


Tangled Threads: the hidden side of the Fashion Industry

The True Price of Our Jeans



The Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO)

The Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO) is an inter-union international solidarity network that brings together over 60 unions from across Quebec. It was created in 1975 following a major international labour solidarity conference.

Mission and actions

CISO's mission is to develop international solidarity by strengthening ties between workers here and abroad as they fight for their rights, better working conditions and the institution of a more just and democratic society.

Its activities seek to promote and advocate for workers' rights, the development and defense of social safety nets, the promotion of social dialogue and decent wages.

CISO strives to develop international solidarity within the labour and grassroots movements in Quebec, helps disseminate alternative information on international issues, and supports meaningful cooperation and solidarity projects among Quebec-based partners and abroad.

"Tangled Threads: the hidden side of the Fashion Industry" Comic

This comic seeks to spur conversations about the production model and the issue of overconsumption at the heart of the garment and fashion industries under a globalized economic system. It explores past and present struggles in Quebec, Mexico and Bangladesh, as the industry moved to cheaper locations, pitting workers against one another.

While fast-fashion transnational corporations generate obscene profits and destroy the environment, textile workers are on the brink of destitution, with working conditions and wages that are far from dignified. They courageously continue to organize and to fight for their rights, despite the risks and fear they face.

How can we amplify workers' voices and force these enormous corporations to be held accountable for their injustices, violations of human rights and environmental destruction? Is it possible for us to collectively reduce the human and environmental impacts of the fashion industry?

Intended Readership

This comic book is intended for adolescent and adult readers. It may be helpful for anyone who is curious about economic globalization and its impacts, working conditions in global supply chains, and the human and environmental impacts of prioritizing profit and so-called "infinite" growth.

130 billion articles of clothing are purchased each year.
Clothing production has doubled between 2000 and 2014.



The industry uses every trick in the book to convince us to update our wardrobes.
Yet we have already produced enough clothing to dress all of humanity until 2100.

And the industry has a hidden dark side...



95% of clothing sold in Canada is imported



But this was not always the case...

The Story of GISÈLE in VALLEYFIELD

In 1946, I was a worker at Dominion Textile.
There were over 3,000 workers there.



Mainly women, but quite a few children, too.

Our working conditions were horrible.
We weren't earning enough to live on.



The company was making plenty of
money...off our backs!

We decided to organize a union to demand

a 15-cent hourly
wage increase



a 40-hour
workweek

overtime pay



the right for married
women to keep their
job and to access to
maternity leave



The bosses wouldn't hear it. So we ended up having to go on strike.
The government ruled that our strike was illegal but we were not going to stop.

Women were the ones leading the strike.
If we hadn't been so organized and creative,
we wouldn't have won in the end.



We were some of the first unionized
women in Quebec!

But since we managed to get better working
conditions, Dominion Textile decided to close its
factories and move them outside of Quebec.



Now they call it "offshoring" when companies move
production abroad. They call it "globalization",
and they try to tell us it's good for the economy.
But...

THE GLOBALIZED LABOUR MARKET

Neoliberal globalization has caused countries' economies to become more connected and interdependent, allowing merchandise, capital, services, information, and people to more freely move and be traded around the world. National and international laws and policies, commercial agreements, free-trade agreements and privatization have turned the entire globe into one enormous market, a space in which companies can extract resources, produce and sell with fewer and fewer constraints.



Limitless economic growth is seen as the overarching goal, even at the expense of the environment or the rights of people.

Key stakeholders—and beneficiaries—of globalization, particularly the transnational corporations, can shift their operations and capital around the world however they wish.

Much like Dominion Textile, they take advantage of situations of inequity around the world to outsource their production to places with fewer protections for workers, with lower wages or less-restrictive environmental regulations—in short, wherever they can maximize their profits.



The Story of Luisa in MEXICO

My name is Luisa.
I work in a factory
making jeans in
Tehuacán, in the state
of Puebla.

I left my village when I
was 16 years old to come
work here and help my
family.



I trim loose threads from
stitched jeans. All day long.
I work between 10 and 12 hours
a day, 6 days a week.



We're under a lot of pressure depending on the
number of orders from major brands.

There are a lot of young women and children in the workshop. The managers are abusive—they threaten us if we don't work fast enough. Sometimes they hit us. One of them even sexually harassed me. He said that if I accepted his sexual requests, I would have better wages and working conditions...



When I got pregnant
with my son, the manager
started asking me to work
longer hours standing up and
told me I wasn't allowed to go
to the bathroom... trying to get
me to quit so I wouldn't have
access to maternity benefits.
I had no choice so
I didn't give in.

With my income of less than \$10 a day,
we were barely scraping by.
With some other women, we tried to start a
union to advocate for better conditions,
but some of our comrades were too afraid
that the factory would close or move.



VAQUEROS NAVARRA

One of the Vaqueros Navarra factories, in Tehuacán (in the state of Puebla) manufactured jeans for several major international brands.



As is often the case in Mexico, it had a corrupted company union tied to the employer's interests.



Working conditions there were in violation of several laws:

extremely long shifts

child labour

wage irregularities

violence and sexual harassment

firing or a lack of protection in cases of workplace accidents, etc.

none of which prompted a response from the corrupt union.

Workers began to organize to join an independent union that would actually come to their defense, the Authentic Labour Front (Frente Auténtico del Trabajo - FAT).



In the summer of 2007, the company fired 45 organizers, threatening the others with reprisals if they continued to fight.

In November 2007, despite these threats, the majority still voted to leave the company union to join the FAT.

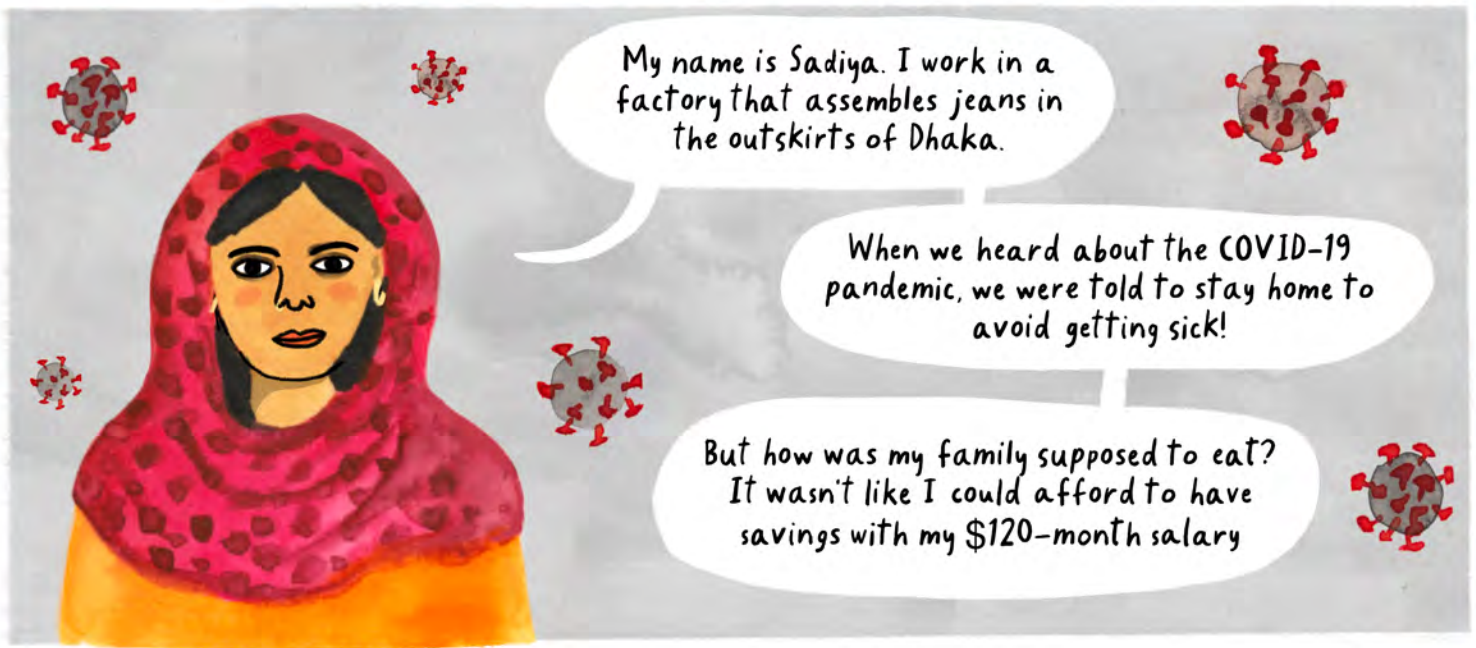


Rather than accept an independent union, the owners preferred to close the factory in early 2008 and shift its production elsewhere.



Hundreds of people lost their jobs and the leading union organizers were blacklisted.

The Story of SADIYA in BANGLADESH



One day, the boss told us that some of his clients from the big brands had delayed, suspended, or cancelled their orders, even the ones we had already produced.



RANA PLAZA

In 2013, 1,135 Bangladeshi textile workers died when the Rana Plaza building collapsed.



Following an international outcry and grassroots pressure and campaigns from multiple countries, the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety was signed.



This Accord required major brands to share information on safety conditions in their suppliers' factories and to carry out risk remediation, or face the penalty of sanctions in their home countries.



Bangladeshi unions,
international union federations
human rights organizations
the International
Labour Organization
the government
222 international brands

The Accord created workplace health and safety committees, and safe spaces in which workers could advocate for their rights in Bangladesh.



Thanks to international solidarity, the Accord led to approximately 40,000 factory inspections and the resolution of 1,475 building safety complaints.

Potential journey of a pair of JEANS

1 COTTON GROWING



India, China,
Uzbekistan,
United States,
Pakistan,
Brazil, Mali...

2 SPINNING AND WEAVING



India, China,
United States,
Russia,
Japan...

3 DYEING



China, Mexico,
United States...

4 MANUFACTURING



Ukraine, Ethiopia,
Sri Lanka, Vietnam,
China, Indonesia,
Philippines,
Bangladesh,
Mexico...

5 DISTRIBUTION

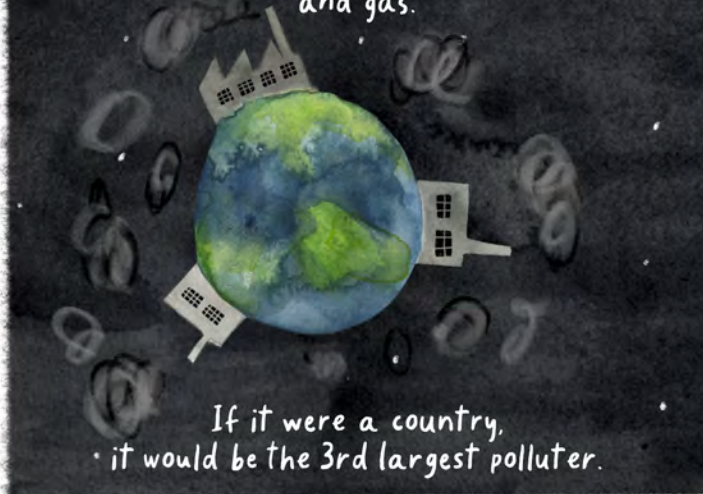
Worldwide, but the largest
markets are in Europe and
North America



A pair of jeans may have circled the globe 1.5 times before reaching the store!

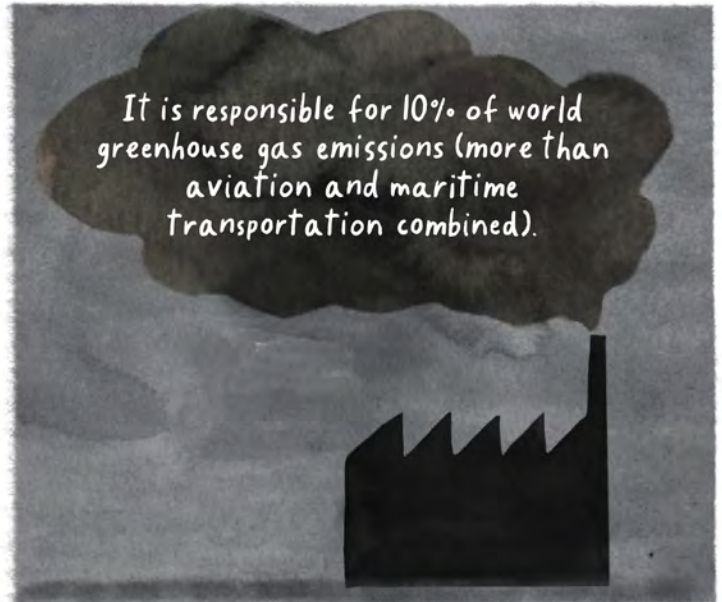
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The textile industry is the second biggest polluter in the world, outstripped only by oil and gas.



If it were a country, it would be the 3rd largest polluter.

It is responsible for 10% of world greenhouse gas emissions (more than aviation and maritime transportation combined).

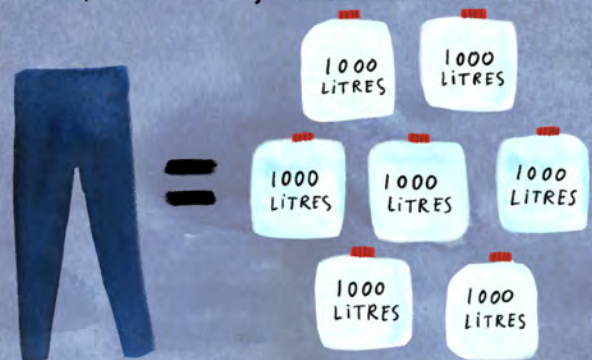


It is the third-largest consumer of water after wheat and rice cultivation.



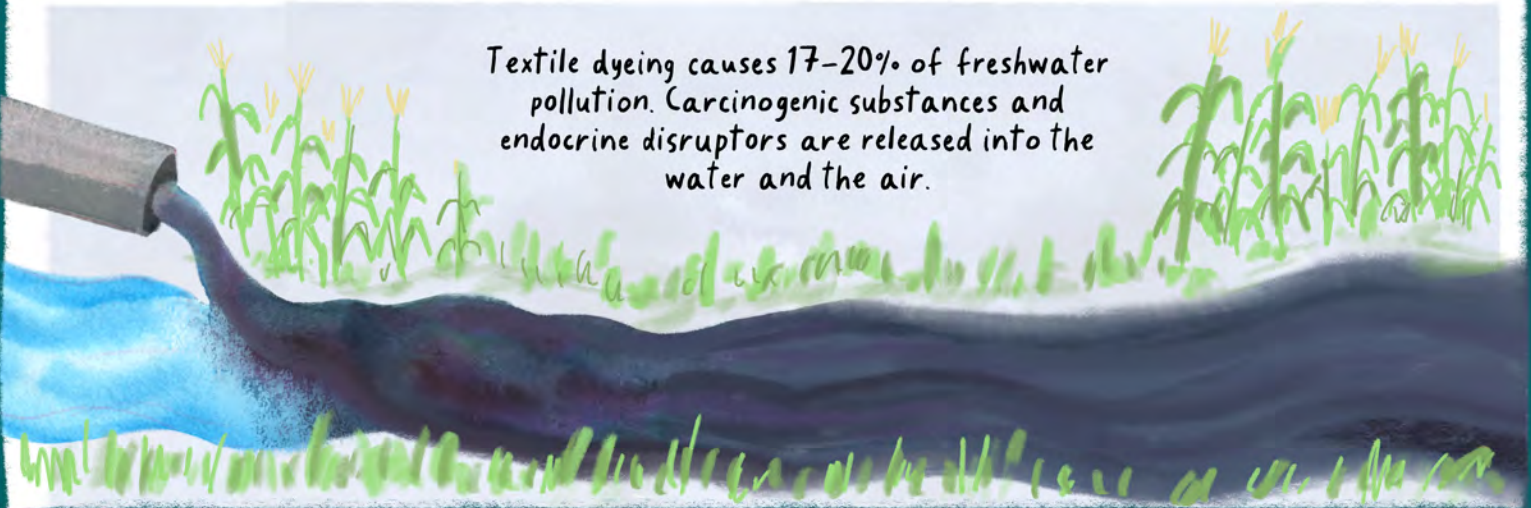
Textile production uses 4% of the potable water available in the world.

To make one pair of jeans requires approximately 7,000L of water.



(This amount of water is enough to keep a human alive for 7 years)

Textile dyeing causes 17–20% of freshwater pollution. Carcinogenic substances and endocrine disruptors are released into the water and the air.





Synthetic fabrics like acrylic, nylon and polyester are made from fossil fuels and oil in particular.

Our washing machines release 50,000 tons of microplastics into the oceans each year, the equivalent of approximately 50 billion plastic water bottles.



Clothes-washing is responsible for one-third of the microplastic contamination in our oceans.

Cotton is considered one of the dirtiest crops in the world. Not only does it require an extremely large amount of water, it also uses the most pesticides of any crop. These toxic products contaminate local waterways and endanger workers' health.



Some cotton producers use forced or child labour.

One consequence of intensive cotton agriculture is the loss of biodiversity and soil degradation.

Across the world, the equivalent of one dumpster full of clothing is thrown away every second. 80% of clothing that is thrown away ends up in landfills, where it takes over two hundred years to break down, or is incinerated, releasing harmful pollutants in the air.



Many countries, including Canada, export their textiles abroad, where they end up in "clothing graveyards" in various African, Asian and Latin American countries.

At least 60 million people around the world, with a large majority of women, work directly in the fashion and textile industries.



In addition to being a disaster for the planet,

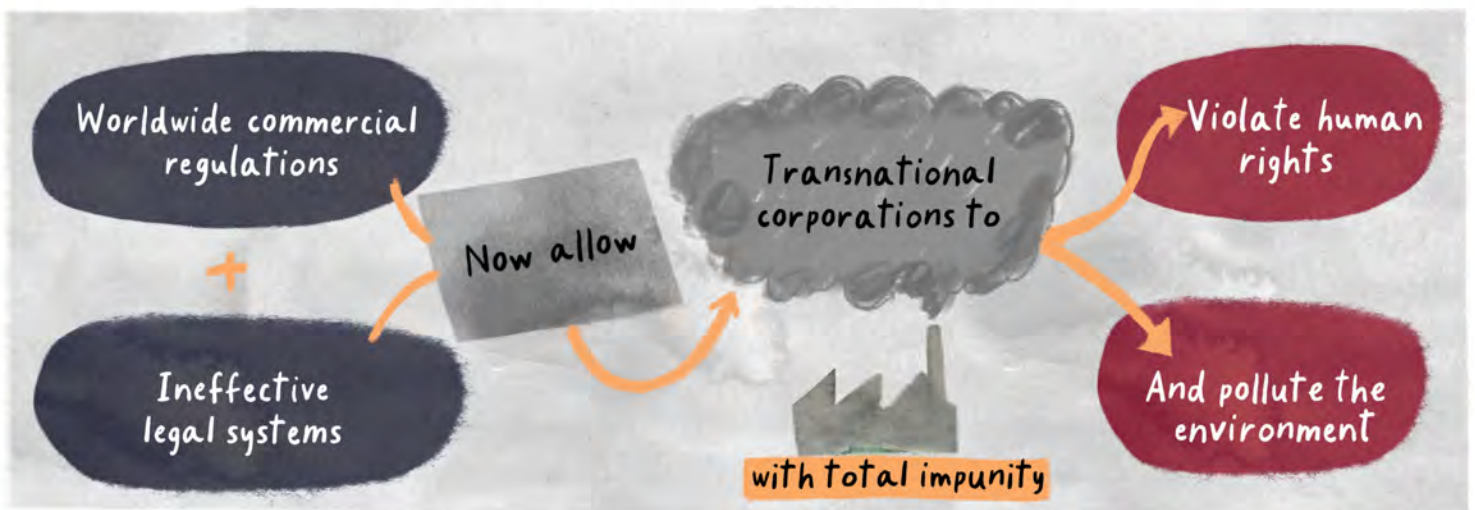


this industry has strong ties to modern slavery:

the poorest people on the planet, most of whom are racialized, and their cheap labour are exploited to make fashionable clothing while brands make obscene profits.



show how workers' rights are connected and interdependent in the globalized economy, which exploits people and nature.



In the face of this reality, we urgently need to reconsider how we consume clothing, insist on transparency about the places and conditions in which our clothes are manufactured and fight for transnational corporations to face up to their actions and ensure justice for all!



CALL TO ACTION

1. Insisting on transparency and vigilance, equitable distribution of profits, and respect for human rights and the environment throughout global supply chains:

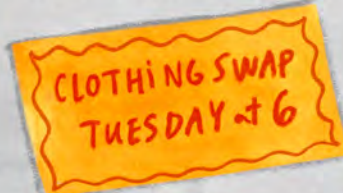


Putting pressure on clothing companies to respect workers' rights.



Supporting Canada's adoption of a law that would make transnational corporations liable for human rights violations or environmental destruction.

2. Consume less clothing, second-guess impulse buys, buy second-hand, participate in clothing swaps, buy local...



3. Support international solidarity and collective organization movements, because all of our journeys are connected. Violating the rights of one worker makes it easier to violate everyone's rights, because we are all interconnected in a globalized economy.





Comic artist : Chloloula

Chloloula is the nom de plume of artist Chloé Germain-Thérien, who generously shared her art with us to amplify the voices of textile workers. Her journey as an artist has involved both documentary cinema and graphic arts. With a Master's in visual and media arts from UQAM, her work is now focused on illustration (children's and editorial) and comics.

Chloé is passionate about using images to tell a story, as a powerful lens through which to explain and understand the world. She cares deeply about the environment and social justice. Originally from Montréal, she now lives in the countryside, where she is raising her young daughter and learning the names of plants.

Acknowledgements

Members of the CISO Education Committee :

Dominique Bernier, mouvement ACTES CSQ
Karine Crépeau, FIQ
Chantal Ide, CCMM-CSN
Myriam Zaidi, FTQ

CISO Team :

Alexandra Fortin
Leïla Mérabet
Amélie Nguyen
Marie Paradis



This project was made possible by the Ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie du Québec.



Translation of this document to English was made possible by :



STEELWORKERS
HUMANITY FUND
FONDS HUMANITAIRE
DES MÉTALLOS





To learn more :

Visit our website : www.ciso.qc.ca
Sign up for our online newsletter.
Visit our Facebook page : [@cqcam.ciso](https://www.facebook.com/cqcam.ciso)