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SECOND-HAND CLOTHING ENCOUNTERS IN ZAMBIA: GLOBAL DISCOURSES, WESTERN COMMODITIES, AND LOCAL HISTORIES

Karen Tranberg Hansen

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In common parlance in Zambia since the mid-1980s, the term *salaula* has referred to second-hand clothing imported from the West. It means approximately, in the Bemba language, to select from a pile in the manner of rummaging. As such, it graphically captures what takes place in urban and provincial markets as consumers pick through the piles of imported clothes, selecting garments to satisfy clothing needs and desires.

The second-hand clothing trade has a long but unexplored history in Africa. It has grown rapidly in recent years in tandem with the liberalisation of economies with previously tightly regulated import regimes. Its rapid growth masks considerable regional variation that is shaped by socio-political norms and pre-existing clothing and textile production practices. This article argues that there is much more to the piles of second-hand clothing displayed conspicuously in public markets up and down Africa than meets the eye. If non-local observers have paid passing attention to the phenomenon at all, they have tended to view it as akin to dumping and the consumption practices it is giving rise to as a faded and worn imitation of the West. Rather than elaborating the obvious, that is, how the international second-hand clothing trade provides yet another example of inequitable North–South relations, this article focuses on the agency of the consumer, suggesting that a cultural economy is at work in local appropriations of the West's unwanted clothing. Turning to Zambia, I approach the popularity of *salaula* with a view to teasing out some of the striking contradictions of that country's on-going marginalisation.

My long-term engagement with issues arising from urban life in Zambia convinced me in the late 1980s that the ways in which people there were dealing with the West's cast-off clothes were rarely what they seemed to be in the view of external observers and critics. As the research project from which this particular discussion draws unfolded, I continued to be struck by the diversity of local constructions that helped transform the West's no longer wanted garments into desirable clothes.¹ For instance, while dressing

¹ The research project on which this article draws explores the entire circuit of second-hand clothing provision (Fine and Leopold, 1993) by tracing second-hand clothing consumption back through the variety of processes that have given rise to it: beginning with its 'production'/sourcing in the West's clothing surplus and the roles of charitable and profit motives in the process, through its international distribution, retailing, and consumption, to the clothing practices in Zambia that embed it in social relations of consumption that are different from those in which these commodities were originally produced. For methodological considerations see Hansen (1995).

in jeans and T-shirts to achieve the 'big look' in 1997, young adult men who worked as open-air barbers and street vendors around a Lusaka shopping centre strove for 'distinction' (their term). This is why, one of them explained, he did not like 'common clothes and imitations' but preferred something that was 'outstanding' and made people look. He went on: 'In *salaula* you will find things you don't know how good they are.' A middle-aged married woman I interviewed in a medium-income residential area put it this way when explaining why she shopped 'from *salaula*'. 'I don't want to wear what everyone else is wearing.' 'Clothes from *salaula* are not what other people wear,' said another woman in the same area, explaining why *salaula* is viewed as 'exclusive'.

These comments demonstrate that the West and Zambia come together in complicated ways when dealing with clothing. Indeed, Zambian involvements with second-hand clothing tell a story of a global encounter that offers insights into the diverse meanings of 'the West' in people's lives, depending on their biographical location, its context, and time. Because second-hand clothing appears so inextricably bound to the West, insisting on a local perspective on clothing consumption may appear problematic to some. I have chosen to forefront this issue because it encapsulates the developmental dilemma in Zambia. The 'allure' or 'craze for foreign' that Zambians display in clothing consumption (both of new and used clothes) turns this particular commodity into a central token of modernity (Orlove and Bauer, 1997: 13).² That is to say that people's preoccupations with clothing are an important key to understanding the process of becoming modern in this part of Africa, and thus to understanding local experiences of development. Thirty-five years of independence from British colonial rule have not brought modernity in its developmental guise within general reach in Zambia. With increased awareness of living in an interconnected world, ordinary Zambians today want access, they want progress, if not for themselves, then for their children. There must be belief in the future (Friedman, 1994: 242). In their narratives about development they define the modern through its objective attributes: education, occupation, and wealth.³ At the very least, they want satisfaction of basic needs such as food, schooling, work, housing, health services, and transport.

People in Zambia also want well-dressed bodies, as the anthropologists who worked there told us already during the colonial period (Mitchell, 1956; Mitchell and Epstein, 1959; Richards, 1939; Wilson, 1942). Unlike the development literature, which is having a difficult time with the normative aspect of the relationship between consumption and well-being (James, 1992: vii), many Zambians will keenly express their subjective interpretations and desires. And clothing goes to the heart of widespread under-

² Wilk (1990: 79) refers to V. S. Naipaul (1968) as the source of this formulation. I came across it as the title of a dissertation (Ichaporia, 1980).

³ Rowlands makes a fairly similar argument about Cameroon, emphasising that the local version of modernity is shaped by its distinct cultural historical setting (1996: 188-9).

standings of well-being (World Bank, 1994: 30–1).⁴ Not only does *salaula* give people what they need, namely clothing they can afford; it also gives them what they want: the ability to dress rather than wear rags. It is because of the way clothing connects with bodies both literally and figuratively that dealings with second-hand clothing offer a particularly rich subject for exploring how people in Zambia reckon with themselves and their situation in the wider world beyond them.

Highly charged cultural, political, and economic questions arise from the international flow of second-hand clothing, the charitable guise of its sourcing in the West, its export and marketing connections, and the consumption practices it is giving rise to in poor countries like Zambia. I begin by outlining some of them, including questions about cultures of consumption, global and otherwise, and what we may make of them. Because the international second-hand clothing trade is a grey scholarly area, I next briefly describe its recent dynamics in order to provide a context for my discussion of Zambia's development predicament. I turn then to a global encounter of a particular kind, the consumption of second-hand clothing, and the ways in which it has been explained by external observers, local critics, and consumers themselves. The article's empirical sections explain the cultural significance of clothing in the Zambian context with reference to historical materials and my own clothing surveys. The meanings of clothing are neither static nor uniform. Depending on the cultural politics of their time, people in Zambia interpret *salaula* in ways that shift across class and gender lines, and between urban and rural areas. Rather than contributing to cultural homogeneity on a world scale in passive imitation of the West, second-hand clothing consumption in Zambia promotes awareness of difference between local livelihoods and opportunities elsewhere while allowing the expression of variety, individuality, and uniqueness in clothing practice.

GLOBALISATION AND CONSUMPTION

Is there a global culture of consumption? While Coca-cola and McDonald's

⁴ In a recent assessment of poverty, rural respondents were asked to describe a poor person. Wearing rags played a major role in characterisations of poverty, and more so for women than for men. These rural perceptions of poverty were based on a combination of household survey and participatory data, in the analysis of which gender-based profiles of poverty were constructed, attributing proportional weight to specific aspects of poverty. Both women and men referred to lack of food and clothing as the most important characteristics of a poor person, with women giving emphatically more weight to these basic needs than men. Rural women also placed more emphasis on income and safety nets than men, who focused on assets and money. Specifically, in their composite poverty profile women weighted 'wearing rags/no clothing' as 21 per cent and 'having no food/does not eat well' as 20 per cent. Men assigned 14 per cent to 'wearing rags/no clothing' and 15 per cent to 'having no food/does not eat well'. Women and men equally weighted lack of money as 20 per cent of their characterisation of a poor person (World Bank, 1994: 30–1). Although the overall poverty assessment was conducted in both urban and rural settings, the published report does not include any urban poverty profiles.

are enjoyed almost everywhere today, predictions of the world becoming a global village have never come true. Such depressing views have yielded to more complex understandings of cultural processes that span larger regions of the world, often with quite different outcomes from one place to the next. Put simply, recent approaches to globalisation have viewed it as distinct from earlier transnational and cross-cultural encounters, owing to worldwide production shifts in labour and capital and to developments in communications technology and transport that are facilitating the movements of people, commodities, and ideas on an unprecedented scale (Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1992). In this reconfigured temporalisation of global space, all that was solid might melt into air in a manner that Marx never would have imagined. As Daniel Miller has suggested (1995), consumption might then become the vanguard of history, opening up to the people 'without history' a global world of previously unimagined possibilities.

The problems with this post-industrial version of Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1944) are both historical and analytical. Briefly, in terms of history, it ignores previous transnational and cross-cultural encounters with globalising effects, sleighting continuous interaction between colonial and post-colonial societies, and placing a break where perhaps none exists (Ranger, 1996: 274; Werbner, 1996: 5). Jonathan Friedman, for one, has harped upon this (1994). And in terms of analysis, this view blurs important differences between commodities. While recognising the importance of centre-periphery models in explaining Third World cultural processes, Ulf Hannerz has warned us against overly determinist approaches, suggesting instead that we explore diversity of outcomes and their consequences (1992: 221). Hannerz makes a special case of the media, yet we may extend his concern with the variable distributive implications that arise from global encounters to other cultural flows. Distinct commodities may resonate very differently in their local reception, some being interpreted through local representations, others becoming reconfigured from scratch, and still others being carried over with much of their original meaning. In effect, globalisation produces different commodity stories, depending on whether we analyse worldwide the consumption of sugar (Mintz, 1985) or the entertainment provided by electronic media. Last, but not least, the diversity of outcomes is also influenced by the proportion of oligopoly capital oriented toward the marketing of specific commodities (Carrier and Heyman, 1997: 356).

Because they mediate identity in different ways, few other imported second-hand commodities—for example, cars, spare parts and tyres, electrical appliances, or computer equipment—cast as stunning a light on this global interchange as does second-hand clothing. For second-hand clothing is not just any commodity but a very special one. This is because of the way in which, as an imported commodity, it offers a special exposure on the interaction between the local and the West, and because of the way it, as dress, mediates both individual and collective identities and desires. Indeed, the power of the dressed body reminds us of the very special nature of clothing as a commodity. Erasmus of Rotterdam recognised this long ago when, anticipating the coming of the modern individual, he likened dress to 'the body of the body' (Elias, 1978: 78), in this way capturing how bodies

are 'worn' through the attributes of the person. Terence Turner's designation of the body surface as a 'social skin' invites us to explore the individual and social identities that the dressed body creates (1980). Extending these insights to analyses of dress practices in Africa, Hildi Hendrickson recently explained their value: 'Being personal, [the body surface] is susceptible to individual manipulation. Being public, it has social import' (1996: 2).

While the economic history of textile and garment production goes to the heart of classical political economy and the expansion of the West, its present-day production practices link North and South in a hostile embrace (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1993). The international trade in second-hand clothing adds interesting twists to this story, as do the dress practices that are arising around the growing consumption of the West's cast-off clothing both at home and abroad (e.g. Hansen, 1994; McRobbie, 1989). But globalisation is not only, or mainly, about the effects of macro-level societal changes; it also involves local cultural and subjective matters. This is Roland Robertson's view when he suggests that the essence of globalisation lies in the consciousness of the global, in people's awareness of the global situation, specifically that we all inhabit this world (1992: 164–81, 183). I suggest that the interactive aspects of globalisation reveal themselves in the meanings Zambians construe about the local and the West through second-hand clothing consumption.

THE INTERNATIONAL SECOND-HAND CLOTHING TRADE

To be sure, the recent rapid growth of the international second-hand clothing trade is a product of on-going unequal economic integration on a global scale. Yet the directions of the commodity flows that comprise this trade cut across conventional North–South and urban–rural divides, giving rise to new distinctions, as I demonstrate later. Although the trade in second-hand clothing has a long history (Ginsburg, 1980), its economic power and global scope were never as vast as they have been since the early 1990s in the wake of the liberalisation of many Third World economies and following the sudden rise in demand from former Eastern Bloc countries. Worldwide second-hand clothing exports increased sixfold between 1980 and 1995, from a value of US \$207 million in 1980 and \$845 million in 1990 to \$1,410 million in 1995 (Haggblade, 1990: 508; UN, 1996: 60).⁵ Sub-Saharan African countries are among the world's largest importers, with consumption of second-hand clothing exceeding that of all other regions.

⁵ There are hardly any conventional social science or economic studies of this process. European governments and NGOs have solicited occasional consultancy reports into the operation and effects of the trade. My richest source of insights has been news wires. While journalistic reports are often sensationalist, they do identify important issues. The worldwide statistics stem mainly from UN reports; some are estimates, some refer to volume, others to weight, and they all underestimate the extent and real scope of the trade because illegal practices are widespread in it. In Zambia in 1990 total second-hand clothing imports were estimated to a value of US \$1,181,000; they grew in 1994 to an estimated value of US \$6,881,000, declining in 1995 to US \$3,651,000. In 1994 about half of Zambia's total estimated imports of second-hand clothing, to the value of US \$3,596,000, were sourced in the United States (UN, 1995: 60, 1996: 60).

The United States is the world's largest exporter of second-hand clothing, followed, in 1995, by Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium-Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom (UN, 1996: 60). The already large share of the United States in this worldwide export trade may increase even further in the near future if recently legislated policy in the European Union on waste disposal, including second-hand clothing from member countries, is implemented as intended. In 1995 the United States exported a total of some US \$340 million worth of used clothing, compared with US \$174 million in 1990 (UN, 1995: 60, 1996: 60). By 1997 second-hand clothing comprised the sixth largest export of the United States to sub-Saharan Africa, increasing almost 38 per cent between 1993 and 1996 (US Department of Commerce, 1997: 1).

The bulk of the used clothes that enter the West's export trade is sourced from major charitable organisations, which, taken together, are the single largest worldwide supplier of this commodity. The major charities—including, in the United States, the Salvation Army, Goodwill, St Vincent de Paul, and Amvets, and, in Europe, Humana, Oxfam, and Abbé Pierre, just to mention a few—receive far more donated clothing than they can sell in their thrift stores. They dispose of a large portion, between 40 per cent and 60 per cent, depending on who you talk to, to the textile recyclers/rag graders. The rag graders operate sorting plants where the clothes are sorted into many different categories of garment types and qualities and compressed into bales ready for shipment to importers in countries like Zambia. 'Used clothing' includes not only garments but also shoes, handbags, towels, sheets, blankets, and draperies. Several charitable organisations also provide used clothing in emergency situations. The volume that is shipped for such purposes is difficult to estimate, and so is the extent to which clothing donated for crisis relief in fact ends up in local markets.

Local normative practices concerning dress affect what types of garments are imported. In Muslim-influenced North Africa, for example, far less second-hand clothing is imported than in sub-Saharan Africa. And dress 'traditions' continue to be made up. In Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire the 'authenticity' code forbade men from wearing Western coats and ties and women from wearing jeans. One of the first edicts President Laurent Kabila of the new Democratic Republic of Congo enacted after assuming power in 1997 forbade women from wearing pants, stretch leggings, and short skirts. In some countries, second-hand clothing was long considered a down-market commodity culturally subordinated to locally styled dress (Heath, 1992). Continuing economic decline, at times combined with civil strife, is changing the status of the West's used clothes in some countries—for instance, in Congo Brazzaville, where the second-hand clothing trade has grown dramatically in the wake of the recent civil war. In a region known for its highly stylised preference for expensive, brand-name, imported clothing 'from Paris', epitomised in *la sape* (Gandoulou, 1989) residents now flock to second-hand markets to purchase affordable clothing, referred to locally as *sola* ('to choose') (IPS, 4 July 1998).

Because this growing import poses a threat to domestic production, textile and garment manufacturers in several countries have called for its prohibition. Some countries—for instance, Mali—charge high import tariffs (between 61 per cent and 83 per cent, according to some sources) on second-

hand clothing, seeking to reduce its volume, with the aim of protecting the domestic textile industry (US Department of Commerce, 1997: 20). Although some countries—including Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Nigeria—at one time or another have banned the commercial import of second-hand clothes, in practice such rules are unable to restrict the flow of this popular commodity across Africa's notoriously permeable borders.⁶

The trade in imported second-hand clothing in Zambia is not new but extends practices that had already by the 1920s, if not before, made used clothing from the West available for local purchase. Second-hand clothing was imported into the Belgian Congo and then traded informally across the border to Northern Rhodesia, as Zambia was known then. According to elderly persons with whom I have discussed the trade, in the 1940s and 1950s, people did their best to conceal the fact that they were wearing second-hand clothing. But when stringent import restrictions began to be loosened in Zambia in the last half of the 1980s, second-hand clothing from the West became an increasingly popular trade and consumption item with a name of its own, *salaula*.

Because of upheavals in Zaire (the Democratic Republic of the Congo) since the late 1980s, second-hand clothing is now imported directly into Zambia by local wholesalers. Containerloads of second-hand clothing arrive at the ports of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Durban in South Africa, and Beira in Mozambique, from where they are trucked to importers' warehouses. Zambia's capital, Lusaka, is the major hub of this trade, though some wholesalers have up-country branches. By the mid-1990s the bulk of the *salaula* wholesale trade was in the hands of thirty to forty firms, many of them general wholesalers who had added *salaula* to their inventory when the trade increased in the early 1990s. These wholesalers supply retailers, mostly small-scale traders, who purchase bales of *salaula* and resell garments in public markets, on the streets, in residential neighbourhoods, and in downtown offices. Up-country traders also purchase bales in town, and town-based traders travel across the countryside selling and exchanging *salaula* for meat, fish, and produce. Today's second-hand clothing trade differs from the past in at least one regard, and that is its enormous reach and appeal, which since the mid- to late 1980s has given rise to a popular consumption circuit with complicated North–South linkages and deep urban–rural interconnections.

SECOND-HAND CLOTHING ENCOUNTERS

Like many other countries in Africa where one-party states with centralised economies are giving way to reform in the post-Cold War era, Zambia in the 1990s is up for sale. The Second Republic's (1972–91) strategies of political

⁶ I have made formal observations in Zimbabwe as part of a consultancy team in 1993 and informal explorations into the dynamics of the second-hand clothing trade throughout the wider region (Uganda, Botswana, and the Eastern Cape of South Africa, 1992; Zimbabwe and Namibia, 1995; Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, 1995; the Transkei, 1997). I also kept an eye open for these processes when my work took me to Nigeria and Ghana in 1989.

repression and economic austerity have been relegated to the past. Privatisation of major national assets is under way in an international bidding process in which several once important players have reappeared. Tate & Lyle, for example, recently bought up the national sugar company that it had owned before it was nationalised. Meanwhile, established mining interests with prior involvement in Zambia like the Anglo-American Corporation are finalising the purchase of major parts of the parastatal mining corporation. A flood of imports are entering the country and being sold from new local branches of major South African chains, making clothing and housewares available to the medium-income and up-scale consumer market. At the same time as this market segment is being targeted from abroad, all manner of imported goods are sold to ordinary consumers by street vendors and itinerant traders, some of whom work on commission for formal firms.

If the world today is for sale in Zambia, it is predominantly imports from southern Africa that are flooding the market. Northmead, a popular shopping area near downtown Lusaka, has become known colloquially as 'Little Jo'burg'. Other consumer goods are brought in by small-scale 'suitcase traders' who travel to Zaire and Tanzania, where they purchase inexpensive imported textiles, garments, and housewares from the Far East for resale in Zambia. The Zaire trade route that fell into disuse because of political troubles is seeing traffic again to and from the new Democratic Republic of Congo. With the exception of a brief period during the Second Republic, when political decisions not to interact in formal economic terms with apartheid South Africa reduced imports from the south, South Africa was always—as it still is today—an important source of things Western in Zambia. In fact, customs rules and regulations during the colonial period placed preferential tariffs on imports from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Other than in mining, there were few developments in industry or manufacturing in Northern Rhodesia. That period's local stores selling 'Kaffir truck' had a limited range of merchandise, mainly non-perishable foodstuffs, simple household goods, farm implements, and tailor-made clothing.

Only after independence in 1964 did the new African government take initiatives in establishing a domestic textile and garment industry. During the period of the extreme economic austerity regime, when import permissions were granted only for essential commodities, the two state-owned textile mills operated in a near monopoly situation, forcing consumers to purchase garments produced locally or to source illegally from outside. When both import and currency restrictions were eased in the late 1980s, customers flocked to the *salaula* markets, extolling not only the affordability but also the choice of second-hand garments. Because of the poor quality and high price of locally produced garments, Zambians from most walks of life have continued to shop 'from *salaula*' throughout the 1990s.

Life is hard for most Zambians, and it has got harder during the Third Republic's liberalised economic regime, where retrenchment both in the public and in the private sector has made ever more people depend for their living on self-reliance of the informal sector kind. The social costs of structural adjustment reforms have been high. In terms of too many

indicators—among them education, health, longevity, child mortality and nutrition, formal employment and wages—Zambians in the first half of the 1990s were worse off than they had been in the mid-1970s (GRZ and UN, 1996). Given the decline in their purchasing power, the significance of second-hand clothing to poor households is not surprising. Yet, as I discuss shortly, the enormous cross-over appeal of this particular commodity can be explained not merely in terms of its affordability but above all by reference to the role people in Zambia attribute to clothing in mediating desires about living better and different lives.

Because clothing consumption is both an economic and a cultural force to be reckoned with, *salaula* has mobilised public opinion at many levels within and outside Zambia. The growing trade in and consumption of imported second-hand clothing has been portrayed negatively in accounts of the economy's performance problems by external commentators and journalists, who draw a direct connection between the popularity of *salaula*, the closure of textile and garment producing companies, and the loss of jobs. Local commentary peaked in 1992 and 1993 when representatives of the manufacturers of textiles and garments, who blamed *salaula* for 'killing' their industries, criticised the new government for not removing adverse tariffs on necessary production inputs while allowing the importation of *salaula*. Most of the import duties were removed in the late 1990s, yet textile and clothing manufacturing firms have continued to close. The firms that are surviving, particularly the textile companies, have shifted production to the cotton export market. It is because of these economic circumstances, among other things, that Zambians have become more dependent than ever on imported textiles and clothing, most of which are sourced from South East Asian and South African producers. Given the sorry look and style of locally manufactured products, for example printed cloth, it comes as no surprise that Zambian consumers prefer imports, which anyway are more affordable.

Unlike in South Africa and Zimbabwe, where the trade unions in the textile and clothing sector actively engaged in the second-hand clothing debate, organised labour in Zambia has taken a low profile on the *salaula* issue. Most workers in the textile and clothing sector earn low wages. Many of them are likely to be retrenched or pruned, owing to IMF/World Bank directives to reform/rationalise the economy. They are among those who have satisfied the clothing needs of their own households with *salaula* and they praise its 'goodness'. I was told by people from many different walks of life that 'the goodness of *salaula*' derives from the availability of quality and stylish clothing at prices people can afford. What is more, *salaula* retailing and a whole lot of ancillary activities have created work for persons without jobs. Last, but not least, from the perspective of parents, at the same time as young people are learning about business practices, *salaula* marketing also keeps them out of mischief.

The response of government to the *salaula* tug-of-war has been equivocal, alternating between statements about ruling out a ban to advocating a prohibition on importing *salaula*. At the moment, *salaula* is no longer front-page news in discussions of the problems of Zambia's manufacturing industry, although the debate may pick up momentum again. Textile and garment manufacturers now complain about 'cheap imports' in general,

referring to subsidy and dumping on the part of South East Asian manufacturers and widespread smuggling. Firms that produced locally, among them Colgate-Palmolive and Lever Brothers, have restructured from manufacturing to marketing and distribution, significantly reducing their local operations. Johnson & Johnson and Dunlop moved their operations to Zimbabwe in 1997. In fact Dunlop, the only tyre manufacturing company in Zambia, ceased its local operation because of inability to compete with the growing import of remoulds (*Financial Mail*, 16–22 September 1997, p. 8).

The constraining effects of economic liberalisation on the domestic manufacturing scene in general are clearer now than they were in the early 1990s, when the popularity of *salaula* was made a scapegoat for the textile and garment industry's problems. Such an argument assumed that the growth in the import and retailing of *salaula* was at the expense of the domestic textile and garment industries; it did not examine the problems of those industries in terms of the contradictory forces, many stemming from the past, that were acting on their components as the Zambian economy began to liberalise. Out of political expediency, the government in the short term has chosen not to interfere with *salaula*, a popular commodity which people can afford to buy, given the social cost of economic reforms and their adverse effects on purchasing power. This stance has obvious resonance with the feelings of those who are at the receiving end. In common parlance, three-quarters of the Zambian population purchase their clothes 'from *salaula*', which they speak of as 'our shops'. I now turn to their engagement with clothing.

ZAMBIAN PREOCCUPATIONS WITH CLOTHING

We cannot come to grips with the social and cultural dimensions of consumption unless we examine the ways in which commodities have been delivered and how they have entered people's lives. Cloth and clothing were key commodities in the long-term transformations that brought the market to Northern Rhodesia and gradually made local people dependent on it as consumers. As a widely used trade commodity, and an early measure of payment for labour, lengths of imported cloth were important vehicles in the broader engagement which we usually describe as modernity. African encounters with Western notions of work, time, wealth, sexuality, and morality shaped new ideas about identity, home, and space that had complex effects on consumption, especially on dress and clothing practices (Hansen, 1992).

From the early days of their contact with traders, prospectors, missionaries and, later, colonists, the people who lived in what now is Zambia eagerly embraced imported cloth. Yard lengths of white and blue calico were widely used as part of remuneration for portage and service work performed during caravan travels at least during the first decade of this century, if not until the advent of motor transport in the 1920s (Hansen, 1989: 31; 40–1). In addition to its role in early labour recruitment, cloth was also a medium of exchange in the grain trade. Africans exchanged some of this new commodity for food, and they adopted it increasingly for their own use and for distribution among relatives. In effect, cloth and clothing had

become an idiom for establishing relations between the sexes and across the generations.

Specific items of clothing have their own histories of local incorporation, distinct for men's and women's wear. This has to do with the uneven pace of the development of men's and women's mass-produced garments in the West and thus with the earlier availability of surplus men's wear, including army surplus (Fine and Leopold, 1993: 100–1). Men's 'fever coats' and jackets came first to this part of Africa, and women's dresses and skirts followed later. But the distinctly gendered histories of men's and women's wear also hinge, as I discuss shortly, on the pivotal role of clothing to the very process of making consumers and to the unevenly gendered pace of that process. General access to the new commodity, clothing, depended on location in relation to the shifting centres of economic activity and to the building of roads and railways. Tailors who followed in the wake of the early establishment of trading houses and stores found an eager clientele among the growing number of wage employed men. African recollections from the early decades of this century stress the importance of clothes from two angles: access to clothing was a great incentive to migration, and tailors formed an important occupational category during the early growth of small *bomas* and towns (UNZA, n.d.).

Anthropologists who worked in this region during the colonial period were struck by the active interest local people took in dress. During the 1930s African mine workers in Kabwe (Broken Hill) spent 51 per cent of their monthly wage on clothes.⁷ Godfrey Wilson noted that the 'desire for clothes' brought Africans to town, and that 'nakedness' was their usual answer to his question 'What made you leave the country?' 'They have been driven,' he argued, 'without any possibility of return, from their Eden of bark-cloth and skins' (1942: 18). As dress practices were embedded in everyday urban life, clothing became 'the chief medium in which obligations to country relatives [were] fulfilled'. Africans in Kabwe, wrote Wilson, 'are not a cattle people, nor a goat people, nor a fishing people, nor a tree cultivating people, they are a dressed people' (1942: 18). This preoccupation with clothing was not solely an urban phenomenon. Audrey Richards noted in the early 1930s that the rural Bemba constantly talked about clothes (1939: 16–18). Wilson echoed this at the urban end, pointing out that Africans in town discussed clothes 'unceasingly, in much the same way as . . . villagers discuss their cattle; they are tended lovingly and carefully housed in boxes at night' (1942: 18). The keen interest Africans on the Copperbelt took in clothing in the 1950s also struck J. C. Mitchell and A. L. Epstein, who held Western clothing to be the most important item in African status aspirations (Mitchell, 1956: 12; Mitchell and Epstein, 1959: 32). Then, as now, clothing mattered importantly in marital and sexual relations, in status competitions, and in economic exchange.

⁷ At the time of Wilson's study African workers received food rations and a cash wage. The proportion of the wage spent on clothing would have declined if workers had to pay cash for food.

By the 1950s Africans from Northern Rhodesia had become adept at making Western-inspired clothing part and parcel of their own dress universe. As I noted earlier, their clothing included second-hand garments traded into Northern Rhodesia from the Belgian Congo. Its advent in Luapula and the Copperbelt was facilitated by close interaction in the trade in fish and second-hand clothing between Congo-based Greek and African entrepreneurs in Luapula (Musambachime, 1981; Mwansa, 1992). During the 1940s and 1950s Luapula-based entrepreneurs extended the second-hand clothing trade across the Northern Province, the Copperbelt, and into the Central Province. Africans from as far away as Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia travelled to the Congo to buy second-hand clothing which they resold in local markets or hawked in town (Gussman, 1952: 88–90). Indeed, as Andrew Roberts reminds us in an essay with the fitting title ‘African cross-currents’ (1986), colonial frontiers were very porous. Social horizons expanded as new ideas and goods were exchanged, reorienting local ways of life toward market relationships. Of the manufactured goods available in towns and company stores, clothing was the most important commodity in the *katundu* (Nyanja for luggage) of returning labour migrants (Davis, 1932; Marwick, 1974).

Last, but not least, the consumption practices that arose in the engagement with commodities like Western-styled clothing were thoroughly gendered (James, 1996; Martin, 1995: 161–9). Migrant labour involved men in market-oriented consumption much earlier than women, whom colonial authorities attempted to keep back in the rural areas. In effect, the overlap of male authoritarian values in both colonisers’ and African rural authorities’ view of women’s proper place exposed them very differently than men to store-bought and tailor-made garments. Deep-seated cultural norms held that husbands, fathers, or guardians should provide women and children with clothing at regular intervals. When a woman today argues—for example, in a divorce case in a local court—that her husband has not given her a dress for several years, her marital troubles are self-evident (Hansen, 1996: 120). Touching the core of widespread Zambian sensibilities, the engagement with clothing goes to the heart of men’s and women’s different experiences of socio-economic change. While these norms are lingering on today, the disjuncture between them and people’s actual lives is becoming more apparent. The way in which clothing is acquired has changed as more and more women are earning an income in their own right, shouldering important burdens in rural and urban household survival. By conspicuous clothing display, women too easily lend themselves to sexual suspicion, even if they bought their garments from *salaula*, using money they earned themselves.

‘YOU WOULDN’T BELIEVE IT, BUT IT’S FROM SALAULA’

Zambia’s geography of *salaula* retailing contains several distinct segments that are most noticeable in big cities like Lusaka. By the beginning of the 1990s the *salaula* sections of outdoor markets in both urban and rural areas had grown much larger than the food sections. In the mid-1990s *salaula* retailing had spread into urban high-income neighbourhoods and downtown offices, and it had spilled out on to the city’s main streets. Still, the

established market places remain the centre of activity. Today, *salaula* is available in most corners of the country, brought out from Lusaka, Chipata or the Copperbelt by small-scale entrepreneurs or traders' hired hands who travel, for instance to commercial farms and other rural sites offering wage work, such as game parks and tourist lodges, where they sell their goods to workers on pay day, and into the countryside, where they exchange second-hand clothing for agricultural produce, goats, chickens, and fish. Villagers who barter their crops for *salaula* do so for lack of a market, and they often complain of the unequal terms of trade (*Times of Zambia*, 1996a).⁸

Today, dealings with second-hand clothes extend across most segments of Zambian society except the *apamwamba* (meaning 'those on the top' in Nyanja). My 1995 survey of clothing consumption practices fleshes this out in more detail.⁹ Roughly two-thirds of the survey households in high-income areas in Lusaka, for example, met most of their clothing needs from *salaula*; in addition to buying *salaula*, more than half of these households also made regular use of a tailor; and the *apamwamba* are the only group with a real choice in the clothing market. These observations can be further specified in terms of age, gender, and socio-economic background.

As an aside, judging from my monitoring of several spatial clusters of tailors in downtown Lusaka since 1992, the tailor's craft appears to have survived through niche production. Some, but not many, tailors undertake alterations and repairs of *salaula*. The respondents in my surveys who regularly used the tailor did so either in order to acquire specially styled garments, for instance elaborately tailored *chitenge* (printed cloth) outfits, or because of size problems. Persons of medium to high income frequented up-market tailors, and several had individual arrangements or even hired a tailor to work for them in their home.

The least well-off of my survey households met most of their clothing needs from *salaula*, save for children's school uniforms and shoes; yet parents or guardians often buy parts of school uniforms such as stockings, shirts, jerseys, and shoes from *salaula*. Nurses, whose dress allowance does not come close to the price of a new uniform, sort through *salaula*, searching for lab coats. Many young men buy their first suit from *salaula*. Adult women in better-off households obtained their clothes both from shops and from tailors, men bought from shops, whereas most of the clothes of children and young adults were purchased at *salaula* markets. The *apamwamba* bought clothing everywhere; they also frequented, but did not depend on, the *salaula* market when searching for specific garments to complement their wardrobe or when buying clothes for country relatives or their household staff. In fact, they sourced most of their garments from the 'outside'. A mid-

⁸ I have undertaken extensive research in Zambia on the distribution, wholesaling, and marketing angles of this trade, monitoring the market in Lusaka since 1992, examining provincial distribution and trade, and exploring the cross-border trade. This includes interviews with wholesalers and extensive surveys of urban and rural markets.

⁹ The clothing consumption survey comprised ninety-two interviews in Lusaka (fifty-five in low-income households, fifteen in medium-income households, and twenty-two in high-income households) and nine in the Luapula Province.

level public sector executive in her late thirties, for example, explained to me in 1995 that she bought almost all her clothes from 'suitcase traders'. Suits from South Africa were popular office wear that year, as was 'American clothing', brought back by persons flying via London to the United States.

Not everyone is enthusiastic about *salaula*. University lecturers and mid-level civil servants, for example, whose consumption and life style have been severely curtailed by the economic decline in general, and by retrenchment in public and private sector employment in particular, purchased more of their families' clothes from *salaula* than they cared to admit. 'Only housewives have the time to go to the *salaula* market,' a male secondary school teacher told me. Still, white-collar workers of both sexes from Lusaka's downtown offices often visit *salaula* markets during their lunch hour. But some adult men will tell you that they won't be caught in a *salaula* market. Instead they send their wives to select the right-sized shirts and trousers for them. Yet men who would not be caught in a *salaula* market themselves will nevertheless admit to buying second-hand clothes. There is an extensive trade in high-income neighbourhoods, as there is in downtown offices, carried on by individuals who notify friends of their purchase of a bale of *salaula* and/or circulate in office buildings, selling clothes to persons who receive a monthly pay cheque. Informal credit arrangements are linked with such practices, as they are with the retailing of tailor-made garments and clothing brought in from the 'outside'.

When shopping for *salaula*, consumers have a number of things in mind, depending on whether they are covering basic clothing needs or satisfying specific desires. The scrutiny of *salaula* takes time. Colour co-ordination is keenly attended to, and there are issues of size and fit to consider. Regardless of income group, most consumers considered 'value for money' a major selection criterion, discerning 'good value' in terms of both quality and fashion/style. Low-income customers both in Lusaka and in the province paid attention to garment durability/strength, whereas young urban adults looked for 'the latest'. This is their own term, and it comprises influences from South Africa, Europe, and North America as well as from specific youth cultures. Because many men's trousers are too big and many women's dresses too tight for adult male and female Zambian bodies, young adults in fact have the best choice in the *salaula* markets.

My clothing consumption survey depicts a well dressed adult as a person who is put together in garments that are well taken care of, with well matched accessories that extend the good look of the clothes, carefully groomed hair, make-up enhancing the natural features, and poised manners and deportment. Clothing attention is highly focused on creating a smooth line, including such styling details as fabric quality and texture, folds/draping, and trimmings. The exception is women's *chitenge* dresses, which are becoming more elaborate and increasingly constructed. The general concerns about clothing are with the length of the skirt, the exposure of the body, the pattern of the blouse/shirt, the cut of the jacket, and the style of the trousers. Women's clothing should not be tight and short, and men's should be neither too loose nor scruffy. This clothing ideal produces elegance and dignity in a 'look' that is neat and polished, not too casual, flamboyant or extravagant. And such ensembles can be readily assembled from *salaula*. A

person in his or her *salaula* best is barely distinguishable from a person in store-bought clothing.

While *apamwamba* wardrobes are more expensive, containing clothing and apparel that has been obtained from a wider variety of sources than those of medium-income people, the norms of what constitutes a well dressed person, depending on age and sex, and on the situation, are pretty much shared across the income/class spectrum. Designer labels are not household names, save among the *apamwamba*. Among ordinary consumers I have found hardly any concern with brand name clothing since I began observing the clothing market in Zambia in the early 1990s. Most stores and boutiques selling ready-made clothes sourced their garments from low-cost producers, largely non-local, without brand names. Only in T-shirts, baseball caps, and running shoes had faked brand-name products made their appearance. This may, of course, change, as already appears to be happening. By 1997 one men's specialty shop in Lusaka was displaying designer clothes by names like Dior and Armani for the upper end of the market.

This is to say that, by and large, income and class distinctions are not very marked in clothing consumption because of the ready availability of *salaula*. A few years ago, when he described how women 'pounce on any latest import mania', a male news feature writer remarked on this. 'When it comes to fashion,' he noted, 'the women in our cities are classless.' As he explained, 'the issue of class does not come in because women from both down-and-out and affluent families are in the race' (*Times of Zambia*, 1990). Indeed, clothing competence in putting oneself together with style, quality, and fit is so keenly developed that it is mainly through shoes and accessories that the second-hand status of garments and apparel reveals itself to the discerning observer. This contrasts with rural people, who have had less exposure to *salaula* and often were identifiable by their ill-matched clothes. Their 'lack of style' is a result of the limited rural availability of garments combined with the tendency of urban traders to offload unpopular *salaula* designs, colours, and fabrics on country people. Even this is changing in the late 1990s, as the *salaula* circuit has reached consumers throughout the country. Rural dwellers have in fact begun to complain about the poor quality and styles of the clothes the *salaula* traders are selling to them.

Clothing competence includes knowledge not only of which garments to wear but also of *how* to wear them. As I noted at the outset, bodies are 'worn' through the cultural attributes of the person. Clothing practices and performance comprise one juncture where socio-cultural norms take on local authorship over the West's used clothing (Strathern, 1992: xiii). *Salaula* is pulled apart, resewn, altered, and put on in ways that physically and culturally fit Zambian bodies. What is being transformed is not necessarily the garment but its meaning. In effect, the body is the site on which cultural ideals are constructed through dress. For example, many young adult men who are close to graduating from secondary school are reluctant to wear jeans for fear of being mistaken for street vendors. They have higher job aspirations for themselves. This contrasts with the search of the young male barbers and vendors I quoted at the outset for oversize jeans from *salaula* to create the 'big look' they associate with the opportunity and daring of a world away from home. I related earlier how easily women who dress

extravagantly are suspected of having loose morals. And some young adult women who are uneasy about approaching sexual maturity 'hate' wearing dresses because they make them look old, and, worse still, dresses make them look like mothers. In short, social and sexual identity is lodged in the way the body is worn through clothes (Craik, 1994: 56). As the matter of 'hating' dresses demonstrates, the norms about how to dress are not uniformly experienced but vary somewhat in rural–urban terms and greatly in terms of age and generation. And they depend on the situation and the broader context. For lack of space I cannot here detail how the normative practices that underpin the cultural attributes alluded to above are also challenged in everyday interaction or how, in their breach, they may become subject to reinterpretation.

WESTERN COMMODITIES AND LOCAL HISTORIES

There can be no doubt that the accelerated transnational commodity flow of second-hand clothing and the widespread consumption of *salaula* in recent years are both a product of globalisation and its effects. But, save for the origin of *salaula* garments, there is nothing particularly 'Western' about how Zambians deal with them. *Salaula* clothing practices and their incorporation of non-local cultural forms are not properly explained as a result of hegemonic domination by the West. The process is interactive, for it draws importantly on local notions of *how* to dress.

The unprecedented vitality of the international commercial export of second-hand clothes to a country like Zambia is due in no small degree to the accessibility and cross-over appeal of clothes to poor consumers. What is more, second-hand clothing is bringing the world within reach and with it imagined communities that may differ from those based on the printed word and the visual media (Hannerz, 1993: 389). When the social and cultural presuppositions that inform clothing practices come into focus, it becomes difficult to view the *salaula* phenomenon as externally driven. Such clothing practices are understood by their wearers as being among the prerequisites of modern society, including suits, dresses, and shoes (not to mention other paraphernalia), and going without them, like wearing rags, marks out their pre-modern status.

The work of clothing consumption provokes a set of arguments about the possibility of leading a different and better life. The model implicit behind this clothing performance argument is a rather unspecified sense of the West. To be sure, when it comes to clothing, Africa and the West cannot escape one another. Unequal integration into the regional and wider world economy took place long ago in this part of Africa. People here have dealt with garments 'from the West' for a long time. What is striking about this engagement is that they rarely use the category 'the West'. Instead they talk of the 'well developed countries', 'the donor countries', or they use terms that emerge in the context of specific encounters, for instance 'America' or 'the UK'. Their narratives are not static but employ idioms of time and place that are indicative of the different exposure to the world beyond home by the generations who grew up prior to and after independence.

While the ready availability of second-hand clothing has redrawn the world map of clothing, opening access to it for the masses, consumers are not particularly concerned about the provenance of the used garments as long as they come from 'the West'. Hardly any of the hundreds of traders and consumers of *salaula* I have interviewed since the early 1990s asked questions or raised concerns about why or how our discarded clothes end up as a cherished commodity in Zambia. In everyday talk the generic West carries little political salience. Few would think of blaming it for affecting clothing consumption, whether new or old, and there is no suggestion of *salaula* being the flip side of Western fashion. What the West is, above all, is an imagined place, associated with power, wealth, and consumer goods that surpass most local products in quality and style. From it came, for example, via American youth subculture in the mid-1990s, the hip-hop style of young male street vendors in Zambia. Yet women's two-piece outfits are not what some perceived them to be, American-derived, but are influenced rather by British and South African fashions. There are a multiplicity of heritages at work here, with complex dialectics between local and foreign influences in a reconfiguration process that generates distinct local clothing consumption practices.

Zambians have continued buying *salaula* in spite of the print media intermittently reporting disquieting news of thieves exhuming bodies from graves and stripping them of clothes which they then resell (*Times of Zambia*, 1993a, b, 1996b, c, d). One confessing grave robber who had ransacked eleven graves in Lusaka in 1997 told police that he used to 'attend body viewing and burials' during the daytime, only to return to the cemetery at night a few days later. This man had earned his living as a hawker by selling graveyard clothes (*Times of Zambia*, 1997a, b). How traders and customers responded to this most vexing issue can be seen in changes of clothing display in the boutique sections of the *salaula* markets. The boutique section displays high-quality, high-fashion clothing carefully selected by traders when their colleagues open bales. While most of the boutiques I saw in Lusaka in 1992 and 1993 exhibited carefully washed and ironed garments, today they display their goods without such intervention. In fact, wrinkles are preferred.¹⁰ This practice, in the words of vendors and customers alike, reduces the fear that such garments are 'third-hand', which is to say, previously used, and specifically by Zambians. Second-hand clothing displayed with folds and wrinkles straight from the bale is considered to be fresh from the source, and therefore genuine. Garments that have been tampered with give rise to suspicion. The real thing, genuine *salaula*, is described as 'new' and 'alive', in contrast to clothing which is considered 'tired' or 'dead'. This conceptual construction of second- and

¹⁰ A similar practice was recently observed in the second-hand clothing markets in the Gambia, where 'traders do not iron or alter the clothes in any way but sell them in the condition in which they come from the bales. This is because Gambian consumers prefer to buy clothes which they know have originated in the West, not those previously worn and donated by the Gambian elite' (Field *et al.*, 1996: 372).

third-hand clothing provides a startling twist on local notions of 'used' clothes that I did not encounter in rural *salaula* markets.

After the grave robbing/stripping incident in August 1996 a *salaula* trader in Lusaka warned customers to be 'cautious about those people who sell [only] a few items [of clothing]. Our goods are genuinely obtained,' he explained. Another trader agreed, adding that it was easy to 'distinguish *salaula* clothes from the second-hand clothes that don't come from bales'. He explained that most '*salaula* clothes have distinct paper tags on them and they have that unique smell probably caused by being tied up in bales, so you can tell genuine *salaula* from suspicious clothes' (*Zambia Daily Mail*, 1996: 5).

When shopping for *salaula*, before assessing the 'value for money' aspect, Zambian consumers scrutinise first, not the price, but whether the garments are foreign enough, and genuinely so. Discerning shoppers will be able to 'tell genuine *salaula* from suspicious second-hand clothing' (*Zambia Daily Mail*, 1996: 5). In distinguishing between clothing that has been worn by Zambians and genuine *salaula*, consumers are placing their own interpretation on a process which from a Western perspective appears to be about nothing but inequitable North-South relations and asymmetrical local-global interactions.

CONCLUSION

Clothing, both new and used, has a powerful hold on people's imagination because the self and society articulate through the dressed body. I have argued in this article that, through dealings with clothing, Zambians are making sense of post-colonial society, their own place within it, and in the world at large. Specifically, I have suggested that the preoccupation with second-hand clothes comprises a politics of consumption that tells us something about 'being-in-the-world' (Friedman, 1994: 112-16; Miller, 1990) on Zambian terms. The West's cast-off garments are interpreted through representations locally available, their meanings informed in important ways by the structure of social relations and normative presuppositions in Zambia. And it is these relations and presuppositions that make practices involving Western-styled clothing local.

Because the meanings Zambians attribute to second-hand clothing consumption are always in process, the *salaula* phenomenon provokes debate and argument. I have alluded to one debate that raises economic and political questions concerning the relationship of production to consumption in the developmental context, the very issue in which the *salaula* phenomenon is lodged. Journalistic and external commentary has tended to deal with these questions from a one-sided point of view that engages neither with culture nor with history. By contrast, I have explained the shifting meanings of clothing in people's lives in the context of global interchanges across time and space that have opened up for complex interactions between this part of Africa and the world beyond it. Understanding how the West's used clothes have become redefined as 'new' in Zambia and how differences have emerged between second- and third-hand clothing invites attention to the drawing and erasing of

distinctions in clothing consumption practices, that is, to both culture and history. In effect, these very designations and their shifts constitute local arguments over the meaning of *salaula*. Explaining second-hand clothing consumption practices in this way turns them into much more than the flip side of the West's fashion. What is more, this view enables us to understand how and why the practices that surround second-hand clothing consumption in Zambia may differ from those in other African countries—for example, in the neighbouring Congo, where the very same commodity, after its tangled journey from the West, is also in great demand.

The tug-of-war over values which *salaula* is fuelling is also social and cultural. It gives rise to conformity in some areas of life and creativity and rebellion in others. This is because the commodity *salaula* also is a social thing, and therefore people's dealings with it have ramifications among social and cultural relations in society at large. For example, in buying their clothes from *salaula* rather than being presented with them by their husband as customary conjugality once prescribed, women are shaking men's domestic imperialism. And while clothing used to mark social distinctions, the ready availability and affordability of *salaula* to both youth and rural residents is mediating a desire for social mobility and visions of a different life. Of course, the dream of a better life must not be mistaken for equality, and therefore the levelling influence of *salaula* beyond the domain of clothing consumption must not be overdrawn. *Salaula* may well mediate desires but it also dresses bodies. Above all, because clothing constitutes a major dimension of well-being in Zambia, the widespread satisfaction of both clothing needs and desires 'from *salaula*' offers concrete evidence of the country's development predicament and the uneasy coexistence of freedom and constraints from which it arises.

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion in commercial exports of second-hand clothing from the West to the Third World and the increase in second-hand clothing consumption in many African countries raise challenging questions about the effects of globalisation and the meanings of the West and the local that consumers attribute to objects at different points of their journey across global space. This article draws on extensive research into the sourcing of second-hand clothing in the West, and its wholesaling, retailing, distribution and consumption in Zambia. Discussing how people in Zambia are

dealing with the West's unwanted clothing, the article argues that a cultural economy is at work in local appropriations of this particular commodity that is opening space for local agency in clothing consumption. Clothing has a powerful hold on people's imagination because the self and society articulate through the dressed body. To provide background for this argument, the article briefly sketches recent trends in the global second-hand clothing trade that place the countries of sub-Saharan Africa as the world's largest importing region. There follows a discussion of Zambians' preoccupation with clothing, both new and second-hand, historically and at the present time. It demonstrates that the meanings consumers in Zambia attribute to second-hand clothing are neither uniform nor static but shift across class and gender lines, and between urban and rural areas. Above all, they depend on the cultural politics of their time. In dealing with clothing, people in Zambia are making sense of post-colonial society and their own place within it and in the world at large.

RÉSUMÉ

Le développement rapide des exportations de vêtements d'occasion de l'Occident vers les pays du Tiers-Monde et la hausse de la consommation de vêtements d'occasion dans les pays africains soulèvent des questions pertinentes sur les effets de la mondialisation et les significations de l'Occident et du local que les consommateurs attribuent aux objets à différents points de leur parcours dans l'espace mondial. Cet article s'appuie sur des travaux de recherche approfondis sur la provenance des vêtements d'occasion en Occident ainsi que sur leur commerce en gros et au détail, leur distribution et leur consommation en Zambie. Analysant l'attitude de la population zambienne à l'égard des vêtements dont l'Occident ne veut plus, cet article suggère qu'une économie culturelle intervient dans les appropriations locales de cette marchandise particulière qui ouvre un espace au commerce local de vêtements. Les vêtements influent beaucoup sur l'imaginaire car le moi et la société s'expriment à travers le corps vêtu. En toile de fond, l'article dresse brièvement un profil des récentes tendances du commerce mondial des vêtements d'occasion qui placent les pays africains sub-sahariens en tête des régions importatrices au niveau mondial. Il s'ensuit une analyse des préoccupations de la population zambienne concernant les vêtements neufs et les vêtements d'occasion, tant sur le plan historique que sur le plan actuel. Cette analyse démontre que les significations qu'attribuent les consommateurs zambiens aux vêtements d'occasion ne sont ni uniformes ni statiques mais qu'elles varient selon la classe sociale et le sexe, et entre les zones urbaines et rurales. Surtout, elles dépendent de la politique culturelle du moment. A travers les vêtements, les Zambiens donnent un sens à la société postcoloniale, à leur place dans cette société et dans le monde en général.