

# Review on Import/Export and Recycling of Second Hand Clothes

Priyabrat Dash,

**Abstract:** *Those of us residing in the global north are gradually being encouraged to remove cast-off garments from the urban waste stream and recycle it for reuse. It is claimed that this is the right thing to do, as it is action that is environmentally responsible, conserves energy, and helps organizations by donation schemes. Hence, second-hand apparel is historically described as excess, as a loss, and as a morally-charged commodity with a strong redemptive potential for collectors, various recyclers and secondary buyers. Two-thirds of collected recycled apparel is sold for reuse economically in developing countries, and it is believed, as a freely traded asset, to expand economies and sustain livelihoods in the global south, rather than a reasonably priced product. As policymakers in Northern Europe seek to improve sustainable textile reuse and recycling systems, attention is beginning to be focused on ethical issues related to distant destination markets in the global South. Notwithstanding highly restrictive tariff barriers, manufactured used apparel is omnipresent in India, and the Indian market is a thought-provoking illustration, since in this case the exchange is neither equal nor open. The paper illustrates the dynamics of the industry as traders manage and extend structural hierarchies between legal and illegal product transactions and formal and informal economies to create successful businesses. This focuses on India's discussions regarding populism, growth and neoliberal economics, and indicates that attempts to implement ethical measures in end markets will need to navigate the intersection of money, governance, and corruption.*

**Keywords:** *Corruption, Ethicality, India, Informal markets, Second-hand clothing, SEZs.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Consumers are gradually being encouraged to stop throwing out and recycle their old clothes, avoiding the loss of wealth and environmental destruction. Usually, recycling programs are connected to organizations that encourage disposers to recycle their discarded clothes to support the poor and the vulnerable. Such noble hopes of the good work that heaps of discarded cast-offs can do seek to turn our all-too-alienable garbage into spiritually motivated gifts which, by extension, are supposed to connect us to less fortunate others and create a better world for us all to live in. Donors, charity collectors and commercial re-processors of worn clothing contribute to a discourse on textile-recycling practices that feed into emerging Northern

European public policy on the environmentally and socially sustainable use of textile resources and wastes. While recycling myths are used as ethical behavior to promote contributions, in this second life they have little or no effect on the forming of subsequent business exchanges. Nevertheless, there is an obvious out of sight, out of mind mentality for many participants, although very little consideration has been given in the countries of origin to the size of exchange, geographical distribution and social and economic effect in developing countries. Throughout capitalist economies, the leftovers are regularly outsourced and pollution is often dealt with in impoverished environments before reappearing as a re-evaluated asset.

The paper would challenge the boundaries of ethicality in foreign second-hand clothing (SHC) trading, beginning with its ethical representation in the global north, and then detail related research into emerging regional southern SHC markets. This discusses existing standards for expanding export market ethics and introduces Indian research data as a case study for addressing such topics. In the broader discussion, the Indian market gives a thought-provoking illustration, as the SHC exchange is neither equal nor openly traded. Imported SHC is limited, yet widely available, operating through a network of dealers negotiating the boundaries between the legal and the illegal, the formal and the informal. The topic intersects with existing Indian debates on social inequality, economic development, democracy and the neoliberal state's position.

The estimated amount of SHC's global trade has steadily risen, from \$1.3 billion in 2001 to \$4.4 billion in 2013, which does not reflect profits made within the importing countries. Winter apparel of the highest quality is graded for markets in Eastern Europe; good summer clothing is marketed to African consumers with a discerning lower to middle-class customer base, while the lowest quality is exported to South Asia for distribution to the weak. The top five exporters were the United States, Britain, Germany, South Korea and Luxembourg, and the top five importers were the Russian Federation, China, Indonesia, Ukraine and India, with major re-export centres across all continents. Some countries are imposing restrictions on SHC imports for purposes of safety or domestic industry security. Now, the US government reports 32 countries that enforce outright bans (with exceptions for authorized charitable donations), and another 31 requiring fumigation certificates and import bans on hygienic grounds for clothing, hats, and shoes. Although cheap semi-skilled labor and tariff-free export areas draw foreign recyclers to set up processing facilities, proximity to restricted markets through porous borders, as is the case for Nigeria in Togo, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for domestic markets in India, USA / Mexico and Hong Kong for the Philippines.

Little detailed research on the relationship between SHC imports and local manufacturing in Asia and Eastern Europe has been carried out yet, but importers such as Mexico and Hong Kong are also leading exporters of ready-made garments to the global north. It represents in part their role as re-export centers into vast hinterlands, but also that clothing made for export is not available to the poorest parts of the local population. Data on sub-Saharan African markets reports that SHC costs around 10–20 per cent of its current counterpart, while Asian products of poorer quality are more competitively priced. Demand varies from the trendy, internationally-branded garments that allow middle-class consumers to create new identities in Zambia to the cheap winter jackets worn by Indian rural

people. Isla reports in the case of the Philippines that, despite official hostility from many garment manufacturers, some are beginning to appreciate the ability of the trade to educate their customers in the latest fashion and world-class brands.

Although low-quality demand, high turn-over 'hot fashion' produced in the global south continues to rise in the global north, re-production of worn clothes as goods for the global south rising result in a continuing dependence system between these realms and continued inequalities within developing economies. Since the elimination of the MFA, textile manufacturers in developing economies have had to fight for developed markets against each other, support for free trade, which encourages the reduction of barriers to trade, unlocks undeveloped markets and absorbs them into the global economy, is constantly offset by concerns that developed economies retain protectionist policies that discriminate unfairly. It is believed that this results in a net transfer of capital from developing economies to developed economies, which raises disparity between poor and affluent economies, impacting many areas of human well-being including employment, health and social mobility.

### ***1.1. Framing SHC as an ethical commodity***

The growth of fast fashion has culminated in excessive fabric turnover in our wardrobes and around 1 million tons of household textiles are thrown away annually in the United Kingdom. Textiles have a huge impact on the environment during their lifecycle and that this influence is a goal for the UK Government. They have a significant carbon footprint during production and use, and are costly to dispose of. Fabric reuse saves an additional 29 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> (the source of carbon dioxide) per kilo of fabric relative to landfill, and 33 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e compared to waste. Multinational textile manufacturers are also having to think about production in the future with increasingly scarce capital in a world economy deeply controlled by resource politics. Innovations in textile processing technology and the growth of closed loop business models are driving initiatives to promote sustainability in the global north, while the EU will present its path to the circular economy in 2015. Collecting clothes is a major source of income for many charities but production abroad is usually irrelevant to their main operations, so exporting apparel recycling to industrial recyclers has become an easy, highly managed way for them to make money. Members of the CRA sign a Code of Conduct which allows them to evaluate how their commercial activities could undermine their overall goal of optimizing the charity's profits, but only in a few situations could this apply to considering negative impacts on overseas development; however, the legal obligation of charities is to maximize revenue for their core goals[1].

### ***1.2. Structuring the supply of second-hand clothing in India***

The industry operates in the unregulated, unorganized labor market, which accounts for 93% of Indian jobs and contributes 50% of GDP; there are no strict lines of demarcation between formal and informal work. In 2009, a local union leader estimated that about 85 percent of the city's 300,000 workers work in the textile industry and about 40,000 of them work in the shoddy yarn and weaving industry. To preparation for their shredding, men run the spinning and weaving machines and women are working to cut the fabric by hand. Women are compensated at much lower rates than people, and women complained of frequent coughs and sore throats from the dirty, humid working

conditions they carry with pre-school children to avoid leaving them unattended during my fieldwork. The ancient shredding machines are loud and unsafe, and the unrefined waste oils that soak the fabrics will cause headaches and dizziness. Recycled plastic fabrics can be over-colored, and open roadside drains will filter untreated wastewater; burning discarded scraps heat up the dye baths, and black smoke rises from tiny chimneys throughout the region[2].

One of the largest recycled blanket industries is the demand for humanitarian aid as services to crises. The ability for the sector to achieve higher standards is shown by some multinational non-governmental organizations attempts to enter into strategic partnerships with some larger mills to introduce contract arrangements utilizing modern business practices. They require regular audits to track social responsibility and environmental standards, guarantee rates in a fluctuating economy, and encourage stockpiling to prevent subcontracting at the last minute.

### ***I.III. Importers and wholesalers***

Licensed companies will arrange clothes for re-export at SEZ. This is in keeping with the broader trend for recyclers in the global north to export unsorted textiles overseas for cheap labor and no duties in hubs. KASEZ offers space for sorting large volumes of relatively low-value goods using cheap migrant labor with local market knowledge. Wide fabric bales are divided into smaller bales, eg. cotton tops for women, skirts, pants and so on. Specific clothing requests, such as pocket cargo shorts or long skirts, are priced at a higher price, whereas apparel that is historically unacceptable for retail consumers, such as short skirts, ends up as wipers and polishing cloths.

Through 2010, Kandla had purchased approximately 95 per cent of all SHCs in India, dramatically reforming trade. These companies also operate recycling facilities and, as was made clear during interviews with importers and their agents, the creative zone in which profits can be made is the slippage between categories of worn clothing for re-export, domestic reuse or recycling. Through the materiality of clothing itself and its heterogeneous existence, the porosity of the SEZ's boundaries, creative accounting schemes and personal connections with acquiescent customs officials, it also offers a backroad to bring large amounts of clothing into India for resale on the black market.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This paper discusses the socio-cultural complexities driving second-hand apparel use in Irbid Town, North Jordan. In the first case, it explores the different images and interpretations that buyers add to used clothes mainly purchased from the West. Author is conceived as a social space in which multiple imaginations and images interact and meet[3]. This paper explores the work done to assess the impact on the fashion and garment sector of the manufactured fresh and second hand garments. Results show that most of these cheap imports don't enter the country through the traditional borders and because of their cheapness and perceived superior quality, they face unfair price pressure to local products[4]. This article examines the manufacture of second-hand clothing commodities, the international economic geographies of Mozambique's used-clothing trade and labor activities. GPNs ' social, network and territorial embeddedness is studied, revealing how trading practices are organized and

unintegrated. Migrant and diaspora communities perform key roles in organizing operations between some exporters and importers, while organizations participate in more lucrative procurement and processing practices in other networks, and are isolated from African wholesale and distributors[5]. This study explores the factors that are responsible for Nigerians' continued use of second-hand clothing, and the measures that could be put in place to ensure that this issue is addressed. Some of the measures suggested in the paper to prevent the use of second-hand clothing in Nigeria include: enforcing the law prohibiting second-hand clothing in the country, substituting for imports, leading by example, reducing the prevalent rate of poverty and cultivating the spirit of patriotism[6]. This analysis is the first attempt to analyze the relationships between shopping values and perceived risks among Chinese consumers with an aim to exchange apparel[7]. This study examined whether the orientations of customers vary among regular shoppers in three categories of second-hand clothing stores: consignment stores, online stores and thrift stores. The literature suggests that six customer orientations may characterize second-hand clothes shoppers: frugality, design sensitivity, ecological knowledge, dematerialize, nostalgia proneness and fashion consciousness[8]. The aim of this study was to examine the motivations of buyers of second-hand clothes, who both buy from and contribute to one retail outlet. Using the hedonic / utilitarian paradigm, people were analyzed to purchase and contribute motivations. Eighteen participants who had collected and purchased second-hand items from the thrift store of a charity organization were intentionally selected and questioned[9]. This essay discusses the motives of buyers to reuse clothes: whether they choose to buy second-hand apparel or not. Next, a taxonomy of types of motivation is provided, based on previous research. It indicates that common characteristics can be used as claims both for and against second hand clothes acquisition. A study of a representative sample of Norwegian buyers reveals that for those who engage in informal clothing distribution, both environmental and economic factors are important. To those who buy second-hand clothes, individuality and elegance are more essential[10].

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Developing apparel sustainability models focuses on turning waste into a resource by closed loop processing with incipient supplier take-back systems, or national circular economies as a means of controlling capital movement and tracking output and consumption's social and environmental impacts. European politicians are focused on promoting reputation and rendering charitable donation schemes and industry recycling more open at regional level as a first move towards realizing such models, but it seems doubtful that SHC's exports to developing markets would drop significantly in the near future. Extending these concerns to sell ethics is likely to raise the political agenda as policymakers continue to collect data and best practice frameworks.

A limited number of key importers tend to exercise considerable influence over borderland state-owned companies and use their political capital to promote their own goals, crowd out smaller traders and monopolize those segments to dominate the business. Van Schendel and Abraham identify a qualitative threshold between the activities of globally organized criminal groups and the scores of everyday forms of abuse that are morally,

politically and economically of a different order, which is certainly a key factor in extending the ethical nature of SHC trade to end markets.

This analysis of the SHC exchange in India reflects Chatterjee's strategy of the dispossessed and recent ethnographies of governance, power and corruption, indicating that providing a large network of capital in informal, non-corporate and criminal markets enables people to function effectively in the new Indian economy, and that operators need to be able to move between these domains to accomplish this. When low-paid consumers absorb cast-offs from the global north in the global south, which they may have made but cannot afford to buy new ones, the whole process is marked by rising social and economic inequality both within and between trade nations. To allow traders to earn a profit at the end of the chain, those involved may have to negotiate politically with local power systems to render an ethical impact on secondary markets, and agree that such markets can be chaotic and unpredictable.

## REFERENCES

- [1] K. Eli, C. Dolan, T. Schneider, and S. Ulijaszek, "Mobile activism, material imaginings, and the ethics of the edible: Framing political engagement through the Buycott app," *Geoforum*, 2016.
- [2] P. K. Singh, "Retail Sector in India: Present Scenario, Emerging Opportunities and Challenges," *IOSR J. Bus. Manag.*, 2014.
- [3] M. M. Na'amneh and A. K. Al Husban, "Identity in old clothes: The socio-cultural dynamics of second-hand clothing in Irbid, Jordan," *Soc. Identities*, 2012.
- [4] A. B. Nyoni, L. Nkiwane, and P. Gonde, "The Impact of Imported New and Second Hand Clothing on the Zimbabwe Textile and Clothing Industry Zimbabwe," *African J. Text. Appar. Res.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 28–32, 2014.
- [5] A. Brooks, "Stretching global production networks: The international second-hand clothing trade," *Geoforum*, vol. 44, pp. 10–22, 2013.
- [6] "Imperialism and Loss of Identity in Second Hand Clothes: The Nigerian Okrika Experience," *J. Lang. Technol. Entrep. Africa*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 151-172–172, 2018.
- [7] C. Lang and R. Zhang, "Second-hand clothing acquisition: The motivations and barriers to clothing swaps for Chinese consumers," *Sustain. Prod. Consum.*, vol. 18, pp. 156–164, 2019.
- [8] M. Zaman, H. Park, Y. K. Kim, and S. H. Park, "Consumer orientations of second-hand clothing shoppers," *J. Glob. Fash. Mark.*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 163–176, 2019.
- [9] J. B. Baker and J. Yurchisin, "An Investigation of the Motivations of Second-hand Clothing Donation and Purchase," *Int. J. Costume Fash.*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 1–17, 2014.
- [10] K. Laitala and I. G. Klepp, "Motivations for and against second-hand clothing acquisition," *Cloth. Cult.*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 247–262, 2018.