longer. Not least, the Clean Clothes Campaign had built bridges – between continents, between producers and consumers, between the present and the future they dreamed of.

*[Voice from the audience]*

*"I am sorry, but our significance is being completely exaggerated now!"*

As Lina went home that evening, she felt a deep sense of satisfaction. Today's fashion was not only beautiful but also good. It was proof that another world was possible – a world where economic justice, social cohesion and environmental sustainability were the guiding principles. Other industries had followed the fashion industry's lead – electronics, toys, mobility, food and many others. And the best part? This world was not a dream. It was the result of choices.

In her mind, Lina followed a package she had sent six weeks ago with samples of new fabric discoveries. It should be arriving in Germany soon.

### **"THE SEAM OF THE FUTURE" – A LIFE IN WÜRZBURG**

In Würzburg, where the Main River meandered gently through the city and the vineyards glowed golden in the evening light, Tom lived with his family in one of the old, lovingly restored half-timbered houses in the city centre. Tom was a designer. His partner, Roy, worked as an educationalist in one of the new textile workshops for children and together they were raising their three children.

That morning, Tom got up early. The fabrics he was going to look at today came directly from his sister-in-law Lina's atelier in Dhaka. As he impatiently opened the package, the familiar scent of organic cotton and natural dyes met his nose. Each piece was fitted with a small chip that stated who had touched, spun and dyed it. Tom smiled. During his training, he had often wondered under what conditions his materials had been created. Today he knew the answer – and it gave him a good feeling.

The house was filled with the laughter of children. Mira was already sitting at the kitchen table, designing patterns for a school project on her tablet – all schools in Würzburg had introduced textile design as a compulsory subject. Finn was tinkering with a miniature loom. “Dad, look!” he shouted. “I’m making thread for Juna!” Tom picked up the little girl, who excitedly grabbed at the colourful threads. “No,” he laughed, “you’re not supposed to eat that.” He handed little Juna a piece of apple. “Perhaps you’ll feel more comfortable in gardening class,” he thought with the love of a father imagining the future of a one-year-old.

Roy had also got up by now. “Lina has written,” he said. “She says if we really come to visit in the summer, the new collection might already be ready for presentation. She’s asking if we are still planning to come.” Tom nodded. Travel and logistics had been revolutionised: annual quotas were distributed for flights and planes were partly powered by synthetic kerosene. Cargo ships ran on sustainable hydrogen and those who could travelled by train.

***[Voice from the audience]***

*“If only: today the fashion industry is responsible for 10% of global CO2 emissions. Wealthy people fly private jets for pleasure. I wouldn’t rely on synthetic kerosene and flight quotas! Hydrogen – as if that were a sustainable alternative! And besides: today, transport and logistics are also a major human rights issue. Delivery drivers struggle with low wages and high workloads. At least we in German civil society are beginning to work on this. The strike in Gräfenhausen a while ago really brought attention to it.”*

***[Voice from the audience]***

*“Speaking of which: do you remember the alternative harbour tour in Hamburg during the 2024 action meeting and the visit to the Seamen’s Mission, when we learned about the horrific labour rights violations at sea?”*

After breakfast, the family made their way to town. Würzburg had changed. Where once large department stores stood, there were now neighbourhood ateliers for all sorts of things. Tom took the children to one of these ateliers, where a children’s birthday party with a textile craft workshop was taking place today.

***[Voice from the audience]***

*“Again, this naivety regarding the circular economy, repairing, etc., etc. Yet for decades, a large part of our old clothes has not ended up in recycling plants but on mountains of rubbish. A recent investigation showed that old clothing in Pakistan was burned during the production of bricks. The repair bonus was a good idea, but it’s already being scrapped in some places.”*

While Mira and Finn curiously examined the fabric scraps, Tom chatted with colleagues. They spoke about smart fabrics that were not only beautiful but also functional – such as shirts that collected energy through photovoltaic threads. “The best part?” said one of the designers. “Everything is reusable. No waste, no squandering.” Tom had to admit he was still sceptical, but he didn’t want to judge too soon. “Bro,” Mira called across the room to another child, “check this out.” “Slay,” the other child said appreciatively. Tom and Roy looked at each other confused, then laughed. They hadn’t heard these phrases in a long time. Some trends really do keep coming back... A brief chuckle, then Tom had to dash after Juna, who was already walking towards the street again.

In the afternoon, the family strolled along the Main River. A small part of the riverside promenade had become a hub for the scene. People sat on benches everywhere, discussing, sewing, knitting, or exchanging the latest ideas. Today, Roy and Tom stopped, fascinated, by a group of joking seniors: a micro-power-plant sewing complex was being presented. A small current in the Main River was apparently enough to power a sewing machine on the bank. “But woe betide if it rains,” Roy whispered amusedly. At one stall, fashion stories were being told. Finn pressed on: “Dad, look! That’s Aunt Lina!” Lina’s atelier could be seen on a mobile screen, the colleagues looked very focused as they worked on a new collection.

In the evening, when the children were in bed, Tom and Roy sat on the terrace. “You know what I find wonderful?” Roy asked softly, tired from the day. Tom thought for a moment without answering. “That the children are growing up naturally knowing that the things they wear are not only beautiful but also good. And that they have a future at all.” Tom nodded. “And that they understand: change is possible.”

## “THE SEAM OF THE FUTURE” – AMANI AND THE LEGACY OF CHANGE

In Kampala, Amani sat on her balcony and looked over the rooftops of the city. The sun was low, bathing the city in a warm orange. Amani was a pensioner, but her hands were still supple and her gaze clear. Formerly, she had fought for the Fashion Innovation Centre Uganda – a project that was today considered a model for the whole world.

It had been a long way. As a young woman, Amani had worked in cotton fields, had seen how the soil suffered from the use of pesticides and how workers toiled for starvation wages. Even the growing cultivation of organic cotton could not take away her feeling of powerlessness, even working at a second-hand market did not seem right to her. But she had refused to accept this as her fate. With other women from her village, she founded an initiative that fought for more of a say. Their demand was simple: the fashion industry should not just take but also give.

### *[Voice from the audience]*

*“A beautiful story. But today, women in textile production are particularly heavily discriminated against. About 80% of workers in the industry are women – often underpaid and threatened by violence. Even in trade unions, women are underrepresented. International agreements like CEDAW and various ILO conventions provide a framework for change, but someone would have to take them seriously.”*

For Amani and her colleagues, the breakthrough came in 2027. A German transformation fund, fed by contributions from major fashion and sports manufacturers who finally had to take responsibility, approved funds for a pilot project. The introduction of extended producer responsibility provided an opportunity for this. Amani and her team built the Fashion Innovation Centre Uganda – a place where sustainable cultivation methods were researched, humane working conditions were implemented and new environmentally friendly materials were developed. Over time, water was also significantly saved; new varieties based on ancient seeds were crucial for this. In 2028, they had said “no” for the first time to outrageous supply contracts with a company from abroad. It had seemed to her as if they wanted to harvest their knowledge and print the cooperation in shiny brochures but not actually work together.

Today, more than ten years later, the centre was a thriving network. German universities were also allowed to benefit from the findings, and regular visits ensured an exchange. Most recently, there had been a lively exchange on the topic of needs-based, free healthcare. There was always something to improve. Had Amani still been in professional life, she would have wanted to talk a lot about the limits of new technologies. But undoubtedly, a great deal had already been achieved.

The company that had tried to dictate brazen business relations back then now belonged to the group of so-called "mammoth companies". Young people knew they had existed, but they were virtually extinct. Here and there, proof of their former presence still appeared in old wardrobes, like a fossil in a quarry. What was that company called again? Promark, or something like that?

Amani laughed so broadly that her cheeks turned into guava-shaped mounds as she thought of the many young people who today were learning on the fields and in the workshops how to produce sustainable materials – with pride and knowledge. The walls of her apartment were decorated with photos and fabrics that told the story of the project.

That afternoon, Amani was expecting visitors. A group of young designers and garment workers from Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda had come to learn more about the centre's past. The next day, they wanted to talk about fabric scraps they wanted to buy in Uganda – not as cheap leftover goods, but as partners willing to pay fair prices for valuable materials. Amani had agreed to tell them the story of the centre. "We can understand the material differently if we know the story," the young guests had said. And Amani wanted to pass this story on so that the memory of the achievements helped the young people to see and appreciate the quality of work, life and material that had been reached. She hoped she could also provide courage for new paths and changes.

Amani served local coffee and listened as the young people spoke of their plans. Then she began to tell her own story.

"In the past," Amani said slowly, "we were told that we should be glad to have work at all. We were showered with the clothes of other wealthy people. Today it is clear to everyone: we have the right to be proud of what we do." She pointed to a cloth she had spread out in front of her. "Every thread here tells a story. A story of justice, of respect, of a future that we don't just dream of, but that we live."



**SÜDWIND** has been committed to economic, social and ecological justice worldwide, for more than 30 years. We combine our research with development education and public relations work, and we carry demands into campaigns, society, companies, and politics. SÜDWIND is a non-profit and independent organization financed by grants, income from commissioned activities as well as membership fees and donations.

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