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"Twice is Nice"[1] Secondhand Clothing in Today's Global World

Clothes, especially of high symbolic and/or material value, were always treasured and passed on to other users as gifts, heirlooms and legacies or given to charity, usually through religious institutions. Although secondhand clothing has a long history, it grew in volume and visibility with industrial revolution and the establishment of the consumer society, the driving force of capitalism. Desire to accumulate the new was always accompanied with the need to dispose of the old. Partly still maintaining charitable character, the global used-clothing exchange, starting with the 19th century rag trade international networks, has grown into a multi-billion-dollar commerce between the global North and the global South. While used clothes are still considered by some as trash, they can be a blessing to the world of the poor, a powerful (counter)-cultural declaration to some groups (e.g., hippies, grunge), or, if marketed as vintage, a deliberate fashion statement. Whatever the case, they present a "hot" controversial topic. Nowadays, the way secondhand is viewed and used around the world, proves again that globalization is a creative process producing always new forms of hybridization. This paper presents a short history and diverse views of the phenomenon. The research was based on multi-sited participant observation and interviews over an extended period of time.

[1] I have borrowed the name of a secondhand clothing store in Midland, Michigan, with owner's permission. The story of this „resale boutique" reveals how this type of business, with small variations, operates around the world (John Kenneth, T*wice is Nice Store in Downtown Midland Gets New Life*).
https://www.ourmidland.com/news/article/Twice-Is-Nice-store-in-downtown-Midland-gets-new-8361213.php (Accessed Septebmer 15, 2021).

Key words: history of secondhand clothing, clothing industry and trade, recycling, sustainability, secondhand clothing semantics as it crosses cultural boundaries

"Twice is Nice": половна одећа у данашњем глобалном свету

Одећа, посебно она која има високу симболичку и/или материјалну вредност, увек је била цењена и преношена другим корисницима као поклон, наслеђе и завештање, или је давана у добротворне сврхе, најчешће преко верских институција. Иако употреба већ коришћене одеће има дугу историју, њен обим и видљивост порасли су са индустријском револуцијом и успостављањем потрошачког друштва, као покретачким снагама капитализма. Жеља да се акумулира ново увек је била праћена потребом да се ослободи старог. Делимично и даље добротворног карактера, глобална размена половне одеће, која почиње од 19. века, и успостављања међународних мрежа трговине текстилним остацима који су припремљени као сировина за поновно коришћење, прерасла је временом у трговину вредну више милијарди долара између глобалног севера и глобалног југа. Док половну одећу неки још увек сматрају отпадом, она може бити драгоцена за свет сиромашних, моћан (контра)културни исказ неких група (нпр. хипи, гранџ), или, ако се продаје као винтиц, свесно исказан модни став. У сваком случају, она представља контроверзну тему. У данашње време, начин на који се половна одећа посматра и користи широм света, поновно доказује да је глобализација креативан процес, који производи увек нове облике хибридизације. У раду су представљени кратка историја и различита виђења феномена. Истраживање се заснивало на посматрању учесника на више локација и на интервјуима током дужег периода.

Кључне речи: историја половне одеће, индустрија и трговина одећом, рециклажа,одрживост, семантика половне одеће

The topic of secondhand clothing/fashion consumption, despite its importance as a fast-growing global industry, especially over the last 30–50 years, is just starting to emerge in anthropological research. The subject is extremely wide, and there is certainly no scarcity of available and diverse sources. In my view, it is important to follow the transformations of this informal economy as it evolves before us, so that its dynamics can be

recorded in all its complexity: „one's trash, other's treasure". It is a story of global processes that we are all a part of, and which affect our lives in many profound ways. To cover it in a comprehensive way, and fully understand why secondhand trade is so popular and lucrative, it has to be conceived as a multidisciplinary, cross-cultural, and multi-sited endeavor, which will reveal, and confirm the existence of numerous similarities among secondhand charity and trade patterns in different areas of the world, both in historic and contemporary perspectives. To achieve these ends, researchers will have to use hybrid techniques[2] and delve into the bottomless sea of Internet sources (commercial sites, social media, blogs, and other platforms), and add them to their tried-and-true in-person data-collecting fieldwork methods. A pattern in secondhand trade can already be discerned: beneath its huge diversity and incredibly fast-paced constant change, there is an underlaying well-established and predictable common structure. The aim of this paper is to indicate motivations, processes, and meanings behind the collection, distribution, and utilization of secondhand trade[3]. The research was based on multi-sited participant observation and extensive interviews with charity institutions, donors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, and consumers over an extended period of time. The principal instrument for knowing was myself, my reactions, sentiments, values, decisions, as I participated in the process (cf. Verdery 2020, 86–88)

1. MY FIRST EXPERIENCES AS A SECONDHAND CONSUMER

In the late 1980s, I noticed a change in the clothing offer at Belgrade farmers' markets and street stalls in their vicinity. Previously one could find new, simple clothes made and sold by local, skilled but „fashion-challenged" seamstresses, with limited appeal to the general, sophisticated, urban consumers. These new arrivals, which from a distance looked like messy bins with discounted items in western department stores and boutiques at the end of the day of rummaging, were different. Colors, fabrics, patterns, designs, undoubtedly indicated that this interesting, fashionable merchandise of good quality, some with designer labels, was

[2] For a roadmap updating research skills by combining online and offline methods (a hybrid ethnography) to tell the story of how people are interacting and making meanings in contemporary culture, see: Przybylski 2020.

[3] Due to limited space, consumption theories will not be discussed here. For a detailed presentation of mostly anthropological theories of consumption, cf. Erdei 2008.

evidently imported from the West, predominantly from Germany and Austria, and sold mostly by entrepreneurial, younger to middle-aged Roma women. How did these obviously secondhand fashion items sold at a fraction of a price of the new imports offered at the growing number of boutiques, get to Belgrade? Was this trade legal, or were those stolen goods? Despite many unknows, sales were going very well. Buyers were well dressed, fashion-savvy women who understood fashion trends[4] and who were thrilled to find such selections in excellent condition at bargain prices. Personally, I found some treasures that I wore for many years and finally had them donated or sold in secondhand stores in the U.S. However, some were reluctant to make purchases because of the well-known stigma[5] surrounding secondhand attires.

The secondhand clothing trade of this type and volume was new, legitimate, and a part of the free-enterprise economy that was inaugurated in the former Yugoslavia under the last and short-lived leadership of Prime Minister Ante Marković (March 1989 – December 1991), a democratic, pro-European, economic reformer who supported privatization, structural changes, elimination of rampant inflation, and liberalization of international trade. The effects of his policies were evident: small businesses were booming, and many new privately owned stores with imported consumer goods were opening everywhere, in cities and in the countryside alike. Western European clothing and fashion accessories, superior to previously available cheaply made label knockoffs from China and Turkey, or „questionably acquired" in Italy, could be found in numerous newly established well designed modern boutiques with beautifully dressed windows. Unfortunately, they were pricey and the majority of the people, earning an average wage, could not afford them. However, as Western fashion was a sign of progress, of fast-track transition from a socialist to a free-enterprise economy and of the growth of the culture of

[4] Once the citizens were allowed to have foreign currency accounts and were free to travel abroad, they started going on buying trips to Italy in the 1960s to shop for the latest fads, such as tergal pleated skirts, „rustling" polyester raincoats, knitted blouse and sweater sets, shoes and purses and above all, blue jeans (Wrangler was the best-liked brand at that time). Information about the latest fashion also came from foreign and domestic fashion and women's magazines, runway shows, movies and television programs.

[5] Some of the objections were that secondhand clothes could have been stolen, could potentially transmit disease, bring „bad-luck" from the previous owner, jeopardize their primary intent to help the poor, or, worst of all, impart a wrong message of the buyers' socio-economic status.

consumption[6], the attractive and inexpensive secondhand alternative was very welcome to fill the void.

My experiences with secondhand clothing started much earlier. Growing up in Belgrade in the 1950s there were not many choices for ready-made or made-to-measure childrenswear. I remember that a few winter coats and pairs of pants were made-to-measure for me of quality wool fabrics in children's clothing store in Knez Mihailova Street, near Kalemegdan. Most of my clothes were, however, homemade by a seamstress who seasonally came to our house to alter and make new clothes for the entire family. She often remade my grandmother's pre-World War II high quality clothes, or used new fabrics from the stash also accumulated in pre-war years to make clothes for my mother and me. But my favorite clothes came from my cousins who lived in America. Their hand-me-downs, which started arriving as soon as I was born, made me into a well-dressed kid, a head-turner in parks and in the streets. I was so proud of my pretty and unique dresses[7]. The parcels remained very important to me, not only because of their content, but also because of the bond they established with the people I knew only from stories and photographs. It comforted me to know that my little family was not alone, that there were members far away who were taking good care of us[8].

Following this, I have not worn secondhand clothes (if I exclude regular sharing of clothes with a few friends in high school, which we saw as a smart way of combining resources to create collective wardrobe, larger than any individual one), until they appeared in Belgrade marketplaces in 1989[9]. Since then I established practices of donating and consuming secondhand and continued even after I moved to the U.S. in 1994. For three decades now

[6] At that time nobody suspected that the informal "stall economy" would not be an alternative and temporary solution, but that with the collapse of the federal state, internal wars, and the implosion of the socio-economic system, it would become the main source of supply for all needs (food, cleaning products, clothing and so on) while the state-owned stores had nothing to offer.

[7] At that time, I was not aware of the differences in perceptions and that some people thought that my prized possessions came from a charitable organization like the Salvation Army. I had photographs of my older cousin wearing „my clothes" and I had no doubt about their provenience.

[8] Later I realized that many other people in Europe received parcels from America as well. There were always important meanings and emotions attached to them, as recorded for Ireland by Hilary O'Kelly (2005, 83–96).

[9] I have, however, done regular „wardrobe purges" and donated large piles of my family's used clothing to the Red Cross or to our churches, St. Marko, and The Temple of Intercession of Theotokos, The Holy Mother of Jesus.

I have travelled for work and for pleasure to many big cities in the U.S., and whenever I had an opportunity, I searched for luxurious secondhand resale boutiques that offered carefully selected, and very gently used, attire bearing labels that I could not or would not want to pay for if new. I still have cashmere sweaters purchased in Philadelphia, a Burberry rainhat found in Chicago, and some designer silk blouses and pants discovered in New York City and San Francisco. I take good care of my wardrobe, new or secondhand, classic in styles and of excellent quality that neither easily reveals the age, or wear, which makes it very suitable as charity donations, or for resale in consignment shops[10]. The best items go to Twice is Nice, then to Shelterhouse[11], and finally to Goodwill or Salvation Army, all in Midland, Michigan.

Of course, today if people want to either sell, donate, or purchase secondhand clothes, they do not have to rely on local suppliers or on travel; there are many always open Internet resale dotcoms for convenient shopping from home. With easy return policies, and free shipping, the risk is minimal, if any. E-Bay was the first global e-commerce company founded in September 1995 by a French-born American Iranian computer programmer, Pierre Omidyar, in San Jose, California, envisioned as an auction house[12]. The other huge virtual seller, Amazon, which started with new and used book sales, also offers secondhand items in all categories. Today's myriad of websites, and apps, mostly specialize in particular kind of used fashion merchandise

[10] A person who donates to non-profit organization receives a receipt, the value of which can be deducted from annual taxes. If they are sold in a resale shop, a consignee receives a percentage of the amount an article was sold for. Either way, there is an incentive, no matter how small, to dispose of unwanted surpluses. However, donating or selling used articles is not motivated by financial gains; it is rewarding to pass on something that was enjoyed to someone else. Even more importantly, taking the trouble to recycle the waste, instead of just dumping it in the landfill, benefits the environment.

[11] „Shelterhouse" is a non-profit organization which provides emergency shelter, counseling and advocacy to victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault." The organization also runs a boutique „that redefines resale shopping in the area, offering gently used clothing, accessories, and home goods at budget-friendly prices". Proceeds go towards the cost of programs, https://shelterhousemidland.org/resaleshop/ (Accessed September 20, 2021).

[12] This corporation connects buyers and sellers in more than 190 subsidiary markets around the world, enabling „sellers to reach new customers and grow their businesses, and buyers to explore vast inventory and unique selection". It also empowers people, especially women, by providing opportunities to participate in a unique and flexible way, to be „at home and in the world" at the same time. Today it is a publicly traded company (NASDAQ) with a revenue of 10.27 billion dollars reported in 2020. There are approximately 1.5 billion live listings, 159 million active worldwide buyers, and 19 million sellers on the e-Bay marketplace.
https://www.ebayinc.com/company/our-history/ (Accessed September 20, 2021).

and styles (shoes, handbags, Bohemian, vintage, high-end designer, luxury). They target a particular group of consumers and offer a variety of different business models for sellers and buyers to choose from, such as Depop, Buffalo Exchange, threadUP, Facebook Marketplace, Poshmark, the Marketplace, Mercari, Crossroad Trading, Rebag, Etzy (handmade and vintage), ASOS Marketplace, Swap, Tradsy, Vinted, Refashioner. There are also luxury consignment sites carrying only top brand designer labels, such as the RealReal and Style Alert. For those who do not want to buy and accumulate more clothes, but need, as one always does in a consumer society, fresh outfits to express identity and maintain real or imagined social status, there are companies in which customers with a paid membership, can rent an attire, with an option to purchase all or some items, at deep discounts. The best clothing rental service in the U.S. are: RentARunway, Nuuly, Armoire (also offering personal shopper service), Le Tote (customized at home shopping), Gwynnie Bee (plus size clothing), Vince Unfold, and Infinitely Loft (an online site servicing the brick-and-mortar Urban Outfitters, Free People and Anthropologie stores, which are used as drop-off locations for returns). At Stich-Fix, a company stylist may suggest the best fit for a customer based on the style-quiz a client takes. There are also highly specialized brick-and-mortar and dotcom (.com) stores offering secondhand equipment for expensive sports, such as equestrian, golf or diving. In general, there is an upsurge in secondhand luxury market, valued at 261.2 billion dollars in 2018. It „is driven by fashion-conscious, digital savvy consumers, and the timelessness of luxury goods"[13].

In today's digital global world, most of these websites are available outside the national borders they are headquartered in. Even if the website availability is more localized, their wholesale suppliers connect them to the global secondhand trade. In Serbia, for example, in addition to Facebook Marketplace and Instagram, there is also a number of local websites offering clothing, fashion accessories, jewelry and many other items, turning them into a „sasomange" of sorts[14]. Those are, for example: kupujemprodajem.com, fast and easy to navigate, with 2 million registered users

[13] According to the researchers of this study the reasons for the growth of luxury secondhand sales are: sustainability, economic benefits and conspicuous consumption (Gopalakrishnan & Degirmencioglu 2020).

[14] Sasomange (sa so mange) is a term in Roma language derived from a person's name who was known to buy things that nobody wanted and later, when there was a high demand for them, resell them at substantial profit. It means „a little bit of everything", a variety of merchandise, a mishmash of offers. Cf. https://vujaklija.com/saso-mange. (Accessed September 24, 2021).

offering 55 thousand new ads daily, followed by kupindo, halooglasi, lalofo.rs, goglasi.com, mojekrpice.rs.

On average only about 35–45% of donated items, offered for resale are sold at their first destination. When the pre-determined display time in a store or on the website expires, items are removed for further processing. What happens next, where do they go to: landfills, incinerators, or somewhere else?

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SECONDHAND CLOTHES EXCHANGE

Historically, good quality clothes were rare, handmade (by artisans or within domestic production), expensive, and often symbolic. Therefore, they were treasured, passed on to other users (except for the ones selected as burial attire), as gifts, heirlooms designated in wills to specific recipients, or donated to charities, usually through religious institutions. They could also be used as „alternative currency" to exchange or supplement a payment for services or purchases. The existing evidence dating from different periods and from various cultures proves that used clothes were also commercially traded even in pre-industrial times through guilds and itinerant vendors. In England (and throughout Europe), when owners needed money quickly, for an investments or debt settlement, garments, fabrics, or parts of outfits (such as elaborately assembled and decorated collars, sleeves, and trim), were sold at town markets and country fairs or were pawned (Lemire 2005, 29–47). In Renaissance Florence there were secondhand clothing dealers, known as *rigattieri*, organized in a guild, who oversaw the circulation of goods and sales on behalf of their clients. In addition, there were also pawnbrokers, (*sensale*) and itinerant *venditrice,* women outside the guilds, who were working the streets buying and selling old clothes from different classes of households (Collier Flick 2005, 13–28). In the 17th and 18th century Paris, different categories, and levels of secondhand sellers, *fripiers*, *brocanteurs*, *revendeurs*, and *revendeuses,* some organized in guilds, others in free crafts, some licensed to also embellish, mend, clean and even remake clothes, played an important role in transforming sartorial habits in the Age of Enlightenment at the close of the Ancient Regime (Roche 1994, 330–363). The second-hand resale was a part of the thriving trade in clothes. It accelerated consumption, promoted fashion, and „improved appearances at frequent intervals and at a modest cost", „throughout the whole social body, since it catered both for basic needs and more sophisticated tastes" (Roche 1994, 360). In pre-modern Japan, and still today, there is a lively trade with silk kimonos and obis, which are recycled into new creations, or repurposed for

use in inner sanctuary of a home, bearing new symbolic meanings, (Satsuki Milhaupt 2005, 67–82).

While prohibitive sumptuary laws could still be enforced, if the lower-class recipients of generous gifts from people of high socio-economic standing could not wear the clothes themselves, they would be sold or exchanged in a marketplace for more appropriate attire, and other needed or desired articles:

> „The old cloaths which another bestows upon him he exchanges for other old cloaths which suit him better, or for lodging, or for food, or for money, with which he can buy either food, cloaths, or lodging, as he has occasion" (Smith 1998, 14–15).

When the old laws had lost their power in the Age of the Enlightenment, which simultaneously promoted standardization of lifestyles and individualization, and as pre- and industrial production increased the volume and reduced the cost of consumer goods, including fashion, mechanisms of „social representation of the hierarchies of wealth and status in the order of appearances" (Roche 1994, 502), also had to change. It was the unprecedented change of fashion that had become the regulator of the expression of social structuring: who could get the newest fashion first and distinguish themselves as trendsetters from the followers. The faster the change, the more items to be discarded and redistributed down the social ladder. This is when the secondhand clothing exchange not only grew in volume and visibility, but also in importance as a structuring element of the consumer society. Textile and clothing industries not only started the revolution but from the very beginning played crucially important roles in establishing the world-wide structure of industrial capitalism and the dynamics of free-market system that have been shaping global power relations ever-since. They enabled the economic growth and prosperity of the core nations at the expense of the peripheral ones (to borrow Wallerstein's terms), which still operate today regulated by the World Trade Organization and many other international institutions, by implementing various protective, or stimulating mechanisms, as needed, but always to the advantage of the former. Industrial powers were interested in securing markets for their products and in finding the most affordable means of production (low-cost labor, energy, raw materials, and nowadays also the absence of strict environmental laws). Today these two areas of the world are referred to as the global North and the global South. This staggering cycle of acquisition and dis-

card created enormous quantities of secondhand merchandise that had to be dealt with.

Obviously, the process of clothing circulation within a society had ambiguous meanings. Discarded articles served both as charitable gifts and commodities traded in the marketplace, directly, or through specialized vendors. While charity was welcome as a noble gesture of the fortunate towards the less fortunate members of a society, commercialization of used clothing was not regarded favorably (Minter 2019, 53). Therefore, the negative perception of secondhand as „waste"[15] had to be reframed. In order to keep both new and used clothing distribution flowing, it was important to turn the rejected clothing articles into acceptable, profit-generating items. In the 19th century when industrially produced clothes became much less expensive, secondhand became less desirable, especially because it retreated to the lowest classes of street and market vendors who often combined honorable donations with stolen goods and articles acquired from beggars who extracted from benevolent owners under false pretenses (Brooks 2019, 114). Not surprisingly, used apparel gradually became „something deviant, associated with crime and morally ambiguous […], on the fringe of the society" (Brooks 2019, 115). To bring back the respect to the much-needed disposal of used clothing, the distribution in the 19th century became increasingly formalized as charitable donations, often mediated through religious groups. In this way, the middle and upper classes had a way to get rid of the unwanted goods in a respectable way, avoiding contact with „undesirable underclass and criminal elements associated with the rag trade" and providing them with reasons to feel good about themselves, as compassionate, charitable people supporting a noble cause (Brooks 2019, 117). In Victorian times on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean respectable ladies of the „polite society" could only engage in volunteering work for charitable causes, donating time, organization skills, goods, and money. While charity brought prestige, working for wages, or selling unwanted personal possessions, was considered disgraceful.

As the volume of discarded garments continued its fast growth, the society and its charitable organizations were forced to improve their collection and distribution, and develop business models, which would ensure efficiency and profitability. One of the first such institutions, capa-

[15] Mary Douglas' definition of „dirt" as a „matter out of place" provides an excellent metaphor in the case of secondhand as it was viewed in the mainstream western societies (Douglas 1966).

ble of handling the volume and satisfying both the people who wanted to donate and those who needed to buy secondhand, was the Salvation Army founded in London in 1865 by the Booth family[16]. A Salvationist, Eliza Sherley, an immigrant from England, transferred the idea and organization to Philadelphia in 1879. Another store opened in New York in 1897. Today the Salvation Army serves all over North America, and in more than 130 countries around the world. Its income, 82% of which is used to support its many charitable programs, derives from donations in kind, and in money. Revenue from donations in kind is generated through thrift shops in which collected clothes and household items are sorted, repaired, priced, displayed, and sold.

A few decades later, in 1902, Reverend Edgar James Helms took over Methodist Morgan Chapel in Boston and started a program of collecting and repairing clothes in local neighborhoods for charitable purposes. Morgan Chapel had a unique and successful way of collecting: burlap coffee bags were distributed in middle class neighborhoods to be filled up and returned with unwanted but repairable articles. These bags became known as „Goodwill bags", and when the model expanded to Brooklyn, the name of the organization was changed to Goodwill Industries. After Methodist affiliation was dropped and Industries began to serve interdenominational communities, Goodwill quickly spread all over the U.S. and Canada. In 1994 International was added to the name as the organization spread to 12 other countries. This large non-profit organization with the annual revenue nearing 5 billion dollars in recent years and with a philosophy of offering „not charity, but a chance", is particularly engaged in job training and employment placement of people who need help. Resources for their programs also come from their thrift stores in North America (numbering more than 3,300), online site, and other e-commerce platforms, as well as from bulk sales of leftover items. There is a precise order in determining what kind of merchandise is offered, where and at what price.[17]

Both charities in the U.S. were established at the most opportune time when the country was experiencing fast industrialization, socio-economic stratification, and the beginning of immense growth of waste. They also

[16] The Christian Mission, soon to be renamed Salvation Army, was founded by the former Methodist minister William Booth, and his wife Catherine. Minister Booth, disillusioned with the formality of the church, often rejecting the ones who needed help the most, left the church and chose the evangelical option to work with the poor directly.

[17] https://www.goodwill.org/about-us/ (Accessed September 25, 2021); Minter 2019, 45–65.

played a role in Christianizing „historically Jewish businesses and Americanizing immigrants" (Le Zot 2017, 5–6)[18].

Every continent and most countries have their own similar organizations, most successful of which (Red Cross, Oxfam, YMCA, Value Village, etc.), have attained global outreach. Another big charitable organization in Europe is Caritas (Latin for love and compassion) founded in Germany in 1897 by Laurence Werthmann. It was inspired by the teaching of the Catholic Church[19] to help „the poor, vulnerable and excluded, regardless of race and religion, to build the world based on justice and fraternal love". In 1951, Pope Paul VI laid the foundation for its international network, which was officially recognized in 1954[20].

In addition to philanthropic organizations[21], there were also for-profit junk dealers and thrift shop owners, who perceived the former as unfair competitors who acquire inventory through donations, while they had to invest in purchases. Donors, however, generally preferred to give to charities: they felt better helping elevate poverty and other misfortunes in their communities and beyond, rather than enable professional dealers to make money.

Gradually, the middle-class attitudes toward purchasing secondhand also began to change from being abhorred to being sought after, first by avantgarde and socio-culturally rebellious social groups. This stretched from the 1920s modernists to punk and grunge, to today's multiculturality,

[18] Many secondhand stores in Europe and America were owned and operated by Jewish entrepreneurs. The same was true for Belgrade. In the 19th century, secondhand stores, *starinarnice* or *telalnice*, as they were called in Serbia were clustered in Fišeklija, at that time at the town periphery, tacked in with gun and gunpowder shops (Andrejević 1977, 95–96). As this area was gentrified, the secondhand stores were moved close to the Jewish residential area towards the Danube River.

[19] Today Caritas is one of the largest aid and development agencies with 160 member groups all over the world, which reflects the social mission and core values of the Catholic Church. They believe in dignity, solidarity, and stewardship on behalf of world's most vulnerable people: https://www.cartas.org. (Accessed September 30, 2021).

[20] https://www.caritas.org. One of the ways of raising money is through the collection of garment and shoe donations (Accessed September 30, 2021).

[21] It is impossible to mention all non-profit fundraising charities. I will mention only two. One is the historic example from the 19th century Belgrade: In 1874 A Fund for Assisting Poor University Students was founded to help them in many ways, including providing warm winter coats (Miljković 1977, 79). The other is a contemporary organization, Dress for Success, which specializes in clothing and accessories. It was founded in 1997 by Nancy Lublin in Spanish Harlem, or East Harlem, a neighborhood in Manhattan, New York City. Its mission is "to empower women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support, professional attire and the development tools to […] thrive in work and in life" https://www.dressforsuccess.org.

diversity, and the search of authenticity, in which, especially the younger members of the middle class, having appropriated marginalized subcultures beforehand (cf. Polhemus & Procter 1978), strive to express their individual identities. Thus, the secondhand „vicious circle" which used to cater predominantly to the urban poor, became open and acceptable to all who wanted it.

Open-air markets and fairs, in villages and in cities, featuring a variety of products, including secondhand, have existed for a very long time. They were in crisis in America, after WW I when the sales of typical farmer's market items were moved to modern grocery stores, and it was the secondhand that saved them. In the 1920s, the decade of conflict and contradictions, two main opposing forces, embodying different moral, cultural, economic, and political ideals, and aspiring towards different goals – conservative in an effort to preserve the status quo, and progressive aiming to move the society forward and away from the 19th century standards[22], worked together to shape the new flea markets[23]:

> „Supplies of secondhand items grew as modern efficiency and innovations in manufacturing, production, and advertising quickened the pace of consumption and disposal […] Demands for used goods grew in apparent proportion. The origins of those demands ran the gamut: the poverty of many new immigrants and other victims of growing inequality of wealth; a popular attraction to wares branded 'exotic' […]; an avant-garde anticommercialism; and finally, a rising conservative nostalgia for the preindustrialized American past" (Ibid, 55–56).

For the middle-class customers, followers of the modernist art movement, and political radicalism, „novelty" was to introject not-new into their existing inventories. Artist and theoreticians (for example, members of the Dada surrealist group, M. Duchamp, Max Ernst, and A. Breton) were looking to include found objects into their work and thoughts. All this gave strength and tenacity to the flea market, still going strong today.

[22] „Americans aghast at youth culture, urban heterogeneity, and the decadent pastimes of relative affluence sought to maintain an imaginary simplicity [..]that sometimes included racial segregation, religious oppression, and ethnic intolerance" (Le Zotte 2017, 55). It is amazing how the same description fits the conservative movement in the U.S. today, a hundred years later.

[23] The term Flea Market first appeared in English, in the Oxford dictionary, in 1922, borrowed from the French Marché aux Puces, an open-air bazaar in Paris.

After WW II, with the new affluence, the building frenzy of single-family homes away from congested city centers, and with an even greater need to dispose of accumulated objects – the result of Fordist (Keynesian) economic model[24] – a new informal economic venue, and the biggest used-goods market innovation, was created in the mid-1950s: the garage sale[25]. They gained even more in importance at the end of the 1960s when the American middle-class suburbia, enabled by the ability to own an automobile, joined in. They signaled a new change in relations between individual customers, material goods, and the style of shopping. The usual lower income level secondhand buyers were joined by the new counter-cultural groups, Beatniks, and hippies, who reframed the oppositional meaning of secondhand clothing (Le Zotte 2017, 92–121). Because of their flexibility and adaptability to always changing circumstances they are still going strong to this day.

Major secondhand collections in the Western world occur when a household is to be liquidated, due to downsizing in owners' golden age (moving to smaller houses, apartments, or retirement, senior or nursing homes), or after their passing. Those tasks are mostly delegated to professional companies or individuals executing „the purge". In the U.S. estate sales are a popular way of emptying a house. Accumulation of „stuff" is so overwhelming that even earlier in life homeowners, who happen to have hoarding tendencies, periodically declutter their dwellings. If they are not ready to let things go yet, they will rent special self-storage facilities mushrooming throughout the global North. Or, for permanent disposal, they take their unwanted possessions to a landfill, or leave them for curbside recycling. Resellers keep track of the pick-up schedule and go through piles of discarded „stuff" looking for items that can be reused, resold, or repaired. The cleanouts are even more complex and pressing in Japan where consumption is high, and homes are

[24] This model, responsible for the economic growth and elevation of standards of living dominated in the post-WW II years. It was gradually replaced by the neo-liberal capitalism, based on Hayek's classic theory, further developed by Milton Freedman, to its current form of classic economic liberalism, revived in the 1980s during Ronald Regan's and Margaret Thatcher's years in power. It favored high profits and benefits for the ruling class while enforcing austerity measures against government spending beneficial to the masses thus considerably reducing their overall quality of life. This model, as an interventionist philosophy, was spread to the post-socialist and developing countries causing the rampant growth of systemic social inequality.

[25] They are also known as yard sales, lawn sales, attic or basement sales, bargain sales, depending on geography and period, or moving sales, which are always bigger and better than regular yard sales. In all cases those sales are for profit that goes to the owners. Rummage sales, on the other hand, organized by churches and other non-profit organizations are fund-raisers for charity.

small. There is a considerable amount of repurposing and reusing clothing. But most of the waste is sold abroad, in southeast Asia, where Japanese made goods are held in high regard (Minter 2019, 87–106).

3. USED CLOTHING „SYSTEMS OF PROVISION"[26] – „TRASH IS TREASURE"

Over the last fifty years, a definite pattern of globalized first- and second distribution has become obvious. First of all, they circulate in opposite directions. Since jobs in textile and clothing industries were overwhelmingly outsourced to developing countries (China, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia and many more), newly manufactured merchandise, while still designed and marketed in and for the core nations, travels from the global South towards the global North. Typically, manufacturing takes place in several different locations, as in the example of popular T-shirts[27], or jeans-jeans. Their "travel itinerers" proving strong global integration through commodities. Once purchased, worn, and donated/discarded, clothes will eventually go back to low-income and emerging economies to be sold as secondhand, often the only affordable option for the people in those countries[28]. Thus, the full global circle of travel is completed.

[26] The term, „system of provision" was coined by the economist Ben Fine as a way of understanding why people buy certain things and how choices are shaped by history, culture, and geography. This approach charts the chain of activity connecting consumption to production that makes it possible (Fine 2002, 79).

[27] Pietra Rivoli (2015) followed the travels of a t-shirt. The journey starts in Lubbock in Western Texas, where cotton is grown (prior to recent Chinese takeover, Texas was the largest cotton grower in the world). Raw cotton is shipped to Chine to be processed into fiber and fabric. The next phase, cutting and sewing of a t-shirt may happen in China, or it may be sent on to another country, Bangladesh, or Vietnam. Then, some of the pieces go to yet another place to be dyed, perhaps in Africa, before they finally return to the distributer in America for silk-screening and finishing before they are distributed to retail stores. Similar stories accompany the production of different brands of jeans (cf. Brooks 2019, 13–55).

[28] American secondhand exports will most likely end up in sub-Saharan Africa, or New Guinea, where a new wearer's T-shirt sporting a North American baseball team, or an event unrelated to the new owners' life experiences may seem out of place, but it nonetheless fulfills its primary function. However, clothing articles like jeans, especially if carrying a well-known label, will have a much better fate as secondhand. Levi's jeans, and jackets are perceived as vintage and they are in high demand, especially in Japan. Hip young Japanese will pay as much as a thousand dollars for the right pair of jeans (5-pocket, 5-button, for example). The same is true for Nike shoes and Disney-themed T-shirts. Their prices reflect the social value of apparel, not its material cost (Brooks 2015, 13–55).

However, before they start their international journey, they are first offered as secondhand to domestic consumers. Large charities, like the Salvation Army and Goodwill, are the collection centers in which not only donations designated to them, but also all leftovers from garage, rummage, estate, and resale shops will end up. Once in one place, there are many tasks that have to be performed multiple times before they are offered for sale. These processes include collecting, sorting, grading, sometimes even cleaning and repairing. If items were too soiled or damaged beyond repair, they are immediately set aside for recycling, or for terminal destruction in landfills. All these tasks are performed mostly by low-paid labor, consisting of women, unqualified men, and immigrants. What has improved, at least in the global North, is the environment in which sorting is done with safety precautions against hazardous exposures to contagious agents in place. It has come a long way from the infamous rag trade, which started in England to become the first transnational network of exchange, „the emergence of which was both the outcome and a response to the changing nature of industrial garment manufacturing and the rise of capitalism" (Brooks 2019, 16)[29]. Rag trade is associated with a smallpox epidemic that broke out in West Sussex paper mill in 1883 (Friel 2020, 37–44).

Articles which pass the test as acceptable for resale are triaged according to quality, condition, demand, and profitability. The best ones are offered online or sold to reputable consignment shops. The rest are displayed in Goodwill and Salvation Army thrift shops for a limited amount of time. If they do not sell even after two deep discounts offered at preset intervals[30], they have to move on. Goodwill will transfer leftovers to their outlet stores, where available, in which owners of lower-grade resale shops located in poor neighborhoods, will look for bargains. If outlet establishments are located close to the southern border, wholesalers and retailers from Mexico are the best buyers. They can achieve high profits across the border where American secondhand merchandise is always in high demand in small towns and villages. From Goodwill outlets unsold items are taken back to warehouses to undergo another triage and

[29] The 19th century England, with its textile industries always in need of raw materials, including textile waste, for paper industry, for example, became the center for sorting rags from all over the world. K. Marx called the process of sorting the most shameful, the dirtiest and the worst paid labor that also exposed sorters to all kinds of disease. But rag trade was a very lucrative business (Brooks 2019, 114).

[30] About 65% of the displayed items remain unsold.

some items are again set aside for recycling. Clothes made of white cotton fabrics, especially T-shirts, highly absorbent with no color to bleed, will go to the rag cutting facilities[31], and some will be packaged and resold for export („salvage market"), while the rest, still a huge amount of waste, will end up in landfills. Oddly, it costs less money to ship bales of used clothing to distant destinations around the world (because those clothes still generate revenue through sales), than to pay for landfill services. Items designated for export will be compressed, unsorted, into large bales[32] and sent to new sorting centers located in places around the world that offer the best conditions for the task.

Those centers have become very important in global secondhand trade. In North America, one of those ideal places is Mississauga, a suburb of Toronto in Canada, where a large pool of immigrant labor is available, and where wholesalers, immigrants themselves, have connections with dealers in the global South markets. Very large and efficient facilities are in Kandla, a fishing village and a port in western India, which has been granted a special economic zoning status, exempting it from the Indian ban on secondhand clothing imports, imposed to protect domestic textile production. It is one of the world's biggest centers for grading, processing, and re-exporting, secondhand clothing.[33] There are other processing centers in South Asia, Arabian Gulf region, and in Europe, in Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland (TEXAID)[34], Hungary, Slovakia, and Spain,

[31] About 30% of textiles recovered for recycling in the U.S. are converted to wiping rugs needed in oil and gas industries, hospitality establishments, auto-manufacturing, healthcare, construction, and painting. The U.S., once the leading rag-making nation, is now reduced to a few plants. One of the best, and still going strong, is the Star Wipers rag-cutting facility in Ohio. Over the last three decades, much of the industry was moved to Asia, especially to India. Star Wipers itself sources cotton textiles suitable for rag-making from Kandla (Minter 2019: 165–167). Wool fabrics are a different story. At first, they were ground and used as fertilizer, but when a machine for processing used wool textiles was invented in England in the early 19th century, they were shredded into fibers used to make cheap coarse fabric known as „shoddy". Inexpensive blankets and garments for the poor and the military were made from it. This industry soon became a very profitable business. Today the center of shoddy mills is in Panipat, India (Minter 2019, 167–178).

[32] Bales come in different sizes, varying from 85, 100, 500 to even 1,000 kg.

[33] https://graphics.wsj.com/glider/rags-dea65355-83f8-4ce7-8297-2e5f8de20fd9 (Accessed January 15, 2022).

[34] It is one of the largest companies in Europe for the collection, sorting and recycling of used textiles owned by a consortium of Swiss charitable organizations, including Caritas. It has facilities in other European countries, including Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the U.S. all established in 2010s, https://retailsolutions.texaid.com/ (Accessed August 10, 2021).

where Mobacotex, operates[35]. Better quality items go from the U.S. to Central American countries, and the rest is shipped to Africa and Asia. Japan, Australia, and New Zealand ship used clothes to south-east Asia and the Pacific Islands (Minter 2019, 128–180). Western Europe sends its supplies to Eastern European post-socialist countries, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. In addition to India, some other countries have also banned import of secondhand clothes (The Philippines, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, partially South Africa[36]), but as many traders say, „there is always a way" (porous borders with neighboring countries, corrupt custom officers, smuggling, bribery). For example, Nigerians, predominantly Igbo tribe members, living in Ghana, Benin, and Togo service the huge illegal secondhand market in their country. They dominate the trade in this area where they act as importers, graders, and wholesalers. They know their customer well and buy only merchandise that West Africans will approve of. Nigerians like secondhand from the global North because articles are more durable and unique. Fatima, a customer in a Nigerian market says: „You can buy even cheaper Chinese ready-mades, but then you look like everyone else. Here I can find designer clothes no one else has"[37]. Therefore, secondhand is attractive not only because of the low cost, but also because of its higher quality, durability, and uniqueness (Brooks 2019, 269)[38].

Once the shipping containers are unloaded, local wholesalers take over, and conduct one more sorting procedure to make sure all articles are to the liking of their Nigerian and all African customers in general (dark colors which do not show dirt, light-weight cotton fabrics suitable for the climate,

[35] Mobacotex, an export-import processing center in Spain, takes care of collecting, classifying, recycling, packaging, selling, and delivering large bales of clothing to stores in Spain and other parts of Europe and to Africa: https://www.mobacotext.com/ (Accessed October 1, 2021).

[36] According to an article by Monica Mark in The Guardian, in 2012 there were 12 African countries that had banned used clothes imports, and 31 globally, with an aim to protect domestic textile production and their sales: https://www.theguardian/world/2012/may/07/europes-secondhand-clothes-africa. (Accessed October 1, 2021).

[37] https://www.theguardian/wor;d/2012/may/07/europes-secondhand-clothes-africa, p. 2. (Accessed October 1, 2021). To accentuate the uniqueness of the secondhand market finds, clothing articles are referred to as „snowflakes" because there are no two items that are alike. The ability to match „snowflakes" with the right customers is another secret of being highly successful in this industry (Rivoli 2015, 218).

[38] Chinese clothing products in Africa are not limited to fast fashion. Their manufactures even try to imitate traditional African fabrics rendered with cheap, synthetic fibers, as for example, poorly styled and executed mass produced kente cloth, an unsuccessful replica of expensive and highly symbolic hand-woven creation, once reserved for royalty of the Ashanti tribe in Ghana.

no shorts or miniskirts for women to meet the modesty standards, and so on), (Rivoli 2015, 224; Brooks 2019, 225–237). The most valuable items in the highest demand often do not even reach the markets. They are offered in elite business, government, and commercial areas of the cities where office employees with better incomes have the first pick.

Secondhand trading practices are similar in other parts of Africa as well. Mozambique, for example is another large African consumer and importer of secondhand clothing from the global North, specifically from Australia, Europe, and North America, and it also distributes merchandise to the neighboring countries. Import and wholesale trade is in the hands of Indian businessmen and merchandise comes directly from Kandla. Due to Mozambique's tumultuous history in postcolonial period, the imported secondhand clothes are often the only garments available to the impoverished population. Wholesalers there, like anywhere else, sell their bales quickly and get profits on the returns of their investments. Retail sales take much longer and can only provide basic income although some popular articles are sold at twice the wholesale price. They chose to sell used clothes because of the lack of opportunities in their country, not because this line of business will make them wealthy. It supports survival, „rather than a livelihood which should be celebrated as a successful entrepreneurial way of life" (Brooks 2019, 265). The same is the case in other poor sub-Saharan African nations: Tanzania, Zambia, Congo, Kenya, and others.

* * *

And where do the resale shops (Fig. 1) and e-commerce sites in Serbia get their secondhand merchandise from? Most of it comes from wholesalers who purchase large bales of clothing and many other items in Germany, England, Switzerland, Austria, and other countries. The largest and the most popular suppliers, according to their own ad, are two European wholesalers, Euroshop and Textile House. According to its website, Euroshop caters to about 100 shops in Serbia with branded and sorted *garderoba*[39]. Textile House is one of the five largest sorting houses in Europe, with a capacity of 20 thousand tons per year. It was founded in 1996

[39] Today in Europe, especially in Scandinavia, the term signifies a concept store. In many European languages it stands for an outfit or the entire inventory of one's clothing items. Etymologically, it is believed to derive from the French word *garderobe* for wardrobe, a closet or armoire used to protect clothes. In Italian Renaissance word *guardaroba* meant "a set of clothing made up of three garments: two layers of indoor clothing and a mantle for outdoors" (Tortora & Marcketti 2021, 128).

and completely renovated in 2017. It is located in Bratislava, Slovakia, and it sources its merchandise from all over Europe to secure the best seasonal choices: fall and winter clothes come predominantly from Scandinavian countries, and spring and summer ones are sorted from Southern Europe, especially Italy[40]. Most likely, the majority of their pieces are purchased from the Catholic charity, Caritas International. Both wholesalers, assert that their secondhand selections are more attractive, of better quality, and much better priced than the new merchandise offered in boutiques, Chinese department stores, such as „Panda", or in fast-fashion retailers like H&R in Knez Mihailova Street (Fig. 2).[41] Unlike many other countries though, secondhand retail stores in Serbia do not, or vary rarely, buy items from individual citizens by piece or in small quantities. They prefer to deal with large suppliers of imported goods because it is a more affordable way (1 kg of clothing costs about 200 dinars), because merchandise had already been inspected and sorted, and because the business part is less complicated than consignment arrangements with individual sellers. Also, buying from individuals could jeopardize the retailers privileged, unregulated status as dealers of secondhand trade who do not need special licensing, nor have to pay customs duty or any other taxes. On the flip side, citizens who want to dispose of their old clothes have no other option but to donate to the Red Cross, or to homeless and refugee centers[42] or, simply leave their extras on or by trash containers where they are quickly picked-up, more often by resellers than by the people who really need them (Fig. 4).

Like in other places in Europe, in or outside the Union, used clothes in Serbia can also be purchased at flea and farmers' markets (Figs. 3), or at still street stalls. D. Milovanović (2016, 18–20)[43] investigated how in

[40] „Each [piece] of clothes is evaluated and the trained sorting lady needs to decide if it's a shop quality or recycling quality […] The shop quality is sorted [once] again according to the seasons" https://textilehouse.sk/sorting-story?lang=en.

[41] https://zadovoljna.nova.rs/moda-i-lepota/odakle-dolazi-odeca-u-srpske-second-hand-radnje/ (Accessed January 20, 2021).

[42] https://novinska-skola.org.rs/sr/category/medialab-odakle-dolazi-roba-iz-second-hand-prodavnica/(Accessed May 30, 2020); Bojana Djordjevic, Kupuje li nas narod u second hand radnjama: Odakle dolazi sva ta roba i ko je kontrolise: http://biznis.telegraf.rs/info-biz3293238, (Accessed January 20, 2021).

[43] I am very grateful to my colleague, Mladena Prelić, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate at the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art for sending me an abbreviated format of Diana Milovanovic's M.A. thesis which is not available on the Internet. I also owe gratitude to Mladena for taking some excellent photographs I requested, and for her constructive suggestions while reading earlier versions of this manuscript.

Smederevska Palanka, Mica, a flea market seller, secures her supplies. She partners with her mother and sister in Austria, who send their own unwanted clothes, supplemented with purchases made at a flea market (Flohmarkt) in Vienna, or at deep discounts at regular stores to be sold at the market stall in Serbia. Mica, like Mexican buyers, also gets her supplies from charitable organizations, Caritas in her case. Also, like many market and shop vendors around the world, including other Balkan and Eastern European countries, she circles Viennese periphery on recycling days, rummaging through discarded items left on curbsides, to picks out articles potentially sellable to her clientele in Serbia (Milovanović 2016, 19–20).

4. CONSUMPTION IN TODAY'S GLOBAL WORLD

Although today the secondhand trade is a well-established, multi-billion dollar business integrated into global informal economy, which shares common features and rules, consumption around the world exhibits both shared traits, and many particularities, thus creating numerous hybrid, culturally specific variations. It is never random, nor a passive imitation of the practices in the West. Purchasing is influenced by a variety of factors, such as specific cultural needs, religious practices, norms governing a society and much more (Appadurai 1986, 29). That is why a very important role in the secondhand success story is played by the small, local retailers who are in position to pay attention to detail and to their customers' specific needs and desires. They know them well and offer personalized service in a world that is increasingly becoming impersonal. This level of provision based on clothing competence in selecting styles and quality, cannot be rendered by large sellers. Special services go beyond clothing selections, and encompass a variety of business models, including credits and extended payment plans. Sales do not always have to be at a public place: there are also ambulatory businesswomen, like in Zambia (Tranberg Hansen 2000, 192) who go door to door and enable customers to salaula[44] in their own homes. Another interesting hybrid is the combination of contemporary globalized trade model with traditional social relations. No matter what position a player occupies in a chain of suppliers – long distance or local, wholesaler or retailer – they always rely on personal

[44] In Bemba language, the term means „to select from a pile in a manner of rummaging", or „to pick" for short. It that has come in extensive use in the 1980s and 1990s when the long-time existing secondhand became increasingly important and voluminous. *Salaula* has become the name for the secondhand market in general (Tranberg Hansen 2000, 192).

relations, and trust in tried-and-true networks of family members, friends, and countryman as their most dependable partners. That is the other big component of their success.

Several examples from different cultural settings support these claims. In West Africa, Muslim women, who are good secondhand customers, make compromises, which allow them to satisfy both their desire for fashion and their submissiveness and respect for religious rules. As one of them, buying sequined Levi's jeans, said to the Guardian reporter: *„I cover myself but under my abaya I still want to wear nice modern clothes"*[45]. Clothes that show wear and tear and have stains are not going to be accepted by African secondhand shoppers. Although some repairs of the apparel may have been done in some of the stops in their travel, the most important alterations are performed at the final destinations, to make clothes highly appropriate and desirable to the local clientele. In Africa again, tops with long sleeves are sent to tailors to be replaced with short ones. As African women rarely wear jeans (unless hidden by an abaya), denim pants are restyled for male customers. Old clothes are altered to give them new physical appearance and new symbolic meanings, which in turn increase their value „because Africans do not want to emulate Westerners; they just want to be well dressed Africans at affordable prices" (Tranberg Hansen 2000, 237).

> „What matters in their clothing selections is not the Western origin of suits and dresses but that these garments have been incorporated into local dress repertoires so long ago that today they are Zambian icons of acceptable wear. Conceptually the term *salaula* reconstructs the West's cast-off clothing into a desirable commodity without making reference to its origins or provenance, in effect submerging its history of production, in the form of 'sourcing' and prior ownership, once retailers place secondhand clothing bales for sale at the end of the chain in Zambia. Indeed, consumers here explain the presence of salaula as a result of 'donations' from the West" (Tranberg Hansen 2000, 3)[46].

[45] https://www.theguardian/world/2012/may/07/europes-secondhand-clothes-africa (Accessed July 10, 2021).

[46] This indicates that imported secondhand can gradually be appropriated and accepted as an alternative source in creating a „nationalized" style. In addition, in many non-western societies, traditional or newly created specific attires have a parallel existence as appropriate wear for special occasions, formal and ritual situation (*boubou* dresses in Nigeria, *chitenga* gowns in Zambia, sari in India, kimono with obi in Japan and so on).

Cases from the former Eastern European socialist countries reveal specifics of how imported secondhand clothing is evaluated and used there after 1989. People from these countries are among the last shoppers to join the global marketplace. According to Creed's study of Bulgarian villages, the last years of socialism brought an economic betterment, relatively speaking, through diversifying activities, resulting in more cash to spend on merchandise and activities of choice. What continued to elevate the quality of life further, was the still present ability to mobilize social relations based on reciprocity. Also, purchasing valuable imported products of good quality, available to a small, privileged group of people during socialism testified to the villagers' ability to circumvent the state regulations (quality of resistance). The expectations were that the end of the socialist era would leave „socialist limitations" in the past and open up space for „capitalist opportunities" (Creed 2002, 119). However, the reality of the transition period revealed that when the safety nets were removed, and as social inequality was arising very fast, a reversed situation was created: choices were available, but they were not affordable. As the villagers were caught between a „modern global citizenship increasingly focused on consumption and a prohibition on these very activities by global financial institutions" (Creed 2002, 122), desire to acquire material goods declined, rationalized as not worthy of respect since any substantial economic success under new circumstances was attributed to criminal activities. Dramatically reduced consumption was also due to the change in the merchandise provenance. While in socialism foreign imports primarily came from Western Europe and Japan, „the plethora of goods now offered in markets and bazaars […] are primarily Turkish and Chinese, many brought to the market through the lucrative 'trader tourism' networks operated predominantly by Roma". What was now offered were „cheap products from marginal countries peddled by social inferiors" (Creed 2002, 123). In the cities, there were more people with discretionary incomes who could shop at the malls (a symbol of transition to free market economy), but fast arising social inequalities left many without that privilege. Similar evaluations were typical for most former socialist countries. Disappointment in what was perceived as a better future has turned many towards socialist nostalgia („democracy brought us only misery and crime"), and prompted consumption toward alternative markets with low-quality, cheap goods.

E. Krăsteva-Blagoeva (2015) studied secondhand clothing trade in Kărdžali, a small town of mixed ethnicity (Turkish majority, Pomak and Bulgarian minorities), in south-east Bulgaria. While in the 1990s secondhand clothing was seen as a sign of a „non-normal consumption", twenty years later wearing secondhand apparel became a norm, which illus-

trates the fact that living in a constant economic crisis has become a new way of life: short term strategies for coping with the crises have created a specific „culture of survival" (Krăsteva-Blagoeva 2015, 246–247). Since the 2007 economic crises, secondhand stores sprung everywhere, even in the shopping districts in large cities, including Sofia. In a national survey, 41% of consumers claimed they shopped in secondhand stores. This study revealed that ethnic and social (class, gender, rural/urban) boundaries and identities were still maintained and expressed in their presentation of self by means of clothing and attitudes towards fashion (Krăsteva-Blagoeva 2015, 242–246). Even more striking was the demonstrated ability of the people to pivot obvious disadvantages of their condition into a „discourse of rehabilitation", which turned them into self-proclaimed winners. In socialism, when poor choices and shortages were a daily reality, they „used the whole range of unofficial channels, from self-made clothing to the black market, private fashion salons and networks of connections to obtain the desired clothes" (Bartlett 2004, 129). The special bonus was the feeling of satisfaction that they could „cheat" the oppressive regime. In post-socialism, yes, they were poor, yes, they were shopping in secondhand stores, but for high quality items, which they would add value to by self-made alterations and decorations. They would construct a topsy turvy world in which, again, they came on top, not only in Bulgaria, but especially in comparison to the women in Western Europe who did not have to invest extra effort „to make something out of nothing", to turn secondhand into impressive personal wardrobes.

> „Members of the elite are wealthy, but often lack the taste and cultural competence to consume properly, while the majority, which is getting poorer […] has the cultural competence to consume, but not the money to spend. As a consequence, there are examples of conspicuous and luxurious kitsch on the one hand, and of discerning combinations of clothes and other second hand commodities compensating the lower financial status of their owners" (Krăsteva-Blagoeva 2015, 242).

The analyses of rich ethnographic data from Romania (Crăciun 2012, 2014) tell a story about the importance of secondhand clothing in post-socialist urban areas. The author looks at the problem of almost obsessive concerns about authenticity of apparel, certified by original labels. If clothes were missing labels, it implied that they could be considered fake, intended to deceive, to suggest falsification, theft, imitation, and impersonation (Crăciun 2012, 847). Specifically, fakes refer to the garments secretly

made primarily in Turkey and brought to Romania first, in the 1990s, as part of the „travel" or „suitcase trade" and later as large-scale cargo transports sold in warehouses, and then distributed to retailers. Chinese imports were graded even worse because they were of even more inferior quality. Therefore, here again, when people of limited means wanted items of better quality and durability, even if they were not of the latest fashion, they turned to secondhand shops. But they have also found a way to come to terms with the negative connotations of fakes by granting them social legitimacy because they can afford them, „whereas the high prices charged for the legally branded garments turn them into something illicit" (Crăciun 2012, 858). The other obsession was with the condition the clothes were in. They had to be perfect: clean, no stains, no rips, and no signs of faulty or decaying materiality, like pilling (or bobbling), because they could impede garments' public life and the wearers' ability to construct the desired public self (Crăciun 2014, 3). That is why Romanian's invested a lot of time to maintaining their clothes in perfect condition for as long as possible.

Women-activists working for Medica, an NGO feminist organization in Zenica, Bosnia, engaged in helping female victims of war atrocities, also had very hard time finding clothing articles that would encode their own, non-radical brand of feminism, worldviews, and identities. They wanted clothes that would signal that they were moderate, inclusive fighters for equal gender opportunities, not dominance or rejection of all societal norms. They wanted to be elegant and fashionable, while retaining femininity, even under the most dare economic and social constraints. But they also wanted, based on their education, to present themselves as cosmopolitan individuals apart from mainstream conservatism and provincial norms followed by rural and working-class women. However, cultivating an alternative style was not easy in a small town in which anything that stood out was sanctioned by informal methods of social control, such as disparaging remarks and gossip. In addition, it was hard to find unusual articles to wear or accessorize, since market stalls and affordable shops offered little variety. Even global chain stores in big cities where not much help: they were either too expensive, or with selections similar to those offered at outdoor markets. Secondhand clothes were not an option either because those stores were still associated with humanitarian aid and poverty. They were meant for refugees. These opinions gradually changed over the years, especially among younger urban generations, in the face of widespread poverty (Helms 2019, 86–95).

In Serbia too, particularly in big cities, wearing used garments and accessories was no longer considered shameful („*blam*"), especially among

young, educated urbanites who wanted to be authentic, and to express their individuality and creativity, rather than follow the standardized, unimaginative trends. High cost, poor quality and selections of ready-made, mostly fast-fashion clothes, led them to discover not only secondhand and vintage store, but also their parents' and grandparents' closets full of hidden treasures waiting to be rediscovered. It is the ability to create authentic style that is praised, irrelevant of the origin of its components[47].

Secondhand, this informal retail industry is exponentially growing in recent decades in the global North as well. Income inequality in the U.S., for example is certainly one of reasons for this expansion. The success of chains like Walmart and Dollar stores[48] testifies to the declining buying power among the majority of the population. However, in developed countries, ideas about pollution, climate change, accumulated waste and demands for sustainability both in fashion production and consumption have changed the attitudes especially among younger generations (Gen-X, Millennials, Gen-Z), who are oddly at the same time the biggest fast fashion consumers at companies such as Zara, Gap, Forever 21, H&M, etc. and the biggest critics of the negative aspects of consumerism. These generations are more willing to spend their limited discretionary funds on experiences than on shopping material goods. They know that fast fashion is one of the most polluting industries in the world today and they are hoping to instigate changes not only in technological practices but also in social aspects of production, such as treatment of predominantly female labor in developing countries which is underpaid, overworked, and treated with no respect as disposable female workforce. Social justice („diversity, equity and inclusion", today's powerful slogan), as well as clean planet, are the values very dear to their

[47] https://zadovoljna.nova.rs/tag/street-style-beograd/ (Accessed July 10, 2021). An article by Božica Luković, Moda i Lepota, features a series of photographs depicting people in Knez Mihailova Street wearing interesting outfits boldly and creatively combined of garments and accessories of different origins. Of special interests are photos by Goran Srdanov of two art students: https://zadovoljna.nova.rs/moda-i-lepota/studenti-iz-kneza-radnicko-odelo-pretvaraju-u-modni-detalj. /and by Vesna Lalić of three high schoolers https://naslovi.net/2020-11-25/nova/fenomenalno-obucenineki-novi-klinci-beograda/26715199 (Accessed July 9, 2021).

[48] Over 40% of new retail stores opening in 2020 and 2021 are from the Dollar store families. Thousands of new stores added each year is an impressive result especially at the time of „retail apocalypse", the pandemic, supply chain crises, and further closures of individual retail shops, chain stores and malls. It is well-known that Dollar stores are not always the cheapest option and that the quality of their merchandise is very low, but if there is no other choice, people who cannot afford better items will continue to go there: https://money.com/dollar-general-dollar-tree-new-stores-opening/ (Accessed July 10, 2021).

hearts[49]. Their responsible behavior in accord with their values has caused a positive reaction among some top fashion labels. For quite some time now, three reputable, yet different companies, Patagonia, Levi's and Japanese Uniqlo have been trying hard to implement significant change. They all specialize in casual, relaxed clothes for outdoor and indoor activities that are not chasing speedy fashion changes, but honor well made staple and basic garments that can be in style much longer than fast fashion[50]. A growing number of companies are also increasingly engaged in collecting their products from customers when they do not want them any longer. They are constantly coming up with new, enticing recycling programs, stimulating customers' cooperation by tempting offers (credits toward new purchases, discounts, coupons and so on). See Fig 5 with Patagonia's instructions how to use their newly purchase item printed on shipping bags.

Finally, the third reason why the use of secondhand is increasing in the global North, are desires to recreate „vintage" looks. I believe that younger generations are getting tired of fast fashion[51], of its irresponsible attitudes toward the environment, its poor quality and durability, and, in spite of huge production, lack of variety. This bleak picture has to be supplemented with something with a punch and a splash, and the best place to find that is in vintage secondhand stores. Vintage, or retro pieces have to be carefully selected not only for their looks but for their symbolic values as well. Once people started roaming through vintage and thrift stores out of curiosity, a discovery was made that many unique, well preserved, high-quality, interesting pieces that stimulated consumers' imagination could be found there. They also brought about the sense of nostalgia of the past, better times. Today they are purchased not to create a uniform look

[49] A recent global survey on sustainability reported by McCann Worldgroup shows that sustainability issues have a pronounced cultural and generational divide: https://www.thedrum.com/news/2021/10/27/sustainability-issues-have-pronounced-cultural-and-generational-divide# (Accessed November 10, 2021).

[50] Because sustainable and accountable textile and garment industry is extremely important today, they deserve much larger space than allotted in this article. Therefore, I have decided just to briefly mention it and dedicate a separate paper to the study of responsible companies' leadership in this crucially important area.

[51] Although one of its most prominent features is quick style changes, I have not seen a lot of innovation among college students in the last 10 years. Their outfits look more like uniforms than imaginative styling. Female wear consists of skinny jeans (sometimes with rips, sometimes with rhinestone decorations), or leggings, T-shirts in summer and sweatshirts in colder weather, topped with a puffer. Men's wear includes tight jeans or sweat (jogging) pants, shorts in summer, topped with a T- or polo shirts, hoodies, and different kinds of sports jackets.

that indicates a subculture membership, but, on the contrary, to enable wearers to build their own look, their unique style and identity. Expressing one's own individuality by searching through „found objects", like surrealists did in the pre-WW II period, and combining them in new, unexpected ways to tell a story of the creator, is the most attractive part of vintage. Being and feeling authentic rather than succumbing to the „stormtrooper" uniformity and anonymity, is one of the most potent signs that the world is changing at a deeper level after all. Young people everywhere are finding meaningful combinations of garments and accessories from different periods, and of different origins, in a new, never before seen bricolages: family heirlooms, vintage finds, thrift shop purchases, fast fashion items, exotic jewelry and much more (Fig. 6–8)[52].

Some of the secondhand critics believe that this unregulated informal economy is to be blamed for preventing the development of textile industries in the global South. If it were so, it would be an easy fix. But what about the impact of corruption, incompetence of the local leaders, invasive foreign competition, and interventions from the global North? Could banning secondhand sales change all that? Instead, I believe that in poor countries, seen by critics as the dumping ground of rich societies' waste, secondhand trade provides much needed self-employment opportunities and dresses people who would otherwise not be able to buy clothes at all.

Secondhand economy provides opportunities for charity organizations, big and small, to raise money for the programs they support; it establishes contacts between large secondhand commercial wholesalers to conduct their enterprise smoothly and productively; it opens opportunities for small family style businesses to thrive and define their purpose and contribution to their communities, countries, and the poor of the world. It also reveals alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism; and finally it prolongs the life of a substantial portion of waste, maybe until safer recycling processes, in addition to landfills and incinerators, are invented and implemented. Seen from a global perspective, in the last fifty years secondhand has by far exceeded to be perceived only as charity for the poor and the suffering (refugees, exiles, victims of wars and natural disasters. It has grown into a movement that drives the change both in the

[52] I owe gratitude to my interlocutors on both sides of the Atlantic who have shared their secondhand experiences with me for a long time. I am particularly grateful to my latest informer, Grace Shurlow, a Northwood University student for sharing her personal engagement in compiling outfits with hybrid elements, for modeling some of them for picture taking, and for allowing me to use them in this article.

system of provision and consumption in a very meaningful and impactful way. It has also become a movement away from conformity towards a new, invigorated individuality and responsibility. It is a docile but loud criticism of the world we live in today. When we notice the change, it only means that it has already happened, as the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier warned us long ago.

Fig. 1 Secondhand store in Dušanova Street.
(Photo: Mladena Prelić, Septembar 2021)

Fig. 2 Classical musicians plying in front of fast-fashion store, H&M, Knez Mihailova Street, Belgrade.
(Photo: Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić, June 2017)

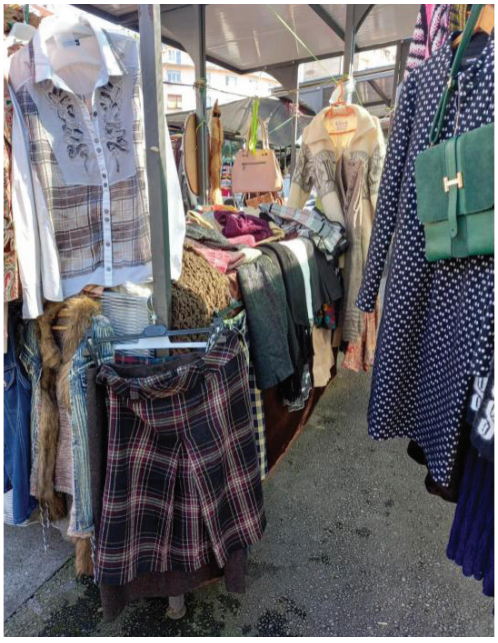

Fig. 3 Secondhand stall at Bajlonova pijaca (Bayloni Farmers' Market in Dušanova Street).
(Photo: Mladena Prelić, Septembar 2021)

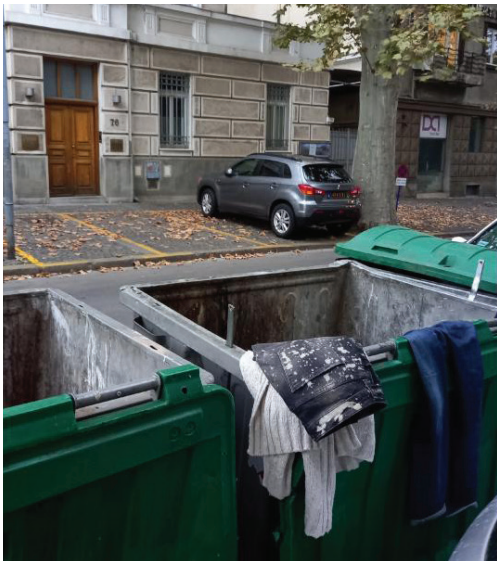

Fig. 4 Clothes left on
a garbage container.
(Photo: Mladena Prelić, Septembar 2021)

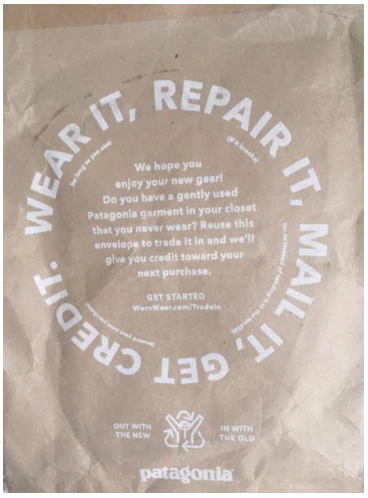

Fig. 5 Patagonia Mailing Bag with
a Recycling Message.
(Photo: Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić, August 2021)

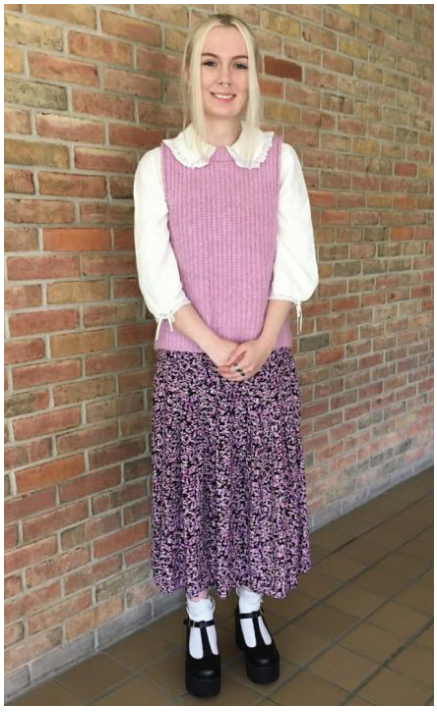

Fig. 6 Grace Shurlow
in one of her „hibrid" outfits.
(Photo: Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić,
October 2021)

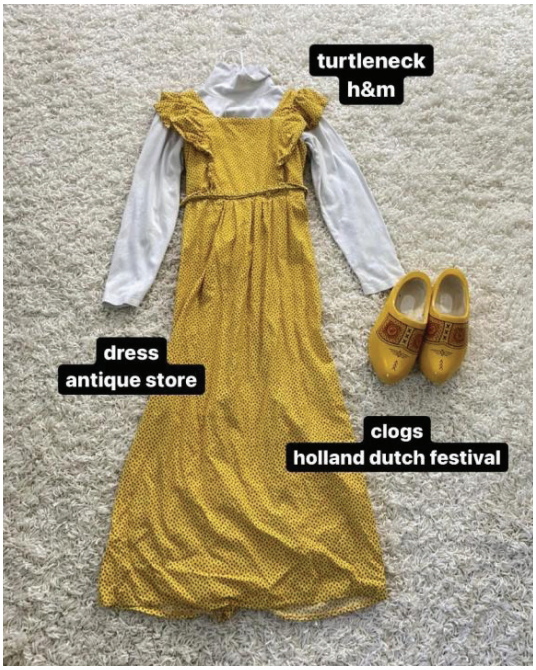

Fig. 7-8 Grace Shurlow's outfits composed of items from different sources.
(Photo: Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić, October 2021)

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