

PRESS RELEASE

Trashing the brand, branding trash

Up to 20% of the UK's used clothing may be exported to India for recycling into flock or fibre, including 12% in the form of sweaters sent to Indian shoddy factories.

Obtaining stocks from charities, textile banks and door-to-door collections, commercial textile recyclers export the remaining 60% for reuse markets in Eastern Europe, West Africa and South Asia. Another 20% is sold for recycling as wipers and flock. Accurate industry figures are not routinely collated.

In 2010, the UK trade had a 14.3% share of the world market, ie nearly 320,000 tonnes, worth £276.4 million (UN Comtrade).

The global market for second-hand clothing was worth \$2.97 billion

Worn winter clothing, discarded in the Global North, may be sent for fibre reclamation in shoddy recycling factories in north India. There it is transformed into recycled yarn, which is then woven into poor quality blankets and cloth, largely for the domestic market.

Shoddy factories are dusty, dirty and potentially dangerous places to work, and as part of the informal economy, remain unregulated. Labour is wholly sub-contracted, unorganized and low-paid, without state benefits and with few, usually unenforced, rights.

The trade is depicted as providing an affordable resource (blankets) for those with little income and giving work to >60,000 migrants. It recycles our discarded clothing out of sight, helping us to ignore its ever-increasing quantity. It also raises funds for the charities who collect it, providing money for often totally-unrelated goals, yet perhaps through a means that would fail to accord with their core values if sustainability in its widest sense is included.

This research project locates the Indian industry within the wider political economy of used clothing. It critiques narratives of recycling that promote its sustainability, while ignoring the invisible places in which it is undertaken, and its impact upon those who perform the dirty work.

This is an unsustainable longer-term system for recycling used clothing from the UK. It allows the wasteful destruction of often-wearable clothing turned into low-value products, and underpins an extractive industry based upon cheap labour and minimum capital investment. We have few opportunities to make an informed choice as to how to dispose of our clothing, unlike the power of the consumer able to choose fairly-traded or ethical products.

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Everything Must Go @ Worn Clothing
www.wornclothing.co.uk

The Waste of the World www.thewasteoftheworld.org

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