Walking on the high street,
Wearing jeans and shoes from Debenham
Knitwear and jacket from Marks & Spencer
Scarf and gloves from River Island:
All are “Made in Bangladesh”.
Browsing from shop to shop
To buy something for Christmas.
Inner soul asked me,
“You have already enough clothes. Why do you need more?
Have you ever thought
Workers who made these clothes
Received their fair wages?
Do they have enough food to eat
During the Covid-19 pandemic?
Do they have warm clothes to wear
During the cold winter?
Can you guarantee that these
Workers were not bullied, abused,
Humiliated, sexually harassed or
Beaten while making these clothes?”
Putting the clothes back in the rails,
Guilty me walked away.

Looking at the display of chocolates –
Ferrero Rocher, Guylian, Godiva and Lindt,
Tempted me want to buy some for myself,
Also for nephews and nieces.
Inner soul shouted,
“Do these companies ethically
Purchase all the cocoas?
Have they paid a fair price to
Cocoa farmers residing in Africa?
Can you ensure that cocoa farmers in
Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria or Cameroon
Have not been enslaved by these companies?”
Putting the chocolates back on the shelves,
Guilty me walked away.

Bewildered me, walking around
In the cold, among the crazy shoppers,
Craving a coffee to reflect on
All the questions I had been thrown.
Standing in the queue in Starbucks,
Waiting for a cup of Caffe Americano
With a worried face!
Thinking about Young’s [1] paper
I had read in the morning,
“Responsibility and Global Labor Justice”.
The obstinate soul kept torturing!
“The coffee you just ordered,
Do you know where it came from?
Was there child labor involved in
The production or processing?
Were the farmers subjected to
Systematic violence?
If so, what has Starbucks done to
Eradicate normalised violence?”
The white British could not pronounce
My Asian name written in the cup.
Did not bother. Pretty much as expected!
Sitting on a comfy sofa,
I told myself,
“We must do something to improve
The life of workers around the globe.”
But what can I do as a consumer?
What should I do as a researcher?
How can I hold companies responsible?
Finishing my Caffe Americano
Guilty me walked home.

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Note

About the authors
Md Shoaib Ahmed is a lecturer in the Department of Accounting, Essex Business School, University of Essex. His current research focuses on corruption, exclusion, inequality, modern slavery, organisational violence and their association with management and organisational practices in the global supply chain and other social organisations. He has published in the Work, Employment and Society. He also published a poem in the Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal. Md Shoaib Ahmed can be contacted at: msahmea@essex.ac.uk