



2023

Thanks, It's Second-Hand: Shifting Values of Second-Hand Clothing in Mexico City

Sofia Arleo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses>



Part of the [Latin American Studies Commons](#)

Colby College theses are protected by copyright. They may be viewed or downloaded from this site for the purposes of research and scholarship. Reproduction or distribution for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission of the author.

Recommended Citation

Arleo, Sofia, "Thanks, It's Second-Hand: Shifting Values of Second-Hand Clothing in Mexico City" (2023). *Honors Theses*. Paper 1419.
<https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses/1419>

This Honors Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby.

Thanks, It's Second-Hand
Shifting Values of Second-Hand Clothing in Mexico City

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Program of Latin American Studies

Colby College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Sofia Starr Arleo

Waterville, Maine

May 2023

Examined and Approved on

By

Advisor

Program Chair

Reader

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the relationship between people and clothing in Mexico City. Using ethnographic snapshots, local histories and scholarly research on used clothing, this thesis looks at how the economic and emotional value attached to second-hand clothing is determined by place, story and social identity. This thesis questions how clothing changes value as it travels between the United States, open air markets that have existed since the Aztec empire and curated second-hand and vintage stores in Roma Norte, one the city's most affluent neighborhoods. Second-hand clothing is unique in that it has an added narrative from its previous owner and time period. These identities contribute to value given by both sellers and consumers. Finally, this thesis considers how race and class structure economic and social relationships within the network of second-hand clothing exchange. This thesis seeks to provide insight about the network of second-hand clothing exchange in Mexico City and encourage readers to consider their own contribution to clothing consumption and disposal.

Keywords: second-hand clothing, vintage, value, *tianguis*

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the Latin American Studies and Anthropology departments at Colby for giving me a new lens to see the world around me. Thank you for keeping me inspired and excited for the last four years.

To Professor Ben Fallaw, thank you for showing me the ways in which history is the world today.

To Professor Winifred Tate, thank you for pushing me to think and for questioning me when I needed it most.

To Professor Lindsay Mayka, thank you for sparking my interest in Latin American studies.

To my interviewees and everyone I crossed paths with during my field work, I cannot thank you enough for your kindness, openness, generosity and time. This project simply would not be possible without you.

To my family and friends, thank you for keeping me balanced and laughing in the depths of this project.

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the generous support of the Walker Grant. Thank you for making undergraduate research possible and supporting curiosity.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction.....	7
Second-Hand Clothing in Mexico.....	9
Project Development.....	12
Motivations for Consumption.....	13
Methodology.....	17
My Research in Mexico City.....	21
Thesis Outline.....	26

Chapter 2 : How Your Favorite Pair of Pants Can Be a Discarded Good, Contraband or a Hot Commodity; How Value is Affected by Place, Geography and Display

Introduction.....	28
Used Clothing in the United States.....	30
Border Politics and Crossing Contraband.....	31
Ropa de Paca.....	32
Value on the Border.....	36
Colonias and Neighborhoods of Mexico City.....	37
Tianguis.....	37
Gentrification of Tianguis.....	41
Bazaars and Collectives.....	43
Vintage Stores in Roma.....	45
Presentation to the Consumer.....	52

Chapter 3: I'm Not Like You, I Am in My Vintage Era: The Value of Story, Era and Past

Introduction.....	56
Power of Brand.....	56
Timeless vs. Ephemeral Material.....	60
Time Value: Not Just a Piece of Clothing but a Way to Go Back in Time and Up in Social Class.....	61
The Value of Who.....	63
Marketing Story.....	65
Value of the Ongoing Story.....	66
Semiotics of Clothing.....	67

Chapter 4: Identity Politics and Community in Clothing : How Race, Gender and Agency Impact Value

Introduction.....	70
Race, Class and Whitemexicans.....	71

Gender and Agency in a Capitalist Economy and World.....	76
Ethical Pricing.....	80
La Tianguis.....	84
Conclusion.....	87
Bibliography.....	93
Appendix.....	97

Chapter 1: Introduction

Clothing is material and fabric. Clothing is human labor and a set of social relationships. Clothing is a cultural symbol. Clothing is expressive, creative and personal. Clothing narrates identity and can be representative of people's role in society. Clothing communicates culture, mood, confidence and age. Clothing holds history and stories. Clothing is particular to the human experience.

Historically clothing was something that was time consuming to make and challenging to acquire. Clothing was expensive and variety was limited to the elite. The rewearing and passing down of clothing has existed for as long as humans have created clothes. Through the industrial revolution as textiles were able to be mass produced, clothing quickly became more accessible and affordable. As clothing was more available, the passing down of clothes and second-hand clothing economies transformed.

Second-hand can mean many things. Put simply, second-hand clothing is a piece of clothing or an item that has been previously owned therefore has had a lifecycle before. For the purpose of this research, the term second-hand will be used to describe clothing exclusively. Through this thesis I will reference a variety of previously owned clothing. I discuss vintage clothing, consignment clothing, second-hand clothing, *ropa de paca* and upcycled clothing.¹ Each of these categories, while being grouped under the larger idea of being previously owned, hold their own unique place in networks of exchange. Previously owned pieces can be reused in the form of hand-me-downs, can be resold at a lower price, or in some cases at a higher price as they can gain value over time. Second-hand and used clothing have a versatile position because they are often given as charitable gifts but also commodities that are sold.

¹ Upcycling is the process of taking old clothing and discarded material and turning it into something new.

Mexico City (CDMX) provides a complex site for the second-hand clothing exchange. The city itself is a cultural hub for fashion, art, food and culture. It is one of Latin America's biggest fashion and design industries, catching attention from the rest of the world. The city stands on the ruins of the ancient Aztec capital city Tenochtitlan. For the context of this project, the Aztec marketplaces, called *tianguis*, are the most significant aspect of this legacy.² Mexico City is one of the most populated cities in the world. As any metropolitan city, it is the site of drastic inequalities. Mexico is one of the most unequal countries in the world. Socioeconomic status is geographically separated through much of the city. The most privileged groups reside in the north east, center and some southern parts of the city in contrast to the east of the city where there are the most marginalized sectors.

Mexico City's socioeconomic inequality intensifies the separation and distinction of different sites of second-hand clothing exchange. This thesis seeks to put them in conversation with each other and show the ways they all participate together in an intricate and single network of exchange. The second-hand clothing industry provides sites of some of the most accessible clothing and the most exclusive. Second-hand and pawn shops have been a response to both textile waste and economic need in Mexico since 1774 when the first pawn shop was founded off the *zócalo*.³ Within Mexico City, *tianguis* have provided accessible used clothing since the pre-Hispanic age, while curated second-hand and vintage stores in the city's more affluent neighborhoods capitalize on the exclusivity and consumer desire for uniqueness found only in second-hand and vintage pieces that are one of a kind.

² Traditionally “*tianguis*” were markets that were opened by indigenous people. The term has expanded to include street markets and vendors that are in Mexican urban neighborhoods once a week (Gauthier 2009, 101).

³ The *zócalo* is the center plaza of Mexico City that has been there since the Aztecs. This is where the primary government is and provides a communal space popular amongst tourists and locals alike.

In the past five to ten years, sustainable high-end fashion has exploded in Mexico City alongside second-hand and vintage stores, specifically in the neighborhood of Roma. This neighborhood was originally built for the middle and upper class during the Porfiriato. The streets are lined with trees, cafes, boutiques and art galleries. Roma is extremely popular amongst foreigners and known as one of the safest in Mexico City. Given the economic status of the area, individuals shopping and spending time at second-hand stores are not doing so because of need. Second-hand stores in Roma have extremely high prices in comparison to tianguis outside of the neighborhood.

There is significant literature and research on tianguis and social relationships that exist within them. Similarly there is literature on the way the curated second-hand and vintage clothing market has gained widespread social attention and desire. Limited research has been conducted showing the ways in which these sites are deeply intertwined with each other. In this thesis I show how second-hand clothing travels through these sites of exchange and how the value attached to used clothing is never concrete.

Second-Hand Clothing in Mexico

I begin my discussion of second-hand clothing exchange through the lens of sustainability and consumer motivation. This is where I began my own exploration and interest of this project and it provides a critical framework for the later argument around value. This foundation helped construct what became my project and provides context for why second-hand clothing is important and desired.

There is limited anthropological research that exists on the shifting values of second-hand clothing in Mexico City specifically. However, there has been work looking at textile waste and

ways of implementing more of a circular economic system around clothing production and consumption. “Worldwide, less than 1% of material used to produce new clothing is recycled into new clothing, representing a loss of more than USD 100 billion worth of materials each year” (Fuentes Carrillo 2019, 7). The way in which clothing and textile waste is currently being dealt with is in no way sustainable.

In 2019, Dr. Juan Carlos Fuentes Carrillo wrote and published a journal of recommendations with the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA). The article questions how Mexico could benefit from a circular economic system in terms of their textiles. It establishes what would need to happen for this shift and provides applicable legal frameworks involved. Additionally, it outlines the features of a circular economy and steps through the design to market process that textiles and clothing would need to transition to. The piece provides tangible solutions and understanding more of how the economic system works in the country. In a circular economy, “the value of products, materials, and resources is maintained in the economy for the longest possible time, and the generation of waste is minimized. The idea is to maintain a steady flow of resources so that they can continue to be used advantageously, over and over again, and continue to add value” (Fuentes Carrillo 2019, 7).

Vintage and second-hand stores provide sites that help promote circular economies; they help to create a culture of reuse rather than disposal. Fuentes Carrillo writes about the political and legal lack of support for these types of businesses and how legal frameworks can change to help business owners benefit from their work. He proposes transforming from linear systems to circular ones where disposal and waste is not the final step of the process. My research originally questioned general awareness of sustainability within second-hand clothing exchange.

Implementing more circular systems is beneficial to Mexico but is only tangible if consumers are aware, conscious and willing to change their habits of consumption. While the lower and working class has, in many ways, practiced circular economic systems for decades, upper and middle class people need to change their consumption practices. These are the socio economic groups that tend to consume the most and therefore produce the most waste. Deschamps, Carnie and Mao (2017) study consumers' motivations and attitudes towards second-hand clothing. Their work concluded that convenience was the main motivation. Their research found that the majority of people engaged and aware of sustainability efforts had a university education and were living in CDMX. At the same time, the researchers acknowledge that these are the people that will be consuming more and will most likely spend a significant amount of their wage on clothing and textiles. Education around sustainability practices remained the primary necessity through the research. While individuals were interested in education they were not sure where to find accurate information. In regards to vintage and thrift stores as an alternative to fast fashion or new fashion consumption, 51% of participants in the study had never bought a vintage garment and 21% did not like the idea that the garment had been used (Deschamps, Carnie and Mao 2017, 10).⁴ People were driven to buy eco-friendly clothing for the fashion, fabric and quality over environmental reasons. Consumers were more interested in companies focusing on sustainable practices but didn't think as much about the environmental consequences of their own consumption (Deschamps, Carnie and Mao, 2017).

⁴ Fast fashion is a term to describe a system of production that focuses on maximum quantity and minimum cost. It prioritizes profits from large scale production and short term trends that will sell. Fast fashion systems have detrimental environmental impacts as clothing specifically is mass produced and often discarded. This kind of production is not built for durability but rather what the consumer is most likely to buy. Due to a desire to have low production costs, products are often made by exploited workers.

Project Development

This thesis originated from an interest in sustainability. I conducted research about a recently closed trash dump outside of Mexico City for an anthropology class taught by Professor Winifred Tate at Colby College. My original interest in the general area of Mexico started from growing up in Northern California, learning about Mexican history and speaking Spanish from a young age. The project for my anthropology class was looking at the ways in which trash can be reimagined. I looked at social identities that are created as waste is circulated over time. I argued that trash and the accumulation of waste provides direct evidence of how capitalist ethics and ideology weaves its way into society's priorities. In an economy dominated by capitalism there is an emphasis on moving goods as quickly as possible to make as much profit as possible. That summer (2021), I received a grant from Colby College to go to Mexico City and observe the ways in which waste was used in art. I continued to be interested in finding ways to give a second life to things that had been thrown away. I visited community gardens and art spaces that were using recycled materials for their work. Towards the end of my trip, I was visiting a number of second-hand and vintage stores because of my own personal interest and quickly realized the connection that was right in front of me. I went into a store in Puebla outside of Mexico City and spoke with a woman that owned the store. She had started the project during COVID after trying to sort through an abundance of clothing that had accumulated in her home over the years. She explained to me the community that she and her friends were able to create, sharing and reusing old pieces while simultaneously not throwing everything away and being aware of issues of over consumption. From this conversation, I realized my project and interest was shifting away from art made from recycled materials to clothing and the process of integrating old clothing back into

communities. From my conversation in Puebla, I was interested in why people choose to shop second-hand and how to encourage more people to do so with the sustainability factor in mind.

Motivations for Consumption

There have been a number of anthropological studies studying the circulation of second-hand goods and the motivations behind consumers in the industry. Sílvia Corrêa and Veranise Dubeux both have PhD's through the *Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing* in Rio; Corrêa in Social Communication and Dubeux in Administration. They specifically researched young people consuming second-hand clothing in Rio de Janeiro. In their study titled; *Buying Clothes from Thrift Stores: An Analysis of Young People Consuming Second-Hand Clothing in Rio de Janeiro*, Corrêa and Dubeux discuss second-hand clothing, culture and consumption. They see consumption practices in Rio de Janeiro connected to social relationships, status, identity and boundaries. "Culture is understood as a set of ideas and activities through which we manufacture and build our world, while consumption means the processes by which consumer goods and services are created, bought, and used"(Corrêa and Dubeux 2015, 39).

Corrêa and Dubeux talk about clothing consumption as a "map for the cultural universe and fashion as a system of communication" (Corrêa and Dubeux, 2015). Their research suggests that consumption is in part a social construct rather than a complete individual choice. In regards to clothing consumption, individual choice is overwhelmed by trends, social pressure to assimilate and general accessibility. In the context of this thesis, I was interested in talking to individuals and their personal experiences to put them in conversation with one another keeping in mind the larger systematic work at play. This is a critical element in framing second-hand

clothing consumption within a capitalist society. Corrêa and Dubeux look at clothing and fashion as a system of communication and the history and meaning behind fabric. Through their study Corrêa and Dubeux noticed that participants had different motivations for shopping second-hand but were all interested in the value it upheld. Price, exclusivity, durability and design were all critical components of the individual consumer's mindset. People mentioned looking for certain brands and a focus on uniqueness while shopping, looking for one thing that no one else will have. Price and uniqueness were at the core of consumers' concerns. People interviewed were not deterred by the previous owner of the clothing and felt they could build their own story out of clothes. In many cases, previous ownership gave pieces even more uniqueness and value. Regarding vintage clothing specifically, there was interest in the clothing given the time frame they were from, what was happening in the world at that time, social movements and fashion icons. Corrêa and Dubeux write, “the clothes and accessories this way would be able to send them back in time, being mediators of social and historical knowledge”(Corrêa and Dubeux 2015, 50). Clothing that was considered vintage or retro people were willing to spend more money on because it had value of the time not only the piece of clothing.

Corrêa and Dubeux mention the work of Appadurai (2008, 15) saying “value is never an inherent property of objects, but a judgment that people make about it”(Corrêa and Dubeux 2015, 53). The value associated with second-hand clothing changed depending on who the consumer was and what kinds of clothing were being purchased. Katharina Kiehn and Antonia Vojkovic (2018) conducted a similar study to Corrêa and Dubeux in Sweden as a part of their masters thesis at the University of Borås where they were both in the Faculty of Textiles for Engineering and Business. This project used anthropological methods and questions while not being a formal ethnography. They conducted semi-structured interviews using a qualitative

approach. Their research, titled “Millennials Motivations for Shopping Second-Hand Clothing as Part of Sustainable Consumption Practice,” similarly studied ideologies of consumers of second-hand clothing. Kiehn and Vojkovic found that consumers were interested in shopping second-hand for the treasure hunt and challenge to find something unique and different. With the rise of fast fashion, companies are mass producing more of the same. People shopping at vintage and second-hand stores were more interested in moving away from common trends and finding something others might not have. There is a pride attached to knowing something is individual and exclusive. Many participants discussed shopping at thrift and vintage stores as a leisure activity and to be trendy. The consumers found a certain status and “coolness” through second-hand clothing specifically because of its uniqueness. Corrêa and Dubeux and Kiehn and Vojkovic made me think more about how value was at the core of consumers' motivations for purchase. What I became interested in is how this value is determined and changed.

Brooks (2015) tells the historical narrative of clothing and consumption, as people had disposable incomes to spend with the rise of industrial capitalism. As waste was produced from access clothing, more was being thrown away and donated. Second-hand clothing became something that was more associated with the poor and specifically urban poor. Brooks writes, “one of the particularities of the market is that everyone has the ability to consume something; there is differentiation in consumption and people become socially defined by their shopping habits” (Brooks 2015, 81). Social pressure and the social experience dictate what consumers choose to buy. Because consumption and specifically clothing consumption are so closely aligned with how the individual presents themselves, as a market, there is reassurance that people will continue to buy and in many ways do so to maintain a certain social status.

Brooks writes, “in a Marxist sense, objects have a greater or lesser single use value, but from a social perspective use value can be broken down. Socially clothes have two meanings; a first-order function, such as keeping you warm, which is their use value; and second-order symbolic value, such as their fashionableness” (Brooks 2015, 193). Brooks concludes that the experience of second-hand shopping was even more of a social experience as consumers were more likely to discuss purchases with one another and participate in putting together outfits, especially those of higher end.

Prior to doing field work in January of 2023, I was interested in consumers' motivations for shopping second-hand. I was interested in how the consumer valued second-hand pieces, what sustainability meant in the textile industry and the ways in which second-hand clothing exchange promoted the development of circular economies; moving away from a system of consumption and disposal. As I started my field work it was clear that sustainability was a part of the conversation around aspects of the second-hand clothing market but rather than being the core rational it was more so a mode of creating value. Stores and businesses capitalize on the fact that the consumer is interested in sustainability and uses it as a marketing tool. I continued to focus on the idea of value and value production.

Clothing, new or used, is valued by individuals and society for a variety of reasons. Clothing can be valued for its aesthetic, the way it presents the human figure, the way it distinguishes an individual in society and can provide insight to power dynamics. Clothing can be valued artistically and creatively and simultaneously can be valued for its power to control and provide uniformity. For the purpose of this research, I will focus on the economic and emotional value attached to used clothing. I chose to focus on these two because they emerged as

the most relevant and mentioned forms of value production through my research and conversations with my informants.

My research is informed by previous studies of second-hand clothing markets. While the focus of my research is in Mexico City, the span of this project extends globally. Everywhere clothing is bought, sold and circulated back into the economy. Using historical knowledge of Mexico City and specifically the affluent culture of Colonia Roma, I will show how second-hand and vintage stores in these neighborhoods market to trend and uniqueness. While these second-hand stores in theory provide an opportunity for circular economies, the consumer interest and practice drives the future of clothing consumption. From my initial research and literature review it became clear that price and uniqueness were the two main drivers contributing to consumers' motivations for buying second-hand. These manifested themselves in my interest of value. From a focus on the consumer, my interest shifted to value assigned to clothing. My research thinks critically about how people assign value to clothing and the ways in which clothing value changes as it is circulated over time. I argue that the emotional and economic value attached to used clothing shifts through its network of exchange depending on place, story and is influenced by social identities.

Methodology

This thesis is an interdisciplinary exploratory analysis of value making in the second-hand clothing network in Mexico City. When I initially started thinking about methods to use for this project I was influenced by Melissa Gauthier whose doctorate thesis examines clothing exchange across the US-Mexico border. She uses a framework developed by Robert J. Foster that focuses on recognizing the ways geography fits into anthropology. Melissa Gauthier

(2009) discusses in her work, the historic work of anthropologists while doing field research to rely on commodity studies by following a piece from its production to disposal or vice versa. This “follow-the-thing” method allows researchers to trace commodities as they move through time, space and people. Gauthier says her research is “grounded in recent reinterpretations of “commodity chains” as “circuits of culture” which have emerged within geography and anthropology”(Gauthier 2009, 4). This shift in method is rooted in Robert J. Foster’s (2006) work titled “Tracking Globalization.” Gauthier working from Foster’s foundations focuses on networks rather than globalization from one source. I was inspired by both their work to apply this method and way of thinking to my own research, specifically in terms of connecting anthropology to geography and the ways in which networks are a helpful mechanism to think about globalization rather than chains. Foster references circuits and networks as being productive modes of research; “tracking strategies thus bring anthropology closer to geography at the same time as they introduce an element of radical contingency into the ethnographic project, especially in cases where relationships are indeed not clear...” (Foster 2006, 286). He continues his argument and critiques common methods derived from Karl Marx’s work with commodities.

Commodities are usually associated with things that are raw materials or agricultural products that can be bought or sold. While clothing is not always a commodity, its overflow, effect on all aspects of the supply chain and complex relationship with people has made it commodified. For the purpose of this analysis, specifically in conversation with the work of Gauthier (2009), Foster (2006), and Marx (1990), I refer to the commodification of clothing.

Marx explains “the mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as

objective characteristics of the products labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things” (Marx 1990, 164-165). Marx continues to say that from this relationship social relationships that exist between capitalists and exploited laborers reflects “the fantastic form of a relation between things” (Marx 1990, 165). In the capitalist society in which this project takes place, Marx argues the producers of commodities remain for the most part invisible. The only way to have access to the products is through monetary exchange. Marx uses the term commodity fetishism, emphasizing the relationship between people and things to be more important in a capitalist scope than relationships between people. The commodity fetishism is tied to the economic value attached to commodities rather than the social relationships present. Foster argues that “marxian fetishism ‘getting behind the veil’ of the market implies both a privilege position for the unmythified analyst and an undue emphasis on the site of production as the ultimate source of a commodity’s value” (Foster 2006, 286). Foster’s critique which he terms “critical fetishism”:

challenges a geographical view of globalization as a ‘spreading ink stain’ and instead promotes a spatial recognition of globalization as partial, uneven and unstable; a socially contested rather than logical process in which many spaces of resistance, alterity and possibility become analytically discernible and politically meaningful (Foster 2006, 286).

Foster’s methods of focusing on the larger geography and network that is created in exchange provides an effective approach to my research rather than a “follow the thing” commodity study. There is no distinct site that provides the ultimate source of value in the exchange of second-hand goods. Second-hand clothing has created a new system that is extending beyond the sphere of capitalism because of its connection to a circular economy but at the same time it often continues to be circulated and exchanged for money. Foster writes,

cultural analysis becomes less a matter of formulating a distinctive logic of code shared by a group of people living in one location and more a matter of tracing a network in which the perspectives of differently situated individuals derive both from their different network experiences and from their perspectives on other people's perspectives- their approximate mappings of other people's meanings(Foster 2006, 287).

My own research was heavily influenced by reading both Gauthier (2009) and Foster's (2006) work, keeping in mind the importance of networks, relationships and value production outside of their direct connection to monetary exchange. I conducted research through participant observation, informal interviews and personal participation. I intentionally wanted the nature of my research to be explorative and fluid, again keeping in mind the idea of Foster's (2006) critical fetishism. Going into my field work I was interested in exploring the ways in which consumers participated in the exchange of second-hand goods. I was curious why people choose to shop second-hand and the primary motivations for the second-hand economy. Using my own personal interest from previous travels to Mexico City, I was interested in the concentration of second-hand stores and businesses in Roma Norte specifically. This thesis questions why the surge of second-hand stores is happening specifically now in Roma and how the history of the neighborhood has shaped what it is now. Once in Mexico City in January of 2023 for my field research, the focus of my work quickly shifted. While I was still aware of and interested in the reasons consumers were participating in the exchange of second-hand goods, I was captivated by the fluctuation of value attached to used clothing and the ways in which people assigned different monetary and emotional values to the same pieces of clothing.

While I had spent time in Mexico City prior to this project, I was not focused on second-hand clothing exchange. I have participated in this network my entire life but until recently had not thought about it in terms of the questions that are emphasized in this work.

Morally, I feel like an outsider and visitor to Mexico City. I acknowledge my positionality as a white American entering a place that not only has a history of colonization but also a history of problematic anthropological work. I made an effort to be aware of these factors and the ways in which they affected the work I was doing. This thesis discusses both the role of whiteness and American influence in the network of second-hand clothing exchange in Mexico City. Throughout this project, I consider how my own identity affected the information I was given and had access to. I am not a local and did not have previous relationships with the people I was interacting with. This increased the time necessary to formulate and participate in ethical ethnographic work. That being said, I will not discount the relationships I made with people in the short amount of time I was in Mexico or the essential contributions the conversations we had made to my project. However, I was only exposed to a very brief aspect of participants' story and understanding. This thesis does not depict the entire ethnographic entanglement that is present. Instead, this work provides an ethnographic snapshot of different sites of the second-hand clothing exchange in Mexico City.

My Research in Mexico

Prior to my trip I began reaching out to businesses and individuals through Instagram. I found their usernames and accounts through Google Map searches of vintage, second-hand and thrift stores in Mexico City. Because I was focusing on networks I wanted to cast a wide web of options. I sent Instagram direct messages through an existing account I have for my personal art.⁵ I reached out to 15 different businesses I found online. In my original outreach I wanted a variety

⁵ I wanted the face of this project to be interwoven with creative design. For initial introductions, I wanted business owners to see my own work and connect me with a person while simultaneously protecting my own privacy by not using my individual personal account. While I initially thought about creating an entirely separate account for this project, I wanted the account I was using as my initial introduction to have a foundation and legitimacy.

of vintage and used clothing stores, ranging in size. I was surprised with the eager response from many of my initial participants, excited to talk to me about their work.

I spent 19 days in Mexico City in January. I stayed in Condesa, a neighborhood next to Roma, at a hostel for the majority of the trip. Traveling solo, I wanted to be surrounded by other young people and was able to meet people to accompany me to places I felt less comfortable going alone. The first two days I was in the city, I spent the day walking around primarily Roma Norte and Condesa. Despite having been in the area before, I now had a different lens of focus. I oriented myself with the place, observed the people walking around, languages I heard and art I saw. I mapped out the stores I had reached out to and walked to check them out taking short hand written notes but nothing formal. I was surprised how close everything was to each other. Walking around the *colonia*, I quickly realized there were many more stores than I had originally thought and that I was going to need to narrow my focus.⁶ I also recognized that my initial approach of searching for business online was not going to be sufficient, many of the stores, street markets and businesses I started interacting with were a part of the informal market and had differing online presences. By the end of the first day, I had added five new stores to my list of 15, and seen about ten additional street vendors I was interested in talking to.

The second day of my field work, I got some lunch and sat on a bench in a park to take a break from walking around in Roma Norte. After eating I got up and turned around to see a collection of clothing stands set up in the park, yet another interesting site for my research. I spent the rest of the day thinking about what I actually wanted to get out of my field work and how my research questions were changing. I kept feeling overwhelmed by the abundance of second-hand clothing that I saw and the number of different people involved in the visible

⁶ Colonias are neighborhoods in Mexico City.

circulation. I was no longer thinking about the people purchasing the clothing but rather the circulation of the clothing itself.

This was when I knew the project was shifting away from consumers' motivations to a larger geography and network understanding of the circulation of second-hand clothing in the city. The individuals I had existing conversations with through Instagram who were primarily involved in selling second-hand clothing still functioned as the participants for my new questions that were emerging. I began mapping out the different sites of exchange present; vintage stores in Roma Norte, tianguis and open air markets, clothing bazaars, street vendors and second-hand clothing retailers. Through the stage of exploring different colonias in the city, I was constantly looking for street posters about second-hand clothing markets, searching through Instagram stories for announcements of events in the city and talking to people to see if they had recommendations. Over the next couple of days I visited and spoke informally to many stores and businesses.

I identified six participants involved in the second-hand clothing exchange in different ways. Mateo, Ricardo and Sara all own vintage stores in Roma and the center. Isabella, works at a second-hand feminist collective in Roma, Ariel works at a second-hand and upcycled store in Roma and Graciella works at a consignment store in Roma.⁷ With each of these participants I recorded 1-3 hour long conversations. Most of these conversations were in Spanish which I later translated to English. Throughout this thesis I include the English translation however those that were conducted in Spanish have the Spanish version as a footnote. If there is no Spanish footnote attached, the interview was conducted in English. These conversations were held primarily in participants' place of work where they were able to physically show me pieces of clothing and their day to day routines. I explained to all participants prior to conducting interviews the

⁷ Names and stores in this thesis are pseudonyms to protect my informant's privacy.

overview and purpose of my project, received their verbal consent for our conversation and assured them that they could stop at any point.⁸ In respect of participants' time and for my own organization, I prepared a set of broad questions. I used these questions more so as a guide for myself because I wanted the interviews to be casual and free flowing.

Over the course of my fieldwork I had 10-15 other conversations that are referenced through this thesis that were not recorded but detailed in field notes. While the majority of the interviews I conducted were with sellers of second-hand clothing, I had numerous passing conversations with customers. All of the sellers simultaneously participate in being customers as the business of second-hand is inherently purchasing or acquiring clothing from others to sell.

I spent varying amounts of time in each of the exchanges doing participant observation. I observed customers, business owners, people passing by and general environments and atmospheres. Through my 19 days in Mexico City, I wrote and reflected on my day and conversations through writing and drawings. Sketching stores and stands I visited acted as a way to remember the places I had visited and think creatively and deeply about what was happening. I drew primarily from photos but the act of drawing made me think more about what I had photographed. Why were certain pieces of clothing hung up on the wall while others were scattered in a pile on the floor?⁹ These observational drawings were a part of my participant observation but also personal participation. From the beginning, this thesis steamed from my own interest and participation in second-hand clothing exchange. By spending time in stores, flipping through racks of clothing and being a consumer myself, I am as are all people that wear clothing involved in this network of exchange.

⁸ Prior to doing field work I had the project approved through the IRB (Institutional Review Board - #2022-093) to ensure rights of all participants.

⁹ Some sketches from field work can be found in the appendix.

Race emerged as a central theme late in my project. Through my field work in Mexico City the topic of race came up briefly in conversations and observations, but it was not the main theme of conversations. Once I returned from field work and began transcribing interviews and field notes, I realized the presence and importance of race in the narrative I wanted to tell. In the wake of the last couple years, there is an increase of racial conversations in the United States and Mexico. Not focusing on race at the start of my field work and discussing it in depth through interviews was a mistake and limitation in this project. There are multiple ways my informants move through racial and national identity categories. Some of the individuals that I interviewed for this project move through Mexico as white despite not identifying as white. This complicates their privilege and role in the second-hand clothing exchange in Mexico City. Other informants discussed not being white but did not mention how they self-identified. When I began writing I was unsure how to approach conversations about my informants' race because it was not clear from our conversations. That being said, there emerged a clear racial role regarding access and power within sites of exchange. Throughout this thesis when referring to informants' race, I have included information that was shared in conversations and the ways in which informants presented. I have included footnotes in all the places this is done. I also want to note and acknowledge the ways in which my own whiteness impacted this project. My whiteness allowed me to access certain spaces, specifically highly curated stores in Roma Norte. This privilege informed how I could move in spaces and have conversations without being challenged. Furthermore, within markets, my own whiteness implicated conversations specifically regarding pricing that could happen, this is discussed in chapter 4. The context of my own and my informants' race is a critical discussion and component of this project.

This thesis is not an ethnography. While I take from anthropological methods and theory, this thesis is a network study of human relationships with clothing and modes of value production. I take from ethnographic methods by using participant observation and interviews. My work involves people's stories. That being said, given time constraints and the trajectory of my project, this thesis is not a formal ethnography. The time needed for ethnography involves long term time in the field; this project was confined to less than 20 days. The building of intimate relationships that are necessary for ethnographic work, in my mind, only begin to form within 20 days. Because of this time frame, my field work was not a full immersive experience. I do want to acknowledge both my informants and everyone involved over the course of my time in Mexico that were crucial for this project.

Thesis Outline

In the following chapter, I focus on how place and geography influences the economic value attached to second-hand clothing. I explain the geographical movement of clothing and the ways in which the network of second-hand clothing exchange in Mexico City is connected to the United States. I describe the processes of how second-hand clothing crosses the border and how its value is assigned before, on and after the border. Once clothing has arrived in Mexico, I distinguish the places where second-hand clothing is sold and how the value attached changes. I focus this analysis on a comparison between clothing sold at tianguis markets and in curated stores in Roma Norte.

Chapter 3 explores how story influences value. This chapter focuses on emotional value alongside economic value. I show how clothing is attached to narrative and the ways in which past narratives stay with pieces. I explain stories that are visible through brand and material and

those that are hidden and needed to be told. The hidden narratives of past owners and places add to the emotional value once they are discovered. The story is what adds to the uniqueness factor attributing to many consumers motivations for shopping second-hand in the first place.

Chapter 4 expands the argument of value formed by place and story to people and social identities that shape how value is created and who is a part of the production. In chapter 4, I analyze the ways in which race, class and gender are ever present in this exchange. I show how race and gender create barriers and shape hierarchy within the network of second-hand clothing exchange and how simultaneously, the second-hand clothing exchange creates a mode of resistance for marginalized communities..

Chapter 2

How Your Favorite Pair of Pants Can Be a Discarded Good, Contraband or a Hot Commodity: How Value is Affected by Place, Geography and Display

When the original owner is done with a piece of clothing, I have identified five primary options that they have. While the sites of used clothing exchange are constantly intertwining, these primary options help to concretely show the path and value evolution clothing goes through from the first owner to the second, third or tenth. For the purpose of this explanation I am going to say they are getting rid of a yellow t-shirt. The choice that the primary owner makes is dependent on how much sentimental attachment they have and economic value they are looking to uphold from the t-shirt.

1. **Trash.** The first option is to throw the yellow t-shirt into the trash. If this is the case, there is probably little to no emotional or economic value the owner has associated with the piece. They could decide to throw away the shirt because it is easy and accessible, they may think it is too destroyed to be reused or they may throw it away because it is simply the easiest thing to do. If the original owner throws the shirt away in the United States it will most likely end up being sorted in a dump. The fabric that is usable may be recycled or put into a landfill. The t-shirt could also end up being sorted and resold. If the shirt ends up in Mexico, either through the chain of border crossing, which will be explained later in my thesis, or because it was thrown away by someone in Mexico it will most likely be sorted by *pepenadores* working at dumps in Mexico. Here items will be valued based on material and quality and may be taken to the streets or tianguis to be resold, or left in the dump.
2. **Sell to consignment.** The second option is to bring the yellow t-shirt to a consignment store. These are stores that are set up to receive used clothing and act as a middle man between the original owner and the second, third, fourth etc. They take commission on pieces but create a physical set place where this kind of exchange can occur.
3. **Sell to a vintage store.** The third is to sell the yellow t-shirt to a vintage store. This option is only applicable if the garment fits the qualifications for “vintage”

the store or store owner has established. Clothing taken to a vintage store may be purchased directly on the spot or sold on commission.

4. **Give to a friend/ family.** The fourth is to give the yellow t-shirt to a friend or family member in the form of a hand-me-down or gift.
5. **Donate to a “goodwill.”** The fifth option is to donate the yellow t-shirt to a clothing donation facility such as Goodwill or the Salvation Army. While these are two examples of organizations that exist in the United States, clothing donation centers vary. At this point in time, many donation facilities are overloaded with clothing and therefore cannot process and resell most of the clothing they are given. Excess clothing is in turn disposed to commercial second-hand clothing dealers. These dealers export it around the world. Within the scope of the United States and Mexico, this clothing is often turned into *pacas* that are later sold in *tianguis* and found in markets and other second-hand clothing retailers.

Each of these options are made up of complex social networks that weave in and out of informal and formal economies of exchange. From the initial choice from the owner of how to dispose of or reintegrate a certain piece back into the economy, the economic and emotional value of the piece fluctuates. The physical place that a certain garment is geographically in the world, within a specific neighborhood in Mexico City and within a store dramatically affects the ways in which it is assigned value. This thesis explores the intricacies at play within the choices outlined above.

In this chapter I discuss the geographical movement of used clothing. I will focus my analysis in Mexico City but explain how the network of exchange is heavily intertwined with markets in the United States. To begin, I explain how used clothing from the United States gets to and is organized on the US-Mexico border. While at the border, I briefly break down the ways in which clothing is smuggled into Mexico, the social relationships that are a part of this transport and how pieces and bundles of clothing are monetarily valued. Once clothing has arrived in Mexico, I explain how it is organized and moved to its next location. For the purpose of this

research, I focused specifically on used clothing that ends up in Mexico City. Within the city, there are multiple sites and systems of exchange and with it, different scales of value making. I outline the geography of the city itself and how the tianguis on the periphery of the city interact with curated vintage boutiques in the city's most affluent neighborhoods. As used clothing circulates through these places of exchange, the value assigned shifts. The same jacket or band t-shirt has the potential to fluctuate hundreds of dollars depending primarily on the physical location the piece is sold. Within each of these physical geographical locations, the ways in which clothing pieces are presented to the consumer or customer furthermore affects the price that can be assigned. I show how used clothing bundled on the border, on a curated rack in Roma Norte and everything in between are valued in part by their geographical and physical location on the web of exchange.

Used Clothing in the United States

The United States is the largest exporter of used clothing globally. American exports of used clothing continue to grow in volume and value. The international trade association, Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles (S.M.A.R.T.), estimates that Americans throw out 68 pounds of clothing each year per person and most of it ends up in landfills. Roughly 15% of clothing thrown away is donated to a Goodwill or Salvation Army-like donation center, but the amount of the clothing that is donated cannot be resold due to market saturation. In the United States, roughly 25% of donated clothes go directly to landfills. Only 10-20% of donated clothing will be sold domestically (S.M.A.R.T.). Garments that are donated are disposed of to commercial second-hand clothing dealers. These dealers then export it around the world or in the case of Mexico, often in the form of pacas which will be explained further. As used clothing approaches

and goes through the process of crossing the border, it undergoes some kind of metamorphosis, “in the United States, they (used clothing) are discarded goods; once they are in Mexico, they are in-demand commodities. While in transit, they are contraband” (Guo March 2018).

Border Politics and Crossing Contraband

Importing used clothing to Mexico from the United States without proper licensing is illegal. In order to obtain the proper licensing from Mexico’s Secretariat of Economy, applicants must submit extensive information which deters essentially everyone from getting the license. The Secretariat of Economy has never received a request for an import license (Guo, March 2018). The entire system remains primary in the grey economy.¹⁰ While the Mexican government has made efforts to protect domestic textile and garment industries by restricting commercial importation of second-hand clothing, it continues on a large scale (Gauthier 2009, 32). The argument for restricting this trade is primarily defended by issues of hygiene and public health but above all, a concern that the used clothing market unfairly competes with legitimate business within the country.

Sandoval-Hénandez (2015) and Gauthier (2009) provide two most relevant studies on cross border relations for the purpose of my research. Their work looks at cross border politics at the two most prominent border crossings, Reynosa-Laredo and Ciudad Juárez-El Paso. Both studies emphasize the changes that were made regarding border politics with the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994. NAFTA solidified a neoliberal economic model. It systematically reshaped how goods are sold, transported and resold in Mexico. NAFTA eliminated nearly all tariffs on imports and exports between the US, Canada and Mexico; clothing was one of the few

¹⁰ The grey economy represents legal goods sold illegally.

exceptions (Gauthier, 2009). While NAFTA limited legal imports of used clothing, its leniency on other imports led to a higher volume of traffic across the border and fewer searches on land border crossings going into Mexico. It is important to note that NAFTA made the movement of manufactured goods across the border both ways easier but did not ease the flow of people. In order to continue the second-hand clothing economy that had been created, bribes became a much more common and necessary element of the exchange. Despite NAFTA's restrictions, used clothing continues to be imported into the country. All of Mexico's borders have illegal and semi-legal entry of clothing.

Ropa de Paca

Pacas provide a primary source of used clothing export. Ropa de paca is a term used to describe clothing that is bought and sold in bulk sourced from the commercial second-hand clothing dealers in the United States. "The garments meant for export are compressed into bales (*pacas*), weighing between 45 and 635 kilograms (100 and 1,400 pounds), which are then wrapped in waterproof plastic and bound with metal straps" (Gauthier 2009, 71). Pacas are often second-hand however can also include new pieces that are either discontinued or that were excess. The point of ropa de paca is that it is bulk, so rather than focusing on the quality of individual pieces, the value is the low price and high quantity. The majority of the ropa de paca in Mexico comes from the United States or more commonly known as *ropa de paca americana*. Private suppliers for ropa de paca are advertised on the internet, primarily on Facebook and rely on carriers to take bulk packages from the US to Mexico. Most of the time it is not entirely clear or transparent what all is included in the bulks (Sandoval, 2022).

Ropa de Paca bundles imported from the United States are often organized by type. Type 1 clothing contains 300 - 350 items of clothing from well-known American brands such as Levis, Gap and Abercrombie and Fitch. These bundles are valued at 12,000-15,000 pesos (\$900-1,100 USD) (Maya, 2015). Type 2 contains clothing that has small imperfections such as stains. These bundles are valued lower at 7,000 - 9,000 pesos (\$400-500 USD) (Maya, 2015). They are usually unfolded and somewhat dirty. Finally Type 3 are bundles of children's clothing and oversized items. These bundles can also include pieces that are deemed out of fashion. These pieces are valued at 5-20 pesos (less than \$1 USD per item) (Maya, 2015). The prices mentioned above are the prices that pacas cost from sellers themselves. Getting pacas across the border varies in price depending on who is involved in the transportation. It may be done through the wholesaler directly or through individual personal connections.

Organized crime began to become involved in the second-hand clothing market between 2009 - 2010. Efrén Sandoval-Hernández, a researcher for the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) Northeast, conducted fieldwork on the Tamaulipas-Texas border, a primary point of resale and exchange of second-hand clothing and ropa de paca. CIESAS is Mexico's leading social science graduate program and think tank. Sandoval-Hernández (2015) argues that clothing that is being taken from the US into Mexico is often traded directly from wholesalers. Otherwise, it is brought in by truckers and freighters who are forced to work with cartels (Maya, 2015). Sandoval-Hernández's research (2015) has also pointed out that the compressed packages of clothes, known as pacas, are being used by drug cartels to smuggle weapons into Mexico (Sandoval-Hénandes 2015, 104).

Ropa de paca is not the only clothing that is sent in bulk from the United States. *Saldos* (remainders) are bundles of clothing that are also sent in bulk but are filled exclusively with new

clothing. Saldos are exported from the United States, China, Egypt, Taiwan among other high production countries to Mexico. Individual sellers then become connected with saldo sellers and are able to purchase the clothing at a very low cost. Much of the clothing is still in near perfect condition. This clothing is often found in tianguis and open air markets where pieces are sold at higher prices than the sellers bought them for, but still much lower than they would be in the United States.

The second-hand clothing trade is one example of cross-border small scale trading operating outside of the law. The trade “is often derived with the expression “*fayuca hormiga*” (Gauthier 2009,13).¹¹ This kind of trade is done by carrying relatively small amounts of goods by the same person across the border to sell them on the other side for a profit. By moving only small bundles at a time, transporters can say the clothing is for personal use. Gauthier looks at how the border creates both an obstacle and an economic opportunity for these kinds of traders. The *fayuca hormiga* functions on multiple scales. *Pasadores* are designated people that are paid to bring goods across the border. The going rate for a pasador is \$40 per 36-gallon plastic bag. Pasadores often have some kind of personal relationship with customs officers which allows them to simplify the process of crossing. If they are caught, they can pay a fine and keep their product or have it all confiscated. By forcing a fine rather than confiscating goods, customs officers are also making a profit from the import of the illegal trade. This benefits both parties; customs officers to continue letting products into the country and people like pasadores to continue their work. Used clothing can also be transported by the pallet. Clothing that is transported across the border by the pallet is done primarily commercially rather than the *fayuca*

¹¹ “According to Pelayo and Para (1994:7), the term *fayuca* is a popular expression used along the northern Mexican border to designate the introduction of new and used merchandise for consumption: its objective is small-scale commercialization at the retail level, as a source of supply for local consumption and as a complement to national production. “The evocative Spanish expression “*hormiga*” (on a small scale, literally antlike) signifies the energetic, industrious habits” (Campbell 2005) of these networks of cross-border traders who bring in secretly and clandestinely there used clothing imports into Mexico.”(Gauthier 2009,13-14)

hormiga. “It will cost \$70 to cross a single bag (much higher than the going rate of \$40), \$350 for a sedan filled up to the windows, \$500 for an SUV, and \$900 for a large unmarked van” (Guo, 2018). Rather than fostering Mexico’s domestic textile industry, neoliberalism encourages a massive grey economy in used clothing, corruption of Mexican officials and helps benefit cartels.

As noted from this brief summary of border crossing and monetary values that are assigned to used clothing, it is evident that the network of exchange is blurry, complex and challenging to track. Personal connections and repeated business are crucial components to the system. These social connections impact the fluctuation of pricing, much of which is done in secrecy. Consumers in both the United States and Mexico, vintage dealers, ropa de paca sellers, market vendors, and second-hand stores all rely on networks of border trade.

Mateo is a middle aged Mexican who owns a number of vintage stores in Roma Norte. I met him at a coffee shop one morning while in Mexico City. We sat outside the cafe on the street and talked for about two hours. He had not yet started going to the United States to find pieces for his stores but many of his friends had, “They fly over, go to markets and buy. They pay a guy 3000 pesos (\$165 USD) with a truck, a Mexican American guy that has the SENTRI card which allows you to cross a border just like that, and they cross over your merchandise, and they put it on this side of the border, because coming in is no problem. They say there you go, there's your package, 3000 pesos and then they go back and get another load, and that's what they do.”¹²

¹² A SENTRI card (The Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection) is a U.S. Customs and Border Protection program easing border crossings for pre-approved, low risk travelers. It can be used instead of a passport traveling between the U.S. and Mexico by land and sea.

Value on the Border

Clothing crossing the border is primarily valued in terms of its monetary value. Specifically clothing that is being transported in bulk is valued in groups rather than individual pieces. As a whole, the majority of the clothing crossing the border is deemed valuable because of its low prices and opportunity to be resold for profit in Mexico. That being said, there is also used clothing from the United States that is valued because of its origins in the US. The physical place of the border is a site where the monetary value of used clothing shifts. As mentioned by Guo (2018) clothing that had lost value from its original owner enters a system where it has such a high demand and value that it is smuggled.

In the following section of this chapter I explain the places used clothing goes once it is on the Mexican side of the border. I then move to Mexico City itself and the various places where used clothing is sold within the city. Once clothing is on the Mexican side of the border, it may be given directly to individuals who had it privately transported across the border or it goes to large industrial warehouses where *las segundas*, second-hand clothing, is gathered, sorted once again and transported to other destinations. *Pacas* may go directly to larger sellers in major cities or are distributed in border towns. For the purpose of this research, I focused on sites of second-hand clothing exchange in Mexico City. Within the city I have identified six primary kinds of places where there is an active exchange of used clothing. First I provide a general overview of Mexico City's spatial organization and 'colonias'. Then I discuss tianguis that have been a site for second-hand clothing exchange for centuries. I then move to talk about bazaars spaces, vintage and consignment stores specifically in Roma Norte. Finally, I explore the ways in which social media and the internet has become an effective location for exchange. I was interested in the stores in Roma Norte as a pinpoint for my research because of the ways in

which the neighborhood, consumer and eagerness to participate in second-hand clothing exchange has increased and flourished in the past five years. This thesis discusses the exchanges, stories and people that are entangled in these places.

Colonias and Neighborhoods of Mexico City

From above Mexico City is a vast nearly endless sprawl of buildings. I remember the first time I flew into the city in August of 2021. Prior to my trip people had told me the city was big, but I didn't fully realize what big meant. Mexico City is the fifth largest city in the world and the largest that speaks Spanish. It is the oldest capital city in the Americas, and continues to act as the political, financial and administrative capital for the country. The neighborhoods within the city are often referred to as colonias. Through the sprawling 573 square miles that make up the city formally, there are 16 *alcaldías* (boroughs) and nearly 2,000 colonias. I focus my research specifically in Colonia Roma located in the Cuauhtémoc borough, west of the historic center. Prior to my analysis of exchange happening in Roma specifically, I introduce marketplace sites outside of Cuauhtémoc where much of the used clothing sold in Roma is sourced.

Tianguis

Tianguis and *mercados* are two of the primary sites for the used clothing market within Mexico City. Tianguis serves as an umbrella term for large open air markets that have existed in Mexico City since the late 1400s. The word tianguis derives from the Nahuatl word *tiyānquiztli*, meaning open air-market. These spaces function within both the formal and informal economy. Tianguis can be found in nearly every neighborhood, some specializing in goods while others have vendors selling absolutely everything imaginable. In Mexico City, Mercado Jamaica, for

example, sells primarily flowers while Mercado Sonora is known for selling animals and products used for magic and religious ceremonies. These are both permanent markets however there are hundreds of more periodic markets that open weekly or once a week. Nearly all markets have stands selling produce, grains, candy in addition to more restaurant style meals. Most larger tianguis have at least a small designated area for clothing, both new and used. Many are known for their low prices and variety of products for the community.

There are tianguis throughout the city that are designated to sell exclusively *ropa de paca*. These are popular for people looking to buy in bulk and others looking to find unique pieces, treasures in the rubble. Above all tianguis have historically provided an abundance of goods at low prices. They are often outside of the most affluent neighborhoods in the city but as used and vintage clothing has become trendier, sellers who are looking for specific items and people with more money visit these spaces. Figure 1 outlines a number of different tianguis and *saldos* that I researched and visited during my field work. While the map I have created does not account for the over 1000 registered tianguis in Mexico City, the map is helpful in providing a visual representation of geographical separation these markets have from the stores and businesses discussed in this thesis. These spaces, as seen in the map included, are away from colonias such as Roma and Condesa. While there also exist tianguis in these colonias, they are smaller scale and tend to appeal to tourists and people with money. Figure 2 shows tianguis in CDMX that are exclusive to *ropa de paca*. Again, this map is intended to visually show the geographical separation between sites of exchange.

Tianguis sell a range of goods that are valued differently depending on their location and audience or customer base. There is a certain level of stigma attached to *saldos* and *ropa de paca* especially depending on the place it is sold. Walking through different markets in Mexico City,

people were eager to tell me that pieces were not ropa de paca, explaining where they got pieces and implying the heightened value. Some sellers even had signs next to pieces of clothing and shoes emphasizing again that pieces were not ropa de paca. Specifically walking around a weekly market in Condesa, a very affluent neighborhood in Mexico City, sellers emphasized that the pieces they were selling were “*de buena calidad*” (of good quality), paying attention to the average customer walking around the market.

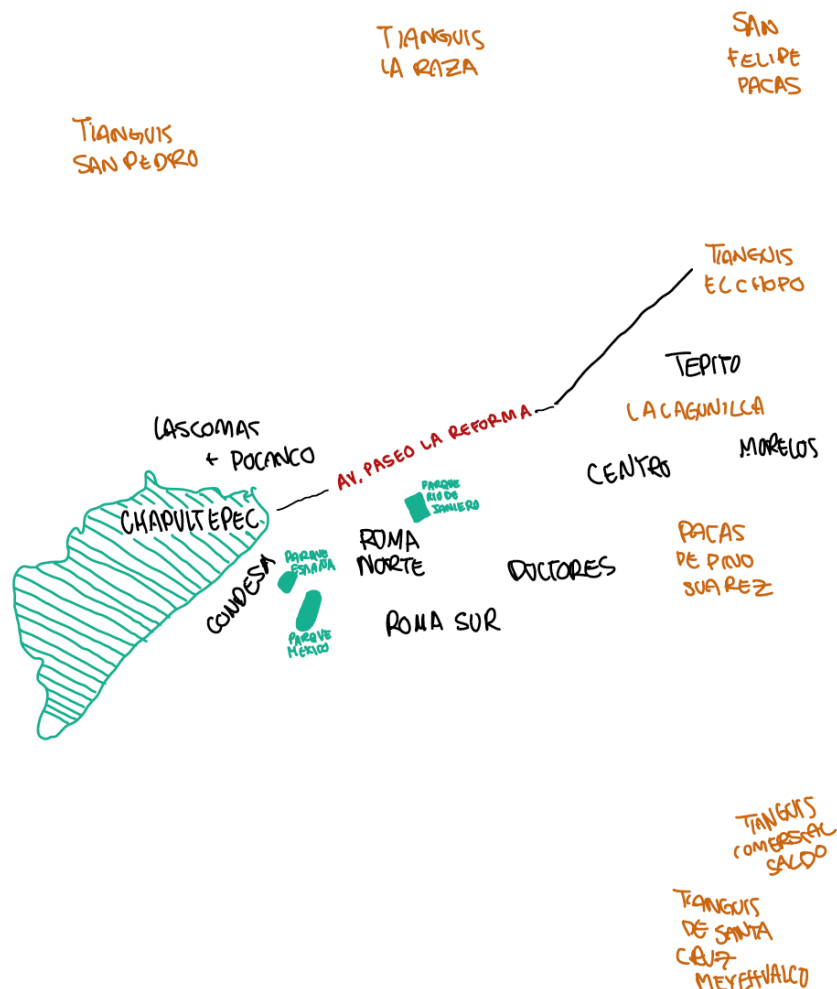
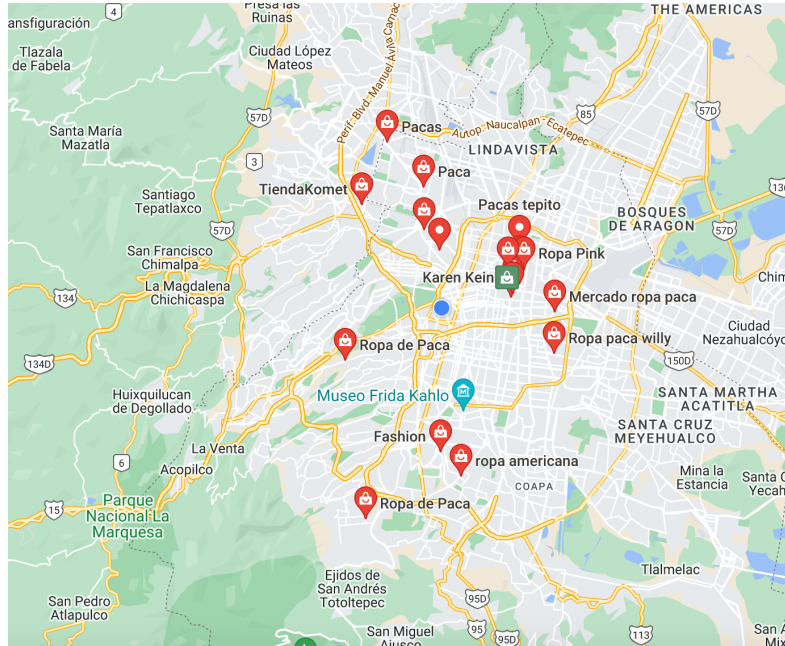


Figure 1: Drawn map of tianguis I visited during field work



**Figure 2: Tianguis that sell Ropa de Paca within Mexico City
(blue dot is Roma/Condesa Area)**



Figure 3: “From Washington D.C. No Es Paka”

Items, specifically used clothing items that are found in tianguis, are often clothing that is ropa de paca or found and sold by individual sellers. This can be clothing that used to belong to them, family members or friends. Used clothing may also come from pepenadores who sorted it from trash and the dumps.¹³ Historically tianguis sold any clothing that was available and while that continues to be true for some, it's not the case for all.

¹³ Pepenadores are scavengers; they are people that make a living by reselling and reusing pieces found in the trash.

Gentrification of Tianguis; Seas of clothing, el pastor tacos and liter size micheladas

Tianguis have acted as a communal space of exchange within neighborhoods in Mexico City since the Aztecs. They are an essential part of the city's cultural and social fabric. Tourism and gentrification have changed the environments, connections and raised prices within these spaces. Within Mexico City and even more so within Roma Norte and Cuauhtemoc just east of Roma, rents have spiked, Airbnb's have transformed markets and there are significantly more foreigners and tourists than ever before. Smaller neighborhood markets generally take up a square block whereas larger markets such as La Lagunilla antique market, covers nearly 10 blocks. Large scale markets like La Lagunilla have become a destination for tourists. La Lagunilla has existed since the 19th century in the middle of La Guerreo, next to Tepito. It is now known as one of the most popular antique markets in the city. The original sellers recognized their success and moved to a more formal space in the Plaza de Angel which has not had the same kind of success. La Lagunilla has remained one of the most popular markets in the city. In the market now, which opens every Sunday, there is blasting reggae house music coming from all directions, people scrambling in a sea of clothing, el pastor tacos and liter size micheladas. Each part of the market is organized by product. There are numerous stalls next to each other selling the same kind of thing. Turning the corner from jewelry there is a world of used clothing. The second-hand clothing sold is at a significantly lower price than the stores in Roma Norte despite much of it appearing to be very similar.

American brands have significant value and interest among consumers. Huge cardboard and sharpie signs highlight specific American brands such as Nike or Levis. Locals who used to visit the market to find things to bring back to their own stores to sell are pushed out by the higher prices that are now possible due to the changing consumer.

Down the street from the glorieta de los insurgentes, I talked to a woman named Elvia who opened her second-hand store two years ago, amidst the pandemic. She initially wanted to open the store because she realized how much extra clothing she had lying around her house. After opening the store and selling all of her own and her family's clothes, she started looking for more. She goes to markets and tianguis in places like Tepito and El Centro to find pieces of clothing that are very cheap that she can then resell. She wanted to have her own store in an area that already had a lot of second-hand and vintage stores, a place she knew there would be a customer base and people walking around. Additionally, glorieta de los insurgentes is one of the busiest parts of the city. It is the intersection of major city streets and the entrance to a huge metro station. When I asked her about where she sourced her clothing now, she said that there are trucks set up for clothing purchase and donation in neighborhoods like Polanco and Las Lomas where there is a lot of wealth. Clothing is essentially given to others or sold at a very low price. She explained to me that these trucks or donation services function much like the junk collectors that drive around the city. This system allows for people to feel good about themselves by giving away old clothing while simultaneously helping her in her own work. Elvia is one example of how tianguis are used as a sourcing place for independent sellers.

Used clothing that is found in these markets is valued differently by the individual consumer. Some clothing is valued because of its low cost and accessibility, others are valued because of their uniqueness and adventure of going to a tianguis and searching for something unique. Tianguis as a site of second-hand clothing exchange provides a space where there is a greater diversity in the consumer. It is a physical place where people from all social classes frequent.

Bazaars and Collectives

A bazaar is similar to a tianguis in that it is a space where individual stands are collectively organized in a set space at a set time. Bazaars tend to be organized by product specialization. These are set up weekly or monthly in large parks, warehouses or buildings. Some are filled exclusively with small businesses that are looking to get their name out, others are solely online businesses having a pop-up. Generally prices tend to be a little higher within these spaces than tianguis. Bazaars are now often found as pop-ups on the city's most affluent streets. I visited a number of bazaars in Roma Norte and Roma Sur, finding the locations on Instagram, street poles or stumbling across them while walking.

Used clothing at these kinds of bazaars is valued economically higher than those at tianguis because it has been curated and picked by the seller. Additionally bazaars can target a specific consumer base by the location and advertising of the event. Likewise the exclusivity of the kinds of sellers that are included in the specific bazaar affect the value attached to clothing sold. The value attached to used clothing is highly dependent on the location of the site of exchange.

Bazaars and tianguis appear in many different forms throughout the city. I focused a component of my research at a feminist collective set up like a bazaar or small scale tianguis in Plaza Rio de Janeiro in Roma Norte. In the park there are people reading books on benches, kids playing in jungle gyms after school and tourists walking around looking at the surrounding area in awe. There are about 40 different clothing rack stands set up primarily with used clothing. The setting in the park creates a high pedestrian trafficked area in the heart of Roma Norte. It is surrounded by popular restaurants, cafes, art galleries and museums. The women's collective

started in 2020 during the end of the pandemic. Women in the area came together to create a safe space for community and agency for women to have control over their lives financially. They explained that after COVID-19 it was challenging for many to hold onto their businesses. The collective created a space for them to sell goods and be inspired by others doing the same. They call themselves the ‘Colectiva Feminista de Zetian’.

Isabella is one of the women who sets up a stand at the collective four days a week. She is a white presenting Argentinian who moved from Buenos Aires to CDMX a few years ago.¹⁴ When we talked, she was wearing a large oversized camo jacket, brown pants, a black baseball hat and a fanny pack. Her thick long straight hair framed her deep-set eyes and small face. The darkness of her makeup and hair intensified her pale complexion. She emphasized in our conversation that the collective was not a tianguis or bazaar, but rather an economic protest.

Yes, well the movement in the Plaza Rio de Janeiro, we are a feminist collective, sometimes people come and say oh this is a tianguis, this is a bazar, but no this is not a *tianguis*, this is an economic protest and we protest for the rights of women, in relation to men in the workforce that always have more. Women have less opportunities we say, lower wages, labor burdens, hours that are not paid...so in our case, we are here also because of the pandemic, many of us were left without jobs so we found this outlet here to have a power over fixed income, we are here Thursday to Sunday all year.¹⁵

The physical space of the ‘Colectiva Feminista de Zetian’ impacts the value of the clothing sold there from both the seller's perspective as well as the consumer. For the seller, the area is heavily trafficked and is in a safe, affluent neighborhood. This benefits both their own

¹⁴ As discussed in my methodology I did not ask for my informants to discuss their racial identity. This was a limitation of my project and what I have chosen to include is referenced from what I did discuss with them in conversation and the ways in which they present.

¹⁵ Spanish translation: “Si pues bueno, este movimiento en la plaza rio de janiero somos una colectiva feminista, aveses personas vengan y dicen que es un tianguis es un bazar, no... esto no es un tianguis, esto es una protesta económica y protestamos por los derechos de las mujeres que entrelaciona los hombres siempre en los trabajos son más, tienen menos oportunidades digamos, salarios más bajos, cargas laborales, horarios que no son pagos.... entonces bueno en nuestros casos las que estamos aquí también es que han pasado la pandémica muchas no quedamos sin trabajo entonces estábamos, encontramos como esta salida aquí para poder subsistir fijo, que estamos aquí de jueves a domingos este todo el año.”

personal safety and the price at which they can sell clothing. Isabella told me that there was a time that the park was known to be a more dangerous place and that if she were to set up a stand by herself she would feel vulnerable. The vulnerability would be not only the risk of people stealing from her but also general discomfort in being alone. Having the collective creates a system of security and care. She said now if there is something that seems to be weird going on in the park or if someone is trying to bother one of the women, they can all come together to deal with the situation. In chapter 4, I return to the value of community and support within used clothing economies in the city.

For the consumer, clothing at the collective is curated and picked out individually by women for a specific reason. Prices are lower and more accessible than at nearby shops because there is not the additional cost of physical space. Isabella said that it is very challenging within the city to find pieces that are good quality or original at accessible prices. She also said that within Mexico City, and globally for that matter, designer clothing is exclusive and expensive. She made note that she understands the reasons designers have high prices, that the quality of design takes time and is not mass produced. The limited pieces, exclusivity, creativity and originality are all aspects that contribute to pieces being expensive. Clothing being sold at the collective will most likely cost more than it would if it was in a *tianguis* but significantly less than if it was in a store; especially a store in Roma.

Vintage Stores in Roma

I was initially interested in focusing my research in Roma Norte because while traveling there the summer prior to my research I was intrigued by the concentration of vintage and used clothing stores. Walking through both the Roma Norte and nearby Condesa colonias, there is a

highly curated vintage shop on nearly every block. I was also intrigued that many of these stores had English names printed on the facade. A year later, I found myself still interested in the why. Why was there a concentration of these kinds of stores in Roma Norte? Why were there so many people walking around this area that were interested in this economy? Why or more so how were the prices at these shops so high? Why is some used clothing valued higher than others even if they are the same pieces? Why were some of these stores so exclusive that you had to be let in individually and looked up and down to enter? Why did this one specific place feel like the center of vintage in Mexico City and why was it happening now? Was it because of Americans wealth there like media headlines?

“As Remote Workers Flock to Mexico City, Airbnb and Housing Prices Soar”(*New York Times*, 12/28/22), ““You’re not welcome’: Mexico City residents decry Airbnb”(*Aljazeera*, 12/13/22), “Foreign invasion brings changes to Mexico City boroughs”(*Mexico New Daily*, 7/27/22), Mexico City residents angered by influx of Americans speaking English, gentrifying area: report” (*New York Post*, 7/28/22). The media has repeatedly headlined remote work, digital nomads and the Airbnb takeover as the root cause of gentrification within Mexico City and specifically Roma Norte and Condesa. During the pandemic many people moved to Mexico City to take advantage of remote work flexibility and benefited from living in the Mexican economy while still making US dollars. The increase of foreigners and specifically Americans living permanently in Mexico City is clear. Many restaurant menus and store fronts are in English, fitness and yoga classes offer bilingual options and walking around the streets of Roma and Condesa English is heard as much if not more than Spanish.

Americans living long-term in Mexico City is nothing new, nor is the wealth in Colonia Roma. People have been attracted to Mexico and specifically Mexico City for the temperate

climate, lower cost of living, beautiful art, architecture and culture for decades. Colonia Roma specifically has always had a lot of foreigners. There are a number of large universities in the area and it is close to European and US embassies. Adding to this, COVID dramatically increased the number of people, specifically young people moving to CDMX because of remote work. Later I will expand on the social effects of having more foreigners in the Roma Norte however for the purpose of this chapter I will focus on the place and geography of Roma Norte and how used clothing is valued. These neighborhoods have always been more expensive and cosmopolitan and having more people with money concentrated in Roma has allowed for all prices to continue to rise. A coffee shop can charge 60 pesos (\$3.31 USD) for an espresso and people will buy it daily, whereas in other neighborhoods an espresso would never be more than 21 pesos (\$1.16 USD). So while COVID-19 has had an impact on the people that walk the streets of Roma, it is not the primary reason curated vintage stores thrive there, or the reason the neighborhood has so much wealth in comparison to others in the city.

Roma has always been a home for the middle but primarily upper class. From the beginning the colonia was planned as an upper class Porfirian neighborhood. Despite going through dramatic changes during the early Porfiriato, Mexico City still hung on to legacies from colonialism while transitioning to a revolutionary city. The center, Zocalo, was set aside for elite *peninsulares*.¹⁶ Colonial structures, churches and large mansions filled the center. Modernization projects targeted these areas causing economic, social and political changes. These projects were also in response to an influx of rural migrants to the city. Between 1870 - 1910 the population in Mexico City nearly tripled. As the city became more populated, a drastic separation of wealth was made between the more impoverished east and affluent west sides of the city. The affluent

¹⁶ Peninsulares refer to people that were born in Spain and living in Spanish colonies, so for the purpose of this discussion, individuals born in Spain but living in what is now Mexico.

western districts came to represent “progress and peace” as defined by Porfirian values of success which also came with greater access and interest in both consumption and leisure (Sluis, 2016). Unsurprisingly, these values also aligned with many trends of the United States and Europe, a pattern that was seen through major Latin American metropolitan cities.

In the context of this paper, it is critical to understand the foundations and histories of Roma. Affluence and a culture of consumption has persisted today and influenced the ways in which people value what they are purchasing. Avenue Paseo de la Reforma, connects Roma Norte to the main Zócalo. This is one example of city planning providing a runway like stage for the elite to show off. Sluis writes, “urban environments, Mexico City in particular, were seen or used as stages to demonstrate and teach Mexicans— especially the illiterate ones— the trappings of civilization, respect for the regime, and more generally, appropriate ways of acting, dressing, and appearing modern” (Sluis 2016,12). Both Parque México and Parque España, two large public parks in the Roma and Condesa colonias, provide similar public opportunities for presentation of self.

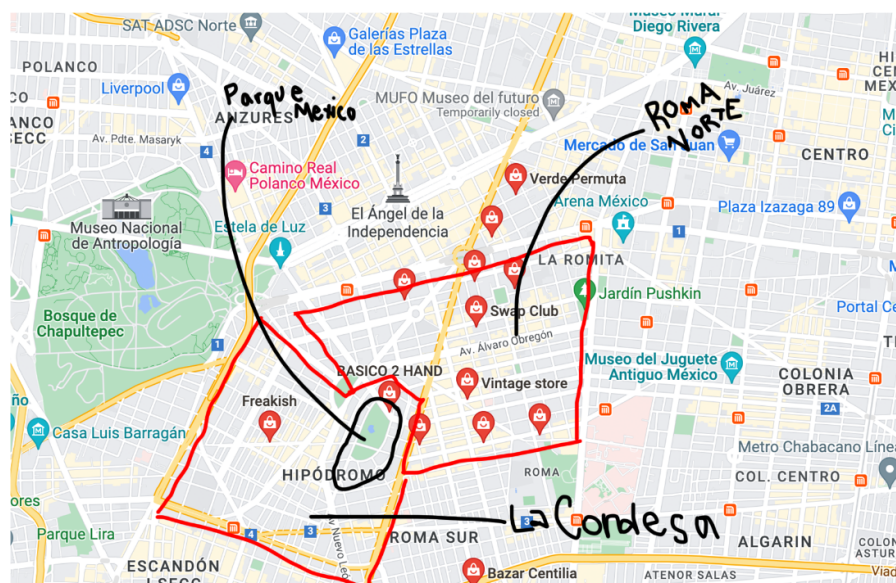


Figure 4: Map of Thrift Stores in Roma Norte and Condesa highlighting Parque Mexico (edits by author)

Parque México which is in the center of the neighborhood, is heavily trafficked and the location for many community events. It is in an oval shape as it was originally built on top of a horse track, again alluding to the history of wealth and affluence of the neighborhood. Surrounding the park, Avenida Amsterdam creates a pedestrian-only loop, lined with plant beds and trees. These areas quickly reflected Europhilic designs seen through fashion, theaters, tree lined streets, architecture and food. After the Revolution, European influence decreased due to the devastations of World War 1 and the United States cultural influence grew.

In the early 1920's President Obregón issued legislation aimed to address rent and growing demand for the middle and working classes (Sluis, 2016). This legislation ended up benefiting property owners in wealthier areas such as Roma, Condesa and Juárez who used the changes to build houses in zones with high demand, increasing rent and making the area even more exclusive. It is not a surprise that many wealthy individuals that were involved in politics lived in these areas and wanted them to become increasingly wealthy as a way to flaunt their power. Urbanization efforts were primarily concentrated in wealthy areas that would help improve the image of Mexico the fastest. Modernization during and after the revolution were seen through architecture, technology, commercial innovation and being seen as modern through the eyes of foreign powers, specifically the United States (Sluis, 2016).

Roma Norte continues to be a home for the elite and tourists. Public parks and open streets continue to be central community gathering areas where people hang out and spend free time. There are very few large buses and trains that run through the area, making it feel calmer and quieter than the surrounding area. In a city that is known for its vast chaos, Roma Norte and Condesa are a calm oasis. The parks themselves not only provide a physical place for people to hang out but also a social space for meeting and display.

City planning and structuring shapes the ways in which people interact and take up space. Victor Delgado looks at the logic and process of urban restructuring the way it is done to support markets. This kind of restructuring increases prices and makes it challenging for low income populations to remain in certain neighborhoods. In Roma Norte specifically, these kinds of urban changes have kept the neighborhoods' affluent history present (Delgado, 2016). Delgado looks specifically at the selective modernization of Mexico City. The upscale fashion, style, food and culture of the Roma has been written about in countless US magazines, blogs and travel journals (*New York Times*, July 2014) (*Goop*, 2022) (*TripAdvisor*, 2022). The markets and businesses in the area display to a very affluent audience and consumer base, aligning to Delgado's analysis of selective modernization. Affluence and aesthetic are built into the place. This is a part of the appeal for both sellers and buyers of the used clothing market. There is a boom in the Roma Norte neighborhood because used clothing pieces can be sold at higher prices but compared to other regions they are still low.

I visited over 10 different vintage stores in Roma Norte. Some were eager to talk to me about their work, others were not. Each store had their own unique atmosphere but quickly there was a common thread that connected most; significantly higher prices and focus on presentation and aesthetics. The stores I spent time in ranged from small consignment shops, 10-year-old vintage nooks, corporate multistore so called vintage experts and artistic boutiques. While independently different, all these sites of exchange are able to assign value to the used clothes they sell because of the location they are in. While Roma Norte has a history of being affluent, the influence of the pandemic, uprisings of Airbnb's and digital nomads has changed who is walking the streets and participating in the local economy. Pedestrian traffic, popular restaurants, bars and cafes are all a part of the overall appeal and success of Roma Norte.

Sara is a 35-year-old who has owned a vintage store with her mom in Roma Norte for 10 years. She is a tall thin woman with dark brown hair, short cut bangs with red lipstick. She was born and raised in Mexico. She said in our conversation that often people don't think that she is Mexican because of the fairness of her skin but that she is Mexican.¹⁷ When I met her, she had a floral blouse gently tucked into her high waisted dark wash skinny jeans. As I walked into her store she was filming a video for her Instagram where she posts about pieces and short videos of their histories. The store was busy with clothing, jewelry and accessories but simultaneously clearly thought through. There were branches, beads and tapestries connected to parts of the ceiling. The window had a floral decorative piece that Sara drew herself. The atmosphere of the store was inviting and made me want to look around and explore. As we began talking about where we were within the city, her voice softened, almost with a tone of sadness.

Recently all tourists, or digital nomads, but this area has changed so much over the years. This area used to be a family area with hospitals and schools but now I just see tourists. With gentrification everything is very expensive. I am very lucky.¹⁸

Sara's response to the question of location focuses on how the neighborhood had changed and her gratitude for being able to continue her work. Sara curates her store by her own taste but is simultaneously aware of what her customers will look for and buy. She began sourcing from her own friends' wardrobes but has now extended to an international scale. She explained to me that people know her store and specifically the location in Roma. With this added location value, they will sell or give vintage clothing to her because they know it will be sold. So what is the

¹⁷ As discussed in my methodology I did not ask for my informants to discuss their racial identity. This was a limitation of my project and what I have chosen to include is referenced from what I did discuss with them in conversation and the ways in which they present.

¹⁸ Spanish translation: "Recientemente todo turistas. O nómades digitales, pero es que esta zona ha cambiado muchísimo con los años. Aquí era una zona de familias, de hospitales, de escuelas, y ahorita solo veo turistas. La gentrificación, todo es muy caro. Yo tengo mucha suerte."

value of location? Or in other words how does the physical location of an article of used clothing affect the value that is attached or associated to it?

There is a recurring phenomenon of clothing being sourced from less affluent colonias outside of Roma is brought in to be sold at a higher price. Geographical place greatly influences the economic value attached to clothing as well as people's emotional and personal values in selling or purchasing pieces. These systems of exchange are interrelated and have to function co-dependently. The impact of neoliberal capitalism has allowed for markets in used clothing to flourish not only because increased demand of clothing as a whole leads to more production but also because of the ways in which clothing continues to be commodified and desired beyond its initial purchase.

Presentation to the Consumer

Within each of these physical geographical locations, the ways in which clothing pieces are presented to the consumer or customer varies. The environment and ambience that is created within a store greatly impacts the economic value or price that can be attached to a physical product. Within tianguis, clothing is most commonly displayed in large piles of unorganized clothing or hung up attached to tents creating a collage-like wall display. In the case of pacas, clothing is often unseen and sold by the bag and general type. The presentation of clothing dramatically shifts within second-hand bazaars and even more so within curated vintage stores.

Graciella is a middle aged woman who owns a 20-year-old consignment store on the fringe of Roma Norte and Condesa. Her business started as a used furniture shop but quickly transformed to also sell consignment clothing. Her friends from all over the world donate

clothing, making her selection unique and different. There are pieces from Italy, Sweden, the states and Spain creating an eclectic selection of pieces that vary in size and style. During our conversation, Graciella flipped through blouses and dresses neatly hanging on the racks in her store surrounding large pieces of furniture in the center. As she was flipping through the rack of clothing, she picked out a feathery vest. She explained that if she were to put the vest on a rack on the street, she would price it at around \$250 pesos (\$14 USD), if it was on a rack in her store it would be \$350 pesos (\$20 USD), if it was in a pile of clothing not folded it would be around \$100 (\$5.50 USD) pesos and if it was being sold at a store in Polanco or Las Lomas it would be \$680 pesos (\$38 USD). In all of these places the same piece would sell. She explained the fluctuation of the price with grand gestures and big eyes, in many ways indicating the absurdity of how the same piece can be valued so differently. The price that a piece is listed for entirely depends on the place it is sold, the way in which it is presented and the customers attitude and willingness to pay. Using the vest as an example, she explained that pieces of clothing can fluctuate their values an endless number of times. To a certain extent, pieces are priced higher at curated stores because of the labor that is involved in curation and selecting pieces from markets. That being said, the degree of price increase does not align with the cost of labor.

Presentation goes along with the place. The atmosphere that a stand or store cultivates influences how the customer sees and personally values an article. Intentional atmosphere is at the core of La Agua, a vintage shop in el centro. I visited La Agua with Mateo, the man referenced previously in the conversation about pricing in border crossing. I walked with Mateo and his store manager up two flights of stairs in a somewhat industrial building. There was no signage on the exterior of the building or even at the locked gate we came to at the top of the

flight of stairs. Eventually a very slender Italian man buzzed the door and let us in.¹⁹ Ricardo had a sharp face and slicked back hair turning grey. Mateo was right, everything about him was vintage even his greaser look. He was wearing a black sweater with thick black and orange striped sleeves, denim pants with a silver embellished belt and chains hanging from his waist. Ricardo began telling me about the history of the land on which we were standing; referencing the old buildings and Spanish influence. The shop itself is filled with racks of neatly organized clothing. The walls are covered in vintage posters, records and clothing; every surface with *chachara* and stories. The presentation of the store adds to the value of the clothing because it compels the customer to believe that Ricardo knows what he is selling. Ricardo made note in our conversation of the space itself.

I honestly built this space for myself because I love it. I don't care if I sell or not. We have such a variety and people come shop and it's like a hidden gem of like oh my I didn't expect this...We have the corner building so that's not bad you know, and I put my heart and soul into this. We restored the whole floor, these are original oak floors and I saved the whole thing. It was a mess but I paid the guy two years to fix the different sections of the shops.

Ricardo has his most prized pieces up on the wall for display. He pointed to a small denim workwear shirt pinned up on the wall among other pieces. “That is original work wear but for kids,” he explained proudly, “part of my personal collection, probably my most valued piece.” By presenting the shirt this way, Ricardo is emphasizing the importance and value it has. While Ricardo and Graciella sell very different kinds of used clothing, they both understand and use presentation strategies in their processes of exchange.

¹⁹ As discussed in my methodology I did not ask for my informants to discuss their racial identity. This was a limitation of my project and what I have chosen to include is referenced from what I did discuss with them in conversation and the ways in which they present.



Figure 5: Image taken in Ricardo's vintage store. Children's workwear referenced can be seen pinned up on the wall.

Place and presentation influence how people sell and buy used clothing. Histories of place, geographical movement and transportation of goods impact the price at which pieces are sold and the customer that will be purchasing them. The monetary value of used clothing is directly related to place and geography. This chapter has provided an overview of different sites of second-hand clothing exchange in Mexico City. It outlines clothing crossing the border, its arrival to Mexico and the network that exists within the city. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the ways in which physical presentation affects clothing's value.

Chapter 3

I'm Not Like You, I'm in My Vintage Era: the Value of Story, Era and Past

In chapter 2, I showed the ways in which physical place affects value. I defined and explained specific sites of exchange and how geographical movement affects value. In chapter 3 I move to the specific article of clothing's past. I present how the history of a piece of used clothing creates a narrative that becomes more complex than if it was purchased new. This complexity adds to the emotional value for both the seller and consumer in turn adding to the economic possibilities. How is the story of a piece of clothing told? I begin my analysis through an explanation of aspects of visible story. From first glance, a story of a piece of clothing can be constructed through brand and material, this is true of both new and used clothing. Time and era can also be identified, giving the piece of clothing context. I then move to explain a story that needs to be explained or hidden. This is when I ask the questions of where a piece came from, who owned it previously and who are the people that participated in its movement. Later, I explain the ways in which narrative is used as a marketing tool. Finally I discuss how the value of the story is ongoing. The new owner of a piece of second-hand clothing acquires its past and history.

Power of Brand

Within all sites of second-hand clothing exchange, brand is one of, if not the most, dominant factor at play in terms of monetary value attached to clothing. Consumers have preconceived associations with brands that immediately impact the ways in which they interact with clothing whether or not it is second-hand. "When consumers lack the knowledge and expertise to distinguish actual quality indicators, or when they do not have the time or interest to

do so, they tend to use heuristic, mostly extrinsic, tangible indicators such as price or brand name to simplify their clothing purchase decisions” (Diederricks, Erasmus 2015, 71). Brands act as a form of semiotics and association with affective meaning. Brands are attached to status, place, and time, forming reputation. Consumers will purchase a piece solely on its brand without investigation of the actual quality of a product.

Consumers are inclined to associate brands with certain countries of origin and inadvertently prefer products from certain countries because of favorable existing reputations (Diederricks, Erasmus 2015, 71). Due to globalization, products are now often constructed in a number of countries and locations. Many brands in the United States for example have moved production outside of the country to benefit from cheap labor in order to maximize profits. Ultimately, it is the place or country that the consumer associates the brand to which influences their perception and assessment. Multiple studies also show how brands have the potential to affect the status or image of the person wearing them (Diederricks, Erasmus 2015, 72). Because second-hand clothing is often presented in somewhat a hodgepodge of pieces, the brand creates a clear distinction or way of categorizing for the consumer. In the abundant world of second-hand clothing, brand creates familiarity and trust.

In all sites of second-hand clothing exchange within Mexico City there is an emphasis on American brands. Tianguis stalls market on pieces of cardboard “*REBAJAS*” (sales) of “real Levis” and shoe boxes with the famous Nike swoosh are consistently placed in the front of sellers' displays. The economic, political and theoretical value attached to American brands can be seen in the ways in which *ropa de paca* is categorized into types. The high-quality and “authenticity” of brand name clothing belonging to the “number one” category enable pieces to be sold at a higher price and as fashionable American garments (Gauthier 2009, 104). Clothing

that can be directly connected to a well known brand is monetarily valued higher even when it is in bundles. Counterfeits of popular American brands show the extent to which people desire a certain symbol and significance attached to their wardrobe. In curated second-hand stores in Roma Norte, there are racks of clothes dedicated exclusively to Dickies, Carhart, Tommy Hilfiger and Adidas. Sellers know that these pieces will have a higher resale value because they are sought after by consumers.

Mateo, the owner of two vintage stores in Roma Norte noted the value of America as an idea within Mexican culture in one of our conversations. He referenced his own Italian heritage and their desire to fit in.

The States has always been the ruler of cultural want-to-be-ness. Okay? Think about Italians when they moved to America, they wanted to be American, they wanted to wear Ray-Bans, they wanted to be blonde, there's even a song.

Mateo then started singing in Italian between sips of his espresso.

Tu ve ser americano americano... and that's what the song says in the 20s or the 30s because it was the land where freedom was, always. The American Dream is that, more than economic status, no no no, it's freedom. And I think it still is, even though America has decayed terribly. I can't believe what is happening.

Brands can also deter consumers from purchasing. SHEIN, for example, is a global fashion and lifestyle brand, specifically an e-retailer. Their pieces are known for being extremely inexpensive. Unsurprisingly, the company has had a number of scandals due to labor rights abuses. Many clothing stores in Mexico source their clothing from companies like SHEIN because of their affordability. This creates a mass circulation of clothing and in turn a cycle through the second-hand clothing market. Isabella, the Argentinian woman with deep set eyes, and a stand at the feminist collective at the Plaza de Rio de Janeiro, explained to me her aversion to brands like SHEIN.

No, personally, when I go to find clothing, I try to not buy that brand. No, no, I don't like it. They do not apply to the quality that I undertake for my customers, I see it the same. If I buy SHEIN and resell fast fashion it's not a reality, so it's about knowing where to buy things. But this is hard, it is a world within a world. Someone comes to a tianguis and there are pacas, mountains and mountains of clothing, most of which is torn, they don't serve, because this clothing is torn, it is very old or stained.²⁰

Isabella understands how the brands she chooses to sell at her stand impact the brand of her own business. Just because it is easy to access SHEIN clothing, it doesn't meet her standards of physical appearance or morality. By selling SHEIN clothing, Isabella feels she would be somewhat of a fraud to both herself and people that shop at her business.

For some consumers, purchasing second-hand provides a more affordable way to have access to certain brands. Brands are intertwined with class and through second-hand clothing, the same symbol of class can be acquired. Brands can be a way to enhance status. Mexico is a highly classist country where status is constantly being calculated. Goods in the fashion world such as designer, couture and exclusive boutiques signal a certain status and exclusivity. At the same time, trends are constantly changing and determining the structure of what is “in.” Bourdieu writes, “tastes are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” (Bourdieu, 1984). In the case of clothing, specifically second-hand clothing, brands are a direct symbol of this difference. Stylistic and brand preferences serve as judgments on which social classification operates. Clothing not only is representative of disposable income but also taste. Within the fashion world, the dominance of certain brands, in the case of Mexico, American brands, is not only connected to a desired appearance but also a social acceptance. In second-hand clothing markets, brands

²⁰ Spanish translation: “No, yo particularmente, cuando voy a buscar ropa, trato de no comprar esa marca. No. no. no me gusta, no aplican para la calidad que yo me emprendo para mis clientes, este y también es como lo veo lo mismo, como se compro SHEIN, y revendiendo fast fashion no es una realidad, entonces es saber donde buscarlas cosas no, este pero si hay de todo, no es fácil porque es un mundo dentro de otro mundo, alguien llega a una tianguis, y son pacas, montañas y montañas de ropa que la mayoría está rota, quizás no sirve porque esta ropa rota, esta muy vieja o manchada...”

produce both accessibility and exclusivity. Brands create exclusivity in the sense that sellers can capitalize on brand popularity and social value from the consumer. Simultaneously, second-hand clothing can be sold at lower prices than market prices making pieces available to a larger audience. Brand is a component of clothing narrative that is visible.

Timeless vs Ephemeral Material

Because also, what can mean a lot is that clothing from other eras has a different quality, much superior to the things today that cost a lot of money. Today, we don't have that. Here in Mexico, fast fashion is the main thing. At every mall I go to, I see fast fashion and there are not stores of design.²¹

- Isabella (Feminist Collective at Plaza de Rio de Janeiro)

In some clothing, the story can be seen through the material. Fast fashion and global consumption practices have changed quality expectations of clothing. People are interested in buying more and staying up to trend. Large fashion companies capitalize on these consumption practices, planning seasons ahead of clothing lines and producing as much as possible. With these kinds of production practices, material and quality deteriorates to lower costs. This can be seen in used clothing and how items quickly become worn. Older styles and materials of clothing tend to have more intricate and lasting design. Part of what second-hand sellers emphasize and value is the quality specifically of vintage goods.

Some vintage sellers within Mexico City are knowledgeable about the histories of textile production and can read the stories of time that are visible in pieces through things such as stitching and thread. Ricardo, the Italian owner of a vintage store in the center, held up pants and shirts during conversations, showing me uneven stitches. He explained this meant they were

²¹ Spanish translation: “Porque aparte también lo que se puede dar mucho es que la ropa de otras épocas, la calidad es muy distinta, muy superior a cosas que hoy en día valen muchísimo dinero. Hoy en día, no tienes. Fast fashion que aquí en México es el principal, a cada centro comercial que voy, veo tiendas en fast fashion, y no hay tiendas de diseño.”

hand sewn. I talked to a mother-son business in a Sunday bazaar in Roma Sur selling a mix of designer vintage clothes alongside second-hand pieces and a couple upcycled pieces that the son had just started working on. They emphasized the quality of pieces that are vintage in contrast to recent pieces that nearly fall apart. The mom said she recently went into Zara, the Spanish multinational retail clothing chain, and while from afar pieces appeared to be well made, at a closer look they were made from low quality materials and often copies of pieces made 30+ years ago.

Buying vintage and second-hand creates an opportunity for consumers to have access to better quality pieces at affordable prices, sometimes. The physical quality of material and production adds to the monetary value that can be attributed and the emotional value of understanding and appreciating the process and effort that went into creating the piece.

Time Value: Not just a piece of clothing but a way to go back in time and up in social class.

Time associated with clothing is not exclusive to stitching or processes that are a part of its production. Second-hand, specifically vintage clothing, is emotionally valued and connected to the era. Most vintage clothing is used clothing but not all used clothing is vintage. The story of an article of clothing is more visible in vintage, adding value to the consumer. The time at which a piece of clothing is made, is situated within music, art, culture, people and ideologies. The 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's all have a unique set of attributes that make up what that time period is known for. By purchasing and wearing clothing from these eras, it connects consumers to something larger, a nostalgia from the past. What gives vintage clothing so much value for so many people is not just the clothing itself, the higher quality of material or the unique design, it is the connection to a specific mindset alternative to the status quo. Wearing vintage or

second-hand is seen as something representing anti-conformity; a way to push the limits of the norm. Wearing a piece of vintage clothing allows someone to be a time traveler. A shirt, pair of pants or jacket can make the wearer feel like they are acting as a memory. The term “hipster” is regularly used to describe people that wear vintage clothes. Ricardo, the Italian vintage store owner in the center of the city, said during one of our conversations,

I remember when we were digging in flea markets and stuff like that all the time there was no interest in rock shirts. You could find that stuff for peanuts. Few pesos, 20 pesos like a dollar, whatever. But now with the internet, and these millennials and the market change and this high price in Roma and Condesa, they are very hipster, so they are popping up in shops like mushrooms.

Roma Norte has become a hub of hipster culture within Mexico City. Mateo, the man who owns two vintage stores in Roma Norte also mentioned the hipsters in the area,

they are on their fixies (single speed bikes with fixed gears) pretending that they are poor, that they are thrifting and having a hard time paying the rent. And you wouldn't imagine that that girl on her fixie wandering around La Roma is sitting on 40 million dollars, you know.

The current generation of hipsters has shifted from the original hipsters. Mateo gave me a distinct history of the ways in which he saw hipsterism's evolution.

The first hipsters are from the 40's which are actually the Mad Men, the people from advertising, rich guys in the advertising world that suddenly decided to make a difference. Yeah I'm rich, yeah I'm cute, yeah I work in the industry but I'm not like you. I smoke pot, I don't wear socks, I would wear a suit with no socks, but I would drive a Porsche, and I would go to a very expensive hotel. They were responding to tense and strong paradigms that were controlling basically everything. Now that we criticize the boomers so much, no I think wait wait wait, they were the first ones that said no. When they started dancing twist in the 60's remember with all these strange weird steps and poses, we don't have something like that now, and those are the boomers. So I would locate the first movement there, in the 40's. The first time when people wanted to be hip. There's even a song, I don't know the name of the girl but the lyrics say something like “if I catch my husband with a guy it's okay because I'm hip, I'm hip, I'm hip.” So

they are already saying that. And then the hipsters have their sons, the first generation which are the hippies. And they were going to save the world and give up on structures and hippies started a completely different trend: natural fabrics, you don't need a bath, do not eat meat, avoid suffering, love, peace, blah blah blah. But then the generation that came from them which is my generation, the generation x, we weren't very happy with them or their parents. So we took over our grandparents' hipsterism again, we were not that creative in the 90s. We took over experimental music, Morton Sabotnik and all those electronic music pioneers that would plug a blender to a toaster to a speaker and start making noises and stomping... That was the 90s. And that's when we said wow, dj clerk, hip hopping, all that that was the 90s and that's the new, the second hipsterism arousal. And we've been recycling the same ideas. There is nothing new really. And so much shit has been produced during all these decades and generations because people say, "no I have a better idea."

As people now are wearing the same clothes from these distinct eras they are simultaneously reclaiming the similar stories. This adds to the value for the consumer of both vintage and second-hand because the piece of clothing connects them to a larger statement, mentality and way of life. While vintage directly takes the wearing back in time, second-hand clothing similarly reflects an anti-conformity to newly produced pieces. Mateo's explanation of hipsters through time shows how an era can be remembered and continued through clothing. Brand, fabric and era are all critical elements of clothing's visible story and add to the economic and emotional value given to pieces by sellers and consumers alike.

The Value of Who

Part of the value that is attached to vintage and second-hand clothing is memory and nostalgia. These feelings are not always apparent at first glance of an item. Vintage clothing for Mateo is about holding onto something and thinking about the person that held it 60 years ago. Who were they? What was their life like? What were their ideologies? What was the world like

back then? Sometimes the previous owner does leave a note in the pocket, a shopping list, an old napkin or a love letter. The imperfection and traces of a previous owner add to emotional value and character. Previous owners of clothing add value to the story. In chapter 2, I discussed Graciella's consignment store and a vest that she priced differently depending on the location within the store. Graciella has personal connections with many of the people that donate clothing to her store. They are her friends, neighbors and family. She is able to tell customers at the store where pieces came from if they are interested, who they belonged to before, a little story. As she flipped through the rack of clothing she told me who all the pieces were from, her cousin who lives in Spain, her neighbor that was moving, her sister who ordered a shirt that was too small. Her hand got to a silk tank top with lace trim and she stopped for a second. Her eyes became a little wider and I could tell this piece had a different story.

For example, a neighbor brought this but she is an influencer. So she has socials and a lot of people know her. So she told me, I am going to take a lot of stuff from my closet and I'll bring it here and we can have a special sale of my closet. And she already has so many followers. So these were her second-hand clothes but that have a higher value. Another part that is interesting about second-hand. It depends on who is selling it. So she brought them and put them here.²²

Graciella was able to sell this influencer's clothing to benefit both her and her friend. Knowing that pieces of clothing belonged to someone with influence make them have more value for the consumer. Customers are able to take a little bit of her with them. Previous ownership and the story attached to the previous owner creates both monetary and emotional value for the new owner. This kind of value is not exclusive in any way to influencers. Graciella

²² Spanish translation: “Por ejemplo, este traje una vecina, pero ella es una influencer. Entonces tiene sus redes y mucha gente que la conoce. Entonces me dijo, voy a sacar muchas cosas de mi ropa de mi closet, lo traigo aquí y vamos hacer una venda especial de mi closet. Y ya tiene sus followers. Entonces eran cosas de segunda mano de ella pero que tiene un valor más. Es otra parte interesante de segunda mano. Depende también de quién vende. Entonces, la traje, la puse aquí.”

said that most people that come into her store are interested in where the clothing came from. She tells them a story and sends them away with an article of clothing and an anecdote.

While some consumers are interested in connecting with the previous owner, others are put off by this relation and want to be as far from it as possible. Many sellers I met with said they had experienced people quickly pulling their hand away once hearing that they were second-hand; that because they had been worn the clothing had become dirty and no longer desirable. In the same regard, pieces are cleaned and displayed as if they were new in hopes of luring the consumer away from the stereotypes of old and worn.

It is important to note that the story of who is primarily valued in regard to curated vintage and second-hand stores and bazaars. Within open air markets and tianguis there is little effort put into sharing or publicizing the stories of previous owners. As much of this clothing is coming from abroad, there is a detached relationship between the old and new owner. Additionally, clothing being sold in these spaces is often primarily valued by both the seller and buyer for the low price.

Marketing Story

Vintage and second-hand stores have begun capitalizing or marketing stories to their consumers. Through Instagram and other social media platforms, sellers can expand on narratives and histories of pieces. Simultaneously, marketing this story gives sellers a greater legitimacy of being experts. Especially during the pandemic when there was little to no face to face interaction between sellers and consumers, social media acted as a space to share the somewhat hidden stories and personal narratives that add considerable economic and emotional value to previously owned pieces. The internet also provides a place for anyone to sell their

clothing. Through the pandemic, spending so much time at home, many people realized they had an abundance of clothing sitting in their closet. Selling it via Instagram, Facebook or online second-hand retailers allowed for people to start their own businesses. Rather than associating used clothing with terms such as worn, outdated, the words, unique, original or treasures of nostalgia completely change how pieces of clothing are perceived.

Value of the Ongoing Story

Story is not exclusive to the past. Second-hand clothing creates a value for the consumer through the narrative that they get to tell and continue. “Oh its vintage” or “I got it second-hand” has become a popular replacement for “thank you” for clothing compliments. Shopping second-hand is now in many ways seen as a badge of honor. Second-hand clothing sales have skyrocketed in the last 5 years. According to a report from GlobalData, the resale market has increased 53.3% since 2017. The irony is that what was alternative and edgy has now become mainstream. As discussed previously in this chapter, the second-hand and vintage clothing story has always been associated with doing something different from the norm specifically in affluent communities. Mateo reflected on his own youth talking about how he and his friends would wear their grandmother's sweaters and skinny trousers like Truman Capote rather than shopping from mainstream brands. Wearing vintage or second-hand clothing is a way to explore individuality and originality. Wearing clothing that can not be purchased everywhere adds to the story of who. The uniqueness of second-hand pieces makes this story exclusive to the wearers.

One of Mateo's stores is set up to help the customer find their identity and use the clothing within the store to add to that story. Walking into the store there is a mural on the front wall with different terms of vibes of expressing someone. They are a mix of Spanish and

English; sexy, casual, weirdo, chistoso (funny), chic, flashy, urbanito (urban). Upon entering the store, customers are asked “what are you?” This allows the individual to immediately feel like they are a part of something. Mateo said that through this project, he was trying to make people realize and be conscious of their own styles and simultaneously create an opportunity to make new suggestions. The list of vibes or energies as he calls them, help people find the identity they so desperately seek. Having these terms in people’s faces as soon as they walk into the store jumpstarts how the clothing in the store can add to their own individual story.

Virginia Woolf writes, “vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than to merely keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us” (Woolf, 1928). As a shirt or a pair of pants circulates through the second-hand clothing economy it acquires stories and narratives, some of which are told and others forgotten. These identities that become attached become a part of the owner.

Ropa de paca and clothing sold at tianguis holds a story value too. While this clothing is not always used to curate a customer's identity to the same extent that vintage clothing does, the discussion of brand and accessibility earlier in this chapter contributes to the clothing's narrative.

Semiotics of Clothing

The story of second-hand clothing is built up through the semiotics of clothing. It is unsurprising that Mateo, the business owner I keep referring to, studied semiotics in school. The design, symbols and interpretation make up the value of a piece of clothing. Mateo calls himself a curator, not just of clothing, stores or buildings but of all things. In understanding the complexity of the pieces he sells, Mateo creates narratives of understanding. I asked him about his prior work in design and curation. He responded;

So for me, it's like I'm a curator, what do I curate? Everything, anything. I do semiology on chairs, on pants, watches and many things. It's impossible to know everything about the vintage business, because when it comes to toys there's a whole world of people, and you move to pens and there's a whole other crowd of people, watches, furniture, clothing. So what we do is we read, we ask. Because many of my friends that own vintage stores are like ghouls. That's not us, we recognize beauty and quality codes, we study them, we do some research, put it there, repeat it but we are not an authority on the subjects.

In many ways Mateo is successful because he sees symbols and stories that are intertwined or woven into materials and textiles. Knowing how to read objects and understand their past is a foundational piece of marketing and selling a piece of clothing. “Clothing is an “identification” tool that functions in determining the symbolic boundaries between people in a sense” (Akdemir 2018, 1389). The semiotics of clothing extends to the semiotics of people. If a certain kind of person wears a certain kind of clothing they are showing or displaying a symbol of who they connect, assimilate to and value.

Clothing throughout history has been an indicator of class and social group belonging. The case of second-hand and vintage clothing is deeply entangled in class, especially as second-hand clothing has become gentrified. Historically, second-hand clothing held a stigma which deterred the general public. It was seen as something that was worn by people that couldn't afford new clothing. Now that that narrative is changing, the accessibility of used clothing to low income communities has deteriorated. The recent popularization of second-hand clothing is in part due to social media and influencer culture. Because this kind of consumption has become trendy, sellers of second-hand goods are able to increase their prices. One of the motivations for buying second-hand is for environmental reasons. Within affluent sites of exchange such as stores in Roma Norte or online exchange platforms, the sustainability factor is a part of the marketing story. “Shop Slow,” recycling symbols and greenwashed marketing are

common sights on street signage and within stores.²³ People are aware to some extent of waste that is produced through clothing and buying second-hand provides an alternative that feels like doing the right thing. While participating in the second-hand clothing economy in theory is more environmentally friendly, there needs to be awareness spread not only regarding ethical buying but also ethical buying behaviors. Creating the narrative that a piece is second-hand or vintage and therefore “sustainable” does not take into account the excessive consumption that can still exist.

The story attached to a piece of clothing, whether or not it is visible, is a contributor to the ways in which a price is assigned to clothing, how much the customer is willing to spend and the sentimental attachment that is given. This chapter has shown the ways clothing’s story adds value for both the customer and seller. While some of this story is visible other parts must be told. The histories of social identities embedded through clothing create complex relationships with their holders.

²³ Greenwashing is an exaggeration of companies' sustainability or environmental initiatives or standards.

Chapter 4

Identity Politics and Community in Clothing : How Race, Gender and Agency Impact Value

The exchange and market of used clothing is situated within social relationships. Relations are the thread and labor power that connect and allow for articles of clothing to continue to have life and be exchanged. Chapters 2 and 3 discussed the ways in which place and story influence value given to second-hand and vintage clothing. People are at the core of these systems of exchange. Social networks and relationships among owners of clothing, sellers, consumers and transporters in between are deeply complex. In chapter 4 I continue to analyze the ways in which race, class and gender are ever present in this exchange. I show how race and gender create barriers and shape hierarchy within the network of second-hand clothing exchange and how simultaneously, the second-hand clothing exchange creates a modes of social mobility and personal agency. While expanding on resistance theory is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will frame the ways in which marginalized communities use the second-hand clothing exchange to present a larger critique of neoliberal capitalism. I begin by focusing on race, specifically through the exchange within Mexico City. Race plays a role in exchanges between sellers as well as the community participating in buying and overall changes in Roma Norte. Race is deeply intertwined with class, especially in Mexico City. I discuss the presence of what many people I talked to referred to as whitexicans and tourists within the city.²⁴ I also emphasize the core and periphery dynamic of place and class referenced earlier in chapter 2. I discuss gender, focusing specifically on the feminist collective and economic resistance at Rio de Janeiro, a park in Roma Norte, a trans community space of second-hand clothing exchange and similar projects. I discuss how these specific sites create safe, creative and communal spaces of expression specifically

²⁴ While this chapter touches on the presence of whitexicans within the second-hand clothing network in Mexico City it is beyond the scope of this project to include a full discussion of the phenomenon and impact of whitexicans. More research on this needs to be done to fill the gap in scholarly work.

available to marginalized communities. Finally, I show the ways in which value is created through monetary assignment based on an individual's circumstances and identity for and from both the seller and customer.

Race, Class and Whitexicans

“Mexico is one of the most racist and classist countries that I’ve seen in the world. But people don’t talk about it very much, they might joke about it... These names and nicknames and whitexicans but it’s a reality; it is racism, it is classism.” Mateo, the vintage store owner I continue to reference, was talking to me about the presence of race and class within the fashion industry in Mexico City specifically the world of second-hand and vintage. Walking around Roma Norte and visiting curated second-hand and vintage stores, it is clear that there is a race distinction. People in the upscale stores for the most part tend to have lighter skin. What Mateo emphasized to a greater extent was the ways in which racism was present in the behind the scenes work of acquiring pieces for his store. As mentioned in chapter 2, many sellers within Roma and other affluent colonias, leave the area and visit tianguis on the outskirts of the city. This is where pieces are less expensive and treasures, as he referred to them, can be found. Mateo himself has very light skin and is seen as white. Within Mexico, having lighter skin is associated with having more money. Mateo said that sellers in tianguis and markets are aware of this and change their pricing accordingly.

When they say “si güero” they are acknowledging that I am a whitexican and that I have money. So I really enjoy going (to markets) but sometimes I don’t go for the business because I am buying higher and I would rather pay the picker and they get good low prices because normally the pickers are darker, more Mexican. Racist fucking country... So whenever I walk there they are immediately going to give me 40% up. When they say the word “güero” you are fucked. And if you are American, forget it... I mean they know I’m Mexican but they see me differently. They are like “güero.”

The term güero is essentially slang in Spanish for “whitey.” That being said, there is a clear distinction between güero and gringo, a slang term used to describe Americans specifically. Güero specifically is used to describe a lighter-skinned person whose family is from or has present ancestry to Europe but is born in Mexico. Güero can also be used to describe white people in general in Mexico. Mateo finds what he calls “pickers” that typically have darker skin to go to tianguis and markets and find and buy things for him. He explained to me that it is often hard to find pickers for his business that are “good and trustworthy,” emphasizing that now there are many more people involved in the second-hand and vintage business, making the need for pickers greater.²⁵ Throughout the day, Mateo is in constant communication with pickers through Whatsapp where he receives images of vintage dresses, pants, shoes, and furniture. Tianguis and market sellers associate a specific value possibility, dependent on the specific customer. Mateo and other store owners with a similar positionality recognize this and participate accordingly. In this sense, what is valued more in the exchange is the race and class of the consumer rather than the piece of clothing that is being sold. The economic value fluctuates depending on the customer's identity.

Attention to who the consumer is, specifically paying attention to race and class, shapes the ways second-hand clothing and vintage businesses function. (I intentionally say businesses rather than stores, because many of these sites of exchange are a part of the informal market and do not have a designated store or place they normally sell). “Cultural analysis becomes less a matter of formulating a distinctive logic of code shared by a group of people living in one location and more a matter of tracing a network in which the perspectives of differently situated individuals derive both from their different network experiences and from their perspectives on

²⁵ Luis also mentioned that most of the pickers he has go to markets for him are men. I was not able to get more insight or information on this act but it would be an interesting point for further research.

other people's perspectives" (Foster 2006, 287). By mapping other people's meanings, individuals adjust their prices, value and attitudes between one another.

Through my field work, the term whitexican was brought up in numerous conversations and had a looming presence through Colonia Roma. "A whitexican is a person who shows pride in Mexico when abroad, but are classist and have racist attitudes within the Mexican population" (Moya, 2019). I visited a museum in Roma Norte, one day and there was an activity where visitors were asked to respond in chalk to a number of questions written. One of the questions was *¿Que te provoca enojo?* (what provokes anger for you). The largest and most dominant answer on the black chalkboard below was *WHITEIXANS* written in all capital letters. Within Roma Norte and specifically shopping at the curated second-hand and vintage boutiques this thesis discusses, whitexicans are accompanied by tourists, digital nomads and expats, most of whom also have lighter skin.²⁶

Whiteness associated with privilege is present throughout history in Roma and Mexico City. In a historical context, the Spanish conquest established a caste system which identified social position based on race and class. This system put those with European descent, who were primarily white in power (Sánchez, 2022). White privilege has been recognized; however, the term "whitexican" is relatively new. The term was first popularized through Twitter to poke fun at the Mexican elites. Twitter accounts making jokes about whitexicans intend to use humor to comment on the country's racist and classist reality but are met with significant backlash from people that believe it is "a way to minimize racism" in a problematic way (Almanza, 2019). The Twitter account @LosWhitexicans uses playful satire to make fun of whitexicans "and categorized them as white or light-skinned Mexicans who shared a core group of common traits.

²⁶ Digital nomads are people that work online in various locations of their choosing. They use remote work as an opportunity to travel. Expats are people that live outside their native country.

These included a white-passing appearance, a considerable amount of wealth, an affinity for all things European or North American”(Forssell Méndez, 2020). While the political context of the term whitexican is interesting, an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. I am referencing the presence of whitexicans in Roma to show the degree of racial and economic inequality that exists in Mexico City. In regards to whitexicans supposed racialized affinity to all things European or North American, there is a strong connection in favor of neoliberalism. The social impacts of neoliberalism in Mexico have created “polarized income distribution, falling wages, increased precarious jobs, rising inequality, and extreme violence” (Laurell, 2015). Whitexicans tend to benefit from neoliberal reform given their level of wealth. They are socially a representation of the elite, with generational power. Many families that originally resided in Roma when it was first established during the Porfiriato have moved to even more affluent neighborhoods such as Las Lomas and Planco. The original residence’s great grandchildren have moved back to Roma and uphold the same socioeconomic privilege. Roma as a place has an identity that is tied to whiteness and neoliberalism. I want to acknowledge the connection between whitexicans and neoliberalism, however a more detailed discussion of this relationship does not fit into the scope of this project focused on the emotional and economic value attached to used clothing.

An aspect of neoliberalism and specifically neoliberalism's connection to the United States I do think is important to note in this work is the ways in which stores commodify Mexico through clothing for targeted consumers. One store I visited on Avenida Amsterdam had a jacket that specifically stuck out as I flipped through the racks. It was an US army jacket with a traditional Mexican blanket square stitched on the back. I asked the young woman sitting behind the counter the story behind the jacket. “Oh we stitched that on there, a lot of the tourists think it

is really cool, they come here to go ‘thrift shopping’ and want to bring something from Mexico or what they think is Mexican back home.” bell hooks writes about the lure of the other. Her analysis in *Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance*, looks at pleasure specifically sexual pleasure and desire of the other and unknown. Similarly, there is an interest by tourists to find and take ownership of something from Mexico to then bring back to their home country. In the example of the army jacket, the addition of the Mexican blanket square adds to the otherness. bell hooks comments on *Channels of Desire*, work by Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen who write,

the politics of consumption must be understood as something more than what to buy, or even what to boycott. Consumption is a social relationship, the dominant relationship in our society – one that makes it harder and harder for people to hold together, to create community (bell hooks 1992, 376).

The social relationships that are present in the exchange of second-hand clothing begin to have a larger presence and effect than the clothing itself. The store on Avenida Amsterdam stitched the blanket square on the back of the jacket because they knew the ways it would appeal to their customers, tourists and people looking to find something they think is Mexican. The final part of this statement that the dominance of the social relationship “makes it harder and harder for people to hold together, to create community” in this case is aligned with the relationship between the seller and consumer. The social relationship between the seller and the consumer at the site of exchange shapes the clothing that is being sold. The clothing is used as an object that creates a reason for the social relationship to exist.

While the sites of second-hand clothing often create an emphasis on class and racial divides, they also provide a space for social mobility and personal agency. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, millions of people lost their jobs in CDMX. Spending significant amounts of time in lockdown, citizens looked at any way to make extra money. Many people I talked to,

especially at bazaars, emphasized COVID-19 was the starting point of their business. This often began by people selling extra clothes that they had in their closets after recognizing the abundance and then moving to family friends and neighbors' clothes. The exchange of second-hand clothing is a market that most people already participate in informally by giving what in the US is called hand-me-downs to family and friends. Transitioning this exchange to a public market for many during the pandemic was a clear way to make an income.

Gender and Agency in a Capitalist Economy and World

The feminist collective at Plaza de Rio de Janeiro is one of the many feminist markets that resulted from a loss of jobs due to COVID-19. The group calls themselves a collective rather than a tianguis or market, but their work functions as a cooperative. Collectives are organizations that do not have ownership buy-in or profit sharing. A cooperative is a more formal title that suggests a member-benefit with economic participation and democratic governance by members. (US Federation of Worker Cooperatives) While the women at the collective share a space, they each have individual racks and businesses. From the start, the collective was a place for specifically women to come together and create a community around second-hand clothing exchange outside of the formal market in a way that would provide them with safety and security. Adriana is one of the women who has had a rack up at the market for the last 2.5 years. She said that the space was created as a place for people to be creative. That is was created as a protest against inequalities in the areas and specifically opportunities for women to have their own businesses. Many of the women working at the collective are single mothers, continuing their education or running their own business. The collective provides them with the ability to have agency over their work. They use Instagram to find other women in the area looking to

participate in the collective. The feminist collective says they are a “protesta económica contra la violencia de género,” an economic protest against gender-based violence. They protest salary inequalities, the gender gap in job access and wealth distribution. Through the protest, they take concrete ways of eradicating economic violence against women and create a space for their own creative projects. Furthermore, they raise awareness of gender based violence on a larger scale through large signs next to their racks of clothing. Violence against women in Mexico is second only to Brazil in all of Latin America. In 2022, there were over 1,000 accounts of femicide (Sanchez, Pesce, 2022). While officials have been aware of these problematic rates, little progress has been made in action. The femicide that exists is connected to the cultural machismo, gender inequality and domestic violence that is present. Through the pandemic lockdown, rates of domestic violence in the country spiked (Sanchez, Pesce, 2022). The feminist collective uses their work and business to educate and inform the public about the realities of the violence against women in the country. Women at the collective use the economic protest as a mode of individual agency and a protest against oppression that they face. The women at the collective need to still make a living from their work but are able to simultaneously comment on and protest against their frustrations.

Working in a communal space allows them to create a more egalitarian form of capitalism. Ngozi Okaro, an activist for economic, environmental and social justice in and out of the clothing industry shared on the “Conscious Style Podcast” the value of collective and cooperative spaces as an “important way to not only provide people with ownership opportunities but to also spread values of democracy in collective work” (Conscious Style Podcast, S3:EP38). Alongside racks of clothing, the women at the collective have hung up banners and signs saying things like “mujeres unidas”(united women, figure 6) “somos el grito

de las que ya no están”(we are the screams of those that are no longer with us, figure 7) and “juntas, libres y sin miedo”(together, free and without fear, figure 8). While there are men that also visit the businesses, the audience is primarily women. Returning to my primary question of value shifts, clothing that is found at the feminist collective has an added emotional value for consumers and sellers because it is a representation of the community that has been created through the collective and a protest to inequalities and violence women face daily. Women working at the collective not only value the clothing they are selling out of passion for the creativity and process but also for the relationships they have been able to cultivate through the collective.



Figure 6, 7 and 8: Protesting signs at the feminist collective

By treating the activity of building commodity networks as contrasted and contingent, these approaches counter presentations of capitalism as a juggernaut or leviathan that induces hopeless acquiescence and political passivity. They open up other ways of knowing and perforce identify possibilities for active resistance - for destabilizing dominant networks and building alternative ones. It is in this general sense that following commodities and value in motion accomplishes critical fetishism (Foster 2006, 294).

For the purpose of my analysis I want to focus on Foster's point that alternative modes of commodity networks "open up other ways of knowing and perforce identify possibilities for active resistance." As I mention in the introduction of my thesis, for the purpose of this analysis I am attaching meanings and theories of commodities to clothing given the ways in which clothing has been commercialized and integrated into the capitalist system. The feminist collective does not function under a traditional capitalist structure. It challenges the ways in which people participate in clothing exchange and who is in power. Economic precarity is a form of violence that women face every day. In establishing the collective, women are able to protest against both physical and economic violence they face.

Eric Wolf writes about the "capitalist mode as an apparatus installed to maintain and further the strategic relationships governing the capitalist deployment of social labor. The capitalist state exists to ensure the domination of one class over another. Yet in each state this function is executed differently, and with different consequences"(Wolf 1982, 308). Products and commodities inherently perpetuate capitalist development as new networks and connections are made. The market of second-hand clothing exchange is in itself an alternative to capitalist systems of consumption and disposal within dominant neoliberal capitalism; that being said, they still function for profit. Within the capitalist mode, labor power gets compensated by a wage and the selling power is given to owners in order to sustain a living. Power is shifted to owners and separates owners and laborers, creating a competition that perpetuates the separation. Women working at the collective and more so participants in second-hand clothing exchange, are heavily involved in both the labor and consumption. The fashion industry as a whole is continued and dominated by capitalism. Trends and fast fashion conglomerates are racing against time production. This is the epitome of neoliberal capitalism, a constant race to lower wages and find

cheaper suppliers. The fashion industry is perpetuated by the consumers' need and desire to buy more. Women working with the feminist collective are not the only ones that have found second-hand clothing exchange as a mode of resistance to more formalized networks of exchange that marginalize them.

Ethical Pricing

“Vintage, upcycling, diseno.” I passed a large chalkboard down an alley walking into Roma Norte. Walking into the store, R&B pop music blasted through the entrance. There were organized racks that looked more like an art exhibit rather than a clothing store. Each piece was meticulously presented. This was a collective similar to the feminist collective in Plaza Rio de Janeiro but in a store. The first floor was primarily denim pieces, cut scrap and upcycled art.²⁷ Pants that were a collage of old denim stitched together hung evenly on colorful hangers. I greeted the sales person, Ariel, who was sitting in a chair in the corner of the store. They were wearing an old grey t-shirt, I later learned was their dad’s shorts and bedazzled fishnet tights. Their dark brown hair was cut shoulder length with straggly uneven bangs shading the top 3/4 of their forehead. I started talking to them and asked if I could record parts of our conversation. Ariel identifies as a trans Mexican woman and discussed the ways in which this had been challenging throughout their life.²⁸ Ariel had grown up in Tepito, a neighborhood that has a reputation of crime and lawlessness, and had been interested in fashion since they were young. They were passionate to hold on to this working class identity despite now working in one of the

²⁷ Upcycling refers to the act of using old objects or clothes to make new ones.

²⁸ As discussed in my methodology I did not ask for my informants to discuss their racial identity. This was a limitation of my project and what I have chosen to include is referenced from what I did discuss with them in conversation and the ways in which they present.

city's most affluent neighborhoods. In Tepito, second-hand markets, tianguis and communities have been a central element of society and life. Tepito has a long history of selling whatever someone will buy and finding ways to make money from selling illegal merchandise (Quinones 2001, 233-247). The “whatever it takes” mentality of Tepito is an example of products and materials that have been reused in Mexico. By having the shop in Roma, Ariel was able to sell goods and not be concerned about their own safety being trans. The collective takes into account the systematic inequalities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. The store Ariel works at in Roma expands their protest against traditional economies by having a shifting price scale depending on the consumer.

Well personally, touching on my history, I have worked a lot with trash because trash is the raw material and the most accessible material for us that grew up in poverty. So it's in places to make art, fashion it is a privilege to do so in this academic sense and status that can move. Privileged people, from a certain socioeconomic status, the only one that I have is trash and the way to create art with this trash.²⁹

Ariel touched on the culture of reuse in Tepito, the growing economic changes in Roma and Condesa and the ways in which fashion had taken advantage of the booming affluence in the area (Quinones 2001, 233). The collective that Ariel works with creates a space for trans individuals to have agency and security not only economically but also the spaces they are in.

We work ethically, so we don't have the same price for foreigners that we have for locals, or trans people or people from the community because the whole team that works here, the majority are nonbinary, trans, and it's really hard to realize that

²⁹ Spanish translation: “Pues personalmente, arengando a mi historia, como también he trabajado mucho con basura porque la basura es la materia prima, más accesible para muchas personas que crecemos en pobreza. Y entonces, en donde hacer arte, o hacer moda, que es un privilegio de esa manera en un estatus académico o se mueven.... Privilegiadas, de cierto nivel socioeconómico, lo único que tú tienes es la basura y la manera de crear arte con esa basura.”

foreign people are our client, so telling them that you need to learn Spanish, confronts different colonial cultures.³⁰

Within the store Ariel works at, the monetary value attached to clothing fluctuates depending on the consumer that is purchasing. At the same time, the emotional value that is given to clothing sold at the store has a story attached to complex social relationships and identities. This changes the meaning of creative design and work for the artists and the consumers. Ariel referred to this kind of price change as the business working ethically. This is an example of price discrimination or price personalization; charging customers different prices for the same product. Price discrimination has been argued over by academics and economists alike. Juan M. Elegido is a economist at the Lagos Business School. He writes “many people consider price discrimination unfair, but economists argue that in many cases price discrimination is more likely to lead to greater welfare than is the uniform pricing alternative—sometimes for every party in the transaction” (Elegido 2011, 633). Both the United States and Mexico have antitrust acts in place in order to prohibit price discrimination from occurring. This is primarily to promote competition and prevent unjustified monopolies (ftc.gov). Price discrimination systematically contradicts neoliberal economics. This kind of pricing is criticized on all business scales for:

lack of transparency about the prices charged or the possible breaches of privacy involved in gathering information about each customer’s reservation price, the fact that different customers are charged different prices may suggest that those customers who have been charged the higher prices might have been exploited through having been charged an unfair price. Further, the fact that the seller could cover its costs at a lower price could indicate that the higher prices charged to some customers are unfair. Finally, the circumstance of different people being

³⁰ Spanish translation: “Trabajamos éticamente, entonces no le damos el mismo precio a extranjeros de personas de aquí o de personas trans or de personas de la comunidad porque todo el equipo de que trabajamos en su mayoría son personas en su non binarias y trans, somos, y es muy difícil darnos cuenta de que la gente extranjera es nuestras clientes entonces decirles que necesitas aprender español, enfrentarnos a diferentes culturas colonialistas, es difícil.”

charged different prices shows that an equal-treatment norm (if such a norm exists) has been breached (Elegido 2011, 634).

While price discrimination has been heavily criticized, it is very common and from Ariel's point of view, the ethical thing to do in certain situations. There is very little academic work done on price discrimination and ethics. Juan M. Elegido (2011) works to fill the gap and questions whether charging two different prices to two different people is itself unfair. He concludes that "provided that the price a buyer pays is not wrong according to the appropriate standard of fairness, that the price will not be unjust" (Elegido 2011, 654). Economists Coker and Izaret, argue that "charging customers as a function of their willingness-to-pay (WTP)...improves social welfare better than Unitary Pricing" (Coker, Izaret 2021, 397). Their conclusion argues that price personalization is not allowable or morally neutral, "but rather that price discrimination is actually better for society than Unitary Pricing from a broadly consequentialist standpoint, at least when it is done progressively" (Coker, Izaret 2021, 397). Progressive pricing from the work of Coker and Izaret means firms or businesses charge customers based on the customers willingness to pay.

In the case of the store Ariel works at, the price at which pieces are sold is determined by the seller, not the consumer's willingness to pay. However the price determined is based on the customers identity and privilege within a predetermined monetary range. In using a system of progressive, or ethical pricing as Ariel refers to it, the business is challenging neoliberal economics and the status quo of business.

La Tianguis

A similar but less formal space for trans folk has been created at the glorieta de los insurgentes. This was an area created also after COVID-19 where many trans people have found community and support, much like the feminist collective. The community in glorieta de los insurgentes has redefined the masculine association of “*los tianguis*” and created *la tianguis*, a place where they can sell second-hand clothing and art. *La tianguis disidente* happens daily. It provides not only a mode of income for many trans people that face economic and social discrimination but also a home and community of support. The structure of the tianguis and the name itself shifts both the power away from the norm and status quo. By changing “los” or “el” tianguis the grammatically correct masculine articles to the word tianguis, the community challenges gender based narratives. “They are open about the fact that, like every utopia, their system is flawed. The collective is not perfect, and arguments often erupt. But they are a community. Here, they can express themselves how they like. They have autonomy. It’s a small pocket of the world where they can be free”(Bonesso, 2022). The setting of *la tianguis* creates an atmosphere where people no matter their sexual orientation and gender can be free to be themselves with the support and community of others. The space itself and attitude among the community that functions within it acts as a resistance to normativities, both social and economic.

Arianna working at the feminist collective, Ariel at the upcycled store and people at glorieta de los insurgentes use the platform of the second-hand clothing market to acknowledge and consider systemic issues they face daily. Nancy Scheper-Hughes writes about how the body itself is impacted by social order and how individuals and marginalized groups physically feel

exploitation. She writes “the presence of suffering, especially when it is expressed in the language of symptoms, exposes the gap between bodies that refuse the demand to suffer quietly and the requirements of antagonistic economic and social orders”(Scheper-Hughes 1987, 239). The collectives I have discussed are examples of people and “bodies that refuse the demand to suffer quietly.” They have made space for their voices and projects to be heard and the second-hand clothing exchange has provided a site in which to do so. Race and gender influence the ways in which people act and are seen in society. This chapter has focused on how these identities complicate the network of second-hand clothing exchange. The feminist collective’s economic protest and the ethical pricing at store Ariel works at, provide examples of the ways in which second-hand clothing exchange is used as a critique of neoliberal capitalism. Both the women at the collective and Ariel choose to not fully subscribe to the capitalist world in which they live. These sites are able to change power relationships at play and take power away from the overpowering capitalist system that oppresses.

The ethical pricing taking place at the store Ariel works at, not only gives power to the seller in choosing how to individually sell goods but also to returns power to the customer who may be marginalized in other ways in society due to their identity. This act resists neoliberal capitalism which systematically perpetuates inequality. The race relations that are at play in tianguis within the city also represent an example of price discrimination. By up-charging certain customers because of the color of their skin or assumed privilege, sellers seek to make the cost of goods (in this case clothing) more equitable. In the case of Mateo, by intentionally hiring people with darker skin to go to tianguis and buy for him, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, he is perpetuating neoliberal capitalism. He recognizes the price discrimination that occurs and intentionally shifts his purchasing strategy to benefit from the resistance. At the end of the day,

Mateo is running a business. While second-hand clothing networks provide an opportunity for resistance, personal agency and pushback to neoliberal capitalism, the underlying privilege and inequality that exists continues to find loopholes and is perpetuated.

While this chapter focused on social relationships and power at sites of exchange between seller and consumer directly in Mexico City, these complex relationships are present at every point within the network of second-hand clothing exchange. The way second-hand clothing and *ropa de paca* crosses the US-Mexico border is completely dependent on existing social relationships among border patrol and individuals (Sandoval-Hénandes 2015). Between the border and Mexico City, clothing continues to be embedded and influenced by social identities. For the purpose of this thesis I focused on social identities at play in Mexico City specifically because it was the site of my research and interviews. The direct economic value attached to clothing is fluid and ever changing. Second-hand clothing's determined price at a specific place and time is also heavily affected by who is selling and purchasing the piece. The emotional value attached to clothing similarly is influenced by identity. I have provided an overview however price and value are uniquely attached to each individual exchange. This chapter has provided snapshots of places within Mexico City where social identity affects second-hand clothing's value.

Conclusion

This thesis is a comparative project exploring the second-hand clothing network in Mexico City and puts the different sites of exchange in conversation with each other. I provide an ethnographic snapshot of different modes of exchange and show the ways in which clothing is valued differently over time and place. The power of putting these sites of exchange in conversation with each other fills the gap of previous scholarly work which focuses on sustainability within the used clothing network and individual sites of exchange. Furthermore, it shows the social and economic inequalities that exist and highlights sites such as the feminist collective that are pushing back against larger systemic oppression. This thesis seeks to show how the economic and sentimental value of used clothing shifts depending on place, story and social identity. I want to emphasize the ways place, story and social identity affect value production are in no way exclusive to second-hand clothing. I use second-hand clothing in this analysis because of the ways its multiple lives and identities intensify these value meanings.

I began this project as a US consumer. I was interested in this point of view and had assumptions that resonated with my own identity. I own clothing that is fast fashion, I purchase clothing that I am drawn to because of trends and price and I participate in the disposal of clothing. Before doing field work and in the preliminary stages of this project, I was interested in the consumer's motivations for shopping second-hand because of my own personal relationship to this part of the network. I associated second-hand shopping and selling with doing something that benefited all parties involved including the environment.

At this moment in time, there is a particular conversation specifically around sustainability that is shaping consumption and the reselling of clothing. I continue the work of Deschamps, Carnie and Mao (2017) who acknowledge that in Mexico City, the leaders of

sustainability efforts in regards to clothing are those that are affluent and the largest consumers. The same people that are consuming the most are creating the narratives and preoccupations around sustainability in Roma. This is evident through the ways highly curated stores in Roma market to sustainability because they know it is one of the ways customers attach value to second-hand clothing.

Despite the focus of this thesis moving away from sustainability, it is still important. The second-hand clothing exchange provides a mode of action where consumers hold the power to counter the environmental crisis. In his book, *The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and second-hand Clothes*, Andrew Brooks writes about consumption trends and specifically the consumption 'arms race'. He writes, "consumption has become an incredibly important force in defining identity. Increasingly people are what they buy"(Brooks 2015, 133). People are quick to get rid of clothing to make room for new purchases. This kind of consumption is simultaneously central to the maintenance of capitalist production. Many companies have started promoting the dropping off of old clothing as a way to market their sustainability practices. Companies with existing buyback and donation programs in the United States include Patagonia, The North Face, Eileen Fisher, H&M and Madewell among others. While companies have marketed sustainability programs where consumers can donate unwanted and old clothes, many of the initiatives aren't as sustainable as they seem. There is an illusion created that all clothing can be recycled second-hand while a lot of it ends up in landfills. With the rise of fast fashion, companies with donation programs as well as thrift and vintage that work off consignment are completely overwhelmed with the mass of clothes. So while clothing is being donated by consumers with good intentions, the reality is that 73% of clothing produced each year ends up in landfills (GreenPeace, 2016).

While company initiatives to donate clothes is somewhat productive in creating more awareness around clothing waste, it simultaneously opens opportunities for consumers to purchase more. Within the excitement for change and the opportunities the second-hand clothing exchange provides in a need for circular economies it is essential to keep in mind the ways consumption is still consumption and contributing to overall waste. Many of the sustainability efforts that are associated with shopping second-hand and vintage underpin problems of consumption and waste that continue to be present. In chapter 4, I discussed the ways in which the fashion industry is perpetuated by consumer's need and desire to buy more and as cheaply as possible. This desire is present in the second-hand clothing industry as well but is often masked by a facade of sustainability and separation from problematic over consumption tied to new goods.

Once beginning my field work, I was not feeling inspired by the consumer motivations specifically regarding sustainability. Consumers that I talked to had similar considerations when shopping second-hand and thought little about their actions. By focusing on the consumer's point of view I felt like my research was only contributing to a cycle of consumption. I became interested in why sellers were participating in the exchange and how value was attached to clothing. This focused the narrative on the clothing itself rather than the consumer.

This thesis uses ethnographic snapshots, history and anthropological questions to consider how second-hand clothing is valued. Using network analysis methods inspired by Foster (2006) I was able to understand larger systems at play. This kind of work does not allow for in depth analyses of individual sites of exchange. Each of the sites explained in this thesis opened new questions and avenues for thinking. The Feminist Market, Luis's store or la tianguis could be a specific site for extended ethnographic work. Given the time frame of this project and

my own positionality being an outsider to the network, I was focused on considering various perspectives within the network of exchange. This kind of analysis limited the amount of time I was able to spend with each individual site, building relationships but allowed me to consider sites in relationship to one another and the greater capitalist system. Conducting a network analysis allowed me to identify larger common trends and connections between all sites of exchange.

In regards to my analysis of value from place and geography, I focused primarily on one neighborhood. I was interested in Roma because of the concentration of second-hand and vintage stores. I was curious what contributed to the concentration and why it was happening in the present. My research shows how the affluent history of Roma contributes to what it is today. As I articulated in chapter 2, Roma's affluence and aesthetic are embedded in the place. This provides a site of wealth where prices can align with customers willingness to pay. Roma's proximity but separation from tianguis on the outskirts of the colonia create a cheap place to source clothing. The historical wealth answers some of my questions of why Roma, but doesn't answer my question of why the abundance now.

This study captures a specific moment in time. Doing this research right after COVID-19 allowed me to capture a moment of accelerated change specifically within Roma. The pandemic much like NAFTA was a social and economic disruption. There has been a dramatic increase in tourism as well as expats to the area. The pandemic popularized remote work and allowed foreigners to benefit from living in the Mexican economy while still making, most commonly, US dollars. This has been supported by the expansion of Airbnb's which are encouraged by the government. These changes have affected prices throughout the neighborhood and the rest of the city. COVID-19 continuously came up in conversations with my informants as the starting point

of their business. Many of my informants lost their jobs due to the pandemic lockdowns and the second-hand clothing network provided them with extra economic support.

This project shows how all sites of second-hand clothing are in a network together. The same piece of clothing has the ability to transform depending on its geographical location. Actions made by consumers and sellers throughout this network affect all others. Place value continues beyond geography. The ways in which pieces are presented to consumers change the economic value that can be attached. This was explained most directly by Graciella, who told me how the price she could put on a vest would change depending on where she is physically in the store.

Used clothing holds narratives of past times, places, people and experiences. Material, stitching, era and story all contribute to the semiotics of clothing. They add significance and distinguish pieces from others. These stories add to the value and separate used and new clothing. Brand is a visible distinguisher of story, providing insight to an individual's status and reputation. Brand affects the economic value attached to clothing in all sites. On the border and in pacas it distinguishes what category clothing fits into and in curated vintage shops it determines the authenticity of a piece. Vintage clothing specifically provides a case study for how story adds to emotional value. Vintage clothing acts as a time machine, telling stories of era and connects people to past ideologies. This relationship adds value to the clothing itself as the new owner gets to uphold whatever aspect of the past they choose to.

The value attached to used clothing is heavily impacted by the identities of the people involved. Chapter 4 shows how class and race structure economic and social relationships within marketplaces. These social relationships that are rooted in historical inequalities change the ways value is given to used clothing. Race implicates who can move and have access to clothing in

certain locations and environments. At the same time, the second-hand clothing exchange provides an accessible site for marginalized communities to find agency. The effects of neoliberal capitalism specifically in Mexico, have shaped a very specific economic and social order. Both the feminist collective and the store Ariel works at used clothing exchange to comment on larger systemic inequalities while simultaneously surviving. While this thesis did not go into modes of resistance and resistance theory, it would be an interesting avenue to consider for future research.

To conclude, this thesis is a story about relationships between people and clothing. I want to emphasize the importance of emotional durability that consumers give to clothing. I urge you to question when purchasing or engaging in clothing consumption: How long will you actually have the t-shirt that you found at a second-hand store? Are you buying it because it is inexpensive? Because it's trendy? Because it has a cool story? Or because you will actually wear the shirt? What contributes to how you value your clothes?

Bibliography

- Almanza, Brianda. 2019. "Whitexicans: A new form of racism in Mexico against the white and Wealthy?" *Mexico Daily Post*, June 29, 2019.
<https://themazatlanpost.com/2019/06/29/whitexicans-a-new-form-of-racism-in-mexico-against-the-white-and-wealthy/>
- Bonesso, Lily. 2022. "La Tianguis Sexo Disidente: the radical, queer, Mexican flea market" *Dazed*, December 12, 2022.
<https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/57772/1/la-tianguis-sexo-disidente-radical-queer-mexican-flea-market>
- Brooks, Andrew. 2015. *The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and second-hand Clothes*. Zedbooks.co.
- Carrillo Fuentes JC. 2019. "Promoción de la economía circular en el sector moda y textil en México." *CEMDA*, México.
- Cachon, Gérard P., and Robert Swinney. 2011. "The Value of Fast Fashion: Quick Response, Enhanced Design, and Strategic Consumer Behavior." *Management Science* 57, no. 4: 778–95.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25835736>.
- Chung, Shuk-Wah. 2016. "Fast Fashion is Drowning the world. We need a Fashion Revolution!" *GreenPeace*, April 21, 2016.
<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/7539/fast-fashion-is-drowning-the-world-we-need-a-fashion-revolution/>
- Coker, Jerod, and Jean-Manuel Izaret. 2021. "Progressive Pricing: The Ethical Case for Price Personalization." *Journal of Business Ethics*. 173 (2): 387-398.
- Corrêa, Sílvia and Veranise Dubeux. 2015. "Buying Clothes from Thrift Stores: An Analysis of Young People Consuming Second-Hand Clothing in Rio de Janeiro." *Comunicação, Mídia e Consumo* 12.
- Cross, John. 1998. *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- De Aguiar Hugo, Andreza, Jeniffer de Nadae, and Renato da Silva Lima. 2021. "Can Fashion Be Circular? A Literature Review on Circular Economy Barriers, Drivers, and Practices in the Fashion Industry's Productive Chain" *Sustainability* 13, no. 21: 12246.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su132112246>
- Delgadillo, Victor. 2016. "Selective modernization of Mexico City and its historic center. Gentrification without displacement?" *Urban Geography*.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/RADiwUV4rWIGrknt7uZF/full>

- Deschamps, T.C., Carnie, B. & Mao, N. 2017. "Public consciousness and willingness to embrace ethical consumption of textile products in Mexico." *Text Cloth Sustain* 2, 6
- Elegido, Juan M. 2011. "The Ethics of Price Discrimination." *Business Ethics Quarterly* 21 (4): 633-660.
- Forsell Méndez, Alfonso. 2020 "Whitexican: Hacia una definición crítica." Nexos: Cultura y vida cotidiana 19 julio 2020.
<https://cultura.nexos.com.mx/whitexican-hacia-una-definicion-critica/>
- Foster, Robert J. 2006. "Tracking Globalization: Commodities and Value in Motion." In *Handbook of Material Culture*, 285-302.
- Freije, Vanessa. 2022. "'You're not welcome': Mexico City residents decry Airbnb." *Aljazeera*. December 13, 2022.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/12/13/youre-not-welcome-mexico-city-residents-decry-airbnb>
- Gauthier, Mélissa. 2009. "The Fayuca Hormiga of Used Clothing and the Fabric of the Mexico-U.S. Border." *Humanities Doctoral Program, Concordia University*.
- Guo, Elieen. 2018. "Here's What Really Happens to Your Used Clothes." *Vox*, March 13, 2018.
<https://www.vox.com/2018/3/13/17082288/used-clothing-mexico-goodwill>
- hooks, bell. 1992. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." Chapter 2, In bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press. Pp. 21-39.
- Kiehn, Katharina and Antonia Vojkovic. 2018. "Millennials Motivations for Shopping Second-Hand Clothing as part of Sustainable consumption Practice." *The Swedish School of Textiles, University of Borås*.
- Laurell, Asa Cristina. 2015. "Three decades of neoliberalism in Mexico: the destruction of society." *International journal of health services : planning, administration, evaluation* vol. 45,2: 246-64. doi:10.1177/0020731414568507
- Marx, Karl. 1990. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Trans. Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin, pg. 164-165.
- Maya, Arcelia. 2015. "Cartels Control Supply of Bundles of Used Clothes Sent from the United States." Trans-Border Freedom of Expression Project. *University of San Diego*.
<https://sites.sandiego.edu/tbi-foe/2015/05/07/cartels-control-supply-of-bundles-of-used-clothes-sent-from-the-united-states-by-arcelia-maya-agencia-reforma/>
- Moya, Maria, Jimenez. 2019. "Our True Face: Mexico is Much More than Just Whitexicans." *University*

- Wire*, October 30, 2019.
<https://colby.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/our-true-face-mexico-is-much-more-than-just/docview/2310509477/se-2>.
- Miller, Andrew Mark. 2022. "Mexico City Residents Angered by Influx of Americans Speaking English, gentrifying area: report." *New York Post*, July 28, 2022.
<https://nypost.com/2022/07/28/mexico-city-residents-angered-by-influx-of-americans-speaking-english-gentrifying-area-report/>
- Peña, Sergio. 1999. *Informal Market: Street Vendors in Mexico City*. The Florida State University, FL.
- Sanchez, Cecilia. 2022. "Mexico's New Racial Reckoning: A Protest Movement Against Colorism and White Privilege." *Mexico Daily Post*, October 24, 2022.
<https://mexicodailypost.com/2022/10/24/mexicos-new-racial-reckoning-a-protest-movement-against-colorism-and-white-privilege/>
- Sanchez, Fabiola and Fernanda Pesce. 2022. "Why Mexico has Made Little Progress on Femicide." *PBS News Associated Press*, December 27, 2022.
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/femicides-in-mexico-little-progress-on-longstanding-issue>
- Sandoval, Edgar. 2022. "On the Border, Buying Clothes by the Pound at Ropa Usada Shops." *New York Times*, April 10, 2022. .
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/us/ropa-usada-border-shops.html>
- Sandoval-Hernández, E. 2015. "Historia de un fayuquero. Circulación, comercio e ilegalidad en la frontera Norte de México." In: T. Camal-Cheluja, J. Arriaga-Rodríguez and E. Cardin, ed., *Fronteras y dinámicas transfronterizas en América Latina*, 1st ed. Chetumal: *Universidad de Quintana Roo*.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1987. "Embodied Knowledge: Thinking with the Body in Critical Medical Anthropology" in *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*, Rob Borofsky, ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 229-42.
- Shortell, David. 2022. "As Remote Workers Flock to Mexico City, Airbnb and Housing Prices Soar." *New York Times* December 28, 2022. .
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/28/world/americas/mexico-city-airbnb-remote-workers.html#:~:text=25%20Mexican%20families.,As%20Remote%20Workers%20Flock%20to%20Mexico%20City%2C%20Airbnb%20and%20Housing,say%2C%20forcing%20out%20local%20residents>.
- Sluis, Ageeth. 2016. *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City. 1900-1939*. Lincoln: UNP - Nebraska. Doi:102307/j.ctt1d989tw.
- Stanton, Audrey. 2020. "How does Textile Recycling Work?" *The Good Trade*, September 21, 2020.
<https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/textile-recycling-process/>

“The Antitrust Laws.” 2022. *Federal Trade Commission*. <https://www.ftc.gov/https://www.ftc.gov/advice-guidance/competition-guidance/guide-antitrust-laws/antitrust-laws>

Tsing, Anna. 2015. *Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton University Press.

Quinones, Sam. 1958. *True Tales from another Mexico: the Lynch Mod, the Popsicle Kinds, Chalino, and the Bronx*. The University of New Mexico Press.

“What are Fashion Co-Operatives and How Can They Center Workers in Sustainable Fashion?” 2022. *Ngozi Okaro with Conscious Style Podcast* March 22, 2022. S3: EP38. <https://www.consciouslifeandstyle.com/custom-collaborative-ngozi-okaro/>

Wolf, Eric. 1982. *Europe and the People Without History*. University of California Press.

“Worker Cooperative FAQ” *Democracy at Work Institute: US Federation of Worker Cooperatives*. <https://institute.coop/worker-cooperative-faq#:~:text=Collectives%20are%20often%20organizations%20that.and%20democratic%20governance%20by%20members>.

Appendix

Below I have attached a number of observational sketches I did during my field work in Mexico City. As explained in my methodology, these sketches helped me to deepen my understanding of places I was engaging with.

