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**Research Report**

## Power relations within the second-hand clothing industry touching down in Ghana

ÖFSE-Forum, No. 88

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Austrian Foundation for Development Research (ÖFSE), Vienna

*Suggested Citation:* Mayer, Verena (2024) : Power relations within the second-hand clothing industry touching down in Ghana, ÖFSE-Forum, No. 88, ISBN 978-3-902906-72-4, Südwind-Verlag, Wien, <https://www.oefse.at/publikationen/oefse-forum/detail-oefse-forum/publication/show/Publication/power-relations-within-the-second-hand-clothing-industry-touching-down-in-ghana/>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/305264>

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## Power relations within the second-hand clothing industry touching down in Ghana

Verena Mayer  
Masterarbeit

# 88 FORUM



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September 2024

**OFSE**'''  
Österreichische Forschungsstiftung  
für Internationale Entwicklung

1. Auflage 2024

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Für den Inhalt verantwortlich: Verena Mayer

Druck: druck.at

Südwind-Verlag

ISBN: 978-3-902906-72-4

#### **Bibliografische Information Der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;

detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <https://portal.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Gefördert durch die



**Österreichische  
Entwicklungs-  
zusammenarbeit**

# Preface

The second-hand clothing industry has experienced significant growth over the past decades, becoming a major global market. Despite its substantial economic impact, this industry is marked by complex and often opaque structures. The lack of transparency in the supply chain and limited research on the topic call for a deeper exploration of the power relations and value distribution within this industry.

Verena Mayer's Master's thesis addresses this need by examining the power dynamics and value distribution in the second-hand clothing supply chain, theoretically grounded in the Global Production Networks and Discard Studies frameworks. Through a combination of literature review, trade data analysis, and extensive field research in Accra, Ghana, Mayer provides valuable insights into the global and local implications of the second-hand clothing trade.

Mayer's findings reveal significant inequalities at both the transnational and local levels. On a global scale, the industry is often misrepresented as charitable and sustainable, while in reality, much of the trade is profit-driven. Locally, the power dynamics within Ghana's market create challenges for smaller actors, with importers often holding significant influence over pricing and trade conditions. Additionally, the study highlights the precarious working conditions faced by many within the industry, particularly migrant workers and women.

In summary, Verena Mayer's work offers valuable insights for academic and policy debates on the socio-economic impacts of the global second-hand clothing trade and the inherent inequalities within this industry. Mayer's work stands out for its theoretical engagement and detailed empirical investigation, making a significant contribution to understanding a largely invisible segment of the global garment industry.

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universität  
wien

# MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Power relations within the second-hand clothing industry  
touching down in Ghana“

verfasst von / submitted by

Verena Mayer, BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
**Master of Arts (MA)**

Wien, 2024 / Vienna 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme code as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

UA 066 589

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Internationale Entwicklung

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Ass.-Prof. Mag. Mag. Dr. Cornelia Staritz, PhDd

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my gratitude to the University of Vienna, who provided me with a short-term grant through the KWA program. This enabled me to travel to Ghana and conduct the empirical research needed for this thesis. I would like to acknowledge and offer my appreciation to all the interviewees in Ghana who willingly shared valuable experiences, insights and sacrificed their precious time during the interviewing process of my thesis research. Furthermore, I'd like to thank my supervisor, Ms. Cornelia Staritz, for her support in terms of thoughtful comments and helpful feedback. Her dedicated support and guidance, as well as expert advice, has been invaluable throughout all stages of this thesis. Finally, I want to express my profound gratitude to my partner Tom who gracefully accompanied me on my travels to Ghana, provided immense support and constant encouragement.



## Abstract

The second-hand clothing industry dates back to times of colonialism when European clothing was exported to colonies in order to achieve “development” via ways of dressing. Since the 1990s and the dominance of fast-fashion, the trade with second-hand clothing has also continuously grown and gained importance. Although the global second-hand clothing trade is huge, worth USD 5.17 billion in 2021, it is defined by opaque and non-transparent structures. In Ghana 90% of clothing originates from second-hand sources and the country was the largest importer in 2021. Given the intransparency of the supply chain as well as the limited amount of publications on the trade so far, research on this topic is extremely relevant. In light of the above, the following research question has been posed. *“How are ‘power relations’ and associated ‘value distribution’ constituted within the supply chain of the second-hand clothing industry touching down in Ghana?”* The methodological approach for this thesis is based on literature research, an analysis of trade data as well as a two-month field research on-site in Accra, Ghana. During this fieldwork 20 interviews were recorded with audio and another 17 interviews were conducted without audio recording. Research was evaluated using Mayring's content analysis. The theoretical basis is provided by the Global Production Networks (GPN) approach as well as Discard Studies. Linkages between the two frameworks can be drawn by the (re)valorization of wasted objects and the interrelations in positions of power. Six key findings came out in the course of the research which are divided in transnational and local inequalities. One of the thesis' key findings is that an important part of second-hand clothing is not sold in Ghana leading to unequal global waste shares. Secondly, transnational inequalities arise from the fact that the industry in the Global North is portrayed under the guise of charity and sustainability while most of the clothes are actually sold for profit to foreign markets in the Global South. Further inequalities emerge as exporters in the Global North determine trade conditions such as price setting, passing on inflation-induced price increases resulting in uncertainties for importers in the Global South. Local inequalities could be observed when looking at importers who hold a dominant position as they can largely push the price and requirements of exporters downwards to other local actors. Within the local industry, precarious working conditions and land issues are key concerns in the context of informal market structures. Migrant workers and women are particularly affected by unstable working conditions. Another insight emerges when considering the imbalance in appreciation and research focusing on (re)valorization practices with techniques in the Global South receiving significantly less attention compared to activities in the Global North.

## Kurzfassung

Die Second-Hand-Bekleidungsindustrie reicht zurück bis in die Zeiten des Kolonialismus, als europäische Kleidung in Kolonien importiert wurde, um „Entwicklung“ im Zuge eines westlichen Kleidungsstils umzusetzen. Seit den 1990er Jahren und der Dominanz von Fast Fashion gewann der Markt mit Second-Hand Kleidung kontinuierlich an Bedeutung. Obwohl der globale Handel mit gebrauchter Kleidung im Jahr 2021 einen Wert von USD 5,17 Milliarden hatte, ist die Lieferkette von undurchsichtigen und intransparenten Strukturen gekennzeichnet. Ghana war 2021 der größte Importeur von Second-Hand Kleidung, was auch darin erkennbar ist, dass 90% der Textilien aus zweiter Hand stammen. Das Thema ist aufgrund der Intransparenz der Lieferkette sowie einer begrenzten Anzahl an bisherigen Veröffentlichungen besonders relevant. Daher hat sich die folgende Forschungsfrage ergeben: *"Wie konstituieren sich Machtverhältnisse und die damit verbundene Werteverteilung innerhalb der Lieferkette der Second-Hand Bekleidungsindustrie sowie der in Ghana verorteten Industrie?"* Die methodische Vorgehensweise für diese Arbeit basiert auf einer Literaturrecherche, einer Analyse von Handelsdaten sowie einer zweimonatigen Feldforschung vor Ort in Accra, Ghana. Im Zuge dessen wurden 20 Interviews mit Ton und 17 Interviews ohne Tonaufzeichnung geführt und mithilfe der Inhaltsanalyse von Mayring ausgewertet. Der theoretische Rahmen ergibt sich aus dem Global Production Network (GPN) Ansatz sowie Discard Studies, wobei die (neu)Inwertsetzung von Müll und damit verbundenen Machtpositionen als Verbindungsstück dient. Sechs zentrale Ergebnisse konnten im Zuge der Forschung gewonnen werden, die in transnationale und lokale Ungleichheiten unterteilt sind. Eine wesentliche Erkenntnis dieser Arbeit ist, dass ein großer Teil der Kleiderimporte in Ghana nicht verkauft werden kann und entsorgt wird, was in einer global ungleichen Verteilung von Textilmüll resultiert. Obwohl tatsächlich nur sehr wenige von diesem Handel profitieren, suggeriert die Industrie Wohltätigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit, was auf ungleiche Machtpositionen schließen lässt. Exporteure im Globalen Norden dominieren Handelsbedingungen, indem Unsicherheiten an Importeure im Globalen Süden übertragen werden. Lokale Ungleichheiten ergeben sich, indem Importeure Machtposition innehaben und Anforderungen der Exporteure auf lokale Akteure abwälzen können. Konflikte hinsichtlich Landrecht und prekären Arbeitsbedingungen, welche im Zusammenhang mit informellen Marktstrukturen auftreten, gelten als weitere zentrale Ergebnisse. Davon sind insbesondere Frauen und Migrant\*innen betroffen. Schließlich waren Ungleichheiten betreffend (neu)Inwertsetzungsprozesse zentrales Ergebnis, indem Techniken im Globalen Süden bislang deutlich weniger erforscht und anerkannt wurden als jene im Globalen Norden.

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## List of Abbreviations

AMA	Accra Metropolitan Assembly
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
GPN	Global Production Network
GRA	Ghana Revenue Authority
GRCL	Ghana Railways Company Limited
GSA	Ghana Standards Authority
GYEM	Ghana Youth Environmental Movement
ISI	Import Substitution Industrialization
KUSA	Kantamanto Used Clothes Sellers Association
MOTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
ÖPULA	Österreichische Putzlappen (Rohstoff-Recycling GmbH)

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## **1. Introduction**

The history of importing second-hand clothes from the Global North to countries of the Global South links back to colonization. During the occupation western style clothing was imported in order to achieve “development” in the colonies. Actors involved in the second-hand clothing business in the Global North suggest a similar picture today by arguing that used clothing is collected for the “poor”. Although this industry has existed since colonial times, the trade of second-hand clothing has gained considerable importance in the wake of fast-fashion in the 1990s. Key features of this industry are, firstly, the constant production of new collections, encouraging consumers to continuously buy newly released seasonal styles and vogue color combinations and secondly, the massive availability of cheap clothing flooding the market. The growing appetite for fast-fashion, created by lead firms following a neoliberal economy, leads to disposal bottlenecks in the Global North. As mentioned above the collection of the clothing takes place under the guise of a donation for charity and recycling purposes and is organized by charities, fast-fashion stores and profit-oriented sorting companies (Brooks, 2015: 79ff.). The majority of the collected garments is imported to markets in the Global South and sold profitably there, with exporters and donors assuming a responsible treatment (Watson & Palm, 2016: 12). On a global scale Ghana was the biggest importer of second-hand clothing in 2021. The importance of this trade within the country becomes evident by the fact that 90% of the used garments originate from second-hand sources (Emefa et al., 2015: 37; OECD - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023).

In general, opinions about the industry are double-edged. It is often argued that second-hand provides many benefits, such as being environmentally beneficial whilst also contributing to a circular economy. For countries in the Global South, the industry is considered a rich source of job opportunities and affordable quality clothing in comparison to new, yet poorly manufactured Chinese garments. However, previous research has shown that this industry also entails various negative impacts. For instance, the weakening of the local textile industry, the disappearance of traditional clothing and the loss and lack of jobs within this sector can be traced back to this trade. In addition, the second-hand clothing industry has strengthened the dependency relationships that exist between countries of the Global North and South (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 2ff.). Furthermore, a significant amount of garments are going unused because of the overwhelming influx of clothing imports in countries of the Global South. Importing countries often do not have the capacity, financial means or

technology for proper disposal of global fashion waste, leading to persistent ecological impacts (The Or Foundation, 2023). The Global South is often portrayed as the “problem”, requiring externally imposed solutions from the North in order to solve waste issues that were, in fact, initially derived from them (Interview 14a; Kalina et al., 2022).

The second-hand clothing sector shows a complex and non-transparent network, including different actors in different locations which remained unquestioned for an exceptionally long time (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021; Interview 14a). Further this murky business has been characterized by a scarcity of documentation and limited discussion within scientific communities (Botticello, 2012: 167; Brooks, 2015: 9ff.; Hansen, 2000: 2ff.). Existing publications are often limited to the effects of second-hand clothing imports in the Global South, but do not examine the activities and processes of individual actors apart from the Global North (Hansen, 2000: 2ff.). Transnational and local relationships between various actors involved in the trade have not been researched much. There are only a few publications interested in emerging inequalities and the huge complexity of the industry. In particular existing publications have lacked acknowledgement for the enormous work involving re-sorting, upcycling and reusing textiles apart from the initial sorting activities that stood out during the research. These factors have led to the following research question:

*“How are ‘power relations’ and associated ‘value distribution’ constituted within the supply chain of the second-hand clothing industry touching down in Ghana?”*

In order to answer the research question, various sub-questions arise:

- Who are the main actors within the second-hand industry on a global level? What are their main activities and what processes exist?
- Who are the main actors within the second-hand industry in Ghana? What are their main activities and what processes exist?
- What are the relations of these actors in terms of risks, price settings, knowledge asymmetry and requirements?
- What is the role of inequalities in regards to gender, formal vs. informal work, socio-economic backgrounds and migrant labor?
- What are the challenges in terms of land, COVID-19, waste, economic factors as well as security and infrastructure?
- How are regulatory processes on second-hand clothing imports constituted? On a global level on the one hand and in Ghana on the other?



Analyzing these questions is extremely relevant considering the forecast in growing numbers in fast-fashion and second-hand clothing industries. This topic is imperative because most actors working within the Global South trade are not visible to the Global North and supply chains are often being simplified and reduced. Therefore, the research is an approach to give a voice to the actors working at Kantamanto market, elaborating on activities, experiences, health and safety and day-to-day challenges they are subjected to. In addition, due to growing ecological concerns, it is essential to expose and create more awareness of the fashion-waste crisis in hope of a change in consumption and waste patterns, particularly within the industry, but also within societies of the Global North. Moreover, research on this topic is relevant in order to expand the scientific discourse.

The theoretical approach of the thesis is based on the global production network (GPN) approach on the one hand and Discard Studies on the other. Although the GPN usually does not investigate post-consumer goods there is some literature applying this framework on reusing items. This lens provides an understanding of how post-consumer goods are transformed into a new capitalist commodity (Coe, 2011). Activities of “production”, exchange, consumption as well as disposal and recycling are the relevant factors for the analysis. Furthermore, embedded networks, actors and resulting power dynamics along the supply chain are investigated transnationally as well as locally. The rather new academic field of Discarded Studies, sets a focus on geographical and socio-economic aspects of waste and wasting. One core interest of the framework is to evaluate categories which are systematically excluded when it comes to reusing waste such as income, social class, education, gender. By applying the two theoretical frameworks an attempt is made to analyze processes and activities focusing waste. The main focus thereby is the (re)valorization of postconsumer objects and related positions of power which is also crucial for this thesis. Within this understanding various parameters serve for analyzing these positions which are explained further in more detail. This enables a differentiated view on processes as the GPN sets an economic focus and Discard Studies focuses on environmental and justice based aspects (Moore, 2012: 6ff.; Brooks, 2013: 11).

In the course of the research and while answering the research questions, six key findings which are structured by inequalities on a transnational and a local level could be concluded. When looking at a transnational scale, positions of power are particularly held by actors in the Global North. Unequal global waste shares of textiles can be considered as the first key finding when looking at transnational inequalities. The historically embedded position of the

Global North being able to make use of the “free disposal system” by shipping clothing waste to the Global South can be classified under the term “waste colonialism” (Interview 4a, 5a). Further inequalities emerge in sorting and exporting companies being able to collect used garments under the guise of charity, supporting the upholding system of capitalism while accumulating vast amounts of profits (Brooks, 2013, 11ff.). Thirdly, a powerful position is held by exporters in the Global North determining trade conditions and prices. Any risks and rise of costs are transferred to business partners enabling them to draw many benefits out of this industry. Local inequalities could be found when looking at the relationship between importers and the workforce of Kantamanto market, particularly retailers. Very similar to the practice of exporters in the Global North, importers also pass on risks and price increases to their business partners. The existing knowledge asymmetry of retailers not knowing the content of the bale and having to deal with individual pieces of clothing is one factor that further accelerates inequalities (Interview 4a, 5a). Another key finding can be drawn from inequalities affecting the workforce of Kantamanto market concerning aspects of gender and migrant labor, an informal trade system, issues arising from an inadequate infrastructure and debates about land ownership (Atmos, 2022; Knott, 2020; Interview 1a, 3a, 4a, 11a, 13a, 18a, 20a). Finally, the research highlights (re)valorization practices in Ghana and reveals that techniques in the Global South have received less attention compared to activities in the Global North although they contribute significantly to a circular economy (The Or Foundation, 2021; Interview 3a, 15a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 10a).

The structure of the thesis consists of a theoretical section elaborating the GPN framework and Discard Studies in chapter two. Chapter three elaborates on the methodology namely a literature research, a qualitative field study as well as a trade data analysis. The sampling, the data collection and the analysis of the semi-structured interviews are explained in detail. To gain insights on the Ghanaian second-hand clothing trade, 20 interviews with an audio recording and 17 interviews recorded on a handwritten protocol were conducted in Accra, Ghana in March and April 2023. The specific section on the second-hand garment industry is divided into three further chapters. First, the global supply chain of second-hand clothing is being analyzed. Another chapter sets its focus on the trade with used garments in Ghana and the Kantamanto market. In the final section, power relations, value distribution and other inequalities are discussed and therefore the above mentioned six key findings presented. Chapter 7 can be remarked as a concluding chapter summarizing the main content of the work.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on the global production network (GPN) approach on the one hand and Discard Studies on the other. The GPN approach builds the foundation by analyzing processes of the (re)valorization of post-consumer goods. Along this value chain, embedded actors and networks as well as existing power asymmetries are subsequently elaborated on. Discard Studies provide a specific perspective on practices concerning waste and wasting by looking specifically at geographical, socio-economic and material aspects. The combination of the two theories provides a holistic approach and an encompassing understanding of extracting value from discarded or donated garments.

### 2.1. Global production network (GPN) approach

Various approaches have been developed since the 1990s in order to analyze supply chains and value creation within international trade. Value concepts like the global commodity chains (GCC) approach, the global value chains (GVC) approach and the global production networks (GPN) approach emerged. All of them examine the production of goods and services as well as power and value dynamics within these processes (Coe et al., 2008: 274).

In the context of this work, the following understanding of a GPN is used:

*“A global production network is one whose interconnected nodes and links extend spatially across national boundaries and, in so doing, integrates parts of disparate national and subnational territories. In a production network, whose ‘purpose’ is to create value through the transformation of material and non-material inputs into demanded goods and services (...)”* (Coe et al., 2008: 274)

The basis of GPN was developed upon the GCC and GVC has its roots in world system theory (Carstensen et al., 2013: 353ff.). However, the GPN approach differs from the two more restricted concepts as it includes both production sites and socio-political, institutional and cultural influences. Hence, the GPN framework attempts to encompass all relevant global as well as local actors and relationships in production that shape and reshape the global economy. Such analysis includes investigating external networks such as states, non-state organizations, civil society, trade unions and consumer groups (Coe et al., 2008: 279ff.). Brooks suggests in this regard the distinction between dominating private actors such as companies and governments as they hold different positions of power (Brooks, 2013: 12).

In a supply chain, inputs are transformed into outputs via different processes during which value is added at each stage, based on the production of goods or services. This is a central aspect when applying the GPN approach. The framework distances itself from the "chain"

notion to avoid linear and horizontal perspectives on how new value is created. Rather it is assumed that the production network is dynamic and in a state of permanent change. This understanding allows an analysis beyond the supply chain and looks at interactions within the production network like the global distribution of labor or economic status (Coe et al., 2008: 272ff.). The GPN can therefore be considered as a heuristic framework investigating how processes in supply chains contribute to an unequal development. Power plays a key role in creating these inequalities in the first place. The element of power has remained an underexplored element in previous academic research. In this regard, it should be reiterated that power is difficult to measure and there is no universally valid concept, as theories may have various practical understandings (Reimann & Ketchen, 2017: 3).

In the course of this understanding an attempt is set to also conceptualize the multidimensionality of socio-culturally embedded power relations including categories like gender, labor migration, inequality, class and racism. Furthermore, the historical aspect of organization and coordination of supply chains between countries of the Global North and the Global South are considered as particularly important. Due to the differentiated understanding of interconnected relations and modes of global production and consumption, the GPN approach is a suitable theoretical basis for the present work. The application of the GPN framework also seems eminently suitable with setting a focus on associations, state institutions, work unions and individual workers which showed to be also decisive within this research (Carstensen et al., 2013).

## **2.2. The GPN Approach and post-consumption**

Most political-economic approaches, including the GPN approach, focus only on the process of production and consumption and do not address the reversed supply chain. An analysis using the GPN would usually have already ended with the consumption and would not investigate the reuse of goods and waste. However, the approach can be stretched and allows an analysis of how used goods, either disposed or donated, are transformed into a (new) capitalist commodity. There is a relatively small amount of GPN literature focusing on activities with post-consumer goods such as Laha (2022), Lampel (2021), Brooks (2012, 2013 & 2015) and Pickren (2014) to name a few examples. Most of these scholars set a focus on certain objects including garments, cars or e-waste. When analyzing post-consumer goods based on a GPN framework the main interest is to identify related tasks of “production”, exchange, consumption as well as disposal and recycling. Disposal practices can be

considered common in ordinary consumption processes as well as the assumption that the value present at the time of consumption will likely not be permanent. Before a garment is discarded or becomes a gift, it is purchased by an individual who expresses personal value towards the item. The practice of donating or discarding goods represents the point at which an object exits the commodity form, as it no longer holds any valued exchange. The process in which a new value is established for an item is a central aspect of the GPN analyses of post-consumer objects (Brooks, 2013: 4). Knowledge of multiple distant markets is crucial in extracting value (Lampel, 2020: 15). In comparison, the recycling of electronic products is significantly more lucrative than that of clothing. Rather, clothing is sorted and resorted via different processes in a system of "downcycling", with each stage receiving lower-value items (Crang et al., 2013: 12ff.).

Within the GPN, different transnational processes depend on connections between companies and individuals in different places (Brooks, 2013: 11). Involved actors are embedded in "production networks" of post-consumer goods differently and have, therefore divergent possibilities of extracting values. A high degree of embeddedness results in being able to take over control of information and influence decision-making processes. Sequentially, if these factors apply, it enables the respective actor/group to take over positions of power within the GPN. Dynamics of embeddedness and power are very much intervened, meaning the more power one has within the trade compared to other actors, the higher the value extraction. When it comes to post-consumer objects, the global flow of goods differs from other supply chains. Unlike conventional first-hand production, different dynamics of supply and demand determine the value chain of used goods, resulting in a relatively inflexible market. Within the trade of post-consumer items, supply comes before demand and the stock depends on the volume and availability of other supply chains and networks. Markets dealing with second-hand objects are not driven by demand but rather by rapid consumption in other geographical spheres (Crang et al., 2013: 12ff.).

When applying the GPN approach on the supply chain of second-hand clothing, countries of the Global North are considered as "providers" of goods (Hansen, 2000: 3). Authors Brooks (2013), Lampel (2021) and Botticello (2012) set a focus on second-hand clothing within their GPN analysis. All of the publications classify sorting activities, of either discarded or donated garments, as the "production process" within the industry, as there is no production in the conventional sense. The categorization within the sorting activities plays an essential role in the (re)valorization of goods. The basis for this process is provided by different value systems

which are oriented toward the respective markets. As a result, the initial classification of garments has new potential in terms of economic and social value. This process requires physical labor and creating new exchange values for each item. Although there are no tangible material costs in the (re)valorization of second-hand clothing items, expenses still arise from paying for workers, office space and equipment. Second-hand garments are post-consumer items with low value and availability in high volumes that circulate between many destinations on a global scale (Crang et al., 2013: 12ff.).

Finding a theoretical context for supply-chains dealing with post-consumer items is of particular importance, as the majority of publications do not utilize a conceptual framework for the analysis with second-hand or waste products (Brooks, 2013: 10f.). Furthermore, theorization is important as the significance of reusing goods will increase in the future due to the EU waste policies aiming to contribute to a circular economy (Lampel, 2020: 6f.).

### **2.3. Discard Studies**

Discard Studies can be considered a rather new academic field developed in response to the increasing amounts of waste produced by the capitalistic system. The analysis investigates waste and wasting as a broad construct and looks beyond conventional notions. The framework considers waste as created by a system that overpowers society. One core interest is to analyze how societies understand waste and the ethics of creating waste by investigating the valuation and devaluation of objects by looking at practices, regions, people and materials (Nair, 2020). As the focus is set not only on looking at waste itself but as a wider set of social, political, and material systems. The term “Discard Studies” is used rather than “waste studies” (Laser & Schlitz, 2019: 9). Attempts are made to examine categories that are systematically excluded, devalued or left behind (Liboiron & Lepawsky, 2022: 2ff.).

An important aspect in studying waste is the set of conditions in which certain objects are considered as waste or a resource. Gregson and Crung (2015) have raised the question “*what waste is and how, why and to whom it matters*”. The practice of discarding is one technique of power that involves rejecting, wasting, destroying, prioritizing, or externalizing some objects in favor of others (Moore, 2012: 6ff.). Demographic variables strongly define the structures on global waste shares and flows. Besides the geographical location, socioeconomic aspects such as income, social class, education, gender, and family life cycle stages play a decisive role when it comes to (re)valorization of waste (Kalina et al., 2022).

Consumption habits are closely linked to waste patterns, where location plays a critical role. It is often argued that people all over the planet are entangled in the causes of the current waste crisis. However, there is a huge distribution discrepancy of how waste and the consequences of waste is managed and manipulated (Moore, 2012: 6ff.). Many societies within the Global North have acquired a self-entitled, superior and privileged notion that nature is at their disposal and can be plundered by human beings. Western cultures pride themselves on being technologically “advanced” but current environmental impacts of production and waste, cast this lifestyle as highly questionable (Nair, 2020). Liboiron & Lepawsky (2022) argue that practices of rejecting, wasting, destroying, prioritizing, or externalizing some things in favor of others creates forms of unevenness. Inequalities arise because African countries produce minimal amounts of the global waste share and are responsible for treating vast amounts of waste produced and imported from countries in the Global North (Kalina et al., 2022).

Besides socioeconomic and geographical variables, Discard Studies also focus on the material aspect when waste is (re)valorized. The perspective on material of waste plays a decisive role in what waste is to become. Items or materials may not have much value in one location but can entail an economic purpose at the same time somewhere else. The motivation for reusing an object can be cheaper than replacing it, which also serves the same function or may be a better alternative than commercially available products (Kalina et al., 2022). The transformation of reusing items can facilitate a wide range of income-generating activities and the growing amounts of waste can create business opportunities involving a multitude of possibilities within any global location (Moore, 2012; Kalina et al., 2022).

The exercise of power within global waste management practices is also evident in the fact that solutions for waste disposal are mostly directed at households and private individuals, even though the industry generates the majority of waste. Advocates of Discard Studies criticise these ideas as they fail to address the actual waste issue and do not contribute to prevent the production of waste in the first place. Recycling is often used as a strategy to create further consumption opportunities and correlates with economic advantages rather than contributing to a sustainable environment. While waste recycling receives more and more attention, waste prevention and zero-waste politics are hardly discussed in the first place (Laser & Schlitz, 2019: 15).

In conclusion, it can be said that global waste flows as well as the politics of waste treatment and disposal are strongly associated with injustice and inequality. The lens of considering various aspects enables one to understand waste in the respective context (Kalina et al., 2022).

#### **2.4. Linkages between GPN & Discard Studies**

The application and linkage of the GPN approach and Discard Studies is suitable for this work, as both approaches allow an analysis on post-consumer items. Thus, combining the GPN and Discard Studies aims to look at the second-hand clothing industry via different lenses while focusing on similar aspects. The GPN can be considered as an economic based approach whereas Discard Studies as an environmental and justice based approach. The combination of these two approaches should ultimately provide a solid theoretical basis for the thesis. The main linkage between the frameworks is the (re)valorization of wasted objects and related positions of power. Both approaches see a connection between consumption habits and waste patterns and set this as the basis for the examination of reusing post-consumer objects (Moore, 2012: 6ff.; Brooks, 2013: 11). The transformation of waste to new commodities can be understood as the core process where value is extracted within the trade of post-consumer items. In these processes power plays an essential role for the GPN approach as well as Discard Studies. Similar variables such as gender, class and ethnicity as well as geographical location are analyzed in this context. When investigating power, the GPN focuses on economic activities, supply chains and market-based trade conditions (Gareffi & Lee, 2016: 30ff.; Crang et al., 2013). Within Discard Studies practices on waste and wasting and consequences of waste play a decisive role when analyzing power dynamics (Liboiron & Lepawsky, 2022: 7). Thus, inequalities can be investigated on an environmental and justice based approach as well as on an economical basis.

Within this thesis and applying the GPN framework as well as Discard Studies power is understood as asymmetrical relationships in the form of interpersonal interactions, which are dominated by some participants who can influence a person, a group, things or events. Power runs through multiple spheres of human endeavor, such as politics, economics or social affairs (Onwuatuegwu, 2021: 362ff.). The GPN refers to the concept of governance in this regard, which is based on laws, institutions and norms that channel and limit economic activities and their influence (Gareffi & Lee, 2016: 30ff.; Crang et al., 2013). Within capitalist oriented value chains, so-called "lead firms" determine supplier networks and thus project



their power outwards by acting as “gatekeepers”. Capital plays an essential role in receiving and maintaining a powerful position (Van der Ven, 2018). Nevertheless, there is also a “bargaining power” in economic networks, influenced by interactions of workers within the labor market. Therefore conceptualization in terms of “positionality” is essential, meaning the respective position actors hold in economic and production networks. Workers are enabled to have agency as individuals or via associations which shape decision making process and impact trade conditions within and between countries (Iliopoulos et al., 2019: 3f.). Discard Studies in comparison, look beyond the “production processes” of used goods through investigating power by waste and reusing practices. The role and possibility of waste and wasting is already considered as a technique of exercising power by advocates of Discard Studies. These decision-making processes are very much influenced by geographic variables (Liboiron & Lepawsky, 2022: 7; Nair, 2020). Based on this understanding an attempt is made to establish trends of power based on various parameters such as:

- Being able to determine prices and profit rates.
- Having access to resources that are not under one’s direct control but are necessary to carry out individual tasks.
- Being able to hold information for one’s own interest.
- Being able to assert one’s interests such as carrying on risks to others.
- Being able to create and exploit dependencies.
- Being able to shape norms of the market e.g. by influencing working conditions or enforce economic sanctions.
- Being able to categorize an item as waste (Reimann & Ketchen, 2017: 3f.; Onwuatuegwu, 2021: 362ff.; Liboiron & Lepawsky, 2022).

Thus, an important factor of the (re)valorization of post-consumer items using the two frameworks is to acknowledge that the trade is already based on power relations with one categorizing an item as waste. When analyzing it becomes obvious that there is no clear differentiation between objects’ waste and usable materials. Combining both Discard Studies literature and GPN analysis, is a tool to investigate processes while acknowledging all activities of value extraction. This perspective aims to look at the industry through a de-colonial lens while appreciating value creation in addition to the collecting and sorting processes taking place in the Global North (Kalina et al., 2022; Interview 14a).

### **3. Methodology**

In the course of this chapter, the data collection process will be explained in detail. This section should provide a more detailed understanding of procedures along the research process. On the one hand the information for the thesis was gathered based on a trade data and literature analysis. On the other hand a two-month field research was conducted on-site in Accra (Ghana) in March and April 2023. It is important to remember that this thesis can not formulate generally valid statements about the second-hand clothing industry. Further research would be necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the global and Ghanaian second-hand clothing industry.

#### **3.1. Field research**

During a two-month field research, the Ghanaian second-hand clothing industry was studied. The aim of the qualitative research was to gather detailed information about the Ghanaian supply chain of second-hand clothing. In this context, information about the value distribution and positions of power were the focus of interest. A rough picture of the Ghanaian supply chain and embedded actors can be drawn from the research. Thus, some relationships and dynamics within the trade could be elaborated on. Challenges arose from the fact that hardly any interviewees could for example provide concrete information about price setting or profit rates. In addition, it was difficult to gather information about the business relationships to exporters in the Global North.

Some of the contacts with NGOs were already organized in advance from Austria. As the establishment of contacts via e-mail was unsuccessful in some cases, interviews with institutions were arranged by requesting an interview directly via a visit to the respective office. The interviews with people working directly at the market were spontaneously organized by approaching the interviewees and asking them for their willingness to participate in the research. Most Ghanaians working at Kantamanto were very friendly, open and helpful in answering my questions. Interviews with importers and suppliers were a bit more challenging to organize as they were not so inclined to participate in an interview. Attempts were made to adjust the interview situation according to the possibilities of the interview partners in order to reach as many people as possible and to provide a low threshold level for participation. There were some challenges during the recording of the interviews, for example the boisterous, loud and noisy market atmosphere and multiple interruptions due to customers or people walking by who would initiate new conversation content. Fortunately,

Ghanaians speak English very well and all interviews were held in English while only a few required the help of a translator; luckily, there was always someone in close proximity willing to help. At this point, it must be noted that communication in these interviews was challenging and limited due to the language barrier as well as the fact of not using a professional translator.

### 3.1.1. Sampling

During the selection of interviewees, efforts were made to incorporate a diverse range of perspectives. The examination intended to represent the main actors working directly at Kantamanto market in Accra as well as their representatives. Furthermore, an attempt was made to include the perspectives of researchers, activists and government officials. In the course of the field research, it was particularly important to include the Ghanaian perception of the industry. 20 interviews were recorded with audio and are marked as “Interview # a”. Another 17 interviews were conducted without audio and the content was written down shortly afterward and can be identified by the marking “Interview # b”. Finding participants who gave an interview without audio recording was much easier due to anonymity and low-threshold access and was therefore the reason why not all interviews were recorded. The following table is a listing of interviewed actors as well as a description of their main activity.

Role	Organization	#	Presence	Date	Audio recording yes / no duration of the interview
NGO	Ghana Youth Environmental Movement (GYEM)	5a	Ghana/ Le Must Restaurant	March 22nd 2023	Yes (1:12:28)
	OR Foundation	14a	Ghana/ office of OR Foundation	April 5th 2023	Yes (44:22)
Institutions	Ministry of railway development	19a	Ghana/ Ministry of railway development	April 13th 2023	Yes (50:29)
	Kayayei Youth Association	2a	Ghana/ office of Kayayei Youth Association	March 7th 2023	Yes (41:26)
	Kantamanto Used Clothes Sellers Association	15a	Ghana/ office of Used Clothing Association	April 8th 2023	Yes (44:22)

<b>Importer</b>	10a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 29th 2023	Yes (36:42)
	16a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 12th 2023	Yes (31:07)
	17a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 14th 2023	Yes (27:14)
	5b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	Mach 21st 2023	No
	11b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 7th 2023	No
<b>Supplier</b>	20a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 18th, 2023	Yes (34:38)
	15b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 14th 2023	No
<b>Retailer</b>	1a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 3rd 2023	Yes (28:12)
	4a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 20th 2023	Yes (34:53)
	13a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 5th 2023	Yes (24:48)
	2b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 6th 2023	No
	4b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 20th 2023	No
	7b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 28th 2023	No
	9b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 3rd 2023	No
	10b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 5th 2023	No
	13b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 8th 2023	No
<b>Hocker/ walking retailer</b>	7A	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 28th 2023	Yes (20:44)
	16b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	15th April 2023	No
<b>Kayayei</b>	3a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 8th 2023	Yes (26:09)
	18a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 13th 2023	Yes (25:54)

<b>Seamstress</b>	6a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 23rd 2023	Yes (30:25)
	8a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 28th 2023	Yes (25:48)
	3b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 8th 2023	No
	6b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	Mach 21st 2023	No
	14b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	12th April 2023	No
<b>Upcycler/ Ironing people</b>	9A	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 28th 2023	Yes (20:32)
	12a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 4th 2023	Yes (24:48)
	1b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 3rd 2023	No
<b>Waste picker</b>	11a	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 3rd 2023	yes
<b>Susu</b>	17b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	17th April 2023	No
<b>Owner of a bale pressing machine</b>	8b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	March 31st 2023	No
<b>Owner of a storage room</b>	12b	Ghana/ Kantamanto market	April 8th 2023	No
<b>Total number of interviews with audio recording</b>				<b>20</b>
<b>Total number of interviews without audio recording</b>				<b>17</b>

Table 1: List of interviewed actors  
Source: Personal research

### 3.1.2. Data collection

The collection of data was based on empirical semi-structured interviews during the field research. This is an attempt to complement literature-based sources about the Ghanaian second-hand clothing industry. The method fitted well to gather the necessary information due to its flexible and interactive approach, allowing room for further questions that arose during the interviews. Semi-structured interviews also proved to be suitable on a varying agenda if the process took longer than planned, a flexible chronology or particular questions only intended for a subset of interviewees needed to be implemented. In order to obtain essential information across all interviewees, key questions were defined and asked during all

interviews. This approach provided an overall foundation to build upon while each interviewee's point of view provided the possibility to give similar or varied individual responses through their uniquely personal experience. A thorough analysis could be evenly calculated due to this streamline of constant transparent questioning (Adams, 2015: 493ff.).

Two target groups were created for which a respective interview guideline was prepared. On the one hand, "Questionnaire 1" addressed actors who are not directly involved in the market but are otherwise connected to the second-hand clothing trade in Accra such as government officials, researchers, interest groups or specific associations. On the other, 'Questionnaire 2' was destined for representatives working directly within the trade.

### **3.1.3. Data Analysis**

Interviews with audio recordings were taken with a mobile phone and transcribed with the software "Transkriptor" shortly after. The content of the interviews without audio were written down in protocol shortly after the interview. For the evaluation of the interviews, the method of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring was used by reducing relevant parts of the text within several steps. Deductive categories were established before the conducted interviews and founded on the existing literature. Inductive categories were determined following research outcomes. Sequentially individual statements were assigned to the respective categories. Examples of deductive categories are "challenges due to poor quality clothing" or "challenges due to poor infrastructure". These are also observable when looking at the structure of the interview guidelines. After the interviews and during the analysis, inductive categories such as "upcycling and reusing methods", "increasing prices/ inflation" or the "profession of Hockers/ walking retailers" were added. In the course of this flexible approach, new findings based on the research could be incorporated.

This framework enabled an analysis structured within an empirical approach while following certain analytical rules and a determined procedure. Subsequently, this qualitative content analysis allowed for a comparison of results with existing literature and other studies (Mayring, 2000: 1ff.).

### **3.2. Limitations**

Limitations arose during the research and writing process from various aspects. First of all it is important to bear in mind that although trade data exists on global second-hand clothing flows the market is likely being underestimated by its actual size (Brooks, 2015: 5ff.).

Reported data might miss details and often does not show the total trade value of the given country. It should be taken into account that generating numbers and data in the first place is also likely to be influenced by certain interests. In this regard, one should recall that the measurability of power within the second-hand garment industry itself is difficult and can only be partially analyzed.

During the field research limitations arose from the fact that the “snowball technique”, where further interview contacts arise within the research process through interview partners unfortunately did not occur which required a higher level of personal initiative. Some essential interviews could not be arranged despite several attempts. Unfortunately, it was impossible to conduct interviews with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), the importer association and academic researchers such as professors from the University of Ghana. When searching for potential interview partners some also referred to the fact that they had already talked to “my white colleagues” meaning other researchers from the Global North.

Limitations within this research can be seen in that not all relevant aspects within the market could be researched and addressed. This becomes evident in the fact that footwear plays a significant role within the trade at Kantamanto market but the category will not be analyzed as the focus of this thesis is on textile-based items. In addition, the growing trend of online traded garments from Kantamanto market on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram or Ebay will also not be elaborated as the attention of this analysis is on personal transactions at the marketplace and would have exceeded the resources of this thesis (Skinner, 2019: 33; Akese, 2022; Interview 6a). The rise of vintage fashion within the second-hand clothing industry will also not be discussed in detail, as it would go beyond the possible framework (Brooks, 2015: 6). Although big players in exporting second-hand garments are the United States, Germany, UK, China and South Korea, a geographical focus is set on the UK and Austria when analyzing activities within the Global North (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023). This choice is based on the fact that there is already some research about these countries such as the publications of Brooks (2015), Boticello (2012), Lampel, (2020) and Südwind (2020). This allows a comparison between a bigger and smaller European country and their embedment within the industry.

It is to be noted that due to limited time resources for interviews as well as a complex and non-transparent supply chain, it is not the purpose of the study to make general statements

about the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana. When interpreting the results, it should be kept in mind that generalizations within qualitative research are difficult as the empirical findings are unintentionally and inevitably influenced by the researcher's perception and personal bias. Also despite the fact that most Ghanaians spoke English well, language barriers as well as studying the trade as a white European researcher have influenced the research.

#### **4. Context of the global second-hand clothing trade**

Although there might be as many people, if not more, dealing with second-hand clothing than with first-hand clothing, the industry remains relatively undocumented and has not received much attention within the public and scientific discourse. The trade with used garments is closely interwoven with capitalism and the so-called fast fashion industry. The "fast fashion" system, which has increasingly dominated the clothing sector since the late 1990s, leads to a massive availability of cheap clothing. A key feature of this industry is the continuity of new collections, encouraging consumers to buy new clothing constantly. While consumption of the Global North is steadily increasing, unfashionable or worn-out textiles are disposed of as waste or donated to charity organizations (Brooks, 2015: 5ff.; Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 3ff.).

The rapid consumer behavior within capitalism leads to disposal bottlenecks and builds the conditions for the second-hand market in the Global South. Such practices are built upon environmental and social injustice which can be seen by the fact that many second-hand clothes are not consumed and end up as waste, leading to persistent ecological impacts on the environment and societies in destination countries. The second-hand clothing trade is subject to a very complex structure, including many actors and networks all over the globe, which has made tracing clothes extremely difficult (Interview 5a; Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 3ff.). How positions of power and related value distribution are structured is very much unclear and largely undocumented. Nevertheless, it is observable that this trade is built upon inequality with profits of the industry mostly going to collection and exporting companies in the Global North, while countries in the Global South are used as waste management strategies (Skinner, 2019: 11f.). This brief overview of the global second-hand clothing trade already exposes the complexity of the global interwoven structures, with all its facets and entities. Within this and the following chapter, an attempt is made to establish a link between



all “production” and distribution steps that spatially transcends national borders as well as that of the local market.

#### **4.1. Divergent perception of the second-hand clothing trade**

While focus may be set on different aspects, the majority of authors researching the topic of the second-hand clothing trade seem to agree on the fact that the structures within the industry are not at all transparent and has received little attention from the public, as well as academic circuits (Brooks 2015; Hansen, 2014; Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022; Skinner, 2019). Attempts are made to investigate this murky business by analyzing the supply chain, involved actors and finding a theoretical framework. The very few publications relating to this trade can be attributed to the difficulty of researching this market. Exact figures and numbers are most likely impossible to derive. Part of this challenge is given because this trade is largely based on informal structures (Brooks, 2015: 237ff.).

Those positively highlighting the trade, mostly benefit from the industry like fast-fashion stores, sorting companies or charities. Such positions argue that the collection of used garments supports a good cause, a circular economy and an environmentally friendly way of dressing. H & M, for instance, advertises that the collection of used clothes contributes to an environmentally conscious fashion industry and offers a discount for consumers when handing in old clothes. According to their website, garments in good condition are reused as second-hand and broken pieces are recycled and reprocessed into other objects (H & M, 2023). Many charities involved in the collection of clothing claim to support similar practices as well as a good cause, with the money they receive from reselling going to sorting companies (Südwind, 2020). Researchers like Brooks (2015), Norris (2012), Skinner (2019) and Hansen (2014) see this positively suggested image as one of the major problems of this industry and point out that these promises should not be taken for granted. Previous investigation has shown that such pledged pictures are not true, as GPS trackers have revealed that broken and dirty clothes are not recycled as suggested but imported to countries within the Global South. Current structures persuade consumers to buy more clothing to preserve the industry, exacerbating the global textile waste crisis (Knus-Galán & Stolzmann, 2021).

Brooks (2015), Hansen (2014) Manieson & Ferrero-Regis (2022) and Skinner (2019) have come to similar conclusions about the impact of the trade, including the reinforcement of dependency relations by the second-hand clothing industry between countries of the Global

North and South. Furthermore, all agree that the weakening of the local textile industry as well as the disappearance of traditional clothing and the loss of jobs within this sector can also be traced back to the second-hand clothing business. Brooks (2015) elaborates on the importance of considering the cultural implications of “Westernization” and “homogenization” through the industry in terms of suppressing traditional clothing through cheap second-hand garments. He continues in this regard by pointing out that some insist that the local textile industries would have declined anyway in the past and would be challenged by cheap clothing sources currently being produced from Asia. Manieson & Ferrero-Regis (2022) argue that the market is often portrayed as a source of employment, tax revenues and affordable quality clothing for everyday use. However, based on Skinner’s findings (2019) as well as the conducted field research for this thesis, it became obvious that sources of employment are based on informal jobs with meager wages, as well as precarious working conditions for people in countries like Ghana. Due to these informal market structures, not much tax revenues can be drawn from the trade. In fact, the state has rather high expenses for the disposal of unwanted clothing, as far too many imports arrive in Ghana.

Manieson & Ferrero-Regis see a duality within practices of the second-hand clothing trade. On the one hand, a new value is created through labor processes for garments that are considered useless and worthless in the Global North. On the other hand, the global second-hand clothing industry has become a synonym for dumping, structured by a continued colonial dependence relationship. The trade from the Global North to the Global South creates a “sacrificial zone of fashion,” which refers to the fact that people in the Global South are held accountable for the disposal (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 1ff.). Ricketts and Brooks can also be referenced on this matter as they elaborate that if the trade was more transparent it would quickly become visible that ethics of second-hand are not that simple (Brooks, 2015: 241; Ricketts, 2021).

When looking at the literature, authors like Botticello (2012) and Brooks (2015) consider sorting activities as the “production processes” within which discarded and donated goods receive new value but they do not really investigate activities of further value extraction apart from the sorting. While Hansen (2014) does look at ways of addressing issues in the markets of Zambia, market structures and activities within the second-hand clothing trade have not been considered. Apart from publications by Anyidoho (2013) and Baah-Boateng & Vanek (2020) focusing on informal workers in Ghana, Adu Opare (2003) writing about the work of Kayayei and Oteng-Ababio et al. (2015a) investigating fire outbreaks at Kantamanto market,

there is generally not much specific literature about the second-hand clothing trade by African and Ghanaian authors. In this regard, the work of the OR Foundation is worth mentioning as it focuses on environmental and social injustice while criticizing the export of waste to countries in the Global South (The Or Foundation, 2021).

#### **4.2. Historical aspects**

The economic trade with second-hand garments goes far back to antiquity, where it has already been a common form of exchange. For a long time, purchasing new clothing was only possible for privileged classes. During the colonial era, second-hand garments also played an important role when used clothing was imported and marketed from the West. Such imports served the aim of modernization, among other things, through Western clothing by colonizers (Amanor, 2018: 28). Also during and after the two world wars used military clothing was imported to African countries and traded for profit there. The import of second-hand military and working clothes was only geared toward men at that time. The industry for female clothing developed much more slowly. Up until the 1960s, most second-hand clothing in Europe was mainly donated or sold to poor people in the Global North rather than exported to the Global South. In the late 1960s and 1970s, charitable collection of used clothing for societies in the Global South became a common practice in countries of the Global North. During this time, charities already functioned as the biggest supplier of second-hand clothing (Hansen, 2000: 10f.). It was the general assumption within Western societies that clothing donations were distributed to people in need for free in their home country or abroad. However, the trade with second-hand garments has long been a lucrative business rather than a charitable act; as the majority of donations have not been given out for free but rather sold for profit (Arenas et al., 2015: 6). Among charitable organizations, textile recycling and grading firms became important practitioners within this business in the 1980s (Lampel, 2020: 26ff.).

The first sharp increase in second-hand garments from the Global North to the Global South happened during the 1970s and 1980s (Hansen, 2000: 347). In the wake of the neoliberal era, a rise in the clothing trade took place. These changes were evident as clothing was sold as a mass-consumption item and therefore, customers' attitude towards clothing became relevant. Repairing broken clothes was no longer valuable since buying new textiles was much easier. For a large part of Western society, purchasing new garments became affordable, whereas wearing second-hand was often associated with poverty. Different socio-economic conditions

and the increasing purchasing power in the Global North have thus favored increased consumption. The falling costs of manufacturing garments and the liberalization through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in many countries of the Global South in the 1980s and 1990s have also led to the rise of second-hand clothing imports, especially to African countries (Brooks, 2015: 159ff.). Another turn in the industry can be seen in the emergence of the fast fashion system in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which was structured by a quick response to fashion trends and the manufacturing of poor quality clothing. The mass availability of clothing as well as this new purchasing behavior in Western countries, have subsequently led to bottlenecks in the disposal of used clothing (Banz, 2015: 10ff.). The rise of the industry can be seen in the value increase of the worldwide market between 1980 and 1999 from USD 207 million to USD 1,48 billion (Amanor, 2018: 33). Another extreme growth in the second-hand clothing trade can be observed by looking at the figures from 2021 where the trade-volume of the industry rose to USD 96 billion (Statista, 2022a).

#### **4.3. Entanglement between fast fashion and second-hand**

The "fast fashion" market model has dominated the sector since the late 1990s and early 2000s, encouraging consumers to purchase new clothes to keep up with fast moving fashion trends. The traditional model of two collections per year was replaced by a continuous change of collections up to 24 times a year. Cheap prices subsequently create opportunities for further consumption. This consumer logic implies that clothing is quickly considered out of fashion and needs to be constantly changed, even if items are still in good condition. Research shows that this system works - people who buy more clothes will more likely discard them faster (Nikolina, 2019: 2; Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 3).

Within this system, the appearance of clothing, which is closely linked to cultural and social values, is more significant than its practical use. Brooks elaborates on the extreme persuasiveness to buying new items, no other industry can convey this better. Trends and new demands are propelled by fashion stores and brands, yet most recently and quite excessively, social media platforms play an influential role (Brooks, 2015: 81ff.). The fast-fashion system has deteriorated life cycles due to cheap processing and low-quality materials. Leading firms and retailers dictate the industry by providing inexpensive clothing sources by pushing cheap production conditions, including high flexibility, short delivery times as well as low cost and fast output processes (Lampel, 2020: 30). Changes in terms of falling costs for clothing can be seen by a first glance at numbers where prices of clothing decreased between 1996 and

2012 by 36%. A shift in consumer patterns can also be observed by the fact that purchases from EU citizens increased by 40% during those years (Nikolina, 2019: 2ff.).

Within this consumption pattern, which is widely represented in the Global North, unfashionable or worn-out textiles are considered rubbish and are discarded or donated. The value of individual garments only exists as long as the next trend is released. Such practices are connected with preserving the capitalist system depending on such consumer societies. This collective need, mediated by the fast-fashion industry sparks numerous challenges and massive amounts of unwanted clothes. These patterns have fuelled the boom of the second-hand clothing trade in the Global South. However, the volume of clothing produced and consumed under capitalism exceeds the capacity of any market to absorb it. Very few people want to deal with the dilemmas this industry creates and are willing to change their consumption habits (Brooks, 2015: 81ff.).

Another important factor to acknowledge is that used garments are not distributed as donations, as often suggested by charities, but traded as marketable goods in the Global South. As a result, a new market has emerged embedded in the capitalist system and has long recognized opportunities for capital accumulation. Hence, a global division in consumption, which produces inequality through divergent forms of exchange, can be observed. The privilege of participating in the first-hand clothing market is reserved for societies in the Global North. In countries of the Global South, "second-hand" offers a cheap source of clothing compared to the more pricey locally manufactured textiles, which is essential considering that many live in poverty (Brooks, 2015: 82ff.).

The fashion industry is structured by inequality from the beginning in terms of precarious working conditions and low wages along the whole supply chain, affecting both the first-hand as well as the second-hand clothing trade. Moreover, importing second-hand garments to countries like Ghana is a form of exercising power and appears to be a neo-colonial project in which the Global North helps itself by making use of the "free disposal system". Therefore, responsibilities for the disposal of consumed textiles are shifted to the Global South by handing over second-hand garments under the guise of a donation, while these countries have to bear the ecological costs arising from this practice (Hansen, 2000: 348ff.).

Summing up, it becomes clear that both of these industries can not exist without the other and must be considered closely linked as several authors, including Brooks (2015), Manieson & Ferrero-Regis (2022), Skinner (2019) and Norris (2012), indicate. Hence, the second-hand

trade is one part of the fashion industry and this interconnectedness is described by Brooks as follows:

*"The Capitalist development of the world economy spawned the exploitive fast fashion system, and also gave rise to the international inequalities that have fuelled the boom in the second-hand clothing trade. The two sectors need to be considered in tandem."*  
(Brooks, 2010: 241)

Looking at the close connection of both, it can also be assumed that the second-hand industry will continue to rise due to the growing numbers of the fast-fashion industry in the coming years. A forecast on the development of the fast-fashion industry can be seen in the following statistic:

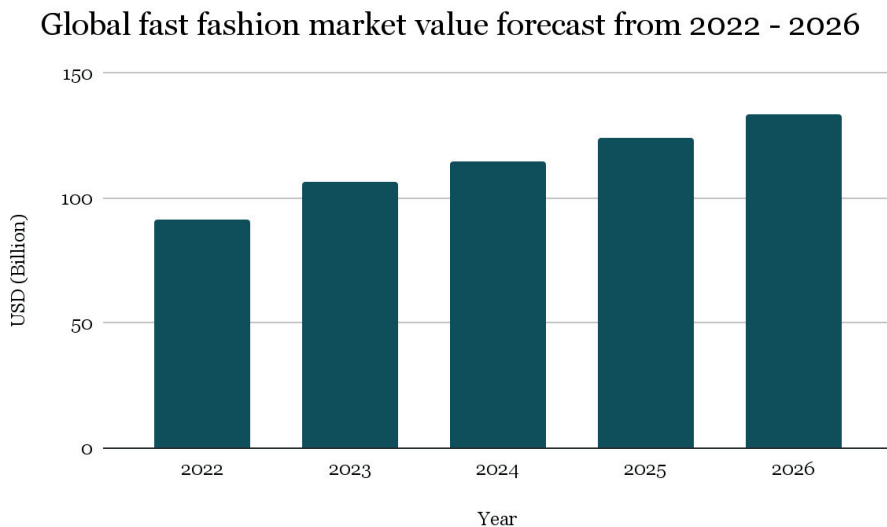


Figure 1: Global fast fashion market value forecast from 2022 - 2026  
Source: In deference on Statista, 2022b

#### 4.4. The supply chain

Within this chapter, an attempt to elaborate on the complex structures of the global second-hand trade, which the fast-fashion industry has created, is made. Generally, countries of the Global North function as suppliers of goods, whereas countries of the Global South count as recipients. Therefore the second-hand garment supply chain differs from others, as

the flow of goods is transported from the North to the South - from wealthy to poor societies (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 4).

Within this trade, an obscure embedding of institutions like charitable organizations, fast-fashion stores as well as commercialized collecting and sorting companies can be observed (Skinner, 2019: 11ff.). Various authors publishing on this topic point to the non-transparency within this supply chain and the difficulty of investigating this business (Brooks, 2015; Norris, 2012). New York Times author George Packer summarizes this phenomenon precisely with the following quote:

*“A long chain of charity and commerce binds the world's richest and poorest people in accidental intimacy. It's a curious feature of the global age that hardly anyone on either end knows it.”* (Packer, 2002)

Before analyzing individual stages of the trade in detail, the following illustration should provide a rough overview of the global supply chain of the second-hand clothing industry:

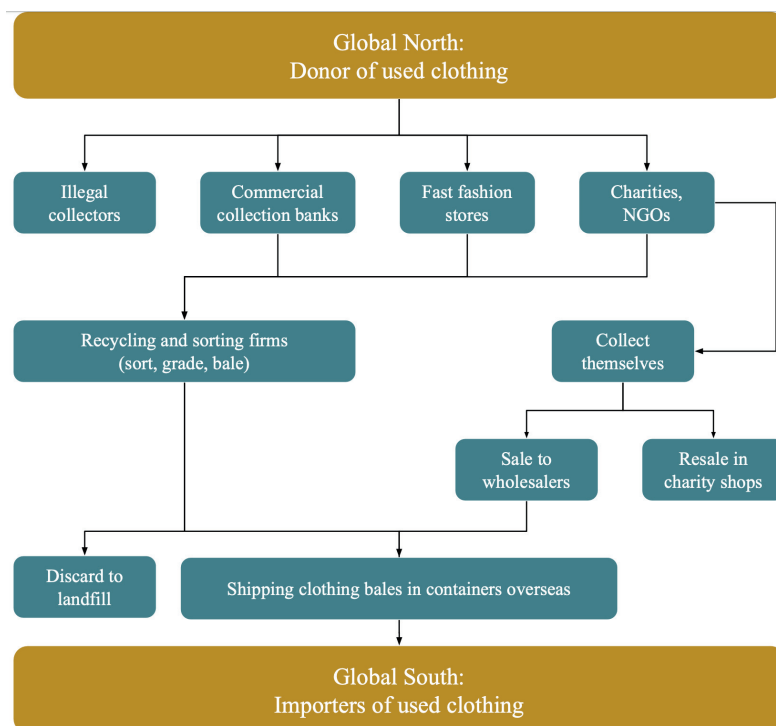


Figure 2: Actor mapping of the global second-hand supply chain

Source: In deference on Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022; Roithner et al., 202; Brooks, 2015

#### 4.4.1. Dynamics of global exports and imports

Although trade data on global second-hand clothing flows exists, it is important to bear in mind that this market will likely be underestimated by its actual size (Brooks, 2015: 5ff.). The OEC estimated that the global value of used clothing was worth USD 5.17 billion in 2021. A growth of 31% compared to the previous year resulted in being the world's 532nd most traded commodity (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023). Big players in exporting second-hand garments are countries in the Global North whereas former colonized countries in the Global South remain top importer. Those dynamics become particularly obvious when looking at the following statistics about import and export streams from 2021:

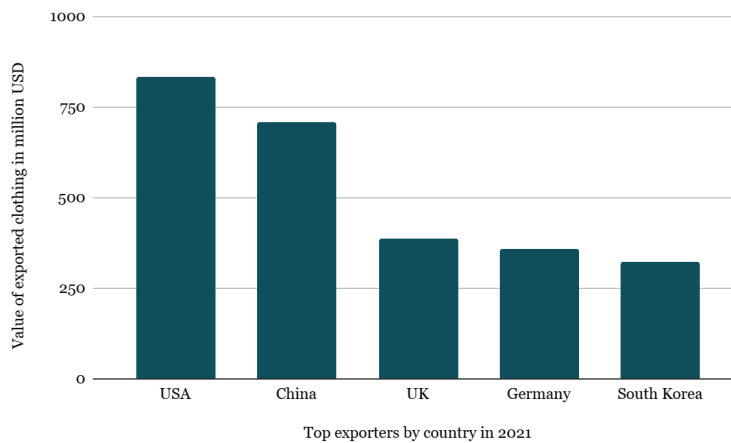


Figure 3: Top exporting countries of second-hand clothing in 2021  
Source: (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023)

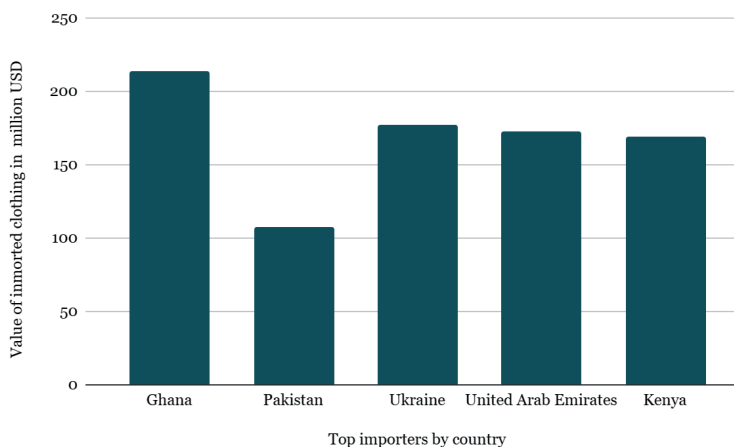


Figure 4: Top importing countries of second-hand clothing in 2021  
Source: (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023)



Austria's value of exported clothes accounted for USD 35,4 million. This considerably smaller amount compared to the above identified countries is likely due to its comparatively smaller population. Ghana currently counts as the world's largest importer of second-hand clothing. Used garments in Ghana were the 16th most imported product in 2021 and accounted for 4,13% of the global market share (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023). The majority of the trade takes place at Kantamanto market in Accra, the largest market for second-hand clothing in West Africa with daily sales of around USD 5 million to USD 10 million (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015: 313).

The importance of this industry can also be observed when looking at forecasts. The market is estimated to grow by 14.8% from 2022 to 2032. This development will be mainly driven by the following key factors: affordability, higher quality product screenings of second-hand garments and environmental factors/reasonings (Future market insights, 2022).

#### **4.4.2. Collection**

The collection of second-hand garments in the Global North is organized by various institutions and companies. On the one hand, donors can hand in used clothing in containers that profit-oriented companies or charitable organizations run. Besides containers, charity sites often serve as drop-off points directly. In Austria, textiles donated directly at drop-off points within dedicated institutions are legally considered donations. In comparison, handing in used clothes in containers is legally classified as rubbish. This can be attributed to the fact that containers are often left littered due to improper use (Tragler, 2019: 2f.). Among the essential charities entrusted with the collection of second-hand clothes in Austria are Caritas, Rotes Kreuz, Kolping, Humana and Volkshilfe. Some of these organizations, except Caritas and Volkshilfe, have been renting their logos to companies like Öpula (Österreichische Putzlappen), the largest textile sorting and recycling company in Austria, which is entrusted with the coordination and collection of donations. In return, charities receive part of the profit generated, which is subsequently used for their charity work. Charities collecting clothing themselves try to sell as much as possible in their local shops. However, only a small amount of the vast quantities they receive can be sold, which results in selling the remaining garments to commercial textile recyclers (Südwind, 2020). In the UK YMCA and Oxfam are among the largest collectors in the country and serve as important clothing collectors within charities. Oxfam is one of the charities that also runs the sorting process themselves, dealing

with around 200 tonnes of clothes per week. The charity owns a modern sorting plant, based in the north of England (Brooks, 2015: 80ff.).

Primarily the tasks of charitable organizations in relation to the collection of clothing can be described as taking care of exports being carried out legally and ensuring that textile waste is not discarded in countries that cannot process it properly. Norries elaborates on the important role of charities in the Global North collecting second-hand garments as this is a relatively easy way to make money. She further clarifies that charities often collect clothing, claiming to support poor societies, although development in the Global South is not their main focus (Norris, 2012: 133f.). However, there are also charities collecting clothes that position themselves to be involved in international development and aim to fight global poverty, such as Oxfam. The institution uses the narrative of poverty and development to promote clothing donations, as the following slogan illustrates:

*“The money your clothes and accessories raise, along with the money we collect from Gift Aid, could build water pumps, dig vegetable plots, send children to school and help families give themselves a better future. We’ll be in touch up to twice a year to let you know how much your donated items have raised towards fighting poverty.”*  
(Oxfam, 2023)

Maintaining this image of fighting poverty when donating clothes is an integral part of the system and the pattern of donating clothes is becoming normalized (Brooks, 2015: 84).

Newer forms of clothing collection are offered by online-based recycling companies such as PACKMEE in Austria, a subsidiary of TEXAID, where donors can send used-clothes to the company via mail free of charge. TEXAID places itself as “charity-private-partnership” which originated in Switzerland and provides a transparent and convenient form of donating clothes from home (PACKMEE, 2023). Also, charities like Oxfam have started to offer the possibility of donating clothes this way and even provide suitable shipping boxes (Oxfam, 2023). A relatively new player in collecting used clothing are fast-fashion shops themselves. By means of vouchers and discounts, donors are enticed to hand in used textiles in respective shops. This is central to upholding the capitalist system where wardrobes are cleared out and new consumption opportunities are created. Such a strategy also promotes the purchase of new clothes and encourages consumers to participate in a “good cause” at the same time (Tragler, 2019: 2f.). Shops promote donations by referring to environmental awareness and the waste hierarchy suggesting reduce, reuse, and recycle whereas donating used textiles becomes a sustainable option compared to landfills. The “redemptive practice” as described

by author Norris is used to persuade consumers to continue purchasing new clothes without any guilt in believing their donations will be reused (Norris, 2012: 130f.). Finally, it should not be undisclosed that clothing collection is also partly run by illegal actors (Roithner et al., 2021: 16).

The clothing collection between these various actors has become extremely competitive and financial benefits are largely undocumented to the public. Commercial recycling firms have increased control over the industry and can generate disproportionately high values. Their influence has a tendency of increased domination within commercial recycling and sorting firms through the creation of policies, guidelines and waste-management strategies. A British study by “Charitybags” investigated that charities can generate 0,05 GBP profit for 1kg of clothing donations if it is managed by recycling companies. In comparison, a direct drop-off at a charity shop that also carries out the sorting could bring in around 10 GBP, including overheads for the same quantity (Norris, 2012: 134). Similar numbers can be found in Austria, where charitable projects have only received around EUR 35 per ton of used clothing, while Öpula earned up to EUR 400 per ton (Südwind, 2020). In comparison, the costs for companies to use charity logos are meager. These existing structures illustrate that this sector's boundaries of charity and profit generation within this sector are becoming increasingly blurred (Brooks, 2015: 89).

#### **4.4.3. Sorting**

Within sorting facilities, a professional selection process based on various criteria, predominantly performed manually, takes place. In the course of this activity, items of waste are reclassified and a new value for each good is defined. Further, it is determined whether the respective items of clothing can be reused, recycled or discarded (Lampel, 2020: 35). It must also be acknowledged that fashion is very contextual and a sorting process creates a distance because there is no immediate customer feedback. From a material standpoint, sorting is more efficient but not from a reuse standpoint. In general, sorting processes should happen as close to the reuse and resale location as possible (Interview 14a).

In the sorting process, clothes are converted for new economic and cultural purposes with new potential before arriving in importing countries (Watson & Palm, 2016: 12). Sorting activities are decisive in order to extract the greatest reuse and resale value of second-hand clothing. Brooks points out that the communication about markets between traders and sorting facilities has shown to be extremely beneficial for reusing as much clothing as

possible and maximizing value. Unfortunately, this form of cooperation is put into practice far too rarely (Brooks, 2015: 150f.). Also, workers' skills at sorting firms are crucial to determine next-life potentials. Knowledge of the respective individual sales market and customer demand in destination countries are important to extend the life cycles of garments and organizing markets efficiently as the following statement by Botticello illustrates (Botticello, 2012: 168):

*“While one T-shirt of reasonable quality but with evident wear may be of little value in the high-end Eastern European market, for instance, the same item may be a welcome commodity for resale in Central Africa.”* (Botticello, 2012: 168)

Different categories are classified throughout several processes, including various selections on conveyor belts and later also on tables. There are about 200 different categories, such as men's white T-shirts or women's button blouses. In addition to the type of garment, there is also a classification according to the respective quality of each piece of clothing (Botticello, 2012: 171). Although various actors may use different terminologies for classifications, the following table shows a rough picture of categories:

Description of items	Classification	Selection	Further use
Vintage as well as particular items of certain brands	Diamonds	Very difficult to find them, that is why they are called diamonds	Very high-value items sold in specific Western European shops or are traded on the internet
New looking items	Grade A	Are selected during initial grading to save them from being relegated	Sold in retail shops at the domestic market and in Eastern European countries
Worn, but good condition can include visible stains	Grade B	Will not be selected during the initial grading but within further selection processes	Better quality: Import to Africa and the Middle East Poorer quality: Asia
Wet, moldy, broken or very dirty clothes	Grade C	Are selected during initial grading so that they do not come into contact with other pieces and reduce their value	Recycled or discarded as mixed waste

Table 2: Classification system within the sorting process

Source: In deference on Botticello, 2012.; Brooks, 2015: 87ff.; Hawley, 2006: 266ff.; Watson & Palm, 2016: 12

Some organizations like Caritas or Volkshilfe in Austria or Oxfam in the UK carry out sorting processes themselves, owning their facilities. These activities are often set up as a second

labor market employment initiative (Südwind, 2020; Brooks, 2015: 80ff.). Nevertheless, the largest part is carried out by commercial sorting and recycling firms which are embedded in capitalistic structures. These companies rely on the donations of society, hence paying relatively little for their stock and thus making this a very lucrative business. Profits are accumulated from past labor processes, where clothes were originally manufactured, as well as new labor through collecting and sorting (Brooks, 2015: 239).

The tasks in the sorting plants are carried out according to a systematic production plan where processes are constantly optimized to keep costs low. This is achieved by making use of technical equipment such as conveyor belts, bailing machines as well as facilities for storing clothes (Arenas et al., 2015: 17). Furthermore, expenses are reduced through outsourcing labor-intensive activities to low- and middle-income countries in Eastern Europe or countries in the middle east. The significantly lower wage level in these countries is a main factor why many commercial sorting and recycling firms in Europe are relocating there. For instance, the Austrian sorting and recycling company Öpula has outsourced their facilities to Italy and Humana to Slovakia (Südwind, 2020; Roithner et al., 2021: 17; Lampel, 2020). The use of cheap labor resources within the industry is also evident by the fact that these jobs are often taken on by migrant workers. Also, the employment conditions found in sorting sites, can be classified as precarious due to various aspects. Health risks fostering skin irritation as well as dust-causing allergies can be traced back to such a working environment (Südwind, 2020). Boticollo's research at a sorting firm in the UK has shown that health prevention is difficult as workers are not allowed to wear gloves since classifying an item's material requires haptic perception. A further difficulty arises from the fact that complaints from importers about the contents of the goods are often attributed to workers in sorting plants, as their perception determines the content of exports. Despite these challenging working conditions, only a minimum wage is paid in most sorting facilities (Botticello, 2012: 172).

In the Global South, we can observe a trend of former textile production companies changing business to trade with second-hand clothing. Domestic textile production, especially in Africa, has been weakened in the wake of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) and politics oriented towards liberalization in the 1980s. These developments resulted in some of these firms changing their business to sorting and importing second-hand clothing as they had the necessary capital and the network to enter the industry. This can be seen as a further example of the linkage between the second-hand and the new clothing sector (Brooks, 2015: 151).

#### 4.4.4. Distribution & Export

After garments are (re)valued, they are exported by the respective sorting company/charity or sold on local or export markets. The market for post-consumer textiles can be distinguished into three areas of distribution. First, the sale of high-quality items in shops in Western Europe; secondly, the redistribution at the international market and third, the retail of clothing for recyclable purposes (Interview 14a, Arenas et al., 2015: 17). Foreign markets play a decisive role as can be seen by the following figure based on the information of a British recycling company showing that the most considerable utilization of second-hand clothing is the resale abroad.

Distribution of clothing donations in the UK

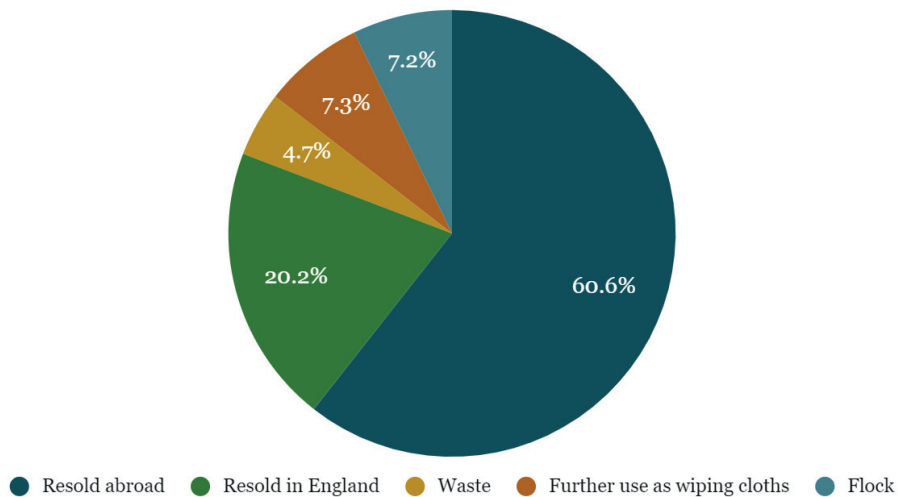


Figure 5: Distribution of clothing donations in the UK  
Source: In deference on Botticello, 2012: 169

Prices for distribution at diverse markets vary within a range between EUR 0,30 to EUR 1,60 per kilogram for reuse and EUR 0,05 to EUR 0,15 per kilogram for recycling purposes (Arenas et al. 2015: 17). Factors influencing markets and pricing are the quality of clothes, demand of suppliers and sales export representatives, transportation costs as well as the local and political context of importing countries. The latter refers to trade barriers as well as regulations such as taxation (Lampel, 2020: 39).

Concerning the supply chain at markets in the Global South, it can be stated that the transport from Europe to destination countries takes place via containers by ship and is then further distributed by trucks (Amanor, 2018: 184). The goods from European suppliers are purchased by importers like local private companies, business-oriented individuals as well as foreign players. Contracts between importers and suppliers in the Global North are mostly set in USD or the currency of the exporting country (Brooks, 2015: 168f.).

#### **4.4.5. Importers, suppliers & retailers**

The Importers' sphere of activity is to import second-hand clothing bales from the Global North. Some importers buy directly from charities or sorting companies, in other cases, the distribution is done through intermediary companies. Importing second-hand clothing encompasses being responsible for shipping the bales, clearing the goods and selling the bales to suppliers or retailers. The respective importing company carries all the costs for these efforts. This role requires capital as well as a large and reliable network of buyers in order to guarantee effective market distribution. A 24-ton container filled with around 570 bales of clothes costs around 35.000 to 45.000 EUR. Within this price, about 40% to 60% represents the cost of clothing, 5% to 10% is spent for transport and 30-40% makes up part of customs duties (Arenas et al., 2015: 29).

Moving along the supply chain, suppliers operate as middle salespeople between importers and retailers. Compared to importers, much less capital is needed as suppliers deal with a significantly smaller quantity of bales. Additionally suppliers are able to negotiate better prices than retailers due to the higher quantity of bales they process. Suppliers have primarily two important functions: on the one hand, they set a price for the whole batch to coordinate a balance between high and low-quality items. On the other hand, their access to capital allows them to provide credits to small retailers. The suppliers' business depends on the importers' deliveries or whether suitable goods are available as they often already specialize in specific categories like women's wear or bags (Interview 20a, 15b). Retailers conclude the supply chain. They buy single bales and sell individual items directly to customers at market stalls (Arenas et al., 2015: 29). Retailers specialize in categories of items, as the bales they buy are sorted by categories of clothing. Further specializations are based on the geographical origin of garments (Amanor, 2018: 40; Interview 4a, 13a, 13b). Buying whole bales of clothing and selling individual pieces is also one of the main risks this profession entails as retailers do not know the content of a bale and if they can actually sell the items (Skinner, 2019: 17;

Interview 1a, 4a, 13a, 14a). A more detailed look on these processes in Ghana is discussed in chapter 5.

#### **4.5. Regulatory processes**

Regulatory frameworks within the second-hand clothing industry can be seen as great potential to ensure health and safety standards, to reduce poverty and to promote equality. Regulations are to be considered an important part of an economic or trade system by setting guidelines for implementing legal acts or laws. Examples include prohibitions, codes, product certifications and standards that are set at a national or international level (Amanor, 2018: 22ff.). However, in order to be effective, measurements must include regulations that apply to the whole supply chain as well as monitoring instruments and institutions. Regulatory frameworks could ensure for instance that low-quality clothing is not imported to countries within the Global South without promoting or suggesting constructive advice addressing proper waste disposal strategies (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 10). Such measures would secure an obligation from the textile companies to be responsible for the entire life-cycle of their products, including the disposal of waste where and when required (Arenas et al., 2015: 21). When analyzing regulatory processes, one should bear in mind that measurements are always shaped and determined by various interest groups.

With the rise of neoliberalism and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), many countries in the Global South deregulated markets by removing import taxes and quotas in order to integrate into the world economy. As a result of this economic liberalization, export products were expensive and the demand for low-priced imported second-hand garments increased (Amanor, 2018: 29). However, due to the growing challenges in which the second-hand clothing industry creates, a re-regulation of markets within these countries of the Global South can be observed. These observations vary from general import bans on used textiles to prohibitions for specific garments like underwear. One of the best-known examples is the attempt to ban imports of second-hand clothing by the East African Community (EAC) in 2016, inclusive of countries like Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda. Due to the threat from the USA to abolish the “Africa Growth and Opportunity Act” (AGOA), which provides duty-free access to the U.S. market, the ban was ultimately only pulled off by Rwanda (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 3ff.). Another form of regulation is noted through the introduction of tax tariffs and import duties (Lampel, 2020: 47). Such second-hand clothing



tariffs were at an average of 19.7% in 2019 (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023).

The debate on regulations along the second-hand clothing supply chain is discussed very divergently on part of different positions within the literature. On the one hand, regulations are seen as protectionist policies for domestic industries. An example of this is attracting and supporting local textile and fashion businesses, which mostly can not compete with the cheap imported second-hand garments. Promoting the local economy is also seen as a possibility to reduce dependencies this industry creates (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 2ff.). Such approaches can also be viewed as the answer to growing social, economic and environmental issues caused by the second-hand clothing industry. Hansen (2000) portrays importing Western clothes to African countries as another example of a continued relationship of colonial dependence and current inequitable North-South relations.

On the other hand, it is argued that protectionist measures like bans negatively impact societies in recipient countries and are unlikely to be effective. Amanor states that bans are often introduced as a “quick fix” and refers to the importance of providing alternatives (Amanor, 2018: 110). In many Global South countries, people depend on second-hand garments, as this is an affordable form of good-quality clothing. Brooks elaborates on a shift in the supplying countries when markets prove to be less profitable due to regulations for companies in the Global North. This results in negative consequences for local traders and people depending on purchasing these clothes (Brooks, 2015: 146ff.). Furthermore, bans make the market difficult to control, as goods are smuggled or trade transitions into a more informal commodity. Concerning illegal practices, the loss of revenue in the form of fees and taxes for states should also be taken into consideration (Arenas et al., 2015: 25). Nigeria illustrates such an example where imports of second-hand clothing have been branded as contraband for the last 40 years. A giant illegal market of second-hand clothing can be observed by neighboring countries, providing an impetus for smuggling (Brooks, 2015: 146ff.).

At the moment, the global trade with second-hand garments is very much unregulated, which can be also seen by the lack of transparency in the supply chain. The Or Foundation stated in an interview that the lack of standards enables institutions in the Global North to pack and export pretty much whatever they want (Interview 14a). This has been confirmed by previous

investigations with GPS trackers where garments that are considered waste were imported to countries of the Global South (Knus-Galán & Stolzmann, 2021).

With regards to regulations in the Global North, most countries in Europe, with the exception of France and Sweden, currently do not have any specific legislation on the collection and disposal of used textiles. This also applies within Austria, where the collection and further utilization of used textiles by companies and charities is tolerated (Roithner et al., 2021: 1ff.). A new legislation that came into force in May 2018 named “EU Waste Directive”, obliges all EU Member States to set up separate textile (waste) collection systems by 1 January 2025. At the moment non-reusable textiles are often discarded in household waste as they are mostly not accepted by collection points since they do not have much value for sorting facilities. The 2025-requirement aims at the collection of all non-reusable textiles along with reusable textiles which will bring a rising quantity with decreasing quality in second-hand clothing. Much potential is seen by the EU in promoting a circular economy and recycling processes by assuming that the number of recyclable goods will increase by a factor of three to four by 2030 (Roithner et al., 2021: 1ff.). A circular economy is, according to Valavanidis, (2018) “*a concept that would turn goods at the end of their service life into resources for others, closing loops in industrial ecosystems, minimizing waste and following sustainable methods.*” Within the fashion industry applying a circular economy would mean to swap, rent, repair and reuse clothes as well as recycle materials that are not used anymore (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2023).

The “EU textile strategy” adopted in March 2022 is another implementation from the European Union aiming to introduce a sustainable circular economy within the textile sector. Starting from 2030 this plan entails for any textiles placed on the EU market to be durable, recyclable and consists to a large extent of recycled fibers. Furthermore, textile production should be aligned with social rights (European Commission, 2023). Particularly in regards to recycling this concept is seen as a promising approach. Recycling garments is currently rather rare, with only 1% of textiles being reprocessed into new fibers (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2023). Criticism regarding the strategy has been raised on part of the industry by arguing that the European textile industry will be pushed out of the market, favoring even a bigger environmental footprint by increasing dependencies on foreign supplies. Further a reference is also made on the global dimension of the fashion-industry and to the fact that an EU strategy is not enough (Mowbray, 2022). Activists fighting the fast-fashion system argue that there is an urgent need to change the industry now and no time to wait until 2030.

Furthermore, it is criticized that there is no serious attempt to reduce this “out of control” growth (Fashion Revolution, 2023).

As there are currently no obligations to recycle at all, the planned “EU Waste Directive” and “EU textile strategy” will influence the textile sector significantly. In the future, those entrusted with sorting and collecting will not only have to focus on reusable items but also on recycling purposes. This will likely boost the market for circulating post-consumer garments as well as result in the involvement of new businesses. Terminologies may be changed if part of the used clothing is already collected as waste, this will likely influence how collecting institutions label themselves. These developments will further affect imports to the Global South as waste is dealt with differently in terms of requirements and documentation. Also envisaged by these legislations would be to create more transparency and international cooperation within the supply chain (European Commission, 2023). These requirements will ask for new technologies and processes but will also increase costs, which is a particular concern for sorting companies (Watson et al., 2020: 5ff.). EPR payments could help finance such innovations and contribute to more textiles being sorted (Bettin, 2022).

The term EPR refers to “Extended Producer Responsibility”, a policy that obligates companies to pay financial compensation or take over physical responsibility for products that impact the environment. This contribution refers to the post-consumer phase, when the life cycle of a product has ended and aims to promote a circular economy. Producers are thus responsible for the recovery and treatment of products at the end of their life cycle in order to reduce environmental impacts. This is usually done by paying those who manage the waste products. The potential is seen in supporting societies to improve recycling techniques and manage textile waste. But also by making fashion brands part of the solution through questioning production methods like used materials as well as overproduction (Ricketts & Skinner, 2023). Sweden and France are currently the only European countries where EPR programs for textiles are mandatory by law since 2009 and 2024 respectively (Bettin, 2022). In France the fares are determined based on 107 different categories with an average payment of USD 0.17 per item. Experts point out that these amounts are not sufficient to convert appropriate reuse, recycle and waste management methods and should rather be USD 0.50 to USD 2.50 per garment. The French model showed that within ten years of EPR payments, twice as many garments could be sorted, contributing to less waste being improperly disposed of (Rockeman, 2023).

## 5. The second-hand trade in Ghana and Kantamanto market

Ghana was the largest importer of second-hand clothing in 2020 and Kantamanto market, located in the city center of Accra, is one of the biggest markets for used clothing if not the largest worldwide (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023; The Or Foundation, 2021). Among locals, Kantamanto market is also known as “bend down boutique” and second-hand clothing carries the name “foose” or “Obroni Wawu” (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a; Interview 12a, 14a). The term “Obroni Wawu” comes from the local Akan language, meaning “the white man has died clothes”, implying that someone must have died to give up so many garments. Although today, most people know that the donors of the clothes are still alive, the wording seems to be an appropriate metaphor to describe the absurd overconsumption of societies in the Global North (The Or Foundation, 2021).

The importance of the industry can be seen by the fact that 90% of the clothing in Ghana from low-income households to the middle class, originates from second-hand sources (Emefa et al., 2015). Within the following statement from an interviewee, the relevance of second-hand clothing and the Kantamanto market can be emphasized as:

*"You know, it's not everybody or majority of the people can't buy the the brand new stuffs or order online and get them. So more than 90% of our population you know rely on these ones, yes. So this is the hub. This is the economy. When you talk of Ghana economy, it is Kantamanto."* (Interview 16a)

Dressing fashionable is crucial in Ghana, which becomes evident when talking with a seamstress about the hot weather in the country, and questioning why Ghanaians will still wear jeans. The statement of the seamstress, “*fashion is more important than comfort*”, portrays the trend for being fashionable (Interview 6b). To fit the Ghanaian style of clothing, a lot of effort is put into upcycling items into extremely creative, unique and stylish pieces (Interview 3a, 5a, 7a, 9a, 1b, 3b, 6b). But buying second-hand is also often the only affordable choice for Ghanaians as locally produced garments or mall-bought items are much more expensive in comparison; and traditional African wear is mostly worn in festive seasons (Interview 5a, 14a). In 2004, the Ghanaian government attempted to support traditional and locally made garments by introducing the initiative “National Friday Wear Program”, where people were encouraged to wear Ghanaian textiles on the first Friday of every month. Even so, the second-hand industry still overpowers the bulk of the garment industry in Ghana (Suuk, 2017).

In theory, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) manages all markets in Accra, including Kantamanto. Unfortunately, as the institution is very under-resourced, its activities are limited (Interview 14a, 16a, 17a). According to Skinner's research, the structures of trade management in Ghana are still shaped by times of colonialism. The administration of informal businesses, including Kantamanto, is undertaken by tightly financed municipal governments like the AMA. In comparison, since colonial times, the Central Government has overseen profitable industries like mining, cocoa and the Accra Mall. Given the limited resources the AMA has, the institution struggles to provide the basic suitable standards within the infrastructure, safety and waste management aspects within the market. The absence of proper structures has led to devastating fire outbreaks in the past and brings little security in times of crisis, like during COVID-19. Skinner further elaborates that no one feels responsible for administering Kantamanto (Skinner, 2019: 116f.). The lack of management can also be seen by the lack of formal commercial zones and the trade often stretches over its fenced area to pedestrian sites. The market developed its own characteristics and unique internal structures (Amanor, 2018: 40).

Kantamanto market is located next to the train station and the area can be entered via 12 gates (Interview 15a). The area is divided into an import site with a size of approximately 60.600m<sup>2</sup> and a retailer site about 23.300m<sup>2</sup> big. The retailer site is again split up into an "old" and a "new" side. The old side has upfitted market stalls with a slightly better building structure than the "new" side with unstable floors and narrow aisles. The train station area and surrounding streets serve as another trading zone for all kinds of goods (Skinner, 2019: 101). The following picture is a map of the Kantamanto market illustrating the different sites.

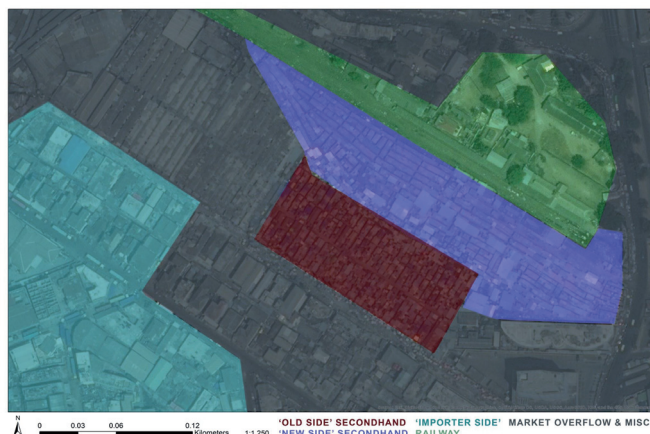


Figure 6: Map of Kantamanto market  
Source: Skinner, 2019: 102

### 5.1. Historical background and the rise of the Kantamanto market

The history of the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana goes back to early colonial years when occupying countries tried to adapt local societies to the European “civilized” way of life. This transformation aimed to be implemented, amongst other things, by providing a dress code for the indigenous people who often contained some form of nudity. This was considered inappropriate, primitive and uncivilized. The way indigenous people dressed did not correspond to Christian values either. To enter certain buildings or work at specific jobs, swapping indigenous clothes for the British style was necessary. Ghanaians were trained to believe that ideologies of the west were superior and civilized. These ideologies often and especially applied to clothing presentation. The British missionaries imported second-hand clothes and created an artificial demand for such clothing (Amanor, 2018; The Or Foundation, 2021).

The Kantamanto market's emergence dates back to when Ghana was part of the British Crown Gold Coast Colony in the 19th century. An unofficial market was created along a train line. People who traveled from the village to the city for meetings with colonial rulers purchased European-style clothes beforehand. The traders merchandised these clothes for purchase by carrying them within their hands, over their shoulders and/or upon their heads. This specific European “civilization benchmark” has strongly taken hold amongst the Ghanaian population. This western style fashion code implementation has become an important aspect for Ghanaians to express a specific form of power and professionalism (Marshall & Ricketts, 2020). European fashion was then already seen as synonymous for development. These patterns still exist today and became especially evident in a statement of an interviewed upcycler highlighting how the practices of the Global North are still considered “role models” within the Kantamanto market:

*“So those are some of the challenges you do face maybe you print. Maybe you get it, you get a mistake. Sometimes you just don't get it as original as you need it like the foreigners people get it, I guess we manage somehow what we do.” (Interview 9a)*

The more official establishment of the market began in the early 1960s when European traders became involved. The Kantamanto market extended steadily after Ghana's independence when the second-hand clothing business within the Global North started its boom (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 1ff.). After Ghana became an independent country in 1957, the country's textile production was promoted as part of the Import Substitution

Industrialization (ISI). Several establishments in the 1960s aimed for the reduction of economic dependence on imports, industrialization, the creation of employment as well as economic growth (Amanor, 2018: 29). While employment in the textile sector grew strongly between 1962 and 1970, accounting for 27% of total manufacturing employment, a decline over the next two decades followed. In 1989, Ghana introduced Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), progressively eliminating import quotas, tariffs and import licensing requirements. Such programs focus primarily on the export of resources and not so much on developing infrastructure. Within this transformation, the local textile sector declined between 1975 and 2000 from 25,000 jobs to 2,000 jobs (The Or Foundation, 2021). This development favored importing second-hand clothing garments from countries of the Global North. At the same time, Ghana was affected by political instability and the economy was influenced by other external forces such as a growing informal sector, high inflation and falling exports. Difficult economic times stirred a demand for cheap garments, which could be met by importing second-hand clothes. The global second-hand clothing trade boom was between 1980 and 2001 becoming evident in the value growth from USD 207 million to USD 1.498 million (Amanor, 2018: 29f.).

## **5.2. Actors, activities and processes**

Within this chapter various professions working within the industry in Ghana as well as resulting processes are analyzed. Currently, there are 5000 shops at Kantamanto market with roughly 30.000 to 40.000 people working there as retailers, Hockers (walking retailers), seamstresses<sup>1</sup>, upcyclers, Kayayei (female head porters), waste pickers and market cleaners (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021; Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a: 313; Interview 7a, 9a, 11a, 12a, 20a). With some exceptions, like the profession of Kayayei- practiced mainly by female workers, and waste pickers practiced only by men, all other job descriptions are conducted by both genders. Selling underwear and bras can be done by men and women, for instance (Interview 4a, 7a, 11a, 13a). Most workers have no formal education and are the breadwinners of their families. People working at Kantamanto market are on average 30 to 45 years old and 60% are men (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021: 6). The research conducted showed that most in the industry have been working in the profession for several years:

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<sup>1</sup> The term seamstress is used as a gender-neutral meaning in Ghana.

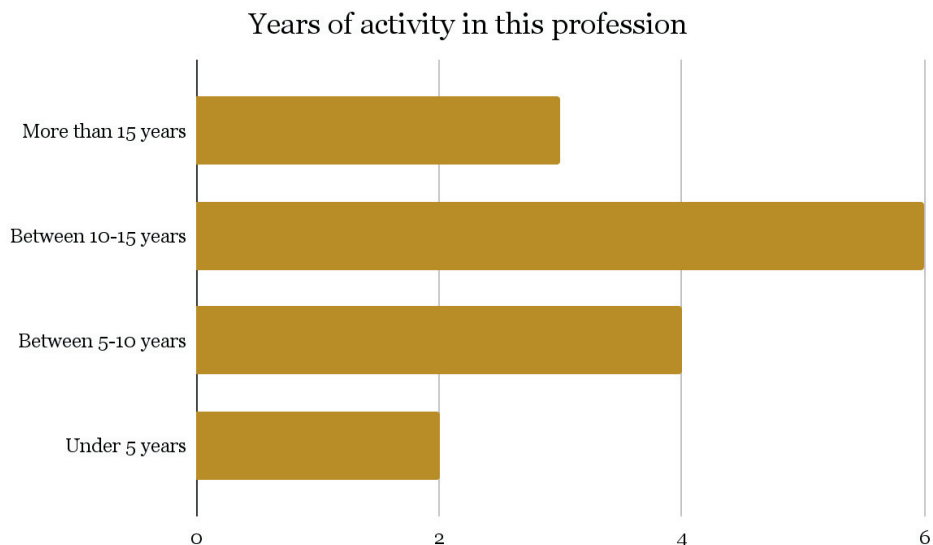


Figure 7: Years of activity in this profession

Source: Interview 1a, 3a, 4a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 10a, 11a, 12a, 13a, 16a, 18a, 20a

The socio-economic background plays a decisive role in which position is taken within the second-hand clothing industry. As already mentioned, financial resources are the basis to participate in the second-hand clothing trade and family assets are often used for necessary start-up capital (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021: 6). Many people who work at Kantamanto took over the business from their parents or entered the profession through friendship connections (Interview 10a, 11a, 12a, 13a). In the course of “family businesses”, the knowledge of the profession as well as the capital and equipment, is usually already available. A change of job to a “higher position” seems relatively rare and is mainly associated with having financial benefits (Interview 1a, 4a, 7a, 6a, 8a, 10a, 12a, 16a).

With the exception of those working in the importing business, the majority are self-employed and work on an informal basis (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021: 6; Interview 1a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 12a, 13a, 18a). This form of employment does not entail social or financial security as there isn't an income when one is not working. Examples of this would include: illness, accidents and personal work performance (Interview 9a). Mandatorily salary payment job role exceptions are: importers, managers and agents who receive a monthly salary including commission for reasonable sale rates and specific overtime working hours (Interview 16a, 17a).



Ahibale & Triki found out in their research that most workers at Kantamanto are also not engaged in any formal banking service (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021: 6). This tendency could also be recognized from the research conducted by all of the interviewees, with the exception of importers stating not to do any business via bank transfer. Although some use mobile money<sup>2</sup> and cash, most payments are made in cash (Interview 1a, 3a, 4a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 11a, 12a, 13a, 18a, 20a). Only importers use bank transfers to pay exporting firms. However, all other payments with business partners in Ghana are conducted using mobile money or cash only (Interview 10a, 16a, 17a). The following diagram shows a trend of accepted payment methods within the Kantamanto market itemized within a statistic, based on the interviews conducted:

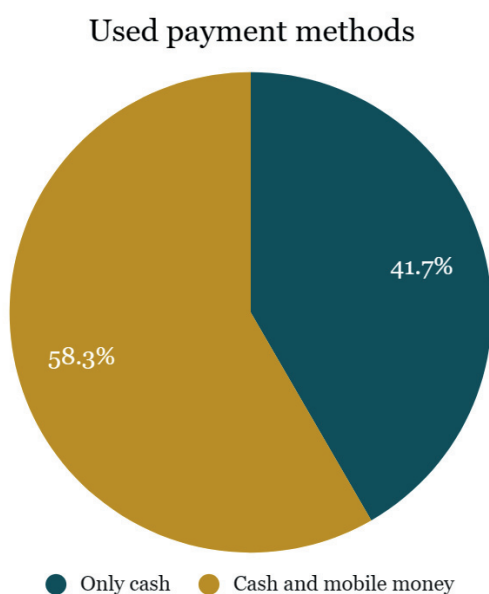


Figure 8: Used payment methods at Kantamanto market  
 Source: Interview 1a, 3a, 4a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 11a, 12a, 13a, 18a, 20a

<sup>2</sup> Mobile money is a form of banking system with the function of saving and transferring money via cell phones only requiring a sim card but no bank account. Different mobile money agencies manage these transactions. This form of payment is easily accessible and used, especially in unbanked and poor areas where there is only cell phone access (Shirano et al., 2021).

In terms of payments, it is worth emphasizing that bales are purchased by importers via the foreign currency of the exporting country and resold to the market in Ghana Cedi. Therefore, importers use foreign currencies and Ghana Cedi, while all other actors working within the Kantamanto market only deal with Ghana Cedi (Interview 14a, 10a, 16a, 17a, 20a). When setting prices, Kantamanto market is all about negotiation whereby the relationship with a customer plays an important and decisive role (Interview 3a, 7a, 8a, 10a, 13a, 16a, 17a, 18a). The importance of bargaining was aptly described in an interview with a retailer:

*“Yeah, we always bargain, every day, every time. Kantamanto is all about bargaining. Even when the thing is 50 pesos the person will still ask for bargain. When you ask why, she will say it's just for bargaining sake.”* (Interview 13)

When addressing the supply chain in Ghana, it can be stated that garments from abroad arrive at Tema port, about 30 km from Accra. The bales are stored within 6 or 12-meter containers, each weighing on average 55 kg and containing anywhere between 40 to 400 pieces of clothing. About 70% of the total Ghanaian imports, averaging approximately 15 million second-hand garments per week; is processed at the bustling Kantamanto market in Accra (Skinner, 2019: 12).

Each Thursday, around 100 containers are transported from Tema port to the import site of Kantamanto market, where further operations occur (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021: 7; The Or Foundation, 2021). Thursday is also when suppliers and retailers from Kantamanto market and from outside Accra come to purchase new bales. Wednesdays and Saturdays are market days when bales are opened and individual items are sold. The market is bustling on these days, especially in the morning when people from boutiques in Accra, as well as customers from other areas of Ghana come to Kantamanto to select good quality items (Interview 7b; Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a: 313). Parts of the unsold garments from Kantamanto are collected and pressed into new bales at special stations within the market for further redistribution to other parts of Ghana (Interview 5a, 8b). However, far too many clothes are imported to Ghana, resulting in 40% being discarded, making the fashion waste crisis particularly visible in this country (The Or Foundation, 2021). Tasks and processes of individual actors engaged in the second-hand clothing trade at Kantamanto market are examined in the following chapters.

The following chart depicts a high-level view on actors within the supply chain:

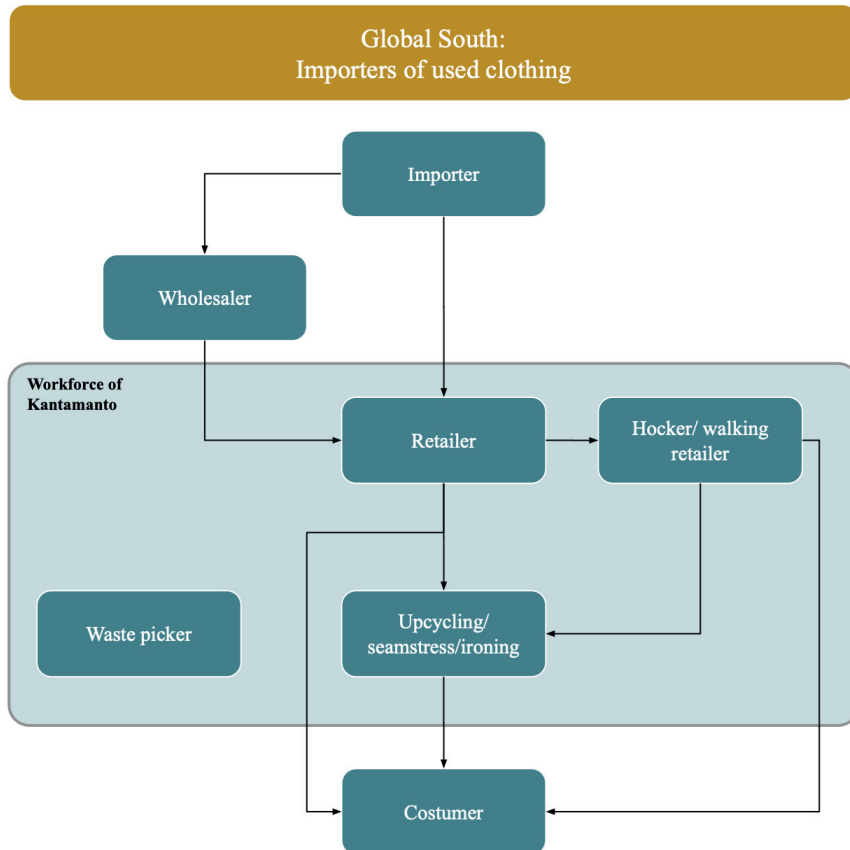


Figure 9: Actor mapping of the Ghanaian second-hand clothing supply chain  
Source: Personal research

### 5.2.1. Importers

Unfortunately, finding information about the number of importers active at Kantamanto market was not possible. In order to enter the second-hand clothing business as an importer in Ghana a lot of capital, a registration and a business certificate is required. Furthermore, a company in the Global North is needed for the cooperation. In this respect, most importers stated that they have already personally visited the respective exporting company they are working with. Those owning the importing business often do not work at the shop, but employ agents and managers responsible for the port clearing process, the transport to the

shop and organizing further sales. Importers tend to only be involved in the communication and organization with exporters (Interview 10a, 14a, 16a, 17a, 20a).

Importers buy between one or two full containers on average in one month, depending on the size of the shop. However, until a year ago, when the market was busier, they imported two to three containers monthly. Due to inflation and high exchange rates, bale costs in Ghana Cedi have doubled within the last year (Interview 10a, 14a, 16a, 17a). To share risks and costs, some importers unite in bigger groups consisting of up to 15 colleagues, importing together around ten containers per month, where profit rates are divided subsequently (Interview 11b).

The containers are loaded with about 300-450 bales, each consisting of a categorical clothing assortment for all seasons. These could include warm weather garments such as skirts, dresses, shorts and T-shirts, formal and office wear such as suits, dresses, blouses, blazers as well as sport and recreation attire (Interview 10a, 11b, 15b). Importers often cannot identify and select the categories in the bales they buy, as they are only given a “packing list” from the company they work with. Through such packing lists, importers receive various clothing bales, including less desirable ones like winter clothing. The following picture illustrates the number of bales as well as the various categories of a specific container.

	Item	weight	quantity	price/kg
A1	Adult Jogging pants	棉运动长裤	90	5
A2	BB	棉运动长裤	90	2
A3	Cargo Long Pants	成人多袋长裤	90	2
A4	Cargo short Pants	成人多袋短裤	90	2
A5	Children Jean pants	儿童牛仔裤	90	3
A6	Children Summer Wear	儿童夏装	90	20
A7	Children Spring Wear	儿童春装	90	7
A8	Children clothing	儿童服装	90	3
A9	cotton Summer/shorts	棉夏季短裤	90	2
A10	Scarves	围巾 (棉/毛)	90	2
A11	Curtain	窗帘	90	3
A12	baby Dress	儿童连衣裙	90	1
A13	Girdle	束身衣	90	2
A14	Flannel Shirts	法兰绒	90	4
A15	Flower pants	女式花裤	90	5
A16	Ladies Knitting Dresses	女针织连衣裙	90	10
A17	Knitting blouse	针织衫	90	2
A18	Jumpsuit (long)	连体裤 (长)	90	1
A19	Jumpsuit (short)	连体裤 (短)	90	5
A20	sport jackets	运动夹克	90	5
A21	Ladies 3/4 Jeans Pants	女七分裤 (牛仔)	90	6
A22	Ladies 3/4 Cotton Pants	女七分裤 (棉)	90	20
A23	Ladies Cotton Pants	女棉裤长裤	90	5
A24	Ladies Autumn Dresses	女秋季连衣裙	90	7
A25	Ladies Jean Pants	女牛仔长裤连裤	90	3
A26	Ladies Jean Dress	女牛仔连衣裙	90	2
A27	Ladies long Jean skirt	女牛仔裙 (长)	90	5
A28	Ladies long Dresses	女长裙连衣裙	90	5
A29	Ladies Silk long skirt	女丝长裙 (长)	90	5
A30	Ladies long skirt	女棉裙长裤 (长)	90	5
A31	Ladies short Jean pants	女牛仔短裤	90	2
A32	Ladies Polo Blouses	女 Polo 衫 (长+长)	90	8
A33	Ladies silk blouse	女丝上衣	90	7
A34	Ladies T-shirt S/S	女短T	90	20
A35	LEGGING	女打底裤	90	2
A36	Men long pants	男长裤	90	5
A37	Men 3/4 Jean pants	男七分裤	90	4
A38	Men Cotton Pants	男棉裤长裤	90	4
A39	Men Original Short Pants	男原单短裤	90	1
A40	Men Men's short pants	男短裤	90	1
A41	Men shirt mixed	男衬衫 (短+长)	90	4
A42	Men T-shirt S/S	男T恤	90	4
A43	Men Tropical Pants	男热带裤	90	3
A44	Underwear	男女内裤	90	2
A45	Men white shirt	男白衬衫	90	2
A46	Children Nylon Sportwear	儿童运动服	90	4
A47	Nylon Sportwear	尼龙运动服	90	5
A48	Redsheet	床单	90	4
A49	Summer Cap	泳帽	40	2
A50	Swimming suit	泳衣	90	2
A51	Sport JESY	球服	90	1

Figure 10: Exporter's “packing list”  
Source: Personal research

During the research, those involved with importing second-hand clothing stated to buy their stock from one to three different firms, but occasionally also from other importers at Kantamanto. Prices and conditions with exporting companies are discussed mainly on the phone, which are followed up and transcribed into written contracts (Interview 10a, 16a, 17a, 18a). The bales are then sold to retailers and suppliers at Kantamanto market and to salespeople dealing with second-hand clothing exclusive to retailers of the outer Accra region (Interview 10a, 17a). Those doing business outside Kantamanto market either bring their own means of transport, or orders can be sent via public transport. The purchaser's details are given to the bus driver and the receiver of the bale collects it from the respective station (Interview 20a).

Prices of bales are determined by the number of items, garment type and country of "origin", which implies the country where the clothing was collected (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021: 7). Suppliers get a better price than retailers as they buy more bales. One interviewed importer explained that a retailer pays around 20% more for a bale than a supplier, this is due to the supplier buying greater quantities (Interview 10a). According to the interviewed importers at Kantamanto market, approximately 20-30% of their stock is sold to suppliers, while 70-80% is sold to retailers (Interview 10a, 16a, 17a).

Importers have many expenses in terms of rent and electricity for their storage room as well as tax-related costs to the AMA and Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA). Unfortunately, it was impossible to determine exactly how high these costs are. Most expenses result from duty and import-related costs, with around USD 4000-5000 per container for the shipment, USD 11000 for duty and 2500 GHC for the transport from port to shop (Interview 10a, 5b, 15b). On average, these costs are higher than the product itself. The reselling price for importers consists of bale expenses, which are converted from foreign currency to Ghana Cedi, general costs for duty, transportation, rent and a profit margin (Interview 10a, 16a). One importer gave an example of how his bale's selling price is composed:

Composition of the price of one bale

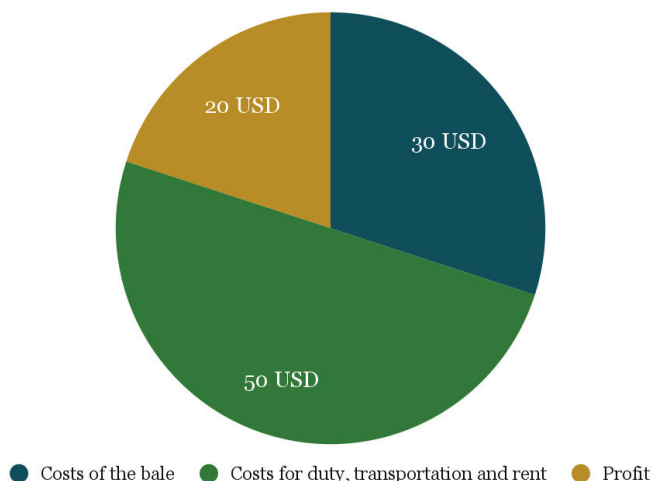


Figure 11: Composition of the price of one bale  
Source: Interview 16a

Once a delivery arrives from the port it is reconciled with the list sent by the exporting company. Although the relationship with the exporting companies in the Global North is considered positive in general, a difficulty described by the importers is the delivery of incorrect stock like receiving wrong labeled or fewer bales than listed. Such incidents are then discussed with the companies in the Global North, but there is usually no compensation from the exporter (Interview 17a). Other challenges stated in the interviews are the competition among importers at Kantamanto market and the risks of bales getting stolen. Some importers reported bales being taken by Kayayei, mainly because the truck unloading often occurs at night when it is dark. The stolen bale does not count as a loss for the company but has to be replaced by the person working at the store and in charge of the offloading at the respective time (Interview 10a, 16a, 17a).

### 5.2.2. Suppliers - middle salespeople

Suppliers function as “middle salespersons” who buy bales from importers and resell them to retailers. Suppliers deal in Ghana Cedi only and do not use written contracts for the most part. Although receipts are given to retailers when required, the sale numbers are only kept in a book. The number of purchased bales for suppliers depends very much on the size of the shop. According to the interviews, they purchase around 50-160 bales per month. The

bureaucratic criteria to enter the market is similar to those for importers, as a business certificate is required (Interview 20a, 15b).

According to the research, the stock is bought from four to five different importers and resold to new and already-known retailers, with the latest making up the more significant part. To find new business partners to buy stock from, suppliers either search on their own or receive information from customers. Suppliers and importers appear to have forged good relationships; however they also depend upon each other for survival. Occasionally, suppliers pay importers in advance to support them financially to buy another container. In this way, suppliers are guaranteed to receive their requested goods. In other cases, the bale is sold to the supplier on a credit basis with the retailer paying the bale cost with a small interest percentage once items have been sold. This is especially helpful in times of financial hardship. The constantly increasing prices and a shortage of the needed bales of the specific category, are the biggest challenges within this profession (Interview 20a, 15b).

### **5.2.3. Retailers**

The retailer site is divided into different sections, such as women's clothes, men's clothes and shoes. Around 3000 retailers at Kantamanto sell clothing in individual stalls mostly built of wood. The position of the stall is essential in terms of customers passing by leading to higher sale rates. A shop and capital to buy a bale is necessary to enter the business as a retailer. Bales are purchased either from suppliers or directly from importers if they have been in business for several years and have established a good working relationship with an importer (Skinner, 2019: 101). The goods are packed in sorted and plastic-wrapped bales at 54 kg with up to 400 pieces of clothes for USD 75 and USD 400. The average retailer buys around one to three bales weekly (Ruddock, 2022; Interview 1a, 4a, 13a, 4b, 7b). Kayayei then carries the stock on behalf of the retailer from the importer site to the retailer site of the market. There are around 12 bale storage sheds at Kantamanto, which are administered by managers who keep track of the belongings of each retailer. Retailers pay a fee of 3 Ghana Cedi per bale per week for the service (Skinner, 2019: 101). Other expenses include paying for stock, electricity, tax payments to the AMA and rent. The amount of rent and payment to the AMA depends on the size of the shop and is paid yearly. The rental agreements are set between “Kantamanto Used Clothes Sellers Association” and the respective retailer. The majority of the business agreements are assigned for a couple of years and cannot be terminated by the tenants. This is why market stalls are subleased in certain cases. Rental contracts are orally

confirmed and are kept on record within a written register by the “Kantamanto Used Clothes Sellers Association” (Interview 1a, 7a, 15a).

The sales structure is also determined by items, the geographical origin of the clothing bales as well as the quality of goods. Upon the latest a hierarchy can be derived by distinguishing between “primary traders” who deal with the “first selection” garments and “secondary” or “subsistence retailers” who mostly trade low-grade garments (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a: 313). The respective categories as well as the origin of the clothing, allow different profit rates, with underwear, baby clothing and suits being more lucrative than others. Trading low-quality items yields little profit, resulting in some retailers having jobs additional to the second-hand business (Ricketts & Skinner, 2019; Skinner, 2019: 101; Interview 13a, 16a, 17a). The selection of the respective categories are assigned for several reasons, firstly; the category type of clothing sold has often been passed down through generations within the same family. Secondly, it is related to affordability (Interview 1a, 4a, 13a). Previous studies have found that bales from England are particularly popular because of the good condition, while those from Canada or the USA are considered poor quality and are therefore much cheaper (Sztana, 2020). A similar picture can be drawn from the conducted research where interviewees stated to prefer UK bales because of the style and quality over Korea and China or often large-sized US imports (Interview 1a, 10a, 5b).

Although the market is open Monday to Saturday from 5:30 am to 6:30 pm, Wednesday and Saturday mornings bring the best sale rates since these are the days when new bales are opened (Ricketts & Skinner, 2019). During these days, a sorting process is carried out by dividing clothes into 3-4 categories. A “selector”, refers to a person owning a boutique outside of Kantamanto market or the owner of the bale, chooses the best quality items referred to as “first selection”. Usually, other people also participate in opening a bale and will buy the poorer quality items. Retailers will then try to sell the leftover garments in the upcoming days, but are often left with vast amounts of unsold clothing. Parts of the garments are sold cheaply to Hockers or to people repacking the items to new bales for redistribution in the northern part of Ghana (Interview 4a, 13a, 15a).

Two components determine prices for each second-hand item. On the one hand, the category of first, second and third selection plays a decisive role. On the other hand, the type of garment, for instance, men's jeans or ladies' tops, set the price. Items of the first category have a price tag or have not yet been worn much and can be sold for around 13-20 Ghana



Cedi. Second grade items are used but still in good condition and fulfill customer requirements in size and trend, costing around 10-5 Ghana Cedi each. Garments of the third category are in the wrong size, culturally taboo or not well-maintained and cost less than 5 Ghana Cedi. The fourth category's clothes are smelly or dirty garments and are considered rubbish (Ricketts & Skinner, 2019; Interview 1a, 4a, 13a, 4b, 7b, 10b). Based on his research, Skinner notes that men's jeans, for example, are more expensive than ladies' tops. However, a first-selection ladies' top might be pricier than a second or third-selection pair of jeans. Retailers play a decisive role when unpacking bales, deciding about the value of each piece and second-hand clothes are re-commercialized once again after the official sorting process (Skinner, 2019: 17f.).

#### **5.2.4. Hockers - walking retailers**

Walking retailers, called "Hockers", do not have a market stall and roam around trying to sell garments while carrying them. Hockers go around Kantamanto market purchasing certain individual pieces of clothing, mostly lower-quality items and re-sell them. Many Hockers buy at Kantamanto and re-sell the items at other places within Accra or Ghana. Before selling, some of the garments are upcycled or repaired to increase their value. This profession requires less capital than being a retailer as they do not need to buy a whole bale and do not pay rent. According to the research, some Hockers do not have a business registration and therefore, do not pay taxes to the AMA. This informal setting results in Hockers receiving fines, which can mostly be circumvented through bribes. It is also one of the more physically demanding professions since a typical day involves carrying all of their inventory all over the market and dealing with very high temperatures throughout the day (Interview 7a, 16b).

One interviewed Hocker, who had previously worked as a retailer, stated that walking around selling clothes brings fewer challenges than staying at one place as retailers do, who might not be able to meet enough interested customers. However, the interviewee also pointed out that the profession of a Hocker brings fewer risks as one can choose the pieces and one is not dependent on the content of a whole bale. Not knowing what is inside a bale and the amount of low-quality items led to a debt cycle for the respective interviewee. With about 50% of unsold clothing per bale, it was tough to secure an adequate living (Interview 7a).

### **5.2.5. Kayayei - female porters**

Kayayei are the head porters of Kantamanto market. They are primarily migrant workers from northern Ghana, a predominantly Muslim and poor area and to Accra for work and a better life. These are extremely physically demanding jobs and are performed almost entirely by women. In the distribution process, the Kayayeis' task is to carry bales on their heads for a fee, in and around the commercial centers. They are employed by various people at the market who can not carry the load themselves or do not want to (Interview 3a, 2a, 18a). The trade is very much dependent on the labor of the Kayayei since the passageways of Kantamanto market are very narrow and the floors are very uneven, making transport on wheels impossible. This "literally" leaves no other option than transporting the garments upon the head. Kayayei can, therefore, be considered "the backbone of the secondhand clothing trade" (Ricketts & Skinner, 2019).

The terms Kayayoo (singular) and Kayayei (plural) refers to a young woman who carries other people's loads upon their head, for a fee. The term comes from the Ga and Hausa language. Kaya can be translated as load or goods and yoo means women, hence it can be embraced as women head porters (Adu Opare, 2003: 34). However, the meaning of carrying a load or a burden also speaks for itself and the challenging conditions these women have to cope with. Such workers can be seen as the most disadvantaged within this supply chain because of deficient payment, inadequate protection, and hard working conditions (Ricketts & Skinner, 2019). In society, Kayayei are often discriminated against by considering them only as a form of transportation and not as a human being. They are judged and criticized as they generally have migrated from the North and have had to leave their families and husbands. Some believe and have opposingly criticized that these women should return to their natural place - "from where they originally came from" (Atmos, 2022).

Barriers of entry into such a profession are shallow or non-existent, since it does not require specific skills or any previous education. In addition, these jobs can easily be arranged through relatives who already work in the business (Ahlvin, 2012: 11ff.). Many Kayayai who migrated from the North had previous experiences carrying water from the well to their villages. The mere fact that one is paid for this activity is often a motive for entering this business. However, the load to carry at Kantamanto is fixed by the weight of a bale, which is much heavier than a typical load back home. Women and girls mostly carry water or other amounts that can be adjusted to age and stamina (Atmos, 2022).

Although Ghana's constitution does not allow child labor, the Kayayei Youth Association pointed out that many girls start to work at the very early age of 10. This occurs most commonly during the dry season in northern Ghana. Many young women are sent to Accra by their families to earn some money working as a Kayayei, hoping to send them back to school for the following semester. These young women generally do not have a choice as their families pressure them. The easy entry conditions are especially attractive for those with none or little formal education (Interview 2a, 3a). A study from 2003 with 700 participants provides a similar picture of Kayayei, starting to work at a very young age (Adu Opare, 2003: 42).

Distribution of Kayayei by age

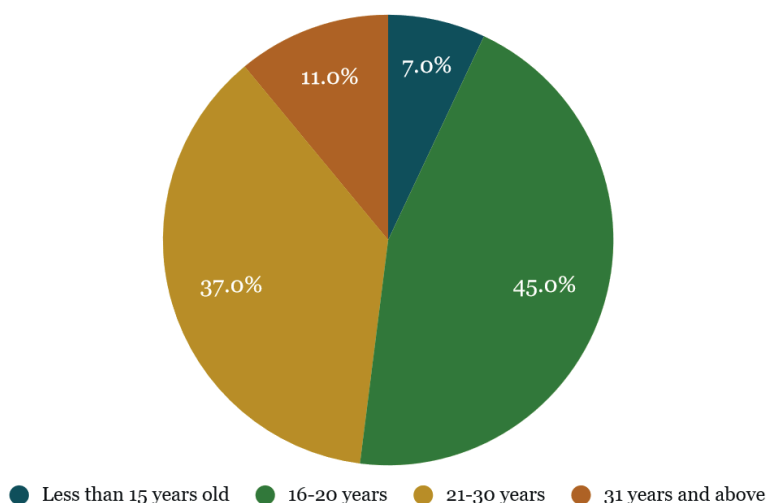


Figure 12: Distribution of Kayayei by age  
Source: (Adu Opare, 2003: 42)

These women carry bales weighing around 54 kg and the narrow walkways leave no other mode of transportation other than upon their head, this becomes the only alternative. The workload of a Kayayei depends very much on how busy the market is. Thursdays, the day shipments arrive from the port are especially demanding. When new bales come into the market, Kayayei can end up carrying 20 bales per day; during regular days, they may only receive jobs for two or three bales (Interview 3a, 2a, 18a). Skinner has found in his study that Kayayei receive anywhere between two Ghana Cedi up to a “generous” five Ghana Cedi for each job. For this they could be walking anywhere between 500 meters and one kilometer on

average carrying the bales directly from the importer site to the retailer site (Skinner, 2019: 101ff.). The majority work around 11 hours a day, six days a week and mostly within an informal settlement. The workload of a Kayayei depends very much on how busy the market is. Some Kayayei have certain importers or suppliers they work for, while others receive orders by advertising their service on the market (Interview 2a, 3a, 18a; Atmos, 2022). No matter what form of employment, payment is always done according to the number of bales carried and prices are agreed upon in advance (Adu Opere, 2003: 36ff.). Regarding expenses, Kayayei must pay around two Ghana Cedi to the AMA daily. Other expenditures derive from individual jobs. This could include the entrance fee via the railway station, which is 0,50 Ghana Cedi each transition. There isn't an option to purchase a day ticket (Interview 3a).

The precarious and difficult working conditions, which include physically challenging labour, low pay, sexual abuse and poor living conditions, have reinforced a solid, supportive network and strong community amongst the women. Since they live and work in closely linked groups, the women are especially protective of one another (Ahlvin, 2012: 14).

#### **5.2.6. Seamstress and upcycler**

At Kantamanto Market, many people work in the field of upcycling with varying tasks such as: sewing, altering, printing and ironing garments. Many creative ideas are practiced when creating a new piece of clothing. This could include the use of different textured textiles, prints and sewing techniques in order to add value and a fresh style to each item.

Sewing is an essential part of Ghanaian culture and this can be seen by the fact that this skill is taught to both genders in school (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 6f.). Alteration centers can be found all over Kantamanto market and seamstress work for retailers, upcycler and directly with customers. Their principal activities are altering clothes to other sizes or adapting them to Ghanaian weather conditions according to customers' wishes (Skinner, 2019: 111f.). Many items are also repaired and the fabric of unsold garments is reused to sew children's wear, boxersshorts or cleaning cloths. Another form of upcycling is to change Polo T-Shirts into so-called "Lacoste", where T-Shirts with holes or stains are cut into a couple of pieces and the better quality parts of two T-Shirts are sewed together into a new T-Shirt. This technique is also used to create new styles for pants and examples of such items are illustrated in the following two pictures (Interview 6a, 8a, 9a, 3b, 6b).



Figure 13: Examples of upcycled garments  
Source: Personal research

The following statement of an interviewed seamstress also highlights this upcycling process:

*"I buy used clothes and the ones which are torn and then I turn them into new ones, that's what I do."* (Interview 7a)

Another upcycling technique practiced at the market is screen printing by hand, where companies or private customers can commission their individual prints. An interviewed printing company employing 14 people could produce up to 1000 prints in a day and has previously printed "company T-shirts" for hospitals and private firms. Adaptingly, the method is also used to print specific designs on clothes to cover stains. Another task carried out by people working in the upcycling business is to dye faded clothing or items containing stains to a darker color, or to implement the batik printing technique. New design styles are also created by using simple methods such as, filling plastic bottles with colored dye and splashing it across the garment (Interview 3a, 6a, 8a, 9a, 1b, 3b, 6b). A popular form of upcycling is the attachment of labels from different brands such as Nike or Adidas to the purchased items (Ricketts & Skinner, 2019).

One of the final processes of increasing value within a single garment is ironing. This of-course makes them much more appealing to the customer. Men primarily practice this profession. Their task is to iron the clothing for retailers as the garments arrive all wrinkled from the bale packaging. Both electronic and non-electronic irons are used, with the non-electronic originating from the colonial era and being particularly popular because of the

good quality. Although non-electronic irons reduce electricity costs, coal must be purchased for heating. Ironing people are the only actors at Kantamanto market working with fixed prices which are not negotiable. Ironing for one T-shirt costs around 50 Ghanaian pesos (Interview 12a).

All these techniques aim to create a higher value and better sale rates for garments and significantly contribute to ensuring that fewer clothing items end up as waste. Within this upcycling process, value is added, which can be turned into profit. After the upcycling, final products can be sold again at a price three times as high as what had been paid, including materials and expenses (Skinner, 2019: 111f.; Interview 3a, 6a, 8a, 9a, 12a). Upcyclers either receive orders or buy single items considered suitable for the upcycling process, which involves only little costs. The risk this job entails is making a mistake, destroying the item or not meeting the customer's expectation during the upcycling process (Interview 6a, 9a, 12a). Besides Kantamanto market, social media has proved to be a suitable and equitable platform for selling the creative upcycled garments. However, the necessary equipment and marketing skills are needed (Skinner, 2019: 111f.).

Regarding employment entry requirements, most upcycling techniques are learned at Kantamanto market and do not require special training, except for seamstress. The skill of sewing is either learned at school beforehand or at the market, mainly when working for someone else. The equipment can impede to practice the profession of upcycling. According to the research, machines are often rented at the beginning of a career due to the lack of financial resources to buy the necessary equipment. Some seamstresses use manual machines because of the costs of energy to save money. Also, working spaces are often shared among a couple of people to reduce costs and because of a strong coherence among this profession. Further expenses actors in the upcycling business have is the tax payment to the AMA (Interview 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 12a, 6b 14b).

#### **5.2.7. Waste picker**

Waste management at Kantamanto market is carried out on the one hand by a formal waste collection service and on the other hand by informal waste pickers. The official services carried out by the AMA clean the area in the morning and the unofficial waste pickers collect most of the waste during the day (Interview 5a). The informal waste pickers walk around the market area and collect the scraps from sewing and discarded clothing left on the floor. Items are collected in big bags, with one interviewed waste picker explaining that three bags can be

filled when working five hours. As some seamstresses collect the scraps themselves, permission is asked beforehand when collecting from a seamstress stall but the relationship with the seamstress is described as friendly. During the research, it was difficult to find out where the textile waste finally ended up. One of probably several disposal options could be observed while accompanying a waste picker for one afternoon. After collecting, the waste picker hired a “moto”, a three-wheel motorcycle with a loading area where the bags were transported to Agboghloshie, a slum near the market. Subsequently, the bags were sold to a public bath where textile waste is used to heat water instead of firewood, as this is much of a cheaper heating source. People living in this slum do not have their own bathrooms and therefore, use these public ones for showering and washing clothes (Interview 11a).

According to an interviewed informal waste picker, there are five of this profession working at Kantamanto market and the job is only practiced by men. There is no order or rules about who cleans which part of the market. Expenses for informal waste pickers arise from costs for the transport with the motorbike which is about 30 Ghana Cedi as well as the bags to collect the waste. The working conditions are generally precarious, as this occupational group earns very little and is confronted with risky and physically hard work (Interview 11a).

### **5.3. Relationships, networks and associations**

At Kantamanto market, there is a high degree of social organization on a formal as well as an informal basis. Close relationships play a decisive role in interactions and processes and seem to be especially supportive, connective and friendly when practicing the same profession, especially when working together or sharing a shed (Interview 1a, 2a, 4a, 6a, 8a, 11a, 12a, 18a). This can be seen in the example of the close relationship among Kayayei where colleges support each other in financial need to pay a hospital bill or a funeral (Interview 2a, 3a, 18a). Nevertheless, the competition on who receives orders among occupational groups influences relationships. The customer determines the choice of who obtains the job. Relationships with customers are friendly and respectful most times. However, when bargaining about the price, interviewees have experienced insults (Interview 1a, 7a, 8a, 13a). The connection to other professions seems mostly friendly but only on a professional level (Interview 4a, 20a). When a close relationship among actors working in different areas at Kantamanto market could be established, business can be done on a loan basis (Interview 1a, 16a, 20a).

The importance of informal unification can also be seen in that 80% of traders rely on saving money with their colleagues. “NCNC”, literally meaning “no contribution, no chop”, is an association form that is organized by groups of around 10 to 20 business people of the same profession. Mostly importers, suppliers and retailers use this framework where each member pays a certain amount of the daily profit to a savings account. The system works based on a rotating box where one participant is paid a lump sum at the end of a week, which serves to minimize risks and make investments (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a: 316; Interview 5a, 15b).

Formal associations among professions are perceived as very positive by most of the interviewees. Today, Kantamanto market has an “Importer Association” for importers only, a “Kantamanto Railway Line Traders Association” for retailers only and a “Kayayei Youth Association” for Kayayei only (Interview 2a, 10a, 15a). Interviews were held with representatives from the “Kantamanto Used Clothes Sellers Association” which is part of the “Kantamanto Railway Line Traders Association” as well as the “Kayayei Youth Association”. Unfortunately, despite several attempts, organizing an interview with the Importers Association during the two-month research was impossible. In the wake of interviews with importers, it was observable that the Importer Association is exclusively for importers and requires a membership fee. Most of the interviewed importers join the association where different subjects like increasing prices are discussed during regular meetings (Interview 10a, 16a, 5b, 11b). Other professions like suppliers, upcyclers, seamstresses, Hocker and waste pickers do not have any form of association and it is also not possible for them to join any other existing association. During the research, it became apparent that having an association for each profession would be desirable to have a representative for certain concerns and interests of the specific occupational group (Interview 3a, 15a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 10a).

“Kantamanto Used Clothes Sellers Association” in short KUSA is among a “Shoe Seller Association” and a “Hardware Association” part of the “Kantamanto Railway Line Traders Association”. The requirements for joining the association are to rent a market stall inside the official area of Kantamanto and pay an annual membership fee for which a membership card will be issued (Interview 7a, 15a). As two different numbers were mentioned within the interview (3000 and 5000), it remains unclear how many members the association has. The leadership of KUSA is structured with five executives elected every four years, including a chairperson, a vice chairperson, a secretary, a financial secretary and a treasurer. Within the interview, it was pointed out that the association is a non-political institution and they do not



align themselves with any party. However, negotiations are taking place with politicians to achieve changes and improvements, which are particularly important in political matters and in times of crisis (Interview 15a). This association was useful for communication and enforcing claims, especially when it comes to discussions about the land on which Kantamanto market is built or in times of crisis like COVID-19 (Okoye, 2017). The management of the rental agreements as well as the collection of the rent and yearly payment to the railway, is also organized via the KUSA. The association is based on informal structures as there are no contracts about the membership and the respective information is only recorded in a book (Interview 15a).

An official network named “Kayayei Youth Association” was created to represent Kayayei and serves today as an advocate for Kayayei active in different markets all over Ghana, not only at Kantamanto market. The Association is funded by the US charity “The OR Foundation” but during the interview, the difficulty of being significantly underfunded as an organization and receiving no to little support from the state was elaborated. On the one hand, the state abdicates its responsibility. On the other, there is an interest in the organization's data generated through its work. The association currently has 59,000 registered members, with an increasing number. Unfortunately, there are no specific figures on how many Kayayei work at Kantamanto market. To join the Kayayei Youth Association, members must pay 20 Ghana Cedi per year and receive a membership card. The organizational structure has a leader for each community handing over relevant information to the head office in Accra. The community-based association enables a mouthpiece to draw attention to their precarious conditions and to stand up for more rights. Furthermore, several services like providing access to medical care, support in filing complaints in cases of sexual abuse and help in conflicts as well as in times of crisis like during COVID-19 are offered (Interview 2a). During the research, it became clear that the level of awareness of the association is limited as Kayayei and other occupational groups from the market did not know about the association's existence. Although the work of these associations is critical in illustrating problems and difficulties, it should be kept in mind that their scope and influence are restricted, especially on a global level (Interview 14a, 16a, 18a).

#### **5.4. Regulatory processes**

In general, the regulatory process can be seen as having great potential given the growing unregulated economic activities within the global second-hand clothing trade (Amanor, 2018:

22). Apart from a current ban on underwear, the second-hand trade is a free market in Ghana (Interview 5a). The ban on underwear, including bras and bikinis, was introduced in 2010 by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOTI) and the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA) to prevent sexually transmitted diseases as well as skin diseases (Knott, 2020). This has led to criticism among retailers arguing that such regulation would negatively impact their businesses and livelihoods (Amanor, 2018: 41). Although second-hand underwear imports are exhibited, you can find retailers selling this category all over Kantamanto market. It was also noticeable from various conversations that information on the policy was insufficiently communicated. Thus, there is often no awareness or knowledge of this ban among those working at the market (Interview 5a, 13a).

The government somehow accepts the informal market structure, but there are ongoing discussions to ban the trade completely. Most people working at Kantamanto see these ideas as problematic, particularly because of the lack of alternatives (Knott, 2020). Based on the intensive research of the interviewed NGOs, a possible import ban or high taxes on imports in Ghana are not likely to happen, nor are they seen as a solution for the issues this industry creates. On the one hand, a ban has to be considered a highly political topic and no political party wants to be associated with such measures. On the other hand, many people's livelihoods depend on this business model and alternatives with decent employment conditions must be considered when changes are introduced. A formal ban on used garments will also not change the fact that there will be a demand for affordable and quality clothing sources, which the second-hand clothing industry can ensure (Interview 5a, 14a).

Ghana is one of 15 members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a large trading block following open-border policies within the international market. Ghana can benefit greatly from this trade agreement as it is a key transshipment place for re-exporting clothes, especially to African neighbor states. An import ban would result in losing this beneficial position and would, in all likelihood, not stop the trade but support a shift into illegal trade forms, which would be very hard to control. A ban among all ECOWAS states would probably be more effective but seems very unlikely as such a regulation would ask for the political consent of 15 states. Another factor to be considered is that within the African Growth and Opportunity Act, Ghana currently has access to the US duty-free market. In the example of Ruanda, it was observable that a ban on second-hand clothing had no positive effects on the local textile industry and led to the exclusion from AGOA by the US. Therefore, the consequences of increasing tariffs or an import ban in

Ghana appear predictable. Also, according to political Ghanaian future visions of becoming a more prominent player on the international stage, it seems very unlikely to introduce such measurements. These examples and tendencies demonstrate the power of global capitalistic structures and neo-imperial influences (Skinner, 2019: 119ff.; Interview 5a).

Nevertheless, there are some ideas and possibilities to regulate the market in a controlled manner to cope with the current issues until the clothing industry will hopefully be changed in a broader sense (Interview 5a). Valuable measures for changing the existing industry suggested by the interviewed NGOs and various other interviewees could be a better initial quality control to sort garments more accurately in terms of stains or broken garments (Interview 5a, 8a, 14a). In this regard, a representative with knowledge about the market who visits the sorting plant regularly could ensure that only garments that can actually be sold on the market are imported, preventing the export of winter clothes to Ghana, for instance. Further, there could also be a fairer distribution in terms of quality, making “grade A” or “diamond” items available to countries in the Global South (Interview 5a, 14a). The Or Foundation elaborated in an interview on the difficulty within the sorting process, where clothing is highly contextual and a distance between people sorting and people reselling is created by the nature of the process. The best way to know if an item will be reused is when it is put up for resale with immediate customer feedback (Interview 14a). Nevertheless, better quality control measures would bring fewer risks for retailers as they could sell more items of one bale (Interview 5a, 14a). If poor quality garments were not imported in the first place, it could be prevented in advance that they end up as waste or if not sold, are properly disposed of. Thus, new standards could regulate and limit the amount of fashion waste that is disseminated into the environment (Interview 5a).

Regarding EPR payments, the OR Foundation has criticized that current practices of payments in France are only used for sorting processes in the Global North and do not benefit societies in the Global South at all (The Or Foundation, 2021). An important cooperation in this context was started in 2022 between the fast-fashion company Shein and the OR Foundation. This agreement is the first of its kind, with the Foundation receiving a voluntary EPR payment of USD 50 million over the course of five years from Shein. It aims to support fair working conditions for those working at Kantamanto, initiatives with Ghanaian textile manufacturers, to transform textile waste into new products and to rebuild the Kantamanto market’s infrastructure to a safe and dignified workplace. Liz Rickets, the Co-Founder of the OR Foundation, commented on this cooperation as follows (Shein, 2022).

*"We have been calling on brands to pay the bill that is due to the communities who have been managing their waste, and this is a significant step toward accountability. What we see as truly revolutionary is SHEIN's acknowledgment that their clothing may be ending up here in Kantamanto, a simple fact that no other major fashion brand has been willing to state as yet." (Shein, 2022)*

As the support services are still in their starting blocks, not much can be said about the effects yet. In particular, it was important for the organization to take immediate measures to improve market conditions at Kantamanto and therefore, started the collaboration (Ricketts & Skinner, 2023). Various parties criticized the decision to work with one of the most prominent fast-fashion labels. Greenpeace, for example, has remarked that such an organization should be financed by donations rather than engaging in greenwashing deals (Wohlgemuth, 2022).

In summary, it became clear that the industry has many positive facets, including the creative aspect of upcycling alongside being a great source of revenue for the country. However, there is a significant need to regulate the market in various ways, considering factors like fair working conditions, environmental impacts, weather conditions as well as the lifespan of fabrics. It is essential to consider that the reversed supply chain needs the same push for transparency and accountability as it is currently asked for in the manufacturing process of clothing (Interview 5a, 14a).

## **6. Power relations, value distribution and other inequalities**

This chapter investigates the relationships and positions that exert control and establish the rules in the industry. Value distribution refers to the profit captured from discarded clothing by groups or individual actors along the supply chain. This part of the thesis aims to analyze aspects where inequalities regarding positions of power and value distribution are manifested. Thus, aspects like pricing, the distribution of risks and decisions concerning waste along the supply chain are investigated. Further conditions like work-related health issues, social security measures, workplace safety standards, working hours as well as factors of gender and migration are analyzed. Upon examining the positions of power, a distinction is drawn between transnational and national inequalities, revealing six key findings and trends related to inequality.

### **6.1. Transnational inequalities**

Transnational inequalities along the supply chain of second-hand clothing are structured and shaped by a colonial past. The historically embedded position of countries in the Global

North allows them to hold a dominant role in determining trade conditions and assert specific interests. When investigating transnational inequalities three key findings emerged. Firstly, unequal global waste shares between countries in the Global North and South favoring immense inequalities on various levels particularly for societies in the Global South. Secondly, the organization of clothing collections under the guise of charity while it is actually a profit-making business for companies in the Global North. Thirdly, inequalities arise because exporters from the Global North determine trade conditions such as transferring risks and increases in costs to importers in the Global South.

### **6.1.1. Unequal waste shares**

*“So I think it benefits both ends, but also say it would benefit the Global North the most since they are just floating their waste to someone and do not care much about what the end results are and what they do with it or what it is turned into.” (Interview 5a)*

This statement from an interview with the organization GYEM already points out that global textile consumption as well as the distribution of clothing waste is characterized by inequalities. Benefits for actors in the Global North result not only from gaining profit but also from making use of the “free disposal system”. The second interviewed NGO “The OR Foundation”, which studied the supply chain of second-hand clothing in detail for several years, described the flows of second-hand clothing similarly to GYEM by referring to the term “waste colonialism”. The historically embedded position of countries in the Global North enables them to import their unwanted clothing to former colonies as they lack in providing the means to deal with the amounts of consumed clothing. This is done under the morally ambiguous idea of a “donation”. The maintenance of the current second-hand clothing trade serves as a waste management strategy for societies in the Global North and is essential for upholding a system of capitalist consumerism (Interview 5a, 14a).

A look at trade data reveals a globally unequal distribution of textile waste. Leading consumers of fast-fashion and exporters in second-hand clothing are countries in the Global North such as the USA, China, UK and Germany. Former colonies and countries in the Global South like Ghana, Pakistan or Kenya remain top importing countries of second-clothing (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023). The trend of shipping unwanted clothing from the Global North to other countries can be observed in Figure 5, which shows that over 60% of a British company's assorted clothing is exported to

foreign markets. Inequalities regarding clothing waste are reinforced by high-quality and high-value items staying in the country of “origin” while poor-quality and lower-value items are being exported to countries in the Global South. These disposal methods have been normalized through the narrative of supporting poor societies with cheap second-hand clothing sources, a narrative based on neocolonial ideas (Botticello, 2012: 168). African countries are often viewed as a “problem” requiring externally imposed solutions for waste management due to the fact that disposing strategies are framed as failure. A common practice by Ghanaians is also blaming other citizens for the waste crisis in the country. During the research countries in the Global North were almost never considered responsible for clothing waste issues. While most interviewees had the opinion that all of the imported clothing can be sold, others found various reasons to explain the improper disposal. To name just a few, people in the slums were blamed for discarded clothing ending up as trash there and one could not complain about the waste as Ghanaians decide to import these clothes in the first place (Interview 4a, 12a, 15a, 17a). These accusations are devastating when one scrutinizes that the issues stem from waste produced and consumed somewhere else (Interview 10a; Lorenz 2020).

Inequalities arise as this industry not only brings cheap clothing resources but also many negative consequences for importing countries, such as overwhelmed markets caused by the massive amount of imported clothing. This can be seen by the fact that too much imported clothing leaves the market as waste. Currently, 40% of imported clothing in Ghana is not sold and ends up as waste, approximately two weeks after arriving at the port or one week after the arrival at the market. A first glance at the numbers makes it very obvious that the 30 million garments arriving on a daily basis cannot be sold, given Ghana's population of 31 million people (Ricketts & Skinner, 2019).

Discovering aspects about waste and unsold clothing were challenging during the research. The picture that emerged from the literature research in advance already showed that a large part of the imported clothes are discarded and can not be sold. However, when this issue was brought up in the interviews, many, including the Kantamanto Used Clothes Sellers Association, answered that all imported clothes can be sold (Interview 4a, 10a, 15a, 2b). In this regard the interviewed organization GYEM stated that many Ghanaians are not fully informed about the impacts this industry creates as they just leave their garbage at Kantamanto's dumpsite and do not follow the waste. There is a challenge to create awareness as speaking about issues seems a threat to those who rely on the business (Interview 5a). Also

the OR Foundation elaborated on similar challenges within their research, as very few people are inclined to say what they actually discard. According to the OR Foundation one key element to find more information about waste was to ask detailed questions about what actually can be sold (Interview 14a). Thus Skinner was able to present a clearer picture of the amount of waste, pointing out that 420 tons of clothing can not be sold at Kantamanto and are discarded every week (Skinner, 2019: 106f.). The following table shows a list of different categories with the share of calculated waste and profit achieved per bale at Kantamanto market:

Calculated waste and income in Ghana Cedi <sup>3</sup> per bale										
Sample	Total	Gender		Clothing type						
		Female	Male	Female-wear	Female suits	Male-wear	Male suits	T-Shirts	Kid's	Other
Waste per bale in %	40.36	37.5	43.12	49.18	45.08	37.9	49.14	31.52	16.29	9.00
Revenue in GHS	191	358	30	62	2054	190	305	214	104	609

Table 3: List of calculated waste and revenue achieved per bale and respective category at Kantamanto market  
Source: In deference on Skinner, 2019: 106

This table shows that these garments are difficult to work with due to their poor quality. The vast amounts of poor-quality garments are one of the main reasons for the high amount of items being discarded (Manieson & Ferrero-Regis, 2022: 4). This issue is compounded by the fact that best preserved pieces of clothing remain in the Global North and waste is being shipped into countries in the Global South. Although places like Kantamanto market make a great contribution in terms of supporting a circular economy there is no capacity to reuse all the clothes imported because there are simply too many. Actors in the Global North do not put much effort into creating an understanding of what can actually be sold and used by importing countries. This can be seen by importing winter clothing to Ghana which can not be sold due to the hot weather conditions (Interview 4a, 5a). Liz Rickets, Co-Founder of the OR Foundation, who has been analyzing the industry in Ghana in detail for several years, describes consequences of this consumption excess as the following:

<sup>3</sup> 1 Ghana Cedi = EUR 0,077

*“It is here in Accra where big Fashion’s waste crisis is made visible, where our excess hits the ground and the debts of an entire industry pile up.” (Atmos, 2022)*

Inequalities for societies of importing countries in the Global South appear in having to deal with the disposal of the unsold clothing. At Kantamanto market traders pay taxes to the AMA for the collection of the clothing waste. However, processing these fees already costs more than they are actually worth and pay by no means for the expensive disposal of unwanted clothing. Collecting waste has been primarily privatized in Ghana among several actors, with Zoomlion being the largest. Due to outstanding debts on part of the city, companies stopped collecting waste in areas that would lie within the city's area of responsibility, like Kantamanto market (Skinner, 2019: 116ff.). Challenges arose not only in terms of management and financial sources but also in terms of technical waste capacities. Accra's main landfill is already exhausted as it can only absorb 2.000 metric tons of waste per day, though twice as much waste is being produced (Informa, 2021). According to the AMA the textile waste from Kantamanto market makes up the largest share of Accra’s official dumpsites (Ahiabile & Triki, 2021: 8). Waste from the second-hand clothing industry in Accra has increased so quickly that there was not enough time to create new landfills (Interview 5a). Currently, only 60% of clothing waste from Kantamanto is disposed of at official dumpsites. Because Ghana can not send its clothing waste to another country like the Global North does, the other 40% ends up being dumped or burned at illegal landfills like Korle Lagoon or Agbogbloshie. Current global disposal methods are not only unethical but also cause a public health crisis, destroying livelihoods as well as the environment. Diseases like malaria and cholera can spread quickly at these dumping sites as they become breeding space for mosquitos and favor contamination of food and water (Interview 5a, 11a; The Or Foundation, 2021). Thus, it can be said that societies in the Global South like Ghana currently pay to landfill the textile waste from the Global North (Skinner, 2019: 12ff.). In this regard EPR payments could help to partly compensate for these inequalities in terms of covering waste management costs and support actors throughout the reversed supply chain (Ricketts & Skinner, 2023).

During an interview, the OR Foundation pointed out that there is no need to create more clothing because there is already enough on our planet. A global understanding is needed that countries in the Global South do not have the infrastructure nor the financial means to deal with or recycle the vast amounts of clothing waste from all over the globe (Interview 5a, 14a). This could contribute to a shift from a linear to a circular economy, supporting more



justice for societies in the Global South. To solve this waste crisis entirely, the fast-fashion industry must acknowledge the vast amount of waste it produces and needs to change and reduce its production on a large scale (Ricketts & Skinner, 2023: 4ff.).

### **6.1.2. Charity & for profit**

As mentioned in previous chapters, second-hand clothes are collected under the guise of a donation, organized by various actors such as charities, for-profit sorting facilities and fast-fashion stores. Charities' logos are often rented by collection companies who pay small shares of their profit to the respective organization in return. The practice in the Global North of collecting clothing for charity purposes which are mostly resold for profits has a long history. Many positive associations, such as sustainability and beneficence, are attributed to clothing donations. However, these programs rather support upholding the capitalist system by creating new purchasing opportunities and do not aim to change anything about the industry. Actors collecting second-hand clothing position themselves to support charity and a circular textile economy when they actually have nothing to do with it. The industry uses this positive image to obscure the actual business interests at play in the trade (Südwind, 2020; Brooks, 2013: 11ff.).

This marginalized and unquestioned system is also a strategy to exert power over formerly colonized countries. Further the trade offers a possibility to introduce economic structures to work with governments in the Global South and to subsequently derive benefits for countries in the Global North (Brooks, 2013: 11ff.). A practical example is the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which allows Ghana access to the US duty-free market. At the same time, deals like this ensure to assert American interests, like the possibility of exporting unwanted second-hand textiles to Ghana. The US was the largest exporter of second-hand garments to Ghana in 2021, sending clothing worth USD 834 million (OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2023).

Exporting second-hand clothing to countries in the Global South shifts the responsibility for the time-consuming and expensive disposal process to countries like Ghana (The Or Foundation, 2021). Considering the information existing about the trade including unequal profit shares and precarious working conditions for people working within the industry in the Global South, statements by actors of the Global North about having nothing to do with these problems and the suggestion to participate in a good cause appear as extreme denial of responsibility and abuse of power (Interview 5a, 14a). Societies in the Global North are

unaware of the issues this industry creates and it is time to acknowledge that the second-hand clothing industry is no form of charity or recycling (The Or Foundation, 2021).

Previous studies have found that societies in the Global North do not understand the final markets where their donated clothes end up. People in the Global South also do not know much about the origin of their second-hand clothes (Interview 14a; Brooks, 2015: 5ff.). In reality the clothing is not donated to “the poor” as suggested by many charities but rather sold on local markets in the Global South. The perspective among Ghanaians who work in the second-hand clothing business seem to have a positive perception about the industry. The trade is considered positive in terms of job opportunities it creates as well as enabling access to cheap and popular clothing sources. As the purchasing power of most people in Ghana is low, the availability of cheap second-hand clothes allows at least some savings to be made. Nevertheless, some interviewees wished for a future market offering first- and second-hand garments (Interview 1a, 5a, 12a, 13a, 16a, 17a). Another positive effect attributed to the industry is the “original European look” when buying second-hand, which one interviewee described as the following:

*"You just go to the shop, you buy it, you just probably put it in the washing machine, then iron and you are going. But with the local one, you're now going to buy the material, you take it to the seamstress or the tailor; take some time and you know and another thing also is that we want to include be and live like the European. So their style is already here, I mean it's already styled you know, but giving it to a local person to give you that style will not be exactly like how the Europeans, you know so so we prefer using this one more than the local one number one because of the cost. Number two because of this one is already made. We want to wear our clothing just like the white, (...)"* (Interview 16a)

In the perspective of the majority of the interviewees who work in the Ghanaian second-hand trade countries in the Global North do not benefit from the industry and were described as “the ones who only bring the garments”. When asked about the fact that so many clothes from Europe end up in Ghana many highlighted the “positive intentions” of the “white people” to support poor and developing countries as they are in need of cheap clothing sources. Some interviewees talked about the existence of various levels in society that can afford different things, with Ghana taking a lower position but highlighted at the same time that they definitely would wear first-hand clothing if financial means were available (Interview 1a, 3a, 4a, 6a, 10a, 12a, 17a, 20a, 1b, 2b).

The perception about the trade analyzed within the research shows a continuance of neo-colonialist practices and the idea of “superior white societies” supporting “developing

countries” with their collected garments. Ghanaian textile culture loses its value as the model of the Western clothing style has prevailed, which can be attributed to decades of colonial oppression. The desire of “wanting to dress like the white” and “white heroism” who support “poor Ghana” are forms of power built and invented by colonialists still existing today. The way the second-hand industry currently works is another example of unequal patterns largely introduced by white people from the Global North to people of color in the Global South (Interview 14a, 13a, 20a).

It seems hard to believe that the industry remained unquestioned for such a long time, although it shows a similar system of exploitation as in first-hand fashion production. The second-hand clothing industry and the reverse supply chain need the same push for transparency and accountability as first-hand clothing production (Interview 14a).

### **6.1.3. Arising inequalities between exporters and importers**

Power structures within the global second-hand clothing trade are particularly inherited between exporters in the Global North and importers in the Global South. An advantageous position for exporters results from the fact that they pay relatively little for the stock and can resell the products to importers at a good price achieving enviable profit rates. High profits for exporters can also be accumulated as labor-intensive sorting activities are outsourced to countries with lower wage levels. Furthermore, risks are transferred by exporting companies to business partners who are importing second-hand clothing. An example can be drawn from the fact that prices between exporters and importers are always set in the currency of the exporting country. Any rise of costs is passed on by exporters to importers. Accordingly, exporters in the Global North largely determine the prices for trade of used garments (Interview 5a, 14a).

Recent difficulties for importers in terms of transferred costs resulted from a rising global inflation rate since 2022 which has affected the second-hand clothing trade immensely. Moreover, challenges also arose from the devaluation of currencies which had a massive impact on the trade. The two interviewed NGOs illustrated that because of these two factors the price of bales has increased 100% since the summer of 2022 (Interview 5a, 14a). The Ghanaian inflation rate and the devaluation of the Ghana cedi are illustrated in the following statistics:

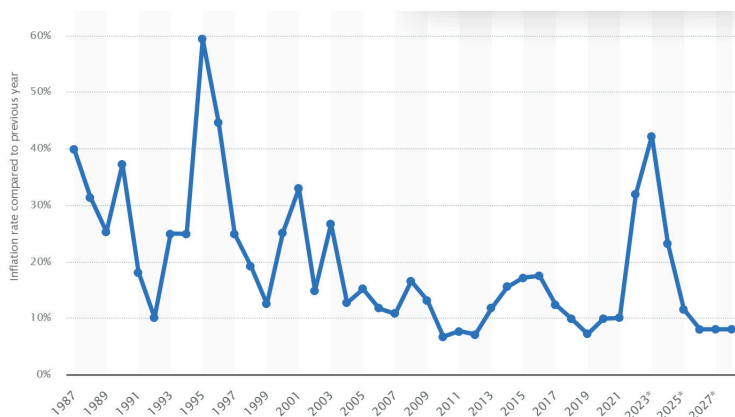


Figure 14: Inflation rate/ prognosis in Ghana 1981 - 2027  
Source: Statista, 2023

The devaluation of the Ghana Cedi peaked in the middle of 2022 with the following statistic providing detailed information:

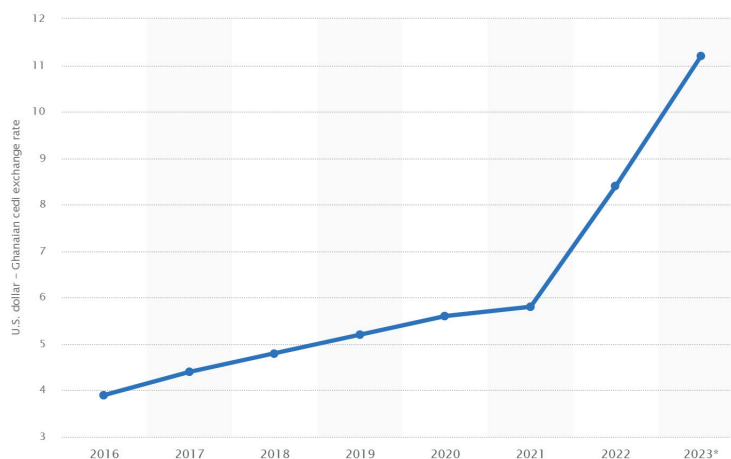


Figure 15: USD to Ghana Cedi exchange rate 2018 - 2023  
Source: Statista, 2024

This development has made it extremely difficult to import second-hand clothing from abroad and the trade is currently affected to a great extent by an ongoing economic crisis in Ghana. The average inflation rate in 2022 within the country was 54.1% and the forecast for 2024 is 29.45% (Statista, 2023). Accordingly, it has become much more expensive for importers to buy bales. Very few Ghanaians are paid in USD and the average income has stayed the same since 2022. Therefore sale rates at Kantamanto market are low and people

purchase much less second-hand clothing (Interview 5a, 14a). While collection and exporting companies in the Global North can generate substantial profits, importing second-hand clothing in the Global South is a risky business, with success highly dependent on the global economic situation. These developments result in less second-hand clothing coming into the market simply because the country can not afford it, and importers can not import the same quantity as before. From a material perspective, the market is slowing down, possibly strengthening the understanding that too much clothing was brought to Ghana previously. However, particularly local inequality has become worse which will be elaborated on closer in the following chapters (Interview 14a).

Exporters in the Global North also take on a dominant role in enforcing their interests and determining the conditions of this business (Interview 5a, 14a). One indication about this dominance can be inferred from the fact that there is no compensation for importers if bales are labeled incorrectly during sorting and packing activities or if a container consists of fewer bales than listed (Interview 17a). Other inequalities arise when looking at the knowledge asymmetry between exporters and importers. Importers often only receive a “packing list” and are not able to select the categories of the bales they purchase. These dynamics show existing power relations determined by an imbalance of supply and demand, allowing exporters to “cheat” on importers and thus making it very difficult for importers to resell all of the stock they purchase. In particular, exporters from the Global North benefit from this knowledge asymmetry since they are able to send whatever they want (Interview 10a, 16a, 17a, 18a). Current trade conditions allow actors involved in the exporting business in the Global North to accumulate high profit rates under very safe and low-risk market conditions (Brooks, 2013: 20).

## **6.2. Local inequalities**

Within this chapter local inequalities among the Ghanaian network of the second-hand clothing business and related dynamics of power are investigated. Firstly, a dominant role of importers over the workforce of Kantamanto was observable during the research. This advantageous position as they can largely push the price and requirements of exporters downwards to their business partners. Moreover, importers benefit along with foreign exporters from the existing knowledge asymmetry with retailers based on the content of a clothing bale where the latter are particularly affected from. A second key finding can be drawn from inequalities arising for the workforce of Kantamanto market. Therefore aspects

of land ownership, migrant labor and gender, a trade based on informality and the lack of infrastructure are central. Moreover, crises like the COVID-19 pandemic have deteriorated market conditions, especially for those already working in poor paid jobs adding to already existing inequalities. A final insight is the recognition of (re)valorization processes in the Global South, which have received little attention in previous publications. Inequalities arise as these activities are not recognized on a global scale even though they contribute significantly to the reduction of textile waste and foster a circular economy.

#### **6.2.1. Arising inequalities between importers and the workforce of Kantamanto market**

During the research, it was observable that the distribution of risk factors within the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana is very uneven and shaped by various factors (Interview 5a, 14a). Along the Ghanaian supply chain of the second-hand clothing trade, a dominant role is taken by importers as they, along with exporting companies, determine the conditions for regional markets. As already discussed, prices of clothing bales between exporters and importers are set in the foreign currency of the exporting company. Subsequently, prices are converted to Ghana Cedi for further sales to business partners and any rises in costs are passed on to suppliers and retailers. Thus, exporting companies in the Global North and Ghanaian importers can take over positions on top of the value chain by transferring costs and risks to other actors and indirectly supporting exploitative working conditions (Amanor, 2018: 126; Interview 5a, 14a).

A powerful position is also held by exporters and importers in the way that risks are imposed on the workforce of Kantamanto particularly on retailers (Amanor, 2018: 126; Interview 5a, 14a). Being a retailer has always been a gambling business of some sort, with the constant hope of finding better quality items by purchasing a new bale. Since prices have doubled over the last year, retailers have been caught in a severe debt cycle and have had to hold on longer to their stock, which doesn't necessarily mean that they make more money or sell more items of a bale. Keeping clothes for a longer time increases the costs of paying for storage and Kayayei for transportation to and from the storage room. These costs pile up when it is less likely to sell anything and retailers cannot buy a new bale of high-profitable “first selection” pieces. The rise in weekly prices means that profits from the previous week must be used to buy a new bale. These developments have prolonged a debt cycle and have worsened the situation for many working in this business. The fact that prices always increase as soon as the exchange rate rises but are then not lowered as soon as the USD falls was criticized

during the research. The rise of all expenses pile up and are hard to cover as retailers often cannot shift the cost to the customers. A slow market, no customers and not being able to cover expenses for food or transportation to and from work have been mentioned as a big challenge during the research as many rely on their daily income (Interview, 1a, 3a, 5a, 10a, 8a, 13b, 14b). But not only are retailers affected by the price increase imposed by importers, also upcyclers buying individual pieces of clothing have explained that supplies have gotten expensive (Interview 9a, 12a, 1b).

Many researchers studying Kantamanto market have also elaborated on not knowing the content of each bale and poor quality clothing as one of the biggest risks within this trade (Skinner, 2019: 104; Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a: 314). These identified challenges could also be confirmed within the conducted interviews (Interview 1a, 4a, 13a, 14a). Although there are some quality regulations, waste laws and quotas on what can be imported to Ghana, exporting companies can pack and send whatever they want, making power dynamics visible. The two interviewed NGOs stated that retailers are the ones whom the risks are placed upon and this group suffers most from this knowledge asymmetry. The major difficulty is that sorting facilities, exporting companies and importers in Ghana deal with bales and weight. Retailers, on the other hand, purchase bales with unknown content and have to work with the individual pieces of clothing. At the time of purchasing a bale a retailer does not know if the content can be sold profitably. The risk is exacerbated by the lack of guarantee or the possibility to return goods even if they do not meet the expected quality. The only exception of a possibility to return goods is when the content is incorrect (Interview 17a, 5b). Therefore, they largely depend on the decisions made during the sorting process. Exporters and importers are unaffected by these decisions as they only deal with whole bales of clothing (Interview 5a, 14a).

If a bale consists of poor quality many garments cannot be sold for a reasonable price. Thus, storage costs are increased as retailers hold on longer to their inventory. Many garments are of inferior quality, which can be attributed to fast-fashion low-cost production. Many interviewees stated a desire for better quality imports, bringing fewer risks for retailers and less waste in Ghana (Interview 4a, 7a, 9b). An interviewed Hocker explained that before, when working as a retailer, the content of the bale was a big issue. However working as a Hocker involves much less risk because the individual pieces are selected at the market:

*“At first I used to open the bale. Sometimes if you open, there are some that are torn. You can't do anything about it. You have to throw them away. And the bales too is very, very expensive. (...) But sometimes if you open, you can't even sell up to 1500 Ghana Cedis. But if you go around and pick, you know that when you're going to pick them, you have 500 Ghana Cedis, you have 500 Ghana Cedis, and I'm picking the ones I like, but the bale I don't know what is inside. So picking is better than opening the bale.” (Interview 7)*

On average, retailers earn around USD 10 per week working in a system entailing huge financial insecurities, with the majority not being able to cover expenses (Skinner, 2019: 104ff.). The risk of this business becomes evident because 46% of retailers are unable to pay for their expenses and only 16% make a profit. Also, many buy their stock on debt with interest rates up to 35%, making it even harder to earn a living out of this business (Ricketts & Skinner, 2019). Profits for retailers can only be achieved when selling 50% of first-grade clothing, another 40% of second-grade and lastly, 10% of third grade (Skinner, 2019: 104). However, interviewees explained that, on average, only 10% of a bale consists of first-selection items and around 40-50% of the clothes are bad quality and can not be sold (Interview 1a, 4a, 13a, 14a, 5a, 7a, 13b).

This knowledge asymmetry and bales containing only a few first-selection items and rather poor-quality garments lead to financial losses for retailers (Skinner, 2019: 104). Within this research, it also became clear that to compensate for the low-quality garments, retailers must sell with high prices for at least some items. One has to constantly buy and open new bales to attract customers and to be able to offer first-selection items as these are the ones that are quickly sold out. This very “fast fashion” system results in a downward spiral, leaving retailers with huge amounts of unsold, low-category clothing. The desire for a larger quantity of quality items was described precisely in the following statement:

*“Why do you wear your clothes for such a long time? You should only wear it for two weeks so we get better quality.” (Interview 9b)*

Within the research, no professional group claims to benefit from the trade. However, all occupations except importers stated that among those actors in Ghana, importers can make the most profit (Interview 3a, 4a, 12a, 13a, 20a). A retailer explained in an interview that the more capital one has, the more value can be extracted from the trade with second-hand clothing (Interview 4a). On the other hand, importers believed everyone benefits from the industry uniformly. It was also mentioned by importers that retailers, in particular, make high profits because they do not do business in foreign currencies and are, therefore, not affected



by foreign inflation and currency devaluation (Interview 10a, 16a, 17a). However, an opposite picture emerged from the statements of the two NGOs, which indicated that increasing costs are transferred from importers to retailers (Interview 5a, 14a).

### 6.2.2. Inequalities affecting the workforce of Kantamanto market

Power asymmetries were particularly evident when looking at working conditions in Ghana. The way the second-hand clothing industry currently works leads to difficulties for those working at the end of the supply chain taking over an economically disadvantaged role. Determining conditions such as passing on price increases and risks on part of exporting and importing companies has a negative impact on the working conditions for the workforce at Kantamanto market. The trade currently takes place under exploitative conditions including low salaries and health-related issues, with the group of migrant workers and women being especially disadvantaged (Atmos, 2022; Interview 1a, 3a, 4a, 11a, 13a, 18a, 20a). Various factors such as an informal market, a poor infrastructure and crisis like the COVID pandemic reinforce these inequalities and are discussed in detail within this chapter.

#### *The role of migrant labor and Gender*

Labour migration is understood as “the movement of people regardless of the distance across an administrative or international border beyond six months”. When examining the role of migration in Ghana, north-south streams can be observed at first sight. The importance of migrant labor could also be observed during this research, with most of the interviewees explaining that they had moved to the capital from outside Accra for job-related reasons:

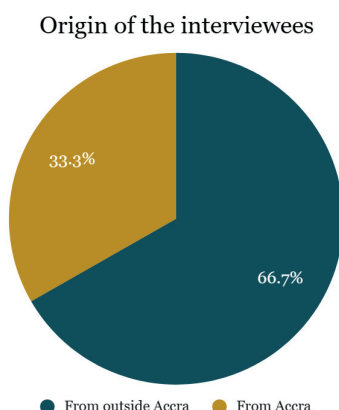


Figure 16: Origin of the interviewee's

Source: Interview 1a, 3a, 4a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 10a, 11a, 12a, 13a, 16a, 18a

The phenomenon of north-south migration has a long history dating back to colonial times when especially male workers were brought from northern parts in Ghana to the south, as this region needed many labor resources for mining of gold, timber and cocoa (Yajalin, 2022). Today, migration patterns are fuelled by climate change, which is evident, among other aspects, in desertification being a significant problem for agriculture and food supply, especially in the North (Atmos, 2022). In the wake of the neoliberal era, the Ghanaian state has played a reduced role in creating employment opportunities and removed subsidies for farms as part of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), which also favored labor migration to the South. Present pull factors for migrating are large commercial markets and domestic work opportunities in urban areas like Accra and Kumasi, the two biggest cities in Ghana. Push factors are poverty, unavailable economic benefits in the place of origin and forced marriages (The United Nations Population Fund UNFPA, 2012; Yajalin, 2022). Challenges for migrant workers result from working and living conditions often being more difficult than hoped. These are visible in working in an informal environment, long hours and the lack of financial means for housing, often resulting in homelessness. Another difficulty is inadequate support on arrival and considerable pressure to send remittances to their families (The United Nations Population Fund UNFPA, 2012; Interview 9a, 14b).

Today, especially young women, migrate to cities in search of alternative sources of income (Agyei et al., 2015: 294f.). Thus, north-south tendencies are still present, however, female migration patterns have replaced the previous male-dominated migration as they are willing to work for lower fees (Yajalin, 2022). Skinner (2019) refers to similar results found during his research about Kantamanto, particularly Ghanaian women who are not profiting from the second-hand clothing industry as they often work poorly paid jobs. Parallels are also found by Anyidoho (2013), arguing that male workers enjoy significantly higher profits than female vendors because men are more likely to trade higher-value items than women. The role of Kayayei characterizes the typical picture of female north to south migration in Ghana. Especially Ghanaian women who migrate for work take on this dangerous form of labor due to the lack of alternatives. The work of Kayayei illustrates an example of precarious working conditions within the second-hand clothing industry. The socio-economic conditions of the Kayayei are precarious in many respects, which is described in an article:

*“(...) their individual identities rendered invisible by their position at the bottom of Accra’s social ladder; and their bodies used as a forklift to transport a commodity already deemed as waste by the people who sent it here.” (Atmos, 2022)*

The size and weight of a bale underlies a system of maximizing efficiency and profit at the expense of health and safety factors for those in the bale delivery role. Due to this physically challenging work, these women are often confronted with devastating health issues such as headache, neck ache, waist pain and exhaustion. As the workers depend on their daily wages, physical warning signs are mostly ignored and painkillers are used to maintain their job. Many Kayayei lack access to health care and the lack of treatment subsequently leads to worsening health conditions (Atmos, 2022). 80% of Kayayei have migrated from the rural North to Accra, hoping for a better life. Still, the situation worsens for many when they arrive in Accra as the living costs are much higher than in all the other parts of the country (Adu Opare, 2003: 38; Interview 2a, 3a, 14b). Migration patterns of Kayayei are illustrated in the following chart, with the regions “North” and “Upper West” representing the most significant streams.

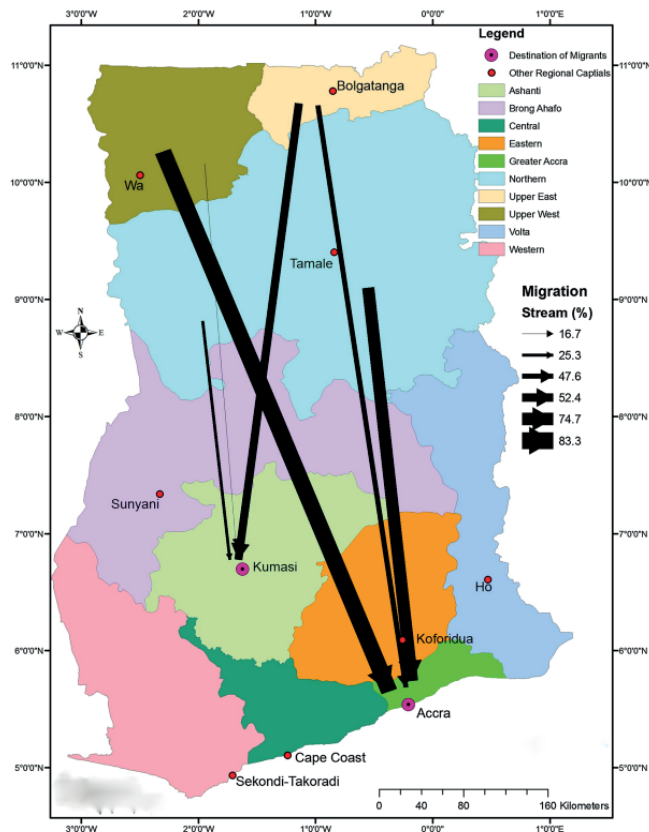


Figure 17: North–South migration patterns of Kayayei  
Source: Agyei et al., 2015: 299

Because Kayayei have left their homes to find work, many end up homeless, sleeping on the street or rent shacks as a group in the slum old Fadama, also known as Agboghbloshie, as they can not afford any other forms of housing (Adu Opere, 2003: 38). Living spaces are shared by as many people as possible to save costs. The activities for which they have migrated bring in addition to physical implications, terrible living conditions as the slums do not provide adequate water and sanitation facilities. People living under such circumstances depend on public baths, which can be used for a fee, exacerbating the financial pressure even more (Interview 3a). Female migrants find horrible living conditions in Old Fadama, situated very close to informal waste piles, where all kinds of scrap, such as secondhand clothing, plastic packaging and electronic waste, are discarded daily. In addition to the health hazards posed by the activities working as Kayayei, they are exposed to further health risks due to the particularly polluted air (Ahlvin, 2012: 12ff.).

These working and living conditions make Kayayei particularly vulnerable, becoming a victim of sexual violence. Ghana has a vast linguistic diversity, with about 60 different languages and each ethnic group having its own. As Kayayei have migrated from the North, they often only speak their tribe language, mostly not spoken in Accra, and cannot file reports at the police. During the interviews, it was explained that various incidents happened in the past where the police did not assist Kayayei in pressing charges because of the language barrier. The experience of Kayayei showed that the police and male perpetrators often downplay violence against women and have an advantage over Kayayei, as they mostly speak the language of the police and can communicate much better (Interview 2a). In terms of an intersectional lens, women experience discrimination due to their migrant status as well as gender. The risk of Kayayei being vulnerable to becoming a victim of sexual violence is also illustrated by the study of Shamsu from 2013. He elaborates on 59.5% of 400 interviewed Kayayei stated to have experienced sexual violence in the past while working as Kayayei in Accra (Shamsu, 2013: 104). Hence, women are often faced with sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortions (The United Nations Population Fund, 2012: 2). This lens shows a linkage between migration, gender and an economically disadvantaged role within the industry. Those migrating to undertake employment at Kantamanto market face socio-economic difficulties, with women being particularly disadvantaged (Agyei et al., 2015: 314).

## ***Informality***

The majority of the Ghanaian trade with second-hand clothing takes place on an informal basis. An informal trade system can be described as economic activities that are not taxed or monitored by the government and should be considered a complex field to research (Katende-Magezi, 2017: 6f.; Ahlvin, 2012: 11). Informality is characterized by not using any written contracts, small-scale operations, self-employment or unpaid family labor. Such employment does not provide social security regarding unemployment, health or pensions (Husmanns, 2003: 6ff.). Ghana's informal economy goes back to the colonial era when employment opportunities were more accessible to men and educated people. As others were excluded from official jobs, an informal economy continued to develop, which remains until today (Anyidoho, 2013: 6ff.). These informal businesses, including Kantamanto, are administered by tightly financed municipal governments like the AMA. In comparison, since colonial times, the Central Government has overseen profitable industries like mining, cocoa and the Accra Mall (Skinner, 2019: 116f.). The government in Ghana has largely been focused on creating policies regarding the formal economy, while the informal trade has been ignored or criminalized (Anyidoho, 2013). The informal system in Ghana has particularly grown in number and density in recent years, resulting in urban poverty (Oteng-Ababio & Sarpong, 2015b: 572). This tendency became significant in a study from 2020, with 89% of Ghanaian employees working on an informal basis and 83% of this share in urban areas. Women and migrant workers dominate this informal trade in Ghana today (Baah-Boateng & Vanek, 2020: 2).

Informal work relations within the second-hand clothing trade result in precarious employment conditions due to limited security, agency and opportunities for representation (Brooks, 2015). This became especially evident during COVID-19 when the government argued that aid funds can not be distributed as there is no proof that one is actually working as Kayayei, for instance (The OR Foundation, 2021: 3). Missing policies, improper management and a lack of infrastructure also characterize the informal trade system at Kantamanto market. The effects of an unregulated system is an unhealthy and dirty environment for workers and customers. Other negative driving forces are the lack of laws regulating a minimum wage or child labor protection, which particularly affects the group of Kayayei (Interview 2a, 14a). Moreover, the system favors jobs with low payment and low-entry conditions. This tendency can be seen in those accumulating less profit, like waste pickers, Kayayei or Hockers, who work on an informal basis as opposed to importers who are

embedded in a more formal sector (Interview 2a, 10a, 14a, 16a, 17a, 16b). Precarious conditions that can be traced back to informality appear in the fact that most people who are part of the labor force at Kantamanto market do not have an existing social security and rely on their daily income. There is no income security if one can not work the respective day due to illness (Interview 7a, 8a, 3b).

Aspects of informality within the Ghanaian second-hand clothing trade can also be observed by the fact that written contracts or receipts are not widely used (Husmanns, 2003: 13). All businesses, employment relationships and contracts at the retailer site seem to be an oral agreement. The only exception to this is when a retailer buys a whole bale from an importer or supplier, they ask for receipts not to be associated with a stolen bale (Interview 1a, 3a, 7a, 9a, 12a). Importers and suppliers work almost only with written contracts and receipts, resulting in significantly higher safety for their business (Interview 10a, 16a, 17a, 20a). One of the few risks for importers that can be traced back to informal trade relations is when Kayayei are employed for one-off trips and steal the bale, which is often difficult to resolve due to missing information. Importers, therefore, prefer close relationships with Kayayei (Interview 16a, 17a, 15b).

Informal saving methods with a “susu”, an informal bank system in Ghana, are also widespread among workers at Kantamanto market. A self-selected amount can be paid daily, a few times a week or on a weekly basis. The susu collector visits the customers at the market, collects the money and records the payments. After a certain period, the savings can be cashed out or exchanged for specific commodities like kitchenware or food items. The susu collector receives a fee based on the amount for keeping and administering the savings (Interview 1a, 4a, 9a, 18a, 17b). Out of 13 interviewees who were asked about whether they are using a susu collector, six interviewees seemed to be satisfied with this form of savings. Many preferred using susu over mobile money as the costs for saving with mobile money with a 10% fee are much higher compared to a 2% share of a susu (Interview 1a, 3a, 7a, 9a, 12a, 18a, 15b). Six interviewees did not trust susu collectors because of the risk that they would disappear with the money. Instead, saving methods like mobile money, bank accounts or keeping cash at home are used (Interview 4a, 5a, 6a, 8a, 11a, 13a).

These discussed aspects demonstrate the need for helpful government interventions, aside from criminalization, to support informal workers and guarantee safe working and trading conditions (Anyidoho, 2013: 41f.).

### ***Infrastructure***

This informal trade system and related missing financial resources is among other things one reason for the poor infrastructure at Kantamanto market. The lack of appropriate basic amenities to address the needs of Kantamanto's workers and consumers has led to various challenges. Improper management by government authorities leads to an unhealthy and dangerous environment (Anyidoho, 2013: 2).

The poor infrastructure can be seen in the inadequate construction of market stalls, which do not guarantee safety in case of fire outbreaks or heavy rain entailing the risks of the destruction of goods for retailers. A bad electrical system as well as market stalls built out of wood, is favoring fire outbreaks and was described as one of the biggest issues at Kantamanto market during the research (Interview 1a, 3a, 4a, 5a, 7a, 8a, 13a, 19a, 20a). The narrow corridors, which are often unpaved, also pose further challenges. On the one hand, using vehicles to transport goods is impossible and requires the dangerous form of head-carrying (Interview 14a). On the other hand, past incidents showed that it is challenging for the fire brigade in case of a fire outbreak to gain access to affected areas due to those tiny walkways (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015b: 583). Furthermore, it was criticized in the interviews that all activities are practiced side by side. Measures in terms of designated areas would be required to be able to guarantee safety for workers as well as customers. In the interview with an ironing person, the fear of burning someone was expressed as the respective workplace was located in a bustling area of the market (Interview 12a). But also, keeping and slaughtering animals at Kantamanto has led to health-related problems like the spread of bird flu in the past (Interview 9a, 12a, 14a, 16a, 10b).

Kantamanto is also bursting at the seams, expanding its activities around the official market area. Reaching the market with a car and finding a parking space in this area proves to be a big challenge. The surrounding railway station, for instance, is also used as market space and clothes are dried after coloring on the rail lines (Interview 5a, 1b). Expanding the market beyond the leased area is seen as a problem on part of the railway. Criticism is expressed about using their land to dispose of second-hand garments, burn trash and urinate in this area. Furthermore, upcycling and coloring purposes are often carried out on the land of the railway lines, resulting in chemicals ending up in the ground. Measures of sacking, like fines by the police, have hardly proved helpful as activities are usually resumed shortly after. Although the train only passes twice a day, railway officials raise safety concerns (Interview 19a).

Fire outbreaks in recent years, including 2013, 2020 and November 2022, have repeatedly drawn attention to the poor security conditions of the market. The causes of the outbreaks can be traced back to different sources such as burning of unwanted and unsaleable goods, a poor electrical system as well as the lack of fire safety standards like smoking precautions or open flame cooking (Amanor, 2018: 41f.; Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015b: 313; Stanley & Abdul, 2022; Interview 7a, 9a, 13a 14a). Fire outbreaks are particularly catastrophic since the basis of many workers is being destroyed and subsequently, their material existence is threatened (Interview 3a, 4a, 5a, 7a, 8a). Traders often buy their goods on credit-based conditions such as family guarantees, including pledging family land. According to the study of Oteng-Ababio et al. (2015a) and the conducted research, many workers can no longer meet payments because of the destruction of their goods by fire and lack of insurance. There are no relief funds for those affected by a fire from the government. In addition to their losses, increased prices often occur after a fire, making the situation even more difficult (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a: 312ff.; Interview 5a, 7a, 10a, 20a). An interviewed Hocker, for instance, had to give up their previous profession as a retailer because all goods were destroyed by a fire and the necessary capital was missing to replace the stock (Interview 7a). Hence, such incidents become particularly critical among workers with hardly any reserves and a dependency on day-to-day operations. On a personal basis, fire outbreaks leave workers shocked, anxious and suspicious of future disasters (Interview 3a, 4a, 5a, 7a, 8a).

Given such difficult situations, different risk-reducing strategies were implemented on the part of the workers, such as informal saving arrangements. Another coping strategy some traders incorporate is keeping stock outside the market, which results in extra cost and effort. Trading smaller quantities of goods also reduces the risk of loss but mostly means lower sales volume simultaneously (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a: 315f.). Oteng-Ababio et al. (2015a) have found out within their research that insurance for fire outbreaks is mostly seen as too expensive among traders and, therefore, not widely implemented. This picture also emerged during this study, with all interviewees stating not to have insurance in the event of a fire (Interview 1a, 4a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 10a, 13a, 16a, 17a, 20a, 12b).

Due to the lack of infrastructure and policies, Kantamanto has become particularly vulnerable to human-induced hazards. Fire Outbreaks have destroyed the market and sites had to be rebuilt, resulting in nourishing the discussions about whether the market should be replaced by the railway extension, which was the case in 2020 by the GRCL and AMA. Considering this, the livelihoods of people working at Kantamanto market are constantly threatened.



Specific Associations proved helpful in joining forces to represent interests and respond to respective issues (Okoye, 2020).

Many traders criticize authorities for collecting taxes and operating licenses but do not ensure safety by changing the infrastructure of Kantamanto. Also, during the interview with the railway, officials outlined that the poor infrastructure should be treated as a national issue where politics need to be involved (Interview 19a). However, in the context of weak urban governance, structures are created that allow informal activities to flourish and limit possibilities for improvement. Appropriate governance structures must be implemented to prevent workers from risks and integrate Kantamanto market into an “urban economy” as the AMA targets. Corresponding changes must also include the exploitive trade and the need to encourage a pro-poor and inclusive strategy (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015b: 572).

A dilemma seems to arise from these diverging positions, needs and plans, as adequate infrastructure is necessary to prevent fire outbreaks in the future and facilitate better working conditions. At the same time, restructuring the market contradicts the current contract with the railway, which prohibits permanent structures. According to the interview with the Kantamanto Used Clothes Sellers Association, there are plans for rebuilding the market into a modern three-storage building, including a school, a bank and a police station. The construction would take around two years and only needs governmental approval and should be finished soon (Interview 15a). The realization of the project seems to conflict with the plans of the railway, which have set the goal of extending the railway line and do not seem too willing to negotiate (Interview 19a).

The research made it clear that many actors involved in the industry wish for a safer environment and a new modern market building. Above all, better infrastructure would also be necessary to prevent future fire outbreaks and support other transport methods than Kayayei (Interview 2a, 3a, 4a, 9a, 16a, 17a, 20a).

### ***The relevance of the COVID-19 pandemic***

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that crises like this exacerbate market conditions for those already working under challenging conditions. As in other parts of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has also led to special challenges in Ghana and at Kantamanto market. For example, economic restrictions and global supply chain disruptions due to COVID-19 have impacted the flow of second-hand garments. Tougher market conditions and the variances between supply and demand during the pandemic led to many difficulties for

Kantamanto's workers. During the lockdowns, many societies in the Global North used the time to weed out their wardrobes, which led to the exploitation of goods and overcrowded storage spaces at the collection centers. Thus, storage costs have climbed, increasing the bales' price. This additional financial burden affected many Kantamanto market workers. At the same time, supply chains were disrupted and fewer second-hand clothing imports were shipped from the Global North (Knott, 2020; Okoye, 2020; Roshitsh, 2020). This trend led to a significant drop in sales figures because prices were high (Interview 4a, 5a, 10a, 17a, 5b).

Besides supply-related challenges, the concern over the spread of the virus became relevant. At the beginning of the pandemic, authorities were uncertain about whether imported clothing could spread the virus further. To prevent COVID-19 infections, authorities closed the Katamanto market from March 2020 to late April 2020. The shutdown particularly affected those who rely on daily wages. Even when the market reopened, many working directly at the market were concerned about returning to work and catching the disease but had no choice as this job was their only source of income and there were no other forms of financial support (Bauck, 2020; Knott, 2020; Okoye, 2020). During this research, many have pointed out that the pandemic has tarnished Ghana's second-hand clothing trade within the past years but also mentioned that it is no longer an issue. For Kantamanto's workers, this was a challenging time, as they could not generate any income and had meager sales rates. Many involved in the second-hand clothing industry had to exhaust their savings or took loans to survive because there was not much financial support from the government (Interview 3a, 5a, 7a, 12a, 13a, 16a). Customers were also afraid of catching the virus via second-hand garments. Ghanaians were very aware that bales were imported from countries with high COVID-19 cases (Interview 1a, 3a, 5a, 8a, 12a, 13a, 16a). The risk of catching the virus via second-hand underwear was perceived as particularly high in Ghanaian society, leading to low sales figures for this category (Interview 13a). The fear can also be traced back to the information shared by the government that the virus will stay up to 90 days on certain surfaces, which led to less second-hand clothing being purchased (Interview 5a). As Kantamanto is very crowded, many feared catching the disease and avoided visiting the market (Interview 12a, 13a, 16a, 5a).

A particularly vulnerable group during the COVID-19 pandemic were Kayayai. Since most Kayayei do not speak English and COVID-19 prevention measures were published mainly in English, they did not receive adequate information (The Or Foundation, 2021: 2). Social distancing proved impossible given the living conditions among Kayayai. Also, using

sanitary facilities, which are only allowed for a fee, made implementing recommended precautions against the virus difficult. The payment of this fee was not affordable for most of them because Kantamanto market was closed and Kayayei could not earn any money. Returning home was also mostly impossible due to financial reasons or a lack of infrastructure because of the lockdowns (Bauck, 2020). The promised aid for Kayayei was withdrawn by the government, arguing that because of the informal employment relationship, there is no proof that one is working as a Kayayei (The Or Foundation, 2021: 3). Due to the missing help from the government institutions like the Kayayei Youth Association supported Kayayei with food and medical supplies. The well-developed network of Kayayei with their community leaders was also of great help during the distribution of this aid program (Interview 2a). To respond to their challenging situation, the Kayayei Youth Association organized a demonstration on April 24th, 2020 and called for more support regarding transportation to go back home north, masks, water and food from the government (PlanB1, 2022).

### ***Inequalities concerning land ownership***

Inequalities regarding land ownership rights of Kantamanto market can be drawn from various actors claiming the land. These debates are characterized by different positions of power and asserting interests and highlights, above all, neocolonial structures of landownership (Interview 4a, 14a). Various groups are involved in the debate about the land on which the Kantamanto market is built. Even after asking questions concerning land ownership to various people during the research, the picture remains unclear (Interview 5a, 14a, 19a, 20a). Contracts for land ownership rights are complicated and create a big urban planning challenge in Accra. Today, various actors demand legal rights for the land on which Kantamanto is built on. The tribe of the Ga people refers to settler colonialism and claims ownership of the whole land of Kantamanto market, arguing that before the British colony built the railway, it was their land (Interview 14a). Regarding claims on the land by indigenous groups, the railway argued in an interview to be run by the government and is therefore not responsible for such concerns. As the government is the highest stakeholder, such requests are their area of competence (Interview 19a). Other parties who have performed cleaning services for the area started to claim rights over the land. Since the colonial conquest of Ghana, the land of Kantamanto market seems to officially belong to the Ghana Railways Company Limited (GRCL) (Interview 14a).

The current regulation was established through an agreement between different actors. Before 1988, traders were already selling their products beside the premises of the present market and thus occupied these areas. There was also an increasing administrative effort as retailers had individual contracts with the railway. Attempts were made to create a trading space solely for the second-hand clothing business (Amanor, 2018: 39f.). All those involved in activities in the second-hand sector formed a joint association under the umbrella of „Kantamanto Railway Line Traders Association” (Interview 19a). The Association had to hand in a lease application with the plans and purposes of use for the land. After examining part of the management of the railway, an agreement was accomplished in 1988, leasing some of the land which is Kantamanto market today. The agreement was renewed in December 2008 when the Ghana Railway Limited Company (GRLC) agreed to lease the land to the Kantamanto Railway Line Traders Association for the next 50 years. Contract conditions state that traders are not allowed to develop permanent structures. The contract can be terminated by both parties with a 40 months notice (Amanor, 2018: 39f.). Since then, there have been several changes within the railway, and the responsibility for the management was handed from Ghana Railway Limited Company (GRLC) to Ghana Railway Development Authority (GRDA) which is currently in charge (Interview 19a). Today, the Kantamanto Railway Line Joint Traders Association collects the rent from individual retailers and pays it collectively to the railway (Interview 15a, 20a).

Despite this agreement, there are continuous tensions between the GRLC, who aim to modernize the railway, the AMA, who force a modernization of Accra, including local markets, and executives of the Kantamanto Railway Line Traders Association for whom the market is the basis of existence. This dilemma is described in the quote from a surveyed study by Otenge et al. (2015a) as followed:

*“What’s happening at Kantamanto is emblematic of dramatic changes taking place throughout the city: export-led and private sector development has fueled high-end and high-price property development, but at the expense of the local and informal sector that undergirds it, at truism which is as old as the city itself.”* (Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015a)

Okoye elaborates on the issues enforceable contracts bring forth, leaving traders with limited negotiation ranges in Ghana against government authorities and the interests of private firms (Okoye, 2020). The government has a big interest in keeping the existence of the market as it is important for the economy and in keeping and creating jobs (Interview 4a, 14a).

Analyzing these aspects ultimately remark that the second-hand clothing industry represents a system of injustice and neo-colonial practices. The workforce of Kantamanto is particularly affected by informal structures, missing safety standards, limited social security and representation as well as precarious working and living conditions. Negative consequences from this trade arise in particular for the environment and people, at the receiving end.

### **6.2.3. The acknowledgment of (re)valorization process in the Global South**

Particularly, the creativity and the time-intensive upcycling processes practiced at Kantamanto market stood out during the research. Although the research results are mostly in line with the existing literature, the aspect of value creation apart from the sorting process in the Global North seems to have been neglected by previous scholars and is therefore one main aspect within this thesis. Many jobs are drawn from upcycling at Kantamanto market, including repairing, resewing, coloring and cleaning garments. These activities aim to create a higher value and better sale rates out of used clothing but also contribute to a large scale of reducing waste (The Or Foundation, 2021; Interview 3a, 15a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 10a). The different perception of wasted items and upcycling ideas among various countries were precisely described by the following statement of an interviewee:

*“No, it's not a waste because for you it is waste but in Ghana it is no waste because people will buy it and re sew it and it becomes something different. Yeah, so it's not waste, but even though Africa becomes a dumping ground.”* (Interview 8)

So far, these innovative ideas and (re)valorization activities such as (re)sorting, upcycling and reuse that have takenplace in countries like Ghana, have not received much acknowledgment as practices from the Global North, which also reveals neo-colonial structures. Analysis about upcycling techniques and how societies understand waste as a problem and a resource remain rare. Previous research has shown that 100 million items are recirculated every 4-5 months at Kantamanto market. In comparison, the well-known US online thrift shop ThredUp has recirculated 100 million items in 10 years. These numbers portray how upcycling activities in places like Ghana are not considered as innovations in the Global North (Kalina et al., 2022).

This is where EPR payments could play a central role in supporting and recognizing upcycling processes all over the globe. The Or Foundation has criticized that current practices of EPR payments in France are only used for sorting processes in the Global North and do not benefit societies in the Global South at all. As citizens in the Global South participate on

a large scale in re-sorting, upcycling and reuse activities, they should receive most of the EPR payments. This also applies to Ghana, with Kantamanto being one the most significant recycling and reusing economies in the world, processing an estimated 25 million garments every month (The Or Foundation, 2021). Especially when looking at the industry from a justice perspective, countries like Ghana should be supported most. Practices at Kantamanto market illustrate that sorting activities are not completed after the initial sorting as garments are re-sorted various times again in Ghana before being sold or reused (Interview 14a). Based on the intensive research of the OR Foundation, the following distribution of EPR payments is suggested:

EPR payment of 1.50 USD per garment could be distributed as follows

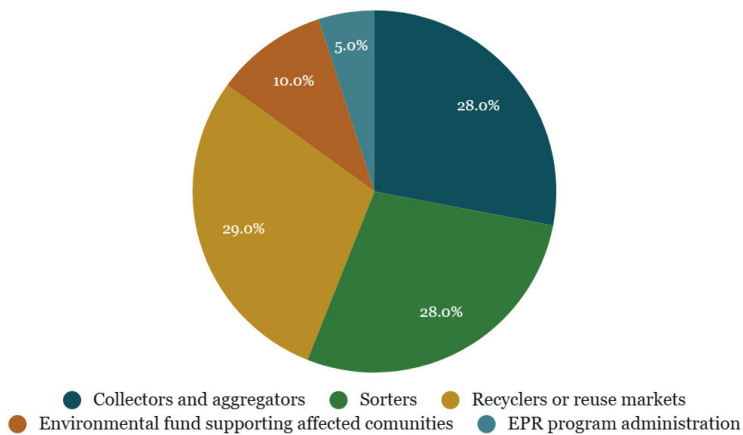


Figure 18: EPR payment of USD 1.5 per garment could be distributed as follows  
Source: Ricketts & Skinner, 2023

Kantamanto market has enormous potential for the future of the domestic textile industry where first-hand manufacturing processes could be replaced by second-hand sorting, re-merchandising and repairing since these practices have been used there for a long time (Interview 14a). Finding proper ways to dispose of fashion waste and recycling is an important measurement that EPR payments could finance. Supporting such mechanisms is also an opportunity for countries in the Global South to become a global player in developing recycling methods, creating new knowledge and supporting a circular economy, which will be even more critical in the future (Interview 5a, 16a). Current upcycling activities in Ghana lead to positive aspects from an environmental, access and creativity perspective. However, there is a need for improvement at Kantamanto market as the current flow of materials does not benefit those working there.

## 7. Conclusion

This thesis portrays the supply chain of the second-hand clothing industry with a specific focus on its trade in Ghana. Embedded actors and networks as well as possibilities of value distribution and related positions of power are the core aspects of the investigation. When analyzing the trade one can elaborate on many benefits that arise from the industry such as job creation, the availability of cheap clothing and a contribution to a circular economy. However, the global supply chain of used garments is structured by intransparency and inequality. Research on these uneven relationships is extremely relevant in order to draw attention to the fact that this trade does not just promote charity and sustainability as suggested. Existing publications on this topic are rare and particularly supply chains in the Global South have not been investigated much.

The analysis of this thesis is based on trade data, literature research as well as a two-month field research on-site in Accra, Ghana. The conducted interviews were evaluated using Mayring's content analysis. The theoretical framework of a GPN analysis as well as looking at the industry through the lens of Discard Studies, enables a theoretical and holistic approach to this trade - an aspect often neglected when researching this topic. Although the GPN usually does not investigate post-consumer items some previous scholars have “stretched” the approach in order to analyze the (re)valorization of discarded objects. Along such global production networks involved actors and uneven outcomes are investigated. The second theoretical base is the framework of Discard Studies that allows to look at aspects of inequality and unequal waste shares. Geographical as well as socioeconomic variables serve as parameters to explain patterns of waste and wasting. Power dynamics and related processes of (re)valorization from post-consumer goods play an essential role for both frameworks and build the intersection point of the two approaches. Within this understanding positions of power are held by being able to determine prices, hold information, carry on risks and categorize an item as waste to name a few.

Based on the empirical research six key findings emerged when investigating the main research question: *“How are power relations and associated value distribution constituted in the supply chain of the second-hand clothing industry touching down in Ghana?”*. In the course of this analysis, a division between transnational and local inequalities is made. Transnational inequalities mainly refer to uneven relationships between the Global North and

South which are embedded in a system of a colonial past. Local inequalities concern different positions of power held by actors involved in the domestic trade of second-hand clothing.

The first key finding can be drawn from unequal global waste shares which are structured by a colonial past. These tendencies become evident when looking at countries in the Global North remaining the top exporting countries and former colonies in the Global South the top importing countries. The Or Foundation refers to this phenomenon as “waste colonialism”. Landfills in the Global South are overflowing due to a lack of infrastructure and financial resources to manage the vast amounts of clothing waste from around the world. These global waste shares are unethical and further exacerbate existing environmental inequalities. Another key finding arises from the industry operating under the guise of charity and sustainability while it actually remains a profitable business for some. The historically embedded position of actors in the Global North enable them to collect the stock for free while proposing to participate in charity. Collecting-, sorting- and exporting companies in the Global North take advantage of this positive image and sell most of the collected clothing for profit in countries of the Global South. These structures disguise the actual commercial purpose of the trade. Advantages for actors in the Global North result not only in a financial sense but also by introducing economic structures subsequently deriving certain benefits. The current trade in second-hand clothing runs under a marginalized and unquestioned system and remains a strategy to exert power over formerly colonized countries. The third key finding regarding transnational inequalities can be drawn from power relations between exporters in the Global North and importers in the Global South. Exporters hold a dominant position in the current trade system which enables them to enforce their interests and determine trade conditions. High profits on part of exporters can be achieved by paying relatively little for the stock and passing on any increases in costs to their business partners. Importers, on the other hand, face significant risks, particularly in relation to global inflation and currency fluctuations, which have had a substantial impact on the trade since 2022. Exporters can also assert their particular interests by providing “packing lists” containing bales that are difficult for importers to resell. Thus, it can be concluded that this trade runs under very safe and low-risk market conditions for exporters.

When considering local inequalities, importers take on a dominant role as risks and cost increases from exporters are passed on to local business partners. By doing so, importers along with exporters, indirectly influence exploitative working conditions. Especially retailers are affected by these decisions as prices of clothing bales have doubled since 2022



making it almost impossible to make a living out of this business. The existing knowledge asymmetry between exporters and importers dealing with whole bales of clothing and retailers who have to work with individual pieces can be considered as the biggest risk within the trade. This risk is intensified by the fact that bales contain many poor quality garments which can not be sold for a reasonable price. For retailers the unknown content of a bale at the time of purchase as well as having to cope with global market-related price increases leads to high uncertainties. Another key finding relates to inequalities that particularly affect the workforce of the Kantamanto market. Precarious working conditions and land issues are key concerns in the context of informal market structures and especially affect those working at the end of the supply chain with migrant workers and women particularly taking over a disadvantaged role. In this context, factors such as poor infrastructure or crises like the COVID reinforce existing inequalities and lead to various challenges. Finally, the recognition of upcycling and (re)valorization activities in the Global South is considered as a central finding of this thesis. Although upcycling processes at places like Kantamanto market largely contribute to reducing waste and supporting a circular economy they are not considered as innovations in the Global North. The research illustrates that value creation processes are not completed after initial sorting activities in the global North. Not much effort has been put into understanding upcycling purposes and the (re)valorization of materials. The current trade does not benefit those working at Kantamanto market although applied upcycling methods have a huge potential for the future textile industry.

The literature (Brooks, 2015; Skinner, 2019, Oteng-Ababio et al., 2015; Boticello, 2012) and the results of the interviews conducted are consistent regarding an uneven distribution of risks as well as possibilities for value extraction between the Global North and South. The imbalance in the distribution of good quality clothing noted in the literature could also be observed during the research in Ghana. The emphasis of this thesis was to contribute to a more detailed picture about the supply chain in Ghana with precarious working conditions for the workforce of Kantamanto market and innovative (re)valorization standing out. Further research is necessary for a complementary investigation, especially to explain processes between exporters and importers in more detail. As in the course of this study only actors in the Global South were interviewed, it was not possible to talk to sorting companies or exporters in the Global North and include their perspectives. Moreover, during this research activities of discarding and consequences of waste could not be fully explored. Although not all processes in Ghana could be traced, this thesis contributes to an understanding of positions

of power and related value distribution within the second-hand clothing industry. Despite the fact that this research has revealed many difficulties arising from the trade, the industry should not be condemned entirely as second-hand clothing largely benefits a circular economy. This thesis clearly demonstrates the need to draw global attention to activities and difficulties happening in countries in the Global South. To conclude, there is still much to unravel about this complex supply chain.

## **8. Annex: Questionnaire**

### **Questionnaire 1 for NGOs/ Representatives of interest groups or specific associations**

#### **General questions about the organisation**

Question 1: How is your organisation/institution involved in the second-hand clothing industry and what are the areas of responsibility?

Question 2: What is your task within this organisation/institution?

Question 3: What is the aim of your organisation/institution?

#### **Actors, Tasks & Processes**

Question 4: Who are the key players within the industry, what are their tasks and in what relation do they stand?

#### **Power, Value & Profit**

Question 5: Who sets conditions/ contracts/ prices? (Are there written agreements)

Question 6: What can you say about the distribution of risks among individual actors within the supply chain of second-hand clothing in Ghana? (not knowing what is in the bale, do you see the susu system as risky, the Kayayei)

Question 7: Who profits most from the industry? (financially, in terms of waste management, in terms of using cheap labor sources)

#### **Inequalities & challenges**

Question 8: What are the main 3 challenges you see in regards to the second-hand clothing trade in Ghana?

Question 9: What is the role of migrant labor within the second-hand industry in Ghana?

Question 10: What is the role of gender within the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana? Which jobs are done by men and which by women?

Question 11: What are the effects of informal employment relationships within the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana?

Question 12: How did COVID-19 influence the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana?

Question 13: Who is in charge of managing the Kantamanto market?

Question 14: Do you think the infrastructure at Kantamanto is sufficient? If not, what issues does the lack of infrastructure create?

Question 15: What are current debates about the land Kantamanto is built on and what challenges do you see within this issue?

#### **Framework & Future developments**

Question 16: What are current developments in terms of regulatory processes and setting standards regarding the trade of second-hand clothes in Ghana? (informality and social security, safety, waste management, import bans)

Question 17: What is your opinion about the global trade with second-hand clothing?

Question 18: What do you think about the fact that so many clothes from Europe are being discarded in Ghana?

Question 19: What changes would you like to see in the industry, which regulations would you consider important and who should be in charge?

## **Questionnaire 2 for Representatives working directly at the market**

### **Actors, tasks & processes**

Question 1: What is your task within the second-hand clothing industry? Question 2: How many days per week and hours do you usually work?

Question 3: How long have you been in this position? Would you like to continue?

Question 4: What were the entry requirements for this job and why did you choose this job and not a different one?

Question 5: Who do you work with together and what is your relation to other actors within the industry?

Question 6: What kind of clothes do you sell and why did you choose this category? (*only retailer*)

### **Power, Value & profit**

Question 7: How much money do you earn on a weekly basis?

Question 8: What are the expenses related to your profession and what is their share in total costs?

Question 9: Which payment methods do you use? (susu, mobile money, cash, bank account)

Question 10: Who defines the conditions/ contracts/ prices for the business you do and are there written contracts?

Question 11: What risks do you see in your job?

Question 12: Looking at all the global actors who do you think benefits financially most from the industry?

### **Inequalities & challenges**

Question 13: Did you have to move in order to practise your job? Does migrant labour play a role in your profession?

Question 14: Does Gender play a role in your profession? If yes, which one?

Question 15: How does your job influence your health?

Question 16: Are you employed informal or formal? What effects does the informal/formal employment relationship have on you?

Question 17: What are the top 3 challenges in your job?

Question 18: How did COVID-19 influence your job?

Question 19: What is your opinion about the general infrastructure at Kantamanto?

Question 20: What is your opinion regarding the discussion about the land on which Kantamanto Market is built?

### **Framework & Future developments**

Question 21: Where do you think the clothing from Kantamanto comes from and what is your general opinion about the second-hand clothing industry?

Question 22: What do you think about the fact that so many clothes from Europe are being discarded in Ghana?

Question 23: What changes would you like to see in the industry, which regulations would you consider important and who should be in charge?

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