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The Muddy Waters of the Troubled Middle

You stand in faded green rain boots with a mustard yellow brim in the ankle deep water of the creek bed. Looking down you see the murky blue water swirled with mud and dirt kicked up by your feet. The water not quite clear and not quite opaque is the troubled middle. Gazing into the water it is unclear what you are seeing, you peer closer watching the brown pigments flow seamlessly into the clear blue hues of the water, both sides mixing to create something new and unique. The troubled middle is the murky water of life. You can see the browns of the mud and the blues of the water, but it is not like seeing a pit of mud or a clear mountain spring, though some do see these, you see them together in the shallows of the creek. There are several topics where people can view the murky water, animal rights, fast fashion, and the cotton industry are examples of such topics. Those who see the mud and water intermingling are given a new perspective, one unique from everyone else’s.

Delving into the clear blue of the water on these topics is only one side of the picture. Starting with fast fashion, which is the act of producing bulk amounts of clothes for very low prices in third world countries to the be sold in developed countries, mainly the United States. A bit of background on the fast fashion industry, this is an industry where the buildings the workers are forced into are not up to code, they are paid barely any money, a “living wage”, and cannot unionize. A prime example of this is the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh in 2012. In the morning the workers had pointed out some infrastructure problems with the building and they were evacuated from the site. However they were then forced to return to the building where it collapsed and killed hundreds of people. This kind of blatant disregard for human life is common in these third world countries. Events like this are reasons people solely see the blue waters when it comes to fast fashion. They believe that these factories should not be open and that all clothing bought, sold, and made should be done by fair trade companies such as People Tree. Going hand in hand with the fast fashion industry is the cotton industry. The cotton industry is a very dangerous industry to be in, due to the pesticides used, and in third world countries there is an extremely high suicide rate among cotton farmers because of all the debt they are put into attempting to grow the cotton. In fact 250,000 cotton farmers in India have committed suicide because of the debt they were put into (The True Cost, Morgan). The blue tones of this issue are that all cotton should be grown without genetic modifications and pesticides so that it is safe for all who grow it and that the cotton industry should not charge the farmers to grow the seed they are forced to grow. A major issue where some people only see blue is animal rights. Those who see different shades of cerulean, aqua, and sky blue believe that no animals should be kept as pets, eaten or tested on, this includes medically.

To counteract these blues there are the browns for each issue. In dealing with animal rights they see animals as things to be kept, eaten, and tested on. They believe that it is right for animals to be raised for the slaughter and to never see daylight, some abuse animals, some do not but do not do anything to stop the abusers, and they have no qualms in testing on animals for the gains of humans. Fast fashion factories provide jobs for people who would otherwise have no job or have to work as a prostitute. This is a view of someone who sees only the tawny tints of the issue. They also have the view that as they are paid a living wage that they should be fine off and have no need to be paid more or to have a union. With the cotton industry however the auburn shades that people see are that we need cotton to produce clothing to keep us warm and safe, and that anyone who does not wish to grown cotton should not grow it.

Those who see the murky water have combined perspectives of both sides. they see both positive and negative things from both points of view. There are those like Hal Herzog who says “I eat meat--but not as much as I used to, and not veal. I oppose testing the toxicity of over cleaner and eye shadow on animals, but I would sacrifice a lot of mice to find a cure for cancer”(Herzog,Emerging, 247). He sees both sides of the animal right issue, he still eats meat and does not believe in animal testing for vain reasons. However he would sacrifice mice to save humankind and he does not eat veal, as most veal slaughter houses are an offshoot of the dairy industry which has some severe issues itself, such as poor living conditions for its animals and separating the mother from its calfs.

I have my own murky view on all of these issues, yes i live in the troubled middle, the world of cyan and chamoisee. When it comes to animal rights I do not think testing makeup and household cleaners on animals is ok and I am avidly agaisnt dog fights, cock fights, or any other type of animal fight or abuse. Having said this I am in support of medical testing on animals in hopes to find cures to deadly diseases. my grandfather died of liver and kidney failure as a result of the chemotherapy he was receiving for the leukemia he had. If testing on mice or other animals will discover a cure for what my grandfather had and prevent others from having to go through what we did the I feel that testing is 100 percent acceptable. I am a pescaterian, this means the only meat I consume is seafood. This is not because I believe that people should not eat animals, it is a simple health choice I made. It can take up to four days for red meat to completely digest inside the human body, which is extremely unhealthy in excess. I wholeheartedly believe that people should keep animals as pets as they have been proven to provide emotional support for people with anxiety and depression. When it comes to the fast fashion industry my view holds a bit more sepia as opposed to iris tones. The conditions these people work in are atrocious and can be seen as cruel and not humane, however they are working and making money. If they do not have these jobs they will be earning no money at all. In the movie The True Cost we learned of Shima and heard her story. She left her village at age twelve to enter into the workforce. She has been working in textile factories for a very long time. She has a daughter who she had to send to live with her parents because she cannot give her the attention and care that she needs while she is working in the factory. However because Shima is earning the money she does her daughter is able to attend school and have private tutors to help her to succeed in life. If Shima did not have this job she would be forced to earn money by selling her body or forcing her young daughter to work and not get an education. Shima also had an incident while her union. She was one of the heads of the union and when they presented their conditions for work to the company they were locked in a room and beaten senseless (Morgan). So I feel that the jobs they have are beneficial however I also think they should be allowed unions and to make demands for worker safety. As for the cotton industry I think it needs to be much more regulated and made safer by the use of less pesticides. There is a village in India where because of the pesticides used more than 3/4ths of the children are being born with mental and physical handicaps and people developing cancer on a regular basis (Morgan). Cotton needs to be more heavily regulated but should not be destroyed entirely as an industry as it is useful to the common man.

Some may ask why is it that if fast fashion is such a bad thing why are people not buying from only fair trade companies. Many college students, like myself, do not have much money and have accumulated a decent amount of debt even as freshman. This means we search for cheap clothes we can buy in bulk to save money. “Tuition and fees at public universities rose, as did student-loan debt”(Merrik 3). We know that these companies use awful means to create and deliver their goods to us but as long as they are readily available to us at a low price we will continue to buy it from them rather than fair trade companies.

Do you see the creek bed now? The green boots slowly wading in deeper and deeper, the dark coffee colored mud from the bottom cascading upwards into the crisp azure water, mixing and making a picture never before seen. Some may have seen things similar, but none like what you are seeing. the troubled middle allows you to gaze upon this dance of colors and to not have to pick seeing only one or the other. The murky water may become clearer at some points and darker at others, however it is still murky water and it’s still the troubled middle.

Works Cited

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