

# Mivumba in Kampala: Tracking the History, Trade, and Perceptions of a Global Commodity in Local Culture

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## **Abstract**

One surprisingly unstudied and little documented aspect of the present-day African market system—almost impossible to ignore when one is walking the streets of Kampala and bombarded by its presence—is second-hand clothing. This study investigates the history, systems, and perceptions of the second-hand clothing market in Kampala, Uganda. Combining an ethnographic analysis with historical research, this paper details how a western commodity is changed, both in meaning and form, and interacted with on a local level—adding to anthropological literature that analyzes how local cultures interact, and not passively react, to globalization.

The emergence of the large second-hand clothing market can be traced to the economic crisis during Idi Amin's regime after the expulsion of the Asians from Uganda— and then to international trade policy and development paradigms (pushed by world superpowers like the U.S.) that have suffocated Uganda's own potential for a textile industry but have also pushed them towards opening their markets to foreign goods—the only ones which they can afford are used. This paper contends that the second-hand clothing market is a brilliant adaptation to these historical and global forces—a way to get affordable, durable, and highly demanded Western apparel and style to the many Ugandans who want it. Furthermore, by documenting the extensive systems of this trade and the complex ways used clothing from the West has been integrated into Ugandan culture, this study shows that Ugandans are not using second-hand clothing, as many outsiders have implied, to imitate Western styles with developed countries' hand-outs. They instead engage with the clothing in a market system and mind-frame that is local, Ugandan in origin. Used clothing, therefore, is not an artifact of the North's neocolonial dominance of the South or evidence of the spread of Western consumer fetishes; it is rather an extraordinary African solution to the binds of international economic power structures.

## Introduction

*“People now– they’d rather buy the old stuff.”*

The worldwide second-hand clothing trade “grew more than sevenfold, from a value of US\$ 207 million to 1,498 million” between 1980 and 2001. (Hansen: 2004, 3) The explosion of this global trade has affected the economies, industries, and clothing practices of many developing nations around the world. In Sub-Saharan Africa, second-hand clothing has become ubiquitous over the past three decades. These nations “are among the world’s largest importers, with consumption of second-hand clothing exceeding that of all other regions.” (Hansen: 1999, 348) The extensive consumption of used clothing by Africans certainly stirs questions about the ways local cultures accept and integrate artifacts from the West; the vast systems of trade invented to exchange this commodity cry for investigations the constructions of present day African markets and their ability to absorb multitudes of urban workers. Yet, surprisingly, this rich topic has rarely been investigated by social scientists in much detail in most of these African nations. Scholarship is so seldom in fact that the dynamics of the trade and local conceptions of second-hand clothing are not documented nor are they well understood in academia, media, or the political sphere. Before more exciting questions about the tensions between local cultures and global hegemonies can be answered, the ethnographic groundwork must be laid.

This study seeks to trace the history, document the systems of trade, and voice the local perceptions surrounding the present day second-hand clothing market in Kampala, Uganda. The complexities and eclectic constructions of these local systems provide further evidence of the dynamic “interactive aspects of globalization” (Hansen: 1999, 347) in which local cultures do not passively react to the invasions of global artifacts– policies, commodities, ideas, images–but engage with them in systems and ideologies that are fundamentally local. Though the acceptance of second-hand clothing into many African cultures may appear as an example of the spread of western consumer fetishism, we must analyze the true reasons why these commodities “cannot be resisted,” in local culture by allowing Ugandans to be the “authors,” and “not the passive objects of their own history.” (Sahlins: 1994, 412) The reasons why Ugandans *choose* to integrate global commodities like second-hand clothing into their societies lie in local histories, economies, ideologies, and values. Therefore, this study breaks “with the tendency to locate the meaning of such clothing practices in the West,” (Hansen 1995; 136) and allows Ugandans to explain how second-hand clothing is meaningful in their lives and why “they’d rather buy the old

stuff.” (Interview 42: 2008) In examining how “indigenous peoples struggle to integrate their experience of the world system,” we must always put it in the context of “their own system of the world.” (Sahlins: 1994, 412)

*Mivumba*, called *mitumba* in Kenya and Tanzania and *salaula* in Zambia (Hansen: 1999, 343), is the Luganda term for second-hand clothing, and it makes up 81% of Uganda’s clothing market. (Masiga: 2005; Dougherty: 2004) In 2007 alone, Uganda imported 43,277,504,986 Ugandan shillings (US\$ 24,914,744) worth of “worn clothing and other worn articles,” with a total net weight of 30,517,622 kg. (URA: 2007) The emergence and growth of the Ugandan second-hand clothing trade can be traced to a sequence of political-economic events in national history in the 1970s and 1980s and more recently to economic reforms, primarily implemented to fulfill conditional terms of structural adjustment loans beginning in 1981 and continuing throughout the 1990s; this series of events repeatedly suffocated the once flourishing cotton and textile industry which supplied Ugandans with clothing during the early Post-independence era in the 1960s. In the hands of Ugandans amidst political and economic turmoil, *mivumba* has been fashioned into “an alternative way of clothing—” which initially began as an “improvisation” at a time when, “Life was hard,” and “there was no clothing,” in Uganda. (Kampala City Council Official, Personal Interview: 2008)

Today, *mivumba* is a flourishing business in Kampala with an estimated 120 active importers and wholesalers (*Mivumba importer*, Personal Interview: 2008) in the city who sell to the almost countless retailers working in markets, shops, and on the street. To give some sense of the magnitude of the livelihoods that *mivumba* retail offers, approximately 6,000 people are employed in the trade at the city’s largest market, Owino, alone. (MVA and UMOT Uganda Ltd: 2008) *Mivumba* has not only developed into an important economic force in the city and Uganda as a whole, it has been integrated into everyday Ugandan life— over the years developing into a complex system of social and economic relations, collective values and identities, and global and local ideologies. The vast majority of people in Uganda like *mivumba* “so much,” (*Asiimwe*: 2008) because of its uniqueness, durability, affordability, and good fashion. Turning the normative idea that new is inherently better than old on its head, used clothes are often more preferable than new clothes in local culture because the options for affordable and good quality new clothing are scarce.

*Among International Perspectives, where are Local Voices?*

Though few formal inquiries have been made into the practices surrounding this commodity, second-hand clothing has activated opposition and criticism from different institutions around the world. (Hansen: 2004, 4) Manufacturers, tax authorities, and national governments throughout Africa have taken some degree of a combative stance towards letting second-hand clothing into their countries. Currently, Nigeria and South Africa<sup>1</sup> prohibit the import of used clothing on the grounds that it devastates local clothing industry— implementing these bans due to local pressure from manufacturers associations and labor unions. (Dougherty: 2004) Many other countries in Africa have either flirted with used-clothing bans, or implemented high taxes on the commodities to discourage their importation, again for the benefit of local industry. In East Africa, the member states of the East African Community, of which Uganda is one, are required to charge a 45% tax on all imported second-hand clothing under the Common External Tariff (CET) which outlines the international tax law for the entire region. (CET: 2007) In Uganda and the rest of East Africa, the manufacturers' needs often get preference over that of local second-hand clothing traders and consumers because they have organized associations that can lobby for their cause to the ministries that determine tax policy. (Ministry of Finance Official: 2008) Local voices can only be heard after policy is implemented. For example, under the 2005 CET the tax on mivumba jumped to 50% after decades of being taxed at a much lower rate. (Ministry of Finance Official; 2008; CET: 2005) Between April 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> in 2005, the Kampala City Traders Association (KACITA) led strikes throughout Kampala, "paralyzing the city," (Rutaagi: 2005) to protest the high taxes. For the people of Kampala, the affordability of basic necessities and jobs in local markets outweighs any concern they might have the success of the local textile industry.

The powerful institutions that oppose second-hand clothing use two arguments to justify their antagonism; first, they contend that the second-hand clothing trade harms local textile production and second, they claim that used clothing can spread skin, venereal, and fungal diseases, thus becoming a public health concern for their citizens. The second argument is based primarily on speculation as no scientific study has shown evidence that used-clothing spreads disease. (Hansen: 2004, 4) Additionally, there are various other factors that hinder the African textile industry more than second-hand clothing, including— outdated technology and factory

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<sup>1</sup> Nigeria has prohibited the importation of used clothing since the 1980s and South Africa implemented the ban in 1999. (Dougherty: 2004; Brooke: 1987)

facilities, high production costs, no control over factory inputs as they must all be imported, and the inability to support local industry through state subsidy because of the conditions set by the International Financial Institutions. (Asiimwe: April 2008; Interview 1: 2008; KCC Official: 2008) Since the arguments they use rest on weak premises, it is clear that something inherent in the commodity itself stirs anger. Implicit in the global criticisms of second-hand clothing is the belief that it, as a product, is degrading. This myth is perpetuated by international journalists—who are, unfortunately, the only people who have recorded the second-hand clothing trade in Uganda outside of Africa—who often reduce the complex local economies and cultures surrounding mivumba. For example, in 2006, The New York Times published an article about second-hand clothing which described the ways that Ugandans feel degraded or ashamed because they wear second-hand clothing. Lacey writes,

“The shirt that Peter S. Kaboggoza had on the other day was nice enough, a bit worn around the edges but with all the buttons in place and no visible rips or stains. Still, it was a cotton-polyester blend, and that made Mr. Kaboggoza a bit sheepish when asked why he was wearing it. Mr. Kaboggoza was wearing what Ugandans wear, second-hand clothes cast away by Westerners and scooped up on the cheap at local markets. But Mr. Kaboggoza is not the average Ugandan. He represents the country's proud past, when people here produced their own textiles, manufactured their own clothes and wore them with pride.” (Lacey: 2006)

This excerpt shows the ways in which outside critics “hide the economic process” (Hansen: 2004, 4) of the second-hand clothing trade—obscuring the fact that mivumba is highly demanded and popular among the population, and that a flourishing market system and many jobs have been created to exchange this good. Rather than letting Mr. Kaboggoza speak, Lacey classifies him within a neo-colonial hierarchy—the Africans must wear the cast offs of old colonial masters. In 2004, The London Times published an article that similarly mischaracterizes the mivumba trade in Uganda, called “Uganda spurns charity clothing.” (Rice: 2004) It tells the story of a supposed ban on mivumba underwear and sleep wear that was going to be implemented in 2004, yet in reality no ban was ever drafted in any ministry of government—it was private associations of manufacturers and health officials that proposed the ban, but no further action was taken because of it. (Ministry of Finance Official: 2008) Apart from getting its facts completely wrong, this article depicts the mivumba business as an aid relationship between donors and recipients when it calls mivumba, “charity clothing.” (Rice: 2004) These articles are examples of the way that global discussions on second-hand clothing exclude the opinions of the people that put on this clothing every day.

Perspectives like these are only dangerous because of the lack of scholarship on mivumba, and in general, second-hand clothing in Africa. The one American anthropologist at the vanguard of this research, Karen Tranberg Hansen, has meticulously outlined the workings and meaning of used clothing in Lusaka, Zambia. My research, conducted in Kampala, Uganda, is meant to add on to the body of literature she started—recording how this dynamic trade works in the region that is the largest importer of second-hand clothing in the world (Hansen: 1999, 348) and evaluating how local people perceive it and integrate it into their culture.

### **Setting**

Mivumba, at various points in the global exchange, carries different ideologies for the many groups of people that interact with it. Social theorist Arjun Appadurai states that this “commoditization lies at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors.” (Appadurai: 1986, 15) Thus, it becomes impossible to locate one setting for mivumba, because it changes in meaning and form, as it travels from Europe and America to Uganda. I therefore chose mivumba itself as my field site and investigated how it is interacted with in many different settings around the city of Kampala. Through literature and media, I deciphered how it is interacted with outside Uganda. By following mivumba wherever it went and wherever it came from, I have traced an entire circuit of the global second-hand clothing trade.

These second-hand goods come primarily from charitable organizations in the United States and Europe, including Salvation Army, Goodwill, Humana, and Oxfam. (Hansen: 1999, 348) These organizations receive far more clothing than they could sell in their stores and approximately half of their stock is sent to textile recyclers/exporters in their respective nations. At this step in the process the clothes are cleaned and compressed into bales and sent around the world, with Sub-Saharan African countries “among the world’s largest importers.” (Hansen: 1999, 348) They arrive at ports in East Africa, including Mombasa and Mozambique, and they make their way to wholesalers in many different nations across the continent by trucks. Each day, between the Kampala Old and New Taxi Parks, one can see the large mivumba bales, covered in clear plastic, being unloaded from large semi-trucks in order to be taken to the largest market in Kampala—Owino— and many other markets, retail shops, and even street corners in the city.

The majority of my time was spent at the hub of the mivumba trade in Kampala— which also happens to be Kampala’s largest market. Formally named St. Balikuddembe Market, it is

known to most Ugandans as Owino. (Kayongo, Personal Interview: 2008.) Owino is a perfect example of how “markets have become the bedrock of livelihood,” in African urban centers where formal employment is scarce. (Guyer and Hansen: 2001, 198) In Uganda, 4.4 million people (about 40% of the entire working population) are employed in informal businesses, while only 16 % of the population is able to work in the weak formal sector. (Uganda Bureau of Statistics: 2007, 27-28) It is estimated that over 50,000 people earn their livelihoods in Owino everyday. (Kayongo: 2008; UMOT Uganda Ltd.: 2008) Owino is located between the Old and New Taxi Parks of Kampala and as you approach it, its vastness cannot be gathered from its exterior. Once inside, a multitude of goods is available to Ugandans at affordable prices. There are vendors for every good imaginable– fresh produce, grains, butchered meat, second-hand clothing and shoes, cookware, household appliances, toys, radios, and televisions. Recently internet cafés, salons, and even health clinics have set up shop inside this market. The market has its own system of governance under the Market Vendors Association, with an elected Chairman of over twenty years– Chairman Patrick Kayongo. Kayongo explains that Owino,

“may be the harbor of business in this city. Over 300,000 people visit per day. It is open 24/7. Do you know any other place that goes 24/7? The market employs so many. No company in Uganda has an employment of 50,000 people.”

In Owino alone, an estimated 6,000 vendors deal in mivumba, in both wholesale and retail.

(MVA and UMOT Uganda Ltd: 2008) Clearly, mivumba has been incorporated into the economy of Kampala on a large scale. The complex history and the current local perceptions of mivumba will show that it has also been deeply integrated into Ugandan culture.

*Mivumba: Formal or Informal?*

In the absence of formal economic institutions during the 1970s and 1980s, informal (yet vast and complex) markets trading commodities became a major source of livelihood and employment in Uganda, and continue to be one today in the urban sector where formal employment is scarce. Though the classification of the present day mivumba trade as part of the formal or informal economy is “subjective” (URA Official: 2008), the business that began largely as informal smuggling is now regulated by many government bodies, including– the Ministry of Finance which works with stakeholder proposals to formulate international and domestic tax policy (Ministry of Finance Official: 2008), the Uganda Revenue Authority which implements this policy and collects mivumba tax revenue at border customs, and even the Kampala City Council which collects revenue from all of the retail vendors in the 24 markets it

manages in Kampala. (KCC Official, Revenue Department: 2008) Clearly, the mivumba trade is a large contributor to government revenue at many levels, bringing in over 17 billion shillings in to the URA alone in 2007. (URA: 2007) Not to mention, the businesses of the mivumba trade are the institutions that effectively clothe the majority of the Ugandan population, even the 38 per cent of Ugandans who earn less than one US dollar per day. (PEAP 2004/5- 2007/8: 2004, 12)

## **Methodology**

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

My research objectives for this study were:

1. To understand the history of Mivumba in Uganda and the national events and international economic policies that cultivated it, using this as a case study of the interaction of local culture with global policies and market
2. To research how the mivumba market works in Kampala, where it comes from and how and why it gets here, by interviewing retail vendors, wholesalers, shop workers, Kampala city council members, and government commerce officials
3. To get the attitudes of many different Ugandans, including the groups listed above, towards mivumba to discover how the public interprets second-hand clothing locally

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research for this report was conducted over a four week period from April to May 2008 in Kampala, Uganda. My primary methods of data collection were a combination of informal and formal interviews—conducted with 62 Ugandans directly or indirectly involved in the mivumba trade—and participant observation at many sites where mivumba is sold around the Kampala city center. I chose to interview a wide cross-section of Ugandans, of various professions, socio-economic statuses, and education levels in order to see if opinions and understandings of mivumba followed more general trends that crossed class and socio-economic lines. Eighteen of my informal interviews were conducted in Luganda with the help of a translator. Additionally, I gathered statistical data on the present day mivumba trade from the Kampala City Council, the Uganda Revenue Authority, and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

The interviews I characterize as informal usually took place in my interviewees' place of work—often interrupted by their need to help customers or work with their merchandise. While I brought a basic set of questions to serve as a guide for the interview, conversation often led me

to ask unplanned questions at the spur of the moment based on my interviewee's responses. This relaxed and more natural interview process was beneficial in many ways— it made people who were at first suspicious of my status as a student markedly more comfortable, led me to ask new questions that I had never thought of as related to my research question, and also prevented me from distorting my interviewees' information by talking too much and using leading or presumptuous questions. Additionally, because many of my informal interviews took place in mivumba market stalls and shops, I was able to observe and learn more about the culture of the mivumba trade by watching it happen. So while an informal interview strategy was necessitated by the space and practices surrounding the interview setting, it was advantageous to conduct them this way to gather the clearest data.

Contrastingly, the professions of the remainder of my interviewees dictated that the interviews be formal in nature as they were usually officials from local or national government. This required me to set up appointments for interviews ahead of time and present them with a letter of introduction in order to validate my position as a student. For these interviews I brought typed sets of questions and I usually stuck to the format of the guide. While the informal interviews tended to last between 15 and 20 minutes, the semi-formal interviews lasted much longer— averaging around 45 minutes.

My primary participant observation took place in Owino market, but also in many other places where mivumba is sold around Kampala, including— the importers shops on Namirembe Road and Nakivubo Road, retail shops in Wandegeya and on Kampala Road (See Appendix A for a Map of Kampala), and anywhere on the street where hawkers<sup>2</sup> sold mivumba throughout the city— whether by laying 5 pairs of freshly-shined men's dress shoes on Kampala Road or walking up and down the streets carrying 20 pairs of ladies jeans and pants, offering them to passersby. In these settings I usually noted and later recorded observations on vendor-customer relations and the marketing techniques of the vendors. At Owino I also participated in buying mivumba in order to observe and practice price negotiation with the vendors.

#### INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHICS

I conducted interviews with 62 Ugandans— 39 men and 23 women. This imbalance in the gender ratio was caused by several factors. First, in Ugandan society, it is more likely for a man to hold a powerful position in his place of work than a woman. For example, all six of the

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<sup>2</sup> This term was explained by my interviewees to mean anyone who sells mivumba on the streets and who does not pay rent to put his or her business in a shop.

government officials I interviewed were male, as were all ten of the importers. In other areas the sample is more representative; these people came from a range of professions, socio-economic statuses, and education levels.

Forty of my interviews were with direct participants in the mivumba trade, including– 24 mivumba vendors from Owino and the neighboring Park Yard markets, 7 mivumba shop owners and workers whose shops were located in Wandegeya and on Kampala Road, and representatives from 10 companies that import mivumba, whose stores were located exclusively on Namirembe and Nabugabo Road. Most of these interviews were informal in nature– conducted in their shops as they were working to sell their merchandise.

The other 22<sup>3</sup> interviews were conducted with people who are involved in the mivumba trade indirectly. This group included the Chairman of Owino Market, a representative from the company who collects the revenue for the Kampala City Council at Owino, two officials from the Revenue Department at Kampala City Council, two officials from Tax Policy Department at the Ministry of Finance, and with Dr. Godfrey Asiimwe– the Chair of the History Department at Makerere University and an expert on the emergence of the informal sector in Uganda. All of these interviews were semiformal, conducted in their offices at predetermined appointments. The remaining 15 interviews were conducted with a small sample of Ugandans who either buy or have opinions about the mivumba trade. The majority of these interviews were informal and conducted at the interviewee's place of work.

#### PROBLEMS IN THE FIELD

During my field research I encountered problems when attempting to get interviews from certain types of people, especially retail shop owners and female vendors in Owino market. Before my research began, locals had intimated that it might be difficult to get interviews from retail shop owners because they may feel mivumba is too sensitive a subject to talk about because many boutiques around the city sell first class mivumba as if it were brand new imported clothing. I was also warned that people in shops think of themselves as 'high class,' and therefore not willing to talk to a student about second-hand clothing. At first I had a hard time convincing shop owners to talk to me about mivumba, but I combated this problem by going to shops that openly sold used clothing– most of the shops I got interviews from had signs reading,

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<sup>3</sup> One interviewee, Chairman Kayongo of Owino Market, also owns a company that imports mivumba and thus is both an indirect and direct participant in the mivumba trade. Since he belongs to both categories, I have counted him twice in this summary– explaining why there are in fact 62 interviews, not 63.

“dealers in second-hand goods” on their store placards. In Owino, I had a problem getting female vendors to agree to answer my questions. This was caused by many different factors. First, women stated they were often too busy working to talk to me and they did not want to neglect their customers. Second, the women in the market tended to speak less English than the men. My translator indicated to me that many of the women I asked did not want to talk to me because they could not understand, and were therefore suspicious, of what I was saying. Last, my gender ratio was imbalanced because so very many male vendors were willing to talk to me. My status as a young, female, American student made me somewhat of a circus attraction among the men of the market– whenever I interviewed one male, many of his friends would surround me and offer their points of view as well. For their enthusiasm, I am very grateful.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

### A HISTORY OF MIVUMBA AND DE-INDUSTRIALIZATION IN UGANDA

The beginning and rapid expansion of the mivumba market in Uganda can be traced to political-economic events within the nation’s Post-independence history as well as to the development policies of International Financial Institutions during structural adjustment starting in the early 1980s. These events tell a story of how the young textile industry in Uganda was repeatedly weakened, “to the point of extinction” (Asiimwe: April 2008) – first by political turmoil and economic crisis, then by the emergence and dominance of the informal economy, and further by the neo-liberal economic policies imposed on Uganda by its international funding agencies that caused “some amount of de-industrialization.” (Oyejide: 2003, 95) This particular political-economic situation opened up an immense market for mivumba and all second-hand goods in general.

The history of mivumba is closely intertwined with the history of the decline of Uganda’s own textile industry which over time eliminated all of the clothing options that existed for Ugandans in the 1960s. After the Second World War, Britain’s devastated economic status made it, for the first time during colonialism, profitable to establish manufacturing industries in its colonies and protectorates. (Southall: 1988, 57) Initiated by British companies before Independence, Uganda’s small industrial and manufacturing sector continued to grow during the 1950s and 1960s, with a burgeoning textile industry in Jinja. After Independence in 1962, many of these manufacturing companies became subsidized by the new Ugandan state. These early

institutions of industrialization, sustained by government funding under the import-substitution<sup>4</sup> paradigm of African economic reform in the 1960s, were largely responsible for the economic prosperity of Uganda during this decade, where, “between 1963 and 1970” the Ugandan GDP averaged a “positive growth rate of 4.8 per cent per year.” (Kiiza et al.: 2006, 63) Himbara and Sultan note that, though these industries were small, they “nonetheless provided the country with a wide range of products and services, including steel, sugar, textiles, soap, construction, finance, insurance, and real estate development.” (Himbara and Sultan: 1995, 87) At that time the Ugandan textile and cotton industry, based in Jinja at the source of the Nile, was revered as the best in the East African region, even exporting “the surplus to neighboring countries” like Kenya. (Himbara and Sultan: 1995, 87)

The majority of my interviewees who were old enough to remember this era verified that Uganda’s own industries provided a more than adequate supply of these products, and particularly good-quality clothing. Asiimwe reflected that during the 1960s,

“There were so many options. There were textiles here, textile industries– I remember NYTIL, Ryan Textile. They were, if I remember, about four manufacturers and there were many other local fabrics that were bought from within the region. There were of course many other imported clothes...And by the way, with the cost of living then, people could afford. I think people then could afford more than now.” (Asiimwe: May 2008)

Though the second-hand clothing trade existed in Uganda at this time– Hansen even notes that second-hand clothes “have been around in much of Africa since the early colonial period” (Hansen: 2004, 3)– it was a minor trade and was thought of as degrading by the majority of Ugandans. With many other options for affordable new clothing at their disposal, second-hand clothing “used to be seen as a really degrading thing– that you’re using such personal effects of the people you don’t know, that they come maybe with diseases, skin diseases,” from the foreigners who gave them away. (Asiimwe: May 2008) Over half of my interviewees explained that there was a time when *mivumba* was looked-down-on by most Ugandans and seen as something only for the poor, but over time there was a shift in attitude and *mivumba* became a preferable option for Ugandans from all classes– which is the popular consensus today. It is important to note that when Ugandan opinions about second-hand clothing were negative,

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<sup>4</sup> The import-substitution model, followed by many African nations during the 1960s, espouses that for African countries to jump start industrialization, they should replace imports with products they produce domestically in state-subsidized companies to protect their weak industries from competition with cheap imported products exported from already industrialized nations with well-developed manufacturing sectors. (Edmonds: 1988, 95-96)

primarily focusing on its inferior and degrading qualities, there were other affordable clothing options available domestically. One man in his thirties recalled that,

“I remember I was in P7, and the mivumbas were so much cheaper than they are now, and I asked, I begged my mother for some money. And I went and bought a shirt and trousers– it was so cheap then. When I came home they abused me, beat me for buying second-hand clothes.” (Interview 50: April 2008)

The same interviewee recalled that mivumba was seen as something primarily for the poorer classes even into the 1980s. (Interview 50: April 2008) An extensive change in the Ugandan mindset on mivumba began to spread as the opportunity to buy affordable new clothing in-country began to disappear under the despotic reign of Idi Amin from 1971 to 1979– during which the majority of the formal economic institutions of Uganda, and especially the industrial sector, were devastated.

Amin’s declaration of “economic war” (Edmonds: 1988, 99; Asimwe: April 2008) shortly after his takeover in 1971, initiated an economic crisis in Uganda that was characterized by poor policies, gross mismanagement, and the mass departure of the skilled labor population– causing the general collapse of all formal economic institutions. The principal actors in Uganda’s young industrial sector in the 1960s were of Indian descent; it was these “Asian families who dominated industrial and commercial activities.” (Edmonds: 1988, 99; Himbara and Sultan: 1995, 87) Thus, it is not surprising that when Idi Amin expelled the Ugandan Asians from the country, out of a desire for Ugandan nationalism and spite for the capitalist class of Indians, the industrial sector was decimated; Amin’s “regime effectively squandered the most productive elements of the Ugandan bourgeoisie.” (Himbara and Sultan: 1995, 87) Many Ugandans were forced to leave the country as well, including, “all of the skilled, trained, and educated” citizens who either “ran away into exile, or were killed.” (Asimwe: May 2008) The formal economy had no chance to recover during the 1970’s as this large exodus of skilled labor and industrialists was followed by eight years of dismal economic management by the military regime that ran the state under Amin. The “monetary economy faltered under the burden,” of this mismanagement and after two and a half decades of successful industrial growth, there was a “retreat into subsistence activities.” (Edmonds: 1988, 99) Any formal economic institutions left veritably collapsed during the 1978-79 war, led by the Tanzanian Defense Force, which finally overthrew Amin and forced him into exile. Southall notes that, “the material plight of Uganda was even worse after than before he left,” because much of the infrastructure left in the country– including factories,

plantations, public buildings, and transportation– was “taken or destroyed by Amin and his followers in their flight” from Uganda at the end of the war. (Southall: 1988, 59)

In 1980, as Uganda began to emerge from years of political chaos and instability, per capita income was at only 68.9% of the level it was in 1963. (Edmonds: 1988, 99) Poverty soared in the absence of formal economic institutions. During the eight year period under Amin, Ugandans lost access to many basic necessities, especially clothing. One Kampala City Council official remembered that,

“During Amin’s time when life became very hard, even owning shoes became almost impossible. We would use the shoes made from car tires...Shoes were so precious that you would only wear them to go to church on Sunday.” (KCC Official: 2008)

In addition to expressing the difficult living conditions Ugandans faced during and after Amin’s rule, this official also alludes to the emergence of local adaptations and improvisations created by the people of Uganda as all formal institutions failed them– such as fashioning shoes out of discarded materials like old car tires; it is in the midst of political-economic turmoil that the informal economy<sup>5</sup>, called *magendo* in Luganda<sup>6</sup> (Asiimwe: April 2008), began to develop. Ugandans formed their own systems of trade in order to acquire basic necessities– such as food, clothing, and materials for shelter and cooking– when they were no longer available in large quantities or at affordable prices, as inflation soared throughout Amin’s rule until 1987<sup>7</sup>. The emergence of the informal sector in the late 1970s and early 1980’s coincided with the mainstreaming of the *mivumba* trade. As second-hand clothes started “creeping in slowly”– often smuggled over the borders from the port in Mombasa and sold in the *magendo* markets– it grew into the largest source of clothing for the lower and middle classes. (Asiimwe: May 2008) Another KCC official declared that, “*Mivumba* started as an alternative way of clothing– It was improvising. Life was hard. There was no clothing. You could not access new clothes.” (KCC Official 2, Revenue Department: 2008) Thus *mivumba*, a commodity that was once frowned upon, became the best option for affordable clothing in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

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<sup>5</sup> I define informal economy here as: economic activities that take place with no regulation or control of the government. These activities could include any number of small businesses, including selling produce in an unregulated local market, selling chapattis on the roadside, or smuggling second-hand clothing across the border and selling them.

<sup>6</sup> The meaning of *magendo* is “illicit” or “black trade.” (Asiimwe: 2008)

<sup>7</sup> In 1987 the Economic Recovery Program (ERP) was implemented in Uganda through a partnership with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and the macro-stabilization policies of the program successfully brought inflation down. Inflation dropped drastically every subsequent year, now resting at a regular rate of 6.4% (Ugandan Women’s Network: 1995, 3; Kiiza et al.: 2006, 85)

Additionally, the trade began to be an attractive option for employment as there was minimal opportunity in the formal sector and little start-up capital was needed to begin a mivumba retail business on the street or in the city's markets. Asiimwe notes that, "when unemployment soared— with little capital you can go buy a bale of mivumba, iron the clothes, and move around and sell them" (Asiimwe: April 2008); one woman in her mid-twenties echoed his sentiments, reflecting that, "Those who didn't have businesses or jobs got jobs through them [mivumba]. Families got something for themselves; they got opportunities through these things." (Interview 49: 2008) Because of the appeal of the business and commodity itself, the mivumba market grew extensively in the 1980s.

While the mivumba and magendo markets were flourishing, Uganda embarked on its first relationship with the International Financial Institutions— the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group— in 1981. (Uganda Women's Network: 1995) Like its neighboring nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, Uganda was prescribed a neoclassical economic strategy by these foreign donor agencies during the period of structural adjustment beginning in the 1980s and continuing in the 1990s. These policies, aimed at achieving economic stabilization and then overall development in struggling African nations, were shortsighted and primarily economic in nature. They were designed to "liberalize trade by removing government controls of prices, exchange rates and interest rates and privatization...of state owned enterprises." (Carmody: 1998, 320)The first set of reforms that took place from 1981 to 1984 during Milton Obote's second presidency, sought to "correct severe macro-economic imbalance that stemmed from a combination of external shocks, civil strife, and distortions in the market due to poor policies" (Uganda Women's Network: 1995, 2) by adjusting the exchange rate, removing price controls, capping government borrowing from the central bank, and making a more flexible system of interest rates. This program saw short-term success, primarily because it improved upon the abysmal resource allocation of Amin's regime, (Edmonds: 1988, 101) until 1984 when the Ugandan government opted out of the structural adjustment program to finance the civil war between the Ugandan People's Congress, led by Milton Obote, and the National Resistance Movement, led by Yoweri Museveni. (Uganda Women's Network: 1995, 3) The period between 1981 and 1985 saw negligible economic recovery from the crisis of Amin's regime, due to the unrestrained growth of the informal sector, yet another era of war and political instability, and the short-sightedness of the initial adjustment policies. The local textile industry was given no

chance to recover as the state was not allowed to borrow from the Central Bank to subsidize textile companies and the domination of the magendo economy supplied Ugandans with mivumba to wear.

Relative peace returned to Uganda in 1986 when President Yoweri Museveni took control over the country, yet he “was now faced with an economic situation at least as difficult as that left behind by Amin.” (Belshaw: 1988, 111) Despite the National Resistance Movement’s original communist principals –in which the adoption of structural adjustment programs was equivalent to the adoption and approval of Western capitalism– “the massive economic crises of the early 1980s left the country with no option but to reform,” (Kiiza et al: 2006, 63) with the help, and under the conditions of, the IMF and World Bank. In May 1987, Uganda adopted the Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) which espoused the neo-classical economic philosophies of the infallibility of free markets and the fallibility of state controlled and subsidized economic sectors. The plan called for the reduction of government expenditure, the privatization of all state-subsidized industries, and the liberalization of trade. (Uganda Women’s Network: 1995, 3-4) It was this second package of structural adjustment reforms that contributed greatly both to the prevalence of mivumba in the present-day clothing market and the prevention of recovery or growth in Uganda’s textile industry.

The policy of trade liberalization asserts “that economies that are shielded from international trade competition can be expected to have firms that operate at inefficiently small scales in the protected domestic market.” (Oyejide: 2003, 77) The implementation of trade liberalization, in actuality, saw that when the already weak Ugandan firms were exposed to competition from efficient and technologically advanced industries in developed nations, they crumbled under the pressure. Under liberalization, Uganda was also required to “religiously open up,” (Asiimwe: April 2008) its markets to foreign products, of which the only ones Uganda can afford are used or are poor quality products from new industrial nations such as China, Malaysia, and Thailand. Additionally, the inundation of foreign used and cheap new items prevents any more expensive locally produced items from having a market among the population. Asiimwe notes:

“What is the sense of having a textile industry when you’re opening up for Chinese clothes that come in and restrict it, regulate it? With young industries operational costs are high and you have to be knocked out,” by this overwhelming competition. (Asiimwe: May 2008)

In this way trade liberalization simultaneously contributes to the dismantling of the textile industry in Uganda as it allows for a plentiful supply of second-hand clothing to come into the country— a cycle that continually strengthens the market for mivumba and weakens the market for locally-produced clothing. Chairman Kayongo of Owino market explained how easy it is to import mivumba in Uganda— “This government has liberalized. There are no restrictions on business. You just have to declare the goods at customs.” (Chairman Kayongo: 2008) In this Catch-22 scenario, there are no restrictions on trade, but the only way for Uganda’s industry to compete is to restrict trade and protect its markets from outside products. One Sub-county chief went so far as saying that Uganda’s industries “collapsed because of the international policies.” (Interview 1: 2008) While this statement ignores the economic crises that took place domestically during the 1970s and 1980s, the policies of liberalization and privatization have certainly halted any further recovery or development of local textile industry.

A large change in the popular ideology surrounding mivumba coincided with the change in the market and supply brought by trade liberalization during the 1990s and up to the present for several reasons including— its rampant availability, the absence of other affordable and good-quality clothing options, and most importantly, mivumba’s own appeal to Ugandans. One man explained that these changing opinions corresponded to the boundaries of the past three decades, noting that, “In the eighties it [mivumba] was for the poor. In the 90s people began to go for it. And with the economic situation right now being so tight— everyone is going for the mivumbas. These days it’s no big deal— you can put on and you’re not ashamed.” (Interview 50: 2008) Though no other interviewee summarized the shift as occurring on this exact timeline, the majority of my sources echoed this basic history on the perceptions of mivumba. First, as Ugandans’ local options for affordable clothing disappeared, mivumba became integrated into the culture— slowly becoming accepted by not only the lower classes, but also the middle and upper classes. Next, demand for mivumba skyrocketed among the population— who now appreciate the fashion, price, and quality of the used clothing— after it became endlessly and easily available through liberalization. Furthermore, the vast majority of my interviewees explained that only the richest Ugandans can afford to buy high fashion and high quality new clothes that are imported. Yet, nowadays even the rich are beginning to appreciate and shop for mivumba. One salon owner noted that, “People now have an awareness that there are very expensive and good things in mivumba. Even the rich, they yearn for such products.” (Interview

51: 2008) His sentiments allude to the main finding in my research on Ugandan's perceptions of mivumba— 88% of people I interviewed *choose* mivumba because of its genuine appeal and affordability.

#### THE SYSTEMS OF THE UGANDAN MIVUMBA TRADE

The historical perspective I have provided brings us to the present day. The complex and extensive systems of trade constructed by Ugandans to exchange second-hand clothing show that mivumba has been incorporated in and benefited the local economy and especially local business owners. These systems also show that mivumba is a good with high demand among the population, not a charity item that they are forced to wear.

Perhaps the worst mischaracterization of the global second-hand clothing trade is that it is imagined to be a relationship between donors and recipients (Hansen: 2004, 3), rather than an economic transaction between companies— both capitalizing on the high demand for second-hand clothes in the importing company's local population. The textile recycling company Hands Industries F. Z. C., one of the companies used to import mivumba in Kampala, declares on its website, "We credit our humble beginnings to Africa where most of the recycled clothing and shoes are in demand." (Hands Industries F.Z.C.: 2007) By stating an appreciation for the large demand in Africa and the profit and success it has brought their company, this statement adequately represents the economic process of the global trade— where Africans are market participants and consumers, not simply recipients of hand-outs. This fact is impossible to deny when "Sub-Saharan African countries are among the world's largest importers, with consumption of second-hand clothing exceeding that of all other regions." (Hansen: 1999, 348) In 2007, Ugandan imports accounted for 24.9 million dollars worth of the 1,498 million dollar second-hand clothing trade, or less than .02%. (URA: 2007; Hansen: 2004, 3) These statistics point to the vastness of the global used clothing trade in its ability to clothe entire nations— if Uganda imports only .02% of all the available clothing, and second-hand clothing makes up 81% of the Ugandan clothing market (Dougherty: 2004), then a substantial majority of Uganda's 28 million people are clothed by this tiny percentage of the world trade.

#### *How it Works*

The entire circuit of the worldwide second-hand clothing trade is rarely documented in recent scholarship. Outside of academia its dynamics are understood very poorly both by the people who unfortunately get to write about it—international journalists— but also by regular

individuals in Europe and America, who perhaps every so often donate some of their clothing to local charitable organizations and are largely unaware of where these commodities will end up, or where they are in high demand. After a brief description of the portion of the trade circuit that takes place outside Uganda, I will document the systems and processes of the Ugandan half of the trade in detail— focusing on importers and wholesalers, market vendors, and shop retailers. Throughout these analyses I will also include information about the government’s involvement and regulation of this trade. The information supplied in the following sections was gleaned from personal interviews and fieldwork with mivumba traders in Kampala as well as from academic articles and company websites.

European countries and the United States of America are the primary exporters of second-hand clothing worldwide. Their supply of clothing primarily comes from charitable organizations in those countries; the largest suppliers in the United States include the Salvation Army and Goodwill and in Europe, Humana and Oxfam are major contributors. (Hansen: 1999, 348) All of these charitable organizations receive far more clothing than could be marketed in their stores in their home countries. This excess amounts to between “40 and 60 per cent” (Hansen: 1999, 348) of all the donations they receive. Rather than stretch beyond their capacity, they dispose of these clothes to the next link in the global trade— textile recyclers and/or rag-graders. These are the two terms used to identify companies that clean, sort<sup>8</sup>, and recycle used clothing by either selling it on the world market or, if it is too damaged or old to be remarketed, separating them into rags that can be used for industrial purposes. These are the companies that export second-hand clothing, vacuum sealed and compressed into 50 kg bales, to the myriad of importers in countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. In my interviews with importers, I was able to acquire the names of five textile recyclers that directly supply local wholesale businesses in Kampala— two of which are located in the United States, in Texas and California<sup>9</sup>, one in Canada, one in India, and the other was recently relocated to Dubai, but deals solely in used clothing from the UK. Local importers place orders with these companies in quantities of “containers,” which hold anywhere from 550 to 570 bales

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<sup>8</sup> Clothes are sorted by type such that each bale includes only one type of clothing, such as “Ladies’ Blouses.” Bales of mixed clothing are also available. (Interview 54: 2008)

<sup>9</sup> World Clothing is a textile recycling company located in Houston, Texas and its website can be found at <http://www.worldclothing.net> . Samiyatex is another textile recycler, located in Los Angeles California, and its website can be found at <http://www.samiyatex.com/samiyatex/index.html> . Both of these companies export to countries across Sub-Saharan Africa in addition to Uganda.

of second-hand clothing. (Interview 37, Mivumba importer: 2008) These containers are shipped by sea to ports in East Africa; all ten of the Ugandan importers I interviewed noted that their containers come into Africa through the port-city of Mombasa, Kenya. The local importers hire transportation companies to bring their shipments to the Ugandan border.

#### *Importers and Wholesalers*

Once the containers arrive at Ugandan border customs, the Ugandan Revenue Authority determines the taxes for the shipment and sends the bill to the importers. (Interview 37: 2008) The current rate charged on imported second-hand clothing is “45% or .30 US dollars/kg” (CET: 2007) as mandated by the Common External Tariff (CET); depending on its contents, one container of used clothing is charged between 25 and 27 million Ugandan shillings in taxes. (Interview 52: 2008) As a member of the East African Community (EAC), Uganda must maintain the tax rates for imports and exports outlined in the CET; all member states must charge the same taxes in order to prevent smuggling into more expensive countries from its neighbors with lower tax rates. (Ministry of Finance Official: 2008) Under the CET, mivumba is considered to be a “sensitive item,” and is therefore given a separate tax rate outside the general tax rules for imports. (Ministry of Finance Official: 2008) Sensitive items are imported products which are given higher tax rates for various reasons, whether it is for revenue purposes, protection, or in the case of mivumba– to discourage its importation through higher taxes, so that clothing produced in local industries may be able to better compete against the more affordable second-hand clothing. This higher tax rate does negligible harm to the mivumba business, and does even less to support local industry– which fails to produce and compete in the present market due to the host of historic and economic factors outlined in my historical analysis, such as trade liberalization, and not directly because of mivumba’s popularity. One importer reflected, “You know the government is only hurting the people in the market who sell,” by implementing these high taxes; he also stated that, “business is going on; it didn’t stop,” because of the high taxes. This measure, “because prices are high–hurts the customers only,” without accomplishing its intended purpose of discouraging mivumba importation. (Interview 52: 2008)The ten importers I interviewed noted that the high taxes on mivumba were burdensome, because “the goods become expensive and it’s difficult to sell because of the competition,” (Interview 56: 2008) but ultimately they did not harm their business to a great degree– it just forces them to raise prices for their customers.

The majority of the companies I interviewed imported one or two containers of used clothing per month, except for one larger company that averaged 4 containers per month, and stored the bales in their wholesale shops. In Kampala, as the mivumba vendors in Owino market intimated to me and as I later discovered myself, there are two streets where the mivumba importers have their shops— Namirembe Road and Nabugabo Road. Interestingly, these two streets also contain different ethnic communities of mivumba importers; the shops in Nabugabo market are known to most Owino market retailers as “the Indian stores,” (Interview 7: 2008) and not surprisingly every company I interviewed in the line of shops on Nabugabo Road was owned and operated by Ugandan Indians. The shops on Namirembe Road, in contrast, were all owned and operated by Ugandans. Additionally, all of the importers were men. On both streets, the formats of the stores are very similar. They tend to be large empty rooms that are filled with hundreds of bales of mivumba at the beginning of each month.<sup>10</sup> One of the importers estimated that there are “80 to 120 importers alone currently,” and indicated that the market has become saturated in recent years— “two or three years ago we used to get 8 containers per month. But now the market is split and so the customers are split.” (Interview 52: 2008) This is indicative of the “absorptive” (Asiimwe: April 2008) quality of the mivumba business amidst Kampala’s lack of formal employment— in which people can easily join the trade and earn their livelihood, though this makes for extreme competition in the local business.

The customers that buy bales from these wholesalers are primarily involved in the Kampala mivumba business, and are furthermore primarily vendors from Owino market, but the majority of the companies mentioned that they also get customers from “up country,” and “even people from neighboring countries like Sudan and Rwanda come.” (Interview 53: 2008) The majority of rural Uganda is supplied with clothing in this way— by vendors coming to Kampala to get their merchandise and bringing it back to their villages. One interviewee astutely observed that the major, “market [for mivumba] is in the middle of the city and it is surrounded by the two taxi parks— it is easy to come and go,” (Interview 5: 2008) for vendors from around the region. There are two types of customers who buy wholesale mivumba in bales from these shops. The first category is the mivumba retailers who sell all of the clothes that they get in the bale to the final customers either in markets or shops around the city. The second category includes vendors

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<sup>10</sup> This format of the store is what allowed me to find these companies for interviews— I just had to look for the large concrete stores filled with bales upon bales.

that are a mix between wholesale and retail, who one female vendor called “the middle men.” (Interview 12: 2008) These individuals purchase bales and bring them to markets around Kampala, but particularly Owino, where they cut them open and sell portions of the bale to the final retail vendors in the market, often very early in the morning. In the morning there is “a lot of struggle and fighting,” over the best quality and highest fashion clothing in the open bales. (Interview 11: 2008) Both categories of mivumba vendors tend to operate on a small scale, only purchasing one or two bales at a time to sell in the market. There are also a small number of hybrid wholesalers/retailers that have actual shops in Owino who purchase many bales and store them in their shops in Owino. (Interview 36: 2008; Interview 38: 2008) Like the people who cut bales early in the morning, these vendors sell to other mivumba retailers in the same market. In following the exhausting chains of vendors, one begins to notice that the people employed in this trade are reduced to mere “sales agents” (Asiimwe: April 2008)– passing the merchandise from one vendor to another, employing no trained skills, just accumulating a margin of profit in the chain. Though, this unfortunate aspect of the mivumba trade is reflective of the complete failure of the formal employment sector in Uganda, and the widespread need of 84% of the working population to find “self-employment” (Uganda Bureau of Statistics: 2007, 13) in more informal institutions. The mivumba trade is vast and should not be discredited as it employs thousands of people in Kampala alone, for whom there are no formal jobs.

#### *Market Vendors*

Continuing our journey through the Ugandan half of the second-hand clothing chain, we arrive at Owino market– which undeniably houses the largest concentration of mivumba retail vendors in Kampala, employing approximately 6,000 people in used clothing alone, and more than 50,000 people in the entire market. (Market Vendors Association and UMOT Uganda Ltd. Official: 2008) Approximately 1,200 fifty kilogram bales of mivumba are brought into this market for sale each day. (UMOT Uganda Ltd. Official: 2008) The Kampala City Council (KCC), the holder of all public land titles in Kampala, collects large amounts of revenue from the vendors who rent the public space in the markets around Kampala. KCC collects 59% of its entire market revenue from Owino alone– about 104 million shillings per month. (KCC: 2007; UMOT Uganda Ltd.: 2008) My interviewees also declared unanimously that Owino is the best place to buy good mivumba at the cheapest prices. One female vendor noted that, “Owino is still

the best for mivumba. Even those models, those singers– they shop their shoes from here.” (Interview 12: 2008)

During my research I interviewed 24 mivumba vendors in Owino who worked in everything from ladies clothing, to belts, and to mivumba curtains and bed sheets. I chose people at random and got interviews from the individuals that were willing to discuss their business with me. Eleven of these interviews were conducted completely in Luganda with the help of the translator. Within my sample there were many different education statuses, some of the vendors were enrolled or had graduated from university, but the majority of my interviewees dropped out before finishing A-level secondary schooling. The presence of university graduates in a business that involves no skills acquired at university again reveals the struggle individuals go through to find formal employment in Kampala. One vendor exclaimed, “There are no jobs here in Uganda. You find people that graduated from university and failed to get a job so they start here in mivumba.” (Interview 13: 2008) These examples reveal the way in which, “markets have become the bedrock of livelihood,” (Guyer and Hansen: 2001, 198) in African urban centers– providing employment and affordable necessities. Yet, whether they thought business was going well or poorly, all of my interviewees in Owino confirmed that they were able to earn their livelihood through mivumba; one vendor declared that, “I’m proud of it. I have my wife, I have children– I can support them through his work.” (Interview 55: 2008) Another female vendor was similarly proud, noting that “this business has helped me shelter myself, pay school fees for my children, and it’s through this business that I also get food and feed my family.” (Interview 31: 2008)

The majority of the Owino mivumba vendors work “6 days a week,” (Interview 8: 2008) excluding Sunday and they must arrive at Owino very early in the morning to go buy their merchandise from “the ones who cut the bales” (Interview 13: 2008) – from the vendors who buy bales from the wholesale importers and bring them to Owino to sell to other vendors. Most of my interviewees collect their merchandise in this way, and the remaining few buy whole bales from the stores on Namirembe and Nabugabo Road. The vendors who buy in bulk do not have a great ability to choose their merchandise based on quality as they cannot discern the contents of a bale before they buy it. Entire bales of clothing cost between 150,000 and 200,000 Uganda shillings, with the more expensive bales containing men’s shirts or suits. (Interview 39: 2008) Individual pieces can be as little as 5,000 shillings. Many of the vendors I talked to saw buying bales as a

“gamble” (Interview 11: 2008) because there are sometimes damaged goods inside. In these unfortunate instances, “you’ve more or less made a loss.” (Interview 44: 2008) By picking pieces of clothing one by one from the vendors who cut the bales in Owino, most of the retailers felt they had great control over the quality, style, and price of the merchandise they select to sell in their stalls.

One common local practice at this point in the chain of trade is the division of the mivumba into classes— first, second, and third— by the vendors who cut the bales. The classifications are made based on quality and style— with many of the first class items appearing almost brand new. Many vendors pick their clothes according to what class it is given and many customers only choose clothing from the better classes. This hierarchy of clothing is also reflected in the vendors’ displays. Many of the vendors hung their first and second class merchandise in neat rows on the walls of their wooden stalls while the “third



*First and Second class mivumba men’s shirts displayed on the wall of an Owino stall.*

class you find when they are thrown down in a pile,” on a tarpaulin often with a “flat rate” given to all of its contents. (Interview 51: 2008) Additionally, the class given to the piece of clothing often determines where it will end up in Kampala; retail shops uptown on Kampala Road and Wandegeya often have relationships with the vendors who cut the bales such that, “when they get first class they bring it to the shops uptown purposely,” because they know they can get a higher price from the retailers in the chic shops around town, who can sell it for a much higher price in their stores. (Interview 51: 2008) In this way, the hierarchy given to the mivumba through classes parallels the hierarchy of socio-economic status reflected in the geography of Kampala. Kampala is often imagined to be divided into “uptown,”—anywhere north of or on Kampala Road— and “downtown,” which lies south of Kampala Road. Uptown is home to the chic shops, posh hotels like Hotel Serena and Sheraton Kampala, and upper-middle class

neighborhoods like Ntinda, while downtown is home to the congested Old and New Taxi Parks, Owino and other markets like Kisekka— places where a large portion of the lower classes come everyday to earn their livelihoods in trade or service businesses. (Interview 11: 2008; Interview 51: 2008) So while a customer can find all three classes of clothing in Owino, she cannot find anything but first class, expensive mivumba in the shops uptown.

Vendors in Owino also pay great attention to the “the fashion, the color, the size” (Interview 60: 2008) and to current trends in popular Ugandan fashion. One woman selling ladies suits stressed that her customers “want low cut short fly. They want waist coats,” and that she must find these types of suits for her stall to be lucrative. (Interview 58: 2008) A man selling ladies jeans also explained that he has to search for a very specific type of popular fashion to be competitive, noting that, “they want short fly and big flare, or tube. And I can’t carry big sizes— I need small sizes.” (Interview 60: 2008) Though prices in Owino are highly negotiable, the popular fashions have a higher starting price. For example, for a pair of jeans that is not very fashionable one vendor “can buy for 8,000 and sell at 10,000,” Ugandan shillings, while the “nice ones he can buy at 12,000 and sell for 15,000.” (Interview 13: 2008) In this way, local cultural practices of fashion shape the monetary values of these commodities in the market— an example of how local culture influences local economy.

The mivumba often makes it to its final consumer at this stage in the trade, going home with an individual after he bargains the price with the vendor. Yet, there are still further steps in the trade for a large part of the second-hand clothing that reaches Owino— it is collected by yet another group of vendors who take merchandise to sell all over the city, whether it be in small boutiques or on street corners.

#### *Retail Shops*

This is the last stop in the worldwide chain from Europe and America to Uganda, where the mivumba reaches its final owner. The streets of Kampala and the surrounding neighborhoods are dotted with many small boutiques dealing strictly in mivumba clothing. I was able to conduct interviews in seven different shops in Wandegeya and on Kampala Road, though in general, it was difficult to find many owners or workers that were willing to talk to me, for the reasons I outlined in the methodology section. The trends in the responses from the seven shops were similar enough to glean how this part of the trade works; many of the answers were almost identical.

These stores get their merchandise from one place—“Owino only.” (Interview 20: 2008) Most of the stores have paid employees, that in addition to working in the shop, go to Owino very early in the morning to select the clothing from the vendors who cut the bales. Most of these individuals go “frequently” (Interview 20: 2008) to pick new merchandise, some going at specific intervals, such as “after every 3 days,” (Interview 24: 2008) and others going when they have to fill orders for customers. Many of the shops provide this service, where if a customer “comes and she doesn’t know what she wants and I can make the choice for her” in Owino. (Interview 20: 2008) If they are not picking clothing for an individual customer, like the market vendors, the retail shop workers pick clothing based on “style, color, good fashion,” and always according with the particular trends “of the season.” (Interview 35: 2008) One shop worker who dealt in first class handbags explained that big and colorful leather bags were the must have of the season, “ones that are purple, yellow, red, and orange.” (Interview 35: 2008) Additionally, all seven of the boutiques deal in first class mivumba only. Shop owners often use the “first class” quality of their clothes to charge much higher prices than those charged in Owino. (Interview 45: 2008) One seamstress estimated that, “a shirt that is five thousand in Owino can be twenty thousand in the shops.” (Interview 3: 2008)

Nearly all of my interviewees expressed that they did not like to shop for mivumba uptown because of the higher prices. As one woman put it, “I don’t go to those shops because you can get the same cloth in Owino at a cheaper price.” (Interview 47: 2008) When I asked why people would decide to shop uptown even though they can get the same quality clothing at Owino for a cheaper price, many people indicated that it has to do with issues of social class, wealth, and status. One man described that, “It depends on their dignity. Some rich people don’t want to come down here. Rich people think, ‘How can I pass in Owino,’ because it is muddy, crowded, and it takes a long time to find what you want.” (Interview 11: 2008) Another interviewee commented that, “there are these people who think going to Owino is low;” She then put on a haughty voice, giving an impression of a wealthy woman— “I don’t go to Owino. It’s for these other low class people.” (Interview 42: 2008) These quotes show that mivumba has been integrated into local systems of social hierarchy; Ugandan conceptions of socio-economic status become imposed both on the mivumba themselves through classes and on the spaces in which they are sold. A few interviewees also mentioned that some people prefer to go to shops over Owino because “some people are really very busy” (Interview 42: 2008) and they do not have

time to walk through the muddy pathways of Owino, sort through the clothes, and bargain with the vendors. Shops therefore provide the much desired organization, cleanliness, security, and peace that Owino does not— but only to those who can afford to pay a much higher price.

Many of the retail shop vendors indicated that they face the same type of heavy competition as importers and market vendors—one female shop owner declared it was the “number one problem” in her business (Interview 34: 2008)— because of the market saturation that has occurred in recent years as the mivumba business exploded in Kampala. For them, business is not as successful as it used to be, it is now “stuck,” (Interview 35: 2008); and customers come infrequently and in random numbers.

Now that I have detailed the ways in which mivumba has been integrated into local trade, exchange, and business practices, I move to show the local perceptions and ideologies that accompany and shape these practices.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF MIVUMBA IN UGANDA

Second-hand clothing in Sub-Saharan Africa is “not just any commodity but a very special one,” (Hansen: 199, 347) because it has “mobilized public opinion at many levels within and outside” the continent to a great degree throughout the past two decades. (Hansen: 1995, 139) Powerful institutions around the world— national governments, trade ministries, manufacturers, labor unions, and international journalists— get riled up by the topic of used clothing, perhaps more often than they do about other used commodity trades. Second-hand clothing is unique among them because this commodity is a nexus for multiple discourses, concerning many issues of present worldwide concern— globalization, neo-colonialism and neo-colonial mindsets, trade liberalization, industrial development in the South, donor-recipient inequalities, the spread of Western fashion practice, and the preservation of local cultures. Additionally, since clothing is such an intimate commodity, one that individuals place on their bodies everyday, opinions on used-clothing are shaped by more general conceptions of the superiority of new goods over used, and the possible degradation that comes with wearing something that has already been worn.

Often the voices that cannot be heard among this global discussion are those of the people who put on second-hand clothing each day. It is clear that, though second-hand clothing certainly offers a “special exposure on the interaction between the local and the West” (Hansen: 1999, 347) that is largely inequitable, the Ugandans who wear mivumba rarely grapple with these global inequalities as they put on their clothing each morning; they care more about

mivumba, “as dress,” and how choosing to wear it conveys their, “individual and collective identities and desires.” (Hansen: 1999, 347) In daily clothing practice, uniqueness, affordability, durability, and style are the qualities that matter to Ugandans. Nearly all of my interviewees indicated that mivumba is the best option for getting all four of these qualities. Though it is difficult for citizens of industrialized and developed nations to comprehend why people would actually prefer to wear used-clothing over new—because their cultures often associate used clothing with lower socio-economic status— understanding can come by first contextualizing the Ugandan clothing practices, values, and market and then listening to how Ugandans conceptualize mivumba in this system.

*The Importance of Dressing “Smartly”*

The importance of dressing well in Uganda is undeniable as one walks down the streets of Kampala. Most men are clothed in collared shirts, ties, and suit trousers even in the heat of the tropical climate. Women have similar standards of dress— attractive skirts longer than the knee, western style business suits, or traditional African tailored dresses and top and skirt sets. The youth of Kampala are equally interested in dressing fashionably, though they follow a different set of trends than the older generations, often embracing the styles they see on “television,” or finding substitutions that look like “what 50 Cent is putting on.” (Interview 50: 2008) One woman summed up these practices, declaring that, “Ugandans really know what is good to wear...They care about the look.” (Interview 42: 2008)

In Uganda, the common compliment given to someone who is dressed well is, “You look so smart.” (Interview 44: 2008; Interview 42: 2008) Dressing smartly holds a great deal of importance in the Ugandan society and smart clothing has a lot of social capital in the public sphere. One female interviewee explained that, “People here think that you gain respect by your fashion, how you put on, you hair,” and that as a society, “we admire a lot.” (Interview 4: 2008) Another interviewee extended this notion further by elucidating how class and status is immediately conveyed and assumed through what a person wears, noting that, “In our society people who dress well, fashionable, are seen as well-off, well-to-do.” (Interview 5: 2008) These concepts are instilled in Ugandans at a young age. A university-educated woman explained,

“When you are growing up, you are raised up trying to dress well. Everyone tries to dress very well, at home— I think in the whole country. So you find it really very hard to move through the street when you have a torn jean or a torn shirt because you see everyone dressing very well. You know there is much

importance on looking so nice...and it really becomes very hard if you're not going to dress very well." (Interview 44: 2008)

Dress plays an important social role— often determining the first impressions and judgments Ugandans make— and it requires much effort from the individual to succeed at consistently dressing smartly. Furthermore, the majority of Ugandans can afford little more than the most basic necessities, making all attempts to dress well more difficult. The combination of style with affordability is why mivumba plays a particularly large role in this culture of dressing smartly. The same woman went on to describe this relationship between smartness and mivumba, first noting that in order to be smart,

"You have to buy very nice clothes. Where are you going to find the very nice clothes? The very nice clothes you really want could be very expensive, those that go for like 200,000 or 300,000. [shillings] But you still want something that would be very high quality and very unique. So the only alternative is getting something which is second-hand. There are very cheap, but they look very nice." (Interview 44: 2008)

Mivumba is in many ways the tool that allows Ugandans of lower and middle socio-economic status to participate successfully in the local clothing culture. If the average income for formally employed individuals is 36,200 shillings per month and "one-third of the employees in the private sector earned less than 20,000 per month," in 2007 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics: 2007, iv) and individuals have to stretch that money to pay for food, shelter, school fees and a myriad of other living expenses, it is no surprise that over the past twenty years mivumba has been so deeply integrated into Ugandan culture. In mivumba, people can find clothes that meet the demands of dressing standards at an affordable price.

*Why is Mivumba preferred by Ugandans?*

I posed the questions, "Do you like mivumba personally?" and "What do you like about it?" to 53 Ugandans in this study. The overwhelming trend my responses show is that mivumba is viewed extremely positively in Kampala and is a valued commodity among people from all ranges of socio-economic status, class, profession, and of both genders. Overall, 47 of the 53 interviewees stated that mivumba is their preferred clothing option. Even the six individuals who declared that they do not like mivumba, who gave responses like, "we are poor so we have to buy mivumba. Poor people must wear mivumba," (Interview 59: 2008) could not deny that mivumba has truly helped Ugandans to clothe themselves and their families as well as provided employment for many people. (Interview 6: 2008; Interview 59: 2008)

The strongest trend that my data shows is that this range of Ugandans appreciate mivumba for the same reasons— mivumba is unique, it is fashionable, it is long-lasting, it is cheap and in all of these categories preferable to the poor-quality brand new clothing products that are available in Uganda. In the current Ugandan clothing market there are no other types of clothing that provide all four of these characteristics. One man asserted that, “People go in for mivumbas because I think our market does not provide the quality they want and it is the best alternative.” (Interview 5: 2008) The other two types of clothing that are available and somewhat affordable are the “so-called new” clothes that are imported from countries in East Asia, and clothing that is produced in Uganda. One man cleverly observed that actually, “the Chinese goods led to an increase in the demand for mivumba,” (Interview 50: 2008) because the desirable qualities they lack—especially durability— are fulfilled by mivumba. Clothing that is produced in Uganda is available, though much less readily because there are only two factories that are currently producing clothes, (Asiimwe: May 2008) and it is widely accepted that products Made-in-Uganda are somewhat more expensive and less fashionable than mivumba. Both of these alternatives are inferior to mivumba in style, durability, and price, so it no surprise that approximately 81% of all garment purchases in Uganda are mivumba. (Dougherty: 2004) In the context the Ugandan clothing market, the perception that new clothing is intrinsically superior to used is turned upside-down; Most people would “rather buy the old stuff,” than the new. (Interview 42: 2008)

#### *Mivumba versus New Clothing from China and East Asia*

Over half of my interviewees said that uniqueness of mivumba clothing is what drives them to choose it. When giving their responses, people often highlighted the “monotonous” (Interview 12: 2008) qualities of the new clothing imported from China and East Asia, explaining that the because these cheap new clothes are mass produced, “You can find four people wearing the same new dress— it is like uniforms, which is not the case with mivumba.” (Interview 36: 2008) Three separate interviewees described that people who put on the new clothes from China wear the “Kampala uniform.” (Interview 44; 2008; Interview 46: 2008; Interview 60: 2008) Unlike manufactured clothes that come in large quantities of the same style, same size, and same color, mivumba pieces only come once. The ability to stand out of the crowd because of your fashion, to have one’s own signature style, is something that many Ugandans desire. One woman put it bluntly— “I don’t want to wear what everyone else is

wearing.” (Interview 46: 2008) A mother gave an example of how this notion is established in individuals at a young age by telling an anecdote about her seven year-old daughter:

“I don’t want to wear something that everyone wears, even my daughter hates it. You buy her a cloth for Christmas –because it’s Christmas and you buy new stuff– and some Auntie bought her something new and she wore it once and said ‘I can’t wear it again. Everyone wears it.’” (Interview 42: 2008)

Uniqueness is another established feature in the culture of dressing smartly that steers people away from buying new clothing that is produced in bulk and towards *mivumba*– where it is extremely rare to find even two items that are identical. Though the East Asian products are comparably priced or even less expensive than good *mivumba*, the individuality that can be presented through second-hand clothing is valued more than the price.

All of my interviewees agreed that the poor quality of the new Asian goods is what discourages Ugandans from buying them. After trade liberalization in 1987, poor quality, inexpensive clothing from countries like China, Malaysia, and Indonesia began to flood the Ugandan market that has “religiously opened up” to all matter of cheap foreign goods. (Interview 47: 2008; Asimwe: April 2008) Many Ugandans believe that these substandard products are a blatant act of dumping– the industrializing Asian countries taking advantage of the unprotected Ugandan markets and making a good amount of profit for products that took nominal money to produce– which only exploits and harms Ugandans. The majority of my sources stated that these new Asian clothes leak color, fade quickly, and do not last for more than a couple months. One woman described that, “The Chinese shops here are selling third class Chinese clothes– whereby you wash it twice and it tears.” (Interview 47: 2008) Many Ugandans also understand that China is capable of making very good quality clothing, either because they have experience or knowledge of clothing in other countries or they see Made-in-China labels sewn into some *mivumba*; they are disheartened that the only Chinese products they have access to are poor quality. On one occasion, a female market vendor from Owino asked me if I knew why China sends such bad products to Ugandans. (Interview 12: 2008) Taken aback and saddened by her question, I tried my best to explain how more powerful countries exploit the markets of poorer countries through trade agreements, all the while witnessing how these global arrangements can hurt individuals in developing nations and make them feel inferior. While many trade ministries, manufacturers unions, and journalists around the world have derided the supposed degradation of

the second-hand clothing trade in Africa, they should take a closer look at how poor quality new clothes are perhaps even more offensive.

Mivumba, though they have been previously worn, are “original” garments from Europe and America that have the best quality and durability of any clothing in the world. (Interview 5: 2008; Interview 13: 2008; Interview 51: 2008) All of my sources agreed that mivumba has a long-life span and they were satisfied with the amount of wear they were able to get out of a mivumba cloth. A woman happily exclaimed, “Some things last forever! I have shoes that I’ve worn and worn and gotten tired of. Yes, from mivumba.” (Interview 42: 2008) In this way mivumba has also “really helped us [Ugandans], especially with children’s clothes.” (Interview 4: 2008) Children require new clothing much more frequently than adults because they grow quickly and they wear out clothes during play. The majority of my interviewees told me that new children’s clothing and particularly children’s shoes are very costly— often much more expensive than new clothing for adults. Cheap alternatives from East Asia last for even shorter periods of time when worn by active children. Thus, mivumba becomes the top option for children’s clothes, preferable to new clothing in terms of price and durability.

#### *Mivumba versus locally manufactured clothing*

Though the Ugandan textile industry is largely inactive, locally produced clothing is still available even though there is inconsequential demand for it in the population. Today Ugandan factories are generally involved in producing uniforms for schools and state institutions, like the Police. (Asiimwe: April 2008) One recent campaign, called Freedom, was implemented by the textile company NYTIL in order to encourage the public to buy clothing produced by Ugandan manufacturers, yet it has failed to flourish for one key reason which a KCC official pointed out, “Those textiles are expensive. They are not affordable.” (KCC Official: 2008) Production costs, made more expensive by the fact that Uganda must import all of its factory inputs, require the prices to be higher for locally-made clothing than for mivumba. While the Uganda Manufacturers Association has identified mivumba as its main enemy is the struggle for a local market (Ministry of Finance Official: 2008), it is the Made-in-Uganda clothing itself that deters customers, not a blind “addiction” to mivumba. (Kayongo: 2008) Well over half of my interviewees informed me time and time again that Ugandan-made clothes are inferior in uniqueness, style, and quality to mivumba. One woman stated that clothes made in Uganda are “not classy” (Interview 44: 2008) and then used the story of a secondary school that ordered locally-produced shoes to explain the lack of style and fashion in these products:

“I don’t know much about the industries in Uganda but there was one in Kawempe– they tried to make shoes. I know there was a secondary school where they would always bring those shoes to their school then put them on the children and they look very, very ugly.” (Interview 44: 2008)

A lack of development in local fashion design coincides with the lack of development in clothing production– as clothing designers are unnecessary if clothes are not being produced. Another woman declared that, “The designers need to produce what the consumers want otherwise they will not be able to compete with mivumba.” (Interview 47: 2008) The history of the decline and stagnation of a once flourishing textile industry has left a complicated scenario for the manufacturers of the present that is almost inescapable due the combination of many factors– high production costs, little technical expertise or skill in fashion and design, high competition from mivumba and Chinese clothes, the inability to stop these products from entering Uganda because of trade liberalization, and the restrictions on government subsidy of industry from donor institutions. The woman who told the anecdote summed it up perfectly, “If I get this shoe and put ‘Made in Uganda,’ people won’t buy it. But if there is a label made from the U.S., many people will buy it. The only reason why people won’t buy that kind of thing is because the things made in Uganda are not really yet of good quality.” (Interview 44: 2008) This statement describes how Ugandans choose to integrate Western commodities into their culture because of the benefits they offer, not because they are simply mimicking more Western fashion practices. In the Ugandan context, mivumba is preferred clothing because of its inherent superiority over other “new” clothes, regardless of its origin in the West.

*The future: Will Mivumba ever Leave Uganda?*

I posed this question to the same 53 Ugandans to try and understand if they perceive mivumba to be a temporary solution that allows Ugandans to afford clothing or as a more permanent institution in the clothing market. I got mixed responses with approximately half of the interviewees claiming that mivumba will leave Uganda eventually– either because the government will put a complete ban on it to revitalize local industry or the country will develop to a level where second-hand clothes are no longer needed. The other half believes that mivumba will always come to Uganda, either as a permanent source of clothing for the poor or because Ugandans from all classes will still demand it even if local industries produce affordable clothing. One woman described that even if there is a total ban mivumba will be smuggled in– “Hook or crook they will come. They’ll have to smuggle them somehow, but they will still come. Yes, because people really love wearing and buying mivumba.” (Interview 42: 2008) Her

sentiments show that mivumba is a beloved part of Ugandan culture— thought of as more than a solution in the constraints of poverty.

Most of the people who think the government will ban mivumba stressed that they “cannot introduce a total ban when there is no alternative.” (Interview 1: 2008) This fact was proved in 2005 when the taxes on mivumba jumped to their highest rate in recent history under the new Common External Tariff for the East African Community, at 50%. (CET: 2007; Ministry of Finance Official: 2008) Many traders in Kampala believed this was an attempt to slowly phase mivumba out of East Africa and they took their anger to the streets and rioted for three days. (Rutaagi: 2005); “people were making a lot of noise,” (Interview 47: 2008) and eventually a proposal from the Kampala City Traders (KACITA) was approved by the EAC Secretariat and the tax rate on mivumba was lessened by 5%— now resting at 45% for the past three years. (Ministry of Finance Official: 2008) The people of Uganda are the largest stakeholders in the debate to ban or allow mivumba and they are most willing to speak out if their needs are threatened. Many of my interviewees stressed that in this ongoing argument, there are more important issues at hand than local industry, such as the large amount of people employed in mivumba. A KCC official stressed that, “More than 3000 families work in mivumba in Owino. Now if you stop it, how would they survive? How would they live? What would be the alternative business that you’d give them immediately? It is not there.” (KCC Official, Revenue Department) To the majority of Ugandans I interviewed, the worrisome problem does not lie in the mivumba trade, but in weak institutions and a lack of formal employment. This demonstrates how the ideologies that rouse anger or opposition to mivumba often move institutions to accuse the commodity of causing problems that are in truth catalyzed by much bigger problems— such as development and controlled inequality among nation-states in the global market.

## **Conclusions**

Though the “export of used clothing from the West to developing countries... may on first sight appear to be a textbook example of the West’s continued exploitation of the rest,” (Hansen: 1995, 133) the inventiveness, eclectic construction, and local culture surrounding the second-hand market characterizes it as more than Africans receiving the charity of rich countries. (Guyer and Hansen: 2001, 198) It is instead an entire market system that is at once a solution to the failure of domestic textile and clothing industries and the lack of jobs in the formal economy.

While second-hand clothing is considered a Western commodity— and its spread throughout Sub-Saharan Africa a supposed conformation that consumer culture subjugates the cultures of peoples in less developed countries— this study proves that the complex Ugandan systems of trade, clothing practices, and their corresponding ideologies transform used clothing into a fundamentally local commodity, *mivumba*. The incorporation of *mivumba* into the present culture was a historical process that has taken place over the past half-century. The decline of Ugandan's industrial base and the emergence of the informal sector in the 1970s, coupled with international economic policies of structural adjustment beginning in the 1980s, reveals that *mivumba* was slowly integrated into the local culture as a solution to the lack of basic necessities, formal employment, and formerly available clothing options. Furthermore, since *mivumba* was once viewed as something degrading and inferior by Ugandans themselves, the fact that it took almost two decades for it to be embraced by a large portion of the population shows that Ugandans chose to integrate this western commodity when it became beneficial to do so. As *mivumba* became a part of Ugandan life, it also became a vital part of the local economy and employment base; today the complex systems of trade between recycled textile exporters abroad, importers in Kampala, wholesale vendors, retail vendors in Owino market and boutiques, and customers are evidence of the eclectic and flexible capacities of the contemporary African market system. These local institutions not only facilitate the flow of affordable goods in the urban sector, they provide considerable opportunities for employment and are continually able to absorb the working population for whom there is no formal employment. Finally, the local perceptions and ideologies of the present day *mivumba* market show that second-hand clothing has become a part of the collective cosmology of the population as it was integrated over time into common practice and trade. The values associated with *mivumba* involve the fundamentally Ugandan notions of dressing smartly and conveying uniqueness through dress. Local perceptions also show that *mivumba* is preferred because it is superior in many ways to all other clothing options available to Ugandans. Here, the Western notion that new is inherently better than old, does not apply in their cultural context. Thus, the local history, present day trade systems, and culture of *mivumba* clearly demonstrate that in the second-hand clothing trade the “specific effects of the global material forces depend on the various ways they are mediated in local cultural schemes.” (Sahlins: 1994: 414) To analyze *mivumba* in Kampala, we must contextualize this commodity in local history, practice, and perceptions.

## Recommendations

First and foremost, more detailed ethnographic research into the local mivumba culture is necessary as this brief report is probably the first documentation of the history, systems, and perceptions of mivumba in Uganda. As mentioned before, the lack of scholarship on second-hand clothing in Africa has made international journalists, manufacturers associations, and trade ministries the authorities on this global trade rather than the people who wear it or earn their livelihood through it. The door is now open for countless studies to be done on more specific trends in the Ugandan mivumba culture.

For example, there is great opportunity to do a study of how second-hand clothing becomes a commodity through which Ugandans reproduce notions of social hierarchy based on socio-economic status or wealth through their appearance. Throughout this project I observed many ways in which class is conveyed or inferred through dress and Ugandan standards of dressing “smartly.” Since the majority of Ugandans cannot afford new clothes that are fashionable/unique and of good quality– the two most important factors in clothes purchasing for Ugandans– mivumba is the preferred alternative way of clothing that can be used to express notions of higher status. One could take this topic even further and research the ways in which low-income Ugandans can use the affordable alternative of mivumba to pass as members of a higher social class by dressing smartly. Additionally, it would be interesting to analyze how the different classes of mivumba are used to perpetuate socio-economic class divisions.

Finally, this research project only focused on one side of the second-hand clothing story because the local point of view had never been given a voice in the institutionalized discussions on used clothing inside or outside Uganda. Given more time, I would have explored the present day clothing and textile sector in Uganda and their opposition to the importation of mivumba further by: researching the initiatives they have taken to stop its importation, proposals they have submitted to the Ministry of Finance and the EAC Secretariat, and their general opinions about mivumba outside of its disastrous affects on their industry. I would have also contacted the Kampala City Traders Association (KACITA), which is the group of business leaders in Kampala that submitted the proposal in 2006 to the EAC Secretariat for the tax rate to be reduced on mivumba imports. This proposal was approved by both the EAC and later by the Ugandan Parliament. (Ministry of Finance Official: 2008) The tax rate was thus decreased by 5 percent to 45 percent in the Common External Tariff for 2007. (CET: 2007) Talking to these

organizations with opposing viewpoints would paint a better picture of how the Ugandan Ministry of Finance responds to different interest groups concerning sensitive imports like mivumba. It would be interesting to see what stakeholders are given more support by the Ministry of Finance and if perceptions about the supposed inferiority or degrading nature of mivumba pervaded some of these interactions.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Uganda Revenue Authority, Total Import per month of Used Items for 2007*

#### Total Import per month of Used Items

Item	Year	Month	Net Weight (kg)	Value in Ushs.	CIF Value in Dollars	DUTY
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Jan	2,571,960	3,849,286,127	2,141,728.71	1,531,560,033
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Feb	2,460,322	4,039,250,993	2,252,374.61	1,442,942,071
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Mar	2,468,748	3,442,972,641	1,950,195.47	1,441,573,040
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Apr	2,217,396	3,129,971,655	1,777,988.88	1,296,793,535
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	May	2,588,698	3,574,834,838	2,057,103.70	1,512,335,961
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Jun	2,470,077	3,452,119,526	2,019,361.99	1,392,698,908
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Jul	2,987,654	4,031,797,234	2,408,509.82	1,690,434,874
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Aug	2,730,570	3,725,173,276	2,259,556.87	1,468,392,938
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Sep	2,450,946	3,336,401,700	1,943,417.96	1,380,052,940
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Oct	2,660,177	3,743,627,281	2,104,911.55	1,588,839,421
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Nov	2,510,098	3,726,341,094	2,120,347.50	1,463,208,601
Worn clothing and other worn articles	2007	Dec	2,400,976	3,225,728,621	1,879,247.63	1,353,843,416
Totals			30,517,622	43,277,504,986	24,914,744.69	17,562,675,738

*Appendix B, following page: Map of Kampala with locations of mivumba trade sites*

*Appendix C, following Map of Kampala: Ground Elevation Plan Indicating Market Zones for St. Balikuddembe (Owino) Market. Population estimates for the Market from 2005.*







*Appendix D: Interview Guides***Interview Guide for Owino Mivumba Vendors and Retail Shop Owners**

1. How long have you had your shop in Owino/Wandegeya/Kampala? How did you get started selling mivumba? How much rent do you pay for your shop per month?
2. What kind of clothes do you sell and how do you select them?
3. Where do you get your clothes?
4. How do you decide what clothes/bales to purchase from the wholesalers?
5. Do you know how these clothes come into Uganda? What ports do they come in from overseas to Africa?
6. How long has mivumba been in Uganda? Do you know anything about the history of mivumba? Did people used to think of it the way they do now?
7. How is business going? What challenges do you face– high prices, competition?
8. How do you feel about mivumba? Do you like it, personally? What about it do you like? What about it do you dislike?
9. Do you think mivumba is good for the people of Uganda?
10. Will mivumba ever leave Uganda?

**Interview Guide for Mivumba Importers**

1. How long has your company been importing mivumba? How long have you been in the mivumba business?
2. What made you decide to get into the business of importing mivumba? Have you found it a good business to be in?
3. How many bales do you import per month?
4. What companies do you import from? Where are they based?
5. How do the clothes come to Uganda– what port do they come in from, who brings them to the border and to Kampala?
6. What is the process for getting mivumba through customs? Is it difficult to bring mivumba in?
7. How are the taxes on mivumba? Have they gotten higher over the years? Why do you think this is?
8. Do you sell any of the bales to other companies or just to individual retailers? Do you ship any bales to rural shops?
9. Do you know anything about the history of mivumba in Uganda? Did people used to think of it the way they do now?
10. Why do you think there is such high demand for mivumba here in Kampala? Why do people love it?
11. What are your personal views about mivumba? Is it good/bad for the economy and Uganda?
12. Do you see the mivumba market ending in Uganda in the future? What will that mean for your business?

**Interview Guide for Sample of Ugandan Citizens**

1. Do you buy mivumba? Where?
2. How much of your clothing is mivumba?

3. How do you feel about mivumba? Do you like it/ dislike it?
4. What do you like about it? Dislike about it?
5. Do you know anything about the history of mivumba? Did people used to think of it the way they do now?
6. Where does the best mivumba come from?
7. I heard the government places high taxes on mivumba, do you know why that is?
8. Will mivumba ever leave Uganda?