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Taking stock: Continuity and change in charity retail

Violet Broadhead
University of Bristol, United Kingdom | *v.broadhead.2019@bristol.ac.uk*

REVIEWED BOOKS
Suzanne Horne and Avril Maddrell
Charity Shops: Retailing, Consumption and Society
London: Routledge, 2002, £47.69 ebook, (ISBN: 9780203167458), 160pp.

Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe
Second-hand Cultures
Oxford: Berg, 2003, £26.99 pbk, (ISBN: 9781859736777), 288pp.

Karen Tranberg Hansen
Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Zambia
London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000, $37.00 pbk, (ISBN: 9780226315812), 314pp.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, a convergence of the currents of academic thought and shifts in the landscapes of production, retailing, and consumption prompted a surge of interest in the charity retail sector. By disputing the prevailing conceptualizations of consumption as the simple endpoint of linear economic processes, the cultural turn had opened up the field for the analysis of multiple, complex, cycles of commodification. Appadurai's landmark volume, *The Social Life of Things* (1986), explored the notion that objects have social lives – or cultural biographies (Kopytoff 1986) – moving through time and space and changing in value and meaning depending on the social context. Similarly, Miller's (1987) contention that

consumption can create inalienable culture – as consumers incorporate mass-produced goods into their identity construction and social relations – destabilized the long-standing analytic distinction between gifts and commodities, and challenged production as the sole means of creating value. These theoretical developments were accompanied by the proliferation and diversification of sites of second-hand exchange in the UK (Gregson and Crewe 2003), and the expansion of international trade, including an increase in the volume of second-hand goods following long-established routes from affluent countries to developing ones (Hansen 2000). The result was an interdisciplinary body of literature which ranged from practical tips for charities beginning trading (Brooks 1996; Holden 1996; Palmer et al. 1999; Whithear 1999) to more culturally oriented work on the spaces and processes of second-hand consumption (Gregson et al. 2000; Parsons 2000; Broadbridge and Parsons 2003).

This review revisits three foundational contributions to the study of charity shops and second-hand economies: *Charity Shops: Retailing, Consumption and Society* (Horne and Maddrell 2000); *Second-hand Cultures* (Gregson and Crewe 2003); and *Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Zambia* (Hansen 2000). There are several reasons for doing so. These books are exemplary of a second generation of consumption studies, extending the discipline into new empirical terrain, and tempering the heavy emphasis of postmodern scholarship on the symbolic aspects of consumption work by highlighting the materiality of consumption practices, the mundane and functional nature of a great deal of consumption, and the intrinsic interrelationship between consumer activities and the political and economic processes surrounding production and distribution (Miller et al. 1998). The authors offer thorough accounts of second-hand exchange, aspects of which have remained consistent to the present day (and indeed stretching back much further in history than the early 2000s). Furthermore, as the moment of focus on second-hand worlds dissipated shortly after their publication, key issues highlighted by these books for further research have to date received little attention. Finally, in addition to some continuities, there have been significant changes in the spaces and processes of second-hand exchange in the intervening years. Despite fears for the future of the charity retail sector at the turn of the century, it has continued to expand: at the last count, there were over 11,000 charity shops (around 4,000 more than at the end of the 1990s), employing nearly a quarter of a million volunteers and processing hundreds of thousands of tonnes of discarded clothing annually (Charity Retail Association 2021) – although it is worth noting that these figures predate the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes in the wider retail sector and historic events such as the 2008 recession, the pandemic, and the increasingly urgent climate crisis, further compound the need for renewed attention to this business which is so contingent on the socioeconomic circumstances of its environment. As indicated by the recent *Secondhand Cultures in*

Unsettled Times symposium, charity shops have once again come to capture the zeitgeist, offering a lens on some of the most prominent topics in contemporary social science. In anticipation of another concerted wave of charity shop scholarship, this essay revisits some of the most significant contributions to charity retail literature, and considers the foundation they lay for new work.

CHARITY SHOPS: RETAILING, CONSUMPTION AND SOCIETY

Charity Shops: Retailing, Consumption and Society by Suzanne Horne and Avril Maddrell provides the first ever overview of the charity retail sector. Collating survey and interview data from their own extensive empirical work, and secondary data from longitudinal trade surveys, the authors draw out practical and theoretical matters to appeal to both retailers and researchers. In doing so, they grapple with the most pressing issues of the day: the tensions arising from the widespread professionalisation of the sector, and its apparent stagnation after years of growth.

Following a brief history of the origins and development of the sector, the theoretical framing for the book is split across two chapters. The first of these explores social scientific perspectives on consumption and identity as they relate to charity retail, including the social and ritual aspects of consumption, the capacity of material things to change in symbolic and economic value, and the ambiguous relationship between charity shop participation and class (chapter one). In the second chapter, Horne and Maddrell draw on retail and marketing theory to develop models of the sector which capture its diversity, in terms of both the varied size and scope of retail operations, and the attitudes of stakeholders within it (chapter two). Subsequent chapters give insight into a series of substantive themes: the demographics of charity shop customers and the specificities of their engagement with this site of consumption (chapter three); the sourcing and management of donated stock (chapter four); the motivations of volunteers and complexities of managing the voluntary workforce (chapter five); and pricing strategies of charity retailers (chapter six). Finally, Horne and Maddrell use the notion of a lifecycle as a theme to draw together the findings of the previous chapters; the milestones which influence the engagement of staff, volunteers, shoppers and donors; the goods moving through cycles of ownership, invested with and divested of meanings and value; and the progression of the sector itself, having grown in size and scope to face new challenges (chapter seven).

A key strength of this book is the authors' insistence on attending equally to the economic and cultural aspects of the charity retail phenomenon, exploring the embedding of charity shops in people's lives in multiple, over-lapping ways. Charity shop consumption is argued

to "cut across the functional/cultural dualism", incorporating both considerations of cost and symbolic meaning (Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 14). Donations are acknowledged, not only as a source of value, but as a means of managing transitions such as moving house, or working through loss of a loved one. The retirees who form the majority of the charity shop workforce use this arena to negotiate identity and develop support networks; Horne and Maddrell examine their contribution both in terms of the financial value of their work hours, and the less tangible aspects of facilitating sociality within the shop, providing links to the community, and disseminating awareness of the cause.

This book speaks to a particular historical moment for the charity retail sector. With the runaway expansion in shop numbers appearing to have peaked, and retailers faced with fierce competition for stock and volunteers, Horne and Maddrell (2002) highlight risks and opportunities facing the sector. They also encourage self-reflection from their practitioner readership, repeatedly posing the question: 'what business are we in?'. This appraisal relates specifically to the tension between the social contribution of charity shops and their professionalisation; Horne and Maddrell (2000, p. 118) note the often-unfulfilled potential for charity shops to act as "a safety net for the socially excluded in society", with the most professionalised outlets being the least likely to offer hospitality and affordability, and urge practitioners not to view commercial and social goals as mutually exclusive. As noted above, the serious contraction predicted by Horne, Maddrell, and others, ultimately did not come to pass, and commercial retailing methods and the prioritisation of fundraising have since been established successfully as a sector-wide normative. Nonetheless, there is evidence of the persistence of idiosyncratic and highly social practices within charity shops (Fitton 2013). It seems likely, then, that the tension identified here continues to be negotiated.

Although the broad scope of the book is an obvious strength, some important subjects warrant more sustained consideration than they receive here. The authors note the growth of less-than-voluntary forms of charity shop participation, such as community service orders, placement schemes for licensed prisoners, and jobseeker's allowance claimants volunteering on pain of benefit sanction through Blair's New Deal. However, this issue is addressed largely in terms of the implications for management, the "greater risks and difficulties" (p. 96) of taking volunteers from this pool, with little attention to the perspectives of the 'volunteers' themselves or the ideological implications of state-mandated charity shop participation. While New Deal placements have now ended following a high-profile anti-workfare campaign (Sharman 2014; Isaac 2015), Maddrell's (2017) recent work with licensed prisoners usefully supplements these gaps. Based on a ten-year study with key stakeholders involved in day-release charity shop placement schemes, she highlights the potential for mutual benefits, but also contingency and fragility, as a prisoner's failure to meet the expectations

of shop management may result in the termination of the placement and loss of privileges within the prison, or even halt progress to parole and release. By hosting licensed prisoners, charity shops become "dynamic permeable transcarceral spaces", acting as an extension of the prison and "fulfilling a number of shadow state functions" such as surveillance and rehabilitation (Maddrell 2017, p. 223).

Horne and Maddrell provide a thorough account of the demographics and motivations of both shoppers and volunteers, but there is scope for research expanding our understandings of the experiences of paid charity shop employees now that this form of staffing is almost universal. Broadbridge and Parsons (2003) have highlighted the increased burden on charity shop managers, as they seek to fulfil commercial expectations as well as to respond to the social needs of the community. They also offer an incisive discussion of the significance of gender roles in relation to charity shop management, highlighting how entrenched occupational gender norms, the low status of the sector, poor pay and limited potential for career progression, contribute to the ghettoising of charity shop management as a female career, such that the considerable skill and effort involved in the role are rarely acknowledged (Broadbridge and Parsons 2005). There is, however, more work to be done here.

Finally, Horne and Maddrell call for research on the relationship between ethnicity and charity shop participation. They highlight that the majority of the volunteers surveyed are white, and suggest that tendencies to recruit through personal networks of staff and current volunteers may serve to homogenise the volunteer base and alienate some customers and potential volunteers. This is a subject which remains poorly understood, subsequent research having failed to address it. As we will explore below in the concluding discussion, then, there are opportunities to build on the groundwork Horne and Maddrell have laid, to develop more specialised and critical engagements with the contemporary field.

SECOND-HAND CULTURES

The self-stated 'mission' of *Second-hand cultures* by Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe (2003, p. 1) is "to show that second-hand worlds matter". Expanding the purview of retail geography beyond "cathedrals of consumption" to ordinary goods in ordinary spaces, the authors draw on comparative case studies of car-boot sales, charity shops and retro shops to demonstrate that the second-handedness of these sites is critical to the creation of value within them Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 4).

Through ethnographic research incorporating large-scale surveys, documentary analysis, key informant interviews and extensive participant observation, Gregson & Crewe establish the

premises – i.e., generally held sets of assumptions about the nature and purpose of second-hand - and the spatialised principles of exchange they connect to in different second-hand worlds. These premises are shaped by consumers as well as retailers, creating potential for tension and even rupture over the modes of selling and buying deemed appropriate by different stakeholders. Retailers are shown to use the symbolic properties of locations (chapter 2) and retail interiors (chapter 3) to position themselves in relation – or opposition – to mainstream first-hand retailers. Retro shops invoke 'the alternative', avoiding "bland" city centres and bemoaning the gentrification of creative/cultural quarters which brings chain stores and the "wrong sort of people" (Gregson and Crewe 2003, pp. 36-37). In contrast, the move of charity shops onto the high street is an attempt to constitute "'proper shops' through proper, appropriate locations" (Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 41). While both of these modes of exchange assume the transference of certain principles from the first cycle, at car-boot sales the absence of formal retailing paraphernalia allows the exchange process to be constituted from scratch in a playful suspension of the conventions of first-hand. Consumers are also shown to place considerable emphasis on the distinction between first- and second-hand worlds (chapter 4), looking to the latter for opportunities to find bargains, express their agency, and enact skill and distinction. The second part of the book attends to the biographies of second-hand goods, exploring the sourcing strategies of traders and disposal in the domestic sphere (chapter 5), post-purchase rituals (chapter 6), and practices of gifting and collection (chapter 7).

Second-hand cultures is an engaging book which effectively captures the ambiance of these familiar spaces of exchange, at the same time as revealing unexpected details of their essential nature. This is due, in part, to the authors' ethnographic engagement with their subject, and their close reading of participants' talk, as detailed in the instructive account of research methods and analysis in the appendix. A clear take-away is the value of ethnography for researching these kinds of spaces and activities. Gregson and Crewe also clearly draw out the implications of their research for broader theories of exchange and consumption. Second-hand worlds challenge commodity chain models which privilege production over consumption, demonstrating that consumers, too, transform the value of objects through appropriation, use and disposal. This last stage is highlighted as a particular gap in the academic literature, accounts of consumption as identity-construction having neglected the way that this process "is as much about constituting alienable goods as it is the inalienable" through discarding that which no longer fits our self-concept (Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 6). Building on the landmark work of Appadurai and Kopytoff (1986), attending to second-hand cultures provides rich insight into the biographies of things, as they move through space, time and regimes of value in ways which are "non-linear, unpredictable, fortuitous and subjective" (Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 142).

As in Horne and Maddrell's (2002 p. 196) work, the sense of risk for charity retail looms large here. It is said to be 'crunch time' for the professionalisation project, as inhabitants of the over-populated sector engage in "bag wars" and "volunteer poaching". Gregson and Crewe's analysis of the spatial strategies of professionalisation reveal discordance between the perspectives of retailers and customers, as retailers seek to collapse the very distinction between themselves and the first-cycle which is valued by their customers. For example, the adoption of highly regulated interiors and standardized modes of display "defeats the object of charity shopping" (Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 81) for many customers, as increasingly prescriptive retail space denies the sense of agency afforded by rummaging. The authors demonstrate how differing interpretations of the purpose of charity shops collide within shop spaces, limiting the capacity of retailers to erase the difference between first- and second-hand and exclude alternative readings of charity shops. From a present-day perspective, the strategies deemed inappropriate by Gregson and Crewe have not proved sufficiently problematic to impede the success of the sector for long. Mass-market styles of stock presentation are now the norm, and the proliferation of specialised book and furniture shops has further enhanced charity retail's resemblance to the mainstream. In terms of location, while it was once aspirational to have a shop next door to Marks & Spencer (Horne and Maddrell 2002, p. 42), during the 2000s charity retail has broken through into some of the most exclusive shopping environments in the UK. High-end 'boutique' shops are now run by most national charity retailers but exemplified by 'Mary's Living and Giving for Save the Children', the roll-out of the retailing concept from Mary Portas' televised make-over of Save the Children charity shops (Mary Queen of Charity Shops 2009). In a yet more drastic alteration to the spaces of second-hand exchange, the growth of the sustainable consumption movement has seen a number of first-cycle retailers incorporating second-hand goods into their offer. In light of these developments, then, and given Gregson and Crewe's thesis on the importance of the distinction between first- and second-hand for value-creation, there is a clear rationale for more research on this subject.

Of particular relevance to contemporary scholarship is the conclusion that "second-hand worlds provide no answers or solutions for critical consumption practices" (Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 199). Gregson and Crewe (2003, p. 198) describe their initial expectation that participants would frame their second-hand consumption as part of anti-consumerist, anti-corporate, and pro-reuse agendas, but find instead that second-hand worlds are generally valued as a means to "enable, even legitimize, 'excessive' consumption". For example, one participant "describes one of the chief attractions of charity shopping as coming away with armfuls of plastic bags!" (Gregson and Crewe 2003, p.94). The authors do find traces of potential for critical praxis, however, in the extent to which second-hand worlds appeal to

consumer agency and reflexivity: "we find those who shop in these spaces thinking hard about exchange, about value, about consumerism, about use and need. And we see them too thinking hard about what shopping ought to be about" (Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 107). Participants frequently define charity shops in opposition to the first cycle; allowing you to "retain the choice you don't really have in the high street", to "look at those things and choose the one that attracts you instead of being bombarded" (Gregson and Crewe 2003, p. 101). By throwing into relief the strategies and imperatives of first-cycle retail giants, then, it is suggested that charity shops might present the seed of a challenge to their hegemony. None the less, prefiguring their subsequent research agenda (Gregson et al. 2007a; Gregson et al. 2007b), the authors conclude that the primary significance of second-hand worlds is in relation to disposal rather than consumption, as they facilitate "potentially endless cycles of de/revalorization" and challenge the concept of a terminal 'rubbish' state (Gregson et al. 2003, p. 201). Nearly twenty years on, the tension identified here remains. Environmental discourses have become far more mainstream, and charity retail is routinely categorized as sustainable consumption. However, there is currently little evidence to suggest that this cultural shift has impacted the fundamental premises or practices of either charity shop consumers or organisations.

Once again, ethnicity emerges here as a theme for future research. Gregson and Crewe (2003, p. 213) note that a limitation of their study is the minimal participation of people of colour, a reflection of "the ways in which second-hand consumption, and particularly charity shopping, is a predominantly white activity – at least if observations made throughout our fieldwork are anything to go by", as well as the challenges of recruiting ethnic minorities, and members of other hard-to-reach groups, for academic research.

SALAULA: THE WORLD OF SECONDHAND CLOTHING AND ZAMBIA

In contrast to the previous two, the final book in the selection encourages consideration of the role of race in the second-hand trade by offering a geopolitical perspective. *Salaula,* by Karen Tranberg Hansen, provides an ethnographic account of the exchange of second-hand clothing in Zambia, illuminating the often-obscured arrangements of the global trade in second-hand clothing, whereby surplus garments donated to charity shops and thrift stores in the West make their way to marketplaces in developing nations. Against tendencies to dismiss this phenomenon as an example of well-established exploitative relations between Western and African countries, Hansen demonstrates the processes through which these goods are transformed into a dynamic, and extremely local, cultural product. *Salaula,* referring to both the garments and the trade, means "to select from a pile in the manner of rummaging", or "to pick" (Hansen 2000, p. 1). Agency and discernment are inherent within

this mode of consumption, which is informed by culturally specific norms relating to the body and sexuality, gender, age, and class, as well as individual style. The trade is argued to be shaped not only by Western patterns of consumption, but also by the hearty demand of all but the wealthiest of Zambians.

As Hansen (2000, p. 2) notes, this book "begins where most other work on clothing has stopped". Horne and Maddrell (2002, p. 114) provide only a cursory account of the sale of "sub-standard or outmoded articles" to commercial salvage firms, and the subject does not feature in *Second-Hand Cultures*. The book lays bare how massive the Western surplus is, compiling figures on export by volume, value and per capita for key players in the trade – figures which can only have grown, given the explosion of fast fashion since the time of writing. Hansen's (2000, p. 103) analysis makes clear what the common use of the term 'rag' in accounts of charity shop and thrift stores conceals - that much of this discarded clothing is only lightly used: "put simply, consumers donate so much clothing that the charities cannot handle it". Thus, in addition to the primary concern of establishing *salaula* "as a Zambian cultural economy of taste and style" (Hansen 2000, p. xiii), by delineating a commodity chain for second-hand clothing Hansen also gives a richer account of the economic, social and environmental implications of consumption in the global north.

A great strength of Hansen's work is how comprehensively it maps this complex and sprawling subject, detailing processes of which many are completely unaware and adding nuance to existing debates. The book is in two parts, the first of which provides the historical context of the trade, from its colonial origins (chapters one and two) through to Zambian independence (chapters three and four). Drawing on Fine and Leopold's system of provision model (1993), the second part of the book explores the 'production' of *salaula* in the West (chapter five), and its subsequent redefinition and recommodification through distribution (chapter six), retailing (chapter seven), and consumption (chapters eight and nine) in Zambia. The fragmented and inaccurate nature of both contemporary and historical records of the second-hand clothing trade necessitate what Le Zotte (2021) has described evocatively as 'gap-work'. Hansen employs a broad suite of data-collection methods, including surveys, interviews, reviews of news media and archival documents, participant observation, budget diaries, and student essays, weaving them together into a cohesive account of the cultural and economic dimensions of the second-hand clothing trade in Zambia.

Once in Zambia, second-hand garments come to be defined, not as rags, but as their antithesis. In the words of one participant, "*salaula* has really helped Zambians dress for without this kind of trade, many Zambians would be wearing rags" (Hansen 2000, p. 186). Clothing is at the heart of understandings of well-being in Zambia, such that wearing rags is

frequently used as metaphor for lack of access to the benefits of modernity, and *salaula* stands for choice, dignity and an improved quality of life. Hansen notes, however, that besides the increased availability of clothing, many of the long-anticipated characteristics of economic development – for example, improved education, employment, and income – have failed to materialise. In addition to demonstrating thoroughly Zambian consumption sensibilities, then, *salaula* offers insight into local experiences of development, revealing an "uneasy coexistence of freedom and constraint" as "cultural and political struggles […] are played out on the body surface" (Hansen 2000, p. 6). These tensions are exemplified by Hansen's young male participants who, on the cusp of leaving school to seek employment in Zambia's declining formal economy, wear *salaula* suits to negotiate their desired identities: "suits are the clothes I like most […] because they make me look decent and soon I will be joining the society of workers"; "I was full of joy… I like these clothes because a lot of people say that I look like a general manager and not only that, they also say that I look like a rich man" (Hansen 2000, p. 221).

From the colonial power struggles involved in imposing European-style clothing on African subjects and subsequently attempting to control their desire for it, to the development predicament of the 1990s, needs, desires, and dubious distinctions between the two emerge as a key theme within Hansen's analysis. Echoing Horne and Maddrell's argument that charity shops should be understood as both functional and cultural consumption, basic clothing needs and the desire to be well-dressed are shown to be inextricable. Hansen explains that *salaula* is preferred to locally manufactured garments not only because it is cheaper, but also because it is better quality and more stylish, allowing "consumers to put themselves together in garments that are 'not very common' and are considered 'unique' and 'exclusive'" (Hansen 2000, p. 91). Thus, *salaula* fulfils both basic clothing needs and the desires of Zambian consumers to 'cut a fine figure' in ways that the domestic garment industry cannot. With regards to the critique that *salaula* is responsible for the decline of this industry, Hansen highlights a number of other contributing factors – from the colonial suppression of Northern Rhodesia's industrial development, to the 1970s import restrictions on manufacturing equipment and raw materials, and the IMF-imposed structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s. Hansen demonstrates the extent to which consumption is not just cultural and economic, then, but also political. Condemnations of the global second-hand trade as exploitative are argued to elide its social and cultural significance, which have been neglected academically due to "a hostile, if not elitist and paternalistic, stance on the global spread of mass consumption and its assumed adverse effects on local cultures" (Hansen 2000, p. 5). Like Miller's (1998) work on Coca-Cola in Trinidad, this research demonstrates that globalised products are not consumed by passive dupes as icons of Western-ness. Hansen's work foregrounds the under-represented perspective of Zambians,

demonstrating empirically the cultural importance of *salaula* and the ways in which anxieties about globalisation and development have been channelled through the debate surrounding it.

Despite emphasizing local demand and the agency of Zambian consumers, Hansen does not shy away from the inequalities in knowledge, power, and money within the trade, which fall along familiar lines. In the global north, a vast network of textile salvagers, rag graders, recyclers, brokers, and shipping firms operate in relative opacity and stand to make large sums of money. An additional issue highlighted by Hansen, and subsequently addressed by Brooks (2013) and Norris (2015), is the significant role played by the moral discourse of charity, both in terms of monopolising the collection of used goods, and protecting the trade from scrutiny. The construction of clothing donation as an ethical behaviour elevates the sector above question, obscuring its relationship with the lucrative dealings of commercial salvage and export. Most donors have no idea how little of what is donated is sold in charity shops and thrift stores, and, at the other end of the supply chain, most *salaula* consumers believe the clothing has been donated by Western countries to Zambia. As in the production of new garments, opacity is conducive to a range of illegal and unethical practices, including exploitative labour arrangements, fraud and corruption. The policy of bales remaining sealed until their final purchase in Zambia shifts the risks of unsaleable stock downstream to individual market traders, who "speak of this business as a gamble, a Pick-A-Lot, in which the outcome hinges on chance" (Hansen 2000, p. 161). More recent work (Abimbola 2012; Brooks 2012) shows the persistence of these asymmetries, their prevalence across the second-hand trade in Africa, and the precarity of the livelihood offered to market traders. Although Hansen stresses the creative and comprehensive upcycling that takes place to make use of even the least desirable *salaula* items, a recent account of the second-hand trade in Ghana suggests that contaminated, low-quality, or otherwise unsellable items found in bales – for example, unpaired shoes – not only threaten the livelihoods of traders, but also prompt disposal methods with high environmental impact. Unusable goods are often burned, thrown into landfill or open gutter systems, causing floods and increasing the risk of cholera and malaria, such that developing nations accrue economic and human costs in relation to the management of waste originating in the West (Lorenz 2020; Dead White Man's Clothes 2018). An ongoing concern for the contemporary field, then, is how to hold the complexity and the contradictions of the global second-hand trade. Hansen's work demonstrates the extent to which consumption and waste sensibilities cannot be taken for granted, highlighting the importance of situated knowledge and intersectionality in research.

DISCUSSION

Though scholarship on second-hand worlds waned during the later 2000s and 2010s – whether due to the perceived decline of the charity retail sector, changing interests or personal circumstances of key researchers, or shifts in the wider intellectual landscape – the Secondhand Cultures Symposium indicates that they are now back on the agenda. The books reviewed here all demonstrate commitment to providing a thorough, systemic account of their subject. Second-hand exchange is shown to be a hybrid phenomenon, necessitating attention to the mainstream retail sector and the global 'rag' trade, to consumers, donors and retailers, to organisational practices, and the meanings underpinning and emanating from these activities. If this begins to sound overwhelming, the symposium also suggests that the contemporary field is well-populated, interdisciplinary, and international. In light of both continuity and change in the spaces and processes of second-hand exchange, to conclude I draw out some of the lessons learnt from these foundational texts, highlight key issues confronting the charity retail sector today, and suggest possible agendas for future research.

Social value

Central to earlier literature were the tensions arising from the professionalisation of the sector. Both Horne and Maddrell and Gregson and Crewe highlight how increasingly professional and profit-driven retail practices threaten the social contributions of charity shops. Many of the changes taking place during this period have now become industry standard, however, my own experience indicates that the appropriate degrees of commerciality and sociality for charity retailers to pursue continues to be negotiated on the ground. As such, questions persist around the extent to which charity shops are still providing cheap goods to low-income consumers, and around their actual or potential role as an informal social service for local residents. Discourses of social value have now become ubiquitous in the marketing of contemporary first-cycle brands and retailers, but acquire a distinctive tenor in relation to the charity retail sector, where, as Gregson and Crewe have explicated, multiple and conflicting notions of charity collide. The persistence of clashes of interpretation (and strength of feeling) was made clear during the UK's austerity era, when the sector's conspicuous expansion and push upmarket were thrown into relief against the struggles of the financial crisis, and prompted accusations from the media and the public of greed and unfairness (Kelly 2013; Reidy 2013). As the UK is faced with another cost-of-living crisis, we may see these debates resurfacing. Moving forward, it will be important to attend to how narratives around social contribution are mobilised by different actors in different ways.

Changing Spaces

Second-hand exchange has been shown by Gregson and Crewe to be predicated on spatialized practices, with shop interiors and locations encoding certain forms of behaviour and norms of exchange. As such, the continued evolution of the spaces and places of charity retail in the last two decades – in particular, the prevalence of high-end shops in affluent neighbourhoods and luxury retailing districts, the development of out-of-town charity superstores, and the growth of online sales - has the potential to significantly reconfigure the experiences of working and shopping in charity shops. The conceptual framework detailed in *Second-Hand Cultures* provides a good starting point for future research, which could usefully explore the premises underpinning new trading formats, the ways they are encoded spatially and organisationally, and the counter-readings they are confronted by in practice. Questions arise as to the kinds of labour practices required to maintain the visual standards of luxury retailing in the context of a charity shop, and how successfully they regulate out expectations of cheapness and hospitality. The inevitable movement into online sales, accomplished conclusively during lockdown, brings digital spaces to the mix, but also the adaptation of existing retail space to the purpose of listing goods, and the acquisition of new warehouses and offices. It requires new skills of paid staff and volunteers who perform 'listing labour' (Kneese and Palm 2020), and now that lockdown is over, the diversion of some donated items from the shop floor to web. Charity superstores provide a good case study for the interconnection between retailing geographies and practices, having higher numbers of paid staff than traditional shops, attributed to the difficulty recruiting volunteers outside of town centres (Civil Society Media 2019, p. 19). Despite often being lauded as community spaces due to their greater capacity to host events and services, their location also seems likely to reduce accessibility to some customer groups. During lockdown, superstores functioned effectively as drive-through donation centres to provide stock for online sales, raising the spectre of a move away from bricks-and-mortar altogether.

As Hansen's (2000, p. 19) work makes clear, "people in Zambia and in 'the West' exist in each other's space". Charity shops are a vital component in the global commodity chain of second-hand goods. In turn, charity retail operations as we know them are predicated on the export of surplus to Eastern Europe and the Global South. Our knowledge of these relationships remains limited (Brooks 2013; Norris 2015); they are invisible from the charity shop floor, and have been omitted from academic accounts. Furthermore, the networks of production, distribution, consumption and reuse are fluid, and continue to evolve. For example, recent EU conceptions of a green economy are informed by the proximity principle, and involve bringing waste management and recycling operations closer to home (Gregson et al. 2016). In recent years, China has also emerged as a major exporter of second-hand clothing, and has implemented bans on the import of numerous categories of used goods and materials from the West, challenging "the spatial fix that has characterised secondary

resource recovery since the 1990s" (Gregson and Crang 2019, p. 1031).

Like Hansen, Norris highlights that these gaps constitute "narrative voids" in the second-hand supply chain, "spaces which the imagination of those at both ends of the trade seek to make sense of" (2015 p. 186). It is worth noting, then that some of the spaces of the second-hand economy are imagined. The imagined future has been shown to play a key role in charity shop donation (Lovatt 2015), and Gregson, Metcalfe and Crewe (2007b) demonstrate that these imaginaries are geographical, as ideas around appropriate careers for particular kinds of goods relate to particular places and methods of disposal. Given that these kinds of imaginaries are key to the construction of second-hand exchange as 'the answer' to the problems of contemporary consumption (Roberts-Islam 2019), future research should explore the understandings of different stakeholders and the practices they structure, for example, as charity shop staff sort donated goods for sale to the local community, to rag merchants, or for landfill.

Labour

The labour relations of the contemporary charity retail sector are another important area for further study. The participation of volunteers in charity retail is key source of social value, providing social contact and helping to build confidence and skillset in a locally accessible, non-threatening environment (Broadbridge and Parsons 2003). At the same time, charity shops rely on voluntary labour to generate profit, such that volunteers occupy a dual role as the agents of charity (as fundraising), and the recipients of charity (as kindness to those in need). The homogeneity implied by the rhetorical construction of the 'voluntary workforce' in many existing accounts conceals the complexity of their role. As depicted so disquietingly in Mary Queen of Charity Shops (2009), professionalisation has also involved a re-framing of volunteers as insufficiently competent, sometimes prompting combative relationships between volunteers and staff (Goodall 2000; O'Callaghan 2019). Earlier research has drawn attention to the potential difficulties for charity shop staff (both paid and unpaid) on the frontline of negotiating the conflicting demands of the changing sector (Horne and Maddrell 2002), to the hard work of maintaining resemblance to the first-cycle with heterogeneous donated stock (Gregson and Crewe 2003), and meeting the operational demands of professionalised retailing practices while tending to the social and emotional expectations of customers and volunteers (Parsons and Broadbridge 2003). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that charity shop managers experience higher than average levels of work-related stress, with more than half of respondents to one survey describing the job as stressful or very stressful (Harrison-Evans 2016). Furthermore, some volunteers have been reluctant to return to shops following the COVID-19 pandemic (Hargrave 2021). All this raises questions of how the burdens of meeting targets and fulfilling the hybrid roles of charity retail impact

the wellbeing of paid and voluntary staff.

As recognized by the UK studies reviewed here, race is underexplored in charity shop literature. More recent research – commissioned by the Charity Retail Association to demonstrate the social value of the sector during a period of mounting public criticism – finds that class and ethnicity are not statistically significant predictors of people shopping at charity shops, however it does not speak to the demographics of volunteers or paid staff (Harrison-Evans 2016). Whether the apparent absence of ethnic minorities in charity shops is the result of academic blind spots, demographics of researched communities, recruitment practices, or cultural difference, requires further exploration.

The precarity of the livelihood afforded to second-hand vendors in developing countries and the scope for improving this are also vital issues. Hansen's work demonstrates the importance of nuance and context, and of considering simultaneously the cultural, economic, and political aspects of these kinds of practices. Similarly, Gregson and Crang (2015) have noted that arguments within an environmental justice paradigm which cast the export of used goods as dumping on the global south often miss the complexities of the reuse, repair and recovery activities that take place there, relying on linear conceptions of economic activities and a homogenizing reading of waste as a hazardous end-state. There is a need, therefore, for regular and targeted research which explores how these markets actually work (Norris 2015), so that interventions in pursuit of more equitable systems do not miss the mark. For example, while the decision to bring recycling operations within EU borders is framed as taking greater responsibility for waste in the West, Gregson et al. (2016) have shown that the poorly paid 'dirty work' of resource recovery continues to be done by itinerant migrant workers.

Sustainability

The contribution of charity shops to sustainable consumption is another complex subject which has not yet been adequately addressed in the literature. Issues raised by earlier scholars – for example, whether charity shops might actually encourage high levels of acquisition and rapid disposal – require further empirical attention, particularly in light of the vastly increased prominence of environmental issues in contemporary public discourse. Given that the purchase of new clothing in the UK is higher per capita than any other European country (Environmental Audit Committee 2019), it is questionable whether the mainstreaming of public discourses of sustainability has significantly impacted consumption practices. Statements on the growing popularity of second-hand clothing, particularly in relation to Gen Z consumers (Hoffower 2021), do not consider how this fits into wider consumption practices, for example, whether it is combined with reducing, reusing, and

repairing. How the powerful and ambiguous concept of charity interacts with others such as sustainability, waste, thrift, frugality and guilt, and how all this is negotiated through the practices of consumption and disposal which charity shops facilitate, warrant further empirical attention.

While Horne and Maddrell highlight the minimal effort of charity retailers to target 'green consumers', today many have begun to incorporate sustainability into their marketing and self-concept. How sustainability is implicated in the premises of and practices of charity retailers themselves has received extremely limited attention, however, accounts of the professionalisation project suggest the likelihood of conflict between sustainability and other retailer goals and priorities. Increasingly stringent processing of donated stock (Goodall 2000; Horne 2000; Broadbridge and Parsons 2003; Gregson and Crewe 2003) and the prioritisation of bought-in new goods (Gregson et al. 2002) have been central to ideas around professionalism and profitability, to the extent that many shops implement a zero-tolerance policy on imperfect goods, and choose not to sell low-value items. The recent governmental report on the environmental impact of the fashion industry also highlights the unwillingness of some charity retailers to engage with local repair and reuse communities (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019). Charity shops are a de facto part of the UK's disposal infrastructure, but this role has received little critical attention. The habits of consumers, then, must be contextualised by research on how the sector negotiates the introduction of sustainability as an apparent core purpose in terms of 'what business they are in'. There are questions about how this manifests through practices such as marketing, staff training, and shop operations, and with what consequences for material flows – not only of textiles, which have dominated the literature on second-hand exchange due to the long history, significant scale, and profitability of the trade (Hansen and Le Zotte 2019), but of books, furniture, electricals, and the catch-all category 'bric-a-brac'. Hansen (2004, p. 9) has noted the striking "lack of curiosity about the clothes themselves and how consumers deal with them" in negative accounts of the global second-hand trade in Western media. This point, predominantly about the suppression of Zambian perspectives, may be expanded to emphasize that the things themselves are not incidental. The specificities of particular objects – the materials they are made of, the ways that we use them, their capacity to be invested with emotion - combine with organisational practices to shape their biographies and their environmental impacts.

The increasing entanglement of the worlds of second- and first-hand exchange also call for further scrutiny. As Oxfam presents runways at London Fashion Week, as both luxury and high-street retailers incorporate second-hand goods into their offer, as charity shops accept large-scale donations of the first cycle's routine overproduction, questions arise around the

implications of this symbiosis. By lending a veneer of social good to the fashion and retail industry - a phenomenon McRobbie has termed "second-hand-washing" (2021) - there is an argument to be made that charity shops are complicit in business as usual, "undermining more extreme notions of thrift and minimalism that involve severely minimizing consumerism" (Hansen and Le Zotte 2019, p. 11). New Extended Producer Responsibility legislation for textiles, expected to come into effect in 2023 (WRAP 2021), seems likely to impact the relationships between stakeholders across the second-hand commodity chain, with potential to generate both competition and collaboration between first-cycle and charity retail. It is increasingly important, therefore, that we expand our understanding of charity shops as sites of reuse and recycling, and of their role in wider systems of consumption and disposal.

The works reviewed above provide thorough accounts of second-hand worlds at the turn of the century. They establish the conceptual complexity of second-hand exchange - at the interstices of various social processes and subject to multiple and conflicting interpretations of its true nature and purpose - and demonstrate the need for methodologies which are material, spatial and discursive. The absence of data from previous works on the social subjects behind the labour of charity shops and on the implications of their practices for sustainable consumption, in addition to changes to the socioeconomic landscape, to the forms and spaces of charity retail, and to networks of consumption and disposal, now call for new empirical knowledge and theoretical tools. Attention to the realities and outcomes of charity retail and second-hand exchange, and to the claims that are made of them, will be vital as we seek to defend the positive contributions of second-hand cultures, and – perhaps - seek out their potential to provide more equitable solutions to the issues of contemporary production and consumption.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Violet Broadhead is a doctoral candidate in the Business School at Bristol University. Her doctoral research explores the role of the UK charity retail sector in sustainable consumption, incorporating the day-to-day practices of shop staff, senior managerial strategies and priorities, and the wider political and economic context. Violet favours qualitative methods, particularly ethnographic ones, adopting a material culture approach in her research.

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