The secondhand clothing supply chain – tracing translations of objects of clothing from the global North to Ghana

Joline d'Arnaud van Boeckholtz

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Sociology – Engaging Public Issues

Student number - 571882

Supervisor - Willem Schinkel

Date – 20.06.2020

Abstract

This thesis deals with the secondhand clothing supply chain and the moments of translation objects of clothing can undergo. Object of clothing are 'followed' from the global North, more specifically the Netherlands, to Kantamanto market, Ghana. This is done in light of a document analysis of public online resources guided by the concept of moments of translation. Collecting, sorting and recycling companies in the Netherlands constitute a corporate identity that foregrounds environmental and social contributions through certificates, statistics and textile categories. By doing this they enact their 'sustainable' and 'circular' identities. However, their articulations do now allow for considering the realities that are lived in Ghana where communities interact with the clothing in different ways which cannot be simplified to a discourse on sustainability or circulation. Articulations in the global North of the secondhand clothing supply chain should be sensitive to these lived realities.

Keywords: Secondhand clothing supply chain, translations, regimes of value

Table of content

1. Introduction

The job of selling secondhand clothing is in Ghana referred to as 'a game of chance' (The OR Foundation, 2019a), which is similar to the experience in Zambia where it is referred to as 'do or die' business, a business where you 'win some and lose some', or as to 'Pick-A-Lot' in the 'state lottery' (Hansen, 2000, p. 156). The supply of secondhand clothing to these markets is driven by the secondhand clothing supply chain. Its largest singular 'raw' resource being clothing donations from the global North (ibid.). Ideas around clothing donation are often in light of a charitable guise. However, in contrast to the dominant belief, donated and collected clothing is almost never 'given away to people in need', but rather sold for reuse or recycling. At this stage clothing *donations* have become a *commodity.*

Ghana is one of the 15 countries that accounts for half of all imports of the secondhand clothing that is sold for reuse (Crang et al., 2012). Accra, the capital of Ghana, is the home to West-Africa's largest second-hand clothing market: Kantamanto. An average of 100 containers, with each carrying 400 bales, are unloaded in Kantamanto every week[1]. 30.000 people work in Kantamanto six days a week cleaning, redyeing, mending, upcycling, ironing and selling the imported clothing. These efforts are made because clothing that comes in is low in quality and often contains stains and tear. Roughly 15 million items are unloaded in Kantamanto every week. The pace with which the high volumes of low quality clothing enter do not allow for every item to be sold. On average, 40% leaves the market as *waste* (Ricketts & Skinner, 2020).

This thesis deals with the translations that objects of clothing undergo along the secondhand clothing supply chain. Starting as a 'donation', becoming a 'commodity' and ending up 'waste', are three examples of such translations. In light of the particular framing of clothing donations in relation to this trade, it is important to understand how and where different translations take place, to recognize misconceptions and the power structures involved.

The concept of translations is drawn from Actor Network Theory (ANT). Researching in light of ANT allows to 'follow' the objects of clothing along the secondhand clothing supply chain. Objects of clothing will be followed from the global North, more specifically the Netherlands, to Ghana. Six sites will be 'visited' along the supply chain. The translations taking place in those sites will be analysed in terms of moments of translation (Callon, 1984). The aim is to foster an understanding of how the translations come into being and how these translations are entangled with different public concerns and/or interests. The research questions read as

[1] Based on research pre-COVID19 (Ricketts & Skinner, 2020, p. 9)

follows:

RQ1: What moments of translations do objects of clothing undergo along the second-hand clothing supply chain?

RQ2: How are these translations entangled with different public concerns and/or interests?

There is much to the secondhand clothing supply chain, consisting of complex and non-transparent relationships, highlighted by brokered forms of governance (Crang et al., 2012). This means that choices on what to include, and what not, are made. It is therefore important to reflect on my own position in relation to the trade and the people involved. As research is taking place from the global North, while it also considers the global South it is important that I am reflexive of my position within the secondhand clothing supply chain – having grown up and still being located in the Netherlands. As Back (2012, p. 25) argues, research should be guided by 'ethical and political reflection on the place and impact of social research on social life'. This should be highlighted as research on second-hand clothing often contributes to the idea of the clothing (waste) being a resource. For example, Gregson and Crang (2015) examined global flows of waste between the North and the South and challenged the idea that 'the global North is trashing the global South'. While different framings of the circulation of waste are examined, they argue in favour of a narrative which highlights 'waste as resource' for lower income countries. At the same time it is argued that resource recovery is part of the global economy (Gregson and Crang, 2015) foregrounding global *recycling* economies and networks. However, their reasoning does not consider that within the 'recycling economies/networks', countries such as Ghana need to deal with clothing waste, which is guised as a 'resource for recycling'. Moreover, drawing from work on waste-pickers, they argue that the work that the waste-pickers do contributes to resource recovering. However, this completely obscures the hazards that come along by doing the actual waste-picking and the waste flow to the landfill itself. On Kpone Landfill, waste-pickers also face dangerous situations as they do their work. Research should be wary of simplifying supply chains and eliminating the humanity of their research. It is in light of this that this thesis 'follows' the objects of clothing and contextualizes its translations.

2. Theoretical framework

To understand the notion of supply chain in secondhand clothing supply chain – and not economy, trade, network, the first paragraph of this section discusses Tsing's (2009) theoretical concept of supply chains in relation to the human condition. The following paragraphs will cover the concepts of translation and regimes of value. Working with ANT as a method allows to examine relations, however it does not necessarily say something about the relations (Jóhannesson, 2005). The concept of regimes of value is therefore used in addition to the concept of translation. Regimes of value deal with socio-political relations (Appadurai, 1986), which allows for the examination of public interests/concerns related to the translations.

2.1 Supply chain capitalism

Supply chains deal with global standardization *and* growing inequality between rich and poor, across lines of color and culture, and between North and South (Tsing, 2009, p. 150). Tsing (2009) argues for paying attention to the *diversity* within power structures in relation to local and global capitalist developments. Diversity is inherent to the structure of capitalism as by the connection of diverse firms it expands; moreover it 'conditions the responses of both capital and labor to the problems of cutting labor costs and disciplining the workforce' (Tsing, 2009, p. 150). It is valuable to understand outsourcing and subcontracting, essential to regimes of profitability, in terms of supply chain capitalism. This, because these concepts take into account the difference in noneconomic features of identity, such as gender, race ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality and citizenship status, being sources for exploitation (Tsing, 2009). Referring back to the example that discusses waste-pickers, the involved research focusses on the economic gains only, leaving pre-established differences and the forthcoming exploiting inequality aside.

When discussing how 'Narratives of capitalism gain purchase through convincing protagonists', Tsing (2009, p. 152) highlights 'exemplary figures through which we come to understand capital and labor. In this thesis, textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies are considered such 'exemplary figures' through which the narrative of the secondhand clothing supply chain is narrated. It is not that they serve as an example for how the rest of the chain should be, rather they should be considered the ones conveying the dominant narrative constituting an *understanding* of the rest of the chain. It is the narrative that they tell that will be analysed in terms of moments of translation and regimes of value.

2.2 Translation

The concept of translation is key in the process of tracing and describing underlying practices in a network (Jóhannesson, 2005). As the concept is derived from ANT, it relates to the concept of 'multiple realities', which highlights that reality "is *done* and *enacted* rather than observed" (Mol, 1999, p. 77). The moments of translation foreground how, in terms of Mol (1999), different 'versions' of an object are done and enacted. Translation is a process, which Callon (1984) describes in four moments of translation: problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization (Callon, 1984). These moments deal with the way a certain translation is introduced, and accordingly 'done' and 'enacted'. The first moment, problematization, deals with how and by whom a certain translation comes to the foreground and which actors play a constituting role in this. Followed by interessement, which deals with the stabilization of power imbalances that grow from how relationships of identity are introduced in the first place through 'devices'. Devices refer to actions that enact the predetermined identities. Where interessement deals more with actions, enrolment focusses on material investments that are there to strengthen the coordination within the network. Central to this thesis is the moment of mobilization, where it becomes apparent 'who speaks in the name of whom', meaning which voices are there to thrive and which voices are suppressed. The method section deals with the operationalization of the four moments of translation.

Building on Farley and Geison (1974), Callon (1984, p. 199) states that the positions of translators (in light of the triangular working of translations), also referred to as the protagonists, are never clearly defined, because 'the definition of the positions is what is at issue'. "To speak for others is to first silence those in whose name we speak." (Callon, 1984, p. 216). It is here that also the spatial dimension becomes important as people in the global North base their reality on the narrative which is told there (by charities, clothing collectors and researchers, for example) and differs from the narratives in the global South. It is important to consider what realities for example the term 'donation', includes and excludes. Translation is about displacement (Callon, 1984). By saying what is, what is left unsaid? The translations will be analysed in this light while also examining how translations are enacted.

2.3 Regimes of value

The concept of regimes of value was first introduced by Appadurai (1986). He argued that the value of objects may be ambiguous as they pass through several regimes. Within this circulation objects can be reassessed, disposed or given new use, while exchanging value (Hansen & Le

Zotte, 2019). As Appadurai (1986) lacks a clear definition, Murakami (2016, p. 60) defined a regime of value as:

> "constituted by a set of rules for valuation, which is created, reproduced, and transformed through the entanglement of the material properties, the acts of production, exchange, and consumption, and the agency of producers, intermediaries, consumers, and other groups of people".

These regimes of value are connected with each other through "Politics (in the broad sense of relations, assumptions, and contests pertaining to power) … in the social life of commodities" (Appadurai, 1986, p. 57). That circulation is embedded in socio-political relations "reminds us that it requires political work – not excluding coercion – the dis-embed flows from these earlier relations and re-embed them in new arrangements and circulatory regimes." (Appadurai, 1986). This "re-embedding of flows" is obvious when considering the history and the present of Kantamanto market. The British colonizers forced the idea of 'western style' being the appropriate way to dress on Ghanaian people and started the import of western clothing. The colonial legacy of the clothing in the present builds on previous relations and infrastructures. This can also be seen in light of using pre-existing diversity in terms of supply chain capitalism. The two also meet each other in relation to the regime of profitability. Profitability being a value close to the supply chain capitalism, which highlights the normalization of outsourcing and subcontracting to lower (labor)costs (Tsing, 2009). Outsourcing is a common thing in the secondhand clothing supply chain, allowing to take diversity in this context into consideration when examining other regimes of value at stake.

The concept of regimes of value also allows for examining the historical context. Clothing at Kantamanto is often referred to as 'Obruni Wawu', meaning 'the white man has died clothes', already hinting to the clothes' origin. Kantamanto market cannot be understood without looking at its origins and references to its history are therefore included.

3. Analysis framework – Methods, data and operationalisation

3.1 Methods

The complexity of second-hand commodities does not suit a general assessment method. As Hansen and Le Zotte (2019, p. 7.) state: "Because secondhand circulation and exchange have no central archives due to legal categorization and the small size of many of the enterprises on which the secondhand economy depends for its operations, and because the very categorization of secondhand items is shifting and often ambiguous (for example, from trash to used, pre-owned, or gently-worn, to retro or vintage), research in this area invites methodologically creative approaches". The creative approach in this research is expressed through the resources used, and the combination of the concepts of translations (ANT) and regimes of value. The process of gathering and analysing data will be in the light of multi-sited ethnography through document analysis. ANT as a method allows for a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). As the documents are acquired online, ethnography refers rather to the interaction with the online documents than really being at the site. The explicit notion of multi-sited ethnography is noteworthy in light of the different 'sites' that will be analysed in the secondhand clothing supply chain. The sites that will be covered are Dutch textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies (1), the sorting process and distribution (2), Kantamanto market (its colonial origins, 3), retailers on Katamanto (4), customers at Kantamanto (5), waste in landfills, gutters and the sea (6). In the Netherlands, the focus on sorting companies stems from the process of categorization being located in the companies. During sorting and categorization a lot of translations arise. It is not the aim to consider every single translation taking place in the supply chain, rather to consider what allows for particular articulations of translations. Note that waste it is not particular to *one* site. However, it is important to consider the complexity of this translation in relation to other translations in the supply chain as all items of clothing eventually end up being waste.

3.2 Data

The focus on the Netherlands and Ghana is now elaborated. The Netherlands for historical and geographical reasons, has been a key player in the secondhand clothing trade; it is home to the world's largest importers and exporters of secondhand clothing, driven by commercial interest (Hansen, 2000). The Boer Group, in mid-1990s known as Boer and Smaal Holding, was the largest commercial sorting company in West-Europe. The Boer Group is member of Verenignig Herwinning Textiel, translated 'Textile Retrieval Association'. This association represents the

main textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies in the Netherlands, comprising of the following; Wieland Textiles, Boer Groep, Erdotex, ReShare, T&C Trading and Sympany. For this thesis these companies' websites are examined. T&C Trading does not have a website and is therefore excluded from the analysis. The specific context allows me to zoom in on their translations and how they enact them.

Data from Kantamanto market and the secondhand clothing supply chain in relation to Ghana in specific is acquired through research from The OR Foundation. The OR Foundation is a USA-based NGO that has been doing a multimedia research project called 'Dead white man's clothing' since 2016; diving into how the secondhand clothing supply chain functions and how it environmentally, socially and economically affects the industry and communities in Ghana (Ricketts & Skinner, n.d., see; Introduction | Dead White Man's Clothes (deadwhitemansclothes.org)). Note that research is ongoing. It being a multi-media research project means that data is mainly acquired from their Instagram and website.

A document analysis has been conducted which entails reviewing or evaluating documents with a systemics procedure (Bowen, 2009) and is often guided by content analysis (Labuschagne, 2003). Although it can be an inductive approach (Bowen, 2009), this document analysis is guided by the theoretical concepts of translations and regimes of value.

3.3 Operationalization of 'translation'

The translations that happen in the six sites will be analysed in terms of moments of translation. The operationalisation of the concept of translation is as follows.

Translation consists of 'four moments of translation': problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization (Callon, 1984).

Problematization

Problematization is hypothetical and entails defining who and what actors are included and excluded from the network, their identity and the link between them. It also involves the defining of 'obligatory passage points' (Callon, 1984), meaning that certain actors become indispensable to the action. During the dynamic process in which alliances, or associations, are established, also actors' identities and what they 'want' are defined.
It is here that being attentive is really important. Which actors are considered in the network and which not? This entails knowledge about the network as a whole. As noted previously, Ghana is for this thesis considered the end of the secondhand clothing supply chain. The problematization of the second-hand clothing supply chain starts in the global North. Here

it is determined who gets to be part of the network, who donates, what is donated and to which places the donations are exported. Roughly, the network of the second-hand clothing supply chain in relation to Kantamanto Market consists of people who donate (the source of second-hand clothing supply), brands with deadstock, charities, clothing collecting companies, clothing sorting companies (in global North as well as in global South), domestic recyclers (vintage shops), recycling companies, international traders, Ghanaian wholesalers, and people working in and around Kantamanto Market. Questions such as: *Who is included and what identity is constituted? Who are the ones indispensable in the network? What obligatory passage points are established?* will be answered.

Interessement

Interessement is the group of actions by which an entity attempts to impose and stabilize the identity of other actors and defines them through its problematization. "The devices of interessement create a favourable balance of power" (Callon, 1984, p. 211). *What devices are used to enact and secure the identities established?*

Think of how charities and clothing collecting actions portray themselves. Very often it is stated that the clothing is going to be reused. It obscures that the clothing is being sold to clothing sorting centres – from the money charities make with this they support their projects. It leaves out the local narratives and the alternative realities when clothing is not being reused. Moreover, researchers produce papers and books, including images, about the circulation of second-hand clothing. Most of them foster the identity of 'doing good', foreclosing the alternative narratives. *How are devices used to enact and secure the established identities (during problematization)?*

Enrolment

Enrolment has to do with the coordination, through material investment, strong alliances, and roles in the network. "To describe enrolment is thus to describe the group of multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks that accompany the interessements and enable them to succeed" (Callon, 1984, p. 211). Think of clothing bins from charities and clothing collecting bags that materialize their 'interessement'. *Through what actors is the network coordinated?*

Mobilization

Mobilization has to do with questions such as: "Who speaks in the name of whom? Who represents whom?" (Callon, 1984, p. 214). A few come to speak in the name of the many. In the global North this has to do with the dominant narrative of 'donations' and 'doing good', 'helping those in need'. Comparing these narratives to the narratives of people in Ghana is

necessary for an understanding of how the different translations are entangled with different concerns/interests.

Translation is a process (Callon, 1984), meaning that although there are theoretical distinctions between the four moments, in practice they overlap and co-occur. Note that the questions are not explicitly answered, rather they served as a guide for the analysis.

4. Analysis

In this section several sites of the secondhand supply chain will be discussed and analysed, with in mind the concepts of translation and regimes of value. First, a simplified route from the moment of donation to its arrival in Ghana will be outlined. This will be followed by the examination of the six sites that are 'visited'. The sites will be chronologically discussed, starting in the Netherlands with textile collectors, sorting and recycling companies (1) and the sorting process and distribution (2) (the global North). Central in this part is the way they present themselves and ascribe value to the clothing. Accordingly, this is followed by the sites in Kantamanto market, Ghana (the global South), where the following translations will be analysed; 'dead white man's clothing'(3), 'cheap and unique'(4), 'selections' (5). and 'waste'(6). Where the textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies in the global North deal with the dominant narrative, there will be more focus on how they frame their narrative and how this is done, compared to the narratives in Ghana. As the narratives in Ghana, and equivalent ones, are often not considered or obscured in research, there will be more considerate attention to the complexity of such.

A simplified route of an object of clothing from the global North to Ghana

There are many ways for pieces of clothing to enter the secondhand supply chain. For the donating public the following clothing discarding options can be distinguished: textile collecting bins, textile collecting bags, door to door collecting, and takeback programs. Deadstock (including returned items) go directly from company to textile collecting centres (ReShare, n.d.-f). The logistics of clothing collecting are well thought through. When it comes to charities who are often partnered up with clothing collecting companies, meaning charities contract out the right to collect in their name to commercial dealers. In return clothing collector companies receive a percentage of the profit made (Hansen, 2000). When it comes to

municipalities they offer textile sorting centres the opportunity to place bins and collect clothing; the municipality receives up to 41 cents per kg (Straver, 2019).

Once collected, the clothing needs to be sorted. Sorting costs and transportation are often determining factors for a profitable business (Hawley, 2006). As sorting is labor intensive and therefore expensive, the sorting of the collected textiles is often outsourced to countries with lower labor costs (Norris, 2012), such as eastern European countries (Palm et al., 2014). In 1997 two of the twenty companies that Hansen (2000) reached out to, had already moved their sorting operations to Hungary.

The process of sorting can be distinguished into two phases: rough sorting/pre-sorting, and fine-sorting. First, the removal of garbage takes place and textiles are sorted in a way that T-shirts go with T-shirts, men's jeans go with men's jeans, etc. It should be noted that rag sorters are charged for every amount of kg that they take to landfill (Hawley, 2006). After rough sorting/pre-sorting the fine sorting takes place. In this phase clothing is sorted into categories and the destination of distribution is determined. Some companies operate their own rag companies ensuring continuous supply and control over the production process and earnings (Hansen, 2000). When distributed for reuse or recycling, it is often sold to wholesalers (OUVERTES Project, 2005). The lowest grade being exported to Africa and Asia, also in the form of unsorted bulk clothing (Hansen, 2000).

Containers with bales of clothing that are exported to Ghana arrive at Tema harbour, 25 km east of Accra. Bales travel from Tema to Kantamanto and are unloaded *every* Wednesday and Thursday (Ricketts & Skinner, 2020). Compressed into same sized bales it means that the amount of items per content of the bale differs; ranging from 60 items (men's suits) to over 800 items (children's wear). This equals an influx of 15 million items into Kantamanto every week. Containers are sold to importers for prices ranging from US $12,000 to US $35,000 and distributed to retailers for prices between US $20 to US $500, depending on the type of bale (ibid.).

The global North – textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies in the Netherlands

From the above becomes clear that supply chain capitalism is salient. Diverse networks are connected and the trade expands relying on the differences of groups of people in terms of skill, costs and pre-established asymmetrical power dynamics. The following two sections deal with two sites: 'textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies in light of the dominant narrative they convey and '(fine)sorting and distribution' which highlights moments of enrolment and

mobilization. All sites will first be introduced whereafter they are analysed in terms of translation and regimes of value.

4.1 Site one: Textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies

In the Netherlands most of the textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies are members of '*Vereniging Herwinning Textiel*', 'Textile Retrieval Association' (VHT/TRA). The TRA argues to have the whole textile recycling supply chain represented (Vereniging Herwinning Textiel, n.d.-a). Two of their four aims read: "advocating the importance of the textile recycling industry and the wholesale in used textile in general and of its members in particular"; "be in support of the collecting and recycling of textiles in light of the environment and the economy" (ibid. – my translation). Moreover, it puts effort in contributing to 'a right image' of the industry and its members (ibid.). What they mean with the 'right image' can be read from their websites. Most of the companies' websites are structured by posing the problem of fast fashion and the throw away culture; which leads to clothing waste accumulation in landfills and accordingly polluting the environment. This is where they come in, as they collect, sort and distribute discarded textiles, which prevents the textiles from going to landfill and takes pressure off the environment. It is therefore their aim to collect *more* textiles then they already do. Their 'philosophy' behind this is illustrated in the following quotes:

> Wieland Textiles (2021):
> "Looking at the 3,978 tons of collected textiles that Wieland has upcycled in 2017 as secondhand clothes (see the overview below). This is the equivalent of over 15.9 million pieces of garments. Moreover, in this estimation, it is assumed that *the prevention of sales of three new garments results in savings of approximately 57 kg CO_2 per year, and that *every sold second-hand garment prevents the sale of one new garment. From this it can be deduced that in 2017, Wieland has contributed to a CO_2 reduction of 302 kiloton CO_2 with the upcycling of 15.9 million second-hand garments."

> Erdotex (2020a):
> "Erdotex extends the product lifecycle and minimizes environmental impact along the textile value chain. This is especially important, as the textile industry is the second largest polluting industry worldwide."

ReShare (n.d.-a, my translations):

"De grootste effecten om het milieu te sparen worden bereikt door het ingezamelde textielvolume te vergroten" / "The biggest contributions that contribute to saving the environment will be achieved through collecting larger volumes of textiles".

"Iedere kilo kleding die we opnieuw gebruiken, scheelt 3,4 kg CO_2. Simpelweg omdat we daarvoor geen nieuwe kleren hoeven te maken." / "Every kg that we reuse saves 3,4kg CO_2. Simply, because we do not need to make new clothes."

Noteworthy is that they almost all state they are 'big players' in the circular textile chain. Wieland Textiles slogan reads: 'First in secondhand clothing'. Also they state the following;

ReShare (n.d.-e): 'Als grootste textielinzamelaar en -hergebruiker van Nederland …' / 'As largest textile collector and reuser in the Netherlands …'.

Erdotex (2020a): 'Partly due to strong and long-term collaborations with our suppliers, as well as customers, Erdotex Group has grown to be one of the most influential players in the revaluing textile sector'.

Sympany (2020): 'Sympany is één van de grootste textielinzamelaars van Nederlands'/ 'Sympany is one of the largest textile collectors in the Netherlands'.

This implies that their work is inextricably linked to 'solution' to the fast fashion waste issue.

4.1.1 An incomplete story – how the 'circular' and 'sustainable' narrative is shaped through certificates and statistics

What can be derived from the above is that, in terms of the process of translation, these companies articulate a 'problem' and establish themselves as indispensable from the solution. This is the moment of problematization. They construct an identity, more specifically a corporate identity, that foregrounds their contributions by putting less pressure on the environment and keeping things out of landfill by collecting them for reuse and recycling, which prevents textiles from going to landfill and being burned. The moment of interessement, in which the 'circular' and 'sustainable' identity claimed is enacted, is visible through mainly two 'devices': certificates and statistics. The next two paragraphs will cover the these devices in detail to show how the established identity is enacted. Thereafter, the process of translation is continued, covering the moment of mobilization.

4.1.1.1 Certificates in the moment of interessement

The TRA has its own certificate regulation called ‘Certificeringsregeling Herwinning Textiel’/’Certificate Scheme Textile Retrieval’. Three of the six aims are: “optimising the image of the textile recycling branch” (Vereniging Herwinning Textiel, n.d.- b), “promoting the market position of companies who comply to the certificate regulation’s quality requirements”, and lastly stated in the enumeration: “The possibility to guarantee that recycled textiles and the forthcoming textile waste are processed in a responsible way” (ibid.). However, it is not clear what the exact content of the certificate is, as it is not accessible online, only on request as a company. Nevertheless, it ‘allows’ these companies to make statements about the traceability of the textiles they distribute. As ReShare (n.d.-b; my translation) states: “All textile being recycled is traceable along the whole supply chain, until the last kg, from the moment of collecting to the end-use by buyers from the sorted textile products in all parts of the world” However, this is a false statement when in mind they do not account for the lives of the clothes after they distributed it – this will become more clear when reading along.

Something which is not standardized but frequently used is a ‘code of conduct’ or an ‘ethical code’. In the case of Sympany (2021a), the ‘ethical code’ highlights a safe and enjoyable workplace for everybody; ReShare’s Code of Conduct deals with the supervision and monitoring of external sorting companies and their buyers in terms of child labor, working conditions of employees, environmental requirements and the stimulation of reuse, all according to their Salvation Army EU-protocol (ReShare, n.d.-c). However, the following case will shed light on the ambiguity of ‘codes of conduct’. In the US, Salvation Army is recently sued over failing to pay minimum wage to people who work for them in the sorting companies during rehab, under the guise of ‘work therapy’ (CBS San Francisco, 2021). ‘Work therapy’ meant working (more than) 40 hours a week, doing heavy work without getting paid minimum wage. This of course raises questions around the functioning of their ‘code of conduct’ and how they ensure a safe work environment for their employees. It should be noted ReShare (part of Salvation Army) highly values social wellbeing. Also in the Netherlands this is translated in offering people who are disconnected from the labor market a place to work in a ‘therapeutic position of employment’, which refers to labor reintegration and ‘dagbesteding’ – which can be translated in ‘daytime activities’. On their website they state; ‘It is more than cost reduction, a norm or a demand. It is about (vulnerable) people who deserve a chance’ (ReShare, n.d.-d). However, ‘a chance’ should be defined; what is *really* offered to people who engage in ‘therapeutic positions of employment’ besides a place to work and fill the day. Also their word play on ‘people, planet, profit, namely ‘people, planet, prosperity’, obscures the important role

that money has within their organisation. To frame the textile chain, more specific the secondhand clothing supply chain, in terms of 'circular' and 'sustainable' while highlighting the CO_2 reductions and social relevance the labor intensive work is obscured.

4.1.1.2 'Statistics' in the moment of interessement

The strengthening of their identity in terms of statistics can be seen in two ways: claimed CO_2reductions and diagrams and figures in which they present numbers/statistics in terms of how much they recycle and reuse (see figure 1 and image 2), and in the case of the Boer Group, how much less waste is produced because of them, the amount of jobs they offer, and the amount of reduced CO_2 emissions, see image 1.

Figure 1 : *On the homepage of Sympany this figure says: 23.154.739 kg textile collected in 2020 [from which] 65% reusable, 20% recycling, 15% waste 'that is how we do it' – the underlined text is a link to a webpage which explains what they do, their mission and vision (Sympany, 2021b).*

Image 1: *Figure on the homepage; making visible their 'contributions' (Boer Group, 2018).*

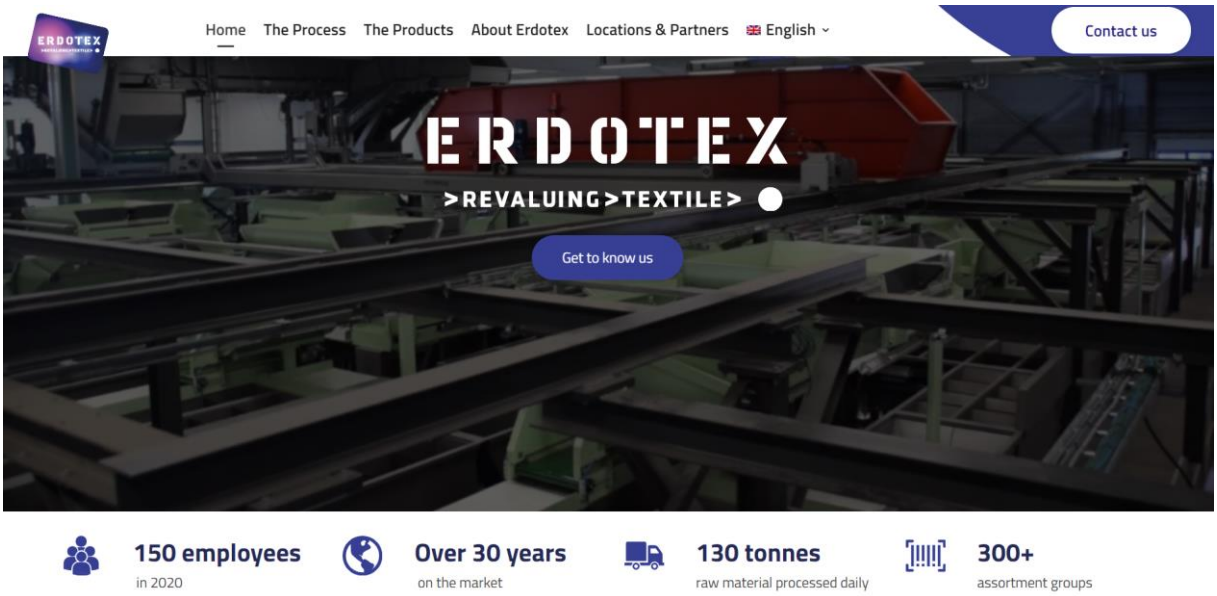

Image 2: *Homepage of Erdotex, which among other things shows their slogan 'Revaluing textile' and some numbers: '150 employees, 'Over 30 years on the market', '130 tonnes raw material processed daily', '300 plus assortment groups' (Erdotex, 2020a).*

To present numbers of CO_2 reductions is problematic when considering how donated secondhand clothing waste in Ghana is burning on overflowing landfills in Accra – this will be elaborated on later. It is important to note now, however, as it creates an understanding of how certain realities of the objects of clothing are being ignored. The exclusion of the receiving end[2] of the supply chain is also visualised in their understanding of the supply chain, see figure 2.

[2] The term 'receiving end' is in this context used to signal that is perceived as an *receiving end*. The term is not here to imply that Ghana receives the clothing passively. There is a lot of *work* involved in dealing with the clothing.

Figure 2: *A figure that Erdotex has on their website to illustrate their supply chain (Erdotex, 2020b).*

The 'statistics' they present are based on *their* numbers, not accounting for what happens after they sell it for reuse or recycling. Besides not considering CO_2 emissions in other parts of the world, oversimplified causal relationships are being made. The reuse of a piece of clothing does not *per se* mean that the production of one item is being prevented. Moving from the argument that the use of CO_2 numbers is not right, it should also be considered that it is a very specific point of reference to speak in terms of CO_2 emissions (and sometimes amounts of water) when talking about the environment and sustainability – which entail so much more.[3]

It should be noted that their corporate identities have changed and are still changing[4]. Sympany's slogan nowadays reads "Stof tot grondstof"/"Fabric to resource", while it used to read "Geef goed door"/"Pass it down well". Another example is seen in the different tone of the videos from the Boer Group in 2012 and 2020, in which they explain their working process. The video of 2012 starts with the sentence: "Over 70% of the world population has a need for secondhand clothing" (Boer Groep Holland, 2012, 0.07 – 0.11). They state that the 'need' and the 'demand' is especially apparent in 'third world countries' (ibid.). The Boer Group is "committed to meeting the demand for used textiles" (ibid.). The fragments that discuss this are followed by fragments in which their partnership with the Red Cross is explained. The video of 2020 begins with explaining the impact of the fast fashion industry:

[3] It transcends this thesis to elaborate on the concept of sustainability. See Gibson (2006), Hansmann, Mieg, and Frischknecht (2012), and Throsby (2017) for an understanding of social, environmental, economic and cultural sustainability.

[4] The websites have also been updated and changed during the time I visited them, which makes explicit the ongoing process of translations.

> "With over 100.000.000.000 new garments flooding the world each year. This means we also throw away our clothing faster and more often. In Europe 1/3 of all clothes are collected for reuse and recycling. The majority ends up in the household waste, creating a huge waste stream, which is very harmful to the environment when incinerated. Not an option if you want to ensure a clean healthy planet for future generations" (Boer Group, 2020, 0.14 – 0.43).

This is in light of their 'sustainable' corporate identity, being indispensable from the solution to a better environment. Moreover, they state: "This is our mission, we are going for a future with 100% high quality reuse and recycling of our textiles, for a sustainable and circular textile chain" (Boer Group, 2020, 1.16 – 1.27). ReShare (n.d.-a) makes similar statements: "This is how we serve the environment, the more textile we can recycle, the less ends up in the incinerator through the household waste. And the less new textiles are needed to produce".

These examples show that the focus on the 'charitable' part of their contributions has shifted to a focus on how they contribute to a 'sustainable circular textile industry'. The certificates and statistics enact the identity that the textile sorting, collecting and recycling companies created.

Circular and sustainable – for whom?

The above dealt with the moments of problematization and interessement. Although the moments of interessement and enrolment are closely related, the second site will elaborate on enrolment as it deals with material investments that constitute the coordination of the network (rather than the devices that are discussed above). From the above the issue around mobilization can also be read. Mobilization deals with the question: who speaks in name of whom? It is clear that textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies frame a sustainable and circular textile chain and push themselves forward as leaders of the circular solution. These companies act as if they represent the whole supply chain and account for the 'wins', presented in numbers and statistics. However, the receiving end of the chain is excluded in their 'circular' and 'sustainable' supply chain. This was seen when the numbers of CO_2 reductions were discussed in relation to the burning landfills in Accra. Talking in terms of 'sustainability' and 'circularity' that are linked to the clothing being a resource for reuse and recycling, is only there to suit their corporate identity. They do not account for what happens after they sold it, although it is argued so.

4.2 Site two: The business of (fine)sorting and distribution

After rough sorting/pre-sorting the fine-sorting happens, which often takes place at the assembly lines and is done by hand. The process of fine-sorting is a key moment in the secondhand clothing supply chain as value is ascribed through the categorization and determines what can be done with the textiles and where it goes (Alexander & Reno, 2012). The heterogeneous aspect of the clothes makes the sorting process time consuming and labor intensive. Each item is assessed individually, see image 1. The textiles are sorted into 300 to 350 categories, which represent the quality, fashion trends, season, specific market demands (Wieland Textiles, n.d.), the relationship between exporters and importers and trade laws for used clothing (Hawley, 2006) – however, trade laws are often swerved.

The model created by Hawley (2006), presenting a 'General Life Cycle Schematic for Postconsumer Textiles', shows a simplified overview of possible pathways objects of clothing can go, see figure 3. Note that in the 'direct similar use' many categories can be distinguished that fall in the 300-350 categories.

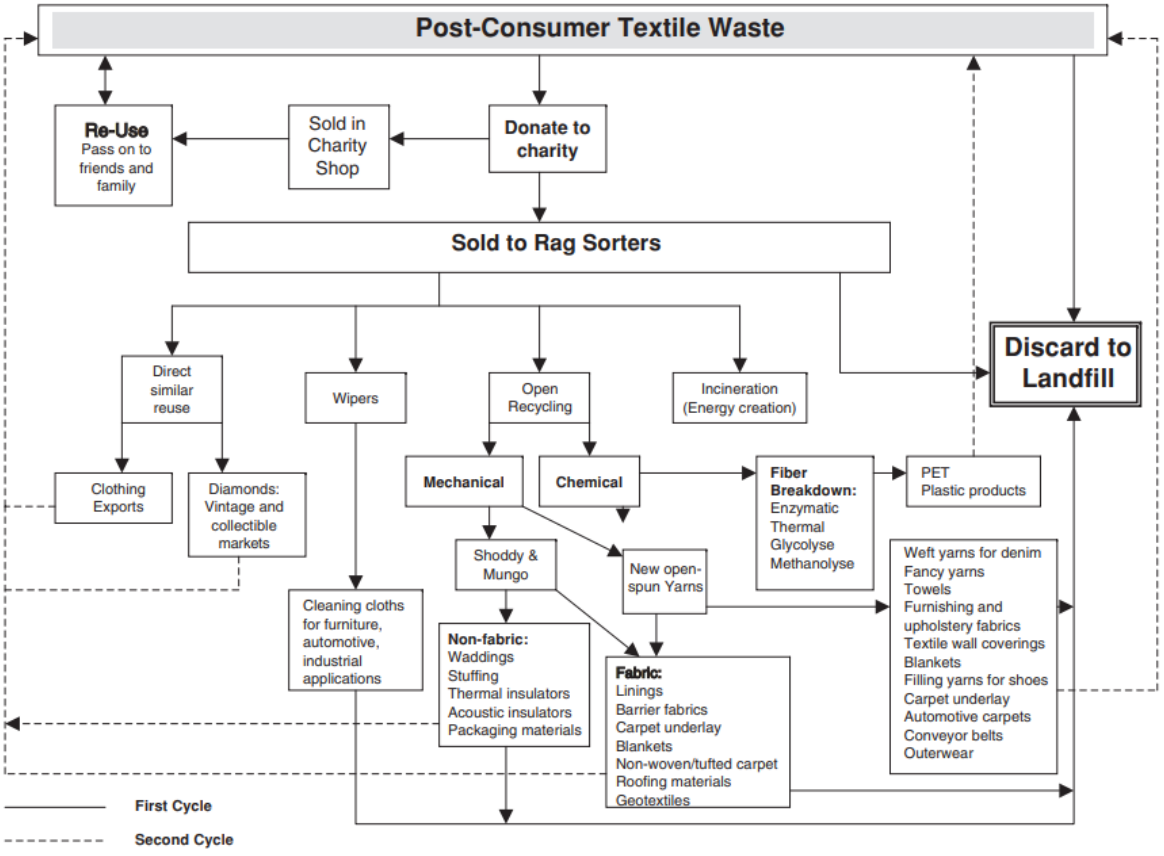

Figure 3: '*General Life Cycle Schematic for Postconsumer Textiles' by Hawley (2006, p. 267)*

Research of Hawley (2006) showed the importance of the ‘diamonds’ category’ for sorting companies. Special, collectable pieces – such as a certain brand or couture clothing, can be a great source of monetary value for the selling company. She refers to an example in which a ‘fair to good condition’ century-old Levi’s was sold for $43,532 (Hawley, 2006). In the context of the United States, Hawley (2006) noticed that the wives of the family-owned sorting facilities are responsible for the ‘diamond’ category. Although this example is not in a Dutch context, it is important to consider as sorting companies work in the same secondhand clothing trade, and it gives insight into how objects of clothing are revalued, by whom and in what context.

It is in the process of categorization that value is ascribed in de objects of clothing. It should be noted that in the video of 2012 Boer Group makes a comment on the sorting process and the waste they separate: ‘… and a little bit of waste; and the waste we try to keep as little as possible’ (Boer Groep Holland, 2012). As the objects of clothing themselves do not change and only the category requirements determine whether they are considered waste or fit in a certain category, this comment shows the ambiguity that can be involved in the assessment of the textiles.

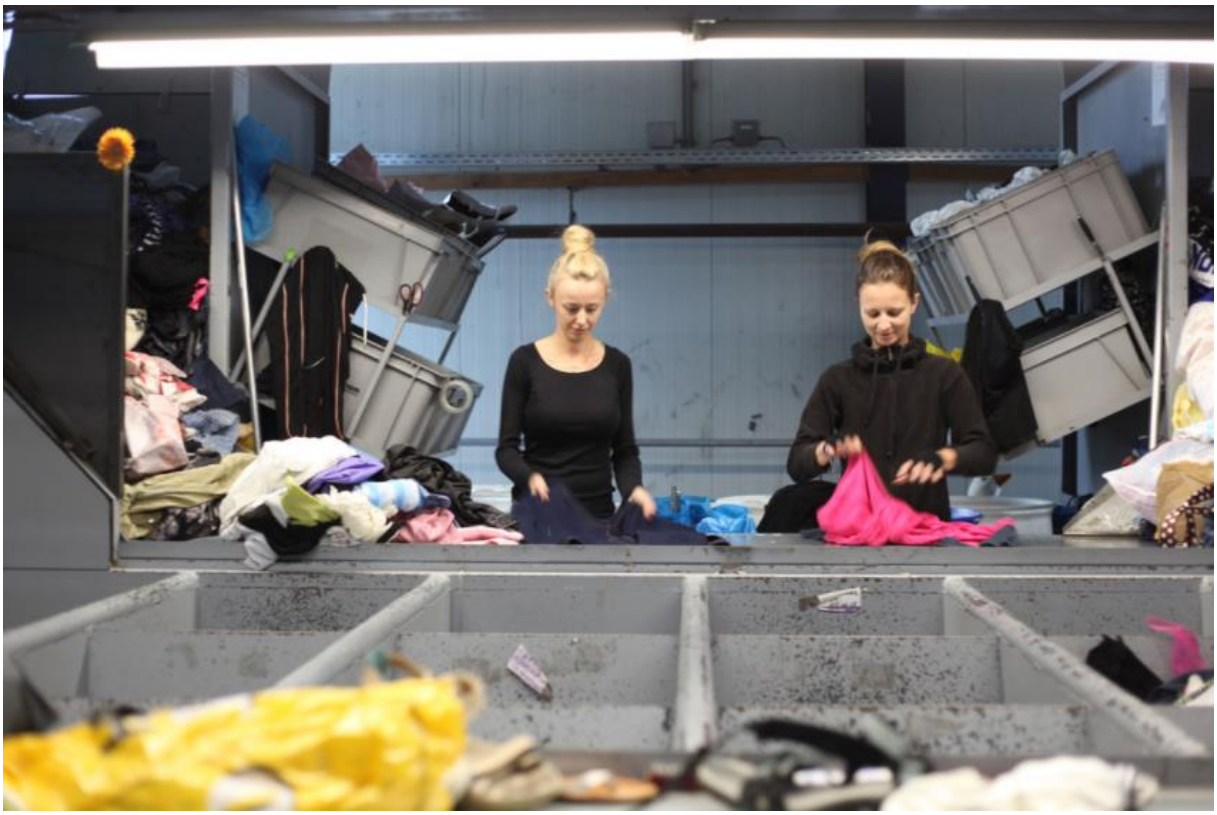

Image 3: Two people sorting at Wieland Textiles (Wieland Textiles, 2019).

The labor involved in sorting is often emphasized in terms of the expertise and experience. Since clothing is sorted by hand (see image 3) and there are 300-350 different categories, there

are people who are specialized in specific sorting tasks and categories. Categories are not stable as they change according to fashion trends and market demands. Seeking, developing and nurturing markets is an ongoing business to increase profits (Hawley, 2006). When it applies the sorting company being a family company is also highlighted, followed by statements about the inhouse knowledge and the business relationships they have built in the past years. As Norris (2012, p. 135) states: "Which clothes go to what part of the world is mutually dependent upon the categories set up by the rag sorting factories – worked out over time through their relationships with global buyers – but also by the material qualities of the clothing and the sorting and discernment skills of the workers". The relationships with buyers is important because buyers deal with information asymmetry (Abimbola, 2012). Standardization is lacking (Norris, 2012) and there is no official regulation around the categories that companies create. Therefore, buyers cannot rely on labels attached. However, the grading and sorting of the clothing ascribes a 'brand value' onto the objects of clothing (ibid, p. 135). "This shifts the focus away from labels on individual items to a collective brand of the sorting company, who generate a *definitive mark of quality* through the sorted constitution of their bales" (Norris, 2012, p. 135; emphasis added). Hence, companies ascribe a certain value to the objects of clothing by creating categories, which are maintained by their sorting employees, who rely on their knowledge and experience for the grading.

After textiles are sorted they are packed into bales. The quality of the items determines how they are packed. This is seen at for example at Erdotex: crème/Nr 1 is of the highest quality and packed in non-pressed woven bags; Grade A/B quality is wearable clothing, pressed in small bales; textiles for rags and recycling are textiles that are judged by their fabric and mostly pressed in large bales; they also consider vintage as a separate category (Erdotex, 2020d). Bales are distributed accordingly; valued per item often sold in bulk as commodity. Noteworthy is that bales are loaded "with the help of loading docks and forklifts, as the products are too heavy to load manually" (Erdotex, 2020c).[5] Bales are distributed according to their labels.

[5] This is noteworthy because in Ghana bales are not unloaded with machines. Containers are unloaded by hand, and bales are carried by *kayayei*, female head porters. Kantamanto is dense, and the alleyways and gutters do not allow for transport vehicles. Bales move in the market through the work of kayayei – female head porters. Their age ranges from 14 – 30, with exceptions of 8 year old children. Carrying the heavy bales, for sometimes more than over a kilometre, this work is leads to back and neck pain. Besides injuries being common as bales sometimes fall in the narrow, chaotic aisles, injuries can also be fatal. Although essential to the working of the market as bales

4.2.1 Ascribing value through categorization – the life of a commodity

Building on the moments of problematization and interessement in the 'first site' this section mainly focusses on the moment of enrolment, discussing the material investments in the translation. It is still the case that in the translation that occurs when textiles are categorized, the collecting, sorting and recycling companies are centred – indispensable from the network, the 'circular' textile chain. When textiles are categorized, sorting companies are in charge of the 'definitive mark of quality' (Norris, 2012), becoming an obligatory passage point for the 'sustainable' processing of the textiles – similar to the way they present their mission and work as a company. Related to this being a family with the 'inhouse knowledge' taps into the moment of problematization, which refers to the constitution of identity and obligatory passage points. Accordingly, the references to employees' sorting experience and knowledge fosters the established identity. Moreover, it fits in the moment of interessement as the knowledgeable and experienced sorting employees secure the categories that are created by the companies. Although categories are not standardized, and quality gradings differ from company to company, the knowledge and experience of employees are used to secure the quality of the process of categorization. This goes hand in hand with the process of enrolment which, at this stage, refers to the categories themselves as being the material investments that enact the coordination of the network. As noted before, the 'belonging' category ascribed to the object of clothing determines what will be done with it and where it goes (Alexander & Reno, 2012). As high and low valued items circulate in distinct networks (high valued often keep circulating in the global North, where low valued items are send to countries in Africa and Asia). The distribution of low and high value items is therefore predetermined, as ascribed value through categorization governs the items to their assigned location. Categorization is therefore a social, economic and political act, governed by the 'regime of profitability'. The distribution of the items relies on the difference in purchasing power and pre-established power dynamics.

Not only are the clothes themselves unequally distributed, but also the responsibility to take care of them. The highly valued items, are distributed in a network which has the infrastructure

otherwise would not reach their stales, each time a bale is delivered as little as between GH₵2 – GH₵5 is earned – $0.30 and $1 per trip. Retailers sometimes describe kayayei as slaves of the system. Kayayo means someone who carries a load, 'someone who carries a burden' (The OR Foundation, n.d.-b). This translation in Ghana is put here to allow for imagining the bigger context. This is necessary, as this analysis shows, because there is a lack of framing the *whole* secondhand clothing supply chain.

to care for them and otherwise dispose them in a way that it does not affect the one disposing. However, as can be read later in this analysis, the low valued objects of clothing circulate in a network which does not have the infrastructure to deal with high amounts of the low valued objects of clothing. To distribute high amounts of low valued clothing to communities who are not able to process these amounts in the pace they are supplied, is in contrast with a circular and sustainable textile supply chain which the collecting, sorting and recycling companies aspire and claim to contribute to. The power over the quality and categorization labelling and accordingly the distribution of the baled items, again shows the disconnectedness with people in the receiving end. Categories are determined, bales are formed and labels are attached. Under the guise of 'securing quality' and 'serving needs' these categories further enact their identity and the coordination of the network. The moment of mobilization becomes apparent when collecting, sorting and recycling companies are in power to frame and create demand; they speak in the name of the people they supply. Where there is definitely supply, the 'demand' side should be considered with nuances and care – later in the discussion this will be elaborated upon.

The following sections deal with sites in and around Kantamanto market in Ghana. The next coming site deals with some of the history of Kantamanto market, as the market today cannot be fully understood without recognizing its colonial origins. During the sections I sometimes reflect on my own position.

4.3 Site three: Kantamanto market, its colonial origins

Clothes in Kantamanto are often referred to as 'obroni wawu', an Akan phrase which translates to 'the white man has died clothes'. This name was given to the clothing when it first started to pour into Ghana in the 1960s. It was thought that the clothes belonged to white people who had died as this was considered the reason to give up so much clothing, 'implying that the concept of excess was foreign' (Ricketts & Skinner, n.d.-a). The colonial powers paved the way for the secondhand clothing business to thrive. Not only were they the ones to bring in the Western secondhand clothing, they forced a imperial 'modern' ideal of 'Western style' being the appropriate way to dress. Traditional dress becomes inappropriate in 'professional' setting, and 'Western dress' became the way to navigate through colonial institutions (The OR Foundation, 2021a). This, together with firsthand Western clothes not being affordable or available – as it was not the Ghanaian way to dress, it "pushed the idea of donation and secondhand, because if you have to wear a certain type of clothing to exist in your own society and you cannot afford this clothing … what you do is find the nearest best option, which is secondhand" (Samuel

Antwi Oteng in Threading Change, 2021, 22.32 – 22.49). The colonial infrastructure, which goes hand in hand with white supremacy, created the 'demand' for secondhand clothing, through asymmetric power dynamics.

4.3.1 The white man has died clothes – Reconsider 'demand'

The term 'obruni wawu' signals the colonial legacy. The notion by The OR Foundation, that it implies the concept of excess being foreign, taps into moment of 'problematization' in translation. In this translation Ghanaian's relationship to the clothing is not highlighted, rather where it comes from and why it is not there anymore. It underlines that, initially, it is not theirs and it is not made for them; it can only be acquired through 'the white man'. The moments of interessement and enrolment should be considered with how the way people in the global North deal with the secondhand clothing supply chain as this fosters an understanding of the coordination of the network.

The act of donation is an act of convenience (Liz Ricketts in Masters of Good, 2021), and a privilege (Chloe Asaam in Wardrobeaffaire, 2021) at the same time. When thought of as 'helping people in need in Africa' it can also be thought of in terms of white saviourism. The value in the act of donation lies within the consequence of that donation. However, the ignorance of these consequences shaped how the secondhand textile industry presents itself – referring to the analysis above, and the history that lives in the present. The way the global North engages with donations to 'third world countries' is situated in a white supremacist mindset.

To consider the coordination of the network, also in terms of material investments in Ghana, can be in light of the people in Kantamanto *working with* the clothes. Clothing in Kantamanto is washed, redyed, upcycled, mended, etc. Although entering as 'obruni wawu', through these practices, the clothes get new values ascribed; values that reflect the style and relationship with clothing of people working with and buying 'obruni wawu'. Although 'obruni wawu' signals where it comes from and that there has never been 'demand' for that type of clothing, once it circulates in Kantamanto it serves as the beginning for making the clothes one's own. This is elaborated on in the next site.

A reflection – At this point my position becomes more complicated. There is a lot to understanding the dynamics of the market and it is difficult to leave things out and highlight others, as it is not my place to decide on how to do that. The following should be read with in mind that realities of the clothing in and around the market are multiple, accompanied with the

people who need to deal with the consequences of the excess of clothing waste. The following paragraphs deal with the translations of 'a burden', 'selections', 'cheap and unique', 'resource and competition', and 'waste'.

4.4 Site four: Retailers on the market making selections, distinguishing the sellable from the trash

After retailers acquire their bale, they often pray before opening it. Quality could not be assessed before, and having paid between US $20 to US $500 for the bale– often with loans, it depends on the content of the bale whether retailers will make profit, break even, or lose money (Ricketts & Skinner, 2020). Based on the country of origin and the content of the bale in terms of garment type, together with knowledge about the selling party, bales are purchased considerately. Retailers know what their customers want. Consistency in what they offer therefore plays an important part in the selection process. Besides consistency the selection process reflects curation and expertise, as this is how they create their brand name on the market (Ricketts & Skinner, 2020). Three selections represent the quality of the items. The first selection, representing high quality items, on average makes up 18% of a bale. The sale from these top items make between 50-90% of retailer's incomes. Third selection, which represents items that are in decent shape, but are not trendy, large in size and have small stains, make up an average of 46% of a bale. In contrast, third selection does not contribute more than 10% of a retailer's income. The fourth 'selection' is called 'Asei', meaning 'the under' (Ricketts & Skinner, 2020, p. 15). This comprises slashed deadstock and items with large stains and tears, and trash such as food packaging. With in mind the stuff that in the end is not sold, 40% leaves the market as waste. This is despite all the efforts that are being made to make the most out of the clothing. Kantamanto is not only a place in which clothing is sold; clothing is sorted, repaired, washed, redyed, upcycled, mended, and ironed under' (see image 4).

Image 4: Caption in original: "A team of 10+-people work six days a week to upgrade second and third selection denim by dyeing and starching with dark blue or black dye sourced from Nigeria" (The OR Foundation, n.d.-a).

Many efforts are being put in getting the most out of the clothing. Kantamanto itself can be considered a model of sustainability. It is driven by a culture of upcycling where retailers, tailors, screenprinters, dyers, embroiderers, cobblers and menders are connected (Ricketts & Skinner, 2020, p. 22). As noted before, the concept of excess was not indigenous to Ghanaians (ibid.). Moreover, the act of retailers praying before opening their purchased bale, and referring to their job as gambling, should not be taken lightly. The regime of profitability that suits the global North, comes at cost of people in Kantamanto trying to make a living out of the selling of the 'donated' clothing.

4.4.1 Possibilities of co-creation

Retailers making selections from the acquired bale and divide them into 'first selection', 'second selection' etc, guided by their experience and consistency in what they want to offer in terms of their brand value, acquiring an identity that centres these retailers and their customers (problematization). Where 'obruni wawu' is in light of where it came from, the division between 'selections' foregrounds the retailer and its buying public. There is considerate effort in determining what is put on display as consistency is preferred.

The guided decisions on how selections are made and the upcycling of the clothing can be read as actions and material investments in terms of interessement and enrolment. As each garment is studied on what it needs, testing its seams, checking closures, assessing stains, noting sizes, etc. (The OR Foundation, 2021b), the clothing accordingly gets what it needs (to be sold). This is done by the retailers themselves or other people in the market. The separate stalls for dyeing, upcycling, and ironing, enhance the possibilities; highlighting that Kantamanto is not only a place for selling, but also for creation (ibid.). It is a network in which people can rely on each other.

The selections made are done with the possibilities of co-creation and the buying public in mind. This means that in terms of mobilization the several options of which the clothing can go through are 'represented'. Not only the possibilities for direct resell and alterations are represented, but also waste, as is a profound amount of which the bale comprises.

4.5 Site five: Customers at Kantamanto market; cheap and unique – two reasons to shop secondhand

The reason to buy at Kantamanto is twofold; clothing is cheap and there is variety (The OR Foundation, 2019b). The following quote, acquired from the research of Mensah (2013) on

discussing the idea of "one man's food being another man's poison" from SHC point of view, will highlight the nuances of the clothing being considered cheap, in other words affordable, in the context of dressing in a way to not be perceived as poor.

A second year fashion student on a Higher National Diploma stated:

"As for me, I buy second-hand clothing because it is cheap which means I can have more clothes in my wardrobe so as to not look poor. The local African prints are too expensive for me to be wearing every day. What I have, I will wear it on special occasions so that it will last me longer. Though I sew sometimes for my customers and for myself, I have a better selection of nice clothes when I buy SHC because I don't want to look poor" (Mensah, 2013. P. 15).

Secondhand clothing can be a means for not being perceived as poor. However, secondhand clothing is worn by the majority of the Ghanaian population, with age, gender and class categories not being a determining factor (The OR Foundation, 2019b).

The variety that Kantamanto offers speaks to the ones that express themselves through dress. The 'local' textiles, being available for everyone that acquires a garment from a tailor, means that one is more likely to come across someone in the same print than come across something that one has bought from Kantamanto (ibid.).

4.5.1 Clothing as a tool

The translation of clothing being a 'tool' is in light of the clothing being cheap and unique. It centres the person who acquires the clothing in relation to its environment. The clothing is an extension of what the wearer wants to communicate through the clothes. As stated by The OR Foundation, 'clothing and style are two different things' (The OR Foundation, 2019b). It is the wearer that ascribes new values to the clothing that reflect the wearer.

Although 'Western' clothing has a history in signifying wealth and secondhand clothes were used to bridge class divides, the values ascribed to secondhand clothing today are different. As The OR Foundation states; "When it comes to consumer habits and style articulation, Kantamanto is less of an imposing foreign influence & more a supply of material to individuals with agency. In short, Kantamanto serves looks" (The OR Foundation, 2019b). This resonates with Hansen's (2000, p. 256) view on secondhand clothing in Zambia, in which she highlights

secondhand clothing practices as *not* being 'a passive imitation of the West'[6]. It is these actions, the styling of the clothing in one's own way, that can be interpreted in terms of interessement. The mending according to one's wishes and upcycling is in light of enrolment, the material investments which enhances the moment of interresement. These efforts highlight the personal values of the wearer in terms of style and identity.

Considering clothing as a tool when thinking in terms of mobilization, it foregrounds the wearer in relation to the people in- and outside Kantamanto whom the wearer interacts with. This interaction can be interpreted in a broad sense as there are also many facets to style. Clothing (style) can be a reference to something. Depending on what is depicted on the clothing item, it can be literal or not. For example, music and the clothing musicians wear (in music videos) can serve as an inspiration (Mensah, 2013). Social media can also play a big role in this, both in acquiring inspiration as well as a place to extent one's identity through clothing.

4.6 Site six: Waste in landfills, gutters, and the sea

As noted before, around 40% of the clothing that arrives at Kantamanto leaves the market as waste (Ricketts & Skinner, 2020). As 40.000 bales arrive in Tema every week, waste accumulation is high. Kpone Landfill in Accra had 20% of its capacity reserved for clothing waste coming from Kantamanto, foreign clothing waste. This capacity is beyond reached and the landfill has caught fire multiple times.

Clothing waste finds its way to informal landfills – where it is burned, and into gutters, from where it travels into the sea (ibid.). Clothing waste is visible. However, the consequences it has are at first glance sometimes less visible. Beside clothing waste in the seas affecting sea life, it also affects the fishing community (Liz Ricketts in Masters of Good, 2021). Garment wraps around motors of fishing boats, causing the motor to break. This means that fishing is no longer possible and the motor needs to be repaired – both affecting income. Moreover, fishermen go further into the sea to avoid the clothing which can be more dangerous. These are just examples to highlight the complexity that revolves around the issue of clothing waste as it has many knock-on effects (ibid.).

[6] Although Hansen (2000) highlights the agency of the Zambians in how they deal with the Western clothing. It should be noted that she does talk in terms of desire and demand. Moreover, her notion of imitating the West in the first place reflects her Eurocentrism.

4.6.1 The breakdown of an infrastructure

The clothing waste issue in Ghana makes visible a larger issue, the issue of overproduction and overconsumption, grounded in the infrastructure of capitalism accompanied by the issue of who is represented and who is not (The OR Foundation, 2019c) – meaning an issue of mobilization when considering the dominant narrative in the global North. The same object of clothing that ends up at one of Accra's beaches was in the first place a 'donation', labelled as 'lady's blouse' – for example, with Ghana being a 'destination', because it is considered that there is a 'need' for secondhand clothing. The continuous revaluating of the objects of clothing continuously erases the possibility of what it should not be – waste.

There is not one way of analysing the translation of 'waste' as it appears in many places throughout the secondhand supply chain as well as in Ghana (when just considering Ghana). Many communities deal with the issue. However, what should be considered is who has the power to translate an object of clothing in terms of waste. The choice that companies in the global North have to not categorize textile as waste – avoiding incineration costs, and transport it to Ghana with no infrastructure to deal with, all of the low valued and trashy clothing, should be considered when talking about waste. Moreover, recall the example of The Boer Group where they keep the waste 'as little as possible', while this can only depend on their revaluation and categorization process. The translation of waste along the secondhand clothing supply chains deals with the displacement of the responsibility. As Ghana deals with a clothing waste issue, it becomes clear on whom the responsibility is put.

It is clear that the big actors in the global North dominate the narrative and working of the secondhand clothing supply chain when it comes to international relations. The issue of mobilization is at stake. They do not represent the communities and places where they send clothing to, and they do not account for what happens to the clothing. This, while arguing for a circular textile supply chain.

In light of the circular textile supply chain which the companies propose, it should be considered what *is* circulating? When clothes are circulating, what is with them being revalued? Labor, humanity, dignity. Moreover, something what is *not* circulating *with* the clothes is money. Meaning what does circulate is exploitation. Not only in terms of money (a resource), but also in terms of land – landfills and beaches (Liz Ricketts in Masters of Good, 2021) and people – labor. What also circulates with the clothing is the imposed responsibility to deal with it.

Clothing that travelled under the guise of ‘affordable quality clothing’ in the ‘sustainable circular textile chain’ network.

5. Conclusion

The different translations that objects of clothing undergo express the diversity in the secondhand clothing supply chain, reflecting the interest and concerns, depending on one's position in the supply chain. The translations of 'reuse' and 'recycling' of the 'top-of-the-chain' focus on the product and what one can do with it, losing the connection with how it is made, the labor involved and other realities of the objects of clothing. The main narrators in the global North foreground economic factors of labor involved and environmental gains, foreclosing the exploitation of the 'noneconomic'– read gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, age, and citizenship status (Tsing, 2009). Moreover, the focus on the gains in the global North by textile collecting, sorting and recycling companies, such as the reduction in CO_2 emissions, moves away from the clothing waste realities in Ghana, such as burning landfills, and their contribution to it.

Although implicit, the regime of profitability can be read as a red thread through the analysis. The collecting, sorting, and recycling companies obscure the goal of financial gains, while participating in circle of exploitation. Through self-constituted identities, companies move away from the labor intensive work part of the secondhand supply chain, both in the global North as in the global South. The moments of translations in Ghana are more connected to the labor involved and represent the people that the clothing is related to. It could be argued that it stems from the way Kantamanto works and the people working in and around Kantamanto deal with each other, not in isolation, rather in cooperation. The way the companies in the global North talk about sustainability and circularity cannot be taken seriously, without the incorporation of the people that work in and around Kantamanto into the message they convey. Their established identities enact a reality which enhances power imbalances and exploitation. Moreover, the identities are actively constituted as in the timespan thesis trajectory the sites have already changed in terms of content. As it could be argued to be a shortcoming of this thesis in terms of the data acquired as not everything is on the websites anymore, it highlights that the companies are continuously editing the story that they convey in a way that suits them best.

This thesis highlights the vision of Callon (1984, p. 223) on translations: "To translate is to displace' and 'the result is a situation in which certain entities control others" (Callon, 1984, p. 224). What should be taken away from Tsing (2009) is that we need to be reflexive on how we deal with the power imbalances. The vocabular in the global North should be sensitive to the realities lived in Kantamanto in Ghana.

References

Abimbola, O. (2012). The International Trade in Secondhand Clothing: Managing Information Asymmetry between West African and British Traders. *TEXTILE*, *10*(2), 184–199. https://doi.org/10.2752/175183512x13315695424310

Alexander, C., & Reno, J. (2012). *Economies of recycling: The global transformation of materials, values and social relations* (1st ed.). Zed Books.

Appadurai, A. (1986). Introduction: Commodities and the politics of value. *The Social Life of Things*, 3–63. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511819582.003

Back, L. (2012). Live sociology: social research and its futures. *The Sociological Review*, *60*, 18-39.

Boer Group. (2018, July 18). *About us*. https://www.boergroup.eu/about-us?lang=en

Boer Group. (2020, May 29). *Boer Group | Welkom in de wereld van textielrecycling!* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOZ2wWJ_K_8

Boer Groep Holland. (2012, June 14). *A world of textile recycling - UK* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKbxSRjldpw

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *9*(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/qrj0902027

Callon, M. (1984). Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay. *The sociological review*, *32*, 196–233.

CBS San Francisco. (2021, May 10). *Salvation Army sued over failure to pay minimum wage for work required of people in rehab*. https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2021/05/10/salvation-army-lawsuit-minimum-wage-drug-alcohol-rehab/

Crang, M., Hughes, A., Gregson, N., Norris, L., & Ahamed, F. (2012). Rethinking governance and value in commodity chains through global recycling networks. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *38*(1), 12–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00515.x

Erdotex. (2020a, October 9). *About*. https://www.erdotex.com/about-erdotex/

Erdotex. (2020b, October 9). *Erdotex group | Sorting and revaluing used textiles | 30+ years experience*. https://www.erdotex.com/

Erdotex. (2020c, June 16). *The Process*. https://www.erdotex.com/the-process/

Erdotex. (2020d, May 10). *The products*. https://www.erdotex.com/the-products/

Farley, J., & Geison, G. L. (1974). Science, politics and spontaneous generation in nineteenth-century France: the Pasteur-Pouchet debate. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, *48*(2), 161-198.

Gibson, R. B. (2006). Beyond the pillars: sustainability assessment as a framework for effective integration of social, economic and ecological considerations in significant decision-making. *Journal of Environmental Assessment Policy and Management, 8*(3), 259–280. Geraadpleegd van https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/223053/mod_resource/content/1/526_sa_gibson.pdf

Gregson, N., & Crang, M. (2015). From Waste to Resource: The Trade in Wastes and Global Recycling Economies. Annual Review of Environment and Resources, 40(1), 151–176. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-102014-021105

Hansen, K. T. (2000). *Salaula : the world of secondhand clothing and zambia*. University of Chicago Press.

Hansen, K. T., & Le Zotte, J. (2019). Changing secondhand economies. *Business History, 61*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2018.1543041

Hansmann, R., Mieg, H. A., & Frischknecht, P. (2012). Principal sustainability components: empirical analysis of synergies between the three pillars of sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, *19*(5), 451–459. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2012.696220

Hawley, J. M. (2006). Digging for diamonds: A conceptual framework for understanding reclaimed textile products. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *24*(3), 262–275. https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302x06294626

Jóhannesson, G. T. (2005). Tourism translations. *Tourist Studies*, *5*(2), 133–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797605066924

Labuschagne, A. (2003). Qualitative research: Airy fairy or fundamental? The Qualitative Report, 8(1), Article 7. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR8-1/labuschagne.html.

Marcus, G. E. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of Multi-Sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *24*(1), 95–117. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.000523

Masters of Good/Delebois, L. [@mastersofgood]. (2021, April 20). Is donating our clothes a good idea? [Instagram IGTV]. Retrieved 2021, April 23, from https://www.instagram.com/p/CN5nu1_JsmE/

Mensah, A. (2013). *Conversations on perceptions on clothing waste – A Ghanaian perspective*. Accra Polytechnic. Amsterdam Fashion Colloguia - Conversations on the perceptions of clothing waste.pdf

Mol, A. (1999). *Ontological politics.* A word and some questions. *The sociological review, 47*, 74–89.

Murakami, T. (2016). Materiality, regimes of value, and the politics of craft production, exchange, and consumption: A case of lime plaster at Teotihuacan, Mexico. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology, 42*, 56–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2016.03.003

Norris, L. (2012). Economies of moral fibre? Recycling charity clothing into emergency aid blankets. *Journal of Material Culture*, *17*(4), 389–404. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183512459628

OUVERTES Project. (2005). *Report by textile reuse and recycling players on the status of the industry in Europe.* OUVERTES Project. Report by textile reuse and recycling players on the status of the industry in Europe.pdf

Palm, D., Elander, M., Watson, D., Kiørboe, N., Salmenperä, H., Dahlbo, H., Moliis, K., Lyng, K. A., Valente, C., Gíslason, S., Tekie, H., & Rydberg, T. (2014). Towards a Nordic textile strategy. *Norden*. Published. https://doi.org/10.6027/tn2014-538

ReShare. (n.d.-a). *Planet*. Retrieved 15 May 2021, from https://www.reshare.nl/planet

ReShare. (n.d.-b). *Keurmerk en certificering*. Retrieved May 17, 2021, from https://www.reshare.nl/keurmerk-en-certificering

ReShare. (n.d.-c). *Wat gebeurt er met de kleding?* Retrieved 15 May 2021, from https://www.reshare.nl/wat-gebeurt-er-met-de-kleding

ReShare. (n.d.-d). *Arbeidsre-integratie en dagbesteding door textielinzameling en -hergebruik*. Retrieved 17 May 2021, from https://www.reshare.nl/arbeidsre-integratie

ReShare. (n.d.-e). *Gemeenten*. Retrieved 17 May 2021, from https://www.reshare.nl/gemeenten

ReShare. (n.d.-f). *Stocklots en zakelijke inzameling*. Retrieved 15 May 2021, from https://www.reshare.nl/stocklots-en-zakelijke-inzameling

Ricketts, L., & Skinner, J. B. (2020). *Our long recovery: Catalyzing a justice-led circular textiles economy*. The OR Foundation. TheORFoundationJusticeLedCircularEconomyVision.pdf

Ricketts, L., & Skinner, J. B. (n.d.-a). *Dead white man's clothes*. Dead White Man's Clothes. Retrieved 25 May 2021, from https://deadwhitemansclothes.org/intro

Straver, F. (2019, July 15). *De kledingbakken van goede doelen zitten vol met huisvuil*. Trouw. https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/de-kledingbakken-van-goede-doelen-zitten-vol-met-huisvuil~be8ddd47/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

Sympany. (2020, September 17). *De circulaire textielketen*. https://www.sympany.nl/bestemming/sympany-werkt-aan-een-circulaire-textielketen/

Sympany. (2021a, March 18). *Onze ethische code*. https://www.sympany.nl/onze-ethische-code/

Sympany. (2021b, June 10). *Sympany - stof tot grondstof*. https://www.sympany.nl/

The OR Foundation. [@theorispresent]. (2019a, April 17). Wednesday 2/4 ~ The Un-Baling = Retailers buy clothing in bales. [Instragram caption]. Retrieved June 3, 2021, from https://www.instagram.com/p/BwWygVqlgdp/

The OR Foundation [@theorispresent]. (2019b, January 17). Wednesday 3/4 ~ Who is buying? In short, everyone. [Instagram post]. Retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/p/BwWyza-Fnw4/

The OR Foundation [@theorispresent]. (2019c, January 20). Clothing waste is collected from Kantamanto #secondhandclothing market by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly 2x a day. [Instagram post]. Retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bs2cwfllYy3/

The OR Foundation [@theorispresent]. (2021a, January 17). Heavy are the clothes your back – Part 1. [Instagram post]. Retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/p/CKJZHETApOD/

The OR Foundation [@theorispresent]. (2021b, April 26). Reselling means. [Instagram story]. Retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/theorispresent/

The OR Foundation. (n.d. a). *Dead white man's clothes*. Retrieved 3 April 2021, from https://deadwhitemansclothes.org/gallery

The OR Foundation. [@theorispresent]. (n.d.-b). Kayayei. [Instragram Stories]. Retrieved June 3, 2021, from https://www.instagram.com/p/BwWygVqlgdp/

Threading Change. (2021, April 1). *#ClothesBusters webinar one: Sustainable spring cleaning* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RQoW75H0LU&t=14s

Throsby, D. (2017). Culturally sustainable development: theoretical concept or practical policy instrument? International Journal of Cultural Policy, 23(2), 133–147. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2017.1280788

Tsing, A. (2009). Supply chains and the human condition. *Rethinking Marxism*, *21*(2), 148–176. https://doi.org/10.1080/08935690902743088

Vereniging Herwinning Textiel. (n.d.-a). *Onze organisatie*. Retrieved May 15, 2021, from https://www.textielrecycling.nl/vht-onze-organisatie/

Vereniging Herwinning Textiel. (n.d.-b). *Certificeringsregeling Herwinning Textiel*. Retrieved 17 May 2021, from https://www.textielrecycling.nl/certificering/certificeringsregeling-herwinning-textiel.html

Wardrobeaffaire [@wardrobeaffaire]. (2021, June 4). 'Robe x Kantamanto. [Instagram IGTV]. Retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/tv/CPsDBj_DOne/

Wieland Textiles. (2019a, December 7). *Quality management*. https://www.wieland.nl/en/quality-management/

Wieland Textiles. (2021, January 29). *Wieland's sustainable performance*. https://www.wieland.nl/en/wielands-sustainable-performance/

Wieland Textiles. (n.d.). *The art of sorting collected textiles*. https://www.wieland.nl/en/sorteren-van-gebruikt-textiel-een-vak-apart/